

1 March 2008, N°55

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 140 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. To search past issues of CrisisWatch visit our databases and resources page at www.crisisgroup.org.

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February 2008 Trends



Deteriorated Situations

Armenia (p.8)	Philippines (p.7)
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Chad (p.2)	Somalia (p.3)
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Improved Situations

Cyprus (p.10)
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Kosovo (p.8)
Pakistan (p.6)



Unchanged Situations

Afghanistan (p.6), Albania (p.8), Algeria (p.12), Azerbaijan (p.9), Bahrain (p.11), Bangladesh (p.6), Basque Country (Spain), (p.9), Belarus (p.9), Bolivia (p.10), Bosnia & Herzegovina (p.8), Burundi (p.2), Central African Republic (p.2), Chechnya (Russia) (p.9), Colombia (p.10), Côte d'Ivoire (p.4), Ecuador (p.10), Egypt (p.12), Ethiopia (p.3), Georgia (p.9), Guinea (p.4), Guinea-Bissau (p.4), Haiti (p.10), India (p.6), Indonesia (p.7), Iran (p.11), Iraq (p.11), Kazakhstan (p.5), Kyrgyzstan (p.5), Lebanon (p.11), Liberia (p.4), Macedonia (p.8), Mali (p.4), Mauritania (p.12), Moldova (p.9), Morocco (p.12), Myanmar/Burma (p.7), Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan) (p.9), Nepal (p.6), Niger (p.4), Nigeria (p.5), North Caucasus (non-Chechnya) (p.9), North Korea (p.6), Rwanda (p.2), Saudi Arabia (p.11), Senegal (p.5), Sierra Leone (p.5), Somaliland (p.3), Sri Lanka (p.7), Syria (p.11), Taiwan Strait (p.6), Tajikistan (p.5), Thailand (p.7), Turkey (p.10), Turkmenistan (p.5), Uganda (p.2), Ukraine (p.9), Uzbekistan (p.5), Venezuela (p.10), Western Sahara (p.12), Yemen (p.12), Zimbabwe (p.4)

March 2008 Watchlist



Conflict Risk Alerts

Armenia
Comoros Islands
Kenya



Conflict Resolution Opportunities

Cyprus
Kenya
Pakistan
Timor-Leste
Uganda

Crisis Group

Crisis Group is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 140 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict. Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, Crisis Group produces regular analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers, and backed up with high level advocacy. Crisis Group is co-chaired by former European Commissioner for External Relations Lord Patten of Barnes and former U.S. Ambassador and Boeing Vice President, International Relations, Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering, and its President and Chief Executive is former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans.



Africa

CENTRAL AFRICA

- ➡ **Burundi** Government-PALIPHEUTU-FNL peace talks scheduled to resume 1 March; mandate of South African facilitator Charles Nqakula extended to end 2008 at talks with FNL 4-5 Feb. FRODEBU leader Pascal Manisha severely wounded in 8 Feb grenade attack, wife and child killed, circumstances unclear. Opposition FRODEBU local council member killed 3 Feb by unidentified gunmen; 46 opposition politicians called on UNSG Ban Ki-moon for protection month end, alleging death-list of 350 opposition members. Policeman killed 17 Feb in army-FNL clashes. Continued insecurity in and around Bujumbura: FNL killed 3 police, abducted 1 soldier 24 Feb, reportedly killed 2 soldiers 26 Feb, fierce fighting reported 29 Feb. 4 officials seized by FNL in recent months released 2 Feb. State prosecutor 1 Feb called for 15 years imprisonment for former leader of ruling CNDD-FDD Hussein Radjabu in his trial on charges of fomenting insurgency.
- [“Burundi MPs in death-threat plea”](#), BBC, 29 Feb. 2008.
 - [“Half of the national budget embezzled within two years”](#), *Burundi Réalités*, 2 Feb. 2008.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°131, [Burundi: Finalising Peace with the FNL](#), 28 Aug. 2007.

- ➡ **Central African Republic** EU peacekeeping (EUFOR) deployment resumed 12 Feb (see Chad). Government reported 19 Feb president and spokesman of rebel Union for Democratic Forces for Unity (UFDR), held in Benin since Nov 2006, released for peace talks. UN special rapporteur Philip Alston reported end to government’s “scorched earth tactics” in north 8 Feb, but unclear if security forces definitively reined in. Some 200 LRA rebels reportedly entered CAR 18 Feb from DR Congo, killing several civilians (see Uganda).
- [“Benin frees Central African rebels for talks”](#), Reuters, 19 Feb. 2008.
 - [“UN rights envoy sees progress in C. African Republic”](#), Reuters, 8 Feb. 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** 23 Jan Goma ceasefire and peace accord increasingly fragile. Renegade general Laurent Nkunda withdrew from ceasefire commission 22 Feb in protest at UN allegations his CNDP rebels massacred 30 Hutus around Kalonge village west of Goma, 16-20 Jan. Despite truce, CNDP, Mai Mai group PARECO and Rwandan FDLR clashed frequently; CNDP fired on UN peacekeepers 15 Feb. Patriotic Resistance Forces in Ituri (FPRI) rebels attacked army positions and villages in Ituri. Additional violence in western Bas-Congo province, 6 reported killed in separatist-police clashes. UNSC renewed arms embargo and asset freeze targeting rebel groups for further 6 weeks 15 Feb. President Kabila created steering committee 11 Feb to oversee expulsion of foreign fighters, with MONUC assistance, primarily targeting FDLR. Army colonel and ex-leader of National Integrationist Front Mathieu Ngudjolo

flowed to Hague 6 Feb to face ICC charges including murder, sexual enslavement and use of child soldiers. After 10 years Sudanese SPLA soldiers withdrew from Kengezi Base in Ituri.

- [“Congo peace deal faces hitch over massacre charges”](#), Reuters, 22 Feb. 2008.
- [“Congo warlord flown to the Hague”](#), BBC, 7 Feb. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°133, [Congo: Bringing Peace to North Kivu](#), 31 Oct. 2007.

- ➡ **Rwanda** Spanish High Court Judge Fernando Andreu indicted 40 senior officers of Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) and Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) 6 Feb on genocide and crimes against humanity charges, also citing evidence implicating President Kagame (immune from prosecution as acting head of state). Government called international arrest warrants “bogus”. Head of ICTR defence lawyers association called for suspension of tribunal 27 Feb for failure to investigate Kagame. Callixte Nzabonimpa, youth and sports minister during 1994 genocide and major ICTR fugitive, arrested 18 Feb in Tanzania; another top suspect Claver Kamana arrested 26 Feb in France.
- [“Lawyers try to halt Rwanda genocide tribunal”](#), Reuters, 27 Feb 2008.
 - [“Rwanda’s fury at Spanish warrants”](#), BBC, 11 Feb. 2008.

- ➡ **Uganda** Momentum building for government-LRA comprehensive peace agreement with signing of “permanent” ceasefire 23 Feb, disarmament accord 29 Feb; yet muted by reports of LRA truce violation and 27 Feb threats to withdraw from talks if ICC warrants against LRA leader Kony and 2 others not lifted. LRA request for government to intervene with UN over warrants followed 18 Feb accountability agreement stipulating creation of national court for major war crimes, traditional justice for lesser crimes. Reported movement of some 200 rebels from assembly point to Central African Republic (CAR) 18 Feb; village chief in north eastern DRC reported killed by LRA 12 Feb, CAR civilians killed 25 Feb.
- [“Uganda rebels, government sign ‘permanent’ ceasefire”](#), Reuters, 23 Feb. 2008.
 - [“International court to keep chasing Uganda rebels”](#), Reuters, 21 Feb. 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 alliance of up to 3,000 launched assault on capital N’Djamena 2-3 Feb in failed attempt to overthrow President Déby: hundreds killed, 20,000 fled to Cameroon. Rebels withdrew from capital 4 Feb, moved east – described as “tactical”; refused ceasefire without Déby’s resignation. He accused Khartoum of supporting rebels; they accused France of backing government. JEM and other Darfur groups supporting Déby. UNSC presidential statement 4 Feb urged international support for government. State of emergency declared 14 Feb amid reports of soldiers looting in capital. EU Council of Ministers 18 Feb called for release of 3 opposition leaders arrested in government crackdown, former president Lol Choua reported freed 28 Feb; under French pressure government agreed 27 Feb to international probe into violence, 2 politicians still missing. 3 major newspapers stopped publication to protest heavy media controls. EU peacekeeping force (EUFOR) deployment

suspended 1 Feb, resumed 12 Feb; rebels denounced French-dominated force as partisan. EUFOR force commander Jean-Philippe Ganascia said 19 Feb force operational mid-March. Gunmen blocked UNHCR staff from relocating Darfuri refugees to camps 15 Feb – reasons unclear.

