

# CrisisWatch

A monthly bulletin on current and potential conflicts  
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## May 2016 – Trends

### ↓ Deteriorated situations

[Guinea-Bissau](#), [Haiti](#), [Libya](#), [Mali](#), [Nigeria](#), [Turkey](#), [Venezuela](#)

### ↑ Improved situations

## June 2016 – Watchlist

### 💣\* Conflict risk alerts

[Haiti](#), [Libya](#), [Venezuela](#)

### ☪ Conflict resolution opportunities

[Yemen](#)

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**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.

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

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# Africa

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## Central Africa

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➔ **Burundi** Talks to end political crisis postponed from 2 May after govt and opposition threatened to boycott over participants, later held in Arusha, Tanzania 21-24 May. Bowing to pressure from Bujumbura and Burundian East African Community (EAC) chief, lead facilitator former Tanzanian President Mkapa did not invite main exiled opposition alliance National Council for the Respect of the Arusha Agreement, Restoration of the Rule of Law (CNARED) but only some CNARED members. CNARED leaders and civil society organisations asked EAC chief not to interfere in talks. Mkapa 24 May said he would convene next session in June. African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights 20 May called for international police force, more military and rights observers to be deployed in Burundi. Burundian rights activist late April said 1,098 civilians killed since violence began April 2015; police 3 May said 77 police and 374 civilians killed in same period. Security forces mid-late May arrested about 400 youths in Bujumbura and Mugamba; Bujumbura mayor said necessary to "manage movement of people". Court 9 May delivered 21 life sentences to those involved in May 2015 attempted coup. Assassinations of military personnel continued; former colonel killed 25 May in Bujumbura. Rwanda mid-month expelled over 1,300 Burundians (see Rwanda).

- Thierry Vircoulon, ["Insights from the Burundian Crisis \(II\): When WhatsApp Replaces the Radio"](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 13 May 2016.

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**New** Crisis Group Africa Report N°235, *Burundi: A Dangerous Third Term*, 20 May 2016.

The current political crisis has reopened the wounds of Burundi's past. Hardliners now dominant in the government brutally stifle dissent, fuel ethnic hatred, and undermine the Arusha accord that framed Burundi's peace for the past decade. The international community should push toward real dialogue, and prepare to intervene if violence escalates.

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➔ **Cameroon** Boko Haram (BH) continued attacks on civilians in Far North but at lower rate, killing thirteen people, including: girls detonated suicide bombs 2 May in Kolofata and 9 May in Homaka-Blabine killing only themselves, BH killed nine civilians and abducted two in Idoua 20 May. Army and govt-recognised vigilante groups sustained counter-BH operations, including in Nigeria: jointly attacked BH in Kambalam, Nigeria 2 May; jointly killed seven BH members in Homaka 7 May; army rapid intervention force 12 May conducted operation in Madawaya forest, Nigeria, freed over fifty captives, arrested Boukar Kaou, alleged BH amir of Kumshe, Nigeria. Security forces arrested opposition Cameroon People's Party members in Yaoundé 20 May.

➔ **Central African Republic** National assembly 6 May elected former Minister Karim Mekassoua as assembly president, despite corruption allegations against him. French President Hollande 13 May visited Bangui, said Sangaris mission would end by Dec, 250 French soldiers would secure airport in 2017 and more would join EU training mission and UN mission. Ex-Seleka rebel factions late May demanded positions in govt and threatened to reunify to pressure govt. Legislative elections held 15 May in ten constituencies where initial results contested; results due by 5 June. Govt 19 May created

committee to prevent genocide. Armed men 18 May killed Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) driver 82km north of Bossangoa (NW); MSF 19 May suspended operations in area. ICC prosecutor 18 May requested minimum 25 years' imprisonment for Congolese former rebel Jean-Pierre Bemba for abuses committed by his militia in CAR 2002-2003. IMF 29 May said it would provide \$110mn in financial aid over three years.

- Thibaud Lesueur, [“Central African Republic: Four Priorities for the New President”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 10 May 2016.

➔ **Chad** Constitutional council 3 May announced official results of 10 April presidential elections; President Déby winner with 59.92% of vote, Saleh Kebzabo second with 12.77%. Council's dismissal on procedural grounds of opposition's request that vote be invalidated led six opposition candidates to call for general strike on 5 May; call not heeded. U.S. and France early May called on govt to investigate disappearance of at least twenty military personnel 9 April allegedly after voting for opposition. Former President Habré 30 May convicted in Senegal for crimes against humanity and sentenced to life.

➔ **DR Congo** Constitutional court 11 May ruled that President Kabila could legally stay in office after his second term ends in Dec if elections have not been held. Main opposition parties rejected judgement, called for protest marches. Anti-govt protests held throughout country 26 May, clashed with police in several cities, one protester and one policeman killed in Goma. Ex-Katanga Governor Moïse Katumbi 4 May said he would run in presidential elections; govt same day opened investigation into Katumbi's alleged hiring of foreign mercenaries in plot against govt. Prosecutor general 19 May issued arrest warrant for him but Katumbi flew with prosecutor's permission to South Africa 20 May for medical treatment, 27 May flew to Europe. Attacks on civilians rose in eastern Beni territory, North Kivu, attributed to Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebels, leaving at least twenty people dead; armed forces 14 May launched new operation against ADF.

- Richard Moncrieff, [“The Reluctance of Joseph Kabila to Cede Power Could Push Congo to the Brink”](#), *Guardian*, 2 May 2016.

➔ **Republic of Congo** Following govt crackdown in southern Brazzaville opposition stronghold early April, police maintained heavy presence there during month, frequently detaining youths. Charles Bowao, leader of opposition platform Initiative for Democracy in Congo and the Republican Front for the Respect of Constitutional Order (IDC-FROCAD), 25 May called for political dialogue with govt and end of opposition leaders' house arrest. FM 9 May demanded EU withdraw head of EU delegation following alleged persistent opposition to govt and “disdainful” behaviour; EU refused.

➔ **Rwanda** UN experts' report leaked 13 May claimed govt continues to support Burundian rebels seeking to oust Burundian President Nkurunziza, following UN experts' similar accusation in Feb. President Kagame denied allegations. Burundian officials 16 May said Rwandan govt had expelled over 1,300 Burundians including refugees and long-time residents; Kigali said expulsions part of crackdown on illegal residents, not Burundians specifically.

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## Horn of Africa

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➔ **Djibouti** President Guelleh sworn in 8 May following 8 April re-election; Sudanese President Bashir attended ceremony flouting ICC arrest warrant.

➔ **Ethiopia** Ethiopian and S Sudanese authorities by 27 May reportedly returned to Ethiopia's Gambella region 63 children abducted by S Sudanese ethnic Murle armed group in April; Ethiopian troops reportedly still in S Sudan in search of some 60 children still captive.

➔ **Kenya** Opposition protests in Nairobi against Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) for alleged pro-govt bias continued from late April and started in Mombasa and several counties: dozens wounded during month in clashes with police, who 23 May reportedly killed at least one protester in Kisumu county and two in Siaya county. Govt 6 May announced plan to close Dadaab refugee camp in NE despite international pressure.

➔ **Somalia** Al-Shabaab continued to launch regular attacks despite Somali National Army (SNA) and AMISOM offensive and U.S. drone strikes, but lost territory. Al-Shabaab 1 May attacked SNA base in Middle Shabelle, killed at least fifteen soldiers; IED killed two security officials in Puntland 6 May; suicide attack on traffic police HQ in Mogadishu killed five police 9 May; militants ambushed convoy of Kenyan AMISOM troops and Jubaland militia 24 May in Lower Juba, killed one Jubaland militant and wounded seven; militants 31 May killed two soldiers in Puntland. SNA and AMISOM forces 6 May repelled Al-Shabaab assault in Gedo region, three militants, one SNA killed; SNA 12-15 May retook three villages in Lower Shabelle, no casualties reported. Somali Federal Govt President Hassan Sheikh 22 May endorsed plan for electoral process ending months of dispute.

➔ **South Sudan** Transitional unity govt 27 May approved cantonment of rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army-In Opposition (SPLA-IO) forces in Greater Equatoria and Bahr el Ghazal; 22 May formed committee to resolve controversial issues of boundaries and number of states as demanded by IGAD. Small groups of Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and SPLA-IO clashed in former Unity and Upper Nile states.

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**New** Crisis Group Africa Report N°236, *South Sudan's South: Conflict in the Equatorias*, 25 May 2016. The 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan reached a milestone with the formation of a transitional government in Juba in April. Yet fault lines like those in the Equatorias remain outstanding. A committed, inclusive political response is vital to stop low-level conflicts continuing indefinitely.

