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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 145 staff members across five continents, who already report on some 60 of the situations listed here. Comments and suggestions can be sent to crisiswatch@crisisgroup.org.

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December 2007 Trends



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January 2008 Watchlist



Conflict Risk Alerts

Kenya
Pakistan



Conflict Resolution Opportunities

DR Congo

Crisis Group

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Africa

CENTRAL AFRICA

➔ **Burundi** Tripartite Plus Joint Commission met 4-5 December; set 31 December deadline for PALIPEHUTU-FNL to re-enter Joint Verification and Monitoring Mechanism before imposition of travel, financial and armament restrictions: FNL demand security assurances before return. Parliament voted South African mediator Charles Nqakula unsuitable 14 December; accused him of bias. New grouping of regional and international actors "la Direction politique" set up 15 December in response to impasse. FNL attacked army in Bubanza province, 28 December. UNSC extended BINUB mandate to end 2008. Trial began of former leader of ruling CNDD-FDD Hussein Radjabu on charges of encouraging instability.

- "One government soldier killed in fighting", *Burundi Réalités*, 28 Dec. 2007.
- "Burundi parliament wants SAfrican mediator out: speaker", *AFP*, 13 Dec. 2007.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°131, *Burundi: Finalising Peace with the FNL*, 28 Aug. 2007.

➔ **Central African Republic** Insecurity continued in north with limited progress on political dialogue. President Francois Bozize established committee 1 December to prepare dialogue with opposition and rebel groups. Committee has 90 days to report before talks to be organised in Bangui. All groups designated representatives except APRD and UFDR.

- "France: EU has assembled 'bulk' of its force for Darfur spillover", *AP*, 21 Dec. 2007.
- "EU force may halt Central Africa's decline- report", *Reuters*, 14 Dec. 2007.

Crisis Group Africa Report N°136, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, 13 December 2007. Violence and corruption have turned the Central African Republic (CAR) into a phantom state, but the recently approved EU and UN forces (EUFOR and MINURCAT), which aim to contain any spill-over from the Darfur crisis, could help the failing nation get on its feet. CAR lacks any meaningful institutions and is wracked by insurrections and corruption. France has led the initiative to deploy the EU peacekeepers to its north-eastern region, who, if they make use of Paris's strengths without serving as an international cover for its continued domination, could aid CAR's much-needed reform process. This might be the last chance for the CAR to break out of its phantom status.



➔ **Democratic Republic of Congo** Heavy fighting continued in east throughout month, yet government-sponsored peace conference due 6 January. Intentions of participants unclear and ceasefire not yet observed, but conference offers opportunity to move towards peace. Government launched offensive against forces under Laurent Nkunda in North Kivu with MONUC logistical support, 3 December. Army suffered significant defeat to rebels at Mushake, 11 December. Nkunda declared unilateral ceasefire 24 December ahead of 27 December (postponed to 6 January) peace conference. Congolese,

Rwandan representatives met in Goma 16 December; proposed implementation taskforce for November Nairobi Communiqué to conduct anti-FDLR operations. U.S. pledged to strengthen FARDC in Kivu at 4-5 December Tripartite Plus Joint Commission summit. Kinshasa signed border security deal with Kampala 15 December. Ugandan LRA rebels based in Garamba national park reportedly attacked town of Duru 16 December, causing mass displacement.

- "Nkunda calls ceasefire as Kivu peace conference postponed", *UN news*, 27 Dec. 2007.
- "Fear of new war as clashes erupt on Congo's edge", *New York Times*, 13 Dec. 2007.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°133, *Congo: Bringing Peace to North Kivu*, 31 October 2007.

➔ **Kenya** Credible reports of 27 December presidential election rigging led to violence in several parts of country. Incumbent, President Mwai Kibaki, declared winner 30 December amid protests and international concern about credibility of polls. Violence by youth gangs, vigilante groups followed, while police commissioner implemented shoot to kill policy against protesters, particularly in opposition strongholds in west, coastal and Nairobi slum areas; over 300 killed and 70,000 displaced in post-poll violence. Defeated presidential candidate Raila Odinga (from Luo tribe) and Kibaki (Kikuyu) called for end to killing; accused each other's supporters of ethnic cleansing. 30, mostly Kikuyu, died in western town of Eldoret after church sanctuary set on fire by mob, 1 January. Scores of opposition sympathisers killed indiscriminately by police in Kisumu and Nairobi. Kibaki reportedly called for meeting, rejected by Odinga 1 January. AU head, Ghanaian president John Kufuor, former President of Sierra Leone and head of Commonwealth delegation Ahmed Tejan Kabbah and Archbishop Desmond Tutu called in to mediate dispute.

- "AU head goes to Kenya following violence", *AP*, 2 Jan. 2008.
- "A 'national disaster'", *IRIN*, 1 Jan. 2008.
- "Kenya's unsound election", *Economist*, 30 Dec. 2007.

➔ **Uganda** Ceasefire between government and Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) remained intact. Uganda-DRC agreement set 31 January deadline for LRA leader Joseph Kony to leave eastern DRC; extension to 15 March requested. President Museveni claimed Kony "not ready" for peace. UN Special Envoy Joaquim Chissano visited 12-18 December to consult all parties. LRA representatives ended reconciliatory tour of north, 11 December. Uganda-DRC border security pact signed, 15 December; meeting of Joint Committee for Border Re-marking due in Bunia 16 January 2008.

- "Ugandan president says LRA not serious about peace", *Reuters*, 20 Dec. 2007.
- "Kony given 42-day ultimatum", *Monitor*, 20 Dec. 2007.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°46, *Northern Uganda Peace Process: The Need to Maintain Momentum*, 14 Sept. 2007.

HORN OF AFRICA

➔ **Chad** Fighting worsened in east between Khartoum-backed Chadian rebels and Chadian military (ANT). Rebels cited failure of government to begin discussions stipulated in 27 October peace agreement. President Deby sacked Minister of Defence (ex-rebel FUC leader) Mahamat Nur. EU/UN

peacekeeping force for eastern Chad behind schedule; French domination risks becoming problem with other EU member states; rebels argue Paris's support for Deby threatens neutrality of force. UN aid worker killed in south, 6 December.

- "Chad says Sudan arms rebels to block EU peace force", Reuters, 27 Dec. 2007.
- "Violence and insecurity not just in the east", IRIN, 11 Dec. 2007.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°111, *Chad: Back towards War?*, 1 June 2006.

↳ **Ethiopia** Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) rebels reported killing 215 government soldiers in 13-16 December fighting in region; denied by government.

- "Rebels say killed 215 Ethiopian troops, govt denies", Reuters, 17 Dec. 2007.
- "Ethiopia expels UK, Australian aid staff", Reuters, 7 Dec. 2007.

↳ **Ethiopia/Eritrea** Border area relatively stable despite 1 December Boundary Commission deadline expiry following increased international attention. Concerns raised by exchange of gunfire 25 December.

- "Exchange of gunfire on Eritrea-Ethiopia border", AFP, 27 Dec. 2007.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°48, *Ethiopia and Eritrea: Stopping the Slide to War*, 5 November 2007.

↳ **Somalia** New PM Nur Hassan Hussein dissolved cabinet 16 December, 2 weeks after 5 senior officials resigned in power-sharing row. New cabinet to consist of 18 ministers and 5 deputies, compared with 73 total in previous government. Insecurity continued, particularly in Mogadishu. At least 50 killed in month including 13 December mortar attack on capital's main market. Mayor's spokesman and army colonel killed by landmines end-month. Roadside bomb targeted army convoy in Baidoa 15 December. Senior national security ministry official Sheikh Qasin Ibrahim Nur said 80% of country out of government control and unsafe. Ethiopian PM Meles Zenawi accused UN 20 December of exaggerating scale of crisis. Ethiopian troops left key central town of Guriel, 28 December. In semi-autonomous Puntland region gunmen temporarily abducted 2 MSF workers 25 December prompting departure of foreign MSF staff; French journalist held for 8 days, released 24 December. First Burundian soldiers, some 100, finally deployed to join AU force.

