December saw fighting worsen between rival forces in Libya, including over oil facilities, which could escalate in January and upset the precarious political and economic balance. Turkey’s security deteriorated further following a series of violent attacks on civilians and security forces, including a twin bombing in the capital, Istanbul, claimed by an offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). Ankara responded by intensifying its crackdown on alleged PKK supporters. In Russia’s North Caucasus, Islamic State (IS)-affiliated militants and police were killed in clashes in the Chechen capital, while in Burkina Faso a deadly attack on security forces reflected worsening insecurity in the north. In Macedonia and Gambia, elections led to heightened political tensions. In East Asia, Pyongyang’s announcement that preparations are at an advanced stage for an inter-continental ballistic missile test-launch deepened international concern over North Korea’s weapons and nuclear programs.
Trends and Outlook

In **Libya**, fighting between Misratan-led forces, nominally loyal to the internationally recognised Presidency Council (PC), and forces loyal to eastern strongman General Haftar escalated throughout December, risking worse clashes around Sirte, Jufra or Tripoli in January. In early December Misratan-led forces took full control of Sirte from IS, but rifts over governance of the city quickly emerged between the PC-supported city council, Misratan militias and the east-based government. Moving west towards Tripoli, factions loyal to Haftar took control of a military base from Misratan forces in Brak Shati, 200km south of Sirte and anti-Haftar forces launched unsuccessful offensives to retake control of oil export terminals. As we warned mid-December, new fighting over oil facilities threatens “a dangerous economic meltdown”. Beyond security assistance, international actors must urgently prevent any further escalation in the Gulf of Sirte, and help stabilise the economy.

In **Turkey**, the conflict between the state and PKK militants deepened further. PKK affiliate Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK) claimed responsibility for twin bomb attacks in central Istanbul on 10 December, which killed 36 police and eight civilians. After the attack counter-terrorism police detained more than 900 people on charges of PKK membership and terrorist propaganda, some for posts on social media, and the government intensified its crackdown on Kurdish political representatives. TAK also claimed a suicide attack on a bus carrying off-duty soldiers in Central Anatolia on 17 December, killing fourteen. In another incident in the capital, an IS-claimed attack left at least 39 dead, including 24 foreign nationals, during New Year celebrations.

In Russia’s **North Caucasus**, the Chechen capital Grozny also faced deadly IS-claimed attacks which left the city virtually paralysed on 17-18 December. Crisis Group has previously warned of the threat of IS in the North Caucasus and the need for Russia to develop a de-radicalisation strategy and address unresolved grievances. In **Burkina Faso**, some 40 unidentified gunmen attacked a military and gendarmerie post close to the Malian border, killing twelve. The assault is the deadliest against security forces since suspected jihadist and criminal networks thought to be based in Mali began making incursions in the north in the last year.

Political tensions spiked in Gambia and Macedonia following elections. President Jammeh of **Gambia** initially conceded defeat after losing the 1 December presidential poll to Adama Barrow, but later refused
to step down and called for a new vote. The ECOWAS regional bloc said it could deploy forces to the country if he does not leave office by 19 January when his mandate ends. A close result in Macedonia’s snap elections on 11 December, which were meant to help bring an end to the country’s two-year political crisis, saw neither of the two main parties win an outright majority of seats in parliament, leading to increasingly harsh rhetoric amid uncertainty over who will form the new government.

Concerns about North Korea’s nuclear program and weapons capabilities mounted after Kim Jong-un in his New Year’s address announced that preparations were in their “last stage” to test-launch an inter-continental ballistic missile. This comes as the region has seen a creeping escalation in recent months over the East China Sea between China and Japan, with both taking steps to project their assertiveness, and the emergence of new tensions between China and the U.S. over apparent moves by U.S. President-elect Trump to challenge the decades-old One China policy, including by talking to Taiwan’s political leadership.

Latest Updates

Africa

➡️ Burundi  DECEMBER 2016

Three army officers arrested 1 Dec for attempted assassination of presidential adviser Willy Nyamitwe 28 Nov. Inter-Burundian dialogue mediator, former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa, visited Bujumbura 7-9 Dec to restart talks, 9 Dec said legitimacy of President Nkurunziza should no longer be questioned; main opposition coalition CNARED (National Council for the Respect of the Arusha Agreement, Restoration of the Rule of Law) 12 Dec said it no longer recognised Mkapa as mediator. Soldiers pursued National Forces of Liberation (FNL) rebels in DRC and clashed with Congolese army in S Kivu 21 Dec, at least five Burundian soldiers killed, army denied incident (see DRC). Tensions between govt and Belgium and other European countries rose: after Belgian senate held conference raising human rights abuses in Burundi, govt 8 Dec recalled ambassador to Belgium; accused ambassadors of Belgium, Germany, France, Netherlands and EU of boycotting govt after they failed to attend meeting on development assistance 13 Dec; police 15 Dec searched homes in expatriate neighbourhood in Kabondo, Bujumbura. UN inquiry 5 Dec accused 25 Burundian peacekeepers of sexual abuse in Central African Republic in 2014-2015. Nkurunziza late Dec said govt would sue African Union over unpaid wages for Burundi AMISOM contingent; EU suspended payments in March.
Cameroon  DECEMBER 2016

Boko Haram continued attacks against security forces and civilians in Far North at lower rate: militants attacked army in Djibiri, Mayo-Moskota district 12 Dec; killed two civilians in Grea, Kolofata district 14 Dec and two others in Bame, Kolofata district 28 Dec; suicide bombing killed two civilians in Mora 25 Dec. Following violent protests against perceived govt marginalisation of minority English-speakers in Nov, police 8 Dec fired on English-speaking protesters trying to block ruling Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM) rally in Bamenda, capital of Anglophone North West region, killing at least four; protesters burnt police station.

Central African Republic  DECEMBER 2016

Following clashes late Nov around Bria, Haute-Kotto prefecture (east), rival ex-Seleka factions Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC) and Popular Front for the Central African Renaissance (FPRC) clashed again early Dec in Bakala and close to Bambari, Ouaka prefecture (centre). Attack 27 Dec on displaced persons camps in Batangafo, Ouham prefecture burned over 100 huts, killed three people, injured over 50 and displaced over 900. President Touadéra 1 Dec said he wanted to negotiate conditions of disarmament with armed groups; Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) SG 11 Dec said it would assist disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process by organising talks with armed groups but consider supporting forced disarmament if negotiations failed. In parallel, several ex-Seleka hardliners allegedly met Angolan President dos Santos to discuss further talks. UN mission (MINUSCA) 14 Dec reported “alarming increase” in human rights abuses by ex-Seleka and anti-balaka groups, Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) rebels and Fulani armed groups since Aug 2016. UN report 5 Dec accused sixteen Gabonese and 25 Burundian peacekeepers of sexual abuse and exploitation in CAR 2014-2015.

Chad  DECEMBER 2016
Govt 7 Dec released eleven opposition members arrested in Nov anti-govt protest organised by New Opposition Front for Transition and Change (FONAC) coalition. Rebel group Chadian Front for Change and Accord (FACT) 13 Dec said Libyan General Khalifa Haftar’s forces carried out airstrike on its base in southern Libya 10 Dec killing one FACT rebel. In visit to Chad French PM and defence minister 29 Dec expressed support to gov't and emphasised importance of counter-terrorism partnership.

Democratic Republic Of Congo  DECEMBER 2016

Govt and opposition reached new agreement on way forward after security forces repressed protests 19 Dec at end of President Kabila’s second term (constitutionally his last) and violence continued in east. Clashes between security forces and people protesting Kabila staying in power in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, Boma and Matadi 19-20 Dec killed at least 40 people, 460 arrested. Kabila 19 Dec appointed new gov't led by opposition politician Samy Badibanga. Leader of main opposition coalition Rassemblement, Etienne Tshisekedi, 20 Dec urged people not to recognise Kabila as president and continue peaceful protest. Political dialogue including Rassemblement mediated by Catholic Church (CENCO) resumed 8 Dec after brief suspension, again suspended during 17-21 Dec unrest, signed agreement 31 Dec that Kabila will step down after elections to be held by end of 2017 and appoint PM from Rassemblement to oversee transition; issues still to be negotiated include power-sharing at national level and return of opposition leader Moïse Katumbi. EU 12 Dec imposed asset freezes and travel bans on seven high-ranking security officers for their roles in repressing Sept protests, gov't said EU sanctions “illegal”; U.S. same day imposed asset freezes on Kabila allies including former Interior Minister Evarist Boshab and intelligence chief Kalex Mutond. Electoral commission 12 Dec announced start of voter registration in twelve more provinces, said electoral budget at least $1.8bn. Violence continued in east: in N Kivu armed forces (FARDC) clashed with Raia Mutomboki militia in Walikale 7 Dec, nine people killed; UN mission (MONUSCO) and FARDC 16 Dec repelled two attacks by suspected Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebels near Beni killing three; suspected Mai Mai attacked Butembo 19 Dec, peacekeeper, policeman, five militans killed; suspected ethnic militia killed seventeen near Nyanzale 22 Dec reportedly provoking revenge attacks 25 Dec killing thirteen near Beni. In S Kivu, FARDC 11 Dec killed Burundian National Forces for Liberation (FNL) rebel in Uvira; killed at least five Burundian soldiers pursuing FNL rebels 21 Dec, Burundi denied incident (see Burundi). FARDC 4 Dec clashed with Kamwina Nsapu militia in Kasai province (centre-south), thirteen soldiers and eighteen militans killed.

- OP-ED: Course contre la montre pour un compromis politique en RDC
Republic Of Congo  DECEMBER 2016

Suspected Ninja militia attacked military vehicle early Dec in Mindouli district, Pool department, two people killed. UN 9 Dec said fighting in Pool had displaced 13,000 people since April, warned of risk of food shortages. Opposition coalition Initiative for Democracy in Congo and the Republican Front for the Respect of Constitutional Order (IDC-FROCAD) 13 Dec called for end of state of emergency in Pool. Three people killed in attempted prison break in Brazzaville 29 Dec.

