

CrisisWatch

A monthly bulletin by the ICG on current and potential conflicts around the world



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CrisisWatch:

- 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.

CrisisWatch is compiled by Crisis Group's Brussels Research Unit, drawing on multiple sources including the resources of our more than 100 staff members across five continents, who already report on some 50 of the situations listed here. Comments and suggestions can be sent to crisiswatch@icg.org.

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January 2005 Watchlist



Conflict Risk Alert

Kosovo



Conflict Resolution Opportunity

None

The International Crisis Group

Crisis Group is an independent, non-profit, multinational organisation, with over 100 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict. Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, Crisis Group produces regular analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers, and backed up with high level advocacy. Crisis Group is co-chaired by President Emeritus of the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations Leslie H. Gelb and former European Commissioner for External Relations Christopher Patten, and its President and Chief Executive is former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans.



Africa

CENTRAL AFRICA

- Burundi Constitutional reform referendum planned for 22 December delayed by electoral commission 14 December citing need for prior publication of register; new date expected January. Reports circulated that President Ndayizeye seeks to alter mode of presidential election and his own eligibility to stand. Demobilisation and reintegration of up to 55,000 former fighters began Muramvya province under UN supervision; Security Council extended UN mission to June 2005. Electoral registration completed, though some without identity cards unable to register. Some 27,000 IDPs began return to Bujumbura Rural province, former stronghold of FNL Hutu rebels. Army attacked FNL based Uvira, DR Congo, 15 December; 3 rebels and 1 soldier killed in clash Bujumbura suburb 28 December.
- "Four killed in Bujumbura fighting", Reuters AlertNet, 28 Dec. 2004.
 - "Heeding Annan's zero-tolerance on sex abuse, UN suspends two soldiers in Burundi", UN News, 17 Dec. 2004.
 - "New delay to Burundi referendum", BBC, 14 Dec. 2004.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°81, *End of the Transition in Burundi: The Home Stretch*, 5 July 2004.



Crisis Group Africa Briefing, *Elections in Burundi: The Peace Wager*, 9 December 2004. After a decade of civil war, Burundi has a chance for real peace but only if it holds to its tight election schedule -- five months with a constitutional referendum, local, national assembly and senate elections, and finally selection of the president by parliament. The sequence is ambitious but necessary to finalise a difficult peace process. Negotiations on power-sharing and a post-transition constitution have been completed, and the remaining rebel force still fighting in the field is too weak to upset arrangements. Still, the process will not be credible without the necessary international help. The UN Operation in Burundi (ONUB) needs continued financial support to assist in organising elections and disarming, demobilising and reintegrating combatants.

- Central African Republic Constitution won 90% support in referendum 5 December. Presidential and parliamentary elections postponed to 13 February. Fifteen candidates applied to contest presidency, including incumbent, president Bozize; 10, including former president Patasse, disqualified 31 December by constitutional court.
- "Court clears five to run for president", IRIN, 31 Dec. 2004.
- Chad UNHCR warned eastern Chad potentially unable to deal with large influx of Sudanese refugees; some 200,000 already in Chad.
- "Oil gives Chad 40 percent GDP growth", Afrol, 22 Dec. 2004.
 - "UN seeks \$183 million in 2005 to aid Darfur refugees in Chad", UN News, 21 Dec. 2004.
- Democratic Republic of Congo In face of UN and African Union condemnation, Rwanda withdrew invasion threat 20 December; Rwanda claims DR Congo and UN forces (MONUC) unable or unwilling to disarm Rwandan

Hutu Interahamwe rebels blamed for 1994 genocide. DRC government said voluntary disarmament ongoing South Kivu and suggested forcible disarmament may begin 2005. President Kabila ordered 10,000 troops east to head-off invasion threat; MONUC claimed it returned fire against forces coming from Rwanda near Bukavu 15 December; Rwanda denied incursion reports. In North Kivu dissident troops associated with RCD-Goma – Rwandan backed former rebel group – involved in clashes with Interahamwe, but also with Congolese army into which RCD-Goma supposed to be integrated; up to 200,000 displaced in fighting and looting. RCD-Goma leader, Vice-President Azarias Ruberwa, said unable to control dissidents and affirmed support for transitional government. UN created 10 km buffer zone between Kanyabayonga and Lubero 22 December leading dissidents to retreat. Meanwhile, MONUC uncovered mass grave Ituri province, accusing Armed Forces of Congolese People (FAPC) militia.

- "Congo dissidents pull back from UN buffer zone", Reuters AlertNet, 26 Dec. 2004.
- "100,000 flee fresh fighting in Congo", *The Guardian*, 21 Dec. 2004.
- "Mass grave unearthed in DR Congo", BBC, 7 Dec. 2004.
- "Is this the world's least effective peacekeeping force?", *The Economist*, 2 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°84, *Maintaining Momentum in the Congo: The Ituri Problem*, 26 Aug. 2004.



Crisis Group Africa Briefing, *Back to the Brink in the Congo*, 17 December 2004. Rwanda's dramatic escalation of the conflict in the eastern Congo (Democratic Republic) risks catastrophe in Central Africa. Two wars devastated the Congo in the past decade, resulting in some 3.8 million deaths, and both began the same way: with Rwandan troops crossing the border into its giant neighbour's unstable east. A third such disaster can still be prevented if the main players come together quickly to hammer out a joint strategy. The Security Council should immediately direct the peacekeeping mission (MONUC) to secure key border points, then sit all parties down urgently, decide on a specific course of action with a time-line, designate responsible actors, establish UN verification, and apply a mix of muscle and diplomacy to make a comprehensive solution possible. Donors should link their aid to progress on these agreements, and the Council should punish either country if it fails to fulfil its obligations.

- Rwanda Threat to invade DR Congo withdrawn 20 December, but DRC alleged Rwandan military incursions had taken place over previous week and blamed Rwanda and proxies for violence eastern DRC. Oft-postponed opening of 8,000 Rwandan traditional courts to try cases from 1994 genocide promised for 15 January.
- "Heavy clashes in Congo, 'Rwanda not involved'", Afrol, 20 Dec. 2004.
 - "Over 8,000 genocide courts to begin work on Jan. 15th, Says Official", *Hirondelle*, 20 Dec. 2004.
 - For background to ICTR, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°69, *The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda: Time for Pragmatism*, 26 Sept. 2003.
- Uganda Negotiations between government envoy Betty Bigombe and Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) suspended 1

January and limited government ceasefire ended. Interior Minister Ruganda and LRA Brigadier Sam Kolo both had expressed confidence in wider ceasefire agreement; rebels unable to sign due to internal disagreements. LRA rebels subsequently blamed for 1 January attack on army truck near Gulu. Violence continued through month outside ceasefire zone: 30 LRA rebels killed in separate clashes Goma Hills and Kitgum; LRA ambushes killed several in Pader district while church leaders claimed LRA killed 7 civilians southern Sudan 10 December. Moves to allow President Museveni to renege on 2001 promise to stand down 2006 continued with proposals for constitutional reform.

- [“Ugandan rebels ‘postpone’ truce”](#), BBC, 31 Dec. 2004.
- [“MPs propose five years for Museveni”](#), *The Monitor*, 22 Dec. 2004.
- [“Secret Oslo peace channel for Uganda”](#), Afrol, 14 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°77, *Northern Uganda: Understanding and Solving the Conflict*, 14 Apr. 2004; and Crisis Group Issues Report N°3, *HIV/AIDS as a Security Issue in Africa: Lessons from Uganda*, 16 Apr. 2004.

