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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 some 135 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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June 2008 Watchlist



Conflict Risk Alerts

Zimbabwe



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CENTRAL AFRICA

➡ **Burundi** PALIPEHUTU-FNL leaders returned from Tanzania 16 May, leader Rwasa 30 May, following regional and UN pressure. Talks on implementing 2006 peace agreement resumed 17 May. Ceasefire declaration signed 26 May, but 2 rebels killed 28 May. Army-FNL clashes 5-9 May killed 50 rebels following ambush near capital, displaced some 20,000. Fighting continued despite talks, mid-May UN Peacebuilding Commission visit. Major army offensive 22 May; rebels accused of 22-24 May grenade attacks in Bujumbura, surrounding area: 7 killed, some 20 wounded – FNL denied. Unidentified gunmen killed employee of state-owned Radio Television Nationale du Burundi (RTNB); RTNB cameraman shot in separate incident 12 May.

- [“Burundi govt and rebels sign ceasefire deal”](#), AFP, 26 May 2008.
- [“Burundi risks new war as peace talks falter”](#), AFP, 20 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°131, [Burundi: Finalising Peace with the FNL](#), 28 Aug. 2007.

➡ **Central African Republic** Govt peace deal with APRD, last rebel group to join peace process, signed Libreville 9 May ahead of 8 June all-inclusive talks: secured ceasefire, APRD amnesty, prisoner release but excluded key provisions on demobilisation. DRC opposition leader Bemba arrested in Belgium on ICC warrant 24 May for 2002-3 atrocities during military support for then president Patassé. UN 23 May reported upsurge in banditry adding to devastating humanitarian situation. UNSR Coomaraswamy 26 May began 6-day mission to assess child soldier recruitment in CAR, Chad.

- [“CAR citizens seek aid against mass kidnappings”](#), *Mail & Guardian*, 26 May 2008.
- [“Cautious welcome for rebel ceasefire”](#), IRIN, 14 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°136, [Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State](#), 13 Dec. 2007.

➡ **Democratic Republic of Congo** President Kabila rival and ex-VP Bemba arrested in Belgium 24 May on ICC warrant for war crimes in CAR 2002-3; opposition MLC alleged govt plot, while thousands protested in party stronghold Mbandaka. DRC-Uganda tensions eased as leaders meeting Dar-es-Salaam 10-11 May agreed to re-mark border to resolve oil reserve dispute; but Kampala 19 May confirmed arrest of 14 DRC soldiers for illegally crossing. 3 sentenced to death in trial of 22 BDK sect members accused of separatist plots ahead of March police crackdown that killed at least 100. Aid groups 8 May said 40,000 displaced in North Kivu clashes recent weeks, late month reported steep rise in spontaneous IDP camps; mass graves uncovered in province 26 May dating to 1990s. Infrastructure Minister Pierre Lumbi 9 May announced \$9b Chinese loan, infrastructure investment package agreed in exchange for mining rights; opposition condemned. UNSC 1 June began 9-day Africa trip to promote peace in 5 key conflict zones, including east DRC.

- [“Bemba arrest removes rival to Congo president”](#), Reuters, 25 May 2008.

- [“Congo court sentences three separatists to death”](#), Reuters, 23 May 2008.
- [“After two key deals, what progress towards peace in North Kivu?”](#), IRIN, 14 May 2008.

Crisis Group Africa Report N°140, [Congo: Four Priorities for Sustainable Peace in Ituri](#), 13 May 2008. Congo's reconstruction hinges on the Ituri district, where a new integrated peacebuilding strategy is required, involving national and provincial institutions, actively supported by the UN Mission in Congo and donors. Land-related tensions that helped spark the conflict have not been eased and constantly threaten to lead to new inter-ethnic confrontations. The peace process also critically requires a framework for transparent treatment of Ituri's resources. Absent an integrated approach, the return of chaos is likely.



➡ **Rwanda** ICTR started ex-minister Callixte Kalimanzira's trial 5 May, first new trial since June 2007. Former Muganza commune officials began defence 20 May. ICTR refused to transfer ex-interhamwe leader Munyakazi to Rwandan courts as part of process to speed trials, questioning courts' partiality; witness protection under scrutiny after 6 May witness disappearance from Arusha safehouse. Kenyan govt 6 May froze assets of fugitive Felicien Kabuga, accused of funding Hutu militias during genocide. Col Faustin Sebuhura – wanted by ICTR, hiding with FDLR in eastern DRC – returned 21 May to Rwanda due to illness.

- [“Kenya freezes assets of Rwanda genocide suspect”](#), Reuters, 6 May 2008.

➡ **Uganda** No progress on LRA peace deal. Leader Joseph Kony no-show at 10 May meeting on Congo-Sudan border with northern Ugandan elders, chief mediator Riek Machar; new LRA negotiator James Obita had suggested Kony might sign peace deal after Apr refusal. Impatience grew: Govt of Southern Sudan President Salva Kiir stated 22 May LRA must sign or will be forced to leave Sudan; ICC called for suspension of aid to LRA. Ugandan judiciary 23 May announced creation of new war crimes division of High Court. Rights group estimates at least 100 children abducted by LRA since Feb. DRC, Ugandan presidents agreed 11 May new border demarcation over oil-rich Lake Albert. Constitutional Court late month annulled law requiring police to approve public meetings, protests.

- [“Peace deal dissolves”](#), IWPR, 19 May 2008.
- [“Fresh questions as Kony remains elusive”](#), IRIN, 15 May 2008.
- 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** Rebel leader Koulamallah 13 May called on France to lead mediation with govt amid continued insecurity in east. New PM Abbas earlier retracted Apr offer to negotiate after rebels rebuffed. Tensions with Sudan mounted over N'djamena's alleged backing of 10-11 May Darfur rebel attack on Khartoum: Chad denied, shut border after Sudan cut ties, issued provocative 14 May call on UNAMID to secure Darfur. New AU Chief Jean Ping “confident” tensions would ease after separate talks in capitals mid-month, despite reported Chadian troop build-up along border. Relief effort in east straining amid further insecurity: UN reduced activities 16 May after 2 security staff killed, vehicles hijacked mid-month; some aid groups

halted operations 2-3 May in protest at 1 May murder of French worker near EUFOR base. Force denounced arrest of 4 staff for "unauthorized travel" as breach of status agreement. Reports 27 May Chadian army mobilising in east, opposition forces across border in Darfur. UNSC scheduled to meet President Deby, urge reduction in Chad-Sudan tensions during 9-day Africa mission starting 1 June.

- "Aid groups face dilemma over EU protection", IRIN, 16 May 2008.
- "A bloody tit-for-tat", *Economist*, 15 May 2008.

➡ **Ethiopia (internal)** Ruling EPRDF 19 May won almost all local council, parliamentary seats after most opposition boycotted Apr poll. Bomb exploded 20 May near foreign ministry killing 6: police blamed Eritrean-backed rebel group OLF; suspects reportedly arrested 26 May. Further bombings 28 May in Oromo and Somali regions killed 6. Police 24 May claimed over 20 killed in border clashes between Oromia and Benishangule states. Govt 24 May denied UN weapons sanctions committee accusations Ethiopian arming Somali rebels. Supreme Court 26 May sentenced in absentia ex-President Mengistu Haile Mariam to death.

- "Ethiopia makes arrests over blast: report", AFP, 26 May 2008.
- "Clean sweep for Ethiopian party", BBC, 19 May 2008.

➡ **Ethiopia/Eritrea** UNSC 30 Apr criticised Eritrea for causing temporary UNMEE withdrawal after govt cut fuel supplies; Asmara 1 May called for permanent UNMEE disbandment, 13 May said Apr UNSG warning withdrawal could prompt war "gimmick" to cover UN failings. In separate development, Djibouti 5 May accused Eritrea of border violations and military build-up, requesting UN action. Up to 29 reportedly killed in flash floods in eastern city of Jijiga 30-31 May.

- "A conflict's buffer zone: rocks, and inches", *New York Times*, 25 May 2008.
- "Eritrea says U.N. scaremongering on war risk", Reuters, 13 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°48, *Ethiopia and Eritrea: Stopping the Slide to War*, 5 Nov. 2007.

