

CrisisWatch

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

↓ Deteriorated situations

[Afghanistan](#), [Bangladesh](#), [Gambia](#), [Iraq](#), [Macedonia](#), [Nagorno-Karabakh \(Azerbaijan\)](#), [Republic of Congo](#), [Syria](#)

↑ Improved situations

[Central African Republic](#), [South Sudan](#)

May 2016 – Watchlist

💣* Conflict risk alerts

[Nagorno-Karabakh \(Azerbaijan\)](#)

☪️ Conflict resolution opportunities

[South Sudan](#), [Yemen](#)

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.....	5
Southern Africa.....	7
West Africa	7
ASIA	10
North East Asia.....	10
South Asia	10
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.....	20
MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA.....	22
Eastern Mediterranean	22
Gulf and Arabian Peninsula	24
North Africa.....	25

Africa

Central Africa

➔ **Burundi** Attacks against high-value targets rose sharply. In Bujumbura gunmen killed senior army officer and civilian motorcyclist 20 April; senior army officer with wife and bodyguard 25 April; failed grenade attack against minister of human rights 24 April. Fearing army discontent, govt 17 April retired some army personnel and moved about 500 from Bujumbura to provinces. Burundi and DR Congo armies 9 April launched operations in respective territories to track down Burundian rebel National Liberation Forces. UN human rights chief 18 April said at least 345 new reported cases of torture and ill-treatment by security forces since start of 2016. UNSC 1 April passed Resolution 2279 calling for UN police to monitor security; govt said it welcomed resolution. International Organisation of La Francophonie 8 April suspended cooperation with Burundi citing lack of progress in political dialogue, but maintained programs benefitting civilians and contributing to restoration of democracy. ICC 25 April announced it was starting preliminary investigations into political violence.

➔ **Cameroon** Boko Haram (BH) attacks in Far North declined further as army and govt-recognised local self-defence groups continued operations. BH killed five civilians at Sandawadjiri 4 April and killed four more at Goree Algouthoum 10 April. Security forces arrested over twenty suspected insurgents during month, including six at Minawao refugee camp. Joint Nigerian and Cameroonian military operation began 11 April, killed six BH insurgents. BH 9 April attacked military outpost at Tolkomari, killed three soldiers and wounded five in 12 April ambush between Zigague and Sale. Stand4Cameroon opposition coalition 1 April launched Black Fridays protests against govt-proposed constitutional changes including to bring forward elections due 2018, security services 8 April temporarily detained Stand4Cameroon activists in Yaoundé.

⬆ **Central African Republic** President Touadéra 2 April named former campaign director Simplicie Sarandji as PM, 11 April appointed new govt including six former ministers under ex-President Bozizé, but no ex-Seleka or anti-balaka militia leaders. Ex-Seleka groups said govt not representative. Touadéra 14 April began consultations with ex-Seleka on disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR); Touadéra insisted they begin DDR before discussing demands, ex-Seleka conditioned disarmament on govt meeting demands. African Union and International Organisation of La Francophonie readmitted CAR in recognition of successful elections. National Election Authority (ANE) 8 April announced results of 31 March second round of legislative elections: independent candidates won 56 of 130 seats, ANE said legislative by-election in final ten constituencies to take place mid-May. EU 19 April launched army training mission (EUTM RCA) to become operational mid-2016. Touadéra in Paris 20 April reiterated that CAR needs international support to recover from crisis, President Hollande said Sangaris military mission would remain to improve security. Unidentified assailant killed Moroccan MINUSCA peacekeeper 17 April in SE Rafaï. In continued violent predation, Lord's Resistance Army 21 April killed three people, abducted six in Rafaï. UNSC 27 April renewed MINUSCA mandate until 31 July 2016 and requested UNSG Ban carry out strategic review.

➔ **Chad** President Déby re-elected with 61.56% of vote in first round poll 10 April according to provisional results announced 21 April, constitutional council to present final count by 6 May. Campaigns and voting day passed peacefully but vote marred by irregularities. Six opposition candidates 22 April rejected results, claiming results in reports from voting stations differed from those electoral commission published, 29 April said they had asked constitutional council to invalidate Déby's victory. Amnesty International 29 April said at least twenty soldiers and police reported missing since 9 April after voting for opposition. Parliament 25 April prolonged state of emergency in Lake Chad region for six months empowering region's governor. U.S. Ambassador to UN Samantha Power visited 20 April, discussed with Déby support for fight against Boko Haram and said Chad needs to reinforce democratic institutions to remain stable.

- For latest report, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°233, [Chad: Between Ambition and Fragility](#), 30 March 2016.

➔ **DR Congo** Modest progress made toward political dialogue, as protestors clashed with security forces in ex-Katanga province. AU 6 April appointed former Togolese PM Edem Kodjo as facilitator of national political dialogue, however opposition parties except Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) maintained refusal to take part. Electoral Commission 15 April said creation of new voter list would start July, could take three years. In ex-Katanga province, rising crime and murder of two people 17 April in Kolwezi sparked protest against security services; four protestors killed. Tensions increased in Lubumbashi as incidents at offices of political parties that recently joined opposition and are close to former governor now opposition leader Moïse Katumbi 19 April triggered protests and clashes with security forces. Security forces in Lubumbashi 24 April dispersed crowd with shots and tear gas before Katumbi rally, arrested his supporters and bodyguards. In North Kivu province, army renewed offensives against rebel groups including Rwandan Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), claimed displaced people in Masisi hiding rebels in camps; authorities late March began closing four camps, by 13 April forcing some 35,000 people to move on. FDLR late March-early April reportedly tried twice to cross from DRC into Rwanda, causing Rwandan army to increase troops along border.

↓ **Republic of Congo** Govt crackdown on protests after disputed 20 March election escalated into gun battles and govt airstrikes. Since election police allegedly harassed and jailed residents of southern Brazzaville opposition stronghold; unidentified gunmen also exchanged fire with security forces 4 April, govt said former members of Ninja militia raided and torched military, police and govt offices, at least seventeen people killed including three police, about 50 people arrested. Constitutional court same day confirmed President Sassou-Nguesso's re-election. Amnesty International 18 April said govt helicopters 5 April reportedly began dropping bombs on residential areas across south-eastern Pool region, stronghold of former Ninja militia, including at Vinza, Soumouna and Mayama reportedly killing at least 30 people. Govt said it was targeting military bases linked to Ninja militia leader Frederic Bintsamou a.k.a. Pastor Ntumi. Opposition coalition 5 April urged govt to stop "warlike operations", called for peaceful civil disobedience. Sassou-Nguesso 23 April named one-time opposition leader and former Finance Minister Clement Mouamba as PM, who named govt 30 April.

➔ **Rwanda** Tensions with Burundi rose as Bujumbura refused to repatriate body of former Rwandan minister arrested in Burundi Dec 2015 for spying and who died 31 March in Bujumbura jail, until his family signs statement accepting he died of natural causes.

Horn of Africa

➔ **Djibouti** President Guelleh re-elected 8 April for fourth five-year term with 87% of vote. Electoral commission denied opposition's accusations of fraud; constitutional council 19 April validated results, put voter turnout at 69%.

➔ **Eritrea** Govt soldiers 3 April reportedly shot dead fourteen conscripts jumping from military trucks; in sign of gradual move toward openness govt 8 April said two died, eleven injured; incident adds pressure on govt to end conscription.

➔ **Ethiopia** Armed men from S Sudan's Murle ethnic group 15 April attacked villages in western Gambella region and reportedly killed over 200 people, abducted over 100 children and stole some 2,000 cattle. Army killed 60 assailants, 20 April reportedly crossed into S Sudan in pursuit; negotiations ongoing end-month between Addis and Juba over Ethiopian force's parameters inside S Sudan (see S Sudan). After driver killed two Nuer children in car accident in Gambella region, ethnic Nuer, including refugees from S Sudan, 21-23 April reportedly killed at least fourteen people not from locally-dominant Nuer or Anuak groups.

➔ **Kenya** ICC 5 April terminated case against Deputy President William Ruto and former journalist Joshua Arap Sang accused of crimes against humanity in 2007-2008 post-election violence, deciding there was "no case to answer" and citing political interference. Al-Shabaab 10 April attacked police station in Wajir county 3km from Somalia border, injuring three officers. Ethnic Marakwet 14 April killed three Pokot people in Elgeyo-Marakwet county following fighting between the two groups in March. Degodia clan militias 25 April raided Ajuraan clan homestead in Korondile, Wajir county, killed three women and injured three boys. Police in Nairobi 25 April tear-gassed opposition party Coalition for Reforms and Democracy (CORD) leaders and supporters on way to electoral commission to demand removal of chairman and commissioners.

- Abdullahi Abdille and Rashid Abdi, "[Kenya: Development, County Governments and the Risk of 2017 Election Violence](#)", In Pursuit of Peace, 7 April 2016.