HORN OF AFRICA

- ↳ Ethiopia/Eritrea Eritrea rebuffed Ethiopia’s acceptance “in principle” of 2002 Badme ruling, demanding full implementation; Ethiopia warned Eritrea against taking “military steps”. Ethiopian PM Meles issued 5-point plan, calling for talks while maintaining ruling “illegal and unjust”; UN Security Council called for normalisation. UN Mission to Ethiopia and Eritrea announced 550-man reduction in size.
- [“Normalise relations, Security Council urges”](#), IRIN, 22 Dec. 2004.
 - [“Eritrea rejects Ethiopia’s peace plan”](#), Afrol, 6 Dec. 2004.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°68, *Ethiopia and Eritrea: War or Peace?*, 24 Sept. 2003.

- ↳ Somalia Nairobi-based transitional parliament asserted itself, passing no-confidence motion in government 11 December, claiming ministerial appointments unbalanced. Interim president re-appointed PM Gedi 2 days later; parliament accepted reappointment 23 December. Land disputes in central Somalia killed 100. Attempt to dock first ship since 1995 in Mogadishu prevented by mortar fire. 26 December tsunami killed over 100, hitting President Yusuf’s home Puntland region hard; government attempted to establish credentials through aid coordination.
- [“Parliament endorses new prime minister”](#), IRIN, 23 Dec. 2004.
 - [“Somalia clashes leave 100 dead”](#), BBC, 10 Dec. 2004.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Africa Reports N°79, *Biting the Somali Bullet*, 4 May 2004; and N°66, *Somaliiland: Democratisation and Its Discontents*, 28 July 2003.



Crisis Group Africa Report N°88, [Somalia: Continuation of War by Other Means?](#), 21 December 2004. Despite apparent progress indicated by the declaration in October of a Transitional Federal Government (TFG), Somalia’s peace process risks collapse, leaving the country a dangerous failed state, unless a genuine government of national unity can emerge. The TFG should have been reason to celebrate: after nearly fifteen years of statelessness and civil strife and two years of tortuous peace negotiations in Kenya, Somalia seemed to be emerging from its crisis. But the peace process has since gone largely downhill. The country is still *cont’d*...

....*cont’d* controlled by a patchwork of factions, land remains occupied, and violations of the ceasefire and UN arms embargo are rife. The TFG has to tackle these issues, while earning the legitimacy to do so effectively. Otherwise the peace process will stall, and Somalia will likely return to all-out violence.

- ↳ Sudan Final peace agreement ending 20-year civil war between government and southern Sudan People’s Liberation Army rebels signed Naivasha 31 December. But Darfur situation continued to slide: UN Secretary-General said international approach “not working”; U.S. President Bush signed law enabling sanctions. On-off peace talks Abuja ended with agreement to reconvene January 2005 and temporary ceasefire. However, fighting continued, cutting off humanitarian supplies from civilian population. Fighting around Nyala and Labado, south Darfur, forced suspension of relief, while Save the Children suspended operations after 2 separate incidents killed 3 aid workers. Previously unknown rebel group based neighbouring Kordofan state launched 18 December attack on oil installation, citing marginalisation from peace process. Same group claimed responsibility for attack on Gbubeish 27 December; World Food Programme suspended relief convoys to 260,000 as result. Head of African Union (AU) monitoring mission claimed weapons’ inflow made situation “time bomb”; only 1 third of AU mission deployed.
- [“Sudanese leaders, southern rebels finish peace deal”](#), *The Washington Post*, 1 Jan. 2005.
 - [“UN agency suspends food convoys to Darfur, Sudan after rebels attack town”](#), UN News, 28 Dec. 2004.
 - [“Sudan’s Darfur talks suspended, both sides vow to stop fighting”](#), IRIN, 22 Dec. 2004.
 - [“Darfur: What hope for the future?”](#), Amnesty International report, 16 Dec. 2004.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing, *Sudan’s Dual Crises: Refocusing on IGAD*, 5 Oct. 2004.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

- ↳ Angola UNHCR announced 50,000 refugees repatriated in 2004, short of 90,000 objective. Human Rights Watch claimed large-scale human rights abuse Cabinda province following defeat of separatist insurgency.
- [“Between war and peace in Cabinda”](#), Human Rights Watch briefing paper, 23 Dec. 2004.
 - [“50,000 refugees return home”](#), IRIN, 7 Dec. 2004.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°61, *Angola’s Choice: Reform or Regress*, 7 Apr. 2003.
- ↳ Zimbabwe “Night of long knives” as information minister removed from central Zanu-PF party body by President Mugabe; move followed opposition from faction allied to Emerson Mnangagwa to Mugabe’s nomination of Joyce Mujuru for vice-president. Zanu-PF moved to ensure March 2005 election victory: restrictive NGO law passed and opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) excluded from advertising in state media; breach of regional SADC electoral guidelines. State-appointed electoral commission shifted constituency boundaries to Zanu-PF benefit; MDC said it would announce whether would contest March elections in January.
- [“Mugabe’s party to gain from constituency changes”](#), CNN, 20 Dec. 2004.

- “Zimbabwe approves NGO Act despite protests”, Afrol, 10 Dec. 2004.
- “Zimbabwe’s non-governmental organizations bill”, Human Rights Watch report, 2 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°85, *Zimbabwe: Another Election Chance*, 30 Nov. 2004.

WEST AFRICA

➤ Côte d’Ivoire South African president Mbeki led African Union-backed mediation after November violence, meeting President Gbagbo and Forces Nouvelles leader Soro. Security Council delayed imposing targeted sanctions until 10 January to give time for mediation and meeting of AU Peace and Security Council. Parliament passed citizenship laws 17 December, enfranchising 700,000 – key rebel demand. But Gbagbo insisted that change of constitution Article 35 concerning presidential eligibility be put to referendum; presidential elections planned for October 2005. Improved security encouraged return of refugees from Liberia. But UN force commanders called for more robust mandate and extra 1,000 troops. French troops, also operating under UN mandate, accepted responsibility for November deaths of 20 protesters; Gbagbo supporters questioned figure and French impartiality. Gbagbo called on Security Council to place sanctions on neighbouring countries accused of supporting rebels 28 December. Ethnic violence involving Burkinabe immigrants near Gagnoa killed 11.

- “Ivory Coast urges UN sanctions against neighbours”, Reuters AlertNet, 28 Dec. 2004.
- “Parliament passes crucial law for peace but Gbagbo insists on referendum”, IRIN, 20 Dec. 2004.
- “Call for long-term peacekeeping in Côte d’Ivoire”, Afrol, 14 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°82, *Côte d’Ivoire: No Peace in Sight*, 12 July 2004.

➤ Guinea President Lansana Conté named loyalist minister Diallo as PM, after 8 months without filling position. Students protesting living conditions clashed with riot police Conakry 13 December; university remains closed. Police shot 1 rioter dead 29 December in Fria, north of Conakry.

- “New prime minister finally appointed after eight-month gap”, IRIN, 10 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°74, *Guinea: Uncertainties at the End of an Era*, 19 Dec. 2003.

➤ Guinea-Bissau Following regional and international consultations new armed forces chief of staff, General Tagme Na Waie, ordered readmission of 65 senior officers purged over last 5 years. Move to provide more ethnic and political balance in army’s upper ranks, recently dominated by Balanta ethnic group.

- “65 senior officers readmitted to armed forces”, IRIN, 2 Dec. 2004.

➤ Liberia Electoral reform bill passed 15 December opening way for October 2005 elections. Second tranche demobilisation payments completed same day. However, UN Security Council renewed sanctions 21 December citing fears timber and diamonds could be used to destabilise country.

- “Security Council renews sanctions against Liberia”, UN News, 21 Dec. 2004.

- “No impunity for rape - A Crime against humanity and a war crime”, Amnesty International report, 14 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°75, *Rebuilding Liberia: Prospects and Perils*, 30 Jan. 2004.