- "Ethiopia leaves key Somali town", BBC, 28 Dec. 2007.
- "Prime minister to name new, leaner cabinet", IRIN, 17 Dec. 2007.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°45, *Somalia: The Tough Part Is Ahead*, 26 Jan. 2007.

↳ **Somaliland (Somalia)** Administration ordered 24 Somali journalists who fled Mogadishu to Somaliland capital Hargeysa to leave 4 December. President Dahir Rayale Kahin released 3 senior opposition politicians 18 December, imprisoned 5 months for forming "unauthorised" party.

- "Somaliland frees key political prisoners", Garowe Online, 18 Dec. 2007.

- "U.S. debating shift of support in Somali conflict", *Washington Post*, 4 Dec. 2007.

↳ **Sudan** SPLM returned to government of national unity (GNU) 27 December avoiding collapse of CPA, but clashes started along north-south border and fighting continued in Darfur. Combined Popular Defence Forces militia, government troops and Misseriya tribesmen reportedly clashed with SPLA 23-24 and 28 December in Southern Kordofan and Northern Bahr el-Ghazal. SPLM rejoined GNU after progress on some issues that triggered October 2007 withdrawal, though not Abyei. New list gives greater representation of SPLM in Khartoum: including minister of cabinet affairs and foreign minister. Regional dynamics shifted in Darfur as ex-Janjaweed leader, Ali Hamiti, defected from Khartoum, reportedly in alliance with SLA/Abdel Wahid and Khalil Ibrahim's Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). In month JEM claimed victories against government troops in Kordofan and Suleia town, downing of government airplane, capture of SAF garrison outside el-Geneina, and claimed control of Chinese oil facility 11 December. Khartoum accused Chad of bombing in Darfur in cooperation with JEM attacks – denied by N'Djamena. Aid groups/NGOs said UN/AU peacekeeping force for Darfur (UNAMID) which took over from AU 1 January 2008, hampered by Khartoum and lack of logistical support; urged UNSC to impose targeted sanctions if situation continues. UNAMID continues to lack force capabilities, including 24 helicopters. U.S. diplomat John Granville murdered in Khartoum, 1 January.

- "Clashes kill dozens on Sudan north-south border", Reuters, 30 Dec. 2007.
- "Southerners to take Sudan posts", BBC, 27 Dec. 2007.
- "UN: Security Council should end Sudan's obstruction", Human Rights Watch, 19 Dec. 2007.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°134, *Darfur's New Security Reality*, 26 November 2007.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

↳ **Angola** President dos Santos announced 5-6 September 2008 date for parliamentary elections, first fixed date set since polls first agreed 2004.

- "Angola president sets date for elections", Reuters, 27 Dec. 2007.

↳ **Zimbabwe** Limited revisions made to Public Order and Security Act and other repressive laws 18 December as result of MDC, ZANU-PF talks; MDC criticised as piecemeal. Revisions re-allow foreign ownership of media and mean slightly fewer restrictions on public protest. MDC said many key points unaddressed in mediation talks; dismissed media reports deal to be signed shortly. President Robert Mugabe re-selected as ZANU-PF candidate for forthcoming elections at annual party conference 13 December; said elections would take place in March "without fail" in face of MDC demands for postponement. In its first case, SADC regional tribunal ruled in favour of white farmer fighting land seizure by government 13 December.

- "Zimbabwe amends media, security laws after talks", Reuters, 18 Dec. 2007.
- "SADC court rules in favour of elderly Zim farmer", AP, 14 Dec. 2007.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°132, *Zimbabwe: A Regional Solution?*, 18 Sept. 2007.

WEST AFRICA

➡ **Côte d'Ivoire** Ex-rebel group Forces Nouvelles (FN) and government troops started disarmament process 22 December after joint parades in Tiebissou and Djébonoua. Government troops and FN to move away from front line positions – troops to Yamoussoukro, FN to Bouake – from which both will start to hand over weapons, but doubts persist over process. FN members staged protest in Bouake stronghold 18 December demanding outstanding bonus payments from commanders before Eid al-Adha festival.

- ["UN mission speaks out against violence"](#), UN News, 31 Dec. 2007.
- ["Ivory Coast former foes launch disarmament process"](#), Reuters, 22 Dec. 2007.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°127, [Côte d'Ivoire: Can the Ouagadougou Agreement Bring Peace?](#), 27 June 2007.

➡ **Guinea** 25 members of new electoral commission (CENI) sworn in 6 December. Sekou Ben Sylla elected chair. President Conté signed 5 December decree defining attributions and organization of governmental offices; concerns raised about effect on authority of PM Kouyate.

- ["Après la publication du décret de restructuration: Vers une nouvelle grève générale ?"](#), *Le Diplomate*, 24 Dec. 2007.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°49, [Guinea: Change on Hold](#), 8 November 2007.

➡ **Guinea-Bissau** UN Peacebuilding Commission added GB to its agenda 19 December, alongside Burundi and Sierra Leone; Brazil to chair country-specific "configuration" to work on GB issues. PM Martinho Dafa Cabi urged international community to help raise \$19 million for emergency plan to fight drug smuggling.

- ["Guinea Bissau asks Europe for help in drug fight"](#), Reuters, 19 Dec. 2007.
- ["UN Peacebuilding Commission to begin assisting Guinea-Bissau"](#), UN News, 12 Dec. 2007.

➡ **Liberia** UN Security Council extended arms and travel embargoes for 1 year 19 December in response to increased gun violence. Ex-President Gyude Bryant arrested 7 December after missing court appearance on embezzlement charges; released 8 December after agreeing to appear at 10 December ruling.

- ["Security Council renews sanctions for another year"](#), UN News, 19 Dec. 2007.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°107, [Liberia: Resurrecting the Justice System](#), 6 Apr. 2006.

➡ **Mali** Mali and Guinea announced resumption of joint border patrols 3 December following November talks. 3 clashes in past 6 months caused 11 deaths.

- ["10 Malian soldiers released by Tuareg rebels"](#), AP, 31 Dec. 2007
- ["Authorities move to prevent border clashes"](#), IRIN, 3 Dec. 2007.

➡ **Niger** Clashes between government and rebel Niger Movement for Justice (MNJ) continued. Group accused of laying landmines in north and planning Iraq-style urban insurgency following 2 deaths from anti-mine weapons

in southern towns of Tahoua and Maradi, 10 December. Government admitted culpability following 7 civilian deaths in 9 December firefight with MNJ in northern Tiguiddit region. 3 government troops killed in early December clash near northern town of Iferouane.

- ["Niger government denies army abuses in Sahara"](#), Reuters, 21 Dec. 2007.
- ["Rebels accused of launching Iraq-inspired "urban terror" campaign"](#), IRIN, 11 Dec. 2007.

