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December 2014 Trends



Deteriorated Situations

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Improved Situations



Unchanged Situations

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January 2014 Watchlist



Conflict Risk Alerts

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Conflict Resolution Opportunities

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.

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Africa

Central Africa

➡ **Burundi** National Assembly held consultations with civil society and political parties 19-20 Dec to discuss constitutional review. Protest against constitutional amendment planned 9 Dec cancelled after 5 Dec arrest of prominent FRODEBU politician Frédéric Bamvuginyumvira on charges of attempted corruption; opposition denounced arrest as politically motivated. National Assembly 28 Dec passed controversial draft law on national commission on land and properties.

- [“Alarm over Burundi’s planned constitution changes”](#), IRIN, 18 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Cameroon** Nigerian Islamist Sect Boko Haram (BH) 14 Dec attacked Kousseri town, leaving 2 dead; far-north governor imposed curfew in border areas, especially Mayo Sava, Mayo Tsanaga, Logone and Chari subdistricts. Armed groups from CAR 5 Dec perpetrated separate attacks in Ondiki and Bombe-Bakary, injuring 3 Rapid Intervention Battalion soldiers. Govt 18 Dec deployed troops to reinforce MISCA in CAR. Nigerian military 20 Dec confirmed army barracks attacked by BH in Bama, Borno came from cells located across border in Cameroon. French priest Georges Vandenbeusch abducted Nov by BH freed 31 Dec.

- [“Crise centrafricaine: L’armée camerounaise fonce vers Bangui”](#), 237online, 20 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Central African Republic** Scores killed in cycle of religious killings and retaliations in Bangui: “anti-balaka” militias 5 Dec attacked ex-Seleka; Amnesty International reported over 1,000 killed in ensuing sectarian clashes. UNSC 5 Dec passed resolution authorising French military intervention as violence continued to escalate; 1,600 French troops deployed. Violence continued throughout country: 38 killed, 9,000 displaced by anti-balaka offensive in Bozoum, NW; French soldiers deployed. 30 bodies found 26 Dec close to military camp in Bangui. Interim President Djotodia reportedly offered anti-balaka role in govt 14 Dec in attempt to contain fighting; several anti-balaka elements expressed desire to overthrow Djotodia, oust Seleka. French forces focused on disarmament; 2 French soldiers killed early Dec. EU FMs 16 Dec stated intent to explore possibility of EU civilian or military mission; France urged EU partners contributing logistics aid to increase support, deploy troops. MISCA peacekeeping mission officially transferred from ECCAS to AU 19 Dec; 850 additional Burundian troops deployed. U.S. President Obama 10 Dec authorised use of up to \$100mn to support MISCA; U.S. Ambassador to UN Samantha Power 19 Dec visited Bangui. Political tensions increased as Djotodia fired security, finance and livestock ministers without consulting with PM Tiangaye, violating constitutional charter.

- Thierry Vircoulon, Thibaud Lesueur, [“Africa’s Crumbling Center”](#), *New York Times*, 1 Dec. 2013.
- Africa Program Staff, [“Responding to the Crisis in the Central African Republic”](#), *The African Peacebuilding Agenda*, 17 Dec. 2013.
- [“Découverte d’un charnier à Bangui”](#), RFI, 26 Dec. 2013.

New Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°962, [Central African Republic: Better Late than Never](#), 2 Dec. 2013. As the Central African Republic (CAR) stares into an abyss of potentially appalling proportions, the international community must focus on the quickest, most decisive means of restoring security to its population.

➡ **Chad** Chadian and Burundian soldiers in CAR MISCA peacekeeping force exchanged fire 23 Dec; Deby’s nephew appointed new commander of Chadian contingent.

- [“Coups de feu entre Burundais et Tchadiens de la Misca”](#), RFI, 24 Dec. 2013.