Crisis Group Africa Report N°87, *Liberia and Sierra Leone: Rebuilding Failed States*, 8 December 2004.

International interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone are failing to produce stable sovereign states because peacebuilding is treated as implementing a checklist of operational processes without tackling underlying political dynamics. A fresh strategy is needed if both countries are not to remain vulnerable to new fighting and state collapse. The international community needs to make fifteen- to 25-year commitments to security, rule of law and civil freedoms in Liberia and Sierra Leone to allow new political forces to develop. In Liberia, where it is still possible, it should adopt a long-term revenue-collection trusteeship to finance much of its engagement, take incentives away from spoilers and give the state significantly more money. The Peacebuilding Commission recently proposed by the UN High-level Panel could be the institutional vehicle to implement long-term commitments.

- Nigeria Renewed violence in Rivers state. Kula community villagers, accusing oil companies Shell and Chevron-Texaco of exploiting resources without sharing wealth, occupied 3 facilities for 3 days, preventing flow of 90,000 barrels per day. Shell in dispute with federal parliament, which has demanded \$1.5b pay-out to Ijaw community of Bayelsa state to compensate for oil spills. Newly reinstated governor of Plateau region accused of corruption; supporters claimed vendetta from President Obasanjo.
- “A tale of two robbers”, *The Daily Champion*, 22 Dec. 2004.
 - “Protesters occupy oil facilities in troubled Niger Delta”, IRIN, 6 Dec. 2004.

➤ Sierra Leone Proposed 2005 budget included several anti-corruption measures, shifting focus from reconstruction to development. Ten sentenced to death, 4 acquitted after 8-month trial on charges of attempting January 2003 coup; former Armed Forces Revolutionary Council leader Johnny Paul Koroma believed abroad. No progress in Yenga dispute with Guinea.

- “Government set to execute 10 for treason”, *The Concord Times*, 21 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°87 (above), and N°67, *Sierra Leone: The State of Security and Governance*, 2 Sept. 2003.

Asia / Pacific

CENTRAL ASIA

➤ Kazakhstan Officials launched investigation into 28 November blasts outside ruling Otan party headquarters in Almaty, which injured 2. Police initially blamed “hooligans”. Government demanded George Soros-funded Open Society Institute (OSI) pay back-taxes and fines worth \$600,000; OSI said charges politically motivated.

- “Soros group warns over Kazakh row”, BBC, 29 Dec. 2004.

- [“Clerics quizzed in test to root out radicalism”](#), IWPR, 10 Dec. 2004.
- [“Kazakh blasts blamed on ‘hooligans’”](#), IWPR, 1 Dec. 2004.

⇒ Kyrgyzstan President Akaev criticised events in Ukraine and showed concern they could occur in Kyrgyzstan; government proposed draft law limiting right to protest. Opposition groups, inspired by Ukraine opposition, began seeking ways to unite ahead of 2005 elections.

- [“Kyrgyz leaders eye Ukraine nervously”](#), IWPR, 21 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°81, [Political Transition in Kyrgyzstan: Problems and Prospects](#), 11 Aug. 2004.

⇒ Tajikistan Opposition leader Mamadruzi Iskandarov, head of Democratic Party of Tajikistan and former chief of state gas company, arrested in Moscow 9 December on extradition warrant. Tajik prosecutor said charges include corruption, murder and terrorism. Opposition claimed move intimidation tactic ahead of February parliamentary elections.

- [“Leading politician faces extradition”](#), IWPR, 14 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing, [Tajikistan’s Politics: Confrontation or Consolidation?](#), 19 May 2004.

⇒ Turkmenistan Government declared “triumph of democracy” following 19 December parliamentary elections, despite absence of opposition candidates. Moscow-based opposition cited low turnout as sign of discontent with regime. UN General Assembly adopted resolution condemning human rights situation. Turkmen ambassador in Brussels arrested on return to Ashgabat.

- [“Turkmenistan poll turnout ‘low’”](#), BBC, 20 Dec. 2004.
- Comment by David Lewis and Andrew Stroehein (Crisis Group), [“The Ceausescu career path?”](#), Transitions Online, 1 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°44, [Repression and Regression in Turkmenistan: A New International Strategy](#), 4 Nov. 2004.

⇒ Uzbekistan Parliamentary elections held in tense atmosphere 26 December. No opposition candidates permitted to stand. Elections took place against backdrop of increasing number of protests over economic situation after major November disturbances, and confrontations between police and protestors over power cuts in some parts of country.

- [“Uzbek ‘no-choice’ poll condemned”](#), BBC, 27 Dec. 2004.
- Comment by David Lewis and Andrew Stroehein (Crisis Group), [“The inevitability of change in Uzbekistan”](#), *Financial Times*, 21 Dec. 2004.
- [“Uzbekistan’s angry street traders”](#), BBC, 13 Dec. 2004.
- [“Special report: Uzbek prisons – a survivor’s guide”](#), IWPR, 10 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Reports N°76, [The Failure of Reform in Uzbekistan: Ways Forward for the International Community](#), 11 Mar. 2004; and N°72, [Is Radical Islam Inevitable in Central Asia? Priorities for Engagement](#), 22 Dec. 2003.

SOUTH ASIA

⇒ Afghanistan Newly-elected president Hamid Karzai appointed new cabinet, with influence of warlords significantly reduced. Karzai sworn in as Afghanistan’s first popularly elected president 7 December - promised peace and end to

economy’s dependence on narcotics. New cabinet confirmed 24 December: Pashtun technocrats in key security and financial posts; Northern Alliance influence greatly reduced. UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan announced successful disarmament of 20,000 militia fighters under campaign led by Afghanistan’s New Beginnings Program. Violence continued in southern and eastern provinces: 4 police killed in Kandahar drive-by shooting by suspected Taliban 20 December, days after roadside bomb killed 4 policemen in southern Khost province.

- [“New cabinet faces major challenges”](#), RFE/RL, 28 Dec. 2004.
- [“Standing up to the warlords”](#), IWPR, 17 Dec. 2004.
- [“Afghan demobilization marks milestone with one whole region disarmed”](#), UN News, 16 Dec. 2004.
- [“Afghanistan’s own opium wars”](#), *Asia Times*, 9 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°88, [Afghanistan: From Presidential to Parliamentary Elections](#), 23 Nov. 2004.

⇒ Bangladesh Opposition supporters in mass demonstration 11 December against ruling BNP-Jaamat coalition. More demonstrations expected in run-up to 13th SAARC summit to be held in Dhaka 9 January. NGO report described condition of nearly 300,000 Biharis living in 66 Bangladeshi camps as “humanitarian nightmare”. Approx. 300 Biharis staged hunger strike Dhaka 22 December to protest conditions. Rapid Action Battalion blamed for 6 more deaths in their custody bringing death toll to 80 since operations started in April.

- [“Stranded Pakistanis’ hold hunger strike in Bangladesh”](#), *The Daily Times*, 22 Dec. 2004.
- [“Stateless Biharis in Bangladesh: A humanitarian nightmare”](#), Refugees International, 13 Dec. 2004.
- [“Bangladesh opposition plans ‘human wall’ protest across nation”](#), *The Pakistan Times*, 13 Dec. 2004.

⇒ India (non-Kashmir) Separatist groups United Liberation Front of Asam (ULFA) and National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) blamed for co-ordinated 14 December grenade attacks in northeastern Assam that killed 4, wounded 85. ULFA turned down PM Manmohan Singh’s offer of dialogue; NDFB agreed to ceasefire with Assam government. Ceasefire between southern Andhra Pradesh state and leftist People’s War Group (PWG) expired 16 December, day after landmine blast wounded 4 policemen. Southeast coast, Andaman and Nicobar islands devastated by 26 December tsunami.