➡ **Nigeria** Niger Delta unrest continued: 1 killed in attack on Exxon Mobil vessel in Rivers State, 4 December. MEND refused to sign truce with Bayelsa state government; said peace contingent on release of militant leader Henry Okah, arrested in Angola in September. Niger Delta Vigilante Movement reportedly responsible for 1 January attacks, killing 13 in Port Harcourt. Federal government claimed preparatory talks for Niger Delta summit almost finished. James Ibori, former governor of Delta State and ally of President Yar'Adua, arrested 12 December for abuse of office, money laundering, corruption; hearing due 11 January. Head of government corruption unit, Nuhu Ribadu, reportedly asked to go on 1-year study leave in blow to anti-corruption efforts. Yar'Adua asked Senate to ratify June 2006 agreement to cede disputed Bakassi peninsula to Cameroon, 11 December; followed 7 December meeting between officials from both countries mediated by UNSG Ban Ki-moon. Ruling People's Democratic Party won 102 of 103 seats in local council elections in 5 southern states 15 December; marred by 150 arrests for ballot-box stuffing and 4 deaths. Clashes between Muslim and Christians in Bauchi 11 December killed 6, displaced 3,000.

- ["Gang blamed as 10 are killed in attacks at Nigerian oil port"](#), *New York Times*, 1 Jan. 2008.
- ["Nigeria corruption tsar sidelined"](#), BBC, 28 Dec. 2007.
- ["At least six dead in sectarian violence"](#), IRIN, 13 Dec. 2007.

Crisis Group Africa Report N°135, [Nigeria: Ending Unrest in the Niger Delta](#), 5 December 2007. Nigeria's President Umaru Yar'Adua needs to act decisively to keep violence in the oil-rich Niger Delta from escalating and spreading. Attacks on oil installations by militants and kidnappings by criminals are again on the rise. Yar'Adua must go beyond drawn-out consultations with militants and ethnic leaders and quickly translate his promises into credible policies addressing violence and the region's legitimate demands. The federal legislature needs to urgently commence the process of providing constitutional solutions for the political, economic and environmental grievances which have been at the root of ethnic and communal agitation for decades.



➡ **Senegal** Presidential envoy to Casamance region, Samsidine Dino Némou Aïdara, killed 20 December in apparent political attack. Separatist Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) to hold meeting 11 to 13 January, but culprit for Aïdara death unknown.

- ["Neither war nor peace in Casamance after 25 years"](#), IRIN, 27 Dec. 2007.

➡ **Sierra Leone** Youths clashed with police in protest at local diamond mining practices in eastern town of Koidu, 13 December: residents claimed 4 killed. President Koroma

urged investigation into former government leaders; part of anti-corruption drive. Government agreed 3-year cooperative framework with UN Peacebuilding Commission, 12 December. UNIOSIL's mandate extended 21 December for 9 months to help prepare for June 2008 elections.

- "UN extends Sierra Leone mandate, seeks staff cut", Reuters, 21 Dec. 2007.
- "Government probes unrest in diamond-mining area", IRIN, 20 Dec. 2007.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°129, *Sierra Leone: The Election Opportunity*, 12 July 2007.

Asia/Pacific

CENTRAL ASIA

➤ **Kazakhstan** FM Marat Tazhin said 2010 OSCE chairmanship for Kazakhstan, first for former Soviet country, would spark domestic reforms – regional experts sceptical. Major new pipeline deal signed with Russia, Turkmenistan 20 December (see Turkmenistan).

- "Experts cautious on OSCE announcement", EurasiaNet, 12 Dec. 2007.

➤ **Kyrgyzstan** President Kurmanbek Bakiyev consolidated power in sharply criticised 16 December parliamentary elections – widespread opposition protests and crackdown followed. Of 90 seats, Bakiyev's newly founded Ak Jol party won 71; Social Democratic Party 11; and pro-Bakiyev Communist Party 8. Main opposition party, Ata Meken, second place in national vote but excluded from parliament as electoral commission ruled party failed to meet new threshold of 0.5% vote in all regions. Party disputed finding, responded with hunger strikes and rallies in Bishkek from 16 December; over 40 arrested and several briefly jailed. OSCE criticised election imbalances and disproportionate use of force in crackdown; U.S. condemned "widespread vote count irregularities". Former energy minister Igor Chudinov approved as PM, 24 December. New opposition coalition, including Ata Meken, formed 25 December.

- "Authorities counter vote protests with detentions", EurasiaNet, 21 Dec. 2007.
- "Kyrgyz elections fail to meet a number of OSCE commitments in missed opportunity", OSCE EOM, 16 Dec. 2007.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°55, *Kyrgyzstan on the Edge*, 9 Nov. 2006.

➤ **Tajikistan** 3 Tajik citizens accused of Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan membership sentenced 25 December to between 10 and 17 years for terrorism and attempting to overthrow government.

- "Tajik court imposes stiff prison sentences on convicted 'terrorists'", RFE/RL Newline, 28 Dec. 2007.

➤ **Turkmenistan** Elections held 9 December for 2500-member legislative body, Halk Maslahaty (People's Council): 98% turnout reported; count underway. UN opened regional centre to improve dialogue and reduce conflict risks 10 December. Major new Caspian gas pipeline deal signed with Russia, Kazakhstan, 20 December.

- "Voters still waiting for change", RFE/RL, 8 Dec. 2007.

- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°60, *Turkmenistan after Niyazov*, 12 Feb. 2007.

➤ **Uzbekistan** Islam Karimov won 23 December presidential elections, despite constitutional ban on third term in office. Official figures gave Karimov 88.1% of vote, with 90.6% turnout. Security stepped up ahead of poll. Police presence increased, websites blocked, international news agencies denied accreditation to cover vote. Limited OSCE observation mission condemned absence of genuine political competition and free media. Other 3 candidates widely considered Karimov loyalists. Human rights group reported third death since November due to alleged torture in Andijon prison. Poet and government critic Yusuf Juma reported missing after protest outside office of Bukhara mayor 13 December.

- "Uzbek incumbent wins presidential poll without 'genuine choice'", RFE/RL, 24 Dec. 2007.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°67, *Uzbekistan: Stagnation and Uncertainty*, 22 Aug. 2007.

NORTH EAST ASIA

Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°73, *South Korea's Election: What to Expect from President Lee*, 21 December 2007. Although RoK's newly elected president has ideological differences with his liberal predecessor, he is unlikely to make dramatic foreign and security policy changes. Lee is expected to seek better ties with the U.S., China and Japan, but will be constrained by the fact that these relationships tend to be buffeted by uncontrollable events. Results of National Assembly elections in April could have a serious impact on his policy agenda.



➤ **North Korea** 31 December deadline to declare all nuclear programs missed: disablement of Yongbyon facilities not complete. Pyongyang had indicated slowing process until energy aid agreed in February fully disbursed; little outcry from 6-party states. DPRK leader Kim Jong-il said 12 December U.S. must normalise relations, in response to letter from President Bush requesting Pyongyang reveal all nuclear program details. Uranium traces found by U.S. on smelted aluminium tubing provided by DPRK cast doubt on Pyongyang's assurances no clandestine program. Limited improvement in North-South economic cooperation: first cargo train between Koreans in 56 years left South 11 December, but border demarcation dispute prevented agreement on creation of shared fishing zone.

- "N.Korea hints at halt in nuclear disablement", *Chosun Ilbo*, 28 Dec. 2007.
- "Uranium traces found on N. Korean tubes", *Washington Post*, 21 Dec. 2007.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°62, *After the North Korea Nuclear Breakthrough: Compliance or Confrontation?*, 30 Apr. 2007.

Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°71, *North Korea-Russia Relations: A Strained Friendship*, 4 December 2007. Russia regards a denuclearised NK as in its interests but is likely to remain relatively marginal in 6-party talks. President Putin has had difficulty asserting himself in NE Asia; NK has received neither the political support nor the economic backing it seeks. Energy is a major mutual interest, but growth in cooperation is unlikely unless the nuclear crisis is resolved.