Ethiopia  DECEMBER 2016

Govt 17 Dec said it would release 9,800 people detained for taking part in anti-govt protests since state of emergency began 9 Oct, released some 4,000 21 Dec. U.S. ambassador to UN Samantha Power 20 Dec called on govt to release deputy chairman of opposition Oromo Federalist Congress.

Kenya  DECEMBER 2016

Opposition leaders Raila Odinga of Coalition for Reforms and Democracy (CORD) and Musalia Mudavadi of Amani National Congress (ANC) 6 Dec said they would form coalition to contest 2017 presidential elections. Ahead of Aug 2017 general elections, primaries of ruling Jubilee Party 12-18 Dec marred by claims of rigging and voter intimidation. President Kenyatta 12 Dec accused foreign states and Western-funded NGOs of interfering in electoral process; govt 19 Dec suspended U.S.-funded civic education project. Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) 16 Dec started audit of voter roll. Al-Shabaab 12-14 Dec destroyed four telecommunication masts in Mandera county; Mandera governor said group trying to isolate county, planning major attack. Al-Shabaab 24 Dec attacked communication mast near Tarbaj, Wajir county, killing two people. Govt 27 Dec extended curfew in Mandera county until 28 March.
Somalia DECEMBER 2016

Federal parliament inaugurated 27 Dec despite reports of irregularities in delayed voting during month and presidential vote postponed to 24 Jan as Al-Shabaab sustained attacks against security forces and civilians. Electoral Dispute Resolution Mechanism (EDRM) 14 Dec nullified results for five parliamentary seats due to irregularities. Federal Indirect Electoral Implementation Team (FIEIT) 17-19 Dec suspended election of Somaliland parliamentary representatives in Mogadishu after Somaliland elders complained that polling station should be located in AMISOM base to avoid govt interference. Al-Shabaab 6 Dec captured Qeeyib village, Galguduud; car bomb attack 11 Dec killed 28 people and injured over 50 near Mogadishu port; militants 15 Dec carried out suicide bomb attack against Somali National Army (SNA) checkpoint in Afgoye, Lower Shabelle, killing six soldiers; same day launched two attacks in Mogadishu, killing six people. Al-Shabaab assassinated two senior officials in Bosaso 20 and 26 Dec, attacked Afgoye, Lower Shabelle 29 Dec, killing at least eight. Two civilians and soldier killed 22 Dec in explosion in Mogadishu. Puntland security forces 3-7 Dec recaptured Qandala, Bari region from pro-Islamic State militants.

South Sudan DECEMBER 2016

President Kiir 14 Dec said govt would hold national dialogue aimed at promoting reconciliation. Ethnic Shilluk Aguelek rebels under Johnson Olony, part of Riek Machar’s Sudan People’s Liberation Army-In Opposition (SPLA-IO), clashed with ethnic Nuer rebels under Gen. Tanginye early Dec. Govt forces continued to fight SPLA-IO rebels in Equatoria region in south; rebels captured govt position on DRC border. U.S.-proposed UNSC resolution including sanctions and arms embargo 23 Dec failed to win enough votes to pass.

- REPORT: South Sudan: Rearranging the Chessboard

Sudan DECEMBER 2016
Opposition activists and parties and armed opposition Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) called for stay-at-home protest against austerity measures 19 Dec following Nov three-day strike; call unevenly observed in Khartoum 19-21 Dec. Some twenty opposition party members detained Nov due to calls for anti-austerity protests, including Sudanese Congress Party leader Omer al-Digair, released from prison 25 Dec. Consultations between govt and Darfuri rebel groups Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and Sudan Liberation Movement-Minni Minnawi (SLM-MM) in Addis Ababa 1 Dec broke down over govt’s demand that rebels reveal positions. S Sudan 14 Dec said it had expelled JEM. Chief mediator of African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) Thabo Mbeki tried to restart talks in Khartoum 21 Dec; no developments in negotiation schedule reported.

Uganda  DECEMBER 2016

Court added terrorism, aggravated robbery and attempted murder to murder charge against Rwenzori traditional leader Charles Wesley Mumbere 13 Dec, arrested late Nov after clashes between security forces and local militias in Kasese district; opposition leader Kizza Besigye briefly arrested outside court.

Angola  DECEMBER 2016

Ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) 2 Dec said President dos Santos will not be party’s candidate in 2017 elections. Separatist rebel Front for the Liberation of Cabinda Enclave (FLEC) claimed to have killed six soldiers 5 Dec in clashes in Mbongozi-Muno village near Buco-Zau.

Mozambique  DECEMBER 2016
International mediators left country early Dec as talks between govt and Renamo armed opposition remained stalled. Nampula provincial assembly member from Renamo shot dead 15 Dec in Nampula in north. Renamo gunmen attacked train at Inhamitanga 7 Dec in central province Sofala, kidnapped fifteen people 7 Dec in Barue, Manica province in west, later released. Police 21 Dec accused Renamo of several attacks in central region including on Inhazonia jail, releasing 48 prisoners. Unidentified assailants kidnapped man and stole cattle in Zimbabwe and returned to Mozambique late Dec (see Zimbabwe). Renamo 27 Dec declared seven-day ceasefire for New Year. Unidentified gunmen shot dead senior Renamo official and former MP, Jose Naitelé, in Nampula city 29 Dec.

⇒ Zimbabwe  DECEMBER 2016

President Mugabe confirmed as ruling party ZANU-PF’s presidential candidate for 2018 elections at party conference 16-18 Dec. VP Emmerson Mnangagwa 22 Dec said security forces on alert on border with Mozambique after unidentified gunmen kidnapped man in Zimbabwe and killed him in Mozambique, cattle also reportedly stolen in Zimbabwe and taken to Mozambique; Mnangagwa blamed Mozambique armed opposition Renamo (see Mozambique).

⇒ Burkina Faso  DECEMBER 2016

Côte D'Ivoire  DECEMBER 2016

Legislative elections took place peacefully 18 Dec despite tensions within and between political parties and coalitions. Ruling coalition Houphouëtist Rally for Democracy and Peace (RHDP) won absolute majority with 167 seats of 254. Independent candidates, including many who refused to follow majority coalition line, won 75 seats. Moderate opposition faction led by Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) leader Pascal Affi Nguessan won three seats. Authorities temporarily suspended several opposition newspapers 7 Dec.

Gambia  DECEMBER 2016

President Jammeh 20 Dec refused to step down after losing 1 Dec presidential vote to Adama Barrow. Jammeh initially conceded defeat after electoral commission said Barrow won with 43.3% of vote to his 39.6%, but ruling party 13 Dec filed petition to challenge results in Supreme Court, due for review 10 Jan. Security forces 13 Dec blocked access to electoral commission. Presidents of Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Ghana representing ECOWAS regional bloc visited country 13 Dec, failed to persuade Jammeh to accept results; ECOWAS 17 Dec appointed Nigerian and Ghanaian presidents as mediators, 22 Dec said standby forces “on alert”; Jammeh 31 Dec said ECOWAS deployment would be “declaration of war” and called for new vote. UN 14 Dec said Jammeh must leave office at end of mandate 19 Jan.

Guinea  DECEMBER 2016

In accordance with 12 Oct agreement between govt and opposition on mayoral and community elections, govt 2 Dec sent revised electoral code to national assembly; main opposition party Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG) 10 Dec said provisions on govt’s appointment of neighbourhood chiefs violated 12 Oct agreement, demanded govt change proposed code; govt 14 Dec submitted new electoral code to national assembly.
Guinea-Bissau  DECEMBER 2016

PM Umaro Sissoco Embalo 12 Dec announced new govt, sworn in 13 Dec, including three opposition African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) dissidents. UNSG Ban 16 Dec called on all political stakeholders to compromise and reiterated support to ECOWAS-led mediation. IMF 2 Dec resumed payments to govt suspended in June over govt’s bailout for private banks.

Mali  DECEMBER 2016

Disagreements and continued clashes between armed groups prevented deployment planned for 10 Dec in northern regions Gao and Kidal of joint patrols including main separatist rebel alliance Coalition of Azawad Movements (CMA), Platform coalition that favours national unity and government forces (FAMA); over 100 former CMA members 29 Dec joined FAMA and pro-govt armed groups in Gao. Pro-unity Self-Defence Group of Imrad Tuareg and Allies (GATIA) 1 Dec attacked CMA base in N’tilit, Gao region, killing at least three CMA. Unidentified gunmen 18 Dec attacked base of CMA splinter group Congress for Justice in Azawad (CJA) in Timbuktu region. CMA President Ag Intalla 19 Dec said coalition would suspend participation in Algiers peace process citing violence and lack of reform and asked Algeria-led mediation to call high-level meeting to “save the accord”. Suspected bandits and jihadists continued to attack national and international security forces in several areas. Mortar attack claimed by Ansar Dine jihadist group on military camp hosting FAMA, MINUSMA peacekeepers and French Barkhane troops in Kidal region 4 Dec wounded Chadian blue helmet. Barkhane vehicle 8 Dec detonated IED in Kidal region, French soldier wounded. Gunmen 15 Dec ambushed FAMA convoy in Mopti region, same day attacked gendarmerie outpost in Sikasso region, wounding gendarme before crossing into Burkina Faso. Gunmen 17 Dec attacked National Guard outpost in Timbuktu region, wounding two officers. Gunmen 6 Dec stormed Niono prison in Segou region, freeing 93 inmates and wounding at least two guards. French-Swiss aid worker kidnapped in Gao city 24 Dec.