- [“Rights group says Chadian government using crisis to tyrannize opposition”](#), AP, 21 Feb. 2008.
- [“Chad journalists strike over government controls”](#), AP, 19 Feb. 2008.
- [“Fighting in Chad’s capital prompts fears of a wider war”](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 4 Feb. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°111, *Chad: Back towards War?*, 1 June 2006.

➡ **Ethiopia** Arrest of over 300 police officers on suspicion of links to separatist Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) reported 18 Feb. ONLF claimed 43 soldiers killed during 2 weeks of fighting 27 Feb, dismissed by government.

- [“In Ethiopia, does staying silent save lives?”](#), *Christian Science Monitor*, 26 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Ethiopia/Eritrea** Border dispute intensified as stand-off over UN border peacekeepers escalated: Eritrea cut food and fuel supplies, prevented withdrawal to Ethiopia which offered 11 Feb to host 1,700-strong force in administrative capacity. UNMEE soldiers began regrouping in Asmara 19 Feb after prevented from crossing border. UNSC expressed “deep concern”, urged full Eritrean cooperation. Asmara reported 2 killed 7 Feb by newly planted landmine near border.

- [“UN dispute with Eritrea deepens”](#), *Financial Times*, 23 Feb. 2008.
- [“UN stays put in Eritrea, fears war – official”](#), Reuters, 7 Feb. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°48, *Ethiopia and Eritrea: Stopping the Slide to War*, 5 Nov. 2007.

🏠 ⚡ ✎ **Kenya** Widely welcomed power-sharing deal reached 28 Feb to resolve post-election political crisis after month of frequently stalled negotiations, yet situation remains fragile. President Kibaki to head coalition government, with opposition leader Raila Odinga in newly created executive PM position. Each party to nominate deputy PM, ministerial portfolios to be divided equally: parliament still to vote on agreement; constitutional, land and electoral reforms yet to be addressed. Deal came after chief mediator and former UNSG Kofi Annan briefly suspended stalemated talks 26 Feb; Tanzanian President and AU Chair Jakaya Kikwete joined 27 Feb to help break impasse, following month of sustained international pressure. Violence subsided with sporadic attacks in Rift Valley early Feb, but tensions remained high throughout month as supporters of both sides threatened protests amid reports of militias stockpiling weapons. Police put death toll of post-election violence at 1,500, over 300,000 displaced. U.S. imposed travel bans on 10 Kenyans from both sides suspected of financing and inciting violence; promised independent investigation into the violence.

- [“Kenya rivals reach peace agreement”](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 29 Feb. 2008.
- [“Rice warns Kenya on US relations”](#), *Financial Times*, 18 Feb. 2008.
- [“U.N. rights investigators to probe Kenya violence”](#), Reuters, 5 Feb. 2008.

Crisis Group Africa Report N°137, [Kenya in Crisis](#), 21 Feb. 2008. If Kofi Annan’s mediation of Kenya’s crisis is to succeed, he must not let the parties postpone a power-sharing agreement, and he needs continued international support. The situation since the presidential election of December 2007 represents Kenya’s worst political crisis since independence, and unless people see practical results from these talks soon, mass violence could re-erupt. Continued international pressure is critical to achieving these objectives. The crisis reaches far beyond Kenya and threatens to affect the stability of neighbouring states.



➡ **Somalia** Islamist-led insurgency spread, with attacks reported in Lower Shabelle, Puntland, Hiran, Bay, Bakool and Juba regions. Blast in Bossaso cinema popular with Ethiopian immigrants 5 Feb killed 20; claimed by militant al Shabaab. In Mogadishu, fighting and roadside bombs killed at least 20, while President Yusuf’s compound heavily shelled 16-17 Feb. Targeted assassination of officials continued with up to 10 killed. PM Nur Hassan Hussein said 12 Feb Transitional Federal Government (TFG) ready to start peace talks without preconditions: rejected opposition Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) precondition of withdrawal of Ethiopian troops; said will not travel to Asmara for meetings. UNSC approved 6-month extension of AMISOM mandate 20 Feb, while humanitarian agencies put number in need of urgent aid at 2 million 5 Feb. Médecins Sans Frontières suspended Somalia operations 1 Feb after 28 Jan killing of 3 staff. UNDP Mogadishu offices repeatedly attacked 8 Feb.

- [“Extension of peace mission’s mandate not enough, says government”](#), IRIN, 21 Feb. 2008.
- [“Somalia PM ready for inclusive peace talks”](#), Reuters, 12 Feb. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°45, *Somalia: The Tough Part Is Ahead*, 26 Jan. 2007.

➡ **Somaliland** German aid worker temporarily abducted 12 Feb. Somaliland government reported 5 gunmen, all from rival Puntland region, arrested; Puntland dismissed claims. Reports of Somaliland troop incursions into disputed Sanaag region 25 Feb. U.S. Assistant Sec. State for Africa Jendayi Frazer visited 3 Feb, fuelling rumour of U.S. recognition as state; U.S. said waiting on initial AU action.

- [“Somaliland arrests 5 over German kidnapping”](#), Reuters, 14 Feb. 2008.
- [“US envoy in surprise visit to Somaliland: Somaliland spokesman”](#), AFP, 3 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Sudan** Worst violence in Darfur in months as government launched major aerial bombardments and ground attacks on 3 towns in West Darfur 8 Feb: 200 reported killed, 10,000 fled to Chad. Airstrikes continued mid-month near Aro Sharow IDP camp, condemned by UNSG Ban Ki-moon 20 Feb. International Committee of the Red Cross employee killed during 8 Feb fighting. Signing of Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) 9 Feb on operating rules removed major barriers to deployment of UN-AU hybrid peacekeeping force. Sudanese army rejected appointment of UK officer as chief of staff to force commander 14 Feb. Renewed fighting broke out mid-month in contested Abyei region with heightened tension as some Misseriya unilaterally declared own state. UN SRSG for Sudan Ashraf Qazi warned of Abyei risk in first briefing to UNSC 19 Feb,

also stressed importance of 2005 North-South Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Former UK diplomat Derek Plumbly appointed new head of CPA monitoring body 13 Feb. Justice Minister Mohammed Ali al-Mardi removed from position in 14 Feb Khartoum cabinet reshuffle.

- [“All talk and no action in Darfur”](#), BBC, 25 Feb. 2008.
- [“Situation in Darfur is deteriorating – UN’s Ban”](#), Reuters, 20 Feb. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°134, *Darfur’s New Security Reality*, 26 Nov. 2007.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

-  **Comoros Islands** Federal government 18 Feb said ready to launch military invasion to restore control over renegade Anjouan island and oust disputed leader Col. Bacar. Government rejected extension of AU sanctions, said hope of peaceful solution extinguished. AU 25 Feb said military action only option after failure of AU-led mediation efforts. Hundreds of troops mobilised to nearby Moheli island late Feb. Tanzania, Libya, Senegal and Sudan pledged military and logistical aid.
 - [“Comoros military ready to attack rebel island”](#), Reuters, 24 Feb. 2008.
 - [“AU troops to fight Comoros revolt”](#), BBC, 21 Feb. 2008.

-  **Zimbabwe** Ex-finance minister and SADC head Simba Makoni announced decision to challenge incumbent President Mugabe in 29 March polls, creating 3-way race including opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) leader Morgan Tsvangirai. Makoni expelled from ruling ZANU-PF party, but maintains strong party support, including from General Solomon Mujuru. MDC factions failed to agree common election platform at early Feb talks: sides to field separate candidates at concurrent local and parliamentary polls. MDC faction leader Arthur Mutambara struck alliance with Makoni, signalled withdrawal from presidential race. EU extended sanctions regime for another year 18 Feb. Police chief warned 27 Feb officers would use “full force” to suppress election violence.
 - [“Zimbabwe police licensed to shoot”](#), BBC, 26 Feb. 2008.
 - [“Simba’s roar”](#), *Economist*, 8 Feb. 2008.