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➔ **Sudan** Opposition alliance Future Forces of Change (FFC) and national dialogue (ND) committee 24 May agreed to continue talks on roadmap agreement on multiple conflicts despite disagreements on major issues. Govt, AU and UN 23 May completed fact-finding mission in Darfur to inform discussions on UN Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) exit strategy; made little progress on timetable. Clashes between police and students continued from April: police reportedly arrested dozens of students in Khartoum and other cities; some 25 students injured 16-17 May in Khartoum in clashes between ruling National Congress Party and opposition Popular Congress Party

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supporters over student union election results. Fighting continued between Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), pro-govt militias and rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North in S Kordofan and Blue Nile states, including SAF aerial bombing of civilian areas; military and civilian deaths reported.

➔ **Uganda** Govt continued crackdown on opposition: security forces 3 May arrested over twenty officials of major opposition party Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) and activists for “disobeying lawful orders” by attempting to hold prayer meeting at FDC HQ. FDC led march 5 May in defiance of court order, govt deployed army as preventive security measure, banned media coverage. FDC leader Kizza Besigye arrested 11 May after mock ceremony to swear in Besigye as “rightful” president; Besigye charged with treason and terrorism 13 May. President Museveni sworn in 12 May following Feb re-election; Sudanese President Bashir attended ceremony ignoring ICC arrest warrant, U.S. and EU diplomats left ceremony in protest.

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## Southern Africa

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➔ **Angola** Police acknowledged to press that officers 8 May killed opposition party National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) supporter in Malanje; 24 May detained and beat Voice of America correspondent in Luanda; 27 May arrested four members of activists' alliance Union of Activists in the Eighteen Provinces in Malanje (UA18P). Police and UNITA 27 May jointly confirmed deaths of three UNITA supporters in attack by members of ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in Cubal, Benguela province; govt 27 May said it had created commission to investigate incident. Supreme Court 20 May acquitted Cabinda activist Marcos Mavungo, arrested March 2015 for allegedly planning violent protest against state.

➔ **Madagascar** Rumours of imminent coup persisted throughout May despite appointment of new army and police chiefs to keep in check alleged seditious groups in security forces. Opposition Senator René Lylison 23 May called for general strike to protest govt's poor governance; call not heeded but security forces next day dispersed protests in Antananarivo.

➔ **Mozambique** Armed opposition Renamo 18 May agreed to talk with govt, but violence continued. Govt-Renamo mixed commission 30 May approved agenda for peace talks, preparations ongoing for Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama to meet President Nyusi. However, clashes between Renamo militants and security forces continued with at least a dozen people killed in May. Renamo 18 May echoed 5 May demand by Mozambican Human Rights Commission for inquiry into allegations of murders by security forces, focusing on discovery of thirteen bodies in Gorongosa province in April. Following its admission in April of \$1bn undisclosed debts, govt revealed it failed to disclose two other loans totalling over \$1.4bn; donor grouping Programme Aid Partners responded early May suspending financial aid.

➔ **Zimbabwe** To manage factionalism within ruling ZANU-PF, President Mugabe 5 May created body to hear appeals against decisions by party's disciplinary machinery which enemies of first VP Emmerson Mnangagwa have reportedly used to sanction his allies. Body is chaired by second VP Phelekezela Mphoko, staunch opponent of

Mnangagwa, but includes some Mnangagwa allies. Suspicious death of Mnangagwa supporter Espinah Nhari in car accident 13 May prompted allegations by Mnangagwa allies of involvement of rival G40 ZANU-PF faction aligned with First Lady Grace Mugabe.

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## West Africa

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➡ **Burkina Faso** Govt 6 May dismissed commissioner and judge investigating 1987 killing of former President Sankara and Sept 2015 coup, prompting accusations of govt interference. New commissioner, contradicting Supreme Court's 28 April announcement, 17 May said arrest warrant against former President Compaoré not yet cancelled. President of former ruling party now opposition Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP) Eddie Komboigo provisionally released 30 May, following late-Jan arrest for complicity in Sept 2015 coup. Alleged terrorists 17 May attacked police station in Koutougou, 45km from border with Mali, injuring two police officers. 22 May municipal elections saw large victory for ruling Movement of People for Progress (MPP); opposition Union for Progress and Change (UPC) and CDP came second and third. Elections took place amid localised violence; party militants clashed and ransacked two electoral commission offices.

➡ **Côte d'Ivoire** ICC trial of former President Gbagbo and youth leader Charles Blé Goudé for crimes against humanity resumed 9 May. Gbagbo's son Michel and French journalist indicted 24 May for "spreading false information" after saying that govt still held political prisoners. Alleged member of terrorist cell reportedly responsible for mid-March Grand-Bassam attack arrested in Abidjan 26 May. Trial of former First Lady Simone Gbagbo for crimes against humanity began 31 May in Abidjan.

➡ **Gambia** Govt repression continued. Police 9 May fired at and arrested protesters in Banjul demanding release of opposition members and supporters detained since April demonstrations for electoral reform and free speech. Govt 15 May charged six protesters arrested 9 May with rioting and incitement of violence. UN 17 May asked govt to investigate death in custody of Solo Sandeng, head of youth wing of opposition United Democratic Party (UDP), arrested 14 April.

➡ **Guinea** President of leading opposition party Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG) Cellou Dalein Diallo 23 April said he would file lawsuit against four govt officials after security forces blocked march organised by UFDG women in Conakry to protest imprisonment of opposition activists; trial, due to begin 31 May, was adjourned. NGO Global Witness 11 May published report highlighting bribes British company Sable Mining allegedly paid to officials in Guinea and Liberia to obtain licenses; Guinea govt denied allegations, 23 May said it had opened investigation into issues (see Liberia).

➡ **Guinea-Bissau** Confrontation between President Vaz and dominant faction of ruling African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) led to standoff. High court 9 May annulled earlier regional court decision to suspend mandates of fifteen dissident PAIGC MPs; PAIGC and allied parties same day accused Vaz of legal coup, reiterating call for immediate legislative elections. Vaz 12 May dismissed PAIGC-designated PM Correia, citing his failure to secure both majority in parliament

and parliament's approval of govt agenda; began consultations with all parties. PAIGC 16 May proposed Correia and PAIGC whip Califa Seidi as PM candidates and reallocation of cabinet positions. Vaz, claiming PAIGC's proposal too vague, decided to create govt of "presidential initiative", built on coalition of leading opposition Party for Social Renewal (PRS) and fifteen dissident PAIGC MPs; designated PAIGC dissident Baciro Dja as PM 26 May. PAIGC same day said move unconstitutional, called for popular mobilisation and refused to leave main government building. PAIGC and opposition supporters protested outside presidency; some wounded in clashes with security forces.

➡ **Liberia** Govt 9 May said UN Mission in Liberia will transfer its responsibilities to national security forces as part of drawdown due to be completed June 2016, but will remain in country to help maintain peace. NGO Global Witness 11 May published report highlighting bribes British company Sable Mining allegedly paid to officials in Liberia and Guinea to obtain licenses: govt opened probe into allegations; senior officials including ruling Unity Party chairman and parliament speaker arrested 25 May, immediately released on bail.

↓ **Mali** Clashes between ethnic armed groups and attacks by suspected jihadists rose in centre and armed groups continued to clash in north. Hundreds of protesters in Gao 13 May demanded govt and UN mission MINUSMA include more local youth in delayed disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process. Pro-govt Groupe d'autodéfense touareg imrad et alliés (GATIA) 14 May reportedly attempted to forcefully disarm Ganda Izo militia in Ndaki, Timbuktu region; two GATIA and one Ganda Izo reportedly killed. French Barkhane mission and govt forces (FAMA) maintained efforts to counter jihadist groups: Special Forces 5 May arrested alleged second-in-command of Ansar Dine's southern brigade, Yacouba Touré, outside Bamako; Barkhane forces 6 May said they had killed Ansar Dine commander and captured another. Jihadists continued to target FAMA and international forces: alleged jihadists 11 May ambushed FAMA convoy, killing one officer and one soldier; ambushed MINUSMA convoys, killing five peacekeepers in Kidal region 18 May and five in central Mopti region 28 May. Ethnic clashes increased in centre: Fulani and Bambara armed groups clashed repeatedly in Mopti region 30 April-3 May, leaving some 30 dead.

➡ **Niger** Alleged Boko Haram (BH) fighters reportedly attacked civilians in SE several times: 3 May broke into medical centre in N'Garwa, Diffa region, stole food and medical equipment; 19 May reportedly killed at least six civilians in Yebi, Bosso district and burned village. Govt said army 27 May repelled BH attack in Bosso district, killing ten BH. Fulani and Mohamid Arab armed groups reportedly clashed repeatedly with alleged BH insurgents during month along shore of Lake Chad.