Niger  DECEMBER 2016
Govt 27 Dec said 31 Nigerien Boko Haram (BH) members had surrendered to security forces in Diffa region in SE. Govt 28 Dec announced amnesty and reintegration program for former BH. Netherlands 10 Dec promised €1m to International Organization for Migration in Niger to encourage African migrants to return voluntarily from Europe to home countries. 900 migrants deported from Algeria arrived in Agadez, central Niger, same day.

Nigeria  DECEMBER 2016

Army early Dec launched Operation Rescue Final against Boko Haram (BH) in NE and claimed successes, but insurgency remained unvanquished. Army 22 Dec reported 1,880 captives rescued and over 500 insurgents arrested in previous week; 28 Dec said another 1,240 suspected insurgents including 504 children arrested; President Buhari 24 Dec said army had crushed last remaining BH stronghold. BH continued attacks: eight female suicide bombers carried out five attacks 9-31 Dec, notably on market in Madagali town, Adamawa state 9 Dec, killing at least 56; army arrested at least six other suicide bombers trying to detonate explosives; BH faction leader Shekau in 30 Dec video vowed to fight on; BH 31 Dec attacked military in Rann, Borno state but were repelled and at least fifteen BH killed. In Niger Delta electoral commission reported 70 violent incidents during 10 Dec re-run of federal parliament elections in Rivers state including: political thugs ambushed policemen in Uju community, beheaded two. Violence between rival cult groups in Omoku, Rivers state 24 Dec killed at least eight. Violence escalated in Kaduna state in north central zone: suspected Fulani-Muslim gunmen repeatedly attacked mainly Christian communities in southern Kaduna state; Christian Association of Nigeria 30 Dec reported 808 people killed, 1,422 houses and sixteen churches destroyed. Relations between Kaduna state govt and Shia Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) remained tense: high court 2 Dec ordered federal govt to release detained IMN leader Ibrahim Zakzaky within 45 days and pay fine for unlawful detention; Kaduna state govt 5 Dec declared IMN an insurgent group, vowing to prosecute Zakzaky; 18 Dec banned all marches. In Zamfara state in NW, bandits 12 Dec abducted about 35 women at Matankari, state govt next day said about 30 rescued; 13 Dec abducted twelve men near Yar’ Tashar Sahabi. At 14 Dec talks bandits promised to stop violence; over 1,000 bandits 18 Dec surrendered arms to govt in Zurmi local govt area. In NE at least 42 people killed in clashes between Fulani herdsmen and Tiv farmers in Taraba state 17-18 Dec. In SW, police 28 Dec said it foiled plan to bomb Lagos bridge by locally-based criminals.

- **OP-ED: To Defeat Boko Haram, Nigeria Must Get Women on Board**

Asia
China (Internal)  DECEMBER 2016

Xinjiang authorities reported terrorist attack in Moyu County, W Xinjiang, 28 Dec in which assailants drove car into govt building and set off explosives, killing two people; three assailants shot dead.

China/Japan  DECEMBER 2016

Chinese defence ministry 10 Dec said it had lodged representation to Tokyo over Japan’s interference with six Chinese military aircraft flying through Miyakoko Strait toward Western Pacific in what it called routine exercise; said two Japanese fighter jets scrambled Chinese aircraft from close range in “dangerous and unprofessional” manoeuvres counter to freedom of navigation and over-flight. Tokyo 12 Dec denied close-range interference, said Chinese statement “extremely regrettable and harms improving ties”, lodged protests; said Chinese aircraft did not violate Japanese airspace. Chinese air force 15 Dec said flybys through Miyakoko Strait in early Dec and late Nov “regular”, similar operations would become routine. Negotiation over bilateral Maritime and Air Communication Mechanism to manage such encounters continued with little concrete progress. At 9 Dec talks China and Japan agreed to launch contact mechanism at early date. Japanese PM Abe 21 Dec announced Japan would strengthen its coast guard in ECS to defend disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands; govt next day approved record high defence budget of $43.6bn.

Korean Peninsula  DECEMBER 2016

Leader Kim Jong-un in New Year address 1 Jan said preparation in “last stage” for test launch of intercontinental ballistic missile. Thae Yong-ho, DPRK diplomat who defected to ROK in Aug and reportedly most senior govt official ever to do so, 27 Dec said Pyongyang had no intention to give up nuclear programs and believed 2017 would provide best opportunity for advancement given leadership changes in U.S. and ROK. Following new UNSC sanctions 30 Nov, Pyongyang responded 1 Dec with massive artillery drill. State-run media reported drill, observed by Kim Jong-un, simulated strikes on military targets in ROK, including five border islands and “reactionary ruling organs” in Seoul and other cities. Similar drill took place 11 Dec simulating strike on ROK’s presidential Blue House. Beijing said new UNSC
resolution demonstrated “uniform stand” of international community against DPRK’s nuclear and missile programs, but urged countries to implement it in “balanced way” to avoid humanitarian fallout and negative impact on “normal economic activities”. Tokyo and Seoul 2 Dec both announced additional sanctions, expanding blacklist of DPRK individuals and entities; Beijing said it opposed any unilateral sanction outside UNSC framework. Beijing 15 Dec said Chinese defence cooperation with ROK should be based on respect for “each other’s security interests”; followed ROK media reports that Beijing ignored request by ROK navy to visit Qingdao port as punishment for planned deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) anti-missile system. ROK President Pak Geun-hye impeached 9 Dec over corruption scandal; acting President Hwang Kyo Ahn 18 Dec said he would carry through existing foreign policies, including THAAD deployment. Michael Flynn, U.S. President-elect Trump’s pick for national security advisor, 21 Dec called THAAD deployment “appropriate”.

Kuril Islands/Northern Territories (Russia/Japan) DECEMBER 2016

Meeting 15-16 Dec, Japanese PM Abe and Russian President Putin agreed to take steps to resolve dispute over islands, including joint economic projects.

Taiwan Strait DECEMBER 2016

Tensions between China and Taiwan and U.S. increased after U.S. President-elect Donald Trump answered what he described as congratulatory phone call from Taiwanese leader Tsai Ing-wen 2 Dec, breaching decades-old diplomatic protocol. Beijing initially called incident “little trick played by Taiwan”, lodged representations with White House and Trump’s transition team. White House said it had no prior knowledge of call, reaffirmed its commitment to One China policy. Tsai 6 Dec said call did not signal policy change, Taiwan values regional stability. Beijing 6 Dec called on Washington not to allow Tsai’s planned transit in U.S. in Jan; U.S. said stopovers would continue “based on longstanding U.S. practice”. Trump 11 Dec suggested he might not feel bound by One China policy unless the two countries could make deal on other issues; Beijing called principle its “core interest”, said undermining it would eliminate possibility for cooperation. China 25 Dec lodged “stern representations” with Washington after U.S. passed defence bill including senior military exchanges with Taiwan. China’s first aircraft carrier Liaoning 25 Dec passed 90 nautical miles south of Taiwan via Bashi Channel for first blue water drill in Western Pacific. São Tomé and Príncipe 20 Dec announced termination of diplomatic ties with Taiwan; Taipei described decision as “extremely regrettable”, said it could not meet country’s request for financial aid; Beijing resumed diplomatic relationship with São Tomé and Príncipe.
Afghanistan  DECEMBER 2016

Decline in Taliban attacks on Afghan security forces across country continued with winter weather. Gunmen 17 Dec killed five airport security guards and their driver in unclaimed attack in Kandahar. Security forces 21 Dec killed thirteen Taliban militants, including high profile Mullah Ramazan, and wounded fourteen, including local commander Mullah Mansour. Two civilians killed in roadside bomb in Laghman province 25 Dec. Suicide bombing in Lashkargah 26 Dec killed at least one policeman; MP wounded in explosion in Kabul 28 Dec. U.S. forces continued to attack Islamic State (IS) targets, including 13 Dec airstrike in Nangarhar province’s Achin district killing around a dozen suspected IS. Taliban 10 Dec claimed Mullah Haibatullah Akundzada had consolidated his position as leader after two senior Taliban pledged their support. Commander of U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan 2 Dec accused Russia and Iran of helping legitimise Taliban in Afghanistan by developing political relations with its leadership; Senate 5 Dec announced investigation into claims while Moscow said contacts with insurgents were aimed at facilitating peace deal with Afghan govt. Representatives from Russia, China and Pakistan met to discuss IS threat in Afghanistan 27 Dec, warned of deteriorating security and increased IS influence; Kabul protested failure to invite Afghan govt. Concern over humanitarian situation continued to mount with OCHA reporting 530,470 people displaced by conflict in Afghanistan in 2016, highest since 2012. Attorney general 17 Dec opened investigation into accusations that First VP Abdul Rashid Dostum tortured and sexually assaulted relative of former governor of Jawzjan province; Dostum denied allegations, which fuelled further political tensions between him and President Ghani.

Bangladesh  DECEMBER 2016

Security crackdown continued against opposition figures including paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion’s reported abduction 3 Dec of three Opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) activists in Natore district, found dead two days later. BNP chair Khaleda Zia pleaded not guilty to corruption charges in special court 1 Dec. High court 13 Dec issued three-month stay on anti-corruption case against BNP standing committee member Mirza Abbas. Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha 10 Dec pressed parliament to scrap constitutional provisions dating from military-backed caretaker regime in 2007 empowering president to control postings, promotions and discipline of lower court judges, arguing they contradict basic constitutional principles. Supreme Court 12 Dec ordered law ministry to issue notification by 15 Jan establishing conduct rules for lower courts consistent with separation of powers. Amid continued clampdown on civil society, free speech and political opposition, authorities early Dec
launched fresh investigation into financial affairs of Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus. In 18 Dec meeting, BNP delegation urged President Hamid to form interim cabinet to oversee next national election, due by early 2019. BNP 6 Dec submitted proposal to president’s office to reconstitute Election Commission and amend Representation of the People Order to give military more authority during polling. Security forces 20 Dec arrested two suspected members of Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) faction believed to be involved in July Gulshan attack. Woman believed to have JMB links blew herself up during police raid on house in Dhaka 24 Dec. Awami League MP Manjurul Islam shot dead by masked men at his home in Gaibandha district 31 Dec. As tens of thousands of Rohingya fled military crackdown in Myanmar’s Rakhine state to Bangladesh (see Myanmar), Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan 1 Dec said they would be sent back to Myanmar at “convenient time”; Zia called on govt to give refugees shelter, calling Myanmar’s action “genocide”.