➡ **Kenya** First formal cabinet meeting 15 May after 4-week delay due to divisions between power-sharing PNU and ODM. Fragile coalition further threatened as PNU lawmakers rejected ODM calls for amnesty for those arrested in post-election violence; cabinet decided against; President Kibaki announced members of commission of inquiry 22 May. ODM Rift Valley MPs angry at party leadership over decision. Resettlement of thousands displaced by violence began 5 May, but many unwilling to return, fearing economic, physical insecurity; in Molo (Rift Valley) 2 returnees killed 17 May. After swearing in as PM 7 May, Raila bolstered calls for talks with outlawed Mungiki sect. Police reported killing Mt Elgon Sabaot Land Defence Force commander, 12 others in 16 May ambush; 15 May National Commission on Human Rights report accused both army, militia of torture in area. 4 arrested at hundreds-strong "illegal" rally against high food prices 31 May. Unidentified gunmen killed WFP aid worker 7 May in Lokichoggio, relief hub for Southern Sudan.

- "Cabinet – no amnesty", *Nation*, 23 May 2008.
- "Scarred by strife after election, Kenya begins to heal", *International Herald Tribune*, 6 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°137, *Kenya in Crisis*, 21 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Somalia** UN-backed talks between Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and Asmara-based opposition continued 1 June in Djibouti, after indirect talks 12-16 May; SRSG Ould-Abdullah reported progress initial round. Security situation continued to worsen: suspected U.S. airstrikes on south 25 May; fighting, bombings throughout month in, around Mogadishu. 7-10 May clashes killed some 40; over 20 dead following 26-27 May attacks targeting AU forces; 7 civilians killed 26 May. In south, Islamists recaptured Jilib, other towns mid-month; inter-clan fighting killed 23, displaced thousands. Militants sought revenge for al-Shabaab commander death in 1 May U.S. airstrike, targeted foreigners: 2 aid workers kidnapped 21 May, 2 killed on 7, 17 May. Unidentified militia bombed Canada-based oil exploration site in Puntland's Bossaso port 25 May. UN 22 May report claimed neighbouring countries, some AU forces providing arms; Kampala, Addis rejected. UNSC resolution 15 May requested UNSG report on UN strategy, contingency planning for peacekeeping force; suggested possible sanctions for political spoilers, arms embargo violators. UNSC to meet TFG, opposition, civil society leaders in Djibouti 2 June, part of 9-day Africa mission starting 1 June. Mogadishu airport reportedly mortared 1 June ahead of President Yusuf's flight to Djibouti. Thousands protested high food prices in Mogadishu 5-6 May; estimated 3.5m will need food aid by end year.

- "Somalia peace talks to re-start on Saturday", Reuters, 28 May 2008.
- "Our mission is liberation, says Somali Islamist leader", *Guardian*, 22 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°45, *Somalia: The Tough Part Is Ahead*, 26 Jan. 2007.

➡ **Somaliland (Somalia)** Political deadlock over President Dahir Riyale's 1-year term extension ended 20 May with govt-opposition agreement to hold local elections 15 Dec, presidential elections 15 Mar 2009.

- "Elections Timetable Consensus Reached in Somaliland", *Garowe Online*, 20 May 2008.

➡ **Sudan** 2 major assaults further strained North-South relations and fragile situation in Darfur. Heavy fighting began 14 May in oil-rich Abyei between Sudanese govt (GoS) and southern Sudan troops (SPLA): at least 21 killed, up to 100,000 displaced. SPLA/M withdrew from U.S. talks, claimed emboldening north; reportedly dismissed 30 May GoS proposal for North-South joint-administration of Abyei as PR stunt; party convention 15 May re-elected leader Salva Kiir. 23 killed – including South Sudan defence minister, presidential adviser – in 2 May plane crash near Rumbek; Kiir cited engine failure. Darfur rebel group JEM attacked Khartoum 10-11 May in first attempt on capital for 30 years; 200 reportedly killed. JEM promised fresh attacks, claiming allies in security forces and universities. GoS crackdown followed: 300 arrested in 12 May Khartoum sweep – including opposition leader Al-Turabi, later released; diplomatic ties with Chad cut 11 May over JEM links. Smaller rebel group SLM-Unity 26 May joined JEM call for further attacks. GoS airstrikes on civilian targets in northern Darfur killing at least 13 reported 4 May; Khartoum blocking aid. UNAMID troops ambushed, disarmed by 60 unidentified gunmen West Darfur 21 May; Ugandan peacekeeper found shot dead in El-Fasher 28 May. UNSC due to meet President Bashir and Kiir to urge adherence to 2005 peace deal as part of 9-day mission to key Africa conflict zones, starting 1 June.

- Comment by David Mozersky (Crisis Group), "Abyei conflict threatens to escalate into full-scale war", *allAfrica.com*, 29 May 2008.

- [“New civil war feared in Sudan as town empties”](#), *Washington Post*, 26 May 2008.
- [“Sudan’s Islamist rebels”](#), *New Statesman*, 20 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°47, [Sudan: Breaking the Abyei Deadlock](#), 12 Oct. 2007.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

➡ **Comoros Islands** Govt 20 May approved 5 presidential candidates for 15 June elections on former rebel-held Anjouan island. AU 2 May extended Anjouan Election and Security Mission (MAES) to 31 October. France rejected ex-rebel leader Bacar’s asylum plea but refused extradition to Comoros from French Reunion, angering Moroni. French Territories Minister pledged development funding and Comoran FM Djaffer “peaceful relations” at 15-16 May talks.

- [“African Union extends Comoros mission for six months”](#), AFP, 3 May 2008.
- [“Rebel leader in limbo”](#), IRIN, 15 May 2008.

➡ **South Africa** Brutal xenophobic violence against immigrants, mostly from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, erupted Alexandra township 11 May. Attacks spread in, around Johannesburg, Cape Town – eventually 7 of 9 SA provinces. Over 60 reported killed; some burnt alive. Number of displaced uncertain: reports of 70,000 fleeing, 33,000 to neighbouring states. Mozambique, Malawi evacuated citizens; Harare said sent buses to repatriate some 1,000. President Mbeki 18 May proposed inquiry into attacks; troops deployed 22 May to quell unrest – first such deployment since end apartheid. ANC officials, others called for Mbeki to step down. Govt began 31 May set up of temporary shelters, amid rising unrest in make-shift camps; special courts to prosecute attackers – over 1,300 reportedly arrested.

- [“Mbeki’s rule in limbo as SAfrica townships burn”](#), Reuters, 27 May 2008.
- [“South Africans take out rage on immigrants”](#), *New York Times*, 20 May 2008.

➡ **Zimbabwe** After 5-week delay, electoral commission 2 May announced narrow victory for opposition MDC leader Tsvangirai over incumbent Mugabe in 29 March presidential election (47.9%; 43.7%), necessitating run-off. 27 June poll date finally set 16 May; Tsvangirai resolved to contest after shifting positions, returned to country 24 May – MDC earlier alleged assassination risk. Reports of ZANU-PF-MDC talks in Johannesburg mid-month prompted speculation over possible power-sharing deal; Tsvangirai 30 May urged “peaceful” ZANU-PF to negotiate – dismissed by justice minister. Organised state violence, repression surged: MDC faction leader Mutambara arrested 1 June over published attack on Mugabe; countrywide beatings, murders by ZANU-PF, security services reported throughout month, displacing thousands; army 7 May acknowledged torture camps established in rural areas but denied responsibility; MDC claimed some 50 members killed. Chief-of-staff Chedondo 31 May called for soldiers to vote for Mugabe or resign. Govt again rejected Western election observers 12 May, reportedly planning to deploy ZANU-PF forces at polling stations in police garb. U.S. Amb. McGee threatened with expulsion 25 May after publicly denouncing violence. South African President Mbeki – leading regional mediation effort – again under fire for failure to condemn Mugabe gov’t after 9 May state visit.

- [“Tsvangirai returns to Zimbabwe for Mugabe runoff”](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 25 May 2008.
- [“Opposition leader returns to Zimbabwe”](#), *Washington Post*,

25 May 2008.

- [“Mugabe accuses opponents of violence, MPs arrested”](#), Reuters, 21 May 2008.
- [“Zimbabwe opposition calls for Mbeki to step down as mediator”](#), AP, 9 May 2008.

Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°51, [Negotiating Zimbabwe’s Transition](#), 21 May



2008. Violence in Zimbabwe is likely to escalate risking a military coup or martial law unless African and other international leaders help negotiate a government of national unity led by Morgan Tsvangirai. A credible second-round presidential vote planned for 27 June seems unlikely given the violence. While all parties should aim for an election in favourable conditions, a negotiated solution between ZANU-PF and Tsvangirai’s Movement for Democratic Change should be prioritised, since it is far likelier to resolve the crisis peacefully.

WEST AFRICA

➡ **Côte d’Ivoire** Former rebel Forces Nouvelles (FN) renewed faltering disarmament effort 2 May with 5-month program ahead of 30 Nov elections. Mobile courts issuing identity documents finished work 15 May.

- [“Ivorian ex-rebels begin to disarm”](#), BBC, 3 May 2008.
- [“Ivory Coast urged to tackle youth violence before poll”](#), Reuters, 21 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°139, [Côte d’Ivoire: Ensuring Credible Elections](#), 22 Apr. 2008.

➡ **Guinea** President Conté 20 May sacked Feb 2007 peace deal PM Kouyaté, after months-long efforts to marginalise rival: prompted protests in Conakry and Kouroussa. Conté ally ex-minister Souaré appointed PM. Military wage protests started 26 May, spread to 3 major camps; 2 reported killed, 101 injured. Conté reportedly in hiding, though tensions eased 31 May following payments to soldiers ahead of meeting 1 June.

- [“Guinea mutineers, military to discuss final deal”](#), Reuters, 1 June 2008.
- [“New threat to stability with dismissal of PM”](#), IRIN, 21 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°49, [Guinea: Change on Hold](#), 8 Nov. 2007.

➡ **Guinea-Bissau** Law extending MP terms to 16 Nov elections enacted 19 May, quelling rumours of President Vieira plans to close parliament, set up interim gov’t.

- [“Guinea Bissau leader enacts controversial law extending MPs’ term”](#), APA, 19 May 2008.

➡ **Liberia** Ex-VP Moses Blah testified against ex-President Charles Taylor – on trial for role in Sierra Leone conflict – at SL special court despite death threats; gave evidence of troop atrocities and Libyan support. Prosecutor said Taylor held billions in foreign accounts. General Julu and retd Colonel Dorbor on trial for alleged coup plot against Sirleaf gov’t acquitted 2 May.

- [“Taylor ‘ignored rebel protests’”](#), BBC, 15 May 2008.
- [“Witness: Gadhafi helped Taylor take over Liberia”](#), AP, 14 May 2008.

➡ **Niger** Tuareg-led Niger Justice Movement 14 May kidnapped MP and national human rights commission VP Ahalawey plus nephew in Tanout, north eastern Zinder; released 24 May. UN human rights chief Louise Arbour earlier called for immediate release.

- [“Niger Tuareg rebels free abducted rights official”](#), Reuters, 25 May 2008.

➡ **Nigeria** Court 2 May ordered treason suspect and MEND faction leader Okah to be tried in secret; group promised reprisals. Exxon strike ended 1 May, but further Niger Delta militancy slashed oil production already hit hard by Apr violence: Bayelsa state Shell facility attacked, key infrastructure destroyed 2 May; Chevron oil vessel hijacked 13 May; MEND claimed major 26 May assault on Rivers state Shell pipeline forced closure, 11 soldiers reportedly killed; offices of ruling NDP in Bayelsa state bombed 8 May. President Yar’Adua promised off-delayed Niger Delta summit within 8 weeks; region’s leaders sceptical, while MEND threatened boycott. Ex-President Obasanjo early May denied corruption under his govt to blame for current power crisis, after parliamentary panel revealed vast spending bypassing power. Govt demanded Shell and Exxon pay \$2b in back taxes, signed \$3.1b deal 26 May for Shell to cover funding gaps in joint ventures. 100 killed mid-month by accidental oil pipeline explosion, Lagos state. Review in wake of Apr 2007 flawed elections stalled amid lack of confidence, as politicians failed to attend 14, 19 May hearings.

- [“Nigerian militants warn of attacks”](#), UPI, 28 May 2008.
- [“Pipeline blown up in Niger Delta”](#), BBC, 26 May 2008.
- [“Despite price, future of Nigeria oil sector cloudy”](#), *Mail & Guardian*, 8 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°135, *Nigeria: Ending Unrest in the Niger Delta*, 5 Dec. 2007.

➡ **Mali** Several Tuareg rebel (ATNMC) attacks dealt critical blow to Apr ceasefire: army claimed 9 rebels, 1 soldier killed in ATNMC assault on military convoy en route to Tessalit 3 May; 1 soldier killed in 6 May twin attacks on army camps near Bamako; major clashes at north east army base 21 May killed 15 soldiers, 17 rebels – UNSG Ban Ki-moon said situation urgent. Burkina Faso reported 29 May over 900 refugees since Apr.

- [“UN Secretary-General warns of deteriorating situation”](#), IRIN, 23 May 2008.
- [“Tuareg rebels in deadly Mali raid”](#), BBC, 22 May 2008.

➡ **Senegal** 2 attacks Casamance, reportedly by separatist MFDC: newly-laid landmine killed 1, injured 20 bus passengers outside Ziguinchor 1 May; 2 soldiers, possibly several attackers killed in Djibioneove army base assault 20 May. Mutilation of 16 villagers early May, also Ziguinchor; responsibility uncertain.

- [“Army and rebel fighting leaves casualties on both sides”](#), IRIN, 21 May 2008.
- [“Senegalese bandits chop off ears”](#), BBC, 9 May 2008.

➡ **Sierra Leone** UNIOSIL said UN-led inter-party meeting 13 May ahead of July local elections successful. But opposition SLPP vowed to “hit back” if provoked; electoral/party commissions said parties failing to comply with electoral rules. Govt shut down SLPP’s Unity Radio early May, citing technical issues. In ongoing SL civil war trials (see also Liberia), ex-SL President Kabbah testified in defence of rebel RUF leader Sesay; jail terms of convicted militia leaders that fought for CDF doubled 28 May.

- [“UN Peacebuilding Commission meets to discuss assistance to Sierra Leone”](#), UN News, 19 May 2008.
- [“S.Leone court raises jail terms for militia chiefs”](#), Reuters, 28 May 2008.
- For most recent report, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°129, *Sierra Leone: The Election Opportunity*, 12 July 2007.



Asia/Pacific

CENTRAL ASIA

- ➡ **Kazakhstan** President Nazarbayev’s former son-in-law Aliyev 15 May pledged to testify against him and senior officials in ongoing U.S. probe into bribe-paying by U.S. oil firms. Govt banned oil product exports 19 May in effort to contain rising fuel costs. In first official foreign visit, Russian Premier Medvedev discussed energy, bilateral ties in Astana 22 May. RFE/RL claimed 20 May website blocked by govt since 11 Apr.
- [“Medvedev tries to pick up where Putin left off”](#), EurasiaNet, 23 May 2008.
 - [“President’s former son-in-law offers to testify In ‘Kazakhgate’ probe”](#), RFE/RL, 17 May 2008.
- ➡ **Kyrgyzstan** Rights groups condemned amendments to mass media bill giving state de facto monopoly, approved by parliament late Apr; urged President Bakiyev to veto. IMF lending doubled to \$18m 22 May to mitigate high food prices.
- [“Kyrgyz media bill goes back to square one”](#), IWPR, 2 May 2008.
 - For most recent report, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°150, *Kyrgyzstan: The Challenge of Judicial Reform*, 10 Apr. 2008.
- ➡ **Tajikistan** Reports President Rahmon’s brother-in-law shot dead 2 May by Rahmon’s son fuelled speculation of succession struggle, govt instability. Senior officials called on Dushanbe residents to “voluntarily” give 50% May-June salaries for hydroelectric construction; govt agencies, enterprises instructed to withhold funds. 3 reportedly killed in clashes between security services, alleged drug smugglers in Kulyab city 27 May; at least 2 of 9 arrested linked to leadership of former pro-govt militia Popular Front. World Bank approved \$6.5m energy assistance project 2 May following winter’s chronic shortages. Power rationing ended 19 May.
- [“Who’s in charge?”](#), EurasiaNet, 16 May 2008.
 - [“Government shakes down population amid deepening economic dysfunction”](#), EurasiaNet, 7 May 2008.
- ➡ **Turkmenistan** President Berdymukammedov 3 May ordered ex-leader Niyazov’s statue to be removed from capital centre, further step to dismantle personality cult. Govt reportedly preparing to amend constitution to strengthen parliament, extend presidential terms. Berdymukammedov met Azerbaijani President Aliyev in Baku 19 May, first visit by Turkmen president in 12 years. Planned Caspian sea gas pipeline deal discussed; Ashgabat agreed to write off \$44m Baku debt. 900 prisoners released 6 May in fourth amnesty since Berdymukammedov took office Feb 2007.
- [“President orders major changes to constitution”](#), RFE/RL, 27 May 2008.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°60, *Turkmenistan after Niyazov*, 12 Feb. 2007.
- ➡ **Uzbekistan** Govt continued to reject UN calls for inquiry into Andijon massacre as 3-year anniversary passed 13 May. In further realignment away from Russia, govt signed energy agreement with Malaysian state firm 13 May granting access to 3 Ustyurt Plateau fields, area of longstanding Gazprom interest. Rights activist Mutabar Tojiboyeva, imprisoned after Andijon, won Martin Ennals human rights award 15 May.
- Comment by Andrew Stroehlein (Crisis Group), [“Europe’s soft](#)