➡ **DR Congo** Security deteriorated with attempted coup by reported supporters of pastor Gideon Mukungubila 30 Dec: armed youths attacked state television, airport and military camp in Kinshasa; 46 attackers reportedly killed, 20 arrested by security forces. Congolese govt, M23 and Ugandan govt 12 Dec agreed to end fighting in East; agreement included amnesty for those not responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, and demobilisation of M23 soldiers. UN report leaked mid-Dec said M23 continuing to recruit in Rwanda, accused Congolese army of rights abuses and profiting from illegal mining in eastern provinces. 21 killed mid-Dec in series of attacks on villages near Beni, N Kivu; perpetrators unknown but some reports suggest Allied Democratic Forces behind attacks; UN deployed additional forces to province. At least 40 killed 25 Dec in reported ADF-NALU attack on Kamango village, N Kivu.

- [“Armed group attacks targets across capital Kinshasa, at least 40 dead”](#), *Huffington Post*, 30 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Rwanda** Conviction of opposition leader Victoire Ingabire upheld on appeal, jail term increased from 8 to 15 years.

- [“L’opposante Victoire Ingabire condamnée à 15 ans de prison en appel”](#), *Le Monde*, 13 Dec. 2013.

Horn of Africa

➡ **Ethiopia** Water ministers from Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt met 16 Dec, failed to reach agreement on disputed Ethiopian Renaissance Dam project. FM Tedros Adhanom 5 Dec said over 100,000 Ethiopian citizens repatriated from Saudi Arabia since Nov following latter’s crackdown on migrant workers. 5 additional suspects in Nov suicide bomb plot, which Ethiopian authorities linked to Somali Al-Shabaab militants, arrested mid-Dec.

- [“Ethiopia swamped by wave of returned migrants”](#), *Al Jazeera*, 25 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Kenya** Inter-ethnic clashes in north increased: dozens killed, thousands displaced by clashes between Borana and Gabra communities in Marsabit. Parliament 5 Dec approved deployment of army to Marsabit, Turkana, West Pokot and Samburu. Madrasa teacher believed to be former Al-Shabaab militant working with Kenyan security forces to fight terrorism beheaded 2 Dec in Malindi. Hundreds of Muslim youths from controversial Masjid Musa mosque, widely viewed as centre of Islamist radicalisation, invaded Sakina mosque in Majengo, forcefully evicted Imams, vowed to introduce jihad sermons at all mosques in Mombasa and act against those working with state agencies; police arrested 18.

At least 4 killed 15 Dec in suspected Al-Shabaab grenade attack on bus in Nairobi.

- [“Ethnic clashes in Kenya leave dozens dead”](#), Al Jazeera, 8 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Somalia** PM Shirdon stepped down 2 Dec after losing confidence vote in parliament; President Sheikh appointed Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed new PM, approved by parliament 21 Dec. Al-Shabaab carried out series of attacks including on Mogadishu intelligence base 4 Dec; suicide bomb targeting Puntland troops 5 Dec killed at least 7 and wounded 37 including civilians in Boosaaso; gunmen killed 8, including 5 Kenyan policemen, in Liboi border town 10 Dec. MP Mohamed Warsame Faisal killed 6 Dec by car bomb. At least 10 killed 27 Dec in suspected Al-Shabaab bomb attack targeting govt forces in Mogadishu. Jubaland President Sheikh Ahmed Madobe 7 Dec appointed new cabinet as part of Nov reconciliation agreement; opponents not included. Heightened inter-clan fighting in Lower-, Middle-Shabelle and Hiiraan regions sparked by land disputes and representation struggle; 2 senior Jubaland officials killed 12 Dec in Kismayo, 10 killed 12 Dec in Al-Shabaab attack in Baido, Hiiraan. All 21 presidential opposition candidates 25 Dec approved Puntland President Farole’s appointed vetting committee which will determine outcome of 8 Jan Puntland presidential elections.

- [“Somali parliament approves new Prime Minister”](#), *New York Times*, 21 Dec. 2013.

New Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°97, [Somalia: Puntland’s Punted Polls](#), 19 Dec. 2013. Puntland’s presidential election, scheduled for January, threatens to exacerbate clan tensions and polarise the population. To keep the regional state on the path of democratisation, deep investment from local, national and international actors will be crucial.