**India (Non-Kashmir)  DECEMBER 2016**

Several suspected Maoists reported killed in clashes with security forces in Chhattisgarh during month. Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik 8 Dec reported decrease in Maoist activities in state during 2016. Authorities late Nov said govt’s demonetisation initiative had hit Maoist activities, prompting increase in number of surrenders.

**Kashmir  DECEMBER 2016**

Tensions between India and Pakistan remained high as exchanges of fire between their forces along Line of Control (LoC) continued. Incidents included Indian artillery shelling 16 Dec that reportedly hit school bus in Mohra, Kotli district in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, killing driver and wounding several children. Hostile rhetoric between Indian and Pakistani officials continued. Outgoing Pakistan Army Chief Raheel Sharif 29 Nov advised India not to take Pakistan’s “policy of patience for weakness”. Indian Home Minister 11 Dec warned Pakistan would be broken “into ten pieces” if it does not stop cross-border terrorism. World Bank 12 Dec halted two Pakistani and Indian arbitration processes under 1960 Indus Water Treaty; concerned that current tensions could endanger treaty, called on countries to consider bilateral approaches to resolving conflicting interests under treaty. Clashes between security personnel and protesters in Indian-administered Kashmir continued. Two-day gun battle between security forces and suspected Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT) militants in Arwani, south of Srinagar, 7-9 Dec saw two suspected militants killed and triggered anti-India protests; one protester killed and dozens reported wounded in clashes with security forces. Militant killed in clash with security forces in Anantnag district 14 Dec,
parking protect. Physician for Human Rights NGO issued report 6 Dec accusing Indian police and paramilitary forces of using excessive indiscriminate force against protesters and blocking medical care since start of current protests July 2016. Attacks on Indian troops also continued, including 18 Dec suspected Kashmiri militant attack on convoy in Pampore, killing three soldiers. Indian policeman killed by suspected militants in northern district Kupwara 31 Dec. Indian govt 21 Dec claimed Nov demonetisation initiative has hurt militants’ finances, allegedly spurring them to carry out series of bank robberies; Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Hizbul Mujahideen denied role in robbery in Pulwarna, S Kashmir 15 Dec.

Nepal  DECEMBER 2016

Local elections due April-May 2017 still uncertain due to unresolved constitutional disputes and differences sharpening over reforms sequencing. Opposition Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (UML) and some ruling Nepali Congress (NC) leaders favour polls first so Sept 2015 constitution can be implemented; dissenting Madhesi parties argue constitutional provisions including new provincial boundaries must be amended before elections. Supreme Court 21 Dec appointed six-person amicus curiae team brief on suitability of local polls under existing or restructured administrative units. Despite these differences, NC 30 Dec tabled constitution amendment bill approved by cabinet 29 Nov and Madhesi alliance agreed to support bill; UML obstructed discussions in parliament, announced street protests for Jan 2017. Madhesi alliance objected to constitutionally-mandated Local-level Restructuring Commission’s recommendation to replace existing municipal- and village-level entities with over 720 new local administrative units due to contested provincial boundaries. Former King Gyanendra Shah expressed concern over “intolerable” state of political affairs in 21 Dec statement. Nepal Army (NA) 29 Nov announced first ever joint military exercise with China’s People’s Liberation Army for Feb 2017; NA regularly conducts similar exercises with India and U.S.

Pakistan  DECEMBER 2016

Judicial commission report into Aug Quetta hospital attack that killed 74 people released 15 Dec, highlighting interior ministry’s inaction over banned extremist groups and criticising Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar for meeting leaders of groups and allowing them to hold public meetings. Report also denounced military and civilian intelligence agencies for lack of transparency and accountability. Recommendations include reform of anti-terrorism National Action Plan (NAP); ban on all terror groups and database; and registration of all educational institutions including madrasas. Pakistan Peoples Party
(PPP) MPs called for dismissal of Nisar for failing to implement NAP; Nisar called report “one-sided”. Extremist organisation attacks continued particularly in Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (KPK), including senior counter-terrorism police officer killed by unidentified militants 10 Dec in Peshawar. Govt operations against Taliban continued: 4 Dec airstrike in FATA killed at least twelve suspected Taliban; 5 Dec operation in Balochistan’s Pishin district killed five, including alleged mastermind of Quetta hospital attack. Police failed to prevent 12 Dec mob attack on Ahmadiyya sect mosque in Chakwal, N Punjab, despite prior warning. New army chief General Bajwa reconstituted country’s high command and voiced intention to retain military’s control over internal security policy. Supreme Court 9 Dec adjourned hearings until early Jan on investigating charges against PM Sharif’s off-shore holdings disclosed in Panama Papers leak. Opposition-controlled Senate 15 Dec passed PPP-sponsored bill for parliamentary investigation into Panama Papers; regarded as unlikely to pass in Sharif-controlled National Assembly.

Sri Lanka  DECEMBER 2016

Progress on new constitution further delayed: first full parliamentary debate on Constitutional Assembly (CA) subcommittee reports postponed to 9-11 Jan, also release of interim report of CA's steering committee. Senior Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) leaders 9 Dec announced party would support devolution only within current unitary state, opposed any constitutional changes requiring referendum; United National Party (UNP) same day passed resolution endorsing need for referendum, reiterating support for “maximum devolution within a unitary state”. Both positions at odds with subcommittee reports and positions of Tamil National Alliance (TNA). Transitional justice mechanisms also met with delays: legal steps needed to establish Office of Missing Persons not taken; scheduled 21 Dec meeting to deliver report of transitional justice consultations task force to president and PM postponed until early 2017. In 26 Nov speech to SLFP President Sirisena announced he would write to U.S. President-elect Trump with request to “free” country from continued UN oversight on war crimes allegations. UN Committee on Torture (UNCAT) issued strong “conclusions” 7 Dec: said torture in Sri Lanka “routine”, criticised continued use of Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and near complete impunity for torture and other serious rights violations. Surprise 23 Dec High Court acquittal of six accused in 2006 murder of Tamil National Alliance MP Nadarajah Raviraj dealt further blow to hopes for accountability for war-time crimes. Uptick in incidents of racial and religious intolerance continued: hard-line head of Batticaloa Buddhist temple Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera, believed to be coordinating with Rajapaksa-led opposition, continued agitation to settle Sinhalese illegally in Tamil district. Plans for major rally in Batticaloa 3 Dec, designed to link up with Buddhist Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) march, blocked by court order. Justice minister met BBS leader and Sumanarathana Thera 21 Dec to discuss monks’ concerns.
Trial began 12 Dec of Jakarta’s Chinese-descent Christian governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama on charges of blasphemy over remarks he made in Sept; Purnama denied charges. At least 200,000 joined third mass rally protesting against Purnama 2 Dec; President Widodo, Purnama ally who earlier blamed “political actors” for protests, joined rally prayer session. Police 10 Dec arrested woman and two men near Jakarta suspected of planning bomb attack on presidential palace in Jakarta; also detonated unexploded bomb. Plot believed to be first involving female would-be suicide bomber; police reported suspects had received money and directions from Bahrun Naim, Indonesian militant fighting with Islamic State in Syria. Police reportedly foiled another bomb plot in Jakarta 21 Dec, killed three suspects; 25 Dec killed two suspected militants in shootout in W Java. Several thousand reportedly protested in Papua town Wamena 10 Dec calling for West Papuan independence. Protests held in over a dozen places across Indonesia calling for West Papuan independence 19 Dec despite police refusing permits, over 500 reportedly arrested.

Humanitarian access to closed areas of N Rakhine state, where security forces were attacked by Harakah al-Yaqin (Faith Movement, HaY) armed group in Oct and Nov, remained blocked to over 150,000 including estimated 30,000 newly displaced. Kofi Annan-led Advisory Commission on Rakhine state visited conflict-affected parts of N Maungdaw 2-4 Dec, called for resumed humanitarian access; call also made in statement from fourteen diplomatic missions 9 Dec. UN human rights chief Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein 16 Dec accused Myanmar of “counterproductive, even callous” approach to crisis, cited daily reports of abuses including rapes and killings. Rakhine situation prompted regional tensions including with Malaysia, whose PM Najib Razak speaking at major protest in Kuala Lumpur 4 Dec called for international intervention to stop “genocide”. At special ASEAN retreat in Yangon 19 Dec, govt reiterated its “serious commitment” to resolving “complex issue”, need for “time and space”. President 1 Dec announced national commission to investigate Oct/Nov attacks and military’s response. Fighting between govt and Northern Alliance of four armed groups – Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and Arakan Army (AA) – in Shan and Kachin states intensified over month. Myanmar military further stepped up attacks, particularly on KIO positions, and took key strategic base, Gidon, from KIO 17 Dec after intense fighting including air attacks and heavy artillery bombardment. Fighting caused further 5,000 IDPs to flee to KIO HQ at Laiza; UN 20 Dec estimated 15,000 have fled into China since 20 Nov. Chinese mediation attempt, bringing together Myanmar govt’s Peace Commission and leaders of TNLA, MNDAA, AA and United Wa State Party (UWSP) in Kunming 3-4 Dec failed. Clashes resumed 20 Dec between TNLA and Shan State Army-South (SSA-South) ethnic armed groups in N Shan state’s Namtu township;
clashes also took place between AA and govt forces in S Chin state's Paletwa township 12 Dec. Military and some opposition parties pushed in legislature for Northern Alliance groups and individual military leaders to be declared terrorists; rejected by NLD majority. Shan state legislature passed similar resolution 7 Dec.