- [“Fear grips India’s Assam as rebel violence rises”](#), Reuters AlertNet, 19 Dec. 2004.
- [“AP Govt. urges restraint as Naxals resume violence”](#), New Karala, 16 Dec. 2004.
- [“India’s Assam on high alert after serial blasts”](#), Reuters, 15 Dec. 2004.

⇒ Kashmir Indian and Pakistani officials met Islamabad 14-15 December to discuss confidence building measures related to nuclear and conventional arms - no formal agreement reached to notify each other of missile tests (practice currently followed informally). Foreign secretaries met 27-28 December with no sign of progress over Kashmir. Pakistan test-fired medium-range surface-to-surface “Hatf-IV Shaheen-I” missile 8 December. India tested surface-to-surface version of its supersonic “Brahmos” missile 21 December. Talks 7-8 December on emotive issue of bus service between Srinagar

and Muzaffarabad failed to reach agreement - discussions to continue. Spate of violence in run-up to talks left over 20 dead.

- "No progress in Kashmir talks", BBC, 28 Dec. 2004.
- "Relations moving forward: Singh", *Dawn*, 22 Dec. 2004.
- "Pakistan and India fail to finalise nuclear steps", Reuters AlertNet, 15 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Reports N°s 68, 69, and 70 *Kashmir: The View From Islamabad; The View From New Delhi*; and *Learning from the Past*, 4 Dec. 2003; and N°79 *India/Pakistan Relations and Kashmir: Steps toward Peace*, 24 June 2004.

Maldives Parliamentary elections planned for 31 December postponed until 22 January after 26 December tsunami caused widespread devastation. Free and fair elections doubted by Opposition Maldivian Democratic Party due to intimidation and refusal to register political parties by Gayoom government. EU diplomats in Maldives called upon government 13 December to ensure democratic elections. Treason charges against 4 prominent opponents of Gayoom dropped in post-tsunami conciliatory gesture.

- "Maldives drops treason charges in tsunami gesture", Reuters AlertNet, 1 Jan. 2004.
- "Maldives: A mini Ukraine in the making?", South Asia Analysis Group, 20 Dec. 2004.

Nepal Serious escalation in violence ahead of government's 13 January deadline for Maoists to agree to peace talks. At least 100 killed as fighting intensified in eastern and western districts, while bomb attacks targeted government offices in Kathmandu. Maoist chief Pushpa Kamal Dahal (a.k.a. Prachanda) vowed to sabotage elections if government goes ahead without meeting Maoist demands for talks leading to constituent assembly. Two-day strike called by Maoist Newa National Liberation Front 20-21 December followed by blockade of Kathmandu valley and parts of east and west Nepal. Blockades lifted 29 December. King Gyanendra's visit to Delhi postponed indefinitely at last minute due to death of former Indian PM P.V. Narasimha Rao. Visits to Nepal by EU Troika and UN working group and Kofi Annan statement of 24 December underlined growing international concern at deteriorating situation.

- "Maoists withdraw highway blockades", Kantipur Online, 28 Dec. 2004.
- "Nepal's Maoist chief says will destroy polls-report", Reuters AlertNet, 20 Dec. 2004.
- "Bloodshed rises in western Nepal", BBC, 16 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing, *Nepal: Dangerous Plans for Village Militias*, 17 Feb. 2004.

Pakistan Quetta blast 10 December killed 10; claimed by Baluch Liberation Army (BLA) as targeting army personnel as warning to government against construction of Gwadar port and new military bases. President Pervez Musharraf announced intention to remain as army chief 18 December, reneging on January 2004 deal with Islamist coalition (MMA) to retire by 31 December. Asif Ali Zardari, husband of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto, briefly re-arrested, ostensibly for failing to appear at court hearing, but in fact prevented Islamabad party rally. Violence continued in South Waziristan as local Pashtun politician shot dead 29 December.

- "Still in uniform, but now in a bind as well", *The Economist*, 29 Dec. 2004.

- "Court restores bail for Bhutto's husband", *The Guardian*, 22 Dec. 2004.
- "Bomb kills 11, injures 27 in Pakistani city", Reuters, 10 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°86, *Building Judicial Independence in Pakistan*, 9 Nov. 2004.

Sri Lanka Devastating 26 December tsunami killed estimated 30,000, mainly in disputed north and east. Longer term implications for conflict as yet unclear, but despite some reported attempts by LTTE to politicise aid delivery, early signs are of cooperation between government and LTTE, and return to open conflict seen as unthinkable in immediately foreseeable future. Pre-tsunami, Norwegian peace envoy Erik Solheim pessimistic after meeting head of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam political wing 15 December. Hardline Sinhala Marxist JVP party and coalition partner of President Chandrika Kumaratunga's government main obstacle to talks with Tamil rebels on permanently ending civil war. Grenade attack at Colombo concert 12 December killed 2; LTTE denied responsibility.

- "On Sri Lankan coast, devastation and divisions", *International Herald Tribune*, 1 Jan. 2004.
- "Fears rise for Sri Lanka peace process as Norway fails to end deadlock", Reuters AlertNet, 17 Dec. 2004.
- "Talking with Tigers", *The Guardian*, 17 Dec. 2004.

NORTH EAST ASIA

China (internal) Government announced new rules enshrining religious belief as basic human right.

- "For the Chinese masses, an increasingly short fuse", *International Herald Tribune*, 31 Dec. 2004.
- "Letter: Modernising Tibet", BBC, 22 Dec. 2004.
- "China recognizes religion as a right", *International Herald Tribune* (Reuters), 20 Dec. 2004.

North Korea Rhetoric continued as progress on nuclear talks remained stalled. Japanese PM Junichiro Koizumi pledged to delay sanctions to give Pyongyang more time to respond to demands for truth on abduction issue. North Korea warned if sanctions imposed, would hit back with "effective physical response". No progress on 6-party talks after North Korea reacted to western media reports on possible regime weakness, calling U.S. "extremely disgusting and hateful".

- "Insult and injury", *The Economist*, 16 Dec. 2004.
- "N Korea lashes out at US 'smears'", BBC, 13 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°87, *North Korea: Where Next for the Nuclear Talks?*, 15 Nov. 2004.



Crisis Group Asia Report N°89, *Korea, Backgrounder: How the South Views its Brother from Another Planet*, 14 December 2004. Evolving South Korean attitudes toward the North mean Washington's tough policy risks upsetting its relationship with Seoul and its regional alliance system. A generational shift is occurring, with confrontational viewpoints giving way to a broad consensus on the need for engagement, although its pace and nature remain contentious. Most South Koreans now see the North mainly as an object for dialogue and assistance. For young people especially, it is a starving brother to be helped to his feet to pave the way for eventual, but not quick, unification. They are less swayed *cont'd...*

...cont'd appeal to anti-communism and less reflexively pro-American than their parents' generation. The U.S. needs to recognise this shift to chart an effective course for dealing with the serious problems, nuclear and otherwise, posed by North Korea.

⇒ Taiwan Strait In surprise blow to President Chen Shui-bian's pro-independence policies, opposition Nationalist party and allies won legislative majority in 11 December elections. Beijing reacted cautiously, saying result proved most Taiwanese wanted peace with mainland: later said it intends to pass law banning secession, possibly providing legal basis for military attack should Taiwan declare independence.

- "China planning to enact law against secession", *The Washington Post*, 18 Dec. 2004.
- "Opposition wins Taiwan elections", BBC, 11 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Reports N°s 53-55, *Taiwan Strait I: What's Left of 'One China'?*, *Taiwan Strait II, The Risk of War*, and *Taiwan Strait III, The Chance of Peace*, 6 June 2003; and N°75, *Taiwan Strait IV: How an Ultimate Political Settlement Might Look*, 26 Feb. 2004.