powerlessness", *Wall Street Journal*, 20 May 2008.

- "Tashkent is up to its old geopolitical tricks", EurasiaNet, 20 May 2008.
- "Andijonis continue to flee Uzbekistan, three years later", RFE/RL, 13 May 2008.
- For most recent report, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°76, *Political Murder in Central Asia: No Time to End Uzbekistan's Isolation*, 14 Feb. 2008.

NORTH EAST ASIA

➡ **China (internal)** Security in Lhasa region relaxed as Jokhang Temple reopened 17 May; monks later disrupted gov-led media tour claiming all 117 monks shut inside since protests began 10 March. Dalai Lama warned 25 May Tibetans "losing faith" with Beijing talks following envoys' unproductive 4 May meeting in Shenzhen; predicted "serious violence" should 11 June talks, seventh-round, break down.

- "Tibetans losing faith in talks, says Dalai Lama", *Financial Times*, 25 May 2008.

➡ **North Korea** Pyongyang 8 May submitted 18,000-page document detailing plutonium production at now-closed Yongbyon reactor complex. South Korea FM Yu Myung-hwan stated 21 May 6-Party Talks likely to resume mid-June. SK nuclear negotiator Kim Sook met NK counterpart Kim Kye-gwan 30 May in bid to revive stalled disarmament talks, 3 days after U.S. envoy Hill met Kye-gwan, Beijing for same. Sook said 1 June NK preparations for full declaration "almost done". Provocative North, South rhetoric ratcheted up 30 May with Pyongyang warning tensions could become "catastrophic" if Seoul continued sending propaganda leaflets north; Seoul denied. Reports 31 May North test-fired 3 ship-to-ship missiles off western coast.

- "In disclosure, North Korea contradicts U.S. intelligence on its plutonium program", *New York Times*, 31 May 2008.
- "N.Korea warns S.Korea over propaganda leaflets", AP, 30 May 2008.
- For most recent report, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°73, *South Korea's Election: What to Expect from President Lee*, 21 Dec. 2007.

➡ **Taiwan Strait** Taiwan accepted 29 May China invitation to restart bilateral talks, first in over decade, in Beijing 11-14 June on possible resumption of transport links. Signs of warming relations: President Ma called for "new chapter of peace" during 20 May inauguration, historic meeting between Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) Chairman Wu Poh-hsiung and China President Hu Jintao 28 May. FM Huang, Vice Defense Minister Cheng-heng, Vice Premier I-jen resigned 6 May over disappearance of \$30m intended for Papua New Guinea in exchange for switching diplomatic allegiance from Beijing.

- "China and Taiwan to restart talks", BBC, 29 May 2008.
- "Taiwan calls for truce with China", *Financial Times*, 21 May 2008.

SOUTH ASIA

➡ **Afghanistan** 2 men working for security agencies arrested 4 May over Apr military parade attack. Suicide bomb attacks killed 6 police, 12 civilians in Farah province 15 May; 4 soldiers, 1 civilian in Khost province 25 May; 2 NATO soldiers 31 May. Pakistan ambassador, abducted February, freed 17 May after 40 Taliban militants released by gov. U.S., NATO member states agreed 6-month rotations increase; U.S. army said Afghan forces to number 80,000, play significant internal security role by early 2009. 15 May report by UN special rapporteur stated

hundreds civilians unlawfully killed by ISAF since Jan; NATO rejected. UN warned 13 May thousands displaced in south following recent U.S.-Taliban clashes. EU Council 27 May said planned to double EUPOL force.

- Comment by Mark Schneider (Crisis Group), "Strategic incoherence and Taliban resurgence in Afghanistan", *Huffington Post*, 20 May 2008.
- "Suicide bomb kills Afghan troops", BBC, 23 May 2008.
- "Gates says US could eye expanded Afghanistan role", Reuters, 2 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°145, *Afghanistan: The Need for International Resolve*, 6 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Bangladesh** Interim gov announced elections to be held third week Dec; formal dialogue with political parties on election preparations started 22 May. BNP, AL parties boycotted talks, demanded release of detained ex-PMs Zia and Hasina. Govt arrested 250 BNP, AL activists 31 May in "routine drive against crime": parties claimed politically motivated. Motiur Rahman Nizami, head of largest religious party JI, detained on corruption charges 18 May. Govt banned all rice exports 6 May to ease continuing food crisis.

- "Bangladesh parties decline talks", BBC, 28 May 2008.
- "Bangladeshi religious leader held", BBC, 19 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°151, *Restoring Democracy in Bangladesh*, 28 Apr. 2008.

➡ **India (non-Kashmir)** At least 61 killed, hundreds injured in 8 Jaipur bomb blasts 13 May. Little-known militant group Indian Mujahideen claimed responsibility; police said suspected Bangladeshi group Harkatul Jihad-al Islami. Police killed 6 Maoist rebels in Bihar state 15 May, 11 members of regional militant group in Assam state 15 May; 11 railway workers killed in Assam by same group 16 May.

- "Anytime, anywhere terror", *Outlook*, 26 May 2008.

➡ **Kashmir** India-Pakistan peace talks resumed 20 May after 6-month suspension; signed deal on consular access to prisoners on both sides, otherwise little progress. 8 killed, including 4 civilians, in Samba district police-militants clashes 11 May; first major outbreak of violence in 4 years. Senior Hizbul Mujahideen leader killed by Indian soldiers 28 Apr.

- "Rivals sign prisoner access deal", BBC, 21 May 2008.
- "India to protest to Pakistan over border shooting", BBC, 19 May 2008.

➡ **Nepal** In first sitting 28 May, newly elected Constituent Assembly overwhelmingly voted to abolish monarchy, establish federal democratic republic. Small bomb explosions and scuffles between demonstrators and police but no serious violence. Negotiations on gov formation and division of powers between ceremonial president and executive prime minister continue. Large-scale strikes protesting 8 May killing of businessman by Maoists; Maoists admitted members responsible, but claimed acting outside party orders. Violent police crackdown on pro-Tibet rallies continued; hundreds of protesters detained.

- "Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal", *Kantipur*, 28 May 2008.
- "Urgent need to restore rule of law", Human Rights Watch, 23 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°149, *Nepal's Election and Beyond*, 2 Apr. 2008.

➡ **Pakistan** PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif withdrew party's 9 ministers from federal cabinet 12 May, following disagreement with PPP on how to reinstate judges sacked by President

Musharraf last Nov. But Sharif said would not seek to destabilise govt, or vote with opposition PML-Q. Continued violence in NWFP: suicide blasts killed 3 in Bannu 6 May, at least 13 in Mardan 18 May. Govt signed peace deal with Swat valley Taliban militants 21 May, promised to gradually pull troops out, impose Sharia law, in return for end to suicide bombings. U.S., NATO criticised deal, fearing increased Taliban Afghanistan attacks. Pakistan re-entered Commonwealth 12 May; membership suspended after Nov imposition of state of emergency.

- "Pakistan defends pacts, says no cross-border attacks", Reuters, 26 May 2008.
- "The coalition collapses", *Economist*, 15 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°74, *After Bhutto's Murder: A Way Forward for Pakistan*, 2 Jan. 2008.