➔ **Somalia** Al-Shabaab kept up urban attacks and made limited territorial gains: killed at least eighteen civilians and two National Intelligence Service Agency (NISA) officers in five attacks in Mogadishu including mortar attack near presidential compound; 4 April retook Janale town, Lower Shabelle from AMISOM forces; 14 April killed four govt officials in Afgooye, Lower Shabelle. Al-Shabaab 26 April ambushed military convoy near Baidoa, killed at least eight Somali National Army (SNA) troops and injured thirteen. U.S. drone strikes 31 March killed officer in Amniyat, Al-Shabaab's internal security and intelligence wing, in Jilib, Middle Juba and 11-12 April killed at least twelve militants in Yontooy, Lower Juba. Kenya Air Force 22 April bombed Al-Shabaab positions in Lower Juba; SNA and AMISOM 20 April killed 25 militants in Galguduud. 16 April AMISOM killed four civilians mistaken for militants in Bulo Marer, Lower Shabelle; Ethiopian forces (EPDF) 23-25 April reportedly clashed

with local militia in Da'adheer, Galguduud, nineteen civilians killed. Islamic State-faction claimed first IED attack on AMISOM convoy near Mogadishu 24 April, reportedly damaging vehicle. Puntland 3 April accepted "4.5" clan-based formula for 2016 elections on condition that 2020 elections will use one-man-one-vote system. Seven killed 14-17 April in fighting between rival clan militias over tax collection in Marka, Lower Juba. Conference to merge Hiraan and Middle Shabelle regions started 12 April in Jowhar, Middle Shabelle, most Hiraan elders took part but leading elder boycotted.

➦ **South Sudan** Riek Machar, leader of armed Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-In Opposition (SPLM/A-IO), returned to Juba 26 April and was sworn in as first VP. Govt, SPLM/A-IO and other political groups formed transitional govt 28 April. SPLM/A-IO armed personnel continued arriving in Juba, reaching more than 1,500. Ethiopian army 20 April entered S Sudan pursuing Murle tribesmen who crossed from S Sudan into Ethiopia and 15 April reportedly killed over 200 people and abducted over 100 children; negotiations between Juba and Addis ongoing end-month over Ethiopian force's parameters within S Sudan (see Ethiopia).

➦ **Sudan** Referendum held in Darfur 11-13 April on whether region should remain five states or be reunited, amid reports of low turnout and ongoing fighting: Darfur Referendum Commission 23 April said 97% voted for status quo, 2% for unification and semi-autonomy. Armed opposition groups Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and factions of Sudan Liberation Movement led by Minni Minawi (SLM-MM) and Abdel Wahid al-Nur (SLM-AW) boycotted referendum, accused govt of rigging. Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) 12 April announced capture of last SLM-AW position in Jebel Marra area, Darfur, which SLM-AW denied 13 April. Fighting continued in Two Areas (S Kordofan and Blue Nile) between Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), opposition claimed heavy govt losses: at least a dozen fighters killed early month in Nuba mountains, S Kordofan; dozens reportedly killed 5 April in Mufwa area, Blue Nile; nine killed 15 April in clash in Zalataya area, S Kordofan; at least four SPLM-N killed 24 April in Kadugli area, S Kordofan. Rebel coalition Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) 24 April announced willingness for six-month ceasefire in Darfur, S Kordofan and Blue Nile and urged AU mediators to facilitate meeting with govt to discuss implementation.

- For latest report, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°119, [Sudan's Islamists: From Salvation to Survival](#), 21 March 2016.

➦ **Uganda** Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) 7 April launched two-month Operation Usalama to stabilise W Rwenzori region after 50 people reported killed since end-Feb in post-election attacks targeting security forces, allegedly by Bakonzo ethnic militia linked to Rwenzori cultural kingdom and in clashes between Bakonzo and Bamba ethnic groups. At least two UPDF killed 3 April in clash between UPDF and Rwenzururu kingdom royal guards in Kasese town. UPDF 7-14 April arrested 163 suspected militia members in Kasese and Bundibugyo districts, Rwenzori region. Police 1 April ended 43-day house arrest of Opposition Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) leader Kizza Besigye, 5 April briefly detained him on way to FDC event.

Southern Africa

➔ **Angola** Clashes intensified in Cabinda between Front for the Liberation of the Cabinda Enclave (FLEC) and govt forces (FAA), with some 47 FAA reported killed in four FAA ambushes 9-15 April in Necuto region. Opposition party National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) 4 April called for national peace and reconciliation forum; FLEC 16 April welcomed initiative. Security services 23 April violently dispersed political rally of UNITA's provincial secretary in Mucusso, Kuando Kubango region, reportedly injuring twelve.

➔ **Madagascar** Presidency 8 April announced resignation of PM Jean Ravelonari-vo and cabinet, following months of tension between PM and President Rajaonarimampianina. Rajaonarimampianina 11 April appointed interior minister and ruling party loyalist Olivier Mahafaly Solonandrasana as PM. Mahafaly 15 April named 32-member cabinet including over 60% new members.

➔ **Mozambique** Attacks on civilians and clashes between govt troops and Renamo fighters continued throughout month; clashes 10 and 12 April in Manica and Sofala provinces respectively left at least twenty Renamo fighters and one soldier dead. Unidentified assailants 18 April shot and injured senior provincial Renamo leader Antonio Chule in Inhambane, Inhambane province. President Nyusi maintained appeals for talks with Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama but sidestepped Renamo demands. Farmers 28 April reportedly found mass grave containing over 100 bodies in Renamo heartland, Gorongosa district, Sofala province. IMF 18 April, World Bank 27 April and UK 28 April suspended aid after govt confirmed it had failed to disclose over \$1bn debt and borrowing from Credit Suisse and Russia's VTB bank since 2013.

➔ **Zimbabwe** President Mugabe 18 April called for unity on 36th anniversary of independence, amid ongoing factionalism within ruling ZANU-PF. Mugabe tried to appease thousands of war veterans in Harare in 7 April address, but sidestepped their allegations that senior ZANU-PF members associated with G40 group aligned with First Lady Grace Mugabe used party disciplinary and organising structures to marginalise rival factions. Thousands of opposition Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai (MDC-T) supporters 14 April protested govt's failure to stop economic decline; first major demonstration since 2013 elections.

West Africa

➔ **Burkina Faso** Amid ongoing tensions between military old guard (some suspected of involvement in Sept 2015 coup) and young officers (who stopped coup leaders), gunshots reportedly heard 18 April at military prison holding those arrested in connection with coup; army said they were warning shots against bystanders. Military judge 27 April summoned for second time high-ranking officers including chief of staff General Pingrenoma Zagré allegedly involved in Sept 2015 coup but they ignored summons; military 29 April denied these officers had been summoned. Citing procedural reasons Supreme Court 28 April cancelled arrest warrants for those suspected of involvement in both Sept 2015 coup, including Côte d'Ivoire's national assembly

speaker Guillaume Soro, and 1987 killing of former President Thomas Sankara, including former President Compaoré.

➡ **Côte d'Ivoire** Govt 13 April said it had arrested 83 people in connection with 13 March terrorist attack in Grand-Bassam claimed by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), including sixteen with direct links; prime suspect Kounta Dallah still at large. Students in Abidjan demanding better living conditions clashed with police 11 April. Govt detained 40-50 students and 13 April arrested leader of Student Federation of Côte d'Ivoire (FESCI), former President Gbagbo's violent student wing; protests erupted next day against arrest. UN group of experts report early-April accused former Forces Nouvelles rebels, led by national assembly speaker Guillaume Soro, of holding 300 tonnes of weapons that Soro allegedly obtained in 2011 after post-election crisis, violating UN arms embargo in place since 2004; Soro denied accusations. UNSC 28 April lifted arms embargo, renewed UN mission's mandate for one final year until June 2017 and removed remaining sanctions (asset freeze and travel bans), including against Gbagbo.

⬇ **Gambia** Security forces 14 April broke up peaceful demonstration calling for electoral reform and free speech in Serrekunda near Banjul, arrested at least 50 protestors including main opposition United Democratic Party (UDP) official Solo Sandeng. Following UDP accusations that security forces had tortured to death Sandeng, they arrested senior UDP members 16 April including party leader Ousainou Darboe and supporters; UN and U.S. 17 April condemned crackdown. High Court 20 April charged 37 people involved in protests, including eighteen for unlawful assembly, rioting and incitement of violence.