SOUTH ASIA

➡ **Afghanistan** International and Afghan forces cleared Musa Qala, Helmand of Taliban presence 11 December. Move ended 9 months of Taliban control, established after February UK troop withdrawal; security now entrusted to "local elders". President Karzai made 26 December visit to Islamabad; pledged further security cooperation to thwart border region militants. Government expelled 2 top EU and UN officials 27 December for allegedly meeting with Taliban; UN said "misunderstanding" as officials were "gathering information" in Musa Qala. Increased incidence of suicide bombings in Kabul continued: 13 killed in 5 December attack. Defence ministry said Bonn Conference goal of 70,000 troops for Afghan National Army unrealistic: 200,000 needed. U.S., NATO began "top-to-bottom" strategic reviews of engagement in country. U.S. abandoned pursuit of aerial spraying in poppy eradication efforts.

- "Meeting the Taliban: row over talks exposes divide", *Guardian*, 27 Dec. 2007.
- "Afghan mission is reviewed as concerns rise", *New York Times*, 16 Dec. 2007.
- "What next for Musa Qala?", IWPR, 12 Dec. 2007.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°138, *Reforming Afghanistan's Police*, 30 Aug. 2007.

➡ **Bangladesh** Awami League and BNP called for release of former PMs Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, respectively, claiming necessary for free and fair elections. Anti-corruption commission began proceedings against former home minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury and former commerce minister Abdul Jalil.

- "Khaleda's nephew sued for graft", *Daily Star*, 20 Dec. 2007.
- "Bangladesh parties demand release of ex-premiers", Reuters, 18 Dec. 2007.

➡ **India (non-Kashmir)** Some 50 Maoists among 300 who fled Chhattisgarh jail in 16 December jailbreak, as attacks on police stations, other public targets in state continued. In Assam: ULFA involvement suspected in 13 December train bombing killing 5; local BJP politician shot 14 December in Rangiya ahead of 31 December local polls. In Orissa: 19 churches burned in attacks by Hindus beginning 24 December; state government imposed curfew; police shot 3 in 27 December attack on local precinct. In Uttar Pradesh: 7 federal police killed in attack on camp in Rampur, 1 January.

- "Christians fear attacks by Indian Hindus", AP, 29 Dec. 2007.
- "Maoists spring 300 prisoners from Indian jail", Reuters, 16 Dec. 2007.

➡ **Kashmir** Hardline Hizbul Mujahideen announced end to grenade attacks in public places: part of apparent attempt to garner more public support. Indian police killed 3 alleged members of that group who barricaded themselves in mosque in Palnoo, Kulgam district, 23 December.

- "Police end Kashmir mosque siege", BBC, 24 Dec. 2007.
- "Kashmir militants halt random grenade attacks", AFP, 20 Dec. 2007.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°131, *Discord in Pakistan's Northern Areas*, 2 Apr. 2007.

➡ **Nepal** Maoists rejoined government 30 December, after deal with government led to 28 December vote by interim assembly

to end monarchy. Assembly vote pre-empted decision by future constituent assembly, which must now endorse country's status as republic upon its first meeting. Deal also altered rules for configuration of assembly to be elected in April polls: of 601 members, 240 first-past-the-post, 335 proportional representation, 25 nominated by PM. Science and technology minister and 3 Madhesi deputies resigned 10 December over government's failure to address Madhesi grievances.

- "Vote to abolish Nepal's monarchy", BBC, 28 Dec. 2007.
- "Nepal minister, deputies quit over ethnic strife", Reuters, 10 Dec. 2007.

Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°72, *Nepal: Peace Postponed*, 18 December 2007.



Despite a fresh commitment to hold elections within four months, Nepal's peace process is still at serious risk a year after the CPA promised a definitive end to its civil war. 2 election postponements reflect weak implementation of that deal, as well as the difficulty of addressing its shortcomings. The government and Maoists also need to restore unity through immediate confidence-building measures and demonstrate commitment.

➡ ➡ **Pakistan** Former PM and PPP leader Benazir Bhutto assassinated leaving Rawalpindi rally, 27 December, throwing country deeper into political turmoil; some 50 killed in ensuing street violence. Cause of death disputed: government said militant Baitullah Mehsud chief suspect. Bhutto's husband, Asif Ali Zardari (appointed co-chair of PPP with Bhutto's 19-year-old son Bilawal after her death), blamed government for providing inadequate security and alleged it provoked violence in aftermath to justify delaying polls. Opposition PPP and PML(N) opposed any delay, but Election Commission announced, 2 January, polls delayed until 18 February. President Musharraf lifted state of effective martial law 15 December, after decreeing constitutional changes immunising him from challenges to October re-election and acts committed during emergency. Supreme Court permanently replaced as 14 judges gave oath same day. Many lawyers arrested in November still detained: leader Aitzaz Ahsan rearrested 1 day after goodwill release 20 December; detention extended 2 January. Suicide attack on mosque near Peshawar 21 December killed 50: former interior minister and head of PPP(S) Aftab Khan Sherpao likely target. Army said had cleared Swat valley towns of pro-Taliban militants 8 December, but 8 killed in suicide attack next day, and 9 soldiers killed in further attack in Kohat, NWFP, 17 December.

- "U.S. isn't ready to accept Pakistan's initial findings", *New York Times*, 2 Jan. 2008.
- "Bhutto spouse, divisive figure, asserts himself", *New York Times*, 1 Jan. 2008.

Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°74, *After Bhutto's Murder: A Way Forward for Pakistan*, 2 January 2008.



Unless President Musharraf steps down, tensions unleashed in the wake of Bhutto's murder will worsen, and the country could descend into civil war from which extremists would stand to gain. Particularly the U.S. must recognise that Musharraf is a serious liability, seen as complicit in Bhutto's death, and that Pakistan's moderate majority will settle for nothing less than genuine parliamentary democracy. Crisis Group agrees with the 2 January decision to postpone the parliamentary election scheduled for 8 January – but only if...

...additional steps are taken to create the conditions for free and fair elections and the restoration of democracy.

- **Sri Lanka** Reports 2 January that government formally withdrawing from ceasefire with LTTE rebels. Prominent Tamil MP and critic of government, T Maheswaran, shot dead in Colombo Hindu temple 1 January. Earlier in month, President Rajapakse vowed to wipe out terrorism before discussing political solution. Government gained new momentum after winning 14 December budget vote with backing of Sinhalese nationalist parties. Security forces rounded up thousands of Tamils following late November bomb attacks in Colombo; most released after public outcry. In continued fierce fighting, government forces won some new ground in north, claiming heavy LTTE losses. 16 killed in bus attack in Anuradhapura 6 December, widely attributed to LTTE. At least 4 killed in Colombo mine attack on military bus 2 January; LTTE denied involvement.
- "S.Lanka president may ban rebels if attacks go on", Reuters, 17 Dec. 2007.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°141, *Sri Lanka: Sinhala Nationalism and the Elusive Southern Consensus*, 7 Nov. 2007.