➡ **South Sudan** S Sudan on cusp of civil war after President Kiir accused former VP Riek Machar of attempted coup 17 Dec; UN reported over 1,000 killed, 180,000 displaced by escalating violence. Clashes began in Juba, rapidly spread to Unity and Jonglei states. Violence particularly heavy in Bor, Jonglei, where AU 23 Dec said “war crimes” had been committed: Machar claimed Ugandan jets backing Kiir’s forces bombed Bor 21 Dec; Bor has changed hands 3 times, currently under control of rebel forces “loyal” to Machar. Machar 19 Dec reportedly called on army to oust Kiir; rebel troops 22 Dec took Bentiu, capital of oil-rich Unity state. Regional FMs 20 Dec, mediators 21 Dec met with President Kiir to discuss crisis; Rebecca Garang, John Garang’s widow, met with Kiir 21 Dec but no breakthrough. Govt 27 Dec pledged to observe immediate ceasefire; Machar agreed to talks mediated by regional peace and security body Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD); talks began 2 Jan in Ethiopia. UNSC 24 Dec increased peacekeeping force to 12,500, called for “immediate cessation of hostilities”, dialogue. UN evacuated all non-essential staff; 2 UNMISS peacekeepers killed in attack on Aboko UN base.

- [“South Sudan Needs Respected Outside Mediation”](#), Crisis Group Statement, 18 Dec. 2013.
- [“Political strife in South Sudan sets off ethnic violence”](#), *New York Times*, 21 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Sudan** Reshuffled cabinet unveiled 8 Dec; new appointees primarily from army and security services, as well as President Bashir’s Ja’ali tribe; VP Ali Osman Mohammed Taha replaced by Major General Bakri Hassan Saleh from president’s old guard. AU-UN joint chief mediator and UNAMID head Mohammed Ibn Chambas

held consultations in Addis Ababa 9-11 Dec; rebels reiterated need for joint approach on Darfur, Blue Nile and S Kordofan. Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) rebels 1 Dec claimed over 100 Sudanese security personnel killed in attack on 3 military convoys in Jebel Abu Domou, near border between N and S Kordofan. Army 21 Dec said 17 areas in S Kordofan retaken from rebels. 2 UNAMID peacekeepers killed 29 Dec in S Darfur. Govt expressed concern over S Sudan violence including impact of oil flow disruption on Sudan economy, welcomed S Sudan President Kiir’s acceptance of IGAD mediation.

- [“Sudan’s Bashir replaces top officials amid ongoing protests”](#), Al-Monitor, 29 Dec. 2013.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°209, [Sudan: Preserving Peace in the East](#), 26 Nov. 2013.

➡ **Uganda** Lord Mayor of Kampala and Museveni critic Erias Lukwago early secured high court order re-instating him to office after Nov impeachment and removal; reinstatement not acted upon, raising possibility of by-election. President Museveni 30 Dec called on S Sudan rebels to accept ceasefire, said East African nations agreed to unite to “defeat” rebels; Ugandan soldiers deployed to S Sudan. Army 3 Dec reported senior LRA commander killed in SE CAR, 11 Dec said 19 LRA rebels surrendered to Ugandan authorities. Dissident General David Sejusa 14 Dec launched opposition party “Freedom and Unity Front”. Controversial anti-homosexuality law passed 20 Dec.

- [“Uganda deploys troops to South Sudan amid unrest”](#), *New Straits Times*, 30 Dec. 2013.

Southern Africa

➡ **Madagascar** Second round of presidential election 20 Dec; Jean-Louis Robinson and Hery Rajaonarimampianina both claimed victory, alleged fraud and vote-rigging. SADC, EU observers noted some irregularities but praised polls as “free, credible and democratic”. Electoral commission 30 Dec released partial results showing Rajaonarimampianina, who is close to transitional President Rajoelina, took lead with 53.13% of votes against 46.87% for Robinson, seen as close to deposed President Ravalomanana; final tally due 7 Jan.