➡ **Guinea** Preparations for local elections planned for Oct continued to generate tension between govt and opposition: opposition led by Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG) 4 April rejected Electoral Commission (CENI)'s allocation of opposition seats in its local structures to Union of Republican Forces (UFR), which is now pro-govt; UFR leader Sidya Touré 12 April announced possible alliance with ruling Rally of the Guinean People (RPG). In separate dispute, RPG member and national assembly speaker Claude Kory Kondiano 5 April proposed holding municipal councillor elections separate from ward and borough councillor vote. Former PM Lansana Kouyaté's opposition Party of Hope for National Development (PEDN) rejected proposal, denounced alleged non-implementation of Aug 2015 political agreement and suspended participation in electoral preparations. Opposition called for general strike 30-31 March and 14 April to protest electoral issues and govt authoritarianism; opposition supporters heeded call largely peacefully.

➡ **Guinea-Bissau** Supreme Court of Justice (STJ) 5 April overturned decision by permanent commission of People's National Assembly (ANP) to cancel mandate of fifteen MPs expelled from ruling African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC). Dissident MPs could form new majority with 41 MPs from opposition Party for Social Renewal (PRS) and cause govt collapse. PAIGC President Domingos Simoes Pereira 6 April said party would abide by decision, but needed clarity on dissidents' status as their expulsion from PAIGC remains valid and constitution forbids independent MPs. Other PAIGC supporters called for early general elections, which they believe PAIGC would win. In ANP special session 19 April President Vaz insisted he

would not convene elections, urged PAIGC to find solution or he would form new legislative majority.

➔ **Mali** Limited progress made in implementing June 2015 Bamako agreement; following national assembly's 31 March adoption of law on appointment of interim authorities in north, signatories discussed nomination modalities 8-11 April but made no decision. French Operation Barkhane and army (FAMA) intensified efforts to counter jihadists: arrested at least five and killed two suspected jihadists 7-9 April in central region. Kidal inhabitants 18 April protested house searches and Barkhane forces' arrests; youth demonstrators clashed with MINUSMA forces at airport, three protesters killed. After Barkhane forces arrested local guide for alleged links with jihadist groups, jihadist group Ansar Dine 16 April abducted three ICRC employees he was guiding, demanded his release. Jihadists continued attacks: Ansar Dine claimed responsibility for 20 March and 17 April mortar attacks on Amachach military camp, Tessalit district, occupied by FAMA, MINUSMA and Barkhane forces; Barkhane vehicle detonated IED 12 April near Amachach, Kidal region, three French soldiers killed. Bandit attack on civilian convoy 3 April on Douékiré axis, Timbuktu region, killed pro-govt armed group escort.

➔ **Niger** President Issoufou sworn in 2 April for second five-year term. Opposition 17 April ended its boycott of state institutions which began following late-March presidential run-off, but reiterated rejection of election results. Issoufou 11 April formed new govt comprising mainly members of ruling Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS) party, despite late March pledge to create "govt of national unity". In SE Boko Haram maintained pressure on military and civilians; 6 April suicide attack near Diffa killed two civilians.

➔ **Nigeria** Govt continued operations against Boko Haram (BH) in NE Borno state; claimed it killed over 120 insurgents, arrested three commanders, captured twelve camps and rescued over 2,000 captives during month. Govt said it arrested Khaled al-Barnawi, leader of BH splinter group Ansaru, with three others 1 April in Lokoja, Kogi state. BH 1 April posted video online insisting leader Abubakar Shekau still in charge after March video suggested he would step down. Clashes between herdsmen and farmers continued: about 30 killed in four villages in Taraba state 10 April; eighteen killed in Moor, Benue state 18 April; about 40 killed in Nimbo, Enugu state 24 April. Security in Niger Delta threatened to deteriorate; little known group Niger Delta Avengers threatened to step up attacks on oil facilities after govt 16 April proposed setting up special security force to combat pipeline vandalism. President Buhari 28 April announced plan to establish multinational task force to patrol Gulf of Guinea.

- Nnamdi Obasi and Ayo Obe, ["The Chibok Girls Must Be Found – and Freed"](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 13 April 2016.

New Crisis Group Africa Report N°234, *Implementing Peace and Security Architecture (III): West Africa*, 14 April 2016. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has a formidable record in its efforts to promote peace in a particularly turbulent region. Still, reform is essential to give the organisation new impetus, and is ever more urgent as insecurity worsens throughout the Sahel and Lake Chad regions.

Asia

North East Asia

➔ **China/Japan** Japan 29 March enacted new national security law passed Sept 2015 which allows exercise of right to collective self-defence in conflicts threatening its existence, expands Self-Defence Forces' logistic support missions to assist non-U.S. forces, allows combat roles in peacekeeping missions; China criticised law. Japanese Coast Guard 4 April announced it had finished deploying twelve ships to patrol area around disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. Japanese foreign ministry 15 April released 2016 Diplomatic Bluebook noting Chinese ships' frequent entry into waters near disputed islands, said Tokyo ready to approach dispute calmly. Chinese foreign ministry 18 April stressed its sovereignty over Senkaku/Diaoyu islands and adjacent waters, noted importance of stable China-Japan relationship. Japanese, Chinese FMs met 30 April to discuss possible meeting between PM Abe and President Xi.

➔ **Korean Peninsula** DPRK 1 April launched short-range ballistic missile off east coast, 15 and 28 April failed in three attempts to launch medium-range missiles, reportedly including inaugural test of Musudan missile with range of over 3,000km. U.S. military said unusual launch site indicated road-mobile missile. Responding to launch, Chinese foreign ministry said all parties should respect UNSC decisions. China 5 April announced embargoes on imports of coal and mineral ores from DPRK, halted sale of jet fuel to DPRK except for civilian aviation. DPRK 1 April said state of "semi-war" exists on Korean peninsula, jammed GPS signals in ROK and blocked multiple social media and ROK media websites. DPRK 23 April fired submarine-launched ballistic missile off east coast; UNSC condemned "another serious violation" of UN resolutions. Satellite imagery indicated "continued activity" at Punggye-ri nuclear testing site, amid speculation from observers that failed Musudan launch increased likelihood of fifth nuclear test. ROK 11 April reported defection of senior DPRK military officer who oversaw spying operations. G7 countries 11 April issued joint communiqué condemning DPRK nuclear tests and missile launches. DPRK 27 April announced first ruling Workers' Party of Korea congress in 36 years to take place 6 May.

South Asia

↓ **Afghanistan** Taliban 12 April launched start of spring offensive "Operation Omeri", with clashes throughout month further dimming hope of Taliban participation in peace process and contributing to increasingly strained relations between Kabul and Islamabad. In deadliest insurgent attack on Kabul since 2001, Taliban 19 April detonated car bomb and launched gun attack on National Directorate of Security office killing 64; CEO Abdullah Abdullah postponed Pakistan trip following attack. U.S. special envoy 10 April encouraged Pakistan to use influence to bring Taliban to negotiations. Govt 11 April said Taliban should join peace talks or face military action by Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) states; 28 April criticised Pakistan for reportedly allowing Taliban delegation visit to Islamabad. Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) insur-

gent group 2 April said govt elements trying to sabotage peace process, rejected allegations that its talks with High Peace Council (HPC) were aimed at obtaining ministries; 5 April dropped precondition of troop withdrawal, 18 April insisted on removal of leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's name from UN and U.S. blacklists. President Ghani 4 April said govt facing threats from al-Qaeda, Islamic State (IS), Taliban; acting defence minister warned al-Qaeda expanding. Taliban resumed attacks on police check points in Dand-e-Shahabuddin area, Baghlan province; five militants and two security forces killed 4-5 April. At least 45 IS loyalists reported killed in Nangarhar province by Afghan National Security Forces and U.S. drone strike 5-6 April. Dozens killed in other attacks during month, including twelve army recruits killed in 11 April suicide attack in Jalalabad; at least seven killed in suicide attacks in Parwan and Kandahar provinces 5-6 April. U.S. 29 April released report detailing events of 2015 Kunduz hospital bombing.

↓ **Bangladesh** Several brutal murders during month underscored growing power and impunity of violent extremist groups. Law student and secular blogger Nazimuddin Samad hacked to death in Dhaka 6 April; al-Qaeda-linked Ansarullah Bangla Team claimed responsibility. Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal 10 April called on secular bloggers to "control" their writing, strongly criticised those writing against "religious establishment". In 14 April address to party leaders and workers PM Hasina condemned writing that "hurt religious sentiments" as "unacceptable", however stressed Islam does not allow individuals to murder alleged blasphemers. Jagannath University students 7 April protested over govt inaction following Samad's killing. University professor Rezaul Karim Siddiquee hacked to death NW of Dhaka 23 April; Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility. Two people including LGBT magazine editor and activist Xulhaz Mannan hacked to death in Dhaka 25 April; govt blamed opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), al-Qaeda affiliate Ansar al-Islam 26 April claimed responsibility. Hindu man hacked to death in Tangail 30 April; IS claimed responsibility, authorities 1 May detained secretary of local JeI group, local BNP activist and local madrasa over killing. Violent clashes around second phase of local elections continued early-April, including between rival supporters of Awami League (AL) and between supporters of AL and BNP; more than 30 party activists reported killed. BNP leader Khaleda Zia, granted bail 5 April "considering her age and physical condition", following 30 March arrest warrant over alleged role in firebomb attack during Jan 2015 opposition blockade. Senior police official 17 April said daily *Amar Desh* acting editor Mahmudur Rahman (detained in 2013 on charges of sedition, defamation and corruption) accused of plotting to abduct and murder PM Hasina's son Sajeeb Wazed Joy.