↓ **Nigeria** Security in Niger Delta deteriorated further, cutting oil output to lowest in two decades and reducing national electricity supply. Little-known group Niger Delta Avengers claimed six attacks during month on facilities operated by Chevron, Shell, Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC) and Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) in Delta and Bayelsa states. Security forces attacked Delta militants 26 May, unknown number killed. Hitherto unknown group Egbesu Mightier Fraternity next day threatened to attack offshore oil facilities in Delta if govt did not release within two weeks Biafra separatist leader Nnamdi Kanu and former national security adviser Sambo Dasuki. Security forces clashed with Biafra separatist agitators in several SE cities 30

May, at least twenty killed. Army continued operations to clear Boko Haram (BH) strongholds in NE Borno state's Sambisa forest, reporting several gains during month: 14 May repelled insurgents' attack; 17 May found escaped Chibok girl kidnapped April 2014; 19 May freed 97 girls and women. Clashes between farmers and Fulani herdsmen continued in several states: suspected Fulani herdsmen attacked two villages in Zamfara state 4 May, at least ten people killed; attacked three villages in Taraba state 7 May, about thirteen killed; attacked Tarfi, Benue state 13 May, at least five killed.

- Vincent Foucher, "[Boko Haram is losing ground – but will not be defeated by weapons alone](#)", *Guardian*, 13 May 2016.

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**New** Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°120, *Boko Haram on the Back Foot?*, 4 May 2016. Boko Haram is losing ground, resources and fighters. But defeating the group and preventing a future insurgency needs more than military success. The 14 May summit in Abuja is an opportunity for Nigeria and its Lake Chad basin neighbours to prepare and implement what's been long overdue: a holistic response to the extremist group.

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# Asia

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## North East Asia

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➔ **China/Japan** Japanese official 9 May said Japan and China considering ministerial-level economic meetings in Tokyo, possibly in coming months, which would be first such dialogue since Aug 2010; also said Japan hoped talks would lead to meeting between PM Abe and President Xi on sidelines of Sept G20 summit. Followed FM-level meetings late April in which Chinese FM Wang Yi made four-point requirement on improving relations. Japan 16 May announced plans to conduct joint naval exercises in East China Sea with U.S. in June.

➔ **Korean Peninsula** DPRK 9 May concluded 7th Workers' Party Congress; leader Kim Jong-un 8 May stated nuclear weapons program to be continued "permanently", added would use weapons only if attacked. Chinese President Xi 9 May reportedly sent congratulatory letter to Kim on latter's election to chairman of party, stated appreciation for bilateral ties. Following DPRK's 23 April submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) test, U.S. and ROK officials concluded DPRK could mount small nuclear warhead on short- and medium-range missiles capable of reaching much of Japan and ROK. ROK 31 May reported failed DPRK ballistic missile launch attempt off east coast. U.S. think-tank 10 May reported decline in visible activity at Punggye-ri nuclear test site; satellite imagery taken 8 May showed four vehicles recently observed at site had departed. ROK 23 May rejected DPRK proposal for military talks, cited lack of plan to end DPRK nuclear program. Russia and China 5 May announced first joint computer-assisted anti-missile drills in apparent response to proposed U.S. Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system deployment in ROK. DPRK 16 May informed UK that chief nuclear negotiator and former ambassador to UK Ri Yong-ho to be new FM.

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## South Asia

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➔ **Afghanistan** Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour killed in U.S. drone strike in Pakistan near Afghan border 21 May. Taliban 25 May named new leader Haibatullah Akhunzada; CEO Abdullah Abdullah called on new leader to join peace talks. High Peace Council (HPC) 18 May signed draft peace agreement with Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) insurgent group; includes govt commitment to make efforts to remove HIG and leaders from UN blacklist if HIG ends armed struggle, enters political process; agreement reportedly being verified but not yet signed by President Ghani. National Security Advisor 2 May said Islamabad should act against Afghan Taliban in Pakistan. Gains made against insurgents included: officials 7 May said at least 28 Taliban killed as security forces repelled major offensive in Ghaziabad district, Kunar province; security forces 22 May killed Taliban shadow governor of Helmand; National Directorate of Security 4 May reported it had foiled Haqqani Network plot in Kabul, arrested three suspects; Afghan National Police 11 May arrested suspected Taliban financial officer. Officials 17 May said Taliban cleared from Yakhchal area in Grishk district, Helmand. However Taliban spring offensive continued: officials 18 May reported Tali-

ban capture of Baghlan province's Surkh Kotal area; at least ten killed 10 May in suicide attack on pro-govt militia commander in Nangarhar province; one killed by rockets fired at Herat governor's building 22 May; over 50 police reported killed 29-30 May in heavy fighting in Helmand; Taliban killed at least nine and kidnapped dozens of bus passengers in Kunduz 31 May. Several killed in clashes between Jamiat and Junbish party supporters in Almar district, Faryab province. Ethnic Hazaras protested in Kabul 16 May against late April cabinet decision not to route Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TUTAP) powerline through Hazara-majority Bamiyan province; Hazara leader and second deputy to CEO Adbullah 6 May threatened to stop cooperating with govt.

➔ **Bangladesh** Brutal extremist killings continued: Sufi spiritual leader hacked to death in Rajshahi 6 May; Buddhist monk found murdered in temple in Chittagong Hill Tracts Bandarban district 14 May; homeopathic doctor and secularist killed in machete attack in Kushtia town in west Bangladesh 20 May, reportedly claimed by IS; Hindu man found hacked to death in Gaibandha 25 May, police suspected local extremist group. Police 14 May reported two suspects, members of Ansarullah Bangla Team, identified for role in 25 April double murder of LGBT activist and his friend, one of the suspects arrested next day; 16 May claimed detained operative of extremist Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh had confessed to involvement in 23 April killing of university professor. High court 5 May declared sixteenth constitutional amendment, passed in 2014 to restore parliament's power to impeach higher court judges through two-thirds majority, violated principle of separation of powers and judicial independence and therefore unconstitutional; law minister said govt would appeal decision to Supreme Court. Police 11 May filed fresh charges against BNP chief Khaleda Zia and 26 other BNP leaders/activists for arson attacks during violent govt-opposition standoff in early 2015, fifth such case against Zia. Police 15 May arrested BNP joint Sec Gen Aslam Chowdhuri for allegedly plotting coup in collusion with Israeli intelligence; Chowdhuri and BNP denied allegations. Meeting with U.S. officials 16 May, BNP leaders appealed for U.S. support to ensure 2019 election free and fair. Controversial International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) 3 May convicted five men of murder, torture and abductions during 1971 liberation war, sentencing four to death and one to life imprisonment. Jamaat chief Motiur Rahman Nizami executed 11 May provoking Jamaat street protests and fresh diplomatic tensions with Pakistan, which summoned Bangladeshi envoy in protest; Bangladesh condemned Islamabad's "interference". Dhaka 16 May lodged protest with Myanmar over recent reported mortar shell attacks into Bangladesh, including 12 May shelling of Border Guard Bangladesh camp from area where Myanmar security forces are fighting ethnic armed group.

- For latest report, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°277, *Political Conflict, Extremism and Criminal Justice in Bangladesh*, 11 April 2016.

➔ **India (non-Kashmir)** At least two police reported killed by Maoist insurgents during month, one after being abducted in E Maharashtra, one in attack in Bastar, Chhattisgarh. Three suspected insurgents reportedly shot dead in encounters with security forces in Bastar 21 May; police also reported two local villages killed by Maoists late May. Chhattisgarh govt renewed ban on Maoist organisations for another year.

➔ **Kashmir** Violence increased late month: police reported they killed leader and another member of Pakistani militant group Jaish-e-Mohammed in Srinagar 23 May.

Three police shot dead in Srinagar 24 May; one policeman and one civilian killed in separate attacks by gunmen 25 May; one soldier and six suspected militants killed in two separate encounters in Baramulla district 27 May, one involving gun battle with separatists allegedly trying to cross Line of Control.

➡ **Nepal** Ruling UML party thwarted bid by opposition Nepali Congress (NC) to topple govt through no confidence motion; ruling coalition member UCPN (Maoist) withdrew support from NC's position following 6 May agreement with UML that included withdrawal of transitional justice cases related to war-era abuses. Dissenting Madhesi parties formed Federal Alliance with Tharu and Janajati groups to demand amendments to new constitution, improved governance, and post-earthquake reconstruction; following poorly-attended mid-May protests in Kathmandu, Alliance considering organising demonstrations along highways and calling strikes instead. Madhesi parties continue to refuse participation in govt-led mechanism to resolve disputes on state boundaries and inclusion. UCPN (Maoist) 19 May reunified with several smaller breakaway Maoist parties to form Nepal Communist Party (Maoist Center); hard-line leaders Mohan Baidya and Netra Bikram Chand not involved with new party. Concerns increased regarding govt's increasing intolerance of criticism and dissent following arrest on corruption charges of a prominent commentator and deportation of a Canadian national for political tweets that allegedly caused "social discord". Reports emerged late April that security forces reportedly sought personal details of complainants with the transitional justice commission on truth and reconciliation, and enforced disappearances.