➡ **Sri Lanka** First elections in 2 decades in Eastern provinces held 10 May; ruling UPFA won 20 of 37 seats, but observers said poll marred by fraud and voter intimidation. Head of armed LTTE-splinter group, TMVP, Chandrakanthan named Eastern Province Chief Minister, despite protests from Muslim politicians post had been promised to a Muslim. Tensions between Muslims and Tamils turned violent after 22 May assassination of local TMVP leaders in Muslim town Kattankudy. TMVP blamed for retaliatory murder and abductions. Heavy govt-LTTE fighting continued throughout month; hundreds reportedly killed, mainly rebels, in northern clashes, as govt made some gains in territory. Suspected LTTE bombings continued; 11 civilians killed in Ampara blast day before elections, at least 9 in Colombo train blast 26 May.

- "Sri Lanka election called 'mandate' to defeat rebel Tamil Tigers", *Christian Science Monitor*, 12 May 2008.
- "Fighting kills 73 in Sri Lanka, army takes rebel base", Reuters, 1 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°146, *Sri Lanka's Return to War: Limiting the Damage*, 20 Feb. 2008.

SOUTH EAST ASIA

➡ **Indonesia** President Yudhoyono postponed implementation of attorney general's office Apr recommendation to ban Ahmadiyah sect due to fears of violence against sect members. Hardline Muslims angry at delay. Leaked police documents suggested wanted militant Noordin Moh Top fled Indonesia earlier in year. Govt 24 May raised fuel prices nearly 30%, though poor to receive cash handouts; over 100 arrested after violent protests in Jakarta, protests spread to other cities.

- "Terror suspect may have fled Indonesia", AP, 19 May 2008.
- "Move to ban 'deviant' sect puts Indonesian tolerance in question", AFP, 11 May 2008.

➡ **Myanmar/Burma** Massive cyclone struck Yangon city and Irrawaddy Delta 2 May. Latest death toll 78,000, another 56,000 missing, UN estimated 2.4m at risk. Govt initially refused aid workers entry stating 9 May preferred "relief in cash and kind" prompting international outcry; govt deported Qatari rescue team 8 May and impounded 2 UN food aid shipments at Yangon airport 9 May. Govt claimed entry constraints relaxed 12 May allowing first delivery of U.S. aid; requested assistance 14 May from Asian countries. UNSG Ban Ki-moon met Senior General Than Shwe 24 May, winning promise of full access for foreign aid workers; donors pledged 25 May almost \$50m in aid, although contingent on access. Despite devastation, govt held constitutional referendum in non-affected areas 10 May, affected areas 24 May, reporting 92.48% approval in 98.1% turnout.


Opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest extended 27 May; 20 NLD protesters arrested near home.

- Comment by Gareth Evans (Crisis Group), "Facing up to our responsibilities", *Guardian*, 12 May 2008.
- "Many Burmese still awaiting aid", AP, 30 May 2008.
- "Myanmar's charter sails through referendum", Reuters, 26 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°144, *Burma/Myanmar: After the Crackdown*, 31 Jan. 2008.

➡ **Philippines** Basilan clashes 15, 25 May between marines, Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF); circumstances unclear. In latter 2 rebels killed, possible Abu Sayyaf involvement. 3 civilians left dead in Zamboanga bomb blast 29 May; no claim of responsibility – military suspected Abu Sayyaf. Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) factions agreed in Libya 18 May to form transition leadership and unification committee, including MNLF founder Nur Misuari. General Hermogenes Esperon replaced Secretary Jesus Dureza as presidential adviser on peace process 19 May. Malaysia 10 May began withdrawal from International Monitoring Team in Mindanao.

- "17 soldiers wounded, two rebels killed in Philippines: army", AFP, 25 May 2008.

Crisis Group Asia Report N°152, *The Philippines: Counter-insurgency vs. Counter-terrorism in Mindanao*, 14 May 2008. The U.S. and the Philippines need to refocus energies on peace processes in Mindanao or they risk new hostilities. U.S.-backed security operations in the southern Philippines are confusing counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism and risk pushing the targeted Abu Sayyaf Group into the arms of the broader insurgencies in Mindanao, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). Managing domestic terrorism requires securing the cooperation of the MILF and MNLF, and that necessitates concrete progress toward formal peace agreements.



➡ **Thailand** PM Samak paid first official visit to south 10 May as regular attacks in region continued throughout month. Sit-in protests by some 5,000 began 25 May in Bangkok against PPP-led coalition govt's plan to amend constitution to avoid threat of dissolution over election fraud allegations. House Speaker Yongyuth Tiyapairat (PPP) resigned 30 Apr over alleged fraud committed during Dec 2007 election, trial began 8 May. MP and ally to ex-PM Thaksin resigned 30 May after accused of criticising king.

- "Constitution takes center stage in Thai power struggle", *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 May 2008.
- "Seven killed in Thai south: police", AFP, 13 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°140, *Southern Thailand: The Problem with Paramilitaries*, 23 Oct. 2007.

➡ **Timor-Leste** Marking sixth anniversary of independence 20 May, President Ramos-Horta announced some 90 pardons, remitted sentences: including former Interior Minister Rogerio Lobato, imprisoned for arming civilians in 2006 violence. 4 Reinado supporters linked to 11 Feb attacks on Ramos-Horta, PM Xanana Gusmão extradited from Indonesia 5 May. 3 May agreement between governing coalition member Timorese Social Democratic Association and opposition FRETILIN puts coalition's parliamentary majority at risk; increased chance of elections early 2009. Ramos-Horta early month requested UN presence until 2012: current UN mandate expires Feb 2009.

- "Ramos Horta cuts jail terms for militia", Age, 23 May 2008.

- “Horta wants UN to stay in E Timor”, BBC, 12 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°143, *Timor-Leste: Security Sector Reform*, 17 Jan. 2008.



BALKANS

➡ **Albania** Ongoing investigation of March arms depot blast: 4 defence ministry officials arrested 3 May; opposition accused PM Berisha of delaying indictment of former FM Mediu. 5 high-level officials including former transport minister convicted of corruption 19 May. Govt, opposition parties reached deal 13 May lifting MPs’ criminal prosecution immunity. Opposition Socialist Movement for Integration 10 May started campaign to support petition against Apr electoral reforms.

- “Albania uneasy over “hasty” voting reforms”, BalkanInsight, 27 May 2008.

➡ **Bosnia & Herzegovina** Signature of Stabilisation and Association Agreement with EU further delayed to 16 June after translation constraints prevented signing in Apr, May. Debate over future of Office of High Representative (OHR): Russia, Bosnian Serbs called for end of mandate after HR Lajcak 19 May in UNGA address said possible closure “within months”. EU defence ministers 26 May agreed EUFOR peacekeepers to remain in country. Lajcak 30 May seized passports of 16 alleged war crimes fugitive supporters following 8, 30 May police raids of homes of 3 linked to Karadzic in Pale district.

- “Bosnia ‘vulnerable’ to political instability”, BalkanInsight, 19 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°180, *Ensuring Bosnia’s Future: A New International Engagement Strategy*, 15 Feb. 2007.

➡ **Kosovo** Serbian general elections held in some 300 polling stations in Serb-dominated areas 11 May. First time Serbia organised municipal elections in Kosovo since 1996. UNMIK declared municipal results of local elections illegal, violation of UNSCR 1244. Kosovo assembly adopted further 6 “Ahtisaari laws” ahead of 15 June transition of power to govt, entry into force of constitution. Opposition leader Haradinaj increased pressure on govt accusing leaders of corruption 24 May; also 19 May called for UNMIK departure. EULEX mission chief Yves de Kermabon 19 May confirmed 2-3 months delay in deployment of EU mission amid continued uncertainty of UN-EU transition. UN-EU talks ongoing. U.S. 16 May rejected Russia, China, India demands for resumption of Pristina-Belgrade status talks. 48 Serbs quit Kosovo customs service 20 May; Kosovo Police Service 30 May stopped payments to 300 boycotting Serb officers. ICTY chief prosecutor Brammertz 1 May appealed 3 Apr Haradinaj acquittal.

- “Are UN, EU part of the problem in Kosovo?”, RFE/RL, 28 May 2008.
- “EU Kosovo mission to face delay”, EUobserver, 19 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°47, *Kosovo’s First Month*, 18 Mar. 2008.

