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March 2012 Trends



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- summarises briefly 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 information sources (all references mentioned are hyperlinked in the electronic version of this bulletin);
- 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;
- alerts readers to situations where, in the coming month, there is a particular risk of new or significantly escalated conflict, or a particular conflict resolution opportunity (noting that in some instances there may in fact be both); and
- summarises Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers that have been published in the last month.

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Africa

Central Africa

➡ **Burundi** Gunmen 7 March killed 2 police in clash at checkpoint, Bubanza province, 1 attacker killed. Despite govt warnings, threats, civil society and 2 labour unions organised strike 27 March to protest water, electricity costs, political elites not paying taxes. Pascal Nyabenda elected 31 March as head of ruling CNDD-FDD parliamentary coalition.

- "Three killed in Burundi attack: police", Reuters, 8 March 2012.

New Crisis Group Africa Report N°185, *Burundi: A Deepening Corruption Crisis*, 21 March 2012. Despite the establishment of anti-corruption agencies, Burundi is facing a deepening corruption crisis that jeopardises prospects for lasting peace and stability.

➡ **Cameroon** Govt, Nigeria 28 Feb signed agreement establishing joint border security committee as part of measures to restrict crossing of insurgents, security elements.

- "Piraterie maritime: Réactivation des attaques au large de Bakassi", Cameroon Info, 16 March 2012.

➡ **Central African Republic** PM Touadéra 19 March headed delegation to Khartoum, discussed military cooperation, bilateral relations. EU 7 March pledged €14mn to MICOPAX peacekeeping mission. Security in centre-north remained fragile following Feb offensive against Chadian FPR rebels. LRA attacks in SE increased early March after period of calm; UN Special Envoy for Central Africa Abou Moussa 23 March said LRA leader Joseph Kony believed to be in CAR; AU 24 March launched regional taskforce to tackle LRA.

- "Kony believed to be in Central African Republic: UN", AFP, 23 March 2012.

➡ **Chad** Thousands of migrants returned, fleeing clashes in Nigeria between Boko Haram, security forces. Opposition deputy Ngoté Gata sentenced 6 March to 1-year prison for attempted bribery. International Court of Justice 12 March began hearing Belgium's request to secure extradition from Senegal of former President Habré for alleged crimes against humanity.

- "Niger and Chad nationals flee violence in Nigeria", GlobalPost, 12 March 2012.

➡ **Democratic Republic of Congo** FDLR rebel commander Idrissa Muradadi surrendered 10 March during joint MONUSCO-FARDC offensive; fears offensive aggravating civilian displacement, provoking rebel reprisals. ICC 14 March found Thomas Lubanga, alleged Patriotic Forces for the Liberation of the Congo (FPLC) militia leader, guilty of war crimes. Despite requests from ICC, civil society and NGOs, DRC govt continued refusal to fulfil ICC arrest warrant for Bosco Ntaganda, accused of war crimes. UN Joint Human Rights Office 20 March reported security forces loyal to President Kabila killed at least 33 in Kinshasa during Nov 2011 polls; FM Alexis Mwamba 23 March reportedly denounced "unilateral, partisan and selective nature" of report, urged investigation. UNHCR expressed concern at increased LRA attacks on civilians in Orientale Province since Nov 2011, said thousands displaced.

- "UN-backed Congolese army drive could displace 100,000 people, analysts warn", *Guardian*, 16 March 2012.

➡ **Rwanda** Opposition leader Charles Ntakirutinka freed after completing 10-year jail sentence for inciting civil disobedience, associating with criminals. 1 killed, 5 injured 23 March in suspected grenade attack in Musanze; 6 injured 30 March in 2 grenade attacks in Kigali.

- "Blast in northern Rwanda kills one", Reuters, 24 March 2012.

Horn of Africa

➡ **Eritrea** Relations with Ethiopia deteriorated further as Ethiopian troops 15 March reportedly attacked military bases in Ramid, Gelahbe, Gimbe, SE Eritrea; Ethiopian govt said bases used to train insurgents, responsible for tourist deaths in Afar region; Eritrean govt 16 March called on UN to take action against Ethiopia, said U.S. aided Ethiopian assault, attack aimed to divert attention from decade-old border dispute.

- "Eritrea is an easy target for Ethiopia", *Guardian*, 19 March 2012.

➡ **Ethiopia** Tensions with Eritrea intensified with reported 15 March cross-border attack on Eritrean military bases by Ethiopian troops (see Eritrea). AU 9 March announced Ethiopian troops in Somalia to be replaced by AU by end of April 2012; Ethiopian soldiers, al-Shabaab fighters 10 March clashed in Yurkud, scores killed; troops 22 March captured key strategic town of Hudur, SW, 23 March captured El Bur. Govt 20 March condemned fighting in Ethiopian Somali region, said Somaliland chiefs smuggling arms across border into Ethiopia. 19 killed, 5 kidnapped in bus attack by gunmen in Gambella, SW. Afar rebels 6 March said 2 German hostages captured 18 Jan released.

- "Ethiopia official: gunmen kill 19 in bus attack", AP, 13 March 2012.

➡ **Kenya** At least 9 killed, over 60 wounded 10 March in Nairobi grenade attack; al-Shabaab denied responsibility, threatened large-scale attacks; 4 suspects arrested, freed 12 March. One killed, 15 injured 31 March in 2 grenade attacks in Mombasa. AU 17 March announced AMISOM will take command of Kenyan troops in Somalia 30 March. ICC 9 March rejected application by 4 indictees including Deputy PM Kenyatta, former minister Ruto requesting appeal on decision to try them for 2008 election-related killings. Pro-ICC Justice Minister Kilonzo 27 March replaced in cabinet reshuffle. Elections body 17 March announced 4 March 2013 general election date, move criticised by ODM and civil society. In Mandera, clashes between Degodia, Gabbra communities continued throughout month, hundreds protested 22 March against growing insecurity.

- "Kenya sets March 2013 election date", CNN, 17 March 2012.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°184, *The Kenyan Military Intervention in Somalia*, 15 Feb. 2012.


➡ **Somalia** Suicide bomber 14 March killed 6 at presidential compound, Mogadishu; 6 killed 19 March when mortars fired at Presidential Palace hit IDP camp, al-Shabaab claimed responsibility. Scores of fighters killed 10 March in al-Shabaab offensive on Ethiopian soldiers in Yurkud, key strategic town; dozens killed 20 March in clashes between Ahlu Sunna militia and al-Shabaab in Dusamareb, Galgadud region. Ethiopian troops 22-23 March captured key strategic Hudur, El Bur towns; AU 30 March said al-Shabaab stronghold of Deynile captured; Kenyan warplanes bombed al-Shabaab bases throughout month. EU 8 March pledged additional €100mn AMISOM funding to 2013; 23 March

extended counter-piracy mission to 2014, for first time allowing attacks on land. At least 9 killed 3 March in al-Shabaab attack in Puntland prompting fears of resurgent militant activity in region. Journalist shot dead 4 March by gunmen in Galkayo marking 4th journalist assassinated in 4 months; Shabelle radio director shot, injured 25 March.


- "AU forces claim Somali rebel bastion seizure", Al Jazeera, 30 March 2012.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°87, *Somalia: An Opportunity that Should Not Be Missed*, 22 Feb. 2012.

 **Somaliland** 3 govt officials including senior presidential adviser arrested 10 March for misappropriation of food aid, dismissed from govt positions; President Silanyo 18 March dismissed 7 Ministers in cabinet reshuffle. At least 10 killed, scores injured mid-March when Gashamo district residents clashed with Ethiopian Zone Five new police. President Silanyo 3 March said govt ready to hold talks with leaders of self-proclaimed Khatumo state; at least 50 Somaliland soldiers reportedly defected to Khatumo 17 March.

- "Major reshuffle in the Somaliland gov't", Garowe Online, 18 March 2012.