- **IMPACT NOTE: WSJ: Asia's New Insurgency**

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**Philippines** DECEMBER 2016

President Duterte early Dec signed order creating 25-member panel to propose constitutional amendments setting up federal system of govt, in order to end conflict and open up economy; proposals will be presented to Congress in six months. Addressing Mindanao Peace Conference in Davao City 16 Dec, Presidential peace advisor Jesus Dureza said amending constitution would remove “stumbling block” to peace talks with rebel groups. After meeting with Duterte 2 Dec, Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) said president wants newly expanded Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BCT), including representatives from Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), to start crafting new Bangsamoro Basic Law. MILF leader Murad Ebrahim 27 Dec said he hoped new law would reach Congress by July 2017. MILF 4 Dec warned that new Islamic State (IS)-affiliated Maute group complicates peace process and feeds on frustrations caused by delay in implementing Bangsamoro agreement. Suspected Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) militants 15 Dec attacked military in Maguindanao province; two suspected rebels and one civilian reported killed. More than a dozen wounded in two explosions outside churches in Mindanao in Dec. Military renewed offensive against Abu Sayyaf group, responsible for recent spate of kidnappings, in Jolo early Dec: six soldiers reported killed in clashes in Sulu's Patikul town 10 and 12 Dec; around ten Abu Sayyaf also killed. Military 12 Dec reported Abu Sayyaf had released two Indonesian hostages; still holds 23 hostages, reportedly kidnapped four fishermen 20 Dec. Military 10 Dec reported Malaysian security forces had killed Abu Sayyaf commander Abraham Hamid nicknamed “kidnap king”. Indonesian military chief 6 Dec warned IS attempting to create base in Mindanao; Duterte 7 Dec said his next priority after his so-called war on drugs will be crackdown on terrorism. Duterte early Dec rejected communist rebel alliance National Democratic Front (NDFP) request to release over 130 political prisoners as confidence-building measure until bilateral ceasefire agreement is signed; third round of peace talks between govt and NDFP scheduled 18-24 Jan.

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**South China Sea** DECEMBER 2016

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China continued military deployments in SCS, 8 Dec flying long-range nuclear-capable H-6 bomber along disputed territory for first time since March 2015; 15 Dec said this was regular exercise, will be routine. U.S. Center for Strategic and International Studies report 13 Dec said satellite images showed China might have built large anti-aircraft guns and close-in weapons systems on its seven artificial islands in disputed Spratly Archipelago. Beijing said it was legitimate to deploy “necessary military facilities” for defence purposes, deployments did not mean militarisation. Chinese Liaoning aircraft carrier and five other vessels entered SCS 26 Dec; China said deployment part of annual plan. China and Philippines continued rapprochement. President Duterte 11 Dec said his govt would finalise firearms deal with China. Both coast guards 15-16 Dec held first meeting to discuss forming Joint Coast Guard Committee (JCGC) on Maritime Cooperation. Reuters 9 Dec reported Vietnam has started dredging work on Ladd Reef on SW fringe of Spratlys, based on satellite imagery; Beijing called activity illegal. Chinese and Vietnamese vice FMs 12 Dec discussed border negotiation mechanism, agreed to expand cooperation on border control and law enforcement. Confrontational rhetoric between China and U.S. intensified (see also Taiwan Strait). Head of U.S. Pacific Command 14 Dec said U.S. would begin flying its most advanced fighter plane out of Australia 2017 should Beijing’s “aggressive” actions continue; Beijing urged U.S. to “stick to its pledge of not taking sides” in SCS. Chinese navy 15 Dec captured U.S. Unmanned Underwater Vehicle (UUV) some 50 nautical miles NW of Philippines’ Subic Bay. U.S. registered objection to China’s “unlawful seizure”; China said it retrieved “unknown device” to prevent safety hazards, regretted Washington’s move to “dramatise” issue, returned UUV 20 Dec.

Thailand

King Maha Vajiralongkorn Bodindradebayavarangkun, Rama X confirmed 1 Dec; swore in Privy Council next day with seven members from his father’s Council and three new members, all retired generals and members of ruling National Council for Peace and Order; later appointed three more Privy Councillors. National Legislative Assembly 16 Dec unanimously passed amendments to 2007 Computer Crimes Act expanding state powers to monitor, block and remove online content; several people alleged to have hacked govt websites in protest arrested. Police General Srivara 30 Nov announced police mid-Oct arrested three men from Narathiwat province in deep south planning attacks on six tourist sites in and around Bangkok. Army 13 Dec handed over to police six more suspects in plot, which observers believe suggests Malay-Muslim militants intend to follow up on Aug bombings with further attacks on tourist areas outside their traditional area of activity. Govt and MARA Patani (Patani Consultative Council, umbrella organisation of five Malay-Muslim separatist groups in exile) negotiators met 19-21 Dec in Malaysia; discussion reportedly focused on establishment of safety zones; main militant group Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) not involved in dialogue. Six people killed in five separate shooting attacks 6 Dec in Patani and Narathiwat provinces. IED attack wounded four Border Patrol Police officers in Sungai Kolok district, Narathiwat 12 Dec.
Europe & Central Asia

Bosnia And Herzegovina

Constitutional Court 1 Dec annulled results of controversial 25 Sept Republika Srpska (RS) referendum approving continued celebration of 9 Jan RS annual day, saying it was contrary to constitution. RS President Milorad Dodik and Croat member of tripartite state presidency Dragan Covic 16 Dec announced initiative to obstruct work of govt, including reforms required for progress on EU membership, until foreign judges are removed from Constitutional Court.

Kosovo

Ethnic Serb party Srpska Lista 28 Dec suspended its participation in Kosovo govt institutions in line with request from Serbian PM Aleksandar Vucic, after Pristina replaced Serb minister for local govt for accompanying Serbian minister who visited northern Kosovo without authorisation from Pristina. Pristina criticised Belgrade’s position as “destructive and unacceptable”. Environment ministry 8 Dec declared construction of concrete wall by Serb authorities on Serb-dominated north side of bridge in Mitrovica early Dec illegal; North Mitrovica mayor Goran Rakic claimed it was “supporting wall” for new development project; parliament 29 Dec voted to remove wall.

Macedonia

Close result in 11 Dec snap early general elections, which were intended to end country’s two-year political crisis, saw no party win outright majority, resulting in spike in political tensions and uncertainty over formation of new govt. Election commission (DIK) announced ruling VMRO-DPMNE won 38.06% (51 of 120 seats in parliament) against 36.69% (49 seats) for opposition Social Democrats (SDSM) and 7.33% (ten seats) for ethnic Albanian Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), which was junior ruling party in
previous govt coalition; three smaller ethnic Albanian parties won remaining ten seats. Margins of only a few hundred votes reported in some places; SDSM won most votes in capital Skopje, while VMRO-DPMNE dominant in rural areas. SDSM and ethnic Albanian party BESA 12 Dec each submitted eight election complaints; VMRO-DPMNE accused SDSM of trying to “steal” vote. Thousands of VMRO-DPMNE supporters protested outside DIK 15-17 Dec; addressing them 17 Dec PM Gruevski criticised DIK, said VMRO-DPMNE would not accept election rerun, claimed Western diplomats attempting to influence outcome, also threatened to increase control over foreign-funded NGOs. U.S. embassy 14 Dec issued statement denying rumours that ambassador had tried to influence DIK. DIK 20 Dec ordered election rerun in polling station in Tearce, near Tetovo 25 Dec, however result did not change number of seats held by main two parties. Three ethnic Albanian parties met with Albanian PM and FM in Tirana 29 Dec to discuss conditions for joining govt. Public Revenue Office 20 Dec announced it would send financial inspectors to some twenty foreign-funded NGOs, denied claims that inspections were politically motivated.

Armenia DECEMBER 2016

Govt 29 Dec said three of its military killed in northern part of border with Azerbaijan, result of failed Azerbaijani “incursion”; Azerbaijan denied accusations, said Armenia staged provocation, reported one of its servicemen also killed in clash. During 21 Dec visit of Iranian President Rouhani, Iranian and Armenian leaders finalised regional gas and electricity deals, signed bilateral cooperation agreements on security and customs.

Azerbaijan DECEMBER 2016

Azerbaijani soldier killed in clash with Armenian forces along border 29 Dec (see Armenia). Baku court 8 Dec sentenced opposition activist Bayram Mammadov to ten years’ prison for drug trafficking; rights groups condemned case as politically motivated, Mammadov said he was tortured into confession. Security service reported it shot dead would-be suicide bomber in Baku 3 Dec; suspect previously jailed for joining terrorist organisation. Amid continued weakening of currency, central bank tightened restrictions on transfer of foreign currency abroad. During visit of Israeli PM Netanyahu, Azerbaijani and Israeli leaders signed cooperation agreements including on energy.
Georgia  DECEMBER 2016

Parliament 15 Dec launched commission to review constitution and limit powers of President and PM; President announced he would boycott commission. De facto Abkhaz leadership mid-Dec secured political agreement with opposition following year-long standoff and early Dec escalation. De facto Abkhazia President Raul Khajimba 1 Dec met with Russian President Putin in Moscow; next day Abkhaz opposition leader Aslan Bzhania, who had been leading calls for Khajimba to step down by 15 Dec, briefly detained and questioned for two days by Russian police. Amid increased tensions, opposition supporters gathered for protests 15 Dec, disbanding after govt offered concessions to opposition including several govt positions in election commission, prosecutor office, constitutional court and cabinet. Georgian court 28 Dec sentenced de facto Abkhaz border guard (currently under house arrest in Abkhazia) to twelve years’ prison for killing ethnic Georgian in May 2016.

Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)  DECEMBER 2016

Formal meeting between Armenian and Azerbaijani FMs at OSCE Ministerial Council in Germany 8-9 Dec to further discuss proposed strengthening of OSCE monitoring in NK, under discussion since April escalation, and next steps in peace process, did not take place; the two ministers met only informally. Occasional exchanges of fire in Northern and NE sections of Line of Contact during month; Armenia 5 and 8 Dec reported at least two of its soldiers killed. Armenian President Sargsyan visited military bases and different sections of front line in NK 8-11 Dec; Azerbaijani President Aliyev also visited front line early Dec. New French Minsk co-chair Stéphane Visconti visited Armenia and Azerbaijan mid-month; U.S. 30 Dec named Richard Hoagland its new interim Minsk Group co-chair. Tensions exacerbated by deadly clash between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces in northern section of their shared border 29 Dec (see Armenia).

Russia/North Caucasus  DECEMBER 2016
Chechen capital Grozny and its outskirts virtually paralysed 17-18 Dec by sporadic clashes between militants and security forces. Official sources reported seven fighters killed, four detained, four police killed. Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov said clashes took place near Grozny; footage posted on social media and numerous Crisis Group sources suggested some took place within city. Over 100 relatives of fighters subsequently detained by security forces, some reportedly ordered to leave Chechnya; blood feuds declared on them at public rally in Grozny on 30 Dec. Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for 17-18 Dec attacks and posted video of the eleven young attackers prior to operation, three of them with knives, pledging allegiance to IS leader Al-Baghdadi, swearing to die and threatening killings and attacks on Russian and Chechen police and authorities. Media reported Chechen special task force being deployed to Syria after camera-phone video posted online 6 Dec showing preparation. Novaya Gazeta investigation claimed Chechen authorities have been tasked with urgently forming two 600-strong battalions; also linked 17-18 Dec Grozny attack to revenge for Russian role in Aleppo and attempt to make Chechens fight on side of Assad regime. Five individuals suspected of sharing leaked video detained; twelve soldiers reportedly fired for refusing to go to Syria. Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) 4 Dec said it had killed IS leader and “emir” of IS Caucasus province Rustam Aselderov and four associates during raid near Dagestani capital Makhachkala previous day. Aselderov suspected of being responsible for Dec 2013 bombings in Volgograd among other attacks. Authorities reported one police officer and two suspected militants killed in clash in Dagestan 29 Dec. According to FSB end-of-year report, 129 militants including 22 leaders killed in counter-terrorism operations during 2016, 42 terrorist attacks prevented, 84 people prevented from leaving country to join terrorist organisations.

Moldova  DECEMBER 2016

Breakaway Transnistria region held presidential election 11 Dec; vote not recognised by Moldovan govt and international community. Self-declared parliament chief Vadim Krasnoselsky won with 62% of vote; later said he would strengthen region’s partnership with Russia.

Ukraine  DECEMBER 2016

Month saw sudden upsurge of fighting in east resulting in significant casualties. In one of largest clashes Kyiv reported nine Ukrainian soldiers killed and nine wounded, and 25 separatists killed in clashes near
Svitlodarsk, close to Debaltseve, in fighting which started 18 Dec. Govt and separatists 21 Dec agreed indefinite ceasefire to start 24 Dec; sides traded accusations that other had violated ceasefire. NATO Sec Gen Jens Stoltenberg 7 Dec called for continued diplomatic pressure and sanctions on Russia until it respects Feb 2015 Minsk Agreement; cited “massive increase in ceasefire violations” in east, hundreds of explosions some involving heavy weapons banned under Minsk. UN human rights office report 8 Dec said civilians in east facing human rights abuses, “serious lack of security”. EU leaders 15 Dec agreed to extend sanctions against Russia over Ukraine for another six months. U.S. 20 Dec introduced expanded list of Russian individuals under sanctions. UNGA 19 Dec passed resolution recognising Crimea as “temporarily occupied” by Russia, condemning abuses and discrimination against Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians in Crimea. U.S. congress 8 Dec passed defence bill including $350mn military and security assistance for Ukraine, authorising supply of lethal weaponry; funds partly contingent on Kyiv addressing corruption and waste in military. Bill also bans military-to-military contact between U.S. and Russia. President Poroshenko 29 Dec said Russian security services “directly or indirectly” waging cyberwar against Ukrainian state institutions. Kyiv 18 Dec announced it would nationalise country’s largest bank, PrivatBank, in move praised by EU. Parliament 21 Dec passed long-delayed 2017 budget, keeping deficit at 3% of GDP in line with IMF guidelines. Rare signs of dissent in separatist entities LNR and DNR: former LNR leader Valeriy Bolotov 10 Dec criticised LNR’s top leader Igor Plotnitsky, linking him to assassination of most of entity’s key military commanders. In DNR, former leader Alexander Khodakovsky 6 Dec criticised DNR leaders’ corruption, incompetence and abuses in series of media interviews.

- **BRIEFING: Ukraine: Military Deadlock, Political Crisis**

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**Cyprus** DECEMBER 2016

Greek Cypriot leader Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Akinci 1 Dec agreed to resume UN-backed reunification talks in Geneva 9 Jan. Both sides to present maps with proposals for entities’ boundaries within a federation 11 Jan; multiparty conference focusing on issues of guarantees and security to start 12 Jan, with participation of powers that guarantee constitutional settlement on island (Greece, Turkey and UK). Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot negotiators early Dec started to meet three times a week to try and make progress on outstanding issues ahead of Jan talks.

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**Germany** DECEMBER 2016
Twelve people killed and 56 injured by hijacked truck driving into Berlin Christmas market 19 Dec in attack claimed by Islamic State. Chief suspect, Tunisian national, killed by Italian police near Milan 23 Dec; German police arrested suspected accomplice, also Tunisian, in Berlin 28 Dec.

**Turkey**  DECEMBER 2016

Twin bombing in central Istanbul 10 Dec killed 36 police and eight civilians and wounded over 150; PKK affiliate Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK) claimed responsibility. Crackdown on Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) and Democratic Regions Party (DBP) representatives intensified after attack, including two HDP MPs arrested 13 Dec. Counter-terrorism police also detained 924 people on charges of PKK membership and terrorist propaganda, some for posts on social media. Suicide car bomb targeting bus carrying off-duty soldiers killed fourteen and wounded 55 in Central Anatolian city Kayseri 17 Dec; TAK claimed responsibility. Following attack, nationalist mobs targeted nineteen HDP offices around country and party HQ. Clashes between state security forces and PKK militants in SE continued at lower intensity. At least 39, including 24 foreign nationals, killed and 69 wounded in Islamic State-claimed attack on nightclub in Istanbul during New Year celebrations. Turkish military operation to take control of al-Bab in N Syria continued (see Syria). Ankara engaged in intense diplomatic efforts with Russia, Iran, U.S. and European capitals to secure evacuation of civilians/rebel militants from E Aleppo during month. Turkish police officer 19 Dec shot dead Russian ambassador speaking at gallery in Ankara in apparent protest against Russian military role in Syria; Moscow and Ankara next day said murder would not affect bilateral relations or cooperation on Syria. National Security Council 30 Nov announced commitment to prevent PKK/PYD establishing new stronghold in Iraq’s Sinjar province “by all means necessary”. Parliamentary commission 50 Dec approved constitutional reforms that would give president executive powers with weak checks and balances and decrease powers of parliament; draft bill to be debated in parliament Jan.

- **OP-ED: Turkey and Iran’s Dangerous Collision Course**

**Kazakhstan**  DECEMBER 2016

France cancelled extradition of Kazakh dissident Mukhtar Ablyazov to Russia 9 Dec, stating Russia’s
request politically motivated. Ablyazov, charged with embezzling billions of dollars in Ukraine, Russia, and Kazakhstan, has financed opposition media and groups in Kazakhstan for almost two decades. Authorities 21 Dec announced they had detained sixteen suspected members of banned Islamic group Takfir wal-Hijra in counter-terrorism operation in Almaty, Aktobe and Atyrau regions.

Kyrgyzstan  DECEMBER 2016

Referendum on constitutional reform 11 Dec won backing of 79.56% of voters; turnout 42.07%, one of lowest in Kyrgyzstan’s history. Constitutional amendments transfer some presidential powers to PM who will have authority to directly appoint and dismiss local administration leaders, and appoint and dismiss ministers with parliament’s approval. President gained power to pick and dismiss local judges with parliament’s approval and upon advice from Council of Judges, and directly appoint judges to Constitutional Court. Critics argue changes will undermine judicial independence and diminish prospect of judicial reform. New constitution also removes state’s obligation to restore rights of and/or compensate its citizens according to international treaties – believed to be reaction to April decision by UN Human Rights Committee to release ethnic Uzbek human rights activist Azimjan Askarov. Amendments widely regarded a major victory for President Atambayev by allowing him to maintain influence after his term ends in 2017. Changes also introduce language defining marriage as between man and woman. Local elections held same day as referendum: no major evidence of vote buying, however some reports that students and public sector workers were forced to vote for ruling Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK), which won in every district except one town in NE. Three other parliamentary parties, Respublika-Ata-Jurt, Kyrgyzstan, and Onuguu-Progress, performed well across country.