SOUTH EAST ASIA

- **Indonesia** Vice President Jusuf Kalla called on police to do more to stop attacks on Ahmadiyah sect and churches in West Java and Jakarta 18 December. Attacks followed November declaration by MUI ulama council identifying 10 criteria for determining deviant sects. 49 surrendered to police in Majalengka for attacks on sect there after ulama intervened.
- "Ahmadiyah attackers surrender to police", *Jakarta Post*, 31 Dec. 2007.
 - "Kalla orders crackdown on sect attacks", *Jakarta Post*, 21 Dec. 2007.
- **Myanmar/Burma** UN Human Rights Council called on junta to prosecute those involved in September crackdown abuses and asked envoy Paulo Pinheiro to return to country and issue report by March. UNSG Ban Ki-moon convened first meeting of 14-member "group of friends" 19 December. India reportedly ended arms sales and transfers.
- "U.N. human rights body backs new probe of Myanmar", Reuters, 14 Dec. 2007.
 - "Silent but defiant", *Guardian*, 14 Dec. 2007.
- **Philippines** Talks with MILF rebels broke up 16 December without agreement; group accused government of renegeing on earlier agreements on ancestral homeland issue. MILF and rival MNLF signed cooperation agreement after 14 December mediation visit by son of Muammar Gadhafi, but concrete cooperation unlikely. Army launched new offensives against Abu Sayyaf on Basilan.
- "Gov't seeks new proposal on territory for MILF peace pact", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 26 Dec. 2007.
 - "Philippine talks stall as separatists accuse Government of changing agreement", *New York Times*, 17 Dec. 2007.
 - "Philippine Muslim rebel groups agree to reconcile", Reuters, 14 Dec. 2007.
- **Thailand** People's Power Party (PPP), with links to deposed PM Thaksin, won greatest share of seats in 23 December elections, with 228 of 480. Democrat Party, linked to coup

leaders, won 166. TITV blocked from broadcasting interview with Thaksin, who said considering return to country, 26 December. Some harassment of PPP candidates reported ahead of polls; martial law remained in effect in 31 provinces. Government pushed through final draft of internal security act on eve of election. Violence in south unabated.

- "Former Premier's party wins Thai vote in rebuke to Army", *New York Times*, 24 Dec. 2007.
- "Military interference undermines upcoming elections", Human Rights Watch, 20 Dec. 2007.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°140, *Southern Thailand: The Problem with Paramilitaries*, 23 Oct. 2007.

- **Timor-Leste** Trial of former head of military police Major Alfredo Reinado, scheduled to commence 3 December, postponed to January 2008. PM Xanana Gusmao and President Ramos Horta attempted to hold dialogue 16 December with Reinado and leader of "petitioners" Gastao Salsinha – both refused to attend. Gusmao gave fugitive Reinado and supporters last chance to surrender, though consequences of non-compliance not elaborated. November UNSC mission reported 13 December; recommended extension of UNMIT mandate which expires February 2008. UNSG Ban Ki-moon visited 14 December, as did Australian PM Kevin Rudd who promised Australian troop presence until at least end 2008.
- "Anarchy lurking beneath restless peace", *Australian*, 17 Dec. 2007.
 - "Australia and U.N. pledge support for E. Timor security", Reuters, 14 Dec. 2007.

Europe

BALKANS

- **Albania** Parliament lifted FM Lulzim Basha's immunity 27 December, opening path for corruption investigation.
- "Albania's foreign minister stripped of immunity, faces charges of corruption", AP, 27 Dec. 2007.
- **Bosnia & Herzegovina** EU initialled Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) 7 December after Council of Ministers adopted action plan on police reform 3 December. World Bank announced Country Partnership Strategy providing \$400m 4-year development loan, 18 December; further funding conditional on internal reforms. New Republika Srpska (RS) president, Rajko Kuzmanovic, took office 28 December following 9 December presidential elections. Spiric Nikola re-appointed RS Chairman of Council of Ministers 28 December after 1 November resignation. Moves against war crimes suspects: former Bosnian-Serb military leader Momir Savic arrested 14 December; 14 government officials suspended.
- "Crisis and reform: a turnaround in Bosnia?", openDemocracy, 18 Dec. 2007.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°180, *Ensuring Bosnia's Future: A New International Engagement Strategy*, 15 Feb. 2007.
- **Kosovo** UN deadline for Kosovo status talks led by EU, U.S., Russia troika passed 10 December without Kosovo-

Serbia agreement. EU leaders declared talks exhausted 14 December, discussed preparations for supervised independence based on Ahtisaari plan: agreed to prepare civil mission, 1,800-strong rule of law mission and accelerate Serbian EU membership if it cooperates with war crimes tribunal. EU-U.S. leaders reaching consensus that independence to proceed under Resolution 1244, without new UNSC resolution; Russia, Serbia claim this would be illegal. Up to 3,000 Serbs rallied Mitrovica to protest Kosovo independence and planned EU mission ahead of 19 December UNSC meeting, which again failed to yield status compromise. Post-election coalition talks started after 8 December mayoral run-off vote; Hashim Thaci's winning Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) struck deal with President Sejdiu's Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), offering several ministries. Tensions rose amid power cuts, food price rises and Serbian threat of embargo; Kosovo Albanians urged NATO to secure water and electricity supplies against sabotage by Serbs in north. Serbian bank targeted in blast in Dragas, southern Kosovo, 1 January.

- "Serbian MPs issue Kosovo warning", BBC, 27 Dec. 2007.
- "Russian stance ends UN talks on Kosovo", *Financial Times*, 20 Dec. 2007.

Crisis Group Europe Report N°188, *Kosovo Countdown: A Blueprint for Transition*, 6



December 2007. With diplomatic efforts to broker a deal between Belgrade and Pristina on Kosovo's final status fully exhausted, the international community must now coordinate a political process to bring about Kosovo's conditional, or supervised, independence. The "Quint" – France, Germany, Italy, the UK and U.S. – should promptly begin implementing a plan for peaceful transition, with the end goal an independent country under the close supervision of the international community, especially on Serbian minority rights issues, in accordance with the plan of UN special envoy Marti Ahtisaari. The decision cannot wait: the longer status uncertainty lasts, the more agitated the region around Kosovo will become.

➡ **Macedonia** Parliament adopted legislation on prosecutor's office and council required for NATO membership 4 December. Skopje and Athens agreed 5 December to hold talks on name issue in January.

- "UN envoy to visit Athens and Skopje to revive talks on a name dispute", *International Herald Tribune*, 3 Dec. 2007.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°41, *Macedonia: Wobbling toward Europe*, 12 Jan. 2006.

➡ **Serbia** Further strains in governing coalition between PM Kostunica's Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) and President Tadic's Democratic Party (DS). DSS initially rejected DS decision to hold presidential elections 20 January, later relenting but accusing DS of violating coalition agreement on consensus decision-making. EU leaders meeting 14 December offered to accelerate Serbia EU membership in exchange for cooperation with war crimes tribunal; EU Kosovo mission agreed. Serbia responded in 26 December resolution threatening to withdraw from Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) process and break diplomatic ties if states recognise independent Kosovo. Belgrade also rejected EU Kosovo mission and affirmed "neutrality" policy excluding NATO membership without referendum. Outgoing ICTY Chief Prosecutor Carla Del Ponte 10 December

condemned Serbia's failure to capture fugitives Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic; Serbia's Chief Prosecutor for war crimes Vladimir Vukcevic endorsed statement claiming Mladic located in Serbia, Karadzic in region, 25 December.

- "Serbia considers retaliatory steps against West if Kosovo breaks free", AP, 26 Dec. 2007.
- "Prosecutor says Serbia blocked arrests in killings", *New York Times*, 11 Dec. 2007.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°186, *Serbia: Maintaining Peace in the Presevo Valley*, 16 Oct. 2007.

CAUCASUS

➡ **Armenia** 9 candidates nominated for 19 February 2008 presidential elections ahead of 6 December deadline, including PM Serzh Sarkisian and former president Levon Ter-Petrossian. Group backing Ter-Petrossian, Legitimate-President 2008, demanded PM Sarkisian resign to level electoral playing field 4 December. State pressure on independent media intensified: bomb exploded in offices of opposition newspaper *Chorrord Ishkhanutyun* 13 December, following reported threats from PM officials; several hundreds rallied in Gyumri late December in support of Gala TV, threatened with closure for pro-Ter-Petrossian coverage. OSCE and Armenian media group condemned attacks on independent media and pro-Sarkisian media bias.