 **South Sudan** Clashes between SPLA and Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) 26 March sparked fears of return to war; SPLA accused SAF of bombing disputed Jau, Pan Akuach, Teshwin areas near Helgig, said SPLA acted in self-defence. SPLA said SAF 30 March bombed SPLA border positions, SAF denied. Sudan-S Sudan AUHIP-facilitated negotiations 13 March had reached agreement on nationality, border demarcation process, renewed commitment to negotiations on outstanding issues including oil. At least 63 wounded 9 March when gunmen attacked Lou Nuer cattle camps in Akobo and Wanding areas near border with Ethiopia; UNMISS dispatched patrol and medical teams, condemned attacks, urged Jonglei state communities to end violence; UNHCR announced estimated 15,000 fleeing Jonglei violence have entered Ethiopia since mid-Feb.

- "Sudan team in Ethiopia for crisis talks", AFP, 31 March 2012.

 **Sudan** Fears of war with S Sudan increased as President Bashir 26 March suspended planned 3 April talks with S Sudan following clashes along border (see S Sudan); security officials 30 March met with AU mediator Mbeki to discuss crisis; govt 13 March had reached agreement with Juba on nationality, border demarcation process (see S Sudan). Former UN official Mukesh Kapila early-March warned of Khartoum's "scorched earth policy", humanitarian disaster in Nuba Mountains, said govt committing crimes against humanity, war crimes, called for humanitarian access. 5 reportedly killed by police, 21 injured during popular unrest 27-30 March in Kabkabiya, Darfur. President Bashir 16 March defended crackdown on press freedom, said closed newspapers had insulted army, endangered national security.


- "Clashes continue as Sudan summit suspended", Al Jazeera, 28 March 2012.

 **Uganda** Army mid-March said Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebels opened 3 camps in DRC, actively recruiting in Uganda, army on high alert. Assistant police inspector John Ariong killed 21 March when police clashed with opposition Forum for Democratic Change march; opposition said police to blame for death, 26 March said over 100 arrested; opposition leader Kizza Besigye 28 March charged with unlawful assembly, inciting public against police, 30 March arrested with 3 opposition politicians for taking part


in protest. 53 charged with treason 24 March for alleged plans to overthrow govt. Govt 27 March said influx of up to 7,000 refugees from DRC could pose security risk.

- "Uganda protest leader in court after police death", AP, 28 March 2012.



West Africa

 **Côte d'Ivoire** President Ouattara 13 March declared himself defence minister in cabinet reshuffle, named Jeannot Ahoussou Kouadio PM as part of pre-election deal with Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire; outgoing PM Soro named National Assembly president in controversial vote. ICC investigators 14 March announced possible discovery of mass grave near Duékoué where fighters loyal to Ouattara suspected of killing hundreds during post-electoral conflict.


- "Ahoussou-Kouadio, Premier ministre: le changement dans la continuité en Côte d'Ivoire", RFI, 16 March 2012.

 **Guinea** Following failure of political dialogue over organisation of legislative elections, electoral commission (CENI) 1 March announced poll to be held 8 July. Opposition rally in Conakry 17 March calling for free and fair elections, CENI reform, initially banned and then repressed, dozens detained; arrestees soon released and new opposition rally held peacefully 24 March.



- "Guinea security forces tear gas opposition rally", Reuters, 17 March 2012.

  **Guinea-Bissau** Elections held 18 March in calm, but opposition candidates denounced fraud and rejected results in advance of vote, sparking fears of instability. UNSG Ban 19 March praised peaceful election, but urged calm; international observers, ECOWAS, CPLP said poll free and fair. Fears of violence sparked by 18 March killing of former military intelligence chief Colonel Samba Djaló; ex-army Chief of Staff Zamora Induta fled to EU compound 22 March. Electoral commission 21 March said PM Carlos Gomes Júnior won first round with 49%, will face former President Yalá in 22 April run-off. 5 main challengers to Gomes, including Yalá, withdrew from race alleging large-scale fraud and irregularities; submitted evidence to electoral commission.

- "Kumba Yalá boicota segunda volta das presidenciais", Semanário SOL, 22 March 2012.


 **Liberia** Head of Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) party, Winston Tubman, 5 March retired following expulsion from CDC last month, replaced by former football star George Weah. UNMIL 6 March confirmed reduction of troops from 15,000 to 8,000. Clashes between Ivorian refugees and local population in Grand Gedeh 20 March left over 500 seriously wounded.

- "UNMIL Cuts Down", *New Democrat*, 5 March 2012.


  **Mali** President Touré overthrown in army coup 22 March, constitution suspended; coup followed 20-21 March mutiny in Kati garrison, Feb-March protests demanding better weapons for soldiers fighting rebellion in north; Captain Amadou Sanogo named head of military junta. AU, EU condemned coup, World Bank suspended aid; political parties 24 March ordered renegade soldiers back to barracks; ECOWAS 27 March suspended Mali, heads of state visit initially scheduled 29 March postponed following pro-junta protests in Bamako. Sanogo 1 April said constitution would be reinstated. MNLA Tuareg rebels 10-11 March took

strategic town of Tessalit, 31 March took Kidal, 30 March took key garrison town of Gao aided by new rebel group Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA), 1 April took Timbuktu; army activated Peul/Songhai self-defence militias Ganda Koy, Ganda Izo to fight rebels; Ganda Izo leader Amadou Diallo and dozen fighters killed in Tinahama late March. Govt troops reportedly beaten back at Tinzawaten, Aguelhok, Kidal by Islamist rebel group Ansar Dine, headed by 1990 Tuareg rebellion leader Iyad ag Ghaly and accused of links with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). MNLA mid-March distanced itself from Ansar Dine, said only seeking independence of Azawad, following 11 March video showing Ansar Dine assault on Aguelhok, Ansar Dine declaration of intent to impose Sharia law. Mauritanian air force 11 March launched air strike against suspected AQIM convoy near Timbuktu following exchange of hostages 10 March, 2 civilians injured.


- Comment by Gilles Yabi, [Mali: sortir de la confusion à Bamako et du vide sécuritaire au Nord](#), *Jeune Afrique*, 27 March 2012.
- ["Coup d'état militaire contre le président ATT"](#), *Jeune Afrique*, 22 March 2012.

 **Niger** Authorities 20 March arrested Aghali Alambo, 2007-2009 Tuareg rebellion leader and ex-Qadhafi aide, accused of links to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), arms smuggling. EU 23 March agreed on civilian mission to help police/gendarmerie fight terrorism, organised crime in Sahel. International agencies, NGOs warned drought and increasing number of refugees from Mali risk creating regional humanitarian crisis. Following controversy over issuance of Nigerien diplomatic passport to former Qadhafi chief of staff, authorities 16 March said document officially rescinded.

- ["Aghali Alambo mis aux arrêts pour complicité d'actes terroristes"](#), *Afrik.com*, 21 March 2012.

 **Nigeria** Boko Haram attacks continued; 7 killed 7 March in attack on police station, Ashaka; 1 killed 9 March in attack on police station, Kano; 21 killed 11 March in attack on Jos church; 5 killed 12 March in attack on military patrol, Mubi; 2 killed 8 March in failed European hostage rescue bid, Birnin Kebbi; 2 Boko Haram killed in suicide car blast 24 March, Maiduguri; 9 killed 21 March in shootout with security forces, Kano; 6 killed 25 March in suicide blast during raid, Maiduguri; 1 policeman killed 28 March, Maiduguri; several injured 28 March in police station bombing, Yobe; 4 killed 30 March in Boko Haram bank robbery, Kano; 10 killed in police in shootout with Boko Haram 31 March, Kogi. Govt reportedly in indirect talks with group to end violence; Boko Haram 16 March reportedly said may declare 3-month truce. 16 killed 6 March in clashes between Fulani and ethnic Tiv in east; clashes between Hausa and Yoruba in Ekiti 22 March injured at least 20. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) 23 March announced German hostage being held, demanded exchange for "Muslim woman" held in Germany.


- Comment by Andrew Stroehlein, ["On the trail of Boko Haram"](#), *Independent*, 12 March 2012.
- ["Nigeria, Islamist group Boko Haram in indirect talks"](#), *AFP*, 16 March 2012.

 **Senegal** Election held 25 March in calm; Macky Sall elected president with 65% of votes; President Wade acknowledged Sall's victory same day. Tensions high before polls; opposition and M23 movement 19 March accused Wade of buying votes; 12 other candidates rallied behind challenger Sall who early March called on


supporters to be "vigilant". Wade and Sall motorcades pelted with stones 22 and 15 March. 3 soldiers killed, 4 injured early March by Casamance separatists (MFDC) near Sédhiou; MFDC 15 March said Dakar not interested in peace.