SOUTH EAST ASIA

⇒ Indonesia Devastating impact of 26 December earthquake and tsunami left as many as 100,000 dead, most in Aceh: much of conflict-racked province in ruins, including local government structures. Free Aceh Movement (GAM) declared unilateral ceasefire, but longer term impact of disaster as yet unclear, with much depending on how relief and reconstruction effort handled: if well, central government stands to win major new support, but if poor coordination continues, or serious corruption takes place, GAM independence movement will be major beneficiary. Restrictions on access by international aid agencies and foreign media lifted. Vice-President Jusuf Kalla elected head of Golkar, auguring better relations between executive and legislative branches. Corruption Eradication Commission arrested Aceh governor Abdullah Puteh 7 December, pending trial for alleged involvement in 2002 graft case. Minister of Defense Juwono Sudarsono announced government to take over military business enterprises with assets worth U.S.\$550,000 or more. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's government announced multi-agency intelligence teams to be set up throughout Indonesia to boost security. Five injured in 12 December attacks on 2 churches in Palu, Central Sulawesi province.


- "The race to aid the tsunami survivors", *The Economist*, 31 Dec. 2004.
- "Suharto's shadow", *The Guardian*, 20 Dec. 2004.
- "Three states warn RI of terror attack", *The Jakarta Post*, 16 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°83, *Indonesia Backgrounder: Why Salafism and Terrorism Mostly Don't Mix*, 13 Sept. 2004.

 Crisis Group Asia Report N°90, *Indonesia: Rethinking Internal Security Strategy*, 20 December 2004. Indonesia needs a new internal security strategy to strengthen the democratisation process, ease institutional rivalries, reduce wasteful duplication of effort, and aid in conflict management and prevention. New President Yudhoyono's government faces no thornier issue. Indonesia experiences everything from armed insurgencies to terrorism to sporadic outbreaks of ethnic and cont'd...

...cont'd communal conflict, and it is wrestling with these through security institutions that have emerged from an authoritarian past. It has to cope with an unclear division of labour, particularly between police and the military; contradictory or ambiguous legislation; inadequate oversight of internal security operations; and the legacy of previous governments that exercised no strategic direction. If the new government tackles the issue comprehensively and directly, it could make a major contribution toward reducing violence and resolving Indonesia's long-standing conflicts.

⇒ Myanmar/Burma National League for Democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's conditions of house arrest reportedly deteriorated, leading UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to issue statement of concern. Tsunami caused by 26 December Indian Ocean earthquake reportedly killed at least 90.

- "A test from Burma", *The Washington Post*, 18 Dec. 2004.
- "Myanmar dismantling intelligence unit headed by former PM", AFP, 19 Dec. 2004.
- "Forced labour and other customs", *The Economist*, 16 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°82, *Myanmar: Aid to the Border Areas*, 9 Sept. 2004.

 Crisis Group Asia Briefing, *Myanmar: Update on HIV/AIDS Policy*, 16 December 2004. To combat its HIV/AIDS epidemic, Myanmar must urgently boost local staff capabilities and make better use of aid. The infection rate is one of Asia's highest, and the epidemic has security implications for the country's neighbours. It also offers an opportunity for the strengthening of civil society inside Myanmar because fighting HIV/AIDS involves intensive ground-level work entailing the kind of small NGOs and grassroots organisations that might eventually help prepare for any democratic transition. International engagement has not had a transforming impact on either the epidemic or the country's politics, but it has seen some successes, at least with the former. Grave problems remain, however. International aid should be expanded to boost capacity to tackle HIV by targeting local and community-based organisations.

⇒ Philippines Powerful bomb exploded 12 December in General Santos city market southern Mindanao region, killing 14, injuring 70. No claim of responsibility. Government and New People's Army (NPA) announced ceasefires for Christmas celebration from 16 December to 5 January. Soldiers and NPA rebels clashed in Negros Occidental province in central Visayas region 20 December; 1 rebel and 1 soldier killed. Moro Islamic Liberation Front reportedly agreed to resume peace talks with government in February after talks ended in Malaysia 22 December.

- "High alert after Philippine blast", *The Asia Times*, 14 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°80, *Southern Philippines Backgrounder: Terrorism and the Peace Process*, 13 July 2004.

⇒ Thailand In major humanitarian catastrophe, at least 5,000 killed by 26 December tsunami along western coast, but unlikely to have effect on unrest in south. Violence continued in south despite peace stunt by government which saw air-drop of millions of paper doves. Independent human rights commission into 25 October Tak Bai deaths absolved security

forces of wrongdoing but accused army commanders of negligence. Four Muslim private Islamic school teachers arrested on charges of treason, inflaming tensions. Almost daily shooting, arson and bombings; security forces fear escalation of violence as insurgency anniversary (4 January) approaches: 2,000 additional police deployed from 1 January. General election scheduled for 6 February.

- "Thaksin's blame game backfires", *The Nation*, 23 Dec. 2004.
- "An economic battle, too", *The Asia Times*, 18 Dec. 2004.
- "Origami peace gesture met with violence in Thailand", *Christian Science Monitor*, 6 Dec. 2004.

↳ Timor-Leste Joint Indonesian/Timor-Leste Commission on Truth and Friendship unveiled by foreign ministers 21 December. Likely to supersede UN plans for own enquiry.

- "East Timor: New law aims to stifle political dissent", Reuters AlertNet, 29 Dec. 2004.
- "E Timor commission planned", BBC, 22 Dec. 2004.

Europe

BALKANS

↳ Albania Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia agreed 28 December on construction of \$1.2bn oil pipeline to pass through Balkan peninsula.

- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°153, *Pan-Albanianism: How Big a Threat to Balkan Stability?*, 25 Feb. 2004.

↳ Bosnia & Herzegovina Political crisis as Bosnian Serb PM Dragan Mikerevic resigned 17 December, followed by foreign and justice ministers, after High Rep. Paddy Ashdown sacked 9 officials to punish Bosnia's Serb Republic for failing to arrest war crimes suspects. EUFOR took over from NATO 2 December in EU's largest military operation to date.

- "Bosnia envoy stands by sackings", BBC, 19 Dec. 2004.
- "Bosnia Serb PM resigns, rejects western pressure", Reuters, 17 Dec. 2004.
- "EU takes over NATO's Bosnia mission", ISN, 2 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing, *EUFOR: Changing Bosnia's Security Arrangements*, 29 June 2004.

↳ Kosovo Alliance for the Future of Kosovo leader Ramush Haradinaj appointed prime minister 7 December under cloud of possible ICTY war crimes indictment. Belgrade furious, international community uneasy with appointment, though Haradinaj's government made confident, popular start. Indictment would likely spark dangerous political crisis, and insurgency from Haradinaj's native west Kosovo. Further economic responsibilities to be transferred to Kosovo institutions, as local media increasingly focused on rising poverty, and Kosovo Electricity Corporation (KEK) cut power to many (mostly Albanian) bill-defaulting villages. Serbian government refused to deal with Haradinaj or engage with decentralisation on UNMIK's terms. Belgrade officials and media displayed agenda of provocation: made troop redeployments towards Albanian-inhabited areas of southern Serbia abutting Kosovo; wrongly portrayed KEK power cuts to non-bill-paying Serb villages as ethnic

discrimination; backed threats to repeat highway-blocking protests that had attracted Albanian violence in March.

- "Young and wanted", *The Economist*, 29 Dec. 2004.
- Comment by Morton Abramowitz and Heather Hurlburt, "Where to start with Europe", *The Washington Post*, 22 Dec. 2004.
- "A poor choice in Kosovo", *International Herald Tribune*, 20 Dec. 2004.
- "Talk of Haradinaj indictment unnerves Kosovo", IWPR, 16 Dec. 2004.
- For background to the March violence, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°155, *Collapse in Kosovo*, 22 Apr. 2004.