➡ **Macedonia** Parliamentary elections 1 June marred by continued clashes between rival Albanian parties: 1 killed in shooting in Aracinovo in Albanian north; voting reported halted

in some 20 polling stations in area. Lead-up saw series of violent incidents: 8 regional offices of opposition Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) party attacked 11-13 May; alleged assassination attempt on DUI leader Ali Ahmeti in Rakovec village 12 May; ruling Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) denied involvement. 10,000 took to streets in anti-violence protest 13 May. Member of DPA fatally stabbed 10 May; 5 DUI activists beaten in Kondovo village 9 May. Violence lull following international community threats 14 May to halt all integration activities, but DUI Gostivar regional office stoned 22 May; DUI rally 29 May attacked by DPA supporters. DUI claimed police armed DPA, unfairly detained officials; interior minister denied. Election monitoring organization (MOST) 22 May denounced campaign period as “full of irregularities”; OSCE monitors further reported media bias.

- “Gunfire erupts as Macedonia votes in tense elections”, AFP, 1 June 2008.
- “Macedonia campaign ‘full of irregularities’”, BalkanInsight, 22 May 2008.

➡ **Serbia** Results of 11 May early general elections: pro-European DS coalition won 102 of 250 seats; radical SRS 78; socialist SPS 20; nationalist DSS/NS 30; LDP 13; minority parties 7. National-level coalition formation talks ongoing; pivotal SPS negotiating with nationalist and pro-European parties. Nationalist parties formed Belgrade city govt 28 May. Serb delegation left 21 May regional summit in protest over Kosovo FM Hyseni being permitted to speak.

- “Tadic: no parliamentary majority has been formed”, SEE Times, 26 May 2008.
- “With surprise party over, it’s time to do the math”, RFE/RL, 13 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°49, *Will the Real Serbia Please Stand Up?*, 23 Apr. 2008.

CAUCASUS

➡ **Armenia** EU Special Representative for South Caucasus Semneby said 7 May EU closely following Armenia’s fulfilment of 17 April PACE resolution, release of political prisoners and independent investigation of 1-2 March post-election violence. Opposition candidate Ter-Petrosian 5 May claimed 100 of his supporters still in custody. President Sarkisian 27 May dismissed heads of State Protection Service and national police. Visiting U.S. officials 16 May expressed concerns about Yerevan’s fulfilment of political criteria for \$236m aid. Armenia defence minister 12 May announced significant military budget increase to counterbalance Azerbaijan’s military spending.

- “A political prisoner to some, a criminal to others”, EurasiaNet, 23 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°48, *Armenia: Picking up the Pieces*, 8 Apr. 2008.

➡ **Azerbaijan** Authorities 17 May denied opposition party Musavat rally permission. Council of Europe rapporteur Andreas Herkel 19 May condemned “fabricated” trials against journalists, deteriorating media freedom.

- “Officials plan for “problem-free” presidential election”, EurasiaNet, 21 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°191, *Azerbaijan: Independent Islam and the State*, 25 Mar. 2008.

➡ **Chechnya (Russia)** Low-level violence continued: remote-controlled bomb killed 5 police 4 May in Grozny in most

lethal attack in months; 2 law enforcement officials killed in Urus-Martan 2 May following clash with suspected militants. European Court of Human Rights ruled Russia to pay over €350,000 to 2002-2003 raid victims.

- [“Chechnya bomb kills 5 police”](#), BBC, 5 May 2008.

➤ **North Caucasus (non-Chechnya)** Growing number of attacks: in Ingushetia, 3 officers, 6 militants killed 14 May near Nazran. Fatal gun battle 13 May left 2 suspected militants dead. 2 militants shot dead in Ingushetia house raid 10 May. Kuntsevsky district court 26 May suspended main opposition website [ingushetiya.ru](#) citing spread of extremist material. In Dagestan, attacks on police 15 May in village Gubden, 25 May in Makhachkala left 3 dead. 1 police shot dead in Kabardino-Balkaria region 24 May.

- [“Clashes kill 9 near Chechnya”](#), *New York Times*, 15 May 2008.

➤ **Georgia** Continued Russia-Georgia tensions over breakaway Abkhazia: Russia PM Putin 31 May stated support for Georgia’s March “broad autonomy” offer; Georgia Interior Minister Merabishvili 28 May accused Russia of arming separatists to prevent Georgia NATO entry. Moscow 8 May revealed 2,542 peacekeepers stationed in region, 31 May sent additional 300-strong unarmed army railway unit; 6 peacekeepers reported briefly detained by Georgian security services 18 May, Zudidi. UN 26 May confirmed Russia 20 Apr downed unmanned drone: Tbilisi 31 May announced halt of spy flights. UNOMIG 8 May rejected Russian claims of Georgian troop increase in Kodori valley. Tbilisi 5 May announced withdrawal from 1995 air-defense treaty with Russia. Abkhazia forces claimed downed 5 unmanned spy planes 4-12 May; Tbilisi denied. UNGA 15 May adopted Georgia-sponsored resolution recognising right of refugee return. Swedish, Polish, Slovenian, Lithuania FMs in Georgia 12 May pledged support for Georgian sovereignty; low-level EU visit 8-9 May. Ruling National Movement strongest in 2 May parliamentary elections forming 59% constitutional majority; nine-party opposition bloc second 17.64%. 39 polling station results annulled after Central Election Commission observed “grave violations”. International observers said elections better than Jan presidential, but unevenly and incompletely implemented. Up to 50,000 in 26 May protest against results; opposition leaders announced boycott new parliament, plans for “alternative parliament”. Several blasts in Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone: 3 explosions reported 16 May; 2 bombs 29 May.

- [“Protesters decry Georgia election”](#), BBC, 26 May 2008.
- [“Rumors of peace amid drums of war”](#), RFE/RL, 23 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°189, [Georgia: Sliding towards Authoritarianism?](#), 19 Dec. 2007.

➤ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** Azeri Deputy FM 14 May announced 8 negotiation principles requiring resolution of NK status within territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and prior refugee return. FM spokesman Khazar Ibrahim called for further talks on basis of 14 March UNGA resolution reaffirming support of Azerbaijan territorial integrity. Azeri and Armenian FMs met 6 May in Strasbourg, discussed possible June meeting of presidents.

- [“Time for a change on Karabakh?”](#), EurasiaNet, 2 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°187, [Nagorno-Karabakh: Risking War](#), 14 Nov. 2007.

EASTERN EUROPE

➤ **Belarus** In continued diplomatic row over sanctions 11 U.S. diplomats expelled from Minsk 3 May despite U.S. 1 May withdrew threat of Washington Belarus mission closure. Riot police 1 May detained 30 youth activists protesting against pro-govt rally.

- [“Belarus says U.S. sanctions further damage ties”](#), Reuters, 16 May 2008.

➤ **Moldova** President Voronin 4 May visited Transdniestria, first time since 2001. Russia reportedly offered support of territorial integrity if Moldova refrained from NATO bid. During 27 May Brussels visit Voronin pledged willingness to restart talks “at any moment” given Transdniestria accepts broad autonomy; External Relations Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner outlined judiciary, political reforms necessary for closer EU ties.

- [“Back in the Kremlin’s shadow”](#), RFE/RL, 31 May 2008.

➤ **Ukraine** MPs loyal to PM Tymoshenko 13 May blocked President Yushchenko’s annual parliamentary address amid growing tensions in ruling coalition. Authorities 12 May banned Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov from entering Ukraine following claims Russian-majority Crimean city Sevastopol not part of Ukraine.

- [“A political soap opera, continued”](#), *Economist*, 29 May 2008.

WESTERN EUROPE/ MEDITERRANEAN

➤ **Basque Country (Spain)** Joint Spanish-French police operation 21 May arrested high-ranking ETA leader Javier Lopez Pena in Bordeaux. Series of bombs: ETA claimed responsibility for 14 May bomb outside Legutiano police barracks killing 1 officer, car bomb 19 May in Getxo; further explosion 1 June in Zarautz wounded 3. Madrid 28 May announced to block Basque plans for referendum on ETA talks, ties with Spain.

- [“ETA rebels say arrests won’t stop them fighting”](#), Reuters, 30 May 2008.