- ["Macky Sall élu président du Sénégal"](#), *Le Monde*, 26 March 2012.


Southern Africa

 **Madagascar** Fears of further military uprisings following 7 March mutiny over salary arrears at CAPSAT Soanierana camp. SADC 14 March gave govt 2 weeks to finalise amnesty law allowing return of former President Ravalomanana; transitional govt 29 March tabled bill for amnesty law; heated debates expected in Parliament from 3 April. Govt 15 March unveiled new transitional electoral commission; civil society orgs said not independent, unrepresentative. Court 22 March condemned Colonel Andrianasoavina and others for attempted Nov 2010 coup d'état, acquitted former International Court of Justice VP Raymond Ranjeva.

- ["Sortie de crise : L'armée tiraillée de toutes parts"](#), *L'Express de Madagascar*, 10 March 2012.

 **Malawi** Opposition United Democratic Front presidential candidate Atupele Muluzi detained 17 March; anti-govt protesters demanding Muluzi's release 19 March set fire to police station. Police 15 March warned they would use force to break up opposition rallies calling for reform, 16 March arrested chairman of Human Rights Commission John Kapito; HRW 23 March said recent surge of arrests reflects govt's broader crackdown on rights, free speech.


- ["UN issue security alert as Atupele's arrest heightens tension"](#), *Nyasa Times*, 21 March 2012.

 **Zimbabwe** 1 killed, several injured 10 March when Zanu-PF-linked Chipangano militia attacked MDC-T rally, Sunningdale; police failed to prevent clashes. MDC-T rally in Marondera 25 March left several injured when party youths assaulted provincial chairman Johannes Razunguzwa. President Mugabe 10 March said GPA only meant to end violence, secure fresh elections not new constitution. Defence Minister Mwangawa mid-March signed deals with China, Iran to strengthen military cooperation. PM Tsvangirai 8 March warned security chiefs may plan coup if Mugabe loses polls. 1 killed, 7 injured when police attacked residents near Shamva mine; 8 officers arrested. Mining company Zimplats mid-March agreed to engage in controversial indigenisation program.

- ["Mugabe, Zanu-PF desperate as time runs out: analysts"](#), *Standard*, 17 March 2012.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°86, [Zimbabwe's Sanctions Standoff](#), 6 Feb. 2012.

Asia

Central Asia

 **Kazakhstan** Trial of 37 people accused of Dec 2011 violence in western town Janaozen began 27 March; hundreds 24 March attended rally in Almaty to commemorate violence; 3 Algha party

activists 6 March arrested for publicising event. Lawyer of striking oil workers in W Kazakhstan 10 March released on probation following Aug arrest. Almaty court 19 March extended pretrial detention of opposition Algha party leader Vladimir Kozlov, prominent opposition activist Serik Saparghali till late April following Jan arrest. Court 26 March began trial of 47 suspects on terrorism charges, involvement in Oct bombings in Atyrau. Authorities 28 March reportedly thwarted series of “terrorist” attacks in Almaty linked to opposition leader Mukhtar Ablyazov.

- “Kazakhstan trial over deadly riots begins”, BBC News, 27 March 2012.

➡ **Kyrgyzstan** Amid growing opposition to President Atambayev in South, Osh Mayor Myrzakmatov’s Nationalist Uluttar Birimdigi party declared winner of 4 March Osh municipal elections with 47.35%, expected 21 of 45 seats on city council. Large pro-Myrzakmatov rally 1 March in Osh attended by former presidential candidates Adakhan Madumarov, Kamchybek Tashiev; Madumarov demanded govt resignation by 15 March over deteriorating economic situation. U.S. Defence Secretary Panetta 13 March met Kyrgyz officials, stressed importance of continued U.S. use of Manas military base; Defence Council Secretary Tabaldiev said no military mission at base after 2014.

- “Southern nationalists unite to hold on to Osh”, Eurasianet, 1 March 2012.

New Crisis Group Asia report N°222, *Kyrgyzstan: Widening Ethnic Divisions in the South*, 29 March 2012. Kyrgyzstan’s disregard for its Uzbek community is pushing the ethnic minority to a breaking point.

➡ **Tajikistan** Authorities 3 March blocked 4 Russian-language news websites over potential national security concerns; OSCE called on Tajikistan to reverse decision. Uzbekistan late-month announced suspension of gas supplies from 1 April. U.S. govt report on religious freedom flagged Tajikistan as a country of concern for first time.

- “Tajikistan joins “world’s worst religious freedom violators” - US report”, Eurasianet, 20 March 2012.

➡ **Turkmenistan** Authorities 27 March said 2 new political parties to be established “soon”. During 15-16 March hearing of UN Human Right Council, officials announced release of Parliament Speaker Ovezgeldy Atayev, held on domestic abuse charges since 2006.

- “Orwell doesn’t play well outside of Ashgabat”, Eurasianet, 20 March 2012.

➡ **Uzbekistan** Parliament 23 March delayed presidential polls from Dec 2014 to early 2015. Authorities reportedly installed security cameras late-Feb in about 30 mosques in eastern city of Naman-gan; locals described move as another curb on Islamic practices.

- “Uzbek authorities install security cameras in mosques”, RFE/RL, 1 March 2012.

North East Asia

➡ **North Korea** DPRK 16 March announced plans to launch satellite by long-range rocket next month; UNSG Ban urged DPRK to reconsider launch, China expressed concerns, Japan said it will intercept rocket if necessary; U.S. 28 March confirmed suspension of food aid planned in “leap day” agreement. IAEA 16 March received invite from DPRK to visit.

- “Obama’s North Korean leap of faith falls short”, Reuters, 30 March 2012.

South Asia

➡ **Afghanistan** Relations with U.S. continued to deteriorate: U.S. soldier Robert Bales 14 March shot 17 villagers including 9 children in Kandahar’s Panjawi district; President Karzai 15 March called for NATO troops to halt field operations, remain in bases, 16 March accused U.S. of frustrating investigation; soldier charged with murder 23 March. Taliban 15 March broke off prisoner exchange talks with U.S.. 2 killed, 4 injured 2 March when Afghan soldier and civilian instructor opened fire at U.S. Bagram Air Field where U.S. forces burned Qu’rans in Feb; suicide bomber 5 March killed 2 civilians, wounded 4 at Bagram base. Ulema Council 2 March called for public trial of soldiers involved in Qu’ran burning. At least 20 killed 29 March in ambush on NATO supply convoy, Farah province. Afghan Leader of Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan Makhdum Nusrat reportedly killed 27 March in joint NATO-Afghan raid, Faryab province. 2 commanders of militant Haqqani network arrested 31 March in joint Afghan-NATO military operation in Wardak province. Govt 9 March signed MOU with U.S. agreeing 6-month transfer period for Parwan prison at Bagram signalling major U.S. policy shift, U.S. retains veto over prisoner release. Local Afghan worker 14 March attempted attack on U.S. Defence Secretary Panetta at Camp Bastion airbase, Helmand. German Chancellor Merkel visited mid-March, cast doubt on German pullout by 2013/2014.

- “In Afghanistan, two more U.S. troops killed over Koran burning”, *Los Angeles Times*, 2 March 2012.

New Crisis Group Asia Report N°221, *Talking About Talks: Toward a Political Settlement in Afghanistan*, 26 March 2012. A major course correction is needed if talks with the Taliban are to have any chance of delivering sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

➡ **Bangladesh** Some 100,000 opposition supporters 12 March rallied in Dhaka demanding restoration of law requiring independent caretaker govt to oversee elections. 30 people, including eldest son of former PM Khaleda Zia and former Zia govt ministers, indicted 18 March for 2004 grenade attack on rally led by current PM Sheikh Hasina that killed 24.

- “Bangladesh ex-premier’s son among 30 people indicted in grenade attack”, CNN, 18 March 2012.