- "State tightens media controls", IWPR, 20 Dec. 2007.

➡ **Azerbaijan** Relations with Iran strained after 15 alleged radical Islamists convicted for cooperating with Iranian secret services in plot against President Ilham Aliyev, 10 December. Tehran demanded formal apology for "baseless allegations". Journalist Ilgar Nasibov released 10 December after serving 4-day jail sentence for condemning police harassment against journalists. 119 prisoners, including several journalists, granted amnesty 29 December.

- "Faith, oil, and power threaten historic 'Brotherhood'", RFE/RL, 20 Dec. 2007.

➡ **Chechnya (Russia)** Electoral Commission claimed over 99% Chechen turnout for 2 December state Duma elections, with 99% support for Unified Russia party in Grozny. Concurrent referendum confirmed changes to Chechen constitution; measures remove requirement for Chechen head to be popularly elected. Low-level violence continued: 1 killed by roadside bomb 18 December; 1 police officer, 4 rebels killed in clashes in Grozny, 16 December. 2 Russian troops convicted 27 December for killing 3 Chechen civilians in January 2003.

- "Russia jails troops over Chechnya", BBC, 27 Dec. 2007.
- "Roadside bomb kills guard in Chechnya", AP, 28 Dec. 2007.

➡ **North Caucasus (non-Chechnya)** Series of attacks on high-profile figures in Dagestan and Ingushetia. Dagestan Minister Magomed Gazimagomedov vowed to crack down on terrorist acts after lawmaker Gazimagomed killed in Gimry, 9 December: over 50 detained during 1000 Interior Ministry troop raid on Gimry from 16 December. Supreme Court judge Kurban Pashayev shot dead in Makhachkala home, 11 December. Nazran Mayor Magomed Tsechoyev's home attacked with grenades, 9 December; investigation opened.

Police officer and militant reportedly killed in Karachai-Circassia shootout, 26 December. Official figures claim over 90% turnout in Ingushetia, Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria in state Duma elections 2 December, with overwhelming victory for Unified Russia; independent sources in Ingushetia claimed election widely boycotted.

- [“Judge fatally shot in Southern Russia”](#), AP, 11 Dec. 2007.
- [“Two regional fronts affirm support for north Caucasus emirate”](#), RFE/RL, 3 Dec. 2007.

➤ **Georgia** Caretaker government appointed inter-agency group to oversee 5 January presidential elections in apparent step to increase electoral transparency. Opposition groups alleged government inflated voter list to rig election. Top prosecutor accused opposition leader Badri Patarkatsishvili’s campaign manager of planning pre-election coup citing video evidence released 24 December; Patarkatsishvili reportedly requested official withdrawal from candidate list 4 January. Coup charges against him from November dropped; he remains abroad, citing risk of arrest and government assassination plot. Patarkatsishvili-backed broadcaster Imedi station re-opened 12 December after month-long closure for anti-government coverage but went off air 26 December. Russia-Georgia relations further strained: United Russia party leader Boris Gryzlov said Duma likely to recognise Abkhaz and South Ossetian independence in January. Acting Georgian President Nino Burdzhanadze stated move would imply declaration of war, 14 December.

- [“Mikheil Saakashvili, president of Georgia, is seen likely winning a new term”](#), AP, 30 Dec. 2007.
- [“Tycoon Patarkatsishvili withdraws from Georgia’s presidential race”](#), EurasiaNet, 27 Dec. 2007.

Crisis Group Europe Report N°189,  [Georgia: Sliding towards Authoritarianism?](#), 19 December 2007. The West must press Georgia to adopt genuine reforms and democratic openness, to stop creeping authoritarianism. President Mikhail Saakashvili inherited a failing state when he came to power with the 2003 Rose Revolution and soon came under increasing pressure from Russia. Increasing intolerance of dissent became evident when a state of emergency was declared in November. Tbilisi must now engage in a dialogue with political opponents and make its reform process transparent and accountable. The presidential election on 5 January 2008 will be only a first test of whether the worrying trend can be reversed.

➤ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** OSCE Minsk Group presented “basic principles” for Karabakh peace process to Armenian and Azerbaijani FMs 29 November. Armenia expressed confidence in reaching deal before February elections; Azerbaijan claimed principles failed to provide basis for dialogue. Armenia threatened to quit 1990 Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, accusing Azerbaijan of military build-up in violation of CFE limits, 14 December.

- [“Mediators strive to keep peace talks participants ‘on the same page’”](#), EurasiaNet, 7 Dec. 2007.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°187, [Nagorno-Karabakh: Risking War](#), 14 November 2007.

EASTERN EUROPE

➤ **Belarus** Pro-democracy protesters in Minsk reportedly

beaten by police ahead of Russian President Vladimir Putin visit, 12 December. Defamation case against independent paper “Novy chas” began 5 December. Further protests against presidential decree restricting family members employed in small businesses: 80,000 market vendors reportedly held strikes in major cities 19 December.

- [“Belarus threatens to kick U.S. ambassador out over broader sanctions”](#), AP, 30 Dec. 2007.
- [“US condemns beating of protesters in Belarus”](#), VoA, 13 Dec. 2007.

➤ **Moldova** Transdneistrian parliamentary speaker Yevgeny Shevchuk vowed 19 December to renew bid for independence if UN endorses Kosovo statehood. Tensions intensified as 2 Romanian diplomats expelled 12 December. Chisinau responded with demand Romania sign treaty recognising Moldovan independence 14 December.

- [“Moldova ejects Romanian diplomats for ‘improper behaviour’”](#), DPA, 14 Dec. 2007.
- [“Transdneistre says statehood for Kosova would spur bid for recognition”](#), RFE/RL, 20 Dec. 2007.

➤ **Ukraine** Yulia Tymoshenko elected PM by parliament 18 December, after failure to win earlier vote 11 December.

- [“Tymoshenko elected prime minister of Ukraine”](#), AP, 18 Dec. 2007.

WESTERN EUROPE/MEDITERRANEAN

➤ **Basque Country (Spain)** ETA claimed responsibility for bombing in Sestao, Northern Spain, 16 December, and separate attack on ruling party offices in Balmaseda, Basque Country, 24 December. Attacks followed ETA’s 14 December pledge to continue campaign against Spanish government. 8-year National Court trial ended with conviction of 47 for ETA links 19 December.

- [“Dozens jailed over links to Eta”](#), BBC, 19 Dec. 2007

➤ **Cyprus** In report issued 10 December, UNSG Ban Ki-moon criticised Greek and Turkish Cypriot sides for failure to implement July 2006 agreement, undermining progress toward fully-fledged negotiations. UNSC Resolution 1789 extended UNFICYP mandate to 15 June 2008.

- [“Secretary-General laments lack of progress on implementing Cyprus agreement”](#), UN News, 10 Dec. 2007.