WEST AFRICA

-  **Cameroon** Violent protests spread to Yaoundé and other major cities following 24 Feb taxi strike over fuel price rises in Douala. Unrest comes amid rising living costs and after President Biya’s Jan announcement of plan to extend 25-year rule through constitutional amendment. Biya called protests an attempted coup, vowed to use “all means” to restore order; at least 20 killed amid reports of heavy gunfire, looting and police use of tear gas.
 - [“Deadly violence rages in Cameroon”](#), BBC, 29 Feb. 2008.
 - [“Cameroon govt accused of muzzling media over riots”](#), *Mail & Guardian*, 29 Feb. 2008.

-  **Côte d’Ivoire** Electoral Commission announced possible deferral of June presidential elections after meeting with PM Soro 19 Feb, citing technical issues. French firm Sagem to begin voter identification process after Soro set out tasks 22 Feb. New working group on army restructuring created 20 Feb. General Bakayoko announced cantonment process for ex-rebel soldiers to start early March. UNOCI continued dismantling observation

posts in former “zone of confidence” in line with March 2007 Ouagadougou agreement, announcing further removal of 10 military camps. Trial to begin 10 March for ex-rebel leader “IB” Ibrahim Coulibaly and 12 others suspected of 2003 coup attempt involvement; IB remains in hiding. Government announced Radio France Internationale, off-air since 1 Feb, to be closed indefinitely, citing “unbalanced information”.

- [“Gbagbo crée un groupe de travail sur la restructuration de l’armée”](#), APA, 21 Feb. 2008.
- [“UN dismantling observation posts in former Zone of Confidence”](#), UN News, 8 Feb. 2008.

-  **Guinea** Government and electoral commission 12 Feb announced legislative elections to be held between 23 Nov-14 Dec 2008, stating provisional June target impossible to meet. President Conté appointed Ousmane Souaré new government spokesperson 11 Feb after Justin Morel fired 4 Jan amid continued concerns Conté retaking control from consensus PM Kouyaté. Finance minister Saidou Diallo 12 Feb presented audit stating \$47.25m in government spending unaccounted for under previous administration. Growing frustration with water and electricity supplies sparked demonstrations in Conakry suburb 19 Feb, forcefully suppressed by police.
 - [“After a year, honeymoon over for Guinea premier”](#), Reuters, 27 Feb. 2008.

-  **Guinea-Bissau** Head of UN Peacebuilding Commission’s G-B section Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti announced intention to call for UN funding to consolidate political and socio-economic reform gains. EU leaders agreed 12 Feb to send civilian and military experts in March to assist G-B in security sector reform and to fight drug smuggling.
 - [“Peacebuilding Commission to request funds to support recovery”](#), UN News, 21 Feb. 2008.

-  **Liberia** UNMIL announced troop reduction 6 Feb; force strength to drop to 12,250 (from 15,000) by Sept 2008. During 21 Feb visit by U.S. President Bush, President Johnson-Sirleaf urged him to ensure “gradual” UN drawdown; Bush promised education aid and support for reconstruction effort. Chair of group supporting war crimes court Mulbah Morlu briefly detained for sabotage and threatening security during Bush visit. 1 killed and police station burned by crowd protesting murder of local woman by detainee in Tappita 13 Feb.
 - [“Mob violence never acceptable, UN Envoy says after deadly fracas”](#), UN News, 21 Feb. 2008.

-  **Mali** Opposition coalition Front pour la démocratie et la République (FDR) announced intention to invite Tuareg rebel group responsible for government soldier abductions to national consultation 26-29 March. Government urged Algeria to tighten border, assist in efforts to free 26 hostages held by rebels. Military vehicle reportedly struck by Tuareg landmine in north, up to 6 killed.
 - [“Bush, Malian President Toure discuss efforts to combat terrorism, AIDS”](#), VOA, 12 Feb. 2008.

-  **Niger** Niger Movement for Justice (MNJ) vowed to launch direct attacks on mines and oil sites, leading to extension of state of alert in northern Agadez region for further 3 months. Journalist Ibrahim Menzo released on bail 6 Feb after 3-month detention for alleged MNJ links; Radio France International

correspondent Moussa Kaka, held on same charges, denied bail 12 Feb.

- "Niger conflict draws in more civilians", VOA, 26 Feb. 2008.
- "Niger extends state of alert in uranium-rich north", Reuters, 24 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Nigeria** Election tribunal ruled to uphold President Yar'Adua's April 2007 election victory 26 Feb; opposition Atiku Abubakar (Action Congress) and Muhammadu Buhari (All Nigeria People's Party) vowed to appeal decision to Supreme Court. Some Niger Delta groups 6 Feb announced readiness to resume peace talks but violence continued. Key rebel MEND faction loyal to Henry Okah continued to resist talks, protesting his Sept 2007 arrest and alleged death upon extradition from Angola 14 Feb. Government rejected claims, but refused lawyers' demand to present Okah for trial. Attacks on oil installations and shipping continued amid call from maritime unions to declare Nigeria "war zone". 3,500 refugees fled fighting in Chad, crossed north east border. Appeals court upheld nullification of election of Kogi and Adamawa state governors 6 Feb, ordered fresh elections within 90 days; election of Abia governor Orji also nullified 25 Feb. Shell announced Nigerian operations at risk, citing government failure to adequately fund joint ventures.

- "Execution fears raise tension in Niger delta", *Financial Times*, 20 Feb. 2008.
- "Declare Nigeria a 'war zone', says world ship union", Reuters, 8 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Senegal** Casamance unrest continued: 40 vehicles attacked by some 100 suspected Movement of Democratic Forces in the Casamance rebels 26 Feb. Opposition Socialist Party resolved to contest 18 May local elections, after boycotting Aug 2007 parliamentary polls.

- "Ambush of 40 vehicles in Casamance", IRIN, 28 Feb. 2008.
- "Senegal's top opposition party returns to polls after boycott", AFP, 11 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Sierra Leone** UNSG Ban Ki-moon 6 Feb set out plan for UNIOSIL drawdown: initial 20% reduction of 62 posts to be completed 31 March before full transition to smaller integrated political office by Sept 2008. Electoral commission 13 Feb blacklisted 477 presiding officers for malpractices at Aug 2007 polls. Move comes ahead of 29 March by-elections for 4 seats vacated by appointment of ruling All People's Congress parliamentarians to cabinet posts; lead opposition SL People's Party threatened boycott. UK 10 Feb announced resumption of aid to SL after suspension in run-up to 2007 elections.

- "Secretary-General outlines plan for reduced UN presence", UN News, 6 Feb. 2008.



Asia/Pacific

CENTRAL ASIA

➡ **Kazakhstan** President Nazarbayev announced major economic reforms in annual address 6 Feb. Astana court ordered closure of independent *Law and Justice* newspaper 14 Feb due to "registration irregularities"; newspaper owner claimed decision politically motivated. Several opposition parties discussed uniting under National Coalition for

Democratic Reforms.

- "One of few remaining independent newspapers faces closure", RFE/RL, 15 Feb. 2008.
- "Doubts over Kazak opposition unity pledge", IWPR, 7 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Kyrgyzstan** New action plan to combat "spread of religious extremism", announced by PM Chudinov 28 Jan, singles out Hizb-ut-Tahrir. President Bakiyev said 21 Feb government would eventually raise question of closing temporary U.S. air base at Manas. Opposition groups shut out of parliament in Dec 2007 election convened "public parliament" 20 Feb; Abdugany Erkebaev (Taza Koom party) elected chair.

- "Economic crisis likely to rekindle Kyrgyz unrest", IWPR, 20 Feb. 2008.
- "New effort aggressively counters Hizb Ut-Tahrir, religious extremism", RFE/RL, 15 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Tajikistan** Chronic power shortages amid continued frigid weather caused humanitarian crisis but little popular unrest; led to 7 Feb cabinet reshuffle but energy sector chiefs not dismissed. Riot police commander Colonel Oleg Zakharchenko killed 4 Feb in Garm firefight with district's organised crime squad chief Mirzohaja Akhmadov, former United Tajik Opposition leader during civil war.

- "Murder invokes ghosts of Tajikistan's past", IWPR, 20 Feb. 2008.
- "Tajik reshuffle spares unpopular energy chiefs", IWPR, 7 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Turkmenistan** 2 petrol stations set alight in protests after 8 Feb decree raised gas prices by 750%. President Berdymukhammedov announced amnesty for 1,269 prisoners to mark first year in power 13 Feb, but excluded many well-known activists.