➡ **India** 15 Indian police killed 27 March in Maharashtra landmine blast. Central Bureau of Investigation 16 March reported 2010 killing of Maoist leader “Azad” genuine encounter, not execution in custody. 4 Maoists killed 5 March in clash with military in Jharkhand; rebel chief Kishenji’s reported successor arrested 1 March in Kolkata. 2 Italian tourists abducted 14 March by Maoist rebels in eastern state Odisha, one freed 25 March, demands include release of 14 Maoist prisoners. Tibetan exile 26 March self-immolated in New Delhi to protest visit of China PM Hu Jintao. Arrest warrants for 3 Iranians issued 15 March in connection with 13 Feb bombing of Israeli embassy.

- “India’s blast inquiry tests ties to Israel and Iran”, *New York Times*, 16 March 2012.

➡ **Kashmir** 1 killed 22 March in car blast in Anantnag district; militant killed same day in Baramulla district. Five Lashkar-e-Taiba militants killed 28 March in Kupwara district. 17 arrested following community clashes 8-17 March in Rajouri that left several injured.

- “Rajouri limps back to normalcy after 10 days”, Zee News, 18 March 2012.

➡ **Nepal** Supreme Court 28 March refused to review Nov 2011 verdict disallowing further extension of Constituent Assembly term beyond current end on 27 May. Maoist and Nepali Congress leaders neared resolution on peace process and constitutional issues including integration of Maoist combatants into Nepal Army. Govt 10 March began closing 13 of 28 cantonments housing Maoist combatants. Leaders from major parties continued negotiations on state restructuring, form of govt. Rift within Maoist party widened: dissident faction argued that leadership of Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal and PM Baburam Bhattarai has compromised core party goals; faction formed alliance with fringe parties and identity-based groups, called for timely delivery of constitution including identity-based federalism; Madhesi parties and identity-based groups threatened mobilisation if not incorporated. PM Baburam Bhattarai 23, 26 March sacked two Madhesi ministers for alleged malpractice and involvement in corruption.

- [“Turning point”](#), *Kathmandu Post*, 28 March 2012.

➡ **Pakistan** Supreme Court 8 March again ordered PM Gilani to request Swiss authorities reopen corruption case against President Zardari; Gilani 15 March said he would rather be jailed for contempt than obey court order. Ruling Pakistan Peoples Party and coalition allies 2 March won 32 of 49 seats in Senate elections. Pakistan's border region with Afghanistan remained restive: UN 30 March said over 100,000 displaced by military clashes with Taliban or al-Qaeda linked militants in NW. At least 51 Lashkar-e-Islam militants, 4 soldiers reportedly killed 12-18 March in airstrikes, gunfights in Upper Orkzai and Kurram tribal districts; over 21 killed 30 March in clash between security forces and militants in Orkzai region. At least 6 killed 27 March in unrest in Karachi following 26 March killing of Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) party worker and brother; MQM called for 31 March “day of mourning”; at least 14, including Awami National Party leader, shot dead 31 March in sporadic violence, clashes; killings condemned by MQM. Reported U.S. drone 13 March killed 6 militants from group that had signed non-aggression pact with Pakistan military, S Waziristan; Pakistan military official 30 March said 4 militants killed in drone strike in N Waziristan. Parliament 20 March opened debate on re-engagement with U.S.; report by Parliamentary Committee on National Security called for end to drone strikes, unconditional apology for Nov 2011 U.S. airstrike on troops. Interior Minister Rehman Malik 31 March said attempted 17 March attack on parliament foiled. Govt 9 March reportedly banned Ahle Sunnah Wal Jamaat, country's largest Islamic group, believed to be front for Lashkar-e-Jhangvi militants. Taliban leadership rift reportedly emerged early March following dismissal of senior commander, disputes over peace negotiations.

- [“Pakistan lawmakers to debate end to U.S. drone strikes”](#), CNN, 26 March 2012.

➡ **Sri Lanka** UN HRC 22 March, despite aggressive lobbying by Sri Lankan govt, approved U.S. resolution calling for implementation of Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) recommendations and for govt to address international law violation allegations; govt late March announced intention to close several embassies in Europe. OHCHR 23 March condemned harassment and intimidation of Sri Lankan human rights activists, warned of future govt reprisals and called on govt to protect human rights defenders. Month saw continued reports of abductions including attempted abduction of local Colombo politician, allegedly by army

soldiers; soldiers briefly detained, army said politician's identity mistaken, soldiers looking for army deserters.

- [“UN HR Commissioner urges government to “protect human rights defenders”](#), *Sunday Times*, 23 March 2012.

New Crisis Group Asia Report N°219, [Sri Lanka's North I: the Denial of Minority Rights](#), 16 March 2012. The Sri Lankan military's control over the political and economic life of the Northern Province is deepening the alienation and anger of northern Tamils and threatening sustainable peace.

New Crisis Group Asia Report N°220, [Sri Lanka's North II: Rebuilding Under the Military](#), 16 March 2012. The Sri Lankan military's control over the political and economic life of the Northern Province is deepening the alienation and anger of northern Tamils and threatening sustainable peace.

South East Asia

➡ **Indonesia** Indonesian counter-terrorism police 18 March killed 5 suspected terrorists in Bali allegedly planning robberies, 30 March shot dead 2 alleged terrorists in Jakarta, prompting renewed concerns over police tactics. 21 March bombing outside Indonesia Embassy in Paris reportedly intended as warning against Indonesian govt anti-terror crackdown, French fugitive militant with links to Indonesian terrorist groups suspected. Tension continued ahead of 9 April Aceh gubernatorial elections: 6 men, most Free Aceh Movement (GAM) members and Partai Aceh supporters, arrested 10 March, charged over politically-motivated murders, plot on life of current governor. Series of arson attacks in Aceh late March. 5 Papuans sentenced 16 March to 3 years in prison for role in declaration of independence at Oct 2011 Third Papuan People's Congress. Police forcibly dispersed large-scale protests across Indonesia 27-30 March against govt fuel subsidy reductions, demonstrators 30 March attempted to storm parliament; parliament 31 March agreed to limit price increase.

- [“Bali attack plot shows Indonesia terror threat evolving”](#), Reuters, 22 March 2012.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°135, [Indonesia: Averting Election Violence in Aceh](#), 29 Feb. 2012.

➡ **Burma/Myanmar** As campaigning for 1 April parliamentary by-elections intensified, U.S., EU, Canada, Japan and Australia agreed to send observers following invitation by President Thein Sein. Govt 7 March agreed to ceasefire with Karenni National Progressive Party armed group, 8-9 March held inconclusive peace talks with Kachin Independence Army amid ongoing but reduced armed clashes. Phado Man Nyein Maung, senior rebel Karen National Union political figure, jailed 13 March for treason; pardoned 19 March to enable his participation in peace talks. President Thein Sein 1 March gave major speech to legislature, signalled strong commitment to democratic reforms. Foreign dignitaries visited throughout month including Canadian Foreign Minister John Baird, New Zealand Foreign Minister Murray McCully; U.S. Special Envoy for Myanmar Derek Mitchell.

- Comment by Louise Arbour, [“In Myanmar, Sanctions Have Had Their Day”](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 5 March 2012.
- [“Can Burma find a durable peace?”](#), *Diplomat*, 9 March 2012.

➤ **Philippines** Peace talks between govt and MILF resumed 19-21 March, next round to be held April. MILF revealed findings of International Monitoring Team inquiry into Oct 2011 clash between rebels and soldiers; Philippine military cited for 10 violations of ceasefire to MILF's one. Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) early March met govt under Organisation of Islamic Conference auspices to review 1996 peace agreement: MNLF criticised govt for renegeing on June 2011 partnership agreement for governance reform in autonomous region. In Sulu archipelago, 15 March offensive against violent extremist Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) killed 4 militants, 1 soldier, on Basilan; 2 killed 3 March in Jolo town bombing, military said ASG responsible. Media reported "smart bombs" provided by U.S. used in 2 Feb airstrike on Jolo that killed senior ASG leader. Violence involving communist New People's Army (NPA) continued across country; guerrillas claimed responsibility for killing of Swiss-Filipino businessman 7 March in North Cotabato.

- "Philippines unleashes US smart bombs, putting elusive terrorists on edge", AP, 21 March 2012.