- [“Rajoelina candidate leads Madagascar presidential vote”](#), AFP, 30 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Mozambique** RENAMO gunmen 17 Dec attacked bus on main N-S highway, killing 1 and injuring 5. RENAMO 10 Dec reiterated demand for presence at dialogue table of national and foreign mediators, threatened not to take part in further meetings unless observers present; govt 21 Dec accepted presence of local observers. Ruling FRELIMO’s 160-member Central Committee 22-24 Dec met to choose successor to President Guebuza for Oct 2014 presidential polls, shortlisted 3 candidates, all 3 are from northern/central provinces, representing shift from traditional southerner dominance.

- [“We don’t want war in Mozambique”](#), AFP, 20 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Zimbabwe** Following chaotic ZANU-PF provincial elections in Nov, VP Joice Mujuru’s faction of party in control of 9 out of 10 provinces; elections declared free and fair by politburo. Results

theoretically pave way for Mujuru to succeed President Mugabe as party leader. ZANU-PF's 14th Annual National People's Conference adopted resolutions on reestablishment of Special Economic Zones, public-private partnerships and mining sector 13-14 Dec. Finance minister 19 Dec presented 2014 budget likely to further undermine confidence given reiteration of commitment to indigenisation. Worsening liquidity crisis in Zimbabwe with some banks limiting cash withdrawals by customers. Growing anxiety ahead of 1 Jan deadline for foreign-owned shops to close; indigenisation minister 29 Dec said no evictions will take place.

- [“Conference a Resounding Success”](#), *Herald*, 16 Dec. 2013.

West Africa

➡ **Côte d'Ivoire** UN Panel of Experts on Liberia 11 Dec announced it received information Ivorian govt sent hit squads to Ghana to kill followers of former president Gbagbo, made payments to Liberian mercenaries in bid to avoid attacks aimed at destabilising President Ouattara; Ghana govt told UN experts it “foiled” at least 2 missions by Ivorian agents to kill/abduct pro-Gbagbo hardliners. Rally of Republicans and Ivorian Popular Front met 9 Dec for first time in decade, kicked off political dialogue. ICC 16 Dec dismissed Prosecutor's appeal against adjournment of hearing until confirmation of charges against Gbagbo.

- [“Laurent Gbagbo... loin des yeux, loin du cœur”](#), *Jeune Afrique*, 16 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Guinea** Leading opposition parties, with exception of Hope for National Development (PEDN), 12 Dec announced they would sit at newly elected National Assembly; parties nevertheless maintained criticism of 17 Dec presidential decree to reconvene National Transition Council (interim legislative body), Supreme Court's rejection of appeals against Sept elections results. Killing of local footballer Balla Conde 5 Dec sparked protests in Kankan, ruling Rally of the Guinean People (RPG) stronghold; at least 3 killed, 20 injured when police opened fire on crowd. EU 12 Dec announced full resumption of development cooperation, suspended since 2008 coup.

- [“Man's death prompts mass march in Guinea”](#), *AFP*, 17 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Guinea-Bissau** Electoral census began 1 Dec; govt 4 Dec announced 10-day extension beyond 21 Dec deadline as census going very slowly; National Assembly 10 Dec recommended suspending census but govt refused. President Nhamadjo 7 Dec met with political forces, agreed to renew transition beyond end-Dec until formation of new elected govt. UNSC 9 Dec condemned rights violations, encouraged ECOWAS to reinforce military mission in Bissau and pressed for elections, warning stakeholders of sanctions for deliberate obstruction of transition. UN SRSG Ramos Horta 31 Dec said received green light from President Nhamadjo to start comprehensive national political dialogue. Former President Yalá 6 Dec announced run for presidency, 1 Jan announced withdrawal from race, political life.

- [“Security Council warns of potential sanctions if elections hindered”](#), *UN News*, 9 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Liberia** UNSC 10 Dec extended arms embargo imposed in 2003, extended mandate of Panel of Experts. Fayah Gbollie, former presidential candidate and Free Democratic Party (FDP) leader, found murdered in home 6 Dec.