➤ **Turkey** Military operations against Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in south east Turkey and northern Iraq intensified: 13 PKK militants, 1 soldier killed in south east clashes 4-5 December; Turkish military claim hundreds of rebels killed in air strikes against PKK bases in northern Iraq 16, 22 and 26 December. 300 Turkish troops briefly crossed Iraqi border 16-17 December. Ankara promised to continue attacks 28 December. Iraqi Kurds said bombs hit 8 villages, killing at least 2 civilians. U.S. government stated Ankara warned of attacks; confirmed U.S. intelligence provided to assist in hunt for “common enemy”. Israeli defense forces reportedly planning to provide additional military assistance, including 10 aircraft, over coming weeks. EU’s 17 December statement urged Turkish restraint and called for dialogue with Iraq. Authorities arrested Kurdish nationalist Democratic Society Party (DTP) head Nurettin Demirtas 18 December

for avoiding military service; supporters claimed move political. Some 19 detained for links with al-Qaeda after police operations across 4 cities late December.

- [“Turkey again hits Kurdish hide-outs in Iraq”](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 26 Dec. 2007.
- [“For Turkey and U.S., delicate cooperation issue in combating Kurds”](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 20 Dec. 2007.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°184, *Turkey and Europe: The Way Ahead*, 17 Aug. 2007.

Latin America / Caribbean

- ⇒ **Bolivia** Political crisis continued: Constituent Assembly approved new draft constitution 8-9 December; opposition boycotted vote, claimed document invalid. 4 eastern provinces launched bid for autonomy 15 December; extra police sent to Santa Cruz to protect public buildings. President Morales called for dialogue, facilitated by EU ambassadors, but said would not allow separation of Bolivia. Dynamite attack on headquarters of largest Bolivian trade union (COB) 24 December. Venezuelan military plane suspected of carrying arms attacked attempting landing in Amazon region 6 December. Petrobras announced \$1bn gas investment.
- [“Bolivian states inch closer to self-rule as Morales urges talks”](#), AFP, 17 Dec. 2007.
 - [“Bolivians approve draft charter”](#), BBC, 9 Dec. 2007.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Latin America Report N°23, *Bolivia’s New Constitution: Avoiding Violent Confrontation*, 31 Aug. 2007.

- ⇒ **Colombia** Venezuela President Chavez helped broker deal for release of 3 hostages held by FARC. But Venezuelan rescue operation collapsed when FARC claimed 31 December security conditions not met; exact reasons unclear. FARC had rejected earlier proposal by President Uribe for 30-day “zone of encounter” to facilitate negotiations towards broader hostage swap. Several countries offered assistance. French President Sarkozy appealed directly to FARC head Manuel Marulanda 6 December to release hostages; Paris offered 19 December to accept FARC rebels freed in any exchange. OAS said paramilitary threat remains despite demobilisation process; Colombian security forces arrested alleged leader of “Los Nevados” New Illegal Armed Group (NIAG) John Mario Osorio 17 December. Uribe-coalition Congressman jailed for paramilitary links 19 December.
- [“Colombia hostage deal fiasco bad news for captives”](#), Reuters, 1 Jan. 2008.
 - [“Colombia OKs Venezuelan role in hostage release”](#), *LA Times*, 27 Dec. 2007.
 - [“Colombian right-wing ‘paras’ still a threat – OAS”](#), Reuters, 12 Dec. 2007.

- ⇒ **Ecuador** 10,000-strong protest march of mayors and municipal employees stopped by police 27 December before reaching city of Manta, seat of Constituent Assembly (CA). President Correa’s promises not to reduce tax income for municipalities calmed situation.
- [“Ecuador assembly overwhelmingly approves tax reform bill”](#), AP, 30 Dec. 2007.

- ⇒ **Haiti** President René Préal named new national electoral council 11 December, paving way for senate election. UN peacekeepers warned child kidnappings exceeding high rate of 2006.
- [“Haiti names new electoral council, clearing way to reschedule Senate election”](#), AP, 12 Dec. 2007.
 - [“Child kidnappings reported across Haiti, at least 14 abducted in recent weeks”](#), AP, 7 Dec. 2007.

Crisis Group Latin America/Caribbean Report N°24, *Peacebuilding in Haiti: Including Haitians from Abroad*, 14 December 2007. To escape “fragile state” status and consolidate stability, the government needs to implement a long-term diaspora policy with the support of the international community. A sustained initiative to include 3 million Haitians living abroad could foster development and investment, strengthen state institutions and modernise the country’s political system.

- ⇒ **Venezuela** Voters rejected proposed constitutional changes in 2 December referendum, 51% to 49%. President Chávez accepted result, said would leave office at 2013 end of term, but vowed to continue reforms. Diplomatic spat with Bogotá continued as Chávez threatened to reduce trade and FARC hostage swap failed (see Colombia).
- [“El narcosantuario de las FARC”](#), *El Pais*, 16 Dec. 2007.
 - [“Chavez ‘will step down in 2013’”](#), BBC, 7 Dec. 2007.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Latin America Report N°19, *Venezuela: Hugo Chávez’s Revolution*, 22 Feb. 2007.

Middle East / North Africa

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

- ⇒ **Israel/Occupied Territories** Peace efforts slowed but continuing since November Annapolis summit – violence in Gaza up. 11 December IDF launched deepest incursion since June Hamas takeover; cut main artery linking southern Gaza to centre and north. Rocket barrage on Israeli communities near border intensified. Israeli airstrikes and raids into Gaza throughout month killed dozens including Islamic Jihad leaders Majed Harazin and Mohammed Abdullah. Hamas renewed ceasefire offer mid-month; publicly rejected by Israel. Fighting between Fatah and Hamas supporters broke out in Gaza 31 December, killing at least 8. Israel and Egypt slightly eased ban on movement of goods and people, including *hajj* pilgrims, out of Gaza; increased fuel supplies. New East Jerusalem settlement initiatives announced early month; condemned by U.S. and EU. Olmert and Abbas met 27 December: Palestinian negotiator said parties agreed not to prejudice final settlement issues. Donors in Paris 17 December pledged over \$7bn over three years to Abbas government – portion previously pledged. Over 150,000 in Gaza 15 December to mark 20th anniversary of Hamas founding; government banned displays in West Bank.
- [“Rival Palestinian factions clash”](#), AP, 1 January 2008.
 - [“Olmert, Abbas try to revive talks”](#), BBC, 28 Dec. 2007.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°22, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Annapolis and After*, 20 Nov. 2007.

Crisis Group Middle East Report N°71, **International Crisis Group** WORKING TO PREVENT CONFLICT WORLDWIDE
Inside Gaza: The Challenge of Clans and Families, 20 December 2007. As Hamas seeks to consolidate its rule and restore stability to Gaza, it must deal with powerful clans and families with which it has been at loggerheads since it seized power in June. Effective governance and a resolution of the crisis in Gaza require political reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas and territorial unity with the West Bank, as well as a ceasefire with Israel. However Hamas could help preserve order and advance stability by ceasing brutal measures, broadening participation and reaching an arrangement with Gaza's families.

- ↙ **Lebanon** Political crisis deepened as country faced ninth assassination in 3 years and presidency remained vacant. Pro-Western ruling bloc and pro-Syrian opposition agreed army chief Michel Suleiman consensus presidential candidate. But sides locked over required constitutional amendment and opposition demand to agree future government. Parliamentary vote on president repeatedly postponed, now due 12 January, despite intensive French, U.S., diplomacy (see Syria). Car bomb 12 December killed army head of operations General Francois Hajj – likely successor to Suleiman and first military figure in string of assassinations since former PM Rafiq Hariri killed in 2005.
- [“Lebanon president vote postponed to January 12”](#), Reuters, 28 Dec. 2007.
 - [“Lebanon's new low as leader talks fail”](#), *Guardian*, 23 Dec. 2007.
 - [“Lebanon mourns slain army chief”](#), BBC, 14 Dec. 2007.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°69, *Hizbollah and the Lebanese Crisis*, 10 Oct. 2007.