- For latest report, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°276, *Nepal's Divisive New Constitution: An Existential Crisis*, 4 April 2016.

➡ **Pakistan** Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour killed in U.S. drone strike near Afghan border 21 May (see Afghanistan); Pakistani interior minister said strike against international law, U.S. said its rules of engagement allow defensive strikes against threats to U.S. and coalition personnel. Worker from Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) political party died in paramilitary Rangers' custody 3 May showing signs of torture, two days after being arrested; army chief Raheel Sharif ordered inquiry, Sindh Rangers director reportedly admitted torture took place, denied it was cause of death. MQM 2 May submitted list to Supreme Court naming 171 party members detained without charges. Sindh Chief Minister 4 May extended Rangers' policing power for 77 days. Also in Karachi: civil society activist and blogger Khurram Zaki shot dead 7 May in suspected extremist killing. Eleven injured 12 May in clashes between MQM and its breakaway Pakistan Sarzameen Party faction in Hyderabad. Amid continued insurgent violence in Balochistan, Pakistani Taliban (TPP)-claimed bomb outside Quetta's Balochistan University 10 May which killed two police. Police 5 May killed eight militants in Punjab's Sheikhpura district, 10 May arrested five TPP and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) in Bahawalpur district. Son of ex-PM Yusuf Raza Gilani, abducted 2013, freed 9 May from al-Qaeda hideout in Afghanistan by U.S. and Afghan forces. Security forces 8 May arrested Afghan Border Security official in Pishin on spying charges. Opposition 4 May demanded inquiry into offshore holdings of PM Sharif's family; Senate 20 May approved PM's proposal to form committee to finalise terms of reference for establishing judicial commission.

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**New** Crisis Group Asia Report N°279, *Pakistan's Jihadist Heartland: Southern Punjab*, 30 May 2016. Once-tolerant southern Punjab has become a base for jihadist groups. Socio-economic grievances, political alienation and poor education provide a near endless source of recruits. To reverse the tide, the government must end a climate of impunity, block hate speech, improve rule-of-law, and refocus counter-terrorist action to target all jihadist groups.

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➔ **Sri Lanka** Commemoration of seventh anniversary of end of war 18 May overshadowed by heavy rains that led to massive flooding and landslides; more than 100 believed dead, some 400,000 displaced. Constitutional assembly steering committee 4 May established six subcommittees; public representations committee presented report to PM 10 May, publication date uncertain; unofficial negotiations on issues including electoral reform and devolution of power continued. Ahead of June session of UN Human Rights Council, govt appeared close to publicising plan for Office of Missing Persons (OMP), approved by cabinet 24 May. UN special rapporteurs on torture Juan Mendez and on judicial independence Monica Pinto made joint visit 29 April-7 May: Mendez found evidence of continued widespread torture of Prevention of Terrorism Act detainees and regular prisoners and inhumane conditions in prisons; Pinto pointed to serious systemic problems in judicial system, proposed reforms. Arrests of suspected and ex-LTTE members continued in north and east early May. Amid rising public concern about lack of action on corruption and criminality under former govt, cabinet 17 May rejected proposal submitted by four ministers requesting update on progress of investigations. Police financial crimes investigation division 12 May arrested Basil Rajapaksa, brother of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa and previously minister of economic development in latter's govt, over land deal allegedly involving money laundering. Second senior police official arrested 23 May, suspected of suppressing evidence in murder case to protect members of Rajapaksa govt.

- Alan Keenan, ["Time to seize the moment in Sri Lanka"](#), Inside Story, 25 May 2016.

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**New** Crisis Group Asia Report N°278, *Sri Lanka: Jumpstarting the Reform Process*, 18 May 2016. Seven years after its civil war ended, Sri Lanka's democratic space has reopened but strains are building from a powerful opposition, institutional overlaps and a weakened economy. To make reforms a real success, the prime minister and president should cooperate with openness and redouble efforts to tackle legacies of war like impunity, Tamil detainees and military-occupied land.

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## South East Asia

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➔ **Indonesia** Police 2 May arrested hundreds of protesters in Papua calling on Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) to grant pro-Papuan independence groups membership in regional body; 31 May briefly detained some 300 protesters in Jayapura. Followed late April visit to Papua by President Widodo. MSG chair accused Indonesia of refusing to engage in dialogue on concerns over rights abuses in W Papua; Jakarta said claims violated principles of sovereignty and non-interference. Police said two suspected members of East Indonesia Mujahidin terrorist group killed in shootout with security forces in Poso, Central Sulawesi 15 May.

➔ **Myanmar** Legislature 10 May approved without discussion president's request to establish new State Counsellor Ministry to support ASSK's work as state counsellor;

retired ambassador Kyaw Tint Swe appointed 17 May to head ministry. At 13 May press conference Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing confirmed he will not retire during coming govt. Seventeen senior members of former ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) including former chair Shwe Mann expelled from party 22 April. ASSK 27 April met Joint Monitoring Committee of Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), gave first outline of her peace plans: called for conference within one-to-two months, indicated she would personally lead peace process and her personal physician Tin Myo Win to be in day-to-day charge. Plans announced without prior consultation with armed groups and other stakeholders. Govt 31 May set up committees making up new peace architecture. Serious armed clashes continued, including between govt forces and Kachin Independence Organization in Kachin state, Arakan Army (AA) in Rakhine state and Shan State Army-North ceasefire group in Shan state; also clashes between Shan State Army-South and Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) in N Shan state in early-May, leading to the displacement of an additional 1,600 villagers. U.S. renewed sanctions against Myanmar 17 May, including arms embargo, ban on jade and gem imports, and list of over 100 "specially designated" individuals/entities U.S. nationals are prohibited from dealing with; eased some restrictions with aim to ease trade, removed state-owned banks from U.S. blacklist and lifted sanctions against seven state-owned timber and mining companies. U.S. Sec State Kerry during 22 May visit discussed situation in Rakhine state with ASSK and Commander-in-Chief; followed calls by Buddhist nationalist protesters and govt for U.S. embassy to refrain from using word Rohingya. ASSK called for all parties to avoid "emotive" terms like "Rohingya" and "Bengali". Govt 31 May announced formation of central committee for implementation of peace and development in Rakhine State.

➔ **Philippines** Controversial longstanding mayor of Mindanao's Davao City Rodrigo Duterte won 9 May presidential elections with 38.5% of vote. Pantaleon Alvarez, expected to be new house speaker under Duterte, 21 May said next Congress would not pass Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), would focus on federalisation of country which would address provisions of 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on Bangsamoro (CAB); remarks contradict Duterte's previous stated commitment to passing BBL. Chief govt negotiator on CAB 23 May urged passage of BBL; Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) 24 May called Alvarez's statement "non-starter" and said it did not build confidence in Duterte administration's understanding of Bangsamoro issue. Govt and MILF peace panels met 29-30 May in Malaysia and signed Declaration of Continuity of the Partnership in the peace process. Poll results released 7 May showed 45% of Philippine population said new president should implement CAB. Islamic State (IS) claimed 9 May attack on army outpost in Maluso, said carried out by "IS Philippines"; second IS-claimed attack in Philippines. Seven soldiers wounded 18 May on Jolo Island in suspected Abu Sayyaf group grenade attack. Govt forces 24 May captured Abu Sayyaf camp in effort to rescue hostages; Abu Sayyaf set new ransom deadline for 13 June. Abu Sayyaf 11 May freed four Indonesians without ransom; release reportedly negotiated by Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). Govt forces late month reportedly killed 54 militants linked to Islamist terrorist group Jemaah Islamiyah in Lanau del Sur. In other attacks: seven killed, one wounded 9 May by unknown attackers south of Manila. Four killed in Maguindanao mid-May in three clashes between Sabal and Buisan political clans with ties to MNLF and MILF.