Tajikistan  DECEMBER 2016

Foreign Ministry 8 Dec used Collective Security Treaty Organization’s (CSTO) meeting to initiate joint statement calling participation of opposition activists at OSCE meetings unacceptable; followed Sept participation of activists from Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) in OSCE’s annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. CSTO meeting late Dec discussed giving Tajikistan more assistance in securing its border with Afghanistan. Russian ambassador said Suria wants to expand its air force in Tajikistan. Govt 5 Dec restored accreditation of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty journalists which had been revoked late Nov.
**Uzbekistan**  DECEMBER 2016

Acting president Shavkat Mirziyoyev elected President in 4 Dec election with 88.6% of vote; turnout reported at 87.83%. OSCE reported election “devoid of genuine competition”; EU called for continuation of “significant reforms” made ahead of election. Mirziyoyev 7 Dec proposed introducing direct elections for regional governors and city mayors, currently appointed by president. Mirziyoyev 14 Dec introduced as new PM former Deputy PM Abdulla Aripov, dismissed in 2012 after being associated with corruption scandal involving late President Karimov’s daughter Gulnara. Aripov’s cabinet revealed 15 Dec; among other changes, previously influential finance minister Rustam Azimov replaced. Mirziyoyev 23 Dec met with visiting Kazakh FM Erlan Idrisov.

- **BRIEFING: Uzbekistan: Reform or Repeat?**

**Latin America & Caribbean**

**Colombia**  DECEMBER 2016

Eighteen-month Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) demobilisation and arms handover process officially began with “D-Day” 1 Dec: FARC began to concentrate in cantonments, but some sites encountered problems due to poor infrastructure, lack of food. FARC formally registered as a political party and announced the six representatives for FARC in Congress 14 Dec – representatives are not members of FARC, do not represent its new political party and will have no vote, but will be able to participate in congressional sessions. Constitutional Court 13 Dec gave green light to fast-track mechanism for rapid approval of estimated 50 laws required to put terms of peace accord into law, including amnesty law passed 28 Dec for thousands of junior FARC and some military accused of minor crimes. Virtually no FARC armed violence reported during month, though FARC 13 Dec expelled five mid-level commanders who operated mainly in SE department Guaviare for creating dissident factions with some 190 fighters, according to govt. Opposition continues to accuse govt of “ignoring democracy” by pushing peace deal through congress and using fast track. Progress on peace process with ELN remained elusive: further round of talks around certain issues set to resume 10 Jan, but no formal start to negotiations. Group continued violent attacks, mainly in eastern department Arauca, killing two policemen 13 Dec and two soldiers 18 Dec; also blamed for 29 Dec attack on checkpoint N of Bogota in which one policeman killed. Violence against social leaders continued, including murder of local leaders in Caquetá, Nariño, Bolívar and Putumayo departments in south/SE during Nov. Press reported 2016 total...
ranging from 94 to 117. Different actors including UN warned of armed groups filling power vacuums left by FARC. Some groups, mainly left-wing civil society organisations, blamed paramilitaries for violence; govt 26 Dec said unclear who is responsible.

**Venezuela**  
DECEMBER 2016

Opposition MUD coalition suspended participation in Vatican/Union of South American Nations (UNASUR)-led “national dialogue” ahead of third plenary meeting 12 Dec, saying conditions not favourable to return to table 13 Jan until govt fulfils commitments in first agreement from 12 Nov, including allowing humanitarian aid into country, releasing political prisoners, restoring authority of National Assembly (AN) and appointing two replacement members to electoral authority (CNE); govt says dialogue is still active. Supreme Court (TSJ) 13 Dec appointed CNE board members without reference to AN. Chavista congressman Elias Jaua 21 Dec said AN directorate to be elected 5 Jan will be illegitimate so long as TSJ’s Jan 2016 contempt ruling against AN still applies. Govt 31 Dec freed former opposition governor Manuel Rosales from house arrest, also five student activists held since 2014. Fresh plenary scheduled for 13 Jan, three days after Maduro begins fifth year of his presidency – after which he could step down (or be removed) without triggering fresh elections. Social tensions increased 11 Dec after Maduro announced country’s highest-denomination banknote Bs 100, representing almost half cash in circulation, would cease to be legal tender 15 Dec, alleging massive U.S.-led conspiracy to remove banknotes from country. Following days saw long queues outside banks, wave of protests and looting across country, most notably in Ciudad Bolívar; govt subsequently extended date that Bs 100 note would remain legal tender until 20 Jan. Govt ordered closure of Colombian and Brazilian borders to stop Bs 100 notes “being returned to Venezuela”; border re-opened 20 Dec. Mercosur 2 Dec suspended Venezuela’s membership over non-compliance with its accession treaty. Maduro and FM Rodríguez denounced decision; Rodríguez 14 Dec travelled to Mercosur meeting in Buenos Aires but was denied access.

- **REPORT:** Venezuela: Tough Talking

**Guatemala**  
DECEMBER 2016

Presenting International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG)’s ninth yearly report 24 Nov, CICIG Commissioner Iván Velásquez expressed concern about threat of return to impunity, said corruption in Guatemala “structural” and that CICIG will investigate crimes of “recent and the somewhat more distant past.” Warnings came as Guatemala’s economic elites continued to openly criticise actions
of CICIG and Attorney General’s office. Efforts to restore public trust in security apparatus continued, including large inter-institutional operation against extortion rackets belonging to “18 Neighbourhood” and “Mara Salvatrucha” gangs 7-8 Dec.

**Haiti  DECEMBER 2016**

Jovenel Moïse, 48-year old banana farmer appointed by former President Martelly as candidate despite having no prior political experience, expected to be confirmed winner of 20 Nov presidential election 3 Jan. Backed by business community, especially agriculture, Moïse has emphasised need for economic revival of countryside and rural development. Three of nine Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) members 28 Nov refused to validate results, mainly due to irregularities and lack of transparency during vote count. Members of Core Group, most importantly U.S. and Organization of American States (OAS), recognised results, however political opposition refused to do so and started legal proceedings to challenge them. CEP 5 Dec published preliminary results of 20 Nov legislative elections: no political party won majority of votes, however Moïse’s Tèt Kale party gained most ground winning seats for three senators and four deputies. Former rebel leader Guy Philippe, wanted by U.S. and Haitian authorities for drug charges, money laundering and armed attack on police station, won senate seat for Grand’Anse region. UN 1 Dec officially assumed responsibility for 2010 cholera outbreak.

**Mexico  DECEMBER 2016**

Internal attorney general investigation against ex-director of Criminal Investigation Agency, Tomás Zerón, 17 Dec found that key evidence in case of 43 disappeared students from Ayotzinapa, which agency presented under Zerón’s guidance, was obtained by torture. New evidence provided in book by chief investigator Chávez Flores and journalist Anabel Hernández points to involvement of 27th Infantry Battalion stationed in Iguala in disappearances. Authorities 9 Dec arrested Alfredo Beltrán Guzmán alias “El Mochomito”, nephew of arrested Sinaloa Cartel kingpin Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán and son of Alfredo Beltrán Leyva, arrested leader of Beltrán Leyva Cartel; “El Mochomito” considered key actor behind recent violence in Sinaloa. Senate 12 Dec started debating new law that aims to regulate public security responsibilities of military; military has repeatedly demanded such a law, insisting its troops are confronted with tasks they are not qualified for, also requested fewer human rights restrictions. Different Institutional Revolutionary Party ex-state governors continue to be investigated for corruption charges; new Veracruz governor Miguel Ángel Yunes assumed office 1 Dec promising anti-corruption reforms.
Middle East & North Africa

Israel/Palestine  DECEMBER 2016

Egypt presented resolution to UNSC 21 Dec inter alia condemning Israeli settlement construction and declaring it violation of international law; setting 1967 lines as basis for negotiations between parties; and calling on countries to differentiate between Israel and settlements. Egypt next day postponed vote, reportedly following pressure from Israel and involvement by U.S. President-elect Trump. Four other UNSC members pushed ahead with vote on same text 23 Dec, which passed after U.S. abstained. Israel called resolution “shameful”; Palestinian President Abbas called it “strong support for the two-state solution”. Amid spike in tensions between Israeli govt and Obama administration, which said it had refrained from exercising its veto in response to Israeli settlement expansion, Israel 26 Dec said it had evidence that U.S. orchestrated resolution; White House denied. Jerusalem municipal govt same day said it will move ahead with thousands of new homes in E Jerusalem. U.S. Sec State Kerry in 28 Dec speech defended UNSC vote and strongly criticised Israel’s expansion of settlements as threat to two-state solution and peace. France 22 Dec said it will convene planned peace conference in Paris 15 Jan. Controversial “legalisation bill” retroactively legalising settlements built on private Palestinian lands in West Bank passed first two votes in Knesset 6 and 7 Dec. UN human rights chief 8 Dec said it would violate international law and “seriously damage the reputation of Israel around the world”. Following Supreme Court’s Oct decision to dismantle illegal Amona settlement, negotiations between Amona’s residents and Netanyahu led to agreement 18 Dec to relocate Amona to different piece of land on same hill, doubling its size and passing legalisation bill. Claim by Palestinian to be owner of designated land threw agreement into doubt. Staff of U.S. President-elect Trump reiterated intention to relocate U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to West Jerusalem despite concerns over impact on diplomatic process; Trump 16 Dec named his choice of new ambassador to Israel, pro-settler opponent of two-state solution, lawyer David Friedman. Abbas 19 Dec stripped parliamentary immunity of five lawmakers, all allies of Abbas critic Mohammed Dahlan, who was sentenced in absentia to three years’ prison by Palestinian court 14 Dec for embezzlement, charges he said were politically motivated.

Jordan  DECEMBER 2016

Four Islamist militants 18 Dec clashed with security forces in Karak in south; four militants, seven police and three civilians reportedly killed, Islamic State claimed responsibility. Police clashed with suspected militants 20 Dec near Karak, four police and one suspect killed, two arrested.
PM Saad Hariri 18 Dec announced formation of thirty-minister cabinet bringing together representatives of country’s major political parties. Hizbollah holds two seats in cabinet; close allies of Hizbollah Gebran Bassil and Yacoub al-Sarraf hold foreign affairs and defence portfolios respectively. Cabinet also includes new anti-corruption and women’s affairs ministries. Hariri said new govt’s top priority to “preserve security against the fires ravaging our region”. Ahead of parliamentary elections due May 2017 – first in eight years – Hariri said new govt will prepare new electoral law, traditionally source of significant disagreement among political factions about representative system. Army conducted raids in al-Qasr in NE by Syrian border 27 Dec after a soldier was killed previous day.