- ↙ **Syria** Protracted Lebanese crisis (see Lebanon) led French President Sarkozy and U.S. President Bush to express extreme frustration with Damascus. France vowed 30 December to halt contact until it received proof Syria not obstructing. Criticism followed apparent opening in U.S.-Syria relations with Syrian participation in November Annapolis meeting. Syrian state-run media called 31 December for U.S. to start direct dialogue with Damascus following visit of U.S. Senator Arlen Specter. President Assad said 20 December Damascus received letter in 2001 purportedly from Pakistani scientist Khan offering nuclear technology; did not respond. Syrian authorities arrested at least 7 activists in month following opposition group meeting; condemned by U.S., rights groups. 1,000-strong UN peacekeeping force along Israeli-Syrian border extended to June 2008.
- Comment by Robert Malley and Peter Harling (Crisis Group), [“France-Syrie, l'heure de vérité”](#), *Le Monde*, 21 Dec. 2007.
 - [“France ends contact with Syria over Lebanese presidential election”](#), AP, 31 Dec. 2007.
 - [“Syrian leader says his country was approached by head of nuclear black market”](#), AP, 20 Dec. 2007.

GULF

- ↙ **Bahrain** Protestor died following 17 December rally commemorating 1990s Shiite-led uprising against minority Sunni rule. Following next-day funeral, protestors clashed with security forces in outskirts of Manama: 40 arrested on charges including attempted murder, illegal assembly and rioting. Al-Wefaq, Shiite Islamist-led group in parliament,

demanded inquiry into death and detentions. 3-4 December Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) meeting in Qatar criticised Tehran's attitude towards GCC states, and avoidance of issue of Abu Musa and Tunbs islands claimed by UAE.

- [“Bahrain charges dozens with attempted murder, rioting after Shiite protests”](#), AP, 27 Dec. 2007.
- [“Gulf countries challenge US on Iran, Israel, at Bahrain security conference”](#), AP, 9 Dec. 2007.

- ↙ **Iran** U.S. National Intelligence Council's declassified Intelligence Estimate on Iran's nuclear activities stated with “moderate confidence” Tehran had not restarted nuclear weapons program, has no nuclear weapon and is less determined to develop them than previously thought. U.S. President Bush said Iran not to be trusted and 16 December Russian delivery of nuclear fuel meant no need for domestic enrichment program. Tehran announced Bushehr plant to open summer 2008. EU foreign policy chief Solana stated EU intention to continue dual-track approach: inducements to halt uranium enrichment but support for UN sanctions. Security forces killed 4 leaders of Jundollah Sunni rebel group blamed for murder of 12 in roadside attack March 2006 in south east Sistan-Baluchistan province, 20 December.
- [“Iran gives early date for reactor”](#), BBC, 31 Dec. 2007.
 - [“Friendlier hands across the Gulf”](#), *Economist*, 19 Dec. 2007.
 - Comment by Gareth Evans (Crisis Group), [“The right nuclear red line”](#), *Washington Post*, 5 Dec. 2007.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°51, *Iran: Is There a Way Out of the Nuclear Impasse?*, 23 Feb. 2006.

- ↙ **Iraq** Quarterly report from U.S. Pentagon to Congress indicated significant security improvement from September to November 2007, but “disappointing lack of progress” on key legislation and continued dependence on coalition forces. U.S. Sec. State Condoleezza Rice made surprise visit 18 December. Visit coincided with Turkish military incursion into northern Iraq against PKK militants (see Turkey), and other violence around Iraq that killed 30. UK handed over security in Basra to Iraqi forces 16 December. Diyala province saw spike in violence early in month with 60 killed in 5 separate attacks. Violence elsewhere included car bombs in Amara city, Maysan province, 12 December and suicide attacks in Baiji and Baghdad. Iraqi leaders, including parliament of Kurdish region, agreed to 6-month delay in implementing article 140 of constitution, including controversial referendum on status of Kirkuk and other “disputed areas”. UN Security Council extended mandate of Multinational Force until end of 2008, 18 December.
- [“Despite success, Iraq's future uncertain”](#), AP, 30 Dec. 2007.
 - [“Raids across the border”](#), *Economist*, 19 Dec. 2007.
 - [“UK has left behind murder and chaos, says Basra police chief”](#), *Guardian*, 17 Dec. 2007.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°70, *Shiite Politics in Iraq: The Role of the Supreme Council*, 15 Nov. 2007.

- ↙ **Saudi Arabia** Authorities announced further 28 arrests of suspects in plot to attack *hajj* attendees. Rockets, reportedly intended by some arrested late November for use against largest oil facility, still missing.
- [“Ministry: 28 arrested in Saudi Arabia”](#), AP, 23 Dec. 2007.

NORTH AFRICA



Algeria UN and government buildings in Algiers targeted by 2 suicide bombers 11 December; up to 60 killed, including 17 UN staff. Bombers identified as members of al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb. Further violence included 2 soldiers killed by roadside bomb linked to same group 26 December, 7 suspected militants killed by army near Tebessa 30 December and suicide car bomb killed 3 police in Naciria, east of Algiers, 2 January.

- "Suicide car bomb kills at least four in Algeria", AP, 2 Jan. 2007.
- "After deadly assault, Algeria offers details on attackers", *International Herald Tribune*, 12 Dec. 2007.



Egypt Government arrested over 100 Muslim Brotherhood members in month, in apparent warning against participation in spring 2008 elections. 39 Brotherhood members, including Deputy General Guide Khairat al-Shater, remain on trial for belonging to "banned organisation" and running companies to raise funds. Rights group alleged torture used during trial of 22 reported "Victorious Sect" members arrested in April 2006 and accused of plotting terrorist attack. Security forces raided Bedouin homes in Sinai; 5 arrested for allegedly inciting 1 January anti-government protests. Muslim-Coptic Christian unrest in south: at least 7 arrested in riots 12-16 December after reports of attacks on Muslim women.

- "Egypt arrests 35 members and sympathizers of opposition Muslim Brotherhood", AP, 30 Dec 2007.
- "Muslims attack Christian shops in Egypt amid sectarian tensions", AP, 16 Dec. 2007.



- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°61, *Egypt's Sinai Question*, 30 Jan. 2007.



Mauritania Government claimed al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb responsible for murder of 4 French tourists south east of Nouakchott 25 December; Senegalese forces later arrested 3 suspects. 3 soldiers manning military checkpoint in north killed by unidentified gunmen, 27 December.

- "Mauritania arrests 3 for helping alleged killers of 4 French tourists", AP, 30 Dec. 2007.
- "Mauritania probes 'al-Qaeda link'", BBC, 25 Dec. 2007.



Morocco Terrorism court sentenced 7 to 1-4 years for links to May 2003 Casablanca attacks 28 December. 7 others sentenced for receiving training from Algeria's Groupe Salafiste pour la predication et le combat (GSPC), now core of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

- "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb", Council on Foreign Relations, 11 Dec. 2007.



Western Sahara Third round of talks between Polisario Front and Morocco set for 7-9 January in Manhasset, New York. December Polisario congress, held once every 3 years, concluded Morocco blocking peace plans and attacking civilians; warned war would resume if peace talks fail and called on armed wing to prepare.

- "Polisario says risk of war if W.Sahara talks fail", Reuters, 21 Dec. 2007.

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Advocacy Offices

Brussels	brussels@crisisgroup.org +32 2 502 9038
Washington	washington@crisisgroup.org +1 202 785 1601
New York	newyork@crisisgroup.org +1 212 813 0820
Moscow	moscow@crisisgroup.org +7 095 251 4485
London	london@crisisgroup.org +44 207 831 1436

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