- [“UN panel identifies security risks in Liberia”](#), *AllAfrica*, 17 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Mali** Legislative elections held 15 Dec without major incidents but with low turnout (37%); president and allies retained comfortable majority in parliament. Violence and insecurity in north continued; 3 Fulani herders killed in Goundam 4 Dec; 6 ethnic Arabs allegedly abducted Feb by Malian army in Timbuktu found dead 9 Dec. Militants launched several attacks including bombings in Menaka 1 Dec against MINUSMA Nigerien contingent, 1 killed. French troops 10 Dec killed 19 Islamist militants near Timbuktu; car bomb in Kidal killed 2 MINUSMA Senegalese soldiers 14 Dec. Authorities 4 Dec found mass grave in Diago near Bamako, believed to be “red beret” soldiers who participated in April 2012 counter-coup. Govt 27 Dec announced plans to investigate former president Touré for high treason. Chadian, French MINUSMA soldiers 28-29 Dec discovered nearly 6 tonnes of explosives in arms cache 150km SE of Tessalit. French Defence Minister 31 Dec visited Gao, said Mali almost secure, but pockets of fragility remain in Libya, N Niger and Chad.

- [“Nord-Mali : éradiquer Aqmi, la nouvelle priorité de l'opération Serval”](#), *Jeune Afrique*, 20 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Niger** French forces in Mali late Nov arrested Cheibani Ould Hama, who escaped from Niamey prison during June attack by Islamist militants; extradition expected. Police late Nov arrested man linked to Cheibani allegedly preparing terrorist attacks in Niamey. Govt, AREVA still negotiating renewal of contracts over uranium extraction, which expire end-Dec; over 1,000 protested in Niamey 21 Dec demanding AREVA pay more taxes.

- [“Niamey reçoit le président mauritanien: objectif coopération”](#), *RFI*, 3 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Nigeria** Islamist sect Boko Haram (BH) attacks continued including: 2 Dec attack on military facilities in Maiduguri, Nigerian military said 24 killed when militants repelled; at least 12 killed 28-29 Dec in attack on 5 villages in Hawul area, Borno State, military reported 56 insurgents killed. Gunmen 18 Dec attacked market in Mubi, Adamawa State; army reported 12 gunmen killed. Defence authorities 30 Dec said multinational Joint Task Force killed 7 insurgents on Lake Chad islands. UN OCHA 16 Dec said over 1,200 killed in 48 “BH related” attacks since May 2013. AFP 12 Dec reported video obtained of BH leader Abubakar Shekau taking responsibility for Maiduguri attack, warning BH not confined to Nigeria; Shekau 28 Dec said sect under instruction from Allah to “kill, decapitate and mutilate” non-Muslims. Communal violence resulted in 5 killed in Plateau State 18 Dec, 15 in Benue State 23 Dec, 5 in Adamawa State. Crisis in ruling Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) continued as 37 PDP legislators defected to opposition All Progressives Congress.

- [“Troops kill 63 in Borno raids”](#), *Daily Trust*, 31 Dec. 2013.

Asia

Central Asia

➤ **Kyrgyzstan** Ata Jurt supporters 2 Dec stormed regional govt HQ in Osh demanding release of Ata Jurt MP Akhmatbek Keldibekov, arrested 22 Nov. Osh mayor Melis Myrzakmatov, ally of former president Bakiev, offered support to protesters; summoned to Bishkek and sacked 5 Dec. Myrzakmatov called dismissal “political decision”; around 3,000 supporters 7 Dec demanded his return to mayoral office. Bishkek mayor Isa Omurkulov, under investigation for alleged abuse of office, resigned 4 Dec. Protests calling for nationalisation of country’s largest gold mine Kumtor continued: protesters 10 Dec declared state of emergency, curfew in Saruu. Parliament 11 Dec finally approved sale of natural gas company Kyrgyzgaz to Russia’s Gazprom. Sporadic violence continued on Kyrgyz-Tajik border: several roads closed after alleged arson attack 17 Dec. Deputy PM for Security warned Afghan Taliban has Kyrgyz, Tajik and Uzbek wings.

- [“Bishkek fires powerful Osh mayor”](#), Eurasianet, 5 Dec. 2013.