➤ **Cyprus** After exchanging sharp words in public, Greek Cypriot President Christofias and Turkish Cypriot leader Ali Talat met 23 May in Nicosia; joint statement re-affirmed commitment to “bizonal, bicommunal ... federal govt with a single international personality”, comprising a “constituent state” each with “political equality”. Working groups and technical committees continue; talks between leaders to resume June.

- [“Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders hold “fruitful” talks, UN reports”](#), UN News, 23 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°190, [Cyprus: Reversing the Drift to Partition](#), 10 Jan. 2008.

➤ **Turkey** Judiciary and govt traded accusations in lead-up to Constitutional Court decisions on challenge to lifting headscarf ban, prosecutor’s application to close ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) expected June. Court 29 May banned only gay organisation Lambda Istanbul citing harm to public morality. PM Erdogan’s chief foreign policy adviser and Turkish special envoy for Iraq Murat Özcelik met Kurdish regional PM Nechirvan Barzani in Baghdad 2 May to improve relations. New series of strikes against Kurdish bases in northern Iraq 2-3 May killing 150 PKK and 10 May killing 19; latter followed killing of 6 troops in 9 May clashes. 4 people killed by landmine in Sason, Batman province, 2 further blasts in Bingol, Siirt provinces. Erdogan 27 May announced aid package for Kurdish regions.

U.S. 30 May imposed financial sanctions on PKK. 505 arrested 1 May in Istanbul after security forces enforcing govt ban of May Day rallies clashed with left-wing groups.

- "EU-Turkey talks may go step further in June", EUobserver, 22 May 2008.
- "Turkey launches new dialogue with Iraqi Kurds", SEE Times, 15 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°184, *Turkey and Europe: The Way Ahead*, 17 Aug. 2007.



Latin America / Caribbean

➡ **Bolivia** Political situation remains polarised after 85.6% vote in favour of autonomy in 4 May Santa Cruz (SC) referendum; no major violent incidents around poll. President Morales dismissed referendum as unconstitutional. SC started implementation of autonomy statutes 15 May. In ongoing political deadlock, govt and opposition agreed 8 May to hold recall referendum for president, vice-president, departmental prefects 10 Aug. Minor clashes ahead of Beni, Pando 1 June autonomy referendums.

- "Stalled Morales puts faith in referendum", *Guardian*, 10 May 2008.
- "Santa Cruz's referendum, Bolivia's choice", openDemocracy, 30 Apr 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Latin America Reports N°25 *Latin American Drugs I: Losing the Fight* and N°26 *Latin American Drugs II: Improving Policy and Reducing Harm*, 14 Mar. 2008.

➡ **Colombia** FARC 25 May confirmed top commander Manuel "Tirofijo" Marulanda died of heart attack 26 March; Alfonso Cano named as successor 26 May. Influential commander "Karina" surrendered 18 May. Govt mid-May disclosed additional documents on Raúl Reyes computer seized after March airstrike; claimed showed links between FARC and Venezuelan govt, to lesser extent Ecuadorian govt. Documents suggest possible Caracas financing, logistics support in black market weapons negotiations. Interpol 16 May verified documents had not been tampered with by Colombia. Congressional panel 28 May opened investigation of President Uribe after former congresswoman Yidis Medina claimed offered political favours in return for vote for 2004 constitutional amendment. Govt 13 May extradited 14 former paramilitary leaders to U.S.

- Comment by Mark Schneider (Crisis Group), "Rethink the fight against cocaine", *Christian Science Monitor*, 23 May 2008.
- "Death of mythic guerrilla commander confirmed in Colombia", *International Herald Tribune*, 26 May 2008.
- "Las FARC crean células clandestinas para su expansión internacional", *El País*, 11 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Latin America/Caribbean Briefing N°17, *Colombia: Making Military Progress Pay Off*, 29 Apr. 2008.

➡ **Ecuador** Severe diplomatic crisis with Colombia continued; President Correa said 10 May would take legal action over supposed extrajudicial killings in March airstrike. Correa again denied ties to FARC, stated would resign if links proven (see Colombia); opposition demanded investigation. Pressure mounting on govt as Constituent Assembly (CA) continues work: military intelligence accused of spying on CA delegates 20 May; indigenous organisation CONAIE declared opposition to Correa 19 May.

- "Ecuador: una crisis pendiente", BBC, 14 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Latin America Report N°22, *Ecuador: Overcoming Instability?*, 7 Aug. 2007.

➡ **Haiti** Political situation still insecure after Chamber of Deputies 12 May rejected President Préval's PM nominee, Ericq Pierre, despite 7 May Senate approval. Deputies claimed because Pierre failed to prove Haitian ancestry; he said because refused to give bribes for votes. Préval 26 May nominated political ally and respected former state secretary of public security Robert Manuel for post.

- "Corruption defeated me, Haitian PM nominee says", Reuters, 15 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Latin America/Caribbean Report N°21, *Consolidating Stability in Haiti*, 18 July 2007.

➡ **Venezuela** Relations with Colombia remained tense after evidence of Caracas' supposed ties to FARC disclosed (see Colombia). President Chavez denied authenticity of documents, questioned partiality of Interpol. Govt accused Bogotá of illegal incursion after 60 troops entered just inside Venezuelan territory 17 May. Chavez said would not tolerate secession of Bolivia's Santa Cruz (see Bolivia); warned "contagion" might spread to Venezuela's Zulia state. Govt revoked plan to revise school curricula after widespread protests from parents, teachers organisations.

- "The FARC files", *Economist*, 22 May 2008.
- "Venezuela protests Colombian troop 'incursion'", Reuters, 17 May 2008.
- 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** Cairo-mediated Gaza ceasefire negotiations continued: some progress. Israel accepted in principle Egyptian proposal – synchronised mutual ceasefire; opening crossings on terms acceptable to Israel, Hamas, Palestinian Authority (PA); prisoner exchange. Hamas agreed no extension to West Bank for now. Israel demanded exchange include kidnapped soldier Gilad Shalit. Israeli incursions, air strikes in Gaza continued: at least 14 Palestinians, including civilians, killed. Palestinian rocket fire ongoing: Israeli civilian killed 10 May, another 12 May; over 70 reported injured in Ahkelon shopping mall strike 14 May. Black-outs followed further Israel fuel curbs early May; deliveries resumed 12 May. West Bank: some 600 additional PA security personnel deployed Jenin 3 May; Israel said 70 roadblocks removed May, but UN reported increase from Sept to Apr. U.S. President Bush in Jerusalem 14 May for Israel's 60th anniversary celebration; met PA President Abbas in Egypt 17 May; no visible progress on peace talks. Further corruption probe involving PM Olmert's past financial dealings stepped up. Defence minister Ehud Barak 28 May called for PM to leave office; FM Tzipi Livni 29 May said Kadima party must prepare for "any scenario, including early elections".

- "Pressure grows on Israel's Olmert", BBC, 29 May 2008.
- "Two-track tango", *Economist*, 22 May 2008.
- "Egypt discusses Hamas with Israel", BBC, 19 May 2008.

- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report No 73, *Ruling Palestine I: Gaza Under Hamas*, 19 Mar. 2008.

Lebanon Significant progress with 21 May Qatari-brokered deal to end 18-month political stalemate, following dangerous Hezbollah escalation. Group launched military operation against Sunni militias, took over West Beirut 8-10 May; at least 81 dead. Assault prompted by 6 May government decisions to reassign pro-Hezbollah Beirut airport security chief and investigate group's independent telephone network. Opposition Hezbollah and Amal Shiite militias overwhelmed Sunni rivals, took control of pro-Western "March 14" coalition districts; fighting spread to Tripoli and Chouf mountains south east of capital 9-12 May with scores dead; army deployed, remained neutral. Govt revoked controversial decisions 14 May; initial agreement reached 15 May after Arab League intervention. 5-day Qatar negotiation produced deal: army chief Michel Suleiman as president; national unity cabinet – Hezbollah given "blocking third"; new rules for 2009 parliamentary election based on smaller district; renunciation of armed force internally; Hezbollah's weapons to be addressed by new president. Suleiman elected by parliament 25 May; re-appointed Siniora PM 28 May; cabinet discussions 30 May. Progress reported 26 May in UN-sponsored indirect talks on Israel, Hezbollah prisoner exchange. Explosion near refugee camp in north killed soldier 31 May; suspected suicide bomber shot dead same day near Ain el-Hilweh camp.