➔ **South China Sea** U.S. guided missile destroyer 10 May sailed within twelve nautical miles of Fiery Cross Reef in disputed Spratly islands; China deployed fighter jets and warships to warn and track destroyer. U.S. said exercising “right of innocent passage”; China said it was illegal and provocative, proved necessity of increased Chinese defensive facilities in archipelago. Senior Chinese and U.S. defence officials in 12 May talks affirmed desire to avoid confrontation. U.S. 18 May reported that Chinese jets previous day intercepted U.S. aircraft conducting routine patrol in international airspace over SCS, flew only 15m from U.S. plane; China 19 May said its aircraft were at safe distance, urged U.S. to cease close-up reconnaissance. U.S. Pentagon report 13 May characterised China’s SCS strategy as “low-intensity coercion”; also noted no Chinese land reclamation in Spratlys since late 2015. Beijing late April denied U.S. aircraft carrier entry to Hong Kong harbour. Ahead of ruling (expected in June) by Permanent Court of Arbitration on SCS territorial dispute in case brought by Philippines, China sought international support, including meetings with Laos, Brunei and Cambodia, and Arab League. Philippine president-elect Duterte 15 May met with Chinese and Japanese diplomats, confirmed willingness to improve relations with Beijing and discuss maritime dispute. China 4 May began annual combat drill in SCS. Vietnamese PM 14 May called on Japan to play more active role in SCS dispute. China and Vietnam conducted annual fishery patrol on shared fishing grounds in Tonkin Gulf late April. Indonesian navy reportedly arrested crew of Chinese fishing vessel 27 May, despite attempt by Chinese coast guard vessel to intervene, in disputed waters. G-7 leaders 27 May expressed concern over SCS tensions, emphasised importance of peaceful dispute settlement; China expressed dissatisfaction.

➔ **Thailand** Royal Gazette 5 May published National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) order authorising interior ministry to appoint govt officials to local elected councils when existing terms expire. Deputy PM Gen Prawit Wongsuwon 17 May said if voters reject second attempt to pass draft constitution in Aug referendum, another committee would be set up to draft third charter, raising possibility general election set for mid-2017 might be further delayed. Election Commission 19 May met with 65 political parties to discuss Aug referendum; politicians asked NCPO state what will happen if draft constitution is rejected in the referendum. Repression of regime critics continued, notwithstanding ongoing international pressure, including criticism from UN human rights chief Hussein late April on NCPO order providing military officers with police powers. Phase Two of Thailand’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at UN Human Rights Council in Geneva 11 May addressed inter alia torture and ill treatment of detainees by security officials; the death penalty; enforced disappearances; and freedom of speech. Following subsequent meeting with Thai FM, U.S. ambassador told media U.S. is “troubled” by recent arrests of NCPO critics. Country 22 May marked two-year anniversary of coup that brought NCPO to power; authorities permitted demonstration of some 200 people against military rule. Cabinet 26 May resolved to enact law to criminalise torture and enforced disappearances by state officials, drawing praise from UN and human rights activists. NCPO 27 May lifted international travel bans on scores of regime critics. Deep South saw continued insurgent attacks in Narathiwat, Yala and Pattani provinces, including IED in Narathiwat 2 May killing one soldier; several civilians also killed/injured during month.

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## Europe and Central Asia

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### Balkans

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➔ **Bosnia** State statistics agency 18 May said it would publish contentious results of 2013 census to meet 1 July deadline, despite disputes between country's three statistical agencies over methodology to calculate number of residents; Bosnian Serb leadership condemned decision. High Representative Valentin Inzko 5 May briefed UNSC on his concerns over Bosnian Serb leadership's threat to hold independence referendum, and criticised opening of dormitory named after war criminal Radovan Karadzic. Ahead of local elections scheduled for Oct, thousands attended rival political rallies in Bosnian Serb capital Banja Luka 14 May.

➔ **Kosovo** Leaders of five main parties met 17 May for EU-organised joint roundtable, day after opposition MPs also took part in first meeting of EU-Kosovo Stabilization and Association Parliamentary Committee. European Commission 4 May recommended visa-free travel regime for Kosovo nationals, also called for Kosovo to tackle organised crime and corruption and ratify border demarcation agreement with Montenegro; further protests against agreement took place 16 May. Briefing UNSC session on Kosovo 16 May, UN envoy Zahir Tanin called for end to political infighting.

➔ **Macedonia** Political crisis continued with ongoing fallout of President Ivanov's 12 April pardon of 56 politicians, including anti-govt protests throughout May calling for Ivanov to step down and cancel pardon. EU and U.S. called for pardon to be revoked, and for special prosecutor investigating wire-tapping claims to be able to work unhindered. Ivanov 24 May told German newspaper he would not revoke pardon, blamed special prosecution for crisis by selectively targeting ruling party; 27 May announced he would cancel pardon for 22 "politically exposed people" plus those who wanted their pardon to be revoked. Parliament 30 May formed special commission to investigate whether Ivanov's pardon violated constitution. EU and U.S. also pushed for elections scheduled for 5 June to be postponed to allow for implementation of necessary reforms for credible polls. As more countries joined election boycott, EU said it would not recognise election if only one main party participates. Constitutional court 18 May ruled April dissolution of parliament unconstitutional due to incorrect procedure and halted election preparations; parliament same day reconvened and voted to delay elections. Vote succeeded despite some opposition MPs walking out of session in protest at cabinet reshuffle in which two opposition ministers were replaced with their ruling party deputies. EU foreign policy chief Mogherini said "way forward must be defined by all main political parties together". Over 20,000 joined ethnic Albanian opposition protest in Skopje 9 May.

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### Caucasus

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➔ **Azerbaijan** Supreme Court 25 May unexpectedly ordered release of investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova, jailed Dec 2014 and sentenced to seven and a half years

on embezzlement and tax evasion charges in case widely believed to be politically motivated and which elicited international condemnation; U.S., EU and rights groups welcomed release, however over 80 political prisoners believed to remain behind bars.

➔ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** Violations of 5 April truce continued early month, including Yerevan and Baku accusing each other of firing at their positions. Armenian govt 5 May approved opposition-drafted bill calling for Yerevan to recognise independence of N-K; deputy FM said it would only be brought to vote if Azerbaijan launched new attacks. Azerbaijani and Armenian presidents met in Vienna 16 May to discuss conflict, in talks mediated by Russian, U.S. and French FMs in capacities as OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs. Presidents earlier met with EU foreign policy chief Mogherini. U.S., Russia and France 17 May issued joint statement reporting Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents' renewed commitment to ceasefire; also reported OSCE ceasefire monitoring to be scaled up and OSCE investigative mechanism to be finalised; and agreement on next round of talks with aim to resuming negotiations on a comprehensive settlement. One Azerbaijani soldier and one N-K fighter killed in clashes same day; sides blamed each other for outbreak of fighting.

➔ **Georgia** U.S., Georgia and UK conducted joint live-fire training exercise in Georgia 11-26 May, including with U.S. tanks and armoured personnel carriers. Tbilisi said main goal is to improve cooperation with NATO; Russia called drills provocative. Defence minister said drills marked "huge step" toward NATO membership. Following drills, Georgia was invited to join NATO Response Force. Tbilisi 20 May reported an ethnic Georgian man shot dead by Abkhaz de facto border guards on Georgian-controlled side of the administrative boundary with breakaway Abkhazia region. Breakaway South Ossetia region's de facto president and parliament speaker 26 May announced "referendum" on joining Russia to be postponed until after 2017 presidential election.

➔ **North Caucasus (Russia)** National Antiterrorism Committee (NAK) 4 May reported three militants killed during operation in Kizilyurt District, Dagestan. Also in Dagestan, police colonel shot dead at home in Suleiman-Stal region 6 May; insurgents 9 May raided apartment of former Derbent city mayor's family and killed his father; police chief, another police officer and four rebels shot dead during clash in Derbent 14 May, seventeen police also injured, IS claimed responsibility. Press secretary of Makhachkala's main Salafi mosque, who had criticised illegal practices of security services, arrested 11 May, accused of carrying illegal weapon. Six police reported wounded in militant attack at security checkpoint near Chechen capital Grozny 9 May. In Ingushetia, National Counterterrorism Committee 21 May reported arrest of four IS militants suspected of planning attacks against govt officials. Resident of Chechen mountain village who complained to President Putin about corruption early May reportedly fled to Dagestan after receiving death threats; later reported harassment of his family, his house set on fire, while reports also emerged that police were surrounding his village; village residents later reportedly required to apologise to Putin, complainant issued apology to Chechen leader Kadyrov 30 May. Chechen Supreme Court 17 May convicted two Ukrainians guilty of fighting with Chechen separatists in 1990s.

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## Eastern Europe

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➔ **Belarus** After meeting with Russian counterpart, Belarussian FM 16 May said Minsk and Moscow are concerned about U.S. and NATO plans for missile-defence systems in Eastern Europe.