➤ **Tajikistan** Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBO) prosecutor’s office 6 Dec opened criminal case into 29 Nov clashes between security forces and some 20 gunmen in provincial capital Khorog, prompted by attempt to arrest drug control official accused of weapons smuggling. Incident perceived as move by recently re-elected President Rahmon to assert control over restive GBO. Russian ambassador in 10 Dec media interview said Russian troops from 201st military base ready to help Tajikistan defend border with Afghanistan should situation deteriorate following NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan. 5 students sentenced to 2 years’ jail for fighting alongside rebels in Syria.

- [“Stability is better than uncertainty?”](#), Al Jazeera, 14 Dec. 2013.

➤ **Turkmenistan** Democratic Party re-elected in 15 Dec parliamentary elections, winning 47 out of 125 seats; newly-formed Party of Industrialists, loyal to President Berdymukhamedov, won 14 seats. Turnout reportedly 91%. Rights groups said polls marked by complete lack of opposition.

- [“Rights groups criticise Turkmenistan elections”](#), BBC, 19 Dec. 2013.

➤ **Uzbekistan** Speculation over power struggle within govt fuelled by 16 Dec appointment of Adkham Akhmedbayev as interior minister, interpreted as boost for Tashkent political clan over rivals from Samarkand, Jizzakh regions. FM visited U.S. 9-11 Dec for talks on regional stability, rights, economic development. Row continued between President Karimov’s daughter Gulnara and her family, as Gulnara in interview said she was pushed out of country. Power and gas shortages continued across country.

- [“Uzbek first daughter Gulnara Karimova strikes back at recent claims”](#), *Hürriyet Daily News*, 8 Dec. 2013.

North East Asia

➤ **China (internal)** Local authorities reported police shot dead 14 people during riot near Kashgar city in Xinjiang 15 Dec; 2 police also killed. Follows Nov clash in which at least 9 civilians, 2 police reported killed. State media reported 8 people killed in clash with police in Yarkland county 30 Dec.

- [“Riot in China’s Xinjian kills 16, ‘terror gang’ blamed”](#), Reuters, 16 Dec. 2013.

➤ **China/Japan** Japanese PM Abe visited Yasukuni Shrine 26 Dec drawing a swift rebuke from Beijing. Chinese FM Wang said Abe’s action erected a new and major political barrier to already severely strained Sino-Japanese relationship. U.S. VP Biden’s 2-7 Dec Asia trip dominated by talks over China’s new Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ); Biden reiterated that U.S. does not recognise zone, urged China and Japan to establish channels of communications, reaffirmed U.S. alliance with Japan, asked China’s President Xi to “show restraint”. S Korea 8 Dec announced it would expand its air defence zone (ADZ) for first time in 62 years, meaning China, Japan and ROK ADIZs overlap in East China Sea; China expressed “regret”. Referencing China’s ADIZ but avoiding naming it directly, Japan and ASEAN countries agreed to “enhance cooperation in ensuring freedom of movement in the skies” during mid-Dec summit in Tokyo. Japan 17 Dec adopted new National Security Strategy and increased military spending over next 5 years, citing as justification concerns over China; China strongly critical. Japan and S Korea conducted long-planned combined naval drill in area 11 Dec. Chinese FM Wang 16 Dec outlined China’s 2014 diplomatic priorities including “striving to settle territorial and maritime disputes with neighbouring countries” while safeguarding sovereignty.

- Daniel Pinkston, [“China’s ADIZ and Implications for North East Asia”](#), *Strong and Prosperous*, 4 Dec. 2013.
- [“See you at Yasukuni”](#), *Economist*, 27 Dec. 2013.