- "Lebanon elects new president to ease divide", *International Herald Tribune*, 25 May 2008.
- "Peace for a while", *Economist*, 22 May 2008.

See Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°23, **Lebanon: Hezbollah's Weapons Turn Inward**, 15 May 2008. The announcement of an Arab League-mediated agreement is welcome, but if Lebanon is to step back from risk of a new civil war, a package deal must be crafted that defines and regulates use of Hezbollah's weapons without disarming it at this time. Lebanon must find a middle ground between irresponsibly allowing Hezbollah unfettered use of its weapons and recklessly seeking its forcible disarmament.

Syria Israel and Syria 21 May confirmed indirect negotiations through Turkish mediation; talks underway. Syrian FM Walid Muallem repeated claim, first made Apr by Damascus, Israel had agreed to withdraw from Golan to 1967 armistice line; Israel denies, but PM Olmert spokesperson said talks recently gained momentum. Weakness of Olmert, facing further corruption allegations (see Israel/OPT), seen as potential obstacle to success. President Assad 27 May said Damascus would not abandon relations with Tehran as condition of talks. U.S. said did not oppose talks, but prefers Israeli-Palestinian track first. French President Sarkozy telephoned President Assad 29 May – first contact since Dec decision to halt contact over alleged obstruction regarding Lebanon. U.S. 29 May pressed IAEA to expand inspections, currently under negotiation with Damascus, into alleged nuclear program; 28 May said equipment for ballistic missile testing bound for Syria interdicted Feb 2007.

- "Search is urged for Syrian nuclear sites", *Washington Post*, 29 May 2008.
- "Israel holds peace talks with Syria", *New York Times*, 22 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°63, *Restarting Israeli-Syrian Negotiations*, 10 Apr. 2007.

GULF

Iran IAEA report 26 May said "substantial explanations" still lacking for Tehran claim nuclear activities purely peaceful; alleged weapons studies "serious concern". Former nuclear negotiator and newly elected parliamentary speaker, Ali Larinjani, said 28 May parts of report "deceitful"; threatened to limit cooperation. 5+1 group (UNSC P5 plus Germany) early May announced new package of incentives in exchange for halting enrichment; EU's Solana to present in Iran, 13 May Tehran sent own proposals to UNSG calling for new international talks. New conservative parliament held first session 27 May. Officials 9 May said deadly 12 Apr blast at Shiraz mosque was terrorist attack by group linked to "royalists", U.S. and UK.

- "Iran speaker warns nuclear agency", BBC, 28 May 2008.
- "Nuclear agency accuses Iran of wilful lack of cooperation", *New York Times*, 27 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°51, *Iran: Is There a Way Out of the Nuclear Impasse?*, 23 Feb. 2006.

Iraq Iraqi forces, assisted by U.S., continued to battle Shiite militants in Baghdad's Sadr City early May. Truce, brokered 10 May with Tehran support, holding tenuously. Militants agreed to Iraqi, not U.S., security force patrols – some 10,000 deployed 21 May unopposed, but security actions against militias continue. PM Maliki 14 May took charge of Mosul offensive, remaining Al-Qaeda stronghold; resistance limited: some 1,000 reported detained, others dispersed. 2 bomb attacks by youths – possibly detonated by remote – near capital 14 May, at Sunni funeral and army post: over 20 reported dead in blasts, including attackers. U.S. helicopter strike 22 May north of Baghdad killed 8 – Iraqis claimed all civilians. 14 suspected Sunni insurgents killed in Tikrit 29 May by U.S.-backed Sunni militia; suicide bombings in, near Mosul same day killed at least 19, in Anbar province 31 May at least 9. Senior Turkish official met first time publicly with PM Nechirvan Barzani of Kurdistan Regional Government 2 May. Turkoman members of Kirkuk provincial council ended 2-year boycott 19 May. Pentagon audit 23 May found extensive lack of accountability in spending of \$8.2b U.S. funds, \$1.8b Iraqi assets. UN conference on Iraq in Sweden 29 May to review 2007 5-year International Compact with Iraq package.

- "Iraqi military: al-Qaida fleeing Mosul", AP, 25 May 2008.
- "Sadr City: A test of authority", BBC, 21 May 2008.
- "Iran shifts attention to brokering peace in Iraq", *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 May 2008.
- For most recent report, see Crisis Group Middle East Reports N°74 & N°75, *Iraq after the Surge*, 20 Mar. 2008.

Saudi Arabia President Bush 16 May Riyadh visit said U.S., Saudi to sign memorandum of understanding on "peaceful civil nuclear energy cooperation"; pressed for Arab support against Iran; again asked for increased oil production – Riyadh rejected beyond 300,000 barrel early May bump.

- "Bush in Saudi to press king on oil and Iran", Reuters, 16 May 2008.

Yemen Intense fighting between Yemeni forces, al-Houthi Shiite rebels continued in north, approached capital. Clashes 3 May left 5 rebels dead; group claimed govt airstrikes killed scores of civilians. Heavy govt shelling reported late May around Bani Heshiash near Sanaa: casualties unconfirmed. Qatari mediators in Yemen early May attempted to revive ceasefire – left without deal. Mosque bomb 2 May Saada

killed 15; al-Houthi denied involvement. Mosque shooting Kohal 31 May killed 8; govt said criminal. Al Qaeda-linked group claimed failed mortar attacks on Sanaa Italian embassy 30 Apr, oil refinery 31 May. ICRC said some 100,000 affected by violence in north, over 40,000 displaced Saada city alone. Official said 29 May 11 al-Qaeda suspects arrested.

- [“Yemen northern rebels move near capital”](#), AP, 31 May 2008.
- [“Yemen struggles against multiple challenges”](#), Reuters, 29 May 2008.

NORTH AFRICA

➡ **Algeria** 6 soldiers reported killed in Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) attack 17 May, Medea province. Govt reported 115 terrorist-linked kidnappings in 2007; Austria still seeking release of 2 citizens held since Feb by AQIM. 2 killed, property ransacked in 3-day clashes between Arabs and minority Berbers in Beriane; halted by security forces 17 May.

- [“Arab-Berber clashes shake Algeria town”](#), Reuters, 18 May 2008.
- [“Algeria reports 115 kidnappings by militants last year in rare public tally of abductions”](#), AP, 15 May 2008.

➡ **Egypt** Call for early May general strike over rising living costs largely unheeded, but clashes in bread queues resumed 18 May after Apr violent protests. Govt responded with 30% increase in govt worker salaries, but raised fuel prices 40%. Rising dissatisfaction prompted speculation ruling NDP will withdraw backing for President Mubarak’s son Gamal in 2011 presidential elections. Long-standing emergency law 26 May again extended to 2010, despite 2005 Mubarak promise to replace with anti-terror law.

- [“Egyptian president appeals for help with food crisis](#)

[battering Mideast”](#), AP, 18 May 2008.

- [“Tension in Egypt clouds outlook for succession”](#), *Mail & Guardian*, 7 May 2008.

➡ **Mauritania** Islamist opposition joined govt for first time, after new PM Waghf brought RNRD plus leftist UFP into cabinet following PM Zeidane 6 May resignation. But main Islamic opposition RFD rejected PM’s invitation and govt reform program.

- [“New Mauritanian cabinet to include opposition members”](#), AP, 11 May 2008.

➡ **Morocco** Rabat continued campaign to dismantle suspected al-Qaeda-linked cells; crackdown criticised as “disproportionate”, screen for repression. 11 arrested 19 May in Nador and Fez for planning, supporting al-Qaeda attacks abroad; trial began for 27 arrested in Tetouan mid-month. Major labour unions held strikes mid-month protesting rising living costs.

- [“Concerns over Morocco’s chase for terrorists”](#), *Mail & Guardian*, 18 May 2008.

➡ **Western Sahara** Polisario Front, celebrating 35th anniversary, reiterated rejection of Morocco autonomy proposal; criticised UN special envoy Peter van Walsum for Apr statement independence unrealistic. Unconfirmed reports of Moroccan troop movements in disputed area.

- [“UN envoy struggles to break West Sahara impasse”](#), Reuters, 26 May 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°66, [Western Sahara: Out of the Impasse](#), 11 June 2007.

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