↳ Macedonia Social Democrat leader Vlado Buckovski formally elected prime minister 17 December. Armed Albanian group left Skopje village of Kondovo 17 December after Democratic Party of Albanians and bitter opponents Democratic Union for Integration party reportedly negotiated end to standoff. Incident in Tetovo 24 December reportedly between 'Tigers' rapid reaction force and same armed group from Kondovo left 1 dead.

- "DPA accused of dirty tricks", IWPR 24 Dec. 2004.
- "Macedonian parliament approves new government", Southeast European Times, 20 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing, *Macedonia: Make or Break*, 3 Aug. 2004.

↳ Serbia & Montenegro U.S. Ambassador for War Crimes Pierre-Richard Prosper blamed PM Vojislav Kostunica for "zero cooperation" with ICTY. President Tadic's call for early parliamentary elections criticised by other parliamentary parties. Heightened tensions with international community over High Rep. Paddy Ashdown's moves against Bosnia's Serb Republic and Kosovo Serb electricity cut-off. Army moved combat units south and transferred ground forces HQ unit from Belgrade to Nis. Hard-line Army Chief of Staff Branko Krstic replaced by Dragan Paskas. Poll carried out by Montenegrin NGO indicated 73% of voters would vote in independence referendum, 2 thirds of them in favour. World Bank approved new 3-year arrangement for Serbia-Montenegro, worth \$550m while International Monetary Fund approved 9th \$95m instalment of current arrangement for bolstering hard currency reserves and balance of payments.

- "Serbia appoints armed forces head", BBC, 24 Dec. 2004.
- "On the twin-track highway to Europe", IWPR, 24 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing, *Serbia's Changing Political Landscape*, 22 July 2004.

CAUCASUS

↳ Armenia Former president Ter-Petrosian attempting apparent political comeback: plunged forcefully into Armenian politics since 25 November press conference. In 9 December meeting of his Armenian Pan-National Movement (HHSh), Ter-Petrosian called for Western-oriented foreign policy and argued Armenia had suffered for not taking softer line on Nagorno-Karabakh. Country's military spending to increase by 23% based on 2005 budget.

- "Is Armenia heading for an 'apricot revolution'?", RFE/RL, 17 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°158, *Armenia: Internal Instability Ahead*, 18 Oct. 2004.

➤ Azerbaijan International observers said 17 December municipal elections did not conform to democratic standards. Elections boycotted by 3 largest opposition parties. 2005 budget passed with 33% increase in defence spending.

- [“Azerbaijan’s apathetic election”](#), IWPR, 22 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°156, [Azerbaijan: Turning Over a New Leaf?](#), 13 May 2004.

➤ Georgia Election crisis in Abkhazia defused after Russia brokered deal between rival presidential candidates Sergei Bagapsh and Raul Khajimba, ending 2-month standoff. Crisis resolved hours before Bagapsh’s planned inauguration 6 December, as candidates signed agreement “freezing” disputed 3 October election results and promising to participate in new elections as single team, with Bagapsh running for president and Khajimba vice-president. But situation in South Ossetian conflict zone remained fragile; neither side fulfilled demilitarisation pledges made in November. Relations with Azerbaijan deteriorated after Azeri resident of Georgia’s Kvemo Kartli region, which is heavily populated by Azeris, was killed in land dispute. President Saakashvili announced second cabinet reshuffle in 6 months; 2005 budget approved with 38% increase in defense spending.

- [“Saakashvili blows hot and cold on separatist issue”](#), RFE/RL, 17 Dec. 2004.
- [“Azeris angry over Georgia killing”](#), IWPR, 15 Dec. 2004.
- [“Abkhazia rivals strike deal”](#), IWPR, 8 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°159, [Georgia: Avoiding War in South Ossetia](#), 26 Nov. 2004.

➤ Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan) Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers met twice early December, but no significant progress reported.

- [“New players enter Karabakh peace process”](#), IWPR, 22 Dec. 2004.
- [“Whither the Karabakh peace process?”](#), RFE/RL, 6 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Reports N°158, [Armenia: Internal Instability Ahead](#), 18 Oct. 2004, and N°156, [Azerbaijan: Turning Over a New Leaf?](#), 13 May 2004.

EASTERN EUROPE

➤ Chechnya (Russia) Russian president Vladimir Putin said would welcome German and EU involvement in helping resolve Chechnya conflict.

- [“Putin signals Chechnya initiative”](#), BBC, 21 Dec. 2004.

➤ Moldova OSCE, Russia and Ukraine expressed concern over growing tension between Chisinau and Tiraspol after 20 December fire in Bendery-Tighina in building housing Russian peacekeepers and Moldovan police; sides blamed each other. Members of Transnistrian opposition under increasing pressure: attempt to recall Transnistrian opposition MP Alexander Radchenko by popular vote in his constituency failed 19 December, but due to alleged “irregularities” will be repeated 9 January; meanwhile, home of another Transnistrian opposition leader, Oleg Horjan, hit with arson attack 21 December. OSCE meeting Sofia 6-7 December concluded without agreement on President Voronin’s Declaration on Stability and Security for Moldova.

- [“Mediators concerned over incident in Bendery-Tighina”](#), RFE/RL, 23 Dec. 2004.

- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°157, [Moldova: Regional Tensions over Transnistria](#), 17 June 2004.

➤ Ukraine Victory of opposition candidate Victor Yushchenko in 26 December repeat of flawed November presidential election brought peaceful conclusion to month-long political crisis, though challenges remain ahead. Official results gave Yushchenko 52% of vote, with former PM Victor Yanukovich receiving 44%. International observers declared vote considerably more free and fair than previous poll. Yanukovich filed complaints with election commission and Supreme Court alleging election-day violations, but claims dismissed; later resigned as PM, said would appeal Supreme Court decision despite having little hope of success.

- [“At last, President Yushchenko”](#), *The Economist*, 31 Dec. 2004.
- [“Yanukovych quits as Ukraine PM”](#), BBC, 31 Dec. 2004.

WESTERN EUROPE/MEDITERRANEAN

➤ Basque Country (Spain) ETA claimed responsibility for small explosions Madrid and 7 other cities early December. Government officials said bombings sign of desperation and ETA in-fighting. Members of Basque parliament voted 20 December in favour of Ibarretxe Plan for greater autonomy.

- [“Basques back ‘independence’ plan”](#), BBC, 20 Dec. 2004.
- [“Madrid sees signs of ETA’s death throes”](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 20 Dec. 2004.

➤ Cyprus Turkey must recognise Cyprus by bringing it into customs union before October 2005 if EU-Turkey accession talks to proceed. Greek Cypriot foreign minister suggested willingness to negotiate reunification with Turkish Cyprus 22 December, on basis of earlier version of plan put to failed referendum April 2004.

- [“Cypriot threat to Turkey’s EU deal”](#), *The Guardian*, 20 Dec. 2004.

➤ Northern Ireland (UK) British-Irish government peace proposals released 8 December; strong consensus between Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Fein on previously contentious issues. But Sinn Fein refusal to accept DUP demands for photographic proof of IRA decommissioning forestalled clinching deal to restore devolution, suspended since October 2002.

- [“Ulster: The deal that almost was”](#), *The Guardian*, 9 Dec. 2004.
- [“Proposals by the British and Irish governments for a comprehensive agreement”](#), 8 Dec. 2004.

➤ Turkey Agreed 17 December to open EU membership negotiations 3 October 2005; accession talks expected to last up to 15 years, with no guarantee of entry. Clashes between security forces and rebels southeast Turkey left 3 dead: Kurdish rebel killed by security forces 11 December Hatay province, while 2 guerrillas belonging to Maoist Communist Party killed 10 December Tunceli province.