➤ **Thailand** Escalation in southern insurgency with series of 4 car, motorcycle bombings 31 March: 14 killed, 340 injured in Yala, Hat Yai and Mae Lan; militant separatists suspected. Roadside bombings 7, 21 March killed 5 soldiers, injured 2 soldiers and 1 civilian in Narathiwat province; 2 soldiers killed, 12 wounded 9 March when approx 50 gunmen attacked Special Forces military base in Narathiwat. Militants 9 March attacked Yala province military checkpoint, killed 2 soldiers. Trial of Lebanese terrorist suspect arrested 12 Jan began mid-March. Prosecutor 12 March announced inquests into 16 deaths during govt crackdown on 2012 anti-govt "Red Shirt" demonstrations. Courts of Justice 25 March denied discussing bail release for jailed "Red Shirts" following claim by former PM Shinawatra.

- Comment by Jonathan Prentice, "Waiting for RI observers at Preah Vihear", *Jakarta Post*, 17 March 2012.
- "Deadly Thai blasts follow tense weeks", *Wall Street Journal*, 31 March 2012.

➤ **Timor Leste** First round of presidential elections held peacefully 17 March. Lu Olo (29%) and Taur Matan Ruak (26%) will face run-off 16 April after third-place finish for incumbent Jose Ramos-Horta (17%).

- "Timor-Leste president concedes election defeat", AP, 19 March 2012.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°134, *Timor-Leste's Elections: Leaving Behind a Violent Past?*, 21 Feb. 2012.

Europe

Balkans

➤ **Bosnia** Party leaders 9 March reached agreement on disposition of state and defense property, marking fulfilment of terms for closure of Office of High Representative, commencement of NATO's Membership Action Plan; Republika Srpska President Dodik 14 March threatened referendum on NATO membership. Croat member of Presidency Željko Komšić 19 March resigned from leadership of Social Democratic Party, returned 21 March after party presidency

rejected resignation. BiH parliamentary parties 12 March failed to agree constitutional changes demanded by European Court of Human Rights to end discrimination in tripartite Presidency and House of Peoples.

- "BiH on verge of missing another constitutional reform", *SE Times*, 10 March 2012.

➤ **Kosovo** In midst of Serbian election campaign, Serbian govt 13 March announced inclusion of N Kosovo in 6 May local Serbian elections; but said in concession to international community it will undertake activities in cooperation with UNMIK. Kosovo PM Thaci 14 March said Serbia "provoking open conflict" with Kosovo; Interior Minister Rexhepi 22 March said police preparing operational plan in consultation with EULEX, KFOR to prevent vote; EU 14 March said move violation of UNSC resolution 1244; blacklisted Kosovar Albanian National Army, 17 March threatened to use force if international community failed to prevent elections. Police 28 March arrested 4 Serbs for organising Serbian municipal elections in Kosovo; Serbian police same day arrested 4 Kosovo Albanians on charges of "crimes against the Constitution and security"; Serbian Interior Minister Dačić described action as "reciprocal measures". Serbia 31 March arrested 2 Kosovo policemen near border; Kosovo Interior Minister Rexhepi said men within Kosovo territory, condemned act as "kidnapping". Kosovo 15 March walked out of first regional forum with Serbia, citing Serb failure to abide by Kosovo representation agreement; Serbia 22 March called for EU arbitration to settle dispute.

- "Misunderstandings mire Kosovo representation agreement", *Journal of Turkish Weekly*, 17 March 2012.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°215, *Kosovo and Serbia: a Little Goodwill Could Go a Long Way*, 2 Feb. 2012.

➤ **Macedonia** Month saw surge in ethnic tensions: 2 ethnic Albanians 29 Feb shot dead in Gostivar by off-duty police officer, allegedly over parking space; 10,000 ethnic Albanians 1 March protested shooting. Gangs of ethnic youth early March clashed, attacked public buses, 30 arrested; thousands 18 March demonstrated in Skopje against ethnic clashes. Macedonian officials 16 March opened "High-Level Accession Dialogue" with EU, seeking to establish momentum for reform agenda despite stalemate over country's name.

- "Macedonia takes steps to preserve ethnic co-existence", *SE Times*, 16 March 2012.

➤ **Serbia** EU 1 March granted Serbia candidate status. Serbia 13 March announced 6 May parliamentary, provincial, local elections, controversially including N Kosovo in local elections (see Kosovo); Serbian Minister for Kosovo Goran Bogdanović 22 March sent letter to UNMIK requesting agreement for local elections; head of UNMIK Farid Zarif 23 March refused to help organise elections, cited "circumstances on the ground". Serbian police arrested 4 Kosovo Albanians 28 March, 2 Kosovo policemen 31 March near Serbian border (see Kosovo).

- "Serbia faces dilemma over elections in Kosovo", *Balkan Insight*, 8 March 2012.

Caucasus

➡ **Armenia** 4 of 22 political groups aligned with opposition Armenian National Congress (HAK) 6 March announced boycott of 6 May parliamentary elections after failing to reach agreement with former President and HAK leader Ter-Petrosian over electoral list. 9 Iranians, 1 other injured 20 March in grenade attack on Yerevan night club.

- [“Armenian election alignments take shape”](#), RFE/RL, 7 March 2012.

➡ **Azerbaijan** Defence Minister Abiyev 12-13 March visited Tehran, said Azerbaijan would not be used in attack on Iran. Govt 29 March denied reports indicating Israeli access to Azeri airbases. Authorities 14 March announced arrest of 22 Azeris for plotting attacks against U.S., Israeli embassies in Baku, allegedly linked to Iranian Revolutionary Guards. 1,000 residents 1 March rioted in Quba, NE, after district governor characterised city as full of “traitors” for selling land cheaply; governor sacked 2 March. 3 activists beaten, detained by security forces 17 March after criticising President Aliyev during opposition rally in Baku.

- [“Israel’s Secret Staging Ground”](#), *Foreign Policy*, 28 March 2012.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°67, [Tackling Azerbaijan’s IDP Burden](#), 27 Feb. 2012.

➡ **North Caucasus (Russia)** Month saw Russian presidential and municipal elections, widespread reports of vote-rigging; PM Putin received 99.76% in Chechnya (turnout 99.61%), nearly 93% in Dagestan (turnout 92.84%), over 92% in Ingushetia (turnout 86.47%), over 91% in Karachay-Cherkessia (turnout 91.28%). Russian troops deployed from Chechnya to Dagestan following deteriorating security with at least 36 people reportedly killed during month: 3 policemen, 1 attacker killed 4 March in militant attack against polling station in Khasavyurt region; 5 killed 6 March in suicide bomber attack on police checkpoint in Karabudakhkent; gunmen 6 March killed policeman, civilian in Kaspiisk police station, and director of medical school in Izerbash; security forces 12 March killed 2 militants in Makhachkala. Prominent imam 23 March assassinated by insurgents in Buinaksk; militants 31 March killed 2 policemen in Khasavyurt. Security forces in Kabardino-Balkaria Republic 12 March killed 6 militants, 14 March raided bomb factory in Nalchik, 16 March killed 3 suspected militants, 27 March killed chief of Kabardino-Balkarian militants Alim Zankishiev.

- [“Confusion surrounds reported troop deployment to Dagestan”](#), RFE/RL, 20 March 2012.

➡ **Georgia** Russia 2 March refused to reciprocate unilateral Georgian removal of visa requirements for Russian citizens, instead demanded Tbilisi revise “Law on Occupied Territories” regarding presence of Russian troops in Abkhazia, S Ossetia in contravention of EU-brokered 2008 ceasefire with Moscow. President Saakashvili said diplomatic relations with Russia could not be re-established without Russian recognition of Georgian sovereignty over breakaway regions. Abkhazia 10, 24 March held parliamentary elections, independents reportedly won 74% of votes. S Ossetia 25 March held first round of presidential elections, run-off scheduled 8 April. Georgian police 4 March reportedly came under fire at guard post near Administrative Border Line with Abkhazia. Georgian Chamber of Control 11 March began large-scale interrogation of opposition party activists, ostensibly to ensure campaign finance transparency; Amnesty criticised move as politically motivated intimidation. Georgian billionaire opposition leader 20 March

financed \$1.65 million for illegally funding Georgian Dream movement to oust President Saakashvili.