➔ **Ukraine** Russia 25 May unexpectedly released Nadezhda Savchenko, Ukrainian military officer who had volunteered for duty in east and was captured and sentenced to 22 years for murder on charges she denied; Ukraine released two captured Russian paramilitary troops in return. Savchenko's release was facilitated by Ukrainian-Russian businessman Viktor Medvedchuk. Kyiv proclaimed Savchenko Hero of Ukraine; Savchenko announced plans to return to parliament, where she is member of Yulia Tymoshenko's Batkivshchyna party – currently rising in polls – and member of defence committee; 27 May said she is ready to become president if Ukrainians want her. Poroshenko's personal approval ratings currently at 10%. Several Ukrainian oligarchs and senior members of Opposition Bloc, notably Oleg Boyko, reported to be working with Poroshenko and Russian President Putin to find way forward for stalled Minsk peace process. Poroshenko further consolidated his power with appointment of close ally Yury Lutsenko as prosecutor general 12 May. Immediately prior to approving Lutsenko, parliament passed law reducing qualifications for position in move which enraged reformers, although Opposition Bloc supported candidate. Day after appointment, U.S. reported it would move forward with third loan guarantee agreement, which had been contingent on reforms. IMF 18 May reported progress on economy, also noted need for govt to boost reforms. Situation in the east remains tense; fire-fights along most of line of separation; Ukraine and separatists late May both admitted to fatalities, including at least seven Ukrainian servicemen 24 May, several more in following days; separatists 29 May reported two fighters killed. Russian, Ukrainian, German and French leaders 24 May discussed approaches to resolving conflict. UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture delegation cut short its visit after being denied access to parts of country by Ukrainian State Security Service.

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## Western Europe/Mediterranean

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➔ **Cyprus** Ruling Democratic Rally (DISY) party won Republic of Cyprus parliamentary elections 22 May with 30% of vote. New Turkish Cypriot PM Hüseyin Özgürgün 4 May reiterated support for peace talks with Greek Cypriot community. Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot leaders 14 May issued joint statement on first anniversary of resumption of reunification talks, acknowledged ongoing efforts to overcome challenges and noting both sides' optimism about comprehensive settlement in 2016. Turkish govt 3 May lifted visas for all EU citizens, including Greek Cypriots, as part of EU visa liberalisation roadmap; stated move did not imply Ankara's recognition of Greek Cyprus.

⚠ **Turkey** Month saw increased political polarisation as well as intensified violence and civilian casualties in SE, and rise in attacks attributed to Islamic State (IS). PM Davutoğlu resigned 5 May amid heightened tensions with President Erdoğan and following ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP) 29 April decision to remove PM's authority to appoint provincial party officials. AKP leadership 19 May announced

Binali Yıldırım, minister of transport, maritime and communication and close ally of president, new PM. Parliament 20 May approved bill stripping immunity from 148 MPs currently facing criminal investigation, including 53 members of pro-Kurdish HDP (and party co-chairs). Violence intensified in SE with 27 civilians killed during month, up from previous months, also some 70 security forces and 53 PKK-linked militants. PKK continued high profile attacks and reportedly used more advanced weapons systems. Attacks include bomb-laden truck 12 May detonating in Diyarbakır's Dürümlü, three PKK militants and thirteen civilians reportedly killed. Turkish military continued air operations against PKK targets in SE Turkey and N Iraq. Clampdown against IS networks continued following 1 May IS-linked bomb attack on police station in Gaziantep that killed three officers and injured 22. IS-attributed strikes from Syria increased including 2 May strike in Kilis; security forces responded with cross-border strikes on IS positions throughout month. European Commission 4 May recommended lifting of travel visas for Turkish biometric passport holders inside Schengen zone, following Turkey's fulfilment of all but five of 72 criteria laid out in visa liberalisation roadmap as part of March migrant deal. European Parliament (EP) President Martin Schulz 11 May said EP would not take up commission's proposal until remaining five criteria are fulfilled including amendments to anti-terror law, which Turkish govt officials reject citing country's heightened terror threats.

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## Central Asia

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➔ **Kazakhstan** Protests that began in Atyrau 24 April against controversial changes to Land Code and demanding prohibition of sale of state-owned land to foreigners, escalated dramatically and continued throughout month: in Janaozen, Kyzylorda and Almaty 1 May, 4 May in Uralsk and 21 May across country. Protesters confronted riot police 1 May; several hundred protesters and local and international journalists detained 21 May, with heavy security presence reported in major urban areas. Protests prompted resignations of minister of national economy 5 May and minister of agriculture 6 May. President Nazarbayev 6 May put moratorium on amendments to Land Code until 2017 and created by decree new ministry of information and communication.

- Deirdre Tynan, [“Kazakhstan's Protests Postponed – But for How Long?”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 12 May 2016.

➔ **Kyrgyzstan** Parliament 12 May rejected controversial draft law, similar to Russian law on foreign agents, restricting “non-commercial organisations”. At 12 May meeting of newly-created People's Parliament movement, grouping of ex-Akayev and Bakiyev era officials and others critical of govt, leaders made provocative statements on govt; State Committee for National Security (GKNB) quickly detained two leaders of movement on charges of “preparation for the violent seizure of power”. Further leaders and members detained 13-16 May; President Atambayev 14 May accused them of working for the destabilisation of country.

➔ **Tajikistan** Minister of justice faced strong criticism delivering Tajikistan human rights record 6 May at UN Human Rights Council in Geneva; representatives of Norway, Belgium, Australia and Austria expressed concerns over restrictions on mass media and prosecution and repression of Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). Closed

court session 11 May sentenced five IRPT members to life term in prison. National referendum held 22 May on amendments to the constitution, including erasing limit of presidential terms, lowering age qualification for presidential candidates, parliamentary deputies, govt members and judges from 35 to 30, and ban on religion and nationality-based parties; Central Election Commission 23 May reported 92% turnout, 94.5% of voters supported proposed amendments. Ministry of internal affairs 6-9 May detained four Islamic State members allegedly planning terrorist attacks in Dushanbe 9 May.

► **Uzbekistan** Taliban 1 May attacked Uzbek border post, from Balkh province, N Afghanistan.

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## Latin America and the Caribbean

➡ **Colombia** President Santos 11 May said govt hoped to reach peace deal with FARC in “very near future”, as difficult issues including arms abandonment continue to delay signing. Govt and FARC 13 May agreed on legal mechanisms to protect future peace deal; govt stated that if plebiscite vote favours peace deal, it will be defined as a special international agreement according to Geneva conventions and be temporarily included as part of constitution. Govt and FARC 15 May announced agreement for rebels to release all fighters aged fifteen years and younger from camps. Issue of kidnapping still stalling start of formal negotiations with ELN as govt stated it will not negotiate as long as group continues to kidnap and/or retain hostages; ELN said it rejected any such preconditions. ELN 28 May released three journalists, one Spanish and two Colombians, kidnapped 21 and 23 May respectively. Govt 6 May authorised use of military force against neo-paramilitary groups created or strengthened after 2003-2006 paramilitary demobilisation, creating new category of “organised armed group” comprising Úsuga Clan, Pelusos and Puntilleros.

- Kyle Johnson, [“Erradicación, pedagogía y legitimidad”](#), *Semana*, 23 May 2016.
- Kyle Johnson, [“The National Liberation Army \(ELN\) Joins Colombia’s Search for Peace”](#), *In Pursuit of Peace*, 12 May 2016.
- Lucia Sobekova, [“UNGASS – A Very Modest Drug Policy Review”](#), *In Pursuit of Peace*, 2 May 2016.

➡ **Guatemala** Investigations into corruption by public ministry and International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) continued. High Impact Court judge Miguel Angel Gálvez, leading “La Línea” customs fraud and bribery case and other prominent cases including 15 April case related to irregular contract between national Quetzal Port Corporation and the Quetzal Container Terminal (TQC) involving former President Otto Pérez Molina and VP Roxana Baldetti, 10 May said he has been threatened. Attorney General María Eugenia Villagrán resigned 30 May citing threats received in relation to TCQ case. Public ministry and National Civilian Police early-May launched operation against large extortion network linked to Barrio 18 street gang; authorities 2 May arrested at least 72 alleged members of criminal structure operating in municipalities south of Guatemala City.