- [“A date with Turkey”](#), *The Economist*, 17 Dec. 2004.
- [“Kurdish rebel killed in clash in southeast Turkey”](#), Reuters AlertNet, 11 Dec. 2004.



Latin America /Caribbean

- ↳ Bolivia Political tension over hydrocarbons law and Constituent Assembly continued. Armed forces reaffirmed support for President Carlos Mesa to protect natural gas. Preliminary municipal elections results showed Movimiento al Socialismo party obtained most mayoral posts, followed by Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario. Attorney General Gareca announced plan to request extradition of former President Sanchez de Lozada from U.S.
 - [“New forces dominate Bolivia poll”](#), BBC, 6 Dec. 2004.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Latin America Report N°7, [Bolivia’s Divisions: Too Deep to Heal?](#), 6 July 2004.
- ↳ Colombia Progress in demobilisation of paramilitaries continued: 1,400 fighters of Catatumbo Bloc handed in arms 10 December in largest ever demobilisation; further 550 of Calima Bloc disarmed 18 December. Reintegration strategy still lacking. President Uribe said 16 December would not extradite AUC leader Salvatore Mancuso if he remains in talks with government and stops illegal activities. FARC leader Ricardo Palmira (a.k.a. Simon Trinidad) extradited to U.S. after FARC failed to release 63 hostages before 30 December deadline. FARC rebels reportedly killed at least 17 in northeast Arauca province on New Year’s Eve in retaliation for cooperating with paramilitaries.
 - [“Rebels kill 17 peasants in Colombia – police”](#), Reuters AlertNet, 1 Jan. 2005.
 - [“Colombia hands Farc leader to US”](#), BBC, 31 Dec. 2004.
 - [“Colombia fighters hand over arms”](#), BBC, 19 Dec. 2004.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Latin America Report N°9, [Colombia’s Borders: The Weak Link in Uribe’s Security Policy](#), 23 Sept. 2004.
- ↳ Ecuador Congress backed President Gutierrez’s dismissal of entire 31-member Supreme Court. Move strongly criticised as unconstitutional and interfering with separation of powers. Referendum on appointment of judges and other questions to be held in first half of 2005.
 - [“Supreme Court in Ecuador replaced”](#), BBC, 10 Dec. 2004.
- ↳ Haiti UN peacekeeping force, approaching full strength, began more assertive campaign to quell continuing political and criminal violence. Following 2-day stand-off with Haitian ex-soldiers occupying ousted President Aristide’s home, UN forces stormed compound 17 December; soldiers agreed to leave unarmed, in their first major political blunder since beginning of armed uprising in February. Peacekeepers fought way into Port-au-Prince slum 14 December in attempt to end pro- and anti-Aristide gang war and establish permanent presence. Operation successful, though several injured and some reportedly killed; denied by UN.
 - [“Revealed: Haiti bloodbath that left dozens dead in jail”](#), *The Observer*, 19 Dec. 2004.
 - [“UN forces rebels from Aristide home in Haiti”](#), Reuters AlertNet, 18 Dec. 2004.
 - [“Operation deep pockets”](#), *The Economist*, 16 Dec. 2004.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Latin America Report N°10, [A New Chance for Haiti?](#), 18 Nov. 2004.

- ↳ Peru President Alejandro Toledo dismissed commanders of army and air force, raising questions about irregular promotions within armed forces. President has been criticised for allowing too much decision-making autonomy to armed forces high command. State of emergency declared in southern town of Andahuaylas as armed group led by radical former soldier stormed police station, holding 10 officers hostage.
 - [“Peru declares emergency as armed group holds hostages”](#), Reuters, 1 Jan. 2005.
 - [“A dream with many hurdles”](#), BBC, 9 Dec. 2004.
 - [“Locked-up Lori”](#), *The Economist*, 9 Dec. 2004.
- ↳ Venezuela Army announced troop increase and helicopter patrols of Colombian border. Police clashed with rioting street vendors in Caracas 8 December, leaving 42 injured in worst street violence for months. President Chavez appointed 17 new magistrates to Supreme Court – opposition accused government of attempting to control judiciary. New TV/radio law threatened press freedoms, restricting displays of violence over airwaves.
 - [“Venezuela appoints 17 new judges”](#), BBC, 14 Dec. 2004
 - [“Venezuelan media fear new law”](#), CNN, 10 Dec. 2004.
 - [“42 wounded in Venezuela riot”](#), CNN, 8 Dec. 2004.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Latin America Briefing, [Venezuela: Headed Toward Civil War?](#), 10 May 2004.



Middle East /North Africa

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

- ↳ Israel/Occupied Territories Optimism surrounding peace process highest in years, but tempered by absence of significant progress on ground, political fragility ahead of 9 January Palestinian presidential elections and renewed violence in Gaza Strip. UK PM Tony Blair, in visit to region, announced will host conference on Palestinian reform February/March 2005 - international donors declared willingness to significantly increase funding to Palestinian Authority. But conference will not address peace process. Israel said will not attend. PLO Chairman and likely next Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas signalled moderate stance with explicit condemnation of armed uprising; meanwhile, Israeli PM Sharon and his Gaza pullout plan received major boost with deal to form coalition government of Sharon’s Likud party and opposition Labour party. Abbas repaired strained Palestinian-Arab relations in visits to Syria, Lebanon and Kuwait; Israeli-Egyptian relations also thawed noticeably. Violence in Gaza continued: Israeli incursions into Khan Younis refugee camp following rocket attacks left dozens of Palestinians dead. Palestinians killed 5 Israeli soldiers in Gaza checkpoint bombing 12 December.
 - [“A year of opportunity for Sharon and Abbas”](#), *The Economist*, 31 Dec. 2004.
 - [“Two killed in Gaza missile strike”](#), BBC, 31 Dec. 2004.
 - [“Blair: London meeting can revive Mideast road map”](#), *The Daily Star*, 23 Dec. 2004.
 - [“Settler group backs resistance to Gaza plan”](#), *The Washington Post*, 21 Dec. 2004.

- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°32, *Who Governs the West Bank? Palestinian Administration under Israeli Occupation*, 28 Sept. 2004.



Crisis Group Middle East Briefing, *After Arafat? Challenges and Prospects*, 23 December 2004. The transition in the Palestinian Authority following Arafat's death has gone well but the situation is fragile in the run-up to the 9 January presidential election. The extent to which the new dynamics present an opportunity for peace is dependent on whether visible efforts to rejuvenate Palestinian institutions are accompanied by renewed commitment to moving toward a viable, comprehensive settlement. Palestinian political reform is important but internal reform cannot be the only focus: defects in democracy did not cause the Israeli-Palestinian conflict any more than addressing them will resolve it. The new president, likely Mahmoud Abbas, must deliver tangible improvements to daily life and offer hope of a political settlement -- and here Israel and the international community need to deliver as well. Abbas probably has about three months to prove himself; if he fails, the situation is likely to revert quickly to chaos and conflict.

- ↳ Lebanon Opposition groups from across religious and political spectrum called for end to Syrian interference in country's domestic affairs, forming united front for first time since civil war began 1975. Syria redeployed troops from northern town Batrun and Beirut's suburbs and airport to Bekaa valley, closer to Syrian-Lebanese border. Palestinian presidential candidate Mahmoud Abbas and PM Ahmed Qurei made 8 December visit, first by senior Palestinian officials to Lebanon since 1982 Israeli invasion drove PLO out of country.
 - "Lebanese wary of a rising Hezbollah", *The Washington Post*, 20 Dec. 2004.
 - "More Syria troops move in Lebanon", BBC, 18 Dec. 2004.
 - "Lebanese groups unite over Syria", BBC, 13 Dec. 2004.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Briefing, *Hizbollah: Rebel Without a Cause?*, 30 July 2003.