- "Gas rationing stirs rare public outrage", RFE/RL, 19 Feb. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°60, *Turkmenistan after Niyazov*, 12 Feb. 2007.

➡ **Uzbekistan** Gulnara Karimova appointed deputy FM 1 Feb, seen as preparation for her to eventually replace father President Karimov. He met Russian President Putin 6 Feb in first trip abroad post-Dec election, agreed to expand cooperation. 4 human rights activists (S. Zainabiddinov, U. Niazova, K. Bazarbaev, I. Hamroev) granted amnesties in advance of EU 5 Feb cooperation committee visit.

- "Uzbek amnesty designed to please West", IWPR, 15 Feb. 2008.
- "President's daughter takes another step toward 'throne'", RFE/RL, 5 Feb. 2008.

Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°76, *Political Murder in Central Asia: No Time to End Uzbekistan's Isolation*, 14 Feb. 2008. The murder in Kyrgyzstan of journalist Alisher Saipov, a strong critic of the Uzbek regime, raises serious doubts about Western attempts to accommodate the authoritarian government in Tashkent. Despite public Kyrgyz denials of Uzbekistan's involvement in Saipov's death, in private officials are concerned that Uzbekistan President Karimov's brutality and insistence on retaining power are fuelling a radical Islamist underground.



NORTH EAST ASIA

➡ **North Korea** U.S. Sec. State Rice urged China to pressure DPRK to make complete nuclear declaration in 26 Feb Beijing talks. U.S. orchestra played in Pyongyang 26 Feb, most significant cultural exchange with West in DPRK history. Lee Myung-bak sworn in as South Korea President 25 Feb. Domestic opposition forced Seoul 20 Feb to scrap planned closure of unification ministry. South returned 22 North Koreans to DPRK after their boat crossed border 9 Feb.

- "Korean overtures", *Financial Times*, 27 Feb 2008.
- "The Lee Myung-bak era begins", *Chosun Ilbo*, 25 Feb. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°73, *South Korea's Election: What to Expect from President Lee*, 21 Dec. 2007.

➡ **Taiwan Strait** Election commission 1 Feb said referendums on UN membership to be held despite U.S., UK opposition on 22 March, alongside presidential elections. Taipei said recognised Kosovo independence 19 Feb, provoking Chinese condemnation.

- "Taiwan recognizes Kosovo in move likely to anger China", Reuters, 20 Feb. 2008.
- "Taiwan to hold UN referendums alongside presidential poll", AFP, 1 Feb. 2008.

SOUTH ASIA

➡ **Afghanistan** 3 suicide blasts hit Kandahar in 3 days mid-month. 100 killed in 17 Feb attack, country's deadliest suicide bombing to date; targeted local anti-Taliban militia leader but killed mostly civilians. Pakistani army said senior Taliban commander Mansoor Dadullah captured in Balochistan firefight after crossing into Pakistan; rumours of possible exchange for Pakistan ambassador to Afghanistan kidnapped while travelling near Peshawar. Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum led violent raid on rival Akbar Bai's house in central Kabul with ensuing police stand-off 3 Feb. Attorney general suspended Dostum from government post, but with opposition National Front backing; unrest in north likely if Dostum arrested. In run-up to NATO April Bucharest summit, U.S. Defense Sec. Gates warned European military role in Afghanistan linked to domestic safety from terror attacks. U.S. intelligence assessment 27 Feb said Taliban controlled 10%, government 30% of country; figures disputed by NATO chief de Hoop Scheffer.

- "NATO chief disputes US view of Afghan control", Reuters, 29 Feb. 2008.
- "U.S. ties Europe's safety to Afghanistan", *New York Times*, 11 Feb. 2008.
- "Northern warlord flexes his muscles", IWPR, 6 Feb. 2008.

Crisis Group Asia Report N°145, **International Crisis Group** WORKING TO PREVENT CONFLICT WORLDWIDE
Afghanistan: The Need for International Resolve, 6 Feb. 2008. The international community must strengthen its resolve to reverse negative trends. With insurgent violence severely affecting government efforts, the focus should be on institution building, but troop-contributing countries should be prepared to deploy wherever needed. Without greater coordination, the increased attention and resources now directed at the conflict could merely further a quick fix tendency. The Pakistan problem must be realistically addressed and Afghanistan insulated from U.S.-Iran confrontation.

➡ **Bangladesh** 3 members of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) sentenced to death 17 Feb for role in 2006 bombing targeting Udichi cultural group. Former PM Sheikh Hasina's corruption trial halted 6 Feb after high court ruled application of emergency laws unconstitutional. Fresh corruption charges brought against former PM Zia and 10 ministers 25 Feb. Election Commission started discussing new reform proposals, reportedly including constitutional changes and demand for prosecution of war criminals from 1971 war of liberation. State of emergency, in place since Jan 2007, continues.

- "Ex-Bangladesh PM faces new charge", BBC, 27 Feb. 2008.
- "EC vows not to be nat'l traitors", *Daily Star*, 26 Feb. 2008.

➡ **India** Maoist rebels attacked police stations in Nayagarh, Orissa, 15 Feb, killing 14 officers and seizing over 1,000 weapons. Police said 20 rebels killed in subsequent fighting. Indian soldiers reportedly killed 6 Manipur United National Liberation Front (UNLF) rebels near Myanmar border in gunfight 23 Feb.

- "India claims success against Maoist rebels", *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Nepal** 7-party government signed 8-point deal with United Madhes Democratic Front (UMDF) umbrella group 28 Feb, ending crippling indefinite strike called by UMDF 13 Feb. Among key points: considerable (but undefined) autonomy for Tarai plains, greater proportion of seats reserved in Constituent Assembly (30%) for Madhesi representatives, integration of Madhesi forces into Nepali Army, advancement of Madhesi and minorities in civil service. Separate deal signed with Federal Republican National Front 1 March. Strike caused at least 5 deaths, including 3 protestors and 2 police, and cut off fuel supplies to Kathmandu at times. Nepali Congress party condemned Maoist reactivation of United Revolutionary People's Council, disbanded in 2006, calling it "parallel government". Main parties continued to insist on polls at any cost but some royalists have joined boycott.

- "Nepal rules out autonomy in south before polls", Reuters, 24 Feb. 2008.
- "Strike by ethnic minorities shuts down Nepal's capital", AP, 19 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Pakistan** President Musharraf's PML-Q routed in generally peaceful 18 Feb national and provincial assembly polls. Civilian government may have greater public support in addressing militancy in north and west. Opposition parties PPP and PML-N won 33% and 25% of national seats, respectively; PML-Q 15%. PPP leader Asif Zardari announced plans to form coalition with PML-N "in principle", said will favour dialogue over military solution in addressing militancy in tribal belt, and hopes to reverse restrictions on media, judiciary imposed by Musharraf, restoring 1973 constitution. Negotiations over shape of government continue. President currently retains constitutional power to dismiss it. Polls mainly non-violent, but selective rigging, including widespread interference in Balochistan, likely inflated PML-Q share. EU observer mission called elections "competitive" but noted transparency flaws. Zardari offered Balochistan apology 24 Feb for government atrocities in region. Grave insecurity continued throughout country: attacks targeted party rallies in NWFP in lead-up to polls, spiked again late in month. Spokesperson for militant Baitullah Mehsud said ceasefire agreed with government 7 Feb, but violence continued. Army surgeon general killed in

targeted Rawalpindi attack 25 Feb; 3 aid workers killed in S Waziristan same day. 12 alleged militants killed in missile attack near Wana, S Waziristan, 28 Feb that may have been launched by U.S. 40 killed in suicide bombing at 29 Feb Swat valley funeral of policeman killed in Bannu suicide attack day earlier.

- Comment by Nick Grono (Crisis Group), [“A Failed Charm Offensive”](#), *EU Observer*, 6 Feb. 2008.
- [“Islamic stronghold in Pakistan goes secular”](#), *Christian Science Monitor*, 22 Feb. 2008.
- [“Pakistan victors want dialogue with militants”](#), *New York Times*, 20 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Sri Lanka** 2 bombings on 4 Feb, 60th anniversary of country's independence, came amid wave of attacks targeting civilians: 3 Feb suicide attack in Colombo train station killed 11, bus attack 2 Feb killed 18 in Dambulla. Red Cross said 13 Feb civilian casualties had reached “appalling levels”: 180 killed, nearly 270 injured since beginning of year. Meanwhile, army claimed heavy losses in intensified push against northern LTTE strongholds.