Regime forces, Russia and Iran-backed foreign fighters with combined aerial bombardment and ground offensive forced rebels out of E Aleppo mid-Dec dealing blow to non-jihadist rebels and opposition’s political ambitions. Tens of thousands of civilians fleeing bombing entered regime-controlled areas where pro-regime forces rounded up fighting-age men. After several failed attempts by UN, U.S. and rebels to negotiate secure withdrawal of remaining rebels and civilians from E Aleppo, Moscow and Ankara brokered deal 13 Dec to evacuate all rebels and civilians to rebel-held areas west of Aleppo. Militias backed by Iran, not party to deal, blocked implementation and Tehran demanded evacuation of wounded fighters and civilians from two Shia villages besieged by rebels in Idlib, Foua and Kafraya. Fighting resumed in Aleppo 14 Dec until new agreement reached 16 Dec. Evacuations from E Aleppo began alongside preparations to withdraw wounded fighters, women and children from Foua and Kafraya until Salafi-jihadist Jund al-Aqsa group and unidentified anti-regime gunmen 18 Dec torched several buses going to collect Shia evacuees. Turkey assisted talks to ensure security for buses and evacuations from E Aleppo resumed 19 Dec and continued until 22 Dec; at least 35,000 civilians and fighters evacuated. UNSC same day passed resolution authorising UN personnel to monitor process. Islamic State (IS) 11 Dec recaptured Palmyra from regime and allies. Russia, Iran and Turkey 19 Dec at Russia-hosted summit agreed to try to broker talks between regime and rebels and expand ceasefire to area beyond Aleppo, set principles for agreement. Turkish-backed rebels and Turkish soldiers continued offensive to push IS out of al-Bab in north; fighting intensified late Dec, Russian jets hit three IS targets near al-Bab 29–30 Dec. Ceasefire between pro-regime and non-jihadist rebel forces, brokered by Russia and Turkey, began 30 Dec; appeared to be largely holding in north during first 48 hours, but not around Damascus.
where regime military advances continued.

- **COMMENTARY: What Comes After the Bloody Battle for Aleppo?**

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**Bahrain** DECEMBER 2016

Security forces 21 Dec clashed with supporters of prominent Shiite cleric Ayatollah Isa Qassim gathered near his home to prevent his arrest and deportation; govt revoked his citizenship in May for promoting sectarianism. Court 12 Dec upheld nine-year sentence of opposition Shiite cleric Ali Salman.

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**Iran** DECEMBER 2016

U.S. Senate 1 Dec passed ten-year extension of Iran Sanctions Act (ISA) and sent to White House for President Obama’s signature; in procedural protest Obama 15 Dec let act become law but declined to sign it. President Rouhani said ISA renewal violated, at least in spirit, July 2015 nuclear accord between Iran and P5+1 (E3+3) countries and ordered Iran’s atomic energy organisation to develop nuclear propulsion systems. FM Zarif 17 Dec requested meeting of Joint Commission overseeing deal implementation to review ISA extension. International Atomic Energy Agency director visited Iran 18 Dec, confirmed govt has remained committed to deal. Govt signed deals with Boeing 11 Dec and Airbus 22 Dec for aircraft provision and moved toward deals with energy giants Royal Dutch Shell, Total, Gazprom and Schlumberger. Govt 14 Dec blocked Russia-Turkey deal to evacuate rebels and civilians from E Aleppo in Syria until rebels let wounded fighters and civilians leave two Shia villages (see Syria).

- **OP-ED: Turkey and Iran’s Dangerous Collision Course**

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**Iraq** DECEMBER 2016
U.S.-backed govt forces and allied militias made slow progress in campaign to retake Mosul in north from Islamic State (IS): govt forces 6 Dec launched fresh assault from northern Mosul retaking al-Qirawan and al-Hadba districts and from south retaking Wahda neighbourhood, 29 Dec began new push on three fronts into eastern districts. Bomb attack 20 Dec on office of Iranian opposition party Democratic Party of Kurdistan (PDK) in Koy Sanjaq, east of Erbil, killed seven people. Three bombs claimed by IS including one suicide bomb killed 29 people in Baghdad 31 Dec. World Bank 20 Dec approved $1.485bn loan to govt to improve public service delivery and stimulate growth.

Yemen  DECEMBER 2016

Two suicide bombings claimed by Islamic State in Aden in south 10 and 18 Dec each killed over 50 soldiers. U.S. military 22 Dec said it killed 28 members of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen in nine strikes between 23 Sept and 13 Dec. Huthi rebels and forces aligned with former President Saleh stepped up efforts to capture Taiz in south, continued to launch rockets into Saudi Arabia and tried to take more Saudi territory. Saudi-led coalition intensified bombing in north 13 Dec especially around Sanaa and Hodeidah. U.S. Sec State Kerry visited Saudi Arabia 18 Dec to try to persuade all parties to accept ceasefire and support UN roadmap to end conflict.

Algeria  DECEMBER 2016

Algerian-British journalist Mohamed Tamalt, sentenced in July to two years in prison for “defaming public authority” and offending President Bouteflika, died 11 Dec after hunger strike.

Egypt  DECEMBER 2016
Suicide bombing claimed by Islamic State (IS) at Cairo’s Coptic cathedral 11 Dec killed 25 people, wounded 49. Bombing claimed by Islamist militant group Hasm in Cairo 9 Dec killed six police. Bombing in Kafr el-Sheikh governorate in Nile Delta (north) same day killed civilian, injured three police. Prominent Islamist fighter Adel Habara, sentenced to death in 2014 for killing 25 soldiers in N Sinai in 2013, executed 15 Dec despite militant threats to ignite “volcano of jihad”. Supreme Constitutional Court 3 Dec upheld law banning protests. Govt 15 Dec said traces of explosives detected on bodies retrieved from EgyptAir flight that crashed in May 2016. In Sinai, armed forces 6 Dec said they killed eight IS-affiliated “Sinai Province” militants during large-scale security sweep in Sheikh Zuweid, Rafah and al-Arish.

Islamic State (IS) defeated in Sirte but fighting between rival forces escalated, risking greater violent confrontation around Sirte, Jufra or Tripoli in Jan. Misratan-led forces, nominally loyal to internationally recognised Presidency Council (PC), backed by U.S. airstrikes, early Dec claimed full control of Sirte. Rifts over control of city emerged mid-Dec: PC-supported city council 11 Dec elected civilian mayor close to eastern strongman General Haftar, while Misratan militias 13 Dec appointed rival military governor and east-based govt appointed its own (remote) governor for Sirte. In move westward toward Sirte, Haftar’s Libyan National Army (LNA) 9 Dec took control of key military base from Misratan forces in Brak Shati, 200km south of Sirte. Haftar 14 Dec called on officers and soldiers to be ready for offensive to “free” Tripoli. Two Islamist-leaning anti-Haftar coalitions and forces loyal to former local strongman Ibrahim Jedran 7 Dec launched offensive to retake control of oil export facilities in oil crescent from Haftar’s LNA, LNA pushed back forces to Jufra with airstrikes. PC denied it supported offensive but PC’s Defence Minister Al-Barghathi in Govt of National Accord reportedly provided legal and financial assistance to attackers. LNA 26 Dec carried out “pre-emptive” airstrike against camp of Benghazi Defence Brigades loyal to PC in central Jufra region. Operations mid-Dec resumed at two key oil fields, Sharara and El Feel, and connected Rayaina pipeline in west after two-year shutdown. Rival militias clashed in Tripoli early Dec, at least eight people reportedly killed including civilians. Military plane affiliated with Libyan Air Force loyal to PC 22 Dec crashed SE of Tripoli, killing both pilots. Bodies of two police found in Tripoli 26 Dec, unrest followed in some districts. In east, LNA 17 Dec said it had taken control of seafront buildings west of Benghazi district of Ganfouda; suicide attack claimed by IS 18 Dec targeted LNA in Ganfouda, at least seven soldiers killed. Two men 23 Dec hijacked domestic flight from Sabha en route to Tripoli, diverted it to Malta, released passengers and surrendered.

- COMMENTARY: Oil Zone Fighting Threatens Libya with Economic Collapse
Morocco  DECEMBER 2016

Security forces 1 Dec arrested eight people with suspected links to Islamic State during raids in Fez and Tangier (north). Consultations on govt line-up remained stuck reportedly due to inter-party disagreements. European Court of Justice 21 Dec ruled two political and trade deals with EU were valid but did not apply to Western Sahara (see Western Sahara). Opposition Istiqlal party 24 Dec said Mauritania was Moroccan territory, raising tensions between countries.

Tunisia  DECEMBER 2016

Govt 2 Dec said security forces dismantled 160 jihadist cells in first ten months of 2016. Security forces 29 Dec said they dismantled al-Qaeda-linked militant cell active near Sousse. Tunisian engineer Mohamed Zaouari, responsible for developing drones for Palestinian Hamas’s Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, killed in Sfax (east) 15 Dec. Hamas 17 Dec accused Israel of directing killing, security forces arrested several people for suspected involvement. National Security Director General Abdelrahman Haji Ali 15 Dec resigned, reportedly in protest at presidency’s interference in interior ministry. Parliament 10 Dec adopted 2017 budget without proposed amendments to reduce tax evasion and postpone civil service salary increases, following protests by unions. Govt 14 Dec said British oil and gas company Petrofac would halt gas production after two weeks of renewed protests on Kerkennah island by people seeking jobs in company.

Western Sahara  DECEMBER 2016

European Court of Justice 21 Dec ruled two political and trade deals between Morocco and EU were valid but did not apply to Western Sahara (see Morocco).