- [“No clear favorite in repeat South Ossetian election”](#), RFE/RL, 23 March 2012.

➡ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** 2 Armenian soldiers reportedly shot dead 14, 19 March in incidents on NE border with Azerbaijan; 2 Azerbaijani soldiers reportedly killed along Line of Contact during month. Armenian President Sarkisian 6 March accused Azerbaijan leaders of blocking progress on resolving conflict, “continuing to sow hatred” against Armenians. Co-chair of OSCE Minsk Group U.S. Ambassador Bradtke 20 March said both sides “probably closer to an agreement than they think”.

- Comment by Lawrence Sheets, [“A ‘Frozen Conflict’ That Could Boil Over”](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 8 March 2012.
- [“Minsk Group calls for end to Nagorno-Karabakh conflict”](#), VOA, 22 March 2012.

Eastern Europe

➡ **Belarus** Authorities 11 March criticised EU sanctions in joint statement with Russia, Kazakhstan, warning move would have “negative consequences mainly for ordinary people”; Russian Deputy PM Rogozin 15 March promised aid for Belarus. EU FMs 23 March added additional 12 Lukashenka associates, 29 firms to sanctions list. 3 opposition leaders 28 March arrested en route to meet EU officials in Brussels, amid new travel restrictions on dissidents, govt critics. 2,500 opposition supporters 25 March gathered in sanctioned protest in Minsk. 2 men 17 March executed for April subway bombing in Minsk; UN Human Rights Committee, EU condemned execution without fair trial.

- [“Belarus bars critics from leaving the country”](#), *New York Times*, 15 March 2012.

➡ **Moldova** Parliament 16 March broke 3-year political deadlock between Alliance for European Integration and Communist Party, elected pro-EU senior judge Nicolae Timofti as country’s first president since 2009 following 4 Nov defection by 3 communist parliamentarians to ruling coalition, passing 61-vote threshold for holding of election; estimated 70,000 Communists 16 March demonstrated against defections, election outcome.

- [“Moldova elects president after 917-day deadlock”](#), Euractiv, 19 March 2012.

➡ **Ukraine** Parliament 20 March accused jailed ex-PM Tymoshenko of “high treason” for agreeing price increase for Russian natural gas; prosecutor 28 March announced Tymoshenko to stand trial in April on new tax evasion charges. European Court of Human Rights 16 March called on Ukrainian govt to ensure “adequate medical treatment” for Tymoshenko after denial of medical leave.

- [“Playing football with Tymoshenko case”](#), RIA Novosti, 22 March 2012.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➡ **Cyprus** Turkey’s EU minister Bağış 3 March suggested Turkey can annex N Cyprus if reunification negotiations fail; Republic of Cyprus 5 March called comments “arrogant and provocative”, Turkish Cypriot opposition leaders said statement “derogatory

and unfortunate". Local opinion poll 19 March revealed 52% of Turkish Cypriots reject annexation, 31% approve. Turkish Cypriot leader Eroğlu 18 March said negotiations would be pointless after Cyprus assumes EU presidency 1 July; UNSG Special Adviser Downer also said talks likely to break down at that time. Turkish state oil company TPAO 12 March announced plans to drill for oil, gas off Cyprus' north coast. Leaders of two Cypriot communities met 15-29 March to discuss property issue in reunification talks, no significant progress announced.

- "UN envoy says Cyprus peace talks likely to halt in July if accord not reached by then", *Washington Post*, 20 March 2012.

➤ **Turkey** Police 18 March clashed with Kurdish demonstrators in Istanbul, Diyarbakır during banned Nowruz celebrations. 1 pro-Kurdish BDP politician killed, 135 demonstrators arrested in Istanbul, 9 in Diyarbakır. Motorcycle bomb in Istanbul 1 March injured 15 police, 1 civilian near AKP party offices. Turkish police early March confiscated large amounts of explosives in several cities, reportedly planned for use by PKK during Nowruz. Counterterrorism units 6-16 March arrested 85 across Turkey, including journalists, BDP officials, in operations against Kurdish Communities Union, umbrella organisation including PKK. 7 soldiers, 22 PKK militants killed in 21, 24 March clashes in SE. Army 13 March bombed PKK bases in Northern Iraq. 4 journalists released 13 March from prison pending outcome of trial for plotting to overthrow AKP govt; 104 journalists, 35 media distributors still in detention; special trial of retired General Başbuğ began 26 March for alleged role in coup plot. PM Erdogan 15 March said Turkey considering creating humanitarian buffer zone inside Syria; 17,000 Syrian refugees currently in Turkey, with inflow continuing; Arab League 29 March excluded Turkey, observer member since 2005, from Baghdad summit seemingly in disapproval of Turkish action on Syria.

- Comment by Hugh Pope, "Erdogan's Decade", *Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, 29 March 2012.
- "In Turkey's Kurdish Southeast, an incendiary celebration", *Time*, 18 March 2012.

Latin America

➤ **Bolivia** 2,300 soldiers deployed 17 March in La Paz, El Alto, Cochabamba, Santa Cruz, to stop common crime following protests over murder of 2 journalists, demands for reinstatement of death penalty. Morales 18 March threatened to close U.S. embassy over alleged interference in country's domestic affairs. Indigenous communities mid-March announced plans for ninth march April 20 to protest controversial highway construction through TIPNIS national park, pledged to resist govt-sponsored consultation process scheduled 10 May-10 June.

- "2,300 militares patrullan 4 ciudades contra delincuencia", *AFP*, 17 March 2012.

➤ **Colombia** Following FARC killing of 11 soldiers 17 March, security forces 21 March killed 33 rebels in Arauca dept near Venezuela, 26 March killed 36, including 3 military commanders, in central Meta dept. 7 Autodefensas Gaitanistas paramilitaries killed 29 March in clashes with FARC in Antioquia dept. President Santos 18 March accused FARC of dishonesty after 17 March FARC statement that

group would only release hostages if peace negotiators allowed to visit jailed guerrillas, said rebels lying to international community as added condition never agreed as part of deal; govt still expected to free jailed guerrillas 2-4 April. FARC front 1 March imposed 8 day blockade in Chocó department.

- Comment by Silke Pfeiffer, "A chance for real peace", *Miami Herald*, 9 March 2012.
- "Tres jefes de las FARC entre los 35 guerrilleros muertos en Meta", *Semana*, 26 March 2012.

➤ **Ecuador** Late Feb army report raised alarm about increasing number of organised crime structures, rise in drug transit through country. Indigenous protesters arrived in Quito 22 March to protest against govt's mining policy; pro-govt protesters also held demonstration in favour of proposed mining policy.

- "Ecuador Indians protest mining plans", *Fox News*, 22 March 2012.

➤ **Guatemala** 5 former paramilitaries members sentenced 20 March to 7,710 years for 1982 Maya massacre in Baja Verapaz; ex-soldier sentenced 12 March to over 6,000 years for role in 1982 killing of 201 Maya in Dos Erres, Petén. President Molina called drug war failure, promised to take decriminalisation debate to Summit of Americas in April. Hand-written banners found in Flores, Petén, 21 March threatened attacks on civilians following authorities' announcement alleged member of Zetas drug cartel captured; Interior Minister Bonilla 9 March said Zetas now strongest criminal organisation in country.

- "Ex-paramilitaries jailed for Guatemala massacre", *BBC*, 21 March 2012.

➤ **Haiti** President Martelly 1 March named FM Laurent Lamothe as PM; legislature confirmation date still not announced. Senate dual-nationality probe continued; Martelly 8 March presented 8 Haitian passports in attempt to end doubts over his nationality. Govt 15-day ultimatum ordering ad hoc military groups to vacate barracks/occupied buildings expired 16 March, Justice Minister Pierre Michel Brunache 22 March ordered police to turn groups out, use force if necessary. Leader of remobilised soldiers Commander Samson Chery 25 March said troops will resist if police given orders to evict them; member of govt panel on army reconstitution 31 March said panel urged president to appoint interim commander to control ex-soldiers.

- "Des ex-militaires présumés occupent un bâtiment ministériel au Cap-Haïtien", *Radio Kiskeya*, 20 March 2012.