- [“Civilian death toll reaching ‘appalling levels’”](#), IRIN, 18 Feb. 2008.
- [“Not much to celebrate”](#), *Economist*, 7 Feb. 2008.

Crisis Group Asia Report N°146, [Sri Lanka's Return to War: Limiting the Damage](#), 20 Feb. 2008. With Sri Lanka again in civil war, the international community must concentrate on protecting civilians and supporting those working to preserve democratic institutions. While the government's desire to defeat the LTTE and end the war is understandable, its almost entirely military approach has strengthened extremists on both sides. The international community needs to use its limited leverage to prevent further deterioration and strengthen the non-violent forces still committed to a peaceful settlement.

SOUTH EAST ASIA

➡ **Myanmar/Burma** Government announced May referendum on new constitution 8 Feb, culmination of 14-year process; document not yet public. Referendum would allow for 2010 “multiparty democratic elections”, but opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi barred from contesting ostensibly because she married a foreigner. UNSG Ban Ki-moon urged government to include opposition, while Special Envoy Gambari continued regional consultations; said Suu Kyi priority for discussions in planned early-March visit. Jakarta broke regional ranks 21 Feb when Indonesian FM called for consultation with minorities on charter in advance of referendum. Pado Mahn Shar, leader of Karen National Union, shot dead at home in Mae Sot.

- Comment by John Virgoe (Crisis Group), [“A Chance for Change in Burma”](#), *Boston Globe*, 10 Feb. 2008.
- [“Myanmar finishes its new constitution”](#), *LA Times*, 20 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Indonesia** Home Affairs minister announced 15 Feb government would not strike down Sharia-based local regulations as unconstitutional or against ideology of Pancasila. Aceh Governor Irwandi 2 Feb rejected government regulation on regional symbols (seen as “separatist”) as undermining regional autonomy laws.

- [“God save the Republic”](#), *Jakarta Post*, 21 Feb. 2008.

Crisis Group Asia Report N°147, [Indonesia: Jemaah Islamiyah's Publishing Industry](#), 28 Feb. 2008. The Indonesian government should more closely monitor publishers associated with the extremist organisation, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). Some JI associates have developed a profitable publishing consortium, producing books that reflect JI's lively internal debate. Their output has jumped dramatically as JI has weakened over the last few years. They should not be closed down or their books banned, but by enforcing existing laws the government could exert closer scrutiny and also gain valuable information.



➡ **Philippines** Local residents on Jolo island decried “massacre” after troops killed 8 civilians, including 2 children, in Maimbug, Sulu 4 Feb; exact details of operation unclear. Army claimed victims caught in crossfire between troops and Abu Sayyaf, but investigation by human rights commission rejected claims, called for criminal charges. Swiss Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue reported “indiscriminate firing”. Amid claims of assassination plots, President Arroyo upped military and police presence at end-month anti-government rallies in Manila.

- [“Philippine rights agency blames military for deaths”](#), Reuters, 14 Feb. 2008.
- [“Eight civilians said killed in Philippine offensive”](#), Reuters, 5 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Thailand** Daily attacks continued in south. PM Samak Sundaravej downplayed proposal by Interior Minister Chalerm Yoobamrung suggesting autonomy as possible solution. U.S. reinstated financial assistance, including military aid, 6 Feb, suspended after September 2006 coup. Former PM Thaksin returned to Bangkok from exile 28 Feb; granted bail on charges of abuse of power, ordered not to leave country.

- [“Thai leaders spar over autonomy for south”](#), *Christian Science Monitor*, 19 Feb. 2008.
- [“U.S. lifts restrictions on Thai assistance”](#), Reuters, 7 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Timor-Leste** President Ramos-Horta shot in attack on home 11 Feb by rebels led by former head of military police Alfredo Reinado, himself killed in firefight with guards. PM Gusmão escaped uninjured from attack same morning reportedly led by Reinado associate and leader of 2006 “petitioners” (disgruntled former soldiers) group, Gastão Salsinha. Reinado's death may clear obstacle to reconciliation with petitioners, hundreds of whom have come to Dili to negotiate with government, and are housed in government-supported IDP camp. Gusmão declared 48-hour state of emergency, extended for 30 days 22 Feb. Ramos-Horta recovering in Darwin, Australia; Parliament President Araujo appointed acting president 14 Feb. Hunt for Salsinha and others closely associated with Reinado, now hiding in hills, continues. 4 suspects arrested after launch of security operations against rebels. Australia provided extra 200 soldiers and 70 police to help shore up security; few public disturbances reported. UNMIT mandate extended 1 year 25 Feb.

- [“Criminal syndicate in Timor”](#), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 Feb. 2008.
- [“East Timor extends emergency rule after attacks on leaders”](#), AP, 22 Feb. 2008.
- [“Timor-Leste dawn raids”](#), *Economist*, 14 Feb. 2008.



Europe

BALKANS

➤ **Albania** 5 opposition parties 13 Feb withdrew challenge to key electoral reforms after ruling Democratic Party and leading opposition Socialist Party rejected demands for open candidate lists. SMI party left opposition coalition 21 Feb; established "Left for Integration" movement.

- "Small parties drop demands for open candidate lists", SEE Times, 14 Feb. 2008.

➤ **Bosnia & Herzegovina** PM Spiric and national government appointed 20 Feb after Nov 2007 resignation over political reforms. Parliament approved 2 key police reforms 26 Feb establishing Directorate for Co-ordination of Police Bodies and Agencies, supervisory panels for police structures; to be reviewed by EU. 3,000 protesting against rising crime rate 13 Feb in Sarajevo clashed with police. Violent protests held against Kosovo independence (see Kosovo) in Serb-dominated Republika Srpska (RS): 10,000-strong rally in front of U.S. consulate 26 Feb and 21 Feb protest near parliament dispersed with tear gas. 4,000 in rallies 17-22 Feb in Banja Luka. RS parliament adopted resolution with secession option 21 Feb after RS PM Dodik ruled out RS separation. Brussels agreed to extend High Representative mandate 27 Feb.

- "Bosnian police in protest clash", BBC, 26 Feb. 2008.
- "Rights, threats, politics", ISN Security Watch, 5 Feb. 2008.

➤ **Kosovo** 17 Feb [declaration of independence](#) met with celebrations by over 90% of population, limited Serb unrest, but situation in north fragile with Belgrade calling for annulment and resisting deployment of new EU rule-of-law mission (EULEX). In declaration text PM Thaci pledged commitment to protect Serb minorities under the Ahtisaari plan, welcomed planned international civilian and EULEX mission; parliament approved 9 laws of Ahtisaari plan, establishing police force, statehood and diplomatic immunity. U.S., UK, France announced recognition next day; 22 countries recognised including 12 EU member states. Spain, Romania and Cyprus objected, blocking EU common position on recognition 18 Feb. In UNSC emergency session 18 Feb Russia and China led objections to independence, 8 members expressed support. Serbia, Russia rejected declaration as "null and void"; Serbia initiated criminal charges against Kosovo leaders and pledged to continue governing "loyal" citizens. Belgrade ministers visited Kosovo Serb communities to show support. EULEX launched; Dutch Pieter Feith appointed EUSR 16 Feb without formal vote. Feith said 29 Feb Kosovo would not be partitioned, despite Belgrade's efforts to split off Serb-dominated north. Serb enclaves mostly calm, but protests and sporadic violence north of Ibar river caused withdrawal of Albanian police, customs officials and temporary EU withdrawal 23 Feb. Serb officers ignored orders from Pristina, established "parallel" police stations in east, while Serbian pressure mounted for takeover of UN courts in north. Several incidents at Serb border: KFOR, UNMIK briefly shut crossings 20 Feb, then restricted entry after organised Serb groups destroyed Jarinje and Brnjak border posts 19 Feb, with Belgrade's retrospective approval; KFOR stopped Serb mob near Albanian village of Cabra 20 Feb; Serbia allowed army

reservists through 21 Feb to attack Kosovo police, KFOR forces at Merdare and Mutivode border posts.

- Comment by Alexander Anderson (Crisis Group), "[Independent Kosovo: Day One](#)", BalkanInsight, 15 Feb. 2008.
- "[Kosovo is recognized by some, rebuked by others](#)", *International Herald Tribune*, 19 Feb. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°188, [Kosovo Countdown: A Blueprint for Transition](#), 6 Dec. 2007.