- ↳ Syria Relations with U.S. deteriorated as President Bush denounced alleged Syrian support for insurgency in Iraq and threatened new sanctions. In second troop redeployment since September UN resolution, Syria withdrew forces from northern town Batrun and Beirut's southern suburbs and international airport to Bekaa valley, closer to Syrian-Lebanese border. Car bomb, wounding 3, exploded Damascus 14 December; alleged Hamas member Mesbah Abu Hweilih narrowly escaped blast. Syria blamed Mossad; denied by Israel.
 - "More Syria troops move in Lebanon", BBC, 18 Dec. 2004.
 - "Israel accused over Syria blast", BBC, 14 Dec. 2004.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Reports N°s 23 and 24, *Syria Under Bashar (I): Foreign Policy Challenges; Syria Under Bashar (II): Domestic Policy Challenges*, 11 Feb. 2004.

GULF

- ↳ Iran Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi said 14 December Iran would accept U.S. involvement in nuclear talks provided Washington treated it as equal partner. Conciliatory comments came day after EU-3 (Britain, France and Germany) opened

new talks with Iran aimed at reaching long-term agreement on Tehran's nuclear activities.

- "Iran open to U.S. involvement in nuclear talks", Reuters, 14 Dec. 2004.
- Comment by Karim Sadjapour (Crisis Group), "Iran's paradoxical yearning for America", *The Daily Star*, 4 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Briefing, *Iran: Where Next on the Nuclear Standoff?*, 24 Nov. 2004.



Iraq Violence surged toward end December as January elections drew nearer. Suicide bomber killed 22, including 18 Americans, in 21 December attack on U.S. army base Mosul. Two days earlier, twin suicide attacks in holy Shiite cities of Najaf and Karbala killed 60, while in Baghdad 3 Iraqi election workers dragged from car and executed in broad daylight. Campaigning for 30 January elections officially began 15 December: 22 Shiite political parties announced broad-based coalition backed by leading cleric Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. Coalition to run 228 candidates under banner of United Iraqi Alliance. Predicting Sunni Arab absence from polls, Iraqi Islamic Party withdrew from elections process, joining other Sunni Arab parties. French journalists Christian Chesnot and Georges Malbrunot freed after 4 months in captivity. 1,018 Coalition soldiers, including 933 Americans, and thousands of Iraqis killed by hostile fire since declared end of combat operations on 1 May 2003.

- "Iraq attacks claim more lives as plans unveiled to protect voters", *The Daily Star* (AFP), 31 Dec. 2004.
- "US suffers worst Iraq attack yet", BBC, 21 Dec. 2004.
- "Iraqi Shiites form election alliance; pullout talks a goal", *International Herald Tribune*, 10 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°33, *Iraq: Can Local Governance Save Central Government?*, 27 Oct. 2004.



Crisis Group Middle East Report N°34, *What Can the U.S. Do in Iraq?*, 22 December 2004. Iraqi hostility, wider and deeper rooted than the U.S. has acknowledged, means Washington's policy there can no longer achieve its original aims. Soaring resentment feeds the insurgency, making the transition process a source of, not the solution to, the legitimacy deficit. Pursuit of the impossible has become an obstacle to achieving the possible: a stable government Iraqis consider credible, representative, the embodiment of national interests, and capable of addressing their needs. Washington can still salvage the situation if it recognises new realities and adopts a dual disengagement course: gradual U.S. political and military disengagement from Iraq and, equally important, clear Iraqi political disengagement from the U.S. U.S. and Iraqi authorities should agree on and articulate where they want to be by late 2005, when the transitional process is to end, particularly the extent of the political and any military roles the U.S. will still play.



Saudi Arabia Gunmen stormed U.S. consulate Jeddah 6 December, killing 5 non-U.S. staff and 4 of 5 attackers; al-Qaeda off-shoot claimed responsibility. Twin suicide bombings 29 December targeted interior ministry and special forces base, leaving 5 bombers dead; government said one of country's most wanted men, Abdullah Saud al-Sebaie, killed in attacks. Security crackdown 16 December thwarted anti-monarchy protests planned in main cities after exiled dissident

Saad al-Faqih called for demonstrations. UN Security Council placed al-Faqih on list of those thought linked to al-Qaeda after requests from Saudi Arabia, U.S. and UK.

- "Al Qaeda shifts its strategy in Saudi Arabia", *The Washington Post*, 19 Dec. 2004.
- Comment by Toby Jones (Crisis Group), "Saudi Arabia: Reform or ruin", *The Daily Star*, 18 Dec. 2004.
- "Saudi thwarts protests but reformists demand change", Reuters AlertNet, 17 Dec. 2004.
- "Gunmen storm US mission in Saudi", BBC, 6 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°31, *Saudi Arabia Backgrounder: Who are the Islamists?*, 21 Sept. 2004.

➤ Yemen At least 25 killed in inter-tribal fighting Al-Jawf province eastern Yemen 2-3 December. One killed in further clash Zamar province southern Yemen 15 December.

- "Yemen tribal fighting claims more lives", *The Washington Times* (UPI), 15 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°8, *Yemen: Coping with Terrorism and Violence in a Fragile State*, 8 Jan. 2003.

NORTH AFRICA

➤ Algeria Human rights commission appointed as part of reconciliation process said security services abducted 5,200 civilians 1992-2000. Police chief Tounsi said 300-500 militants remained committed to overthrow of regime; 75 were under sentence of death or prison in absentia. Man and 2 daughters killed by Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat at Khraissia, near Algiers, 28 December. Rioters clashed with police over housing shortages near Oran; city hall attacked in Bou Saada. Government promised \$50bn development plan.

- "Algerians burn city hall over housing shortage", Reuters AlertNet, 21 Dec. 2004.
- "Militants plan to topple regime", *The Washington Times*, 19 Dec. 2004.

- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°29, *Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria: Turning the Page*, 30 July 2004.

➤ Egypt Relations with Israel continued to improve with possible restoration of full diplomatic ties. Egypt, Israel and U.S. signed trade pact 14 December sparking riots in Cairo. Israel released 170 Palestinian prisoners 19 December in goodwill gesture; this followed exchange of alleged Israeli spy for 6 Egyptians held in Israel. In rare defiance of ban, 500 protested against possible fifth 6-year term for President Mubarak after October 2005 presidential referendum. Man killed in Christian-Muslim clashes in southern Egypt.

- "Good Copts, sad Copts", *The Economist*, 29 Dec. 2004.
- "Space to say 'no' to the president", *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 22 Dec. 2004.
- "Egypt, Israel sign strategic trade accord", Middle East Online, 14 Dec. 2004.
- "Mubarak calls Sharon best hope of Palestinians", *International Herald Tribune*, 3 Dec. 2004.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Briefings, *Islamism in North Africa: Legacies of History and Egypt's Opportunity*, 20 Apr. 2004.

➤ Mauritania Ringleader of series of coup plots, Major Salih Walad Hananna, pleaded guilty in Mauritania's largest-ever trial (191 suspects); charge carries death penalty. Police arrested 5 on suspicion of planning terrorist attacks against Paris-Dakar rally participants.

- "Mauritania coup leader pleads guilty", Aljazeera.Net, 22 December 2004.

➤ Western Sahara Exiled Saharawi officials claimed hundreds took part in demonstrations against Moroccan rule Dakhla, Western Sahara's second largest city. Similar recent action in El Aaiun, S'mara and Assa referred to as "Intifada"; appeared limited in scope and timed to coincide with World Human Rights Day and UN debate.

- "New protests in occupied Western Sahara", Afrol, 14 Dec. 2004.



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