➤ **Korean Peninsula** Chang Sŏng-t’aek, uncle by marriage and political guardian of Kim Jong-un, stripped of positions of power 8 Dec, arrested and executed 12 Dec; 2 of his close allies executed mid-Nov. International community expressed concern over stability of DPRK following execution; S Korean President Park said purge is part of “reign of terror” that could inflame tensions on peninsula. DPRK 3 Dec threatened to build up nuclear deterrence capabilities. ROK expressed “regret and anger” over Japanese PM Abe’s visit to Yasukuni Shrine 26 Dec (see China/Japan). ROK, U.S. and UK held previously planned combined naval drills around Korean Peninsula 8-9 Dec. ROK 10 Dec decided to increase maritime combat capabilities against “possible provocation” from DPRK. ROK intelligence official 17 Dec said there are signs DPRK is preparing to conduct 4th nuclear test and long-range missile test. U.S. tourist and Korean War veteran detained during Oct visit released 7 Dec. Delegations from N and S Korea met to discuss normalisation and expansion of Kaesŏng Industrial Complex (KIC), which hosted visit by delegations from G-20 countries and international financial institutions 19 Dec, part of ROK effort to “internationalise” KIC. U.S. basketball star Dennis Rodman 19-23 Dec made 3rd visit to DPRK in 2013 to train N Korean players. Russia tightened sanctions against DPRK 2 Dec.

- [“North Korea executes leader’s powerful uncle in public purge”](#), Reuters, 13 Dec. 2013.

New Crisis Group Asia Report N°254, *Fire on the City Gate: Why China Keeps North Korea Close*, 9 Dec. 2013. North Korea's belligerent behaviour is testing the patience of China, its principal backer, but a consequential Chinese policy change, which the U.S. and its allies hope for, is not likely soon.

South Asia

 **Afghanistan** President Karzai continued to refuse to sign Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with U.S.; Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, leader of Hezb-e-Islami insurgent faction, said group would stop fighting if Karzai continues to refuse to sign. Several leading political figures, civil society groups urged Karzai to sign BSA quickly. Pakistan National Security Adviser Sartaj Aziz 15 Dec said Taliban not ready for talks with Afghan High Peace Council, emphasised need for informal discussions. Leading presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah 14 Dec accused certain groups of stoking linguistic, ethnic and sectarian tensions. Security services 10 Dec said it had foiled 9 coordinated explosions in Kabul, detained 22 Haqqani militants. Hundreds protested 11 Dec in Kabul on "National Victims' Day", called for justice for war criminals, criticised NATO and U.S. forces for civilian deaths.

- Graeme Smith, "Afghan Forces Cannot Go It Alone", Council on Foreign Relations, 18 Dec. 2013.
- "Proxy syndrome", *Harpers*, 18 Dec. 2013.

  **Bangladesh** Tensions and violence intensifying amid continued political deadlock ahead of general election scheduled for 5 Jan, with opposition promising blockades until election day, violence bringing country to standstill. Bangladesh National Party (BNP)-led opposition 2 Dec announced it will boycott elections, continues calling for ruling Awami League (AL) to stand down and form neutral caretaker govt to supervise polls: blocked rail, road and waterways. BNP 18 Dec labelled 5 Jan polls "one-party elections". Opposition boycott would mean 154 out of 300 seats could go uncontested. BNP head Khaleda Zia's house surrounded by police 29 Dec; party vice chairman among BNP leaders arrested. AL-led alliance continued election process, 15 out of 40 registered parties 2 Dec filed nomination papers. AL-alliance suffered setback when coalition member Jatiya Party (JP) joined election boycott. Deadlock exacerbated by 12 Dec execution of Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) leader Abdul Quader Mollah, convicted by International Crimes Tribunal for atrocities committed during 1971 liberation war. JeI supporters 12-15 Dec protested execution, enforced nationwide blockade, attacked houses of 4 AL ministers, clashed with police and AL supporters; at least 25 killed. More than 100 dead in political violence since BNP announced boycott.

- "The campaign trail", *Economist*, 21 Dec. 2013.

 **India (non-Kashmir)** 6 police killed in landmine blast 3 Dec in Aurangabad district, Bihar State, blamed on Maoist rebels. Revolutionary Communist Party, breakaway section of Communist Party of India (Maoist), 20 Dec declared its abandonment of Maoist armed struggle.

- "India Maoist attack kills six policemen in Bihar", BBC, 3 Dec. 2013.

 **Kashmir** Pakistan PM Sharif 3 Dec reportedly said failure to resolve Kashmir problem could trigger war "anytime", PM's office later denied statement; Indian PM Singh 5 Dec warned Pakistan would lose in event of war. Pakistani and Indian security forces

meeting in Lahore agreed to reduce LoC ceasefire violations, boost joint security mechanisms.