➤ **Macedonia** Protests against possible name change: up to 5,000 rallied 19, 27 Feb, stoned Greek embassy, after UN Special Envoy Nimetz offered new compromise proposal ahead of 19-27 Feb rounds of name dispute talks in Athens. Opposition parties Democratic Union for Integration and Social Democratic Alliance of Macedonia called on Interior Minister Jankulovska to resign over Nov 2007 Brodec counterterrorism operation that killed 6.

- "[Thousands protest potential name change for Macedonia](#)", SEE Times, 28 Feb. 2008.

➤ **Serbia** President Tadic re-elected in 3 Feb second round presidential elections with 50.5% to Serbian Radical Party (SRS) candidate Tomislav Nikolic's 47.7%. Government unable to agree on proposed EU pre-association agreement. PM Kostunica declared Kosovo EULEX mission illegal 14 Feb, condemned U.S., EU over 17 Feb Kosovo independence declaration (see Kosovo). Declaration sparked violent protests and looting 17-18 Feb, and again on 21 Feb following 200,000-strong rally in Belgrade. 9 Western embassies attacked after government withdrew police protection; U.S. embassy burned, Slovenian embassy sacked. U.S. evacuated non-essential staff 22 Feb. UNSC condemned violence; called on government to restore calm, protect embassies. Belgrade withdrew ambassadors from countries recognising Kosovo. Kostunica said riots a message for law, justice and denounced western "politics of force". Tadic: "Serbia will never recognise an independent Kosovo". EU froze association talks 22 Feb. Russian Deputy PM Medvedev and FM Lavrov visited Belgrade 25 Feb, declared support of Serb rejection of Kosovo independence.

- "[Russia pledges support to Serbia](#)", BBC, 25 Feb. 2008.
- "[Police in standoff with Serb demonstrators over Kosovo](#)", *Guardian*, 22 Feb. 2008.
- "[Serbian prime minister blocks EU talks](#)", AP, 6 Feb. 2008.

CAUCASUS

➤ ➤ **Armenia** As *CrisisWatch* went to press, government violently suppressing opposition supporters in Yerevan, claiming in response to coup threat; armed forces reportedly mobilising for broader crackdown. State of emergency declared 1 March. Response grew progressively stronger during protests following 19 Feb presidential elections. PM Sarkisian received 53% of vote; opposition candidate Ter-Petrosian, 21.5%. Opposition claims vote rigging responsible for Sarkisian's success brought tens of thousands to Yerevan streets. 13 senior government officials resigned 23-25 Feb, citing election fraud. Ter-Petrosian rejected 26 Feb Sarkisian proposal to form coalition government. Several opposition leaders detained 23, 24 Feb; Ter-Petrosian placed under house arrest 1 March. Deputy prosecutor general dismissed, arrested 24 Feb, after voicing support for Ter-Petrosian. OSCE said elections "mostly in line" with international commitments but reported violations in 16% of polling stations. Observers also criticised PM's use of

state and administrative resources during campaign, demanded investigation of 6 Feb Artashat attack on opposition rally.

- [“Armenian police forcibly disperse opposition protesters”](#), RFE/RL, 1 Mar. 2008.
- [“Defeated presidential challenger rejects calls for cooperation”](#), RFE/RL, 28 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Azerbaijan** Journalist Agil Xalil of opposition newspaper *Azadliq* assaulted by state officials 22 Feb. Small opposition party Fazilat threatened protests in March if denied registration. Party platform Popular Front of Unified Azerbaijani Party (PFUAP) announced boycott of Oct 2008 presidential elections. Deputy FM Azimov discussed alleged Kurdistan Worker Party (PKK) cells in talks with U.S. representatives 14 Feb.

- [“Washington, Baku concerned about PKK cells in Caucasus”](#), RFE/RL, 15 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Chechnya (Russia)** 4 militants shot dead by Russian forces in Shatoy sky district 15 Feb. Police-rebel clash during arrest attempt 3 Feb in Vedeno region left 2 police dead. Rebels killed abducted Russian interior ministry serviceman 8 Feb.

- [“There is peace. We have a new airport. People are satisfied”](#), *Guardian*, 22 Feb. 2008.

➡ **North Caucasus (non-Chechnya)** Russian police operations in Dagestan continued throughout month: 2 suspected rebels detained 20 Feb in Gimri. 3 militants and 1 security officer killed in clash in Babayurt district 12 Feb. 3 rebels shot dead 5, 7 Feb. Russian President Putin visited Botlikh army base 4 Feb. Arrests after 26 Jan anti-government rally in Nazran, Ingushetia: main organisers Maksharip Aushev and Magomed Evloev and Aushev's brother-in-law detained 13-14 Feb. Opposition clans protested President Zyazikov's list of candidates for 2 March republican parliamentary elections rejecting “handpicked” candidates. Police killed 1 gunman in village of Novy 8 Feb.

- [“Instability in Dagestan spreads to South”](#), RFE/RL, 15 Feb. 2008.
- [“N.Caucasus poses problems for next Russian leader”](#), Reuters, 5 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Georgia** Protests against 5 Jan presidential election results continued with 10,000-strong rally 15 Feb in Tbilisi. Opposition National Council dropped hunger strike threats 22 Feb after parliament speaker Burjanadze agreed to release detained Nov 2007 protesters and Central Election Commission chair later this month. New board of trustees for public broadcaster appointed 26 Feb. Opposition figure Patarkatsishvili died 12 Feb in London from heart attack. Patarkatsishvili-backed Imedi TV station remained closed after decision on reopening postponed 15 Feb. President Saakashvili threatened police intervention if journalist detained in Abkhazia 26 Feb not released. UN-led talks on Georgian-Abkhaz tensions held 18-19 Feb in Geneva. Saakashvili and Russian President Putin vowed to “improve ties” in 21 Feb Moscow meeting but Putin denounced Georgia NATO membership.

- [“Russia warns Georgia against joining NATO”](#), Reuters, 21 Feb. 2008.
- [“Can Saakashvili keep the country together?”](#), RFE/RL, 14 Feb. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°189, [Georgia: Sliding towards Authoritarianism?](#), 19 Dec. 2007.

➡ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** Azeri President Aliyev announced “ready for war” 4 Feb during Slovenian PM Rupel visit to Baku. Armenia ruled out territorial exchange for peace deal. OSCE Chairman representative Kasprzyk 14 Feb warned both parties against increased ceasefire violations, announced intensification of monitoring; 1 Azeri soldier reportedly killed 16 Feb. Baku called for discussion of OSCE report on conflict 15 Feb. Azeri foreign ministry protested against polling stations in region for 19 Feb Armenian presidential elections. Azeri Deputy FM Azimov said new negotiations with elected Armenian president needed “initiative from the OSCE Minsk Group”.

- [“OSCE warns Azerbaijan, Armenia against frequent violation of ceasefire”](#), Trend News, 14 Feb. 2008.
- [“Azerbaijan up for a fight, but Armenia unbowed”](#), RFE/RL, 8 Feb. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°187, [Nagorno-Karabakh: Risking War](#), 14 Nov. 2007.

EASTERN EUROPE

➡ **Belarus** Prominent political prisoners released: former legislator Klimau 20 Feb; *Zhoda* editor Zdzvizehkov 22 Feb after European Parliament resolution 24 Feb demanded further releases. Imprisoned candidate Kazulin allowed 3-day leave for wife's funeral 26 Feb after threatened hunger strike. Opposition leader Milinkevich briefly detained for questioning 18 Feb.

- [“Release of political prisoners focuses on Kazulin case”](#), RFE/RL, 25 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Moldova** Transnistrian foreign ministry announced 19 Feb intention to seek independence following Kosovo declaration (see Kosovo). Editor of newspaper *Timpul Tanase* investigated on charges of endangering public security and public anti-Russian statements after 3 Feb TV statements.

- [“Moldovan separatists to seek independence”](#), BalkanInsight, 19 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Ukraine** Gazprom threatened 25% cut of gas supplies 26 Feb after PM Tymoshenko failed to clarify deal reached by President Yushchenko and Russian President Putin 13 Feb. Kiev agreed to pay off Gazprom debts. EU started negotiations for free trade agreement 18 Feb. Moscow threatened 12 Feb to target missiles at Ukraine in case of NATO accession or deployment of U.S. missile shield. Verkhovna Rada speaker Yanukovich agreed to hold roundtable 25 Feb to resolve parliamentary deadlock.