⬇️🇸🇰\* **Haiti** Long-delayed presidential elections thrown into further uncertainty with commission report saying flawed Oct 2015 elections must be entirely re-held, prompted fears of further civil unrest. Following postponement of 24 April presidential and legislative run-off elections and subsequent mass protests, MP Gary Bodeau 4 May announced National Assembly will convene 13 June, for beginning of second parliamentary session and one day before end of interim President Privert’s current 120-day term, to ensure institutional continuity (under Feb political agreement, Privert would hand over power to newly-elected president by 14 May). UNSC 13 May expressed “deep disappointment” over authorities’ failure to meet agreed election and inauguration deadlines, though welcomed late-March reconstitution of Provisional Electoral Council (CEP). Presidential run-off election timetable upended as evaluation and verification commission which began 28 April published its report 30 May finding massive irregularities in Oct 2015 presidential elections and recommending to CEP, and ulti-

mately parliament, that poll be entirely re-run. CEP chief Leopold Berlangier said body would announce decision 6 June. Six Haitian police in Les Cayes killed 16 May by army-fatigue wearing gang, some of whom later died when their getaway car crashed; one captured shooter alleged Senatorial candidate Guy Philippe organised attack; Philippe denied involvement.

➔ **Mexico** Two federal judges 11 and 16 May accepted separate U.S. requests from California and Texas district courts, for extradition of cartel leader Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán; process still requires approval from foreign ministry and could be appealed by Guzmán’s lawyers. Citizen-led brigades searching for missing persons continued to find clandestine graves: “Siempre Vivos” committee 12 May discovered remains in Chilapa municipality, Guerrero state, where drug gang kidnapped over a dozen people in May 2015; similar efforts have found remains of over 100 people around city of Iguala, Guerrero; relatives of missing students 22 April also found fifteen clandestine graves containing burnt remains in Gulf-coast state of Veracruz. National Human Rights Commission 11 May released report showing country’s internally displaced population exceeds 35,000; urged govt to take national census along with measures to protect victims’ rights and guarantee their access to social services. Ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and opposition National Action Party (PAN) traded accusations of links to organised crime ahead of 5 June regional elections: PRI 7 May expelled three mayors from party citing alleged links to organised crime; PAN responded alleging PRI had history of association with organised crime in Tamaulipas.

- Mary Speck, [“The 43 Missing Students Are Not Alone. Mexico’s Justice System Is Broken”](#), World Post, 9 May 2016.

⚠️ **Venezuela** Standoff between govt and opposition Democratic Unity (MUD) alliance over attempted presidential recall referendum intensified, amid worsening economic and humanitarian crisis and increasing international concern over deteriorating situation and possible spread of violent protests over food and other basic goods. President Maduro 16 May decreed a wide-ranging State of Exception and Economic Emergency suspending constitutional guarantees for initial period of 60 days in order to combat what he called attempt by opposition and foreign allies to overthrow govt. Decree empowers president to do anything he considers necessary to combat alleged threat and suspends certain constitutional prerogatives of opposition Democratic Unity (MUD) alliance-dominated National Assembly (AN), including control of govt spending and right to censure ministers. Powers of armed forces and other civilian bodies loyal to ruling party also expanded. Though decree acknowledges constitutional requirement for parliamentary approval, govt-run Supreme Court (TSJ) had already ruled late-Jan that AN rejection of such decrees is not binding. AN 17 May rejected decree and MUD leaders called it unconstitutional. Former MUD presidential candidate and Miranda state Governor Henrique Capriles mid-May called on Venezuelans not to obey it, told Maduro to “bring out the tanks” if he intended to enforce it and warned army to choose between allegiance to Maduro or constitution. Public anger over lack of food and other basic goods grew, with increased incidents of looting including wholesale market looted 11 May in Maracay 100km west of Caracas. Electoral authority (CNE) continued to delay and obstruct recall referendum process. MUD 2 May reportedly delivered 1.85 million signatures, ten times number required to trigger second signature drive for 20% of electorate needed to force referendum; though votes should

have been ratified within five days according to regulations, CNE said process would take a month because of added stages including submission of fingerprints for forensic examination. Special presidential commission has also been permitted to challenge signatures at each stage. Amid growing international concern, Organization of American States (OAS) Sec Gen Luis Almagro 31 May invoked Inter-American Democratic Charter; Permanent Council meeting called for 1 June to hear his report and debate deteriorating situation in Venezuela. Govt and opposition 28 May met with group of mediators, comprising three former presidents, led by former Spanish President Zapatero and sponsored by Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), in Dominican Republic, for first discussion on how to de-escalate crisis; face to face talks between govt and opposition did not occur and no next steps were established.

- Mark Schneider, [“Venezuela’s Nicolás Maduro in Wonderland”](#), *Miami Herald*, 25 May 2016.

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# Middle East & North Africa

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## Eastern Mediterranean

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➔ **Israel-Palestine** In worst violence since end of July-Aug 2014 war, Israel early May bombed Hamas facilities in Gaza; Hamas shot light ammunition, mortars, and short-range rockets at Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) soldiers. Tensions rose following Israel's discovery of tunnels leading from Gaza to Israel; Hamas retaliated against subsequent Israeli excavations within Gaza. Following mediation by Egypt, Israel withdrew from Gaza and violence subsided. Stabbings and car rammings by Palestinians continued in Israel; mostly resulting in injuries, some assailants killed. PM Netanyahu 25 May replaced Likud's Moshe Yalon as defence minister with ultra-nationalist Avigdor Lieberman, bringing "Israel is Our Home" party into coalition; followed growing public questioning of army's commitment to protecting Jewish soldiers. Month saw efforts to renew diplomatic negotiations between Israel and Palestine. France postponed its planned international peace conference from 30 May to 3 June to allow for participation of U.S. Sec State Kerry. Palestinian leadership agreed to postpone efforts to put forward UNSC resolution condemning Israeli settlements to give French initiative a chance; Palestinian PM told journalists that Palestinians expect French initiative to generate internationally supported parameters. Quartet currently focused on issuing report expected to detail obstacles to resolving Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including Israeli settlement activity and Palestinian incitement. Egyptian President Sisi 17 May in live televised speech explicitly addressed Israelis, saying there is a "real opportunity" for peace. In Gaza Hamas 31 May executed three people convicted of murder without approval of Palestinian Authority, required under Palestinian law.

- Ofer Zalberg, "[Explaining the relative calm at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade during Passover](#)", Times of Israel, 10 May 2016.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°48, [How to Preserve the Fragile Calm at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade](#), 7 April 2016.

➔ **Lebanon** Top Hizbollah military commander Mustafa Badreddine killed in explosion in Damascus 12 May, representing most important loss for Shiite party since 2008 assassination of former commander Imad Mughniyeh. Hizbollah initially blamed explosion on Israeli airstrike, 14 May accused *takfiri*/jihadi groups of assassination; 20 May vowed to strengthen its presence in Syria. Govt held municipal elections over four rounds, country's first election in six years, in line with constitutional deadline. In Beirut, list led by former PM Saad Hariri and backed by governing elite, including Hizbollah, Amal Movement and the Lebanese Forces, defeated Beirut Madinati (Beirut My City) list, comprised of experts and activists, by less than 7,000 votes. Turnout in Beirut was low at around 20%, compared with close to 50% in Bekaa, Dahiyeh and the South, where ruling parties were entrenched – notably Hizbollah and Amal movement, whose alliance won vast majority of seats in various municipalities in predominantly Shiite areas. In Tripoli, where turnout was also low, list backed by resigning Justice Minister Ashraf Rifi won overwhelming majority of seats dealing major blow to his former close ally Saad Hariri, and other Tripoli leaders. Elections revealed flaws of Lebanese Forces-Free Patriotic Movement recent alliance, which was success-

ful in some areas, however the two major Christian parties failed to agree in other regions, or their coalition did not win majority of seats.

➔ **Syria** Following mid-April collapse of cessation of hostilities in north, diplomatic engagement and military escalation continued. High-level meetings between U.S. and Russian officials produced re-affirmations of truce in Lattakia, Damascus and Aleppo, but reducing violence only for short, pre-defined periods. Regime and Iran-backed Shia foreign forces/proxies escalated in Aleppo as truce continued to erode, however they were unable to gain territory and suffered significant setback south of city where dozens of pro-regime fighters were killed including Iranians as Jaish al-Fateh rebel alliance recaptured village of Khan Touman 6 May. Russian airstrikes remain at lower level than prior to Feb cessation, though reportedly began to hit Aleppo city again starting 22 May. At least 23 reported killed in Russian airstrikes on Idlib 31 May. Islamic State (IS) claimed series of bombings on regime coastal stronghold starting 23 May, reportedly killing over 100 civilians. U.S.-backed Kurdish-led forces 24 May began offensive against IS near its de facto capital Raqqa; IS captured territory from rebels near Turkish border late month, with dozens killed in fighting. U.S. continued to push for return to cessation; UN envoy de Mistura 26 May told UNSG Ban no new round of talks likely for two-to-three weeks. Chief opposition negotiator Mohammed Alloush resigned late month citing failure of talks. Mustafa Badreddine, top Hizbollah commander believed to be organisation's most senior official in Syria, killed 12 May (see Lebanon). Syrian pound depreciated further, fuelling concern over humanitarian situation. UN late month reported humanitarian aid reaching only a fraction of those in need, as govt continues to block supplies to several areas it is besieging. Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group reported at least 60,000 people have died in govt jails since beginning of conflict in 2011.