➤ **Mexico** Campaigns ahead of 1 July presidential vote officially underway. Pope Benedict XVI visited 23-25 March, condemned drug trade, corruption; visit criticised by observers as attempt to boost ruling National Action Party (PAN) party. At least 11 policemen killed, 1 civilian injured by gunmen 18 March in Tloloapan during search for bodies after 10 severed heads found near town same day; 5 policemen killed 28 March by gunmen in Juarez. Security forces 9 March captured Nueva Generación cartel leader Erick Valencia Salazar in Jalisco state; 19 March identified 11 current and ex-govt officials who allegedly served as "protection network" for Zetas drug cartel in Coahuila state.

- "Calderón the campaigner", *Economist*, 10 March 2012.


➤ **Venezuela** Gunmen 4 March attacked October 2012 elections campaign event led by opposition candidate Henrique Capriles Radonski, exacerbating tensions between govt and opposition; President Chávez 20 March said plot to assassinate Capriles uncovered. In joint operation, Interpol, Colombian and Venezuelan secu-

rity agents 21 March arrested FARC co-founder William Alberto Asprilla Chitiva “Marquetaliano” near Caracas. Chávez 31 March returned to Cuba for second five-day radiotherapy treatment.

- “Capriles insinúa que información sobre atentado busca crear clima de tensión”, *Infolatam*, 26 March 2012.


Middle East/North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

 **Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territories** Violence escalated in Gaza following 9 March killing of Popular Resistance Committees leader Zuhair al-Qaissi by Israel; militants, primarily from Islamic Jihad, fired roughly 200 rockets into Israel in response, most intercepted by Iron Dome missile defense; IDF responded with airstrikes, killing 24. Egypt-brokered ceasefire agreed on 13 March, significantly reduced rocket fire. Israel 7 March cautiously welcomed planned resumption of P5+1 nuclear talks with Iran, PM Netanyahu 9 March warned possible strike on Iranian nuclear facilities within months (see Iran). Former Defense Minister Mofaz 28 March elected Kadima head. Supreme Court 25 March rejected deal between govt, settlers to relocate Migron settlement, postponed eviction to late August. Hundreds of Beitar Jerusalem football fans 19 March assaulted Palestinian workers in Jerusalem shopping centre, 16 arrests. Israel 26 March cut-ties with UN HRC in protest at UN probe into West Bank settlements. 1 Palestinian killed, dozens arrested 30 March in W-B, Gaza, E. Jerusalem clashes marking Land Day.



- Comment by Robert Malley, “Mideast peace, with something short of a deal”, *Washington Post*, 2 March 2012.
- “As Rockets Fly, New Conditions Shape Fight in Gaza”, *New York Times*, 12 March 2012.

New Crisis Group Middle East Report N°119, *Back to Basics: Israel’s Arab Minority and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 14 March 2012. Israel should take urgent steps to integrate its Arab minority into the country’s civic order, but Israeli Jews and the Palestinian national movement need also to agree on the character of the State of Israel and the rights its Arab citizens should enjoy.

 **Lebanon** Month saw largely peaceful rallies by supporters/opponents of Syrian regime; occasional shelling, gunfire from Syrian side of border; officials 27 March denied reports of Syrian incursion into Lebanese territory. Military prosecutor 9 March charged 6, including 2 army personnel, with forming armed ring to carry out “terrorist attacks” against army installations.

- “Pro- and anti-Syrian rallies continue”, *Daily Star*, 19 March 2012.

New Crisis Group Middle East Report N°117, *Lebanon’s Palestinian Dilemma: the Struggle Over Nahr al-Bared*, 1 March 2012. Although attention naturally is focused on possible ripple effects on Lebanon from Syria’s conflict, it would be wrong to ignore the unresolved legacy of the battle that shook the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp five years ago.


  **Syria** Month saw continued descent into civil war with increased clashes between opposition armed groups and security forces, growing humanitarian concerns, continuing anti-regime protests countrywide: govt forces continued onslaught

against opposition strongholds; activists said civilians massacred. 27 reported killed 17 March by car-bombs targeting Damascus security buildings; shadowy Islamist group al-Nusra Front to Protect the Levant claimed responsibility. 2 killed 18 March by car bomb in Aleppo. UNSG Ban 2 March said regime committed widespread crimes against civilians, 21 March warned crisis has “potentially massive repercussions”. UNSC same day issued non-binding presidential statement supporting UN/Arab League Special Envoy Annan’s 6-point plan including calls for UN supervised ceasefire, humanitarian access; Syria 27 March accepted peace plan, but many questions remain regarding implementation; Syria 31 March announced troops to stay in residential areas until “peace and security” achieved. Outgoing Russian President Medvedev 25 March said Annan mission last chance for Syria to avoid civil war; UN 15 March said 200,000 Syrians displaced during conflict; Turkish PM Erdogan 16 March raised possibility of buffer zone inside Syria to protect refugees. HRW 13 March said regime mining routes used by escaping refugees along Turkish, Lebanese borders; 20 March accused armed opposition elements of human rights abuses against regime loyalists. UN HRC 23 March extended mandate of UN expert panel investigating alleged abuses; UNHR chief Pillay 28 March said regime “systematically detaining and torturing children”. EU 23 March imposed sanctions on al-Assad family members.


- “Annan with a plan”, *Economist*, 31 March 2012.

New Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°32, *Now or Never: a Negotiated Transition for Syria*, 5 March 2012. Kofi Annan’s appointment as joint UN/Arab League Special Envoy arguably offers a chance to rescue fading prospects for a negotiated transition in Syria.

Gulf


 **Bahrain** Month saw violent street protests in Shiite suburbs of Manama, outlying villages. Hundreds of thousands pro-democracy protesters 9 March demonstrated outside Manama following call by main Shiite opposition al-Wifaq; anti-govt protesters 24 March clashed with police in 10 locations, including Sitra. National Commission (NC) 20 March presented King Hamad with conclusions on implementation of Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) report recommendations; govt claimed 90% implemented; opposition groups dismissed NC as biased, said govt reforms mostly “aspirational”. Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) 26 March published report documenting human rights violations since November BICI report, including 31 extrajudicial killings; BCHR President Nabeel Rajab arrested 31 March. Civil court 20 March reversed ruling dropping cases against 15 medical staff convicted of participating in crimes against state during 2011 anti-govt protests.

- “Scorecard: Bahrain’s progress”, *Al Jazeera*, 20 March 2012.

 **Iran** U.S. President Obama 2 March said Iranian nuclear weapon unacceptable but warned against pre-emptive strike against Iran, 4 March said U.S. preferred diplomacy but “won’t hesitate to use force”. Israeli PM Netanyahu 6 March said little time to stop Iranian nuclear plans, 9 March warned of possible strike on Iranian nuclear facilities within months. U.S. Secretary of State Clinton 31 March announced resumption of P5+1 talks 13-14 April, said window for talks closing; U.S. 30 March introduced new sanctions on foreign banks trading Iranian oil. Conservative allies of Ayatollah Khamenei solidified control over parliament in 2 March legislative

elections; authorities claimed 61% turnout. President Ahmadinejad 14 March questioned by parliament, insisted recent foreign/domestic policy decisions legal, denied challenging authority of Ayatollah Khamenei. Authorities 7 March jailed reformist leader Ali Shakouri-Rad for spreading “lies”, “propaganda” against state. Supreme Court 5 March overturned death sentence against alleged U.S. CIA spy Mirzai Hekmati.


- “Netanyahu won’t attack Iran”, *Foreign Policy*, 2 March 2012.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Middle East & Europe Report N°116, *In Heavy Waters: Iran’s Nuclear Program, the Risk of War and Lessons from Turkey*, 23 Feb. 2012.