- Shehryar Fazli, "[Bangladesh government must step back from chaos](#)", *Nikkei Asian Review*, 8 April 2016.

New Crisis Group Asia Report N°277, *Political Conflict, Extremism and Criminal Justice in Bangladesh*, 11 April 2016. Political repression is reaching new highs in Bangladesh. The government's abuse of rule of law institutions for political ends has created an atmosphere of injustice that is increasingly exploited by anti-state extremist groups. The gruesome recent killing of a secular blogger is just another tragic result of these groups' growing power and impunity.

➔ **India (non-Kashmir)** Deadly clashes between Maoists and security forces continued, including one *jawan* killed and another injured in Maoist ambush in Bijapur district 8 April. Maoists 20 April reportedly killed student suspected of being police informant in Nuapada district. Police 6 April said three villagers killed by suspected Maoists in separate incidents in Bastar, Chhattisgarh.

➔ **Kashmir** Tensions between India and Pakistan increased following Pakistan's 24 March arrest of Indian national accused of being spy for Indian intelligence Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). Balochistan's Frontier Corps commander 2 April said spy's activities demonstrated Balochistan's armed movement was "Indian state sponsored". Pakistan's High Commissioner in New Delhi 7 April said India-Pakistan dialogue process suspended. Indian and Pakistani FMs met on sidelines of Heart of Asia regional summit in New Delhi 26 April, first meeting between the two since Jan militant attack on Indian airbase in Pathankot in Punjab near Pakistani border; no significant progress reported. Indian National Investigation Agency director general 1 April said Pakistan's Joint Investigation Team, which arrived in India late March to investigate Pathankot attack, was given "concrete evidence" of Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed involvement in attack. Pakistan military 9 April said Indian forces "resorted to heavy unprovoked firing and shelling" across Line of Control. Clashes between Indian soldiers and insurgents continued. Four killed in violent clashes between protestors and Indian police in areas of Indian-administered Kashmir including Handwara and Srinagar 12 April, following allegations that Indian soldier molested girl; authorities imposed curfews. Anti-India protests broke out 7 April in Shopian after two suspected insurgents killed in gun battle.

➔ **Nepal** Talks between mainstream and dissenting Madhesi parties on constitutional amendments remain stalled amid increasing indications that govt plans to begin implementing new constitution. Govt 8 April formed two committees to prepare transitional arrangements for new federal structure including identifying new provincial capitals; Madhesi parties opposed decision pointing to outstanding disputes over boundaries; opposition Nepali Congress demanded formation of new political mechanism to address boundary demarcation. PM KP Oli instructed ruling UML party leaders to prepare for local elections; govt seeking to hold initial phase of polls in earthquake-affected areas. Several Madhesi parties preoccupied by preparations for internal conventions which must be held by June according to Election Commission. Some Madhesi and smaller Janajati parties announced new alliance 18 April to increase pressure on govt to address demands of marginalised communities; alliance hamstrung by tactical disagreements over prioritising Kathmandu-centric or district-level protests. Two transitional justice mechanisms mid-April began 60-day complaint registration process for victims of 1996-2006 armed conflict; 2,344 cases received by Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and 604 cases received by commission investigating disappearances as of 28 April. PM Oli accused of attempted intimidation for reprimanding National Human Rights Commission officers 3 April after they criticised govt activities.

New Crisis Group Asia Report N°276, [Nepal's Divisive New Constitution: An Existential Crisis](#), 4 April 2016. Since it was passed amid deadly protests in September 2015, Nepal's new constitution has deepened ethnic, social and political fractures. The country's national parties and protesting groups need to find ways to address constitutional disagreements and

underlying disputes. There is a clear risk of escalating violence unless all sides understand that without compromise and good faith Nepal faces an existential threat.

► **Pakistan** Punjab police 9 April launched security operation against Chotoo criminal gang in southern Rajanpur and Rahim Yar Khan districts; gang 13 April killed six police, took 24 hostage. Military 16 April announced it had taken over operation, launched airstrikes; gang leader and twelve others surrendered 20 April, released hostages. Belying official claims of success of ongoing paramilitary-led Rangers operation in Karachi, seven police protecting polio workers shot dead in two attacks in city 20 April; five people also killed early April in drive-by shootings. Two police, two Lashkar-e-Jhangvi killed 2 April in Karachi police raid. Four killed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including one police 7 April in unclaimed IED blast, Awami National Party leader 10 April in Pakistani Taliban attack, one police 12 April in unclaimed shooting. In other militant attacks, bomb 5 April derailed Lahore-Quetta train, killing one; guard of Bilal Afridi, leader of pro-govt armed group in Khyber Agency, killed 18 April intercepting suicide attack. Security forces reportedly killed 34 members of United Baloch Army 9 April in Kalat district. Frontier Corps 6 April announced arrest of alleged Afghan intelligence operative in Balochistan. Leaked records of offshore holdings implicating over 200 nationals including family of PM Sharif early April further undermined legitimacy of govt.

► **Sri Lanka** First parliamentary steering committee meeting overseeing drafting of new constitution held 5 April, chaired by PM Wickremesinghe. President Sirisena continued moves to strengthen hold over Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) including appointing two additional deputy ministers and new state minister 6 April and new party organisers 28 April. Constitutional council 18 April voted to appoint Senior Deputy Inspector of Police Pujith Jayasundara as new inspector general, who promised strengthened investigations into alleged crimes under previous govt. More than a dozen ex-Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) combatants and other Tamils arrested throughout month following late March discovery of hidden explosives in Jaffna; seizure of some suspects in unmarked white vans raised fears of abductions. District-level Tamil govt officials 10 April reportedly attacked by Sinhalese fisherman in Mullaitivu and subsequently detained by Sinhalese troops. Amid worsening economic situation, government 29 April finalised agreement with IMF for \$1.5bn three year financial support; govt 15 April confirmed VAT increase to take effect 2 May. During three-day visit to Beijing, PM announced 7 April decision to restart \$1.4bn Chinese-funded and owned “Colombo Port City” project, and expansion of other Rajapaksa-era Chinese-led projects previously criticised by Sirisena and Wickremesinghe. U.S. State Dept’s Country Report on Human Rights in 2015, released 13 April, reported harassment of activists, journalists and alleged sympathisers of the LTTE, in addition to arbitrary arrests and detention, torture, and rape committed by police and security forces.

South East Asia

► **Indonesia** NGO Amnesty International reported that anti-terror elite police unit Densus 88 admitted torturing man to death in Klaten, Central Java in March. Protests reported in Papua and W Papua 13 April calling for independence and for United Lib-

eration Movement for West Papua to become full member of Melanesian Spearhead Group regional bloc.

➔ **Myanmar** Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) confirmed in two cabinet positions, FM and minister in the President's Office, after energy and education portfolios given to other ministers 5 April. Parliament 5 April approved bill creating new extra-constitutional position of "State Counsellor" specifically for ASSK, providing her legal authority to advise both executive and legislative branches; law pushed through despite objections from military bloc that it was unconstitutional. New govt released over 150 jailed activists 8 and 17 April; 69 of whom were students charged with illegal demonstration and 83 of whom were people imprisoned on political grounds who received presidential pardons. Fighting between govt forces and Arakan Army in Rakhine state continued, with clashes 16 April in Kyauktaw, Ponnagyun and Rathedaung townships killing several soldiers. Kyauktaw court late-March/early-April sentenced some 30 people to prison sentences of three to five years for links to rebel group. Meeting of groups who did not sign National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in Wa enclave 26-28 March resolved to negotiate end to fighting, but also take joint military action if necessary to respond to attacks by govt forces/"other armed groups". Eight NCA-signatory armed groups held meeting in Chiang Mai 24-26 March, discussed preparations for dialogue with new govt and formed "Peace Process Steering Team". Outgoing President Thein Sein 28 March lifted state of emergency in Rakhine state, in place since June 2012 following outbreaks of deadly communal violence. At least 21 Rohingya IDPs drowned 19 April when boat they were taking from IDP camp to local market near Sittwe capsized in heavy seas. In first official engagement as FM, ASSK hosted Chinese FM Wang Yi on a two day visit to Myanmar 5-6 April; Wang also met commander-in-chief and president.