- Joost Hiltermann, "[The Kurds: A Divided Future?](#)", *New York Review of Books*, 19 May 2016.
- Noah Bonsey, "[Can High-Stakes Diplomacy Save Syria's Battered Truce?](#)", *In Pursuit of Peace*, 4 May 2016.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°49, [Steps Toward Stabilising Syria's Northern Border](#), 8 April 2016.

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## Gulf and Arabian Peninsula

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➔ **Bahrain** Appeals court 31 May extended sentence of opposition al-Wefaq movement leader Sheikh Ali Salman from four years to nine for "promoting change to the political system by force". Court same day ordered release of activist Zainab al-Khawaja, detained since March.

➔ **Iran** In run-off parliamentary elections held 28 April, pragmatic republican supporters of President Rouhani won 123 of 290 seats but failed to secure outright majority, theocrats won 80 seats, independents 86. Parliament 31 May re-elected pragmatist theocrat Ali Larijani as speaker, post-holder since 2008. Revolutionary Guards 7 May said that thirteen of their forces killed in Syria in April and 21 wounded (see Syria). U.S. Sec State Kerry 13 May encouraged European banks – some previously punished for breaking sanctions on Iran – to do business with country after U.S. and EU lifted some sanctions in Jan.

- Ali Vaez, [“Rouhani’s Incomplete Victory in Iran’s Parliamentary Elections”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 4 May 2016.
- ➔ **Iraq** Army backed by Shia militias and U.S.-led coalition airstrikes 23 May launched offensive to retake Falluja (about 50km W of Baghdad) under Islamic State (IS) control since January 2014: U.S. military spokesman 27 May said coalition airstrikes had killed 70 IS militants in Falluja including city commander, govt forces advanced to city’s southern edge 30 May. UN 23 May said estimated 50,000 civilians in Falluja at “great risk” from fighting and lack of food, water and health care. UNHCR 27 May said more than 4,200 civilians fled IS-controlled Mosul to Syria in May as IS reportedly has increased executions of men and boys there. Army 19 May said it had retaken Rutbah (about 550km W of Baghdad on routes to Jordan and Syria) from IS after two-day battle. PM Abadi 26 May appealed for weekly anti-govt demonstrations in Baghdad to stop until Falluja freed, Baghdad streets calm late May. Small steps made toward ending political crisis: Kurdish MPs who left capital end April in protest against cabinet overhaul and after aggression by protestors met Abadi in Baghdad 28 May but did not agree to return to parliament. Parliament convened with quorum 29 May; 167 MPs present including Shiite al-Ahrar bloc affiliated with Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr who led anti-govt protests. Two IS suicide bombers blew themselves up and one other bomb detonated in Baghdad 31 May, killing over twenty.
- Maria Fantappie, [“Iraq: On the Edge of Chaos”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 14 May 2016.
- ➔ **Saudi Arabia** Security forces 30 April-1 May killed two Islamic State (IS) fighters and wounded one in SW Bisha province; 5 May shot dead two suspected IS fighters in Wadi Noman area south of Mecca, two other IS blew themselves up.
- ➔ **Yemen** Peace talks between govt and Huthi/Saleh bloc progressed slowly, as fighting continued. Parties 26 May said they had agreed to exchange prisoners, but had not yet agreed numbers; 30 May discussed creation of mixed military committees to oversee withdrawal of Huthis and allies. Huthi rebels launched at least three missiles at Saudi Arabia from northern governorates provoking it to escalate bombing on Huthi positions. Saudi-led coalition 14 May began sending significant reinforcements to Marib governorate east of Sanaa; spokesman said coalition would take Sanaa militarily if talks fail. Saudi-led coalition-backed fighters 28 May launched offensive in Shabwa governorate taking territory from Huthi/Saleh forces on Shabwa-Marib border. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Islamic State (IS) attacked Yemeni forces in eastern Mukalla: suicide bomber 11 May wounded military commander of Hadramout region and killed eight others, IS claimed 12 May attack on naval base and military compound and 15 May suicide bomb that killed 25 police recruits. IS claimed 23 May suicide car bombing that killed at least 40 army recruits in Aden. Pro-govt southern separatist militias 8 May expelled from southern Aden hundreds of northerners accused of having links with Huthis, President Hadi called move “unacceptable”.

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## North Africa

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- ➔ **Algeria** Govt 3 May said army 29 April-3 May killed five alleged terrorists, found arms in Skikda region (NE). Army 11 May killed seven suspected Islamist fighters in Lakdaria, Bouira region in north. Govt 21 May said large-scale army operation in Ain

Turk, Bouira region which began 17 May killed eight suspected Islamist fighters, captured one; also 12 May reported arrest of dozens of smugglers and sub-Saharan migrants in Bordj Badji Mokhtar region bordering Mali and In Guezzam region bordering Niger.

➔ **Egypt** EgyptAir flight from Paris to Cairo crashed in Mediterranean Sea 19 May, all 66 on board believed dead; investigators have not ruled out terror attack. President Sisi 4 May extended state of emergency in N Sinai for three months: roadside bomb in N Sinai 21 May killed three soldiers; army 25 May said at least 85 militants killed in previous four days in Sinai. Gunmen 8 May killed eight police in Helwan district, S Cairo; both Islamic State (IS) and revolutionary Islamist movement Popular Resistance claimed responsibility, fight between local police and Bedouins also reported as possible cause of attack. Court 14 May sentenced prominent activist Sanaa Seif to six months' jail for insulting judiciary. Another court 15 May sentenced to up to five years' prison over 150 people of at least 1,200 who 25 April protested against Sisi's rule and return of islands in Gulf of Aqaba to Saudi Arabia. Opposition remains in disarray; Social Democratic Party threatened to splinter after founder resigned early May. Court 30 May sentenced Muslim Brotherhood's supreme guide and 35 other people to life in prison for "inciting violence" in north in 2013.

⚠️ **Libya** West-based pro-Govt of National Accord (GNA) and east-based anti-GNA factions mobilised troops to retake Sirte from Islamic State (IS); could lead to confrontation in Gulf of Sirte area over control of oil facilities. Over twenty FMs of countries supporting UN-backed Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) 16 May met in Vienna and reaffirmed support for PM-designate Serraj and Presidential Council (PC), encouraged him to continue establishing GNA, offered to consider exemptions to arms embargo for forces loyal to PC. Emboldened by international support Serraj 16 May requested eighteen ministers to begin work; Serraj named ministers in Feb but they had not begun work due to lack of endorsement by Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR). 60 HoR members continued to demand revisions to LPA before voting on whether to endorse GNA. In east, animosity toward LPA and Serraj spiked, with support for General Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) increasing after its recent military advances in Benghazi and Derna. LNA-affiliated forces early May set up base in central Zella in preparation for offensive against IS stronghold of Sirte. Misratan pro-GNA forces mid-May clashed with IS-affiliates W Sirte, took back Abu Ghrein. Pro-GNA Petroleum Facilities Guard militia advanced westward toward Sirte, reportedly taking from IS Ben Jawad 30 May and Nawfiliyah 31 May.

➔ **Mauritania** Supreme Court 17 May ordered release of high-profile human rights activists Biram Dah Abeid and Brahim Bilal Ramdhane who had been jailed for eighteen months, after deciding their offences warranted one year of imprisonment not two as originally sentenced. Abeid 18 May said he wants to run again for president.

➔ **Morocco** Security services 2 May arrested suspected Islamic State (IS)-affiliated militant in Saidia in east; suspected accomplice arrested 3 May in Sidi Bennour in west; authorities 13 May arrested Chadian suspected IS militant in Tangier, reportedly foiling plot to attack Western diplomatic buildings and tourist sites.

➔ **Tunisia** Four security personnel and two suspected Islamist fighters killed 11 May during anti-terrorist operation in south. Security forces same day killed two suspected Islamist fighters near Tunis, arrested sixteen others. Social unrest, including

strike 11 May, erupted in southern Ben Guerdane after Libyan authorities late April halted freight traffic through Ras Jedir border post to stop smuggling.

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**New** Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°168, *Tunisia: Transitional Justice and the Fight Against Corruption*, 3 May 2016. Polarisation over transitional justice after the 2011 fall of Tunisia's old regime is obstructing basic progress. Accounting for past actions cannot include the early idea of "revolutionary justice", but can become a tool to reconcile citizens, tackle corruption and give the economy a much needed new impetus.

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