- [“EU launches talks on free trade agreement with Ukraine”](#), AP, 18 Feb. 2008.
- [“Russia in Ukraine missile threat”](#), BBC, 12 Feb. 2008.

WESTERN EUROPE/MEDITERRANEAN

➡ **Basque Country (Spain)** Wave of ETA arrests continued: 4 suspects of Dec 2006 Madrid airport bombing arrested 15 Feb. Violent protests in San Sebastian, Bilbao 14 Feb followed arrest of 11 activists and 2 senior members of banned separatist Batasuna. Minor explosions in Arnotegi 23 Feb and near courthouse in Bergera 7 Feb.

- [“Boobytrap bomb explodes in Basque Country”](#), Reuters, 23 Feb. 2008.
- [“Unrest, protests in Basque region after separatist crackdown”](#), AFP, 14 Feb. 2008.

-   **Cyprus** Demetris Christofias of Communist Akel party won 24 Feb second round presidential elections with 53.4%. Conservative Kasoulides second with 46.6%. Incumbent President Papadopoulos ousted 17 Feb first round. Christofias and Turkish Cypriot President Talat agreed to meet at “earliest possible date” for reunification talks.
- Comment by Hugh Pope (Crisis Group), [“The Last Chance for Cyprus, Really”](#), *Daily Star*, 19 Feb. 2008.
 - [“Beyond conflict”](#), openDemocracy, 6 Feb. 2008.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°190, [Cyprus: Reversing the Drift to Partition](#), 10 Jan. 2008.

-  **Turkey** Turkish ground troops crossed into northern Iraq 21 Feb after air, artillery strikes in continuing campaign against Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) bases, reportedly began troop pull-out 29 Feb (see Iraq). Following raid, PKK commander Bahoş Erdal called on Turkish Kurds to fight authorities in protest. U.S. Defense Sec. Gates called on Turkey 27 Feb to keep operation “very short”, 1-2 weeks at most. Controversial amendment to constitution to lift ban on women wearing headscarf in universities passed 9 Feb; decision being challenged in court, several universities resisting implementation.
- [“After 8 days, Turkey pulls its troops out of Iraq”](#), *New York Times*, 1 Mar 2008.
 - [“Trouble for Turkey?”](#), *Economist*, 13 Feb. 2008.



Latin America / Caribbean

-  **Bolivia** President Morales signed law 29 Feb setting 4 May date for referendum on draft of proposed new constitution after congress approved national vote; Morales’s supporters blocked many opposition lawmakers from attending vote. Technical dialogue commission set up to address constitutional, autonomy dispute failed to make progress, while central government began pension payments 1 Feb using provincial funds allocated from hydrocarbon tax without governors’ agreement. Santa Cruz department said autonomy referendum to be held 4 May.
- [“Bolivia sets vote on new constitution”](#), AP, 29 Feb. 2008.
 - [“Bolivia’s Morales defies opposition on pension plan”](#), Reuters, 1 Feb. 2008.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Latin America Report N°23, [Bolivia’s New Constitution: Avoiding Violent Confrontation](#), 31 Aug. 2007.

-  **Colombia** Hostage release issue continued to dominate: FARC released 4 former politicians held hostage 27 Feb but concern grew over health of Ingrid Betancourt. Venezuelan President Chávez pushed for greater international mediation, while FARC rejected earlier proposal for involvement of Spain, Catholic Church. More than 1m marched worldwide in protests against FARC 4 Feb; government support of protests drew criticism, independent protest against all parties to country’s violence planned for 6 March. FARC number 2 Raul Reyes killed 1 March by army. Norte del Valle cartel leader Wilber Varela shot dead in Venezuela 1 Feb, reportedly by associates. Supreme Court justices indicted former DAS (secret police) director Jorge Noguera for allowing paramilitary infiltration. 15 soldiers convicted 18 Feb for murder of 10 elite anti-narcotics policemen in Valle del Cauca in May 2006. U.S. froze assets of former paramilitary leader Carlos “Macaco” Jimenez. Over 2,000 farmers clashed with police near Medellín 19-23 Feb in

- protest against coca eradication program.
- [“Top FARC leader killed by troops”](#), BBC, 1 Mar. 2008.
 - [“Fears grow for Farc sick hostage”](#), BBC, 28 Feb. 2008.

-  **Haiti** Parliament rejected no-confidence vote against PM Alexis 28 Feb. Thousands protested in Port-au-Prince 29 Feb demanding former President Aristide’s return from 4-year exile. Tension mounted on northern border: Dominican Republic army on alert after 2 workers briefly kidnapped by Haitians. Suspected kidnapper lynched 9 Feb, crowds attempted another lynching 10 Feb as kidnappings continued to increase.
- [“Haiti prime minister survives censure vote over handling of country’s economy”](#), AP, 29 Feb. 2008.
 - For latest report, see Crisis Group Latin American/Caribbean Report N°24, [Peacebuilding in Haiti: Including Haitians from Abroad](#), 14 Dec. 2007.

-  **Venezuela** Several small bomb blasts mid-Feb in Caracas, 1 killed; previously unknown Grupo Venceremos de la Izquierda Central Unida claimed responsibility, motives unclear. Chávez threatened to cut U.S. oil supplies 10 Feb after U.S., European courts froze \$12b assets of state oil company PdVSA to guarantee repayment should ExxonMobil win compensation for Venezuelan assets’ expropriation. Caracas asked ExxonMobil to resume participation in World Bank-sponsored talks, paid \$1.8b compensation to European oil firms. U.S. annual narcotics report condemned Venezuela’s “demonstrable failure” to fight drug trafficking 29 Feb. Food shortage protests continued; Chávez warned may nationalise food producers.
- [“Venezuela blames string of blasts on same group”](#), Reuters, 25 Feb. 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** Violence escalated significantly. At month end: 27 Feb Israeli airstrike killed 5 Hamas in Gaza; responding rocket barrage same day killed Israeli man in Sderot – first civilian death from rocket attack since June. In following 3 days, Hamas fired rockets, including into Ashkelon, and Israel intensified Gaza operations, killing some 60 on 1 March, at least half civilians. Total killed 27 Feb-1 March near 100, including 3 dead in raid on refugee camp near Nablus (West Bank) and 2 Israeli soldiers. Earlier in month: Israeli woman killed in 4 Feb suicide bombing in Dimona (Negev) – first in over 1 year – 2 bombers dead; Hamas claimed responsibility. Israel stepped up operations: killed at least 7 Hamas 5 Feb; further 6 militants, 1 civilian dead 7 Feb; 5 dead in 17 Feb raid – some 80 detained. Scores of rockets and mortars fired from Gaza into southern Israel: 2 youths seriously wounded 9 Feb. Egypt resealed Gaza border 3 Feb, 12 days after Palestinians breached barrier under tightened Israeli blockade. Several injured, 1 killed in clashes between Hamas and Egyptian border guards. Hamas in Cairo meetings to discuss border control. Egyptian officials said 1 Feb 15 Palestinians armed with explosives detained in Sinai. East Jerusalem settlement expansion plans again announced 12 Feb. Israel rejected accusations of involvement in 12 Feb assassination of Hizbollah commander in Damascus: on high

alert following retaliation threats (see Lebanon, Syria). Israeli PM Ehud Olmert and Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas held talks 19 Feb. UN humanitarian chief “shocked” by Gaza situation; called for opening Israeli crossings, end to Palestinian rocket attacks.

- Comment by Ezzedine Choukri (Crisis Group), “[The Rafah Quartet](#)”, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 31 Jan. 2008.
- “[Split by geography and politics](#)”, *Economist*, 21 Feb. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°71, *Inside Gaza: The Challenge of Clans and Families*, 20 Dec. 2007.

➡ **Lebanon** Tensions remained high and political crisis continued. In Beirut, 3-year anniversary commemoration of former PM Rafiq Hariri assassination 14 Feb coincided with funeral for Hizbollah commander Imad Mughniyeh, killed in 12 Feb Damascus car bomb. Thousands of troops deployed but no serious violence; low-level clashes between rival political factions throughout month. Hizbollah threatened “open war” against Israel. 28 Feb U.S. deployed 3 warships off Lebanon coast. Arab League SG Amre Moussa left Beirut after failing to mediate presidential succession crisis; parliamentary vote on post delayed to 11 March; speculation Moussa may return 9 March 19 soldiers charged over killings of 6 opposition protesters during clashes in southern Beirut on 27 Jan; followed accusations by Hizbollah of army bias. Fatah al-Islam leader Shaker al-Abssi and 4 Syrian members of group charged for 13 Feb 2007 Beirut bus bomb. Lebanese prosecutor indicted 56 for involvement in al-Qaeda-linked groups, including Fatah al-Islam, 18 Feb. Israeli forces killed Lebanese man near border town Ghajar 3 Feb: circumstances disputed.