➔ **Philippines** Month saw heavy fighting on Basilan island as military launched major operation against Abu Sayyaf Group. Eighteen soldiers killed, over 50 injured 9 April after over 100 Abu Sayyaf attacked military in Tipo-Tipo, highest death toll of single military operation since 2011. Islamic State (IS), to which Abu Sayyaf has claimed allegiance, 14 April issued first official communiqué on attacks in Philippines claiming to have blown up seven trucks carrying soldiers during Basilan clashes; Philippine military rejected claim as propaganda. Military 10 April deployed over 2,000 soldiers to pursue Abu Sayyaf leaders Isnilon Hapilon and Furuji Indama. 37 militants reported killed in clashes 9-16 April. Military captured at least three Abu Sayyaf camps throughout month. Military 6 April confirmed foreign nationals held by Abu Sayyaf include fourteen Indonesians, four Malaysians kidnapped from ship 3 April. Abu Sayyaf 8 April freed former Italian missionary after six months; 25 April murdered Canadian hostage held since Sept 2015; 1 May released ten Indonesian sailors held since late March. Govt's chief peace negotiator 14 April said operations against Abu Sayyaf highlight importance of Mindanao peace process with MILF in curbing terrorist groups. As campaigning got underway for 9 May general elections, candidates debated significance of Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL). All presidential contenders have also declared supporting the continuation of peace process.

➔ **South China Sea** U.S. Dept Defense 13 April confirmed two Chinese J-11 fighters spotted on disputed Woody Island 7 April; satellite imagery showed new fire control radar, providing information for directing weapons at targets, on island, making sur-

face-to-air missiles fully operational. Chinese military aircraft 17 April publicly landed on contested Fiery Cross Reef for first time, evacuated three injured construction workers. U.S. urged China to reaffirm it has no plans to deploy military aircraft in disputed Spratly islands. China 5 April began operation of Subi Reef lighthouse; Vietnam claimed lighthouse violates its sovereignty. Media 4 April reported Vietnamese Coast Guard 31 March seized Chinese fuel ship allegedly sailing in Vietnamese waters, arrested three Chinese nationals. China 3 April deployed oil rig outside Gulf of Tonkin where China and Vietnam are negotiating delimitation; Vietnam 7 April urged China to remove rig. Philippine, Vietnamese FMs 12 April agreed to cooperation initiatives including drafting six-year common action plan from 2017. Media 12 April reported Philippines transporting construction materials to disputed Paga-sa/Zhongye Island in Spratlys, upgrading airfield. Approximately 8,500 U.S. and Philippine troops conducted two-week annual joint military exercise. U.S. Sec Defense 14 April revealed U.S. conducted joint patrols with Philippines in March/April, said U.S. would station warplanes in Philippines. U.S. 19 and 21 April flew three air patrols near Scarborough Shoal in response to observed Chinese survey work; China 26 April condemned patrols, said shoal is its “inherent territory”. G7 countries 11 April issued joint communiqué expressing concern over SCS tensions, opposition to unilateral actions; China 12 April summoned G7 diplomats to communicate dissatisfaction over remarks.

➡ **Thailand** National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) 29 March issued Order giving some military officers authority to conduct warrantless searches of homes, seize assets and detain civilians without charge. Human rights defenders condemned military intrusion into legal process; many observers believe order intended to curb criticism of draft constitution. Following 29 March issue of draft constitution, National Legislative Assembly 7 April approved referendum bill. Referendum will include question on whether or not joint sitting of parliament, including wholly appointed senate, should vote on PM. Referendum bill also authorises ten years’ prison for persons who “cause disturbances, deceive, force or threaten voters”. Army Commander General Thirachai Nakwanit 1 April told reporters that politicians who openly oppose govt could be sent for re-education course at military bases in violence-torn south. Army 19 April detained former commerce Minister Watana Muangsook for fourth “attitude adjustment” after he posted comments critical of NCPO on Facebook; activists demonstrated demanding his release, Watana released on bail 21 April. Soldiers 27 April arrested eight civilians for violations of Computer Crimes Act for Facebook posts ridiculing NCPO; the eight were charged with sedition. Violence continued in southernmost provinces, including several killed late-March/April in attacks/bombings. Secretary of Thai peace-dialogue delegation, Lt. General Nakrob Bunbuathong, transferred from post 21 April. Thai delegation met with Malay-Muslim separatist umbrella group Mara Patani in Kuala Lumpur 27 April, refused to sign Terms of Reference, setting back efforts to start formal negotiations.

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➔ **Bosnia** Chief prosecutor 11 April said Milorad Dodik, president of country's Serb-controlled Republika Srpska (RS) entity, is being investigated in connection with failed Pavlovic bank. European Parliament 14 April adopted resolution condemning RS plans to hold referendum on authority of Bosnian state court.

➔ **Kosovo** Former PM Thaci sworn in as president 7 April; opposition boycotted session, protesters threw stones at parliament; activists disrupted inauguration next day with tear gas. Ad hoc international commission approved border demarcation agreement between Kosovo and Montenegro 30 March, prompting further opposition anger. Stabilisation and Association Agreement between Kosovo and EU entered into force 1 April, welcomed as milestone in EU-Kosovo relationship.

⚠ **Macedonia** Political crisis worsened, prompting widespread domestic and international criticism and days of protests, as opposition Social Democrats 6 April announced party would boycott 5 June early elections due to failure to implement reforms to media and cleaning up of electoral roll; and after President Ivanov 12 April pardoned all politicians facing criminal investigations, undermining work of Special Prosecution tasked with investigating allegations of illegal wiretapping. Protesters 13 April stormed president's office. Speaker of parliament 14 April confirmed date of 5 June election, fuelling protests, which also took place in cities outside capital. EU cancelled crisis talks planned for 22 April after opposition conditioned participation on postponing elections and annulling presidential pardon. Special Prosecutor Katica Janeva 14 April said her team's investigations would continue, launched fresh investigation. Special Prosecution witness found shot dead at home 27 April. U.S. NGO Freedom House annual report described Macedonia's media as "not free".

Caucasus

➔ **Azerbaijan** Rights activists Leyla and Arif Yunus, jailed on fraud charges widely believed to be politically motivated and released late 2015 due to poor health, sought asylum in Netherlands after being permitted to leave Azerbaijan. U.S. State Dept's human rights report criticised govt crackdown on civil society. Leak of data on offshore holdings by global elites included high-level Azerbaijani officials, implying high level corruption.

⚠ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** Heavy fighting erupted between Armenian-backed separatists and Azerbaijani forces in separatist region in early hours of 2 April, claiming dozens of lives in most serious escalation since 1994 ceasefire; reported dead mostly Azerbaijani servicemen, N-K forces and two Armenian servicemen, as well as around a dozen civilians. Each side accused other of instigating outbreak of fighting, which included rocket attacks, tanks and helicopters, and destroyed homes and infrastructure including Azerbaijani power station. OSCE Minsk Group 2 April called for

end to hostilities, and entire group met 5 April to push for de-escalation. Clashes continued across line of contact despite declaration of Russian-brokered truce 5 April, with both Azerbaijani and Armenian-backed sides accusing each other of violating ceasefire, underlining risk of further fighting. N-K de facto authorities reported several fighters killed by Azerbaijani gunfire in several incidents during month; Baku said Azerbaijani soldier killed 14 April, one civilian killed and eight injured by artillery strike from N-K 28 April. Russian PM Medvedev visited both countries to urge end to conflict early April; Iran also offered to help mediate tensions. Minsk Group co-chairs visited Baku and Yerevan to put process back on track.

- Crisis Group Statement, [“Responding to the Nagorno-Karabakh Escalation”](#), 5 April 2016.
- Magdalena Grono, [“What’s Behind the Flare-up in Nagorno-Karabakh?”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 3 April 2016.

➔ **Georgia** After meeting with Russian President Putin 4 April, de facto leader of South Ossetia Leonid Tibilov declared his intention to hold proposed “referendum” on joining Russia; vote reportedly scheduled for July. Putin 14 April said Russia “cannot oppose” desire of South Ossetian people to hold referendum.

➔ **North Caucasus (Russia)** After President Putin 14 April criticised Chechen and other regional leaders for “hunting for enemies of the nation among opposition figures”, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov said his Jan video showing opposition figure Mikhail Kasyanov in crosshairs was “a joke”. Russian civil aviation authority 21 April suspended right of Chechen govt-owned airline Grozny Avia to conduct international flights. Police reported three suicide bombers tried to attack police station in Stavropol region 11 April, only attackers killed. Insurgents 20 April attacked Juli village in S Dagestan, set fire to school and robbed shops; security officials next day blew up house of attack’s alleged organiser. Three alleged insurgents killed in special operation in Makhachkala suburb 13 April. Growing tension between Ingushetia republic head Yunus-Bek Yevkurov and republic’s mufti Issahadzhi Khamkhoyev early April after Khamkhoyev thwarted Yevkurov’s plans to convene a Council of Alims to remove mufti from his office. New amendments significantly increasing criminal liability for terrorism and extremism-related crimes proposed to Russian State Duma 7 April.