 **Iraq** Sustained violence by suspected al-Qaeda militants ahead of 27-29 March Arab League summit in Baghdad: militants 5 March killed 27 policemen, senior officers in Haditha; suicide attacks 7 March killed at least 12 in Tal Afar (Nineveh); gunmen 12 March attacked Baghdad gold market killing 9; series of coordinated attacks 20 March killed over 50 people in 14 cities, including Baghdad, Kirkuk, Karbala. Tensions between ruling coalition partners continued: Iyad Allawi-led Iraqiya bloc 18 March reiterated threat to withdraw from ruling coalition unless govt implement Erbil power-sharing agreement. Opposition Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) mid-month split from Badr Organisation after Badr refused to withdraw its minister from ruling coalition. Kurdish regional President Barzani 20 March criticised PM Maliki’s “monopolisation of military power”. Higher Judicial Council 17 March announced VP al-Hashimi to be tried in absentia 3 May for allegedly running death-squads. Estimated 1 million supporters of Shiite Cleric Moqtada Sadr staged demonstration in Basra marking 2003 U.S.-led invasion. Militant group loyal to Sadr 17 March released former U.S. soldier abducted in June 2011.

- “Iraq war over? Not where Qaeda rules through fear”, Reuters, 25 March 2012.


 **Saudi Arabia** Thousand-strong protest by women against discrimination, mismanagement at King Khalid University in Abha 7 March broken-up by security forces, religious police. 116 prisoners 8 March freed from al-Qassim jail following royal amnesty. 22 March police shootings in Awamiya reportedly targeted opposition activist Mohamed al-Zinadi, wanted by govt.

- “Saudi Arabia’s free pass”, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 3 March 2012.

 **Jordan** 20 arrested by police, charged by military prosecutors with rioting, insulting King Abdullah II following 11 March demonstrations demanding reforms, jobs; further country-wide protests 16 March against “tight security grip” and corruption, demanded release of pro-reform protesters. Refugees in Jordan fleeing Syria violence reached 80,000.

- “Nationwide rallies to demand release of political activists”, *Jordan Times*, 15 March 2012.


New Crisis Group Middle East Report N°118, *Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (IX): Dallying with Reform in a Divided Jordan*, 12 March 2012. The season of Arab uprisings has not engulfed Jordan, but nor has it entirely passed the nation by.

 **Yemen** Violence in South increased significantly: militants 4 March overran military bases outside Zinjibar, killing approximately 180 soldiers, took over 70 hostages. U.S., govt air strikes mid-March killed suspected al-Qaeda militants in southern governorates Abyan, al-Bayda. Alleged Ansar al-Sharia suicide bomber 13


March killed at least 9 soldiers near checkpoint in south; group claimed responsibility for 18 March killing of U.S. teacher in southern city Taiz. Militants 21 March decapitated senior security officer in Mukkala, clashed with security forces. Navy 22 March shelled suspected al-Qaeda positions near Zinjibar, 29 reportedly killed. Tribal militants 21 March abducted 3 Filipinos in Mahrah governorate, demanded release of jailed tribal member. Gunmen 28 March abducted Saudi Deputy Consul in Aden. U.S. drone strike 30 March killed 5 suspected al-Qaeda militants in Shabwa governorate; gunmen blew-up gas pipeline in retaliation, 31 March clashed with army in Lahj governorate, 17 soldiers and 12 militants killed. UN envoy Jamal Benomar early month warned of growing humanitarian crisis, condemned recent al-Qaeda-linked attacks. Tens of thousands of protesters 23 March demanded prosecution of former President Saleh.

- “What’s next for Yemen?”, Al Jazeera, 18 March 2012.

North Africa

 **Algeria** Suicide attack on Tamanrasset military base 3 March killed 24, al-Qaeda offshoot claimed responsibility. Leading opposition party Front of Socialist Forces (FFS) 2 March ended 15-year elections boycott, announced participation in 10 May parliamentary polls. Authorities 19 March approved 7 new political parties. Court 13 March sentenced al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) head Abdelmalek Droukdel to death in absentia over April 2007 Algiers bombings.

- “Suicide Bomber Strikes Southern Algeria”, VOA, 3 March 2012.

 **Egypt** Month saw relations between Islamists and secular parties reach low-point over constitution writing process: 5 secular parties, Supreme Court, al-Azhar University late-month boycotted 100-member panel tasked with writing new constitution due to “under representation”; liberal parties accused Muslim Brotherhood (MB), Salafist al-Nour Party of dominating proceedings, announced parallel constituent assembly to write “representative” constitution. Tensions also escalated between MB and ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF): MB’s Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) 21 March threatened vote of no confidence against PM al-Ganzouri govt, renewed calls for FJP-led coalition govt; MB 24 March demanded SCAF hand over power, threatened second revolution if no improvements; SCAF 25 March warned MB to learn from “lessons of history”, MB 31 March announced would run in presidential elections, with Deputy Chairman Khairat al-Shater as candidate. Chief prosecutor 15 March charged 75 people over February football riot, including police officers, former Port Said security chief; football fans 23 March clashed with security forces in Port Said following decision to ban team for 2 years over violence, 1 killed. Military court 11 March acquitted doctor accused of carrying out forced “virginity tests” on female protesters. Growing lawlessness in Sinai saw gas pipeline attacked 5 March near al-Arish; Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) base in al-Gorah 8 March besieged by Bedouin tribesmen demanding release of jailed member; 2 tourists abducted 18 March visiting St. Catherine’s Monastery.

- “Muslim Brotherhood endorses Khairat al-Shater as presidential candidate”, *Egypt Independent*, 31 March 2012.

➤ **Libya** Emerging eastern federalist movement 6 March announced formation of Congress of the People of Cyrenaica in Benghazi to establish autonomous Eastern province; interim President Jalil proposed decentralised-system of administration, said federalist movement infiltrated by Qadhafi loyalists and foreign powers, threatened to use force against movement if necessary. Anti-federalism protests 9 March drew thousands in Tripoli, Benghazi; pro-federalist rally 17 March attacked by armed men in Benghazi, 1 killed. Fighting between Zuwara militiamen, military police 2 March closed Ras Jdeir border crossing with Tunisia. Fighting between rival militias continued early-month in Kufra reportedly over smuggling tariffs; tribal militias late-month clashed in Sabha, 147 killed. UNHCHR-appointed commission of inquiry report submitted 12 March documented war crimes, crimes against humanity by Qadhafi, opposition forces. Former Qadhafi intelligence chief Abdullah Senussi, wanted by ICC for crimes against humanity, detained in Mauritania; deputy PM Abushagur called for Libyan trial. Muslim Brotherhood 3 March declared formation of new Justice and Development Party.

- “Federalism and fragmentation in Libya? Not so fast...”, *Foreign Policy*, 20 March 2012.

➤ **Mauritania** Leaders of opposition party Coordination for Democratic Opposition (COD) 22 March reiterated call for uprising against President Abdel Aziz. 13 March airstrike against suspected al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) convoy near Timbuktu injured 2; follows 10 March release of gendarme abducted 20 Dec; AQIM 21 March said holding German hostage abducted in Nigeria in Jan, demanded exchange with “Muslim woman” held in German prison. Renewed clashes between police, students over closure of Islamic Institute 15 March left several injured. UNHCR 27 March announced end of repatriation program for more than 24,000 Mauritanian refugees displaced since 1989 Mauritania-Senegal conflict.

- “Raid de l’aviation mauritanienne au Mali contre des membres d’Aqmi”, RFI, 13 March 2012.

➤ **Morocco** Month saw clashes between villagers, security forces as largely economically motivated anti-govt protests spread in northern Rif Mountains, sparked by arrest of 20 February movement activist; dozens arrested, injured; local ruling Justice and Development party (PJD) representatives criticised severity of gov response. Activists 17 March demonstrated outside Parliament against law, legal decision requiring rape victim to marry her rapist following suicide of 16-year old victim.

- “Power to some other people”, *Economist*, 17 March 2012.

➤ **Tunisia** Rift between Salafists and secularists worsened as militant Salafists and labour union activists 11 March clashed in Jendouba; Salafist group 8 March replaced Tunisian flag with radical Islamist flag at Manouba University, clashed with students. Constitutional consultations in National Constituent Assembly 16 March sparked 5,000-8,000-strong demonstration by Gathering of Tunisian Islamic Associations demanding adoption of Sharia law as sole source of legislation; thousands 20 March demonstrated in Tunis against establishment of Islamic state; Ennahda leadership late March said party would oppose Sharia in constitution.

- “Tunisia revolution ‘at a crossroads’: PM”, AFP, 14 March 2012.

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Ernesto Zedillo, Former President of Mexico, August 2007