- “[New visit by Moussa depends on Cairo talks – diplomats](#)”, *Daily Star*, 28 Feb. 2008.
- “[Death of a terrorist](#)”, *Economist*, 14 Feb. 2008.
- “[Rival events reveal Lebanon divisions](#)”, BBC, 14 Feb. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°69, *Hizbollah and the Lebanese Crisis*, 10 Oct. 2007.

➡ **Syria** Hizbollah commander Imad Mughniyeh, in hiding for years, assassinated in Damascus car bomb 12 Feb. Syria condemned killing, announced investigation; Iran, Hizbollah blamed Israel – regional tensions escalated. U.S. welcomed news of death; expanded financial sanctions against senior Syrian officials and associates; again accused Damascus of undermining efforts in Lebanon and Iraq. German Chancellor Merkel called on Syria 22 Feb to play “constructive part” in Lebanon crisis; expressed support for Arab League efforts ahead of March summit in Damascus. Egyptian President Mubarak 26 Feb echoed criticism of Syria’s role in Lebanon. EU agreed 17 Feb additional \$13.2m to Syria (over \$55m total) to fund health aid for some 1.5m Iraqi refugees in country.

- “[Moussa puts off latest effort to end impasse in Lebanon](#)”, *Daily Star*, 23 Feb. 2008.
- “[Bomb kills top Hezbollah leader](#)”, BBC, 13 Feb. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°63, *Restarting Israeli-Syrian Negotiations*, 10 Apr. 2007.

GULF

➡ **Bahrain** Some 2,500 in Manama opposition protests, calling for release of activists detained after Dec 2007 clashes and investigation of abuse claims.

- “[Bahraini protesters demand release of opposition activists](#)”, AFP, 22 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Iran** UK and France introduced UNSC resolution 21 Feb backed by U.S., Russia, China and Germany, seeking to expand financial sanctions and impose travel bans on certain Iranian officials; vote expected 3 March. IAEA report released 22 Feb noted improved access for inspectors but said Tehran yet to adequately respond over questions on nuclear material “weaponisation”. Moscow expressed concern at rocket test-fired 4 Feb. Guardian Council continued to reinstate candidates previously disqualified from running in 14 March vote: over 830 of original 2200 candidates have been re-qualified for election to the 290-seat parliament. President Ahmadi-Nejad to visit Iraq 2-3 March; first visit by Iranian leader since 1979.

- “[New parliament, new policies?](#)”, *Economist*, 21 Feb. 2008.
- “[Iran defiant over sanction threat](#)”, BBC, 23 Feb. 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** Positive and negative developments in month. Parliament passed key legislation 13 Feb after acrimonious delay: laws set state budget (\$48b) and provide for limited detainee amnesty. Presidential council then rejected part of legislation (passed by parliament) defining relationship between Baghdad and local authorities 27 Feb. Radical Shiite cleric Muqtada Sadr announced 6-month extension of his Mahdi Army ceasefire 22 Feb. Turkish troops crossed into northern Iraq 21 Feb after air, artillery strikes in continuing campaign against Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) bases: reportedly began troop pull-out 29 Feb. Turkey claimed 230 PKK, 27 military killed in 3,000-10,000-strong operation. PKK claim 81 Turkish soldiers and 2 PKK killed, with fewer than 1,000 troops crossing border. Turkey warned Iraq not to shelter “fleeing rebels”; Iraqi FM urged withdrawal and stressed threat to sovereignty. Elsewhere security remained volatile: suicide bomber targeted Shiite pilgrims in Iskandariya en route to Karbala for Arbaeen festival 24 Feb, killing 40; car bomb killed 33 in Balad 10 Feb coinciding with U.S. Defense Sec. Gates’ arrival in Baghdad. Leaders of Sunni Awakening Council targeted by al-Qaeda in Iraq: Sheikh Ibrahim Mutayri al-Mohammedi killed 23 Feb north of Falluja.

- “[Iraqi local election law rejected](#)”, BBC, 27 Feb. 2008.
- “[The enigma of Muqtada al-Sadr](#)”, *Economist*, 14 Feb. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°70, *Shiite Politics in Iraq: The Role of the Supreme Council*, 15 Nov. 2007.

Crisis Group Middle East Report N°72, *Iraq’s Civil War, the Sadrist and the Surge*, 7 Feb. 2008.



For the downturn in violence in Iraq to continue, Muqtada al-Sadr’s unilateral ceasefire must become a comprehensive multilateral one that allows his movement to become a legitimate political actor. It is fanciful to expect the Mahdi Army’s defeat; excessive pressure is likelier to trigger fierce resistance in Baghdad and an escalating intra-Shiite civil war in the south. Its leadership has made steps to control its members and the shift toward a non-violent political movement should be strongly encouraged.

➡ **Saudi Arabia** Saudi FM warned Arab states may retract 2002 Arab peace initiative, which offered recognition of Israel for withdrawal from Arab lands, at end-March Arab League summit

in Damascus unless Israel clearly accepts offer. King Abdullah may skip summit due to Saudi-Syrian rift over Lebanon.

- [“Arab leaders warn they could reconsider peace offer to Israel”](#), AP, 22 Feb. 2008.

- **Yemen** Fighting between al-Houthi Shiite rebels and government continued in northern Saada province early Feb despite 1 Feb ceasefire brokered by Qatar. Clashes restarted in Jan after breakdown of June 2007 Qatari-mediated deal. 14 killed 3 Feb in Haidan district, west of Saada. 27 Feb U.S. criticised release on bail of al-Qaeda militant wanted for 2000 U.S. warship bombing.
 - [“Rebel leader warns of more conflict in Saada”](#), IRIN, 10 Feb. 2008.

NORTH AFRICA

- **Algeria** Interior Ministry said 5 Feb security forces killed rebel leader and arrested 6 associates responsible for 11 Dec 2007 twin bombings in Algiers by Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Security forces claimed rebel leader “emir” Hamza shot 26 Feb during counter-terror raid. Lakhdar Brahimi to head UN staff security review following Dec attack. National security chief Ali Tounsi 9 Feb announced police force expansion to 200,000 by 2010 to create climate of security. Attacks on security forces continued: 8 killed in suspected AQIM-led ambush on military vehicle in El Oued 7 Feb; 2 killed in separate attacks on military targets in Boukalfa and Tizi Ouzou 7, 16 Feb.
 - [“Algeria says it killed rebel leader and seized 6 in his gang”](#), Reuters, 7 Feb. 2008.
 - [“Algeria attacks target army convoy”](#), Reuters, 6 Feb. 2008.

- **Egypt** Further Muslim Brotherhood (MB) arrests as authorities continued to target potential candidates for 8 April municipal elections: some 250 rounded up in mid-late Feb raids, 500 now detained. MB leader Mohammed Mahdi Akef 21 Feb vowed group would contest upcoming elections despite crackdown. Several thousand supporters demonstrated in universities ahead of expected 26 Feb military tribunal verdict on trial of 40 senior members, verdict postponed to 25 March.

- [“Egypt treads a fine diplomatic line”](#), *Financial Times*, 21 Feb. 2008.

- **Mauritania** 8 briefly detained in connection with 1 Feb Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb shooting attack on Israeli embassy and nightclub in Nouakchott. UN working group on arbitrary detention began 14-day assessment mission 19 Feb.

- [“Mauritania frees 8 after embassy attack”](#), AP, 19 Feb. 2008.

- **Morocco** Moroccan authorities claimed dismantled terrorist network 21 Feb, after arresting 32 in sweeps 18-20 Feb. Moderate Islamist party al-Badil al-Hadari outlawed 20 Feb for alleged connections to network. Few details of threats released, but Belgium-based Abdelkader Belliraj alleged mastermind.

- [“Morocco’s militants”](#), *Economist*, 21 Feb. 2008.

- **Western Sahara** UN envoy conducted series of meetings with WS, Moroccan and regional leaders ahead of fourth round of peace talks between Polisario Front and Morocco to be held 11-13 March.

- [“UN envoy seeks peace in Western Sahara”](#), AP, 4 Feb. 2008.

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President William J. Clinton, 5 March 2007

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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