- Ekaterina Sokirianskaia, [“Russia’s North Caucasus Insurgency Widens as ISIS’ Foothold Grows”](#), World Politics Review, 12 April 2016.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°238, [The North Caucasus Insurgency and Syria: An Exported Jihad?](#), 16 March 2016.

Eastern Europe

➔ **Moldova** Parliament announced presidential election to be held 30 Oct, first time public will vote for president following March court ruling and in response to popular protests. Thousands protested 24 April calling for early elections.

➔ **Ukraine** Evidence emerged that conflict in east more intense than widely reported, with sustained exchanges of fire – including infantry weapons plus heavier cannon and artillery – taking place daily, and both separatist and Ukrainian military sources reporting heavy casualties, including three Ukrainian soldiers killed in mortar attack

in Mayorsk near Donetsk 20 April. OSCE 9 April reported its monitors came under fire south of Donetsk; EU foreign policy chief Mogherini criticised increase in ceasefire violations. Parliament 14 April confirmed Vladimir Groysman, speaker and protégé of President Poroshenko, as PM by small margin; followed weeks of confusion and contentious debates; PM Yatsenyuk resigned 10 April. Groysman widely considered to be close to Ukraine's oligarchs, appointed several unpopular figures in new cabinet. Fragility of PM's parliamentary base demonstrated 14 April when he was unable to gather enough votes to put on parliament agenda controversial bill which would have reduced qualifications required of prosecutor general. EU late April announced Ukraine summit scheduled for May to be postponed until Sept to allow govt time to deliver on reform commitments; earlier announced it would offer visa-free travel to EU bloc for Ukrainians despite negative Dutch referendum result on EU Association Agreement with Ukraine. U.S. Asst Sec State Victoria Nuland visited Kyiv 25 April, seen as indicator of U.S. impatience with Poroshenko's unwillingness to implement Minsk agreement; declared it is time to start "locking up" corrupt high officials. UN operations facing operational and reputational problems after 8 April arrest of UN Department of Security and Safety (DSS) officer in Donetsk, after DNR's ministry of state security (MGB) identified him as former senior Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) paramilitary officer who was active in operations to suppress separatist movement early 2014.

- Paul Quinn-Judge, ["Ukraine's Meat Grinder Is Back in Business"](#), *Foreign Policy*, 12 April 2016.
- Interview with Paul Quinn-Judge, ["In Eastern Ukraine, 'Too Many Troops Willing to Fire'"](#), RFE/RL, 30 April 2016.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➔ **Cyprus** Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı 16 April approved new coalition govt between National Unity Party (UBP) and Republican Turkish Party-United Forces (CTP-BG), and named UBP Chairmain Hüseyin Özgürkün PM; followed collapse of previous coalition govt after UBP 3 April withdrew, blaming govt inability to address economic problems. Akıncı 7 April warned that fall of govt and Greek Cypriot parliamentary election scheduled for May could have negative impact on peace talks.

➔ **Turkey** Violence continued in south-east provinces with 50 members of security forces, at least 80 verifiable PKK/PKK-linked militants and some 23 civilians killed in April. Turkish media 4 April reported senior PKK figure Duran Kalkan elected leader of People's Revolutionary Movement (HBDH), PKK-led umbrella organisation established 12 March comprising nine illegal leftist and pro-Kurdish extremist groups; security officials warned organisation will engage in acts of terror, including targeting foreign nationals. President Erdoğan 4 April said PKK has no option other than laying down arms or surrendering to security forces, dismissed any prospects for negotiation; 5 April vowed to strip PKK supporters of their citizenship. Suicide bomb attack 27 April hit western province of Bursa, thirteen injured; PKK offshoot Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK) 1 May claimed responsibility, security officials 28 April detained fifteen suspects. Clampdown against Islamic State (IS) and Jabhat al-Nusra networks intensified: authorities 1 April detained fifteen suspects in İzmir province; long-sought IS-linked suspect Hüseyin Tunç detained 6 April on charges of involvement in 10 Oct An-

kara bombings; security forces 14 April detained eleven suspected al-Nusra militants after operations in Adana province. IS-attributed strikes from Syria intensified hitting Kilis province eleven times in April, thirteen reported killed and 59 injured. Defence Minister İsmet Yılmaz 13 April reported 146 IS targets shelled by Turkish artillery, 362 IS militants killed in Turkish military operations in retaliation to rockets landing in Kilis. Erdoğan 7 April warned EU that Ankara would not implement March migrant deal if Brussels failed to fulfil its side of bargain, including visa-free travel to Europe for Turkish citizens by summer and rejuvenated EU accession process.

- For latest report, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°80, [The Human Cost of the PKK Conflict in Turkey: The Case of Sur](#), 17 March 2016.

Central Asia

➔ **Kazakhstan** President Nazarbayev travelled extensively during month: during U.S. visit 31 March said Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) not a recreation of Soviet Union, EEU and EU should hold meetings; discussed trade and cooperation during Tehran visit 11-12 April; delivered speech on terrorism, corruption and non-proliferation at Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), issued joint call with President Erdoğan for unity among Islamic nations; 15 April met Uzbek President Karimov in Tashkent, discussed shared water resources and regional security issues.

➔ **Kyrgyzstan** PM Temirbek Sariev 11 April resigned following corruption scandal; parliament 13 April approved Sooronbai Jeenbekov as new PM, 28 April took oath of office. Three opposition members arrested late March on allegations including plotting a coup and liaising with Uzbek intelligence agents. Foreign ministry 14 April issued angry response to criticism in U.S. State Dept's 2015 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.

- Deirdre Tynan, ["Tracing Political Circles in Kyrgyzstan"](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 6 April 2016.

➔ **Tajikistan** Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) members 21 April held four-day military exercise 30km from Dushanbe involving 1,500 troops reacting to simulated terrorist attack from Afghan-Tajik border. Prosecutor Rahmonov late March said 85% of reported 1,094 Tajik citizens fighting in Syria and Iraq were recruited while working in Russia, 400 from Khatlon province which borders Afghanistan. Two suspects arrested in Khatlon 31 March for allegedly plotting to blow up local interior ministry HQ.

➔ **Turkmenistan** Fighting reported 19 April between 300-400 Taliban and Afghan govt forces less than a kilometre from Turkmen border.

➔ **Uzbekistan** President Karimov 25-26 April visited Moscow, said Russia should be involved in Afghan peace talks (see Afghanistan); President Putin said both countries support creation of international anti-terrorist coalition.

Latin America and the Caribbean

➔ **Colombia** FARC and govt negotiating teams 14 April indicated progress has been made on issue of “abandoning arms”. Following failure to meet self-imposed 23 March deadline for signing final peace deal, FARC 10 April stated agreement could be signed in next round of talks, but govt 19 April said it would be “some months”. National Liberation Army (ELN) mid-April reported peace talks with govt will begin in May and first round will be held in Ecuador, following 30 March joint govt/ELN announcement of opening of formal peace talks. Neoparamilitary group Clan Úsuga/Urabeños 31 March-1 April carried out “armed stoppage” in north west, prohibiting all transportation and forcing all businesses to close under threat of violence; during the stoppage the Urabeños killed four, attacked military and towns, burned vehicles, blocked roads and carried out propaganda-focused actions, affecting at least 36 municipalities. Govt 11 April said Urabeños is purely criminal, rejected any possibility of negotiations with group.

- Kyle Johnson, [“La negociación con el ELN y la búsqueda de la paz completa”](#), *Razón Pública*, 11 April 2016.

➔ **Guatemala** National Civilian Police and Public Ministry with support of International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) 6 April arrested fourteen individuals accused of illegal usurpation of farmland in El Petén and Izabal departments and property in capital city; including Walter Mendoza, who allegedly headed criminal structure and was charged with using coercion and violence to force peasants off land they had received under state program set up in 1999 in fulfilment of peace accords. President Morales 25 April launched national dialogue to reform justice system, with stated aim to reform constitution to contribute to fight against impunity and corruption. Five permanent and five alternate magistrates to Constitutional Court sworn in 14 April after being elected in process marred by accusations of lack of transparency. Morales 18 April presented to UNSG Ban official request to extend CICIG mandate to Sept 2019.

➔ **Haiti** Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) President Léopold Berlangier 5 April announced postponement of planned 24 April presidential run-off elections, 19 April said they would be ready by end- May, although subsequent statements by Interim President Privert put that date in doubt; announcements followed 30 March swearing in of new CEP. Privert 5 April called for national dialogue on establishment of verification commission for controversial and incomplete 2015 elections; members of opposition parties refused to participate in discussions. CEP 11 April released final results of 2015 municipal elections for 69 communes, with some 76 others still pending resolution of 93 complaints. Privert 14 April approved terms of reference of Independent Commission for Electoral Evaluation and Verification; five-member commission granted 30 day mandate from 25 April. Berlangier 23 April said CEP would not automatically accept commission recommendations. Senate VP Ronald Larèche said World Bank does not intend to finance provisional govt before outcome of electoral process; U.S. Ambassador Peter F. Mulrean 6 April stressed cost of election delays but reaffirmed U.S. willingness to provide financial support, 20 April warned that the commission could be used for partisan purposes. Organization of American States (OAS) Sec Gen Luis

Almagro 10 April cautioned Haiti against holding rushed elections, try to avoid past mistakes. UNSG Ban 25 April voiced deep concern regarding electoral process. Privert 24 April announced that elections could be held last Sunday of Oct, now seeking political support to extend his mandate, due to end 14 May.

➡ **Mexico** International experts 24 April released their final report on govt's investigation into 2014 disappearance of 43 students in Guerrero state, detailing errors and inconsistencies and possible torture of suspects. The team, named by Inter-American Commission on Human Rights at Mexico's request, also accused govt of blocking its investigation by withholding evidence and refusing access to military officers stationed where abductions took place. Authorities mid-April said they will not ask for extension of team's mandate, which ended 30 April ; team's departure leaves unsolved one of most serious crimes in recent Mexican history, enforced disappearances of students from Ayotzinapa teaching college reportedly by municipal police acting in league with criminal gang. Panicked residents of Pacific resort Acapulco, Mexico's most violent city plagued by gang battles, shuttered businesses and schools after armed gangs launched simultaneous attacks 24 April on federal police. President Peña Nieto 21 April proposed legalising marijuana-based medicines and relaxing restrictions on personal use.

➡ **Venezuela** Opposition Democratic Unity (MUD) alliance 27 April began collecting signatures to trigger recall referendum against President Maduro; almost 200,000 are required for electoral authority (CNE) to authorise main signature drive, which in turn must gather almost 4 million. Responding to MUD's plan for constitutional amendment to reduce presidential term by two years, pro-govt constitutional lawyer Hermann Escarrá said Maduro could use same means to cut parliament's term to six months. Supreme Court (TSJ) 11 April declared 29 March amnesty law unconstitutional; UNHCHR 12 April expressed disappointment over govt's move to block law; FM Delcy Rodríguez accused UNHCHR of "undermining Venezuelan law" to "please opposition". Maduro 12 April set up "truth commission" focused on violence associated with Feb-March 2013 street protests; commission composed of members of govt and its allies, with four seats reportedly reserved for opposition. Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) Sec Gen Ernesto Samper 12 April announced former leaders of Dominican Republic, Panama and Spain will accompany commission, which he said offered Venezuelans chance to find "sincere path to dialogue". MUD rejected proposal, saying they had learned about it through the media; FM 17 April attacked Organization of American States (OAS) Sec Gen Luis Almagro and Spanish leader for demanding release of political prisoners. Maduro 26 April cut working week to just two half days for most public employees amid severe power shortages, which have prompted angry demonstrations in many cities.

Middle East & North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

➔ **Israel-Palestine** Israeli soldier charged with manslaughter 18 April over 24 March killing of wounded Palestinian assailant in Hebron who no longer posed threat; case dividing Israeli public opinion. Attacks by Palestinians targeting Israelis continued, including Palestinian assailant who attacked soldiers with axe in W Bank 14 April and was subsequently shot dead. Tensions at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade increased around Passover, but Israel and Jordan's rigorous implementation of quiet commitments on access allowed calm to prevail at site; amid fears of renewed violence Israel 22-23 April closed entry points between W Bank, Gaza and Israel. Bomb exploded on bus in Jerusalem 18 April injuring 23; officials said Hamas responsible. PM Netanyahu 11 April announced Israel had conducted dozens of aerial attacks in Syria to prevent Hizbollah obtaining strategic weapons and will continue to do so, did not specify the timeframe or what kind of strikes; 17 April convened cabinet on occupied Golan Heights, announced Israel would hold Golan "forever", prompting condemnation including from Germany, U.S. and Iran. Negotiations ongoing since March between heads of Israeli army and Palestinian security forces made progress over gradual transfer of full authority to PA in W Bank's "Area A": agreed in principle on short trial period for authority to be transferred to PA in all W Bank cities; implementation date remains unclear. France continued diplomatic effort to convene international conference 30 May without Israeli or Palestinian participation; Israel slammed initiative, announcing any diplomatic efforts other than bilateral negotiations would only distance Palestinians from direct negotiations. PA 7 April attempted to advance UNSC resolution condemning Israeli settlement construction. Israeli security officials 20 April said six alleged members of Jewish extremist cell operating in W Bank arrested. Israeli forces 18 April uncovered tunnel from Gaza into Israel.

- Ofer Zalberg, "[How To Keep Calm at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade During Passover?](#)", Times of Israel, 22 April 2016.
- Ofer Zalberg, "[The Israeli Labor Party's 'Separation Plan'](#)", Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 18 April 2016.

New Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°48, [How to Preserve the Fragile Calm at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade](#), 7 April 2016. A deceptive calm on Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade is unlikely to hold under pressure from the ongoing "third intifada", widespread dissatisfaction among Palestinian youth and growing Jewish Temple activism. Bolstering the 1967 Status Quo arrangement remains crucial, but immediate attention must be on maintaining more recent understandings on access to the Esplanade as the religious holiday season begins.

➔ **Jordan** Police 13 April raided and sealed offices of largest opposition party, Muslim Brotherhood (MB), in Amman and other places in following days, reportedly implementing judicial decisions to transfer properties from MB, which lost license in 2015, to rival splinter faction Muslim Brotherhood Society; MB said closures illegal.

➔ **Lebanon** Heightened fears of major escalation of fighting in largest Palestinian refugee camp Aïn el-Helweh following assassination of senior Fatah security official in car bomb attack in Saida 12 April. Month saw series of clashes between Fatah and radical Islamists in Aïn el-Helweh; Fatah member killed in gunfire 1 April. Efforts of Palestinian groups to contain deteriorating situation challenged by internal rivalries including within Fatah, radicalism stoked by al-Qaeda and Islamic State, financial pressures on UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and Palestinian refugees' longstanding grievances. Court 8 April re-sentenced former Information Minister Michel Samaha, arrested in 2012 on terror charges and released on bail in Jan, to thirteen years' prison; retrial followed Samaha's original shorter sentence handed down by military tribunal May 2015 after he confessed to transporting explosives. Parliament again failed to elect new president 18 April due to lack of quorum. Army reportedly killed leader of Islamic State in Aarsal 28 April.

⬇ **Syria** Month saw fragile "cessation of hostilities" which began 27 Feb collapse in N Syria and UN-brokered talks in Geneva unravel; regime and rebel shelling resulted in over 250 people reported killed in Aleppo 22-30 April, including in 27 April regime airstrike on hospital killing 50. Weeks of deterioration culminated 19 April with regime airstrikes on market in rebel-held Maarat al-Nauman in Idlib province, killing dozens. Opposition 19 April suspended participation in Geneva talks, citing continued regime military offensives and lack of progress in improving humanitarian conditions. Violence in Aleppo escalated as regime and Iran-backed militias began major offensive on city mid-April, while non-jihadist rebel factions joined Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) in escalating counter-attacks. Islamic State (IS) 27 April seized villages north of Aleppo along Turkish border, reversing rebel progress achieved early April. Initial casualty figures and pro-regime media reports suggest participation of allied foreign fighters and Iranian military personnel including from Iranian army in Aleppo at all-time high. As violence in Aleppo escalated, UN Special Envoy De Mistura 28 April called on Russia and U.S. to salvage ceasefire. Syrian army announced temporary "regime of calm" beginning 30 April, although Aleppo excluded, and most major opposition groups rejected regional ceasefires. UN rights chief Zeid Raad al-Hussein warned of reports of military build-ups indicating immanent escalation. Fighting continued elsewhere, including clashes between Kurdish forces affiliated with YPG and pro-regime militiamen in YPG-dominated city of Qamishli 20 April, prompting nearby regime forces to shell Kurdish neighbourhoods in Qamishli. Attacks against IS and JN continued, including four U.S.-led coalition airstrikes near two cities hitting three tactical units and destroying two fighting positions 23 April. Regime held parliamentary elections 13 April; Washington dismissed elections, Russia reiterated agreement that new elections should be held once political process produces new constitution. U.S. President Obama 25 April announced 250 U.S. special forces to be deployed to assist local militia in fight against IS.

- For latest report, see Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°47, [Russia's Choice in Syria](#), 29 March 2016.

New Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°49, [Steps Toward Stabilising Syria's Northern Border](#), 8 April 2016. On both sides of the Syria-Turkey border, the uncompromising strategies of Ankara, Turkey's insurgent Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and its Syria-

based affiliate, the People's Protection Units (YPG), are propelling a dangerous conflict toward escalation. The lone force able to head it off is the U.S., and if it fails, Islamic State is ready to exploit any new disorder.

Gulf and Arabian Peninsula

➔ **Iran** Govt continued efforts to gain access to outstanding \$52bn in unfrozen assets following lifting of sanctions in Jan, with delays due to risk avoidance by major international financial institutions undermining political support for nuclear deal and President Rouhani in Tehran. Central bank chief met U.S. treasury secretary in Washington 15 April, Joint Commission held third meeting in Vienna 21 April and FM Zarif met U.S. Sec State Kerry in New York 18 and 22 April to discuss how to allow Iran dollarised transactions. Supreme Leader Khamenei's late March indirect accusations of treason at former President Rafsanjani undermined latter's chances of being elected next chair of Assembly of Experts, body responsible for choosing next Supreme Leader. Army commander 21 April denied it deployed troops in Syria following reports of soldiers killed there, but said some voluntarily joined Revolutionary Guards there (see Syria). Final statement of Organization of Islamic Conference summit in Istanbul 14-15 April condemned gov't's interference in Arab affairs citing Iran's inflammatory statements on legal judgements against alleged terrorists in Saudi Arabia, prompting Rouhani to boycott closing session. Jordan withdrew ambassador from Iran citing Tehran's interference in Gulf internal affairs, but Iran-EU relations continued to improve: Italian PM visited Tehran 12-13 April with 250-strong delegation, granted Iran nearly €5bn in credit lines and guarantees for exports; EU foreign policy chief Mogherini and seven EU commissioners visited Tehran 17 April to "turn a page on Iran-EU relations".

↓ **Iraq** Political disarray in Baghdad intensified amid standoff over attempted cabinet reshuffle, protests by MPs and large-scale demonstrations. After key political groups including opposition Shiite Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and Sunni Mouttahidoun rejected new cabinet line-up proposed by PM Abadi 30 March, Abadi proposed new list early April. Parliament speaker Salim al-Jibouri 14 April postponed parliamentary vote on second list citing lack of quorum. Over 100 MPs 15 April began sit-in in parliament to protest postponement; some demanded Jibouri resign, Sadrist-affiliated al-Ahrar bloc demanded PM, president and speaker resign. Abadi missed 19 April deadline to submit second list to parliament prompting Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr to rally tens of thousands of protestors in central Baghdad, threaten violence if further delays. MPs disrupted parliament session 26 April stopping Abadi presenting third proposal. Protestors 30 April broke into fortified Green Zone and parliament prompting authorities to declare state of emergency. U.S. 19 April said it would send 200 more troops to provide intelligence and battlefield advice as Iraqi forces continue to expel Islamic State militants from Hit, Anbar province. Shiite paramilitary leaders and Kurdish peshmerga commanders 24 April agreed ceasefire but clashes in Tuz Khormato 25 April broke ceasefire and blocked main road from Baghdad to north.

➔ ✂ **Yemen** UN-sponsored talks between gov't and Huthi/Saleh bloc began 21 April, two days late, after Huthi and former President Saleh's General People's Congress (GPC) delegation 17 April refused to attend until UN envoy assured them Saudi

Arabia-led coalition would respect 10 April cessation of hostilities and that agenda had not been changed without their approval. Parties agreed new agenda for talks 26 April. Govt suspended participation in joint sessions 1 May after Huthis 30 April seized Amaliqa military base N of Sanaa. Fighting continued including in Taiz (S), Marib (E) and Nihm (NE of Sanaa). In south govt-aligned Yemeni fighters backed by coalition airstrikes and United Arab Emirates troops 24 April retook Hadramout provincial capital, Mukalla, and environs from al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Suspected U.S. drone strike reportedly killed three AQAP leaders 25 April in Zinjibar, NE of Aden. In Aden, suicide car bomb exploded 28 April outside security chief's home, wounding at least two people.

- April Longley Alley, [“Can the Kuwait peace talks break Yemen’s deadlock?”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 16 April 2016.

➔ **Saudi Arabia** Islamic State affiliate Najd province claimed two attacks: militants 2 April detonated bomb near police station in al-Dilam SE of Riyadh killing one civilian; militants 5 April shot dead police colonel outside Riyadh. Security forces 29 April killed two suspected militants in shootout in Bisha province, one escaped, arrested next day.

North Africa

➔ **Algeria** Tensions marred French PM Valls's visit 9-10 April: govt denied visas to two French media outlets, prompting several others to not cover trip; Valls's tweet of picture of President Bouteflika looking ill provoked backlash from Algerian authorities. Valls reiterated France's aim to remain Algeria's "leading economic partner", a dozen contracts signed. Security forces continued raids. In south, army 4 April killed four armed Islamists, seized arms in El Oued; found arms caches south of Adrar 10 April and in Kouinine 15 March. In north, army 28 April killed two armed Islamists, recovered arms in Boumerdes province; 29 April killed three in Skikda region.

➔ **Egypt** Italy 8 April withdrew ambassador to protest authorities' lack of collaboration investigating killing of Italian student Giulio Regeni whose body was found Feb with signs of torture, urged other EU members to press Egypt on case. Reuters 21 April reported that security services had detained Regeni 25 Jan, contradicting previous denial by Egyptian officials that he had been in custody. Saudi King Salman, French President Hollande, U.S. Sec State Kerry and others visited during month, pledged security support. Govt's 9 April announcement that it would hand over to Saudi Arabia two strategic Red Sea islands as kingdom pledged \$20bn aid and investment package sparked public indignation; demonstrators 15 April called for "downfall of regime" in largest protests since 2013, authorities 25 April dispersed crowds with teargas. Lawyers 23 April said dozens of anti-govt activists arrested since 21 April. Violence in Sinai continued: at least six soldiers and one civilian killed 7 April in two roadside bomb blasts, Islamic State claimed responsibility; four soldiers killed in ambush 9 April.

➔ **Libya** UN-backed PM Serraj made some progress putting in place Govt of National Accord (GNA) after arriving in Tripoli 30 March with six Presidential Council (PC) members. Despite clashes between rival militia in Tripoli 30 and 31 March, several local armed groups declared loyalty to GNA, many municipalities in west and

main financial institutions recognised Serraj's authority. Pre-existing rival Tripoli-based PM Khalifa Ghweil reported 5 April to have handed over power, 6 April denied it. Several armed groups in Tripoli announced their opposition to Serraj's rule starting 6 April. Tripoli-based Mufti al-Sadeq al-Ghariani continued to consider GNA illegitimate. Disaffection with GNA grew in east following Serraj's co-option of members of Tripoli-based Libya Dawn military alliance, election 6 April of Abderrahman Swehli as head of new advisory State Council loyal to PC, and visits of several European FMs to express support. Members of eastern-based House of Representatives (HoR) opposed to GNA repeatedly delayed vote to endorse it. GNA 18 April took over two ministries in Tripoli; 25 April said it had taken control of five others, including foreign ministry. GNA 28 April announced plans to establish joint military command against Islamic State. In defiance of GNA, eastern-based authorities approved export of crude oil that left Tobruk by sea 26 April. Tripoli said sale illegal, UN added tanker to sanctions blacklist; Malta, where transfer to take place, blocked tanker's arrival.

➔ **Mauritania** Appeal court in SW Nouadhibou 21 April upheld death sentence for blogger Mohamed Mkhaitir convicted of apostasy Dec 2014, referred case to Supreme Court which can reduce sentence if it finds defendant repentant. Committee to Protect Journalists and Reporters Without Borders condemned ruling, called on court to repeal sentence. OHCHR 26 April deplored confirmation of sentence.

➔ **Morocco** Govt 3 April said two suspected militants linked to Islamic State (IS)'s Libyan branch arrested 1-2 April in Casablanca and neighbouring Had Soualem after it dismantled terror cell late March. Security services 29 April dismantled three-member IS-linked terror cell in Nador.

➔ **Tunisia** Security forces 7 April killed two alleged jihadists in NW. IMF 15 April agreed in principle to four-year \$2.8bn loan to support economic reforms. Police violently repressed protests early April on Kerkennah island against British oil company Petrofac over jobs it pledged for youth, provoked riots that led to army replacing police and national guard.

➔ **Western Sahara** UNSC 29 April passed U.S.-drafted resolution renewing MINURSO mandate for one year, urging return of political component of mission, expelled by Morocco in March, within 90 days. Gulf Cooperation Council rulers in Riyadh 20 April backed Morocco after March spike in tensions with UN.