- "Don't disturb the consensus", *Foreign Policy*, 18 Dec. 2013.

 **Nepal** Official results of 19 Nov elections for new Constituent Assembly (CA) 3 Dec: Nepali Congress Party (NCP) won largest share of CA seats (196 out of 601); Communist Party of Nepal Unified Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML) won 175 seats, United Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (UCPN-M) 80 seats. 8 major political parties reached deal 23 Dec to bring UCPN-M-led parties into CA. 4-point deal includes: parliamentary committee to investigate "questions raised" about CA election (response to UCPN-M and others alleging fraud); new constitution to be drafted in 6 months in spirit of Oct 2005 12-point agreement, Nov 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, 2007 Interim Constitution, promulgated in a year; high-level political mechanism to help complete peace process, constitution-writing; Truth and Reconciliation and Enforced Disappearances Commissions to be formed. CPN-UML 5 Dec formally demanded election of presidential and vice-presidential posts, NC said president's term not negotiable under interim constitution. Splinter communist group Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) 17 Dec declared "12-point Agreement in 2005 and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2007 stand annulled", said "new understanding" must be reached.

- "Nepali Congress emerges largest party in parliament", *Hindu*, 3 Dec. 2013.

 **Pakistan** Military officials refuted claims by residents that scores of civilians were killed in ongoing military operations in North Waziristan agency, launched after 18 Dec suicide attack on army checkpoint; claimed some 30 militants, mostly Uzbeks, killed. Sectarian violence continued in Karachi, threatens to spread to Lahore: 15 killed 3 Dec, including deputy SG of Shia Majlis-e-Wahdat-e-Muslimeen and 3 members of Sunni Tableeghi Jamaat; Sunni extremist Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ) Punjab head Shamsur Rehman Muawiya shot dead 6 Dec in Lahore; Tehreek Nifaz-e-Fiqah Jafria Shia organisation leader in Multan killed 15 Dec in Lahore. 4 killed by suicide bomber outside Shia mosque in Rawalpindi 18 Dec. 6 Dec Balochistan local elections boycotted by Baloch hardliners; predominately Pashtun Islamist Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam won largest number of votes, followed by independents. Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudry retired 11 Dec, succeeded by Justice Tassaduq Hussain Jilani.

- "23 militants killed in North Waziristan", *Hindu*, 19 Dec. 2013.

 **Sri Lanka** Tensions between newly elected northern provincial council and central govt continued with provincial governor Ret. Gen. Chandrasiri blocking council attempts to establish transport and housing departments; chief minister Wigneswaran repeated council's call for governor's removal; no formal response from President Rajapaksa. Chandrasiri with civilian governor. Pro-govt thugs 10 Dec violently disrupted protest by families of disappeared in Trincomalee, NW. Harassment of Muslims continued: Buddhist nationalists resumed campaign to remove Muslim residents from Debanagala village; police mid-Dec visited 3 Colombo-district mosques, demanded they cease religious activities; 2 Muslim-owned shops in southern Galle district set alight 19 Dec; mosque in Colombo stoned 18 Dec. Govt 17 Dec announced considering South African-style truth and reconciliation commission; U.S. and UK officials early Dec renewed threat of international investigation into alleged 2009 war crimes. Police inquiry began into mass grave found in Mannar 23 Dec. French charity Action Against Hunger

(ACF) accused security forces of killing 17 employees at office in Muttur in 2006, demanded international inquiry.

- "Scars of Sri Lanka", Al Jazeera, 27 Dec. 2013.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°253, *Sri Lanka's Potemkin Peace: Democracy Under Fire*, 13 Nov. 2013.

South East Asia

Indonesia Papuan independence activists flew pro-independence Morning Star flag at govt building in Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea (PNG) to mark national day 1 Dec; Port Moresby governor accused govt of bowing to pressure from Jakarta as 3 PNG activists arrested. 3 suspected terrorists arrested in Java 15 Dec.

- "Govt confident of undermining terrorists", *Jakarta Globe*, 20 Dec. 2013.

Myanmar Next round of govt-ethnic armed group dialogue, planned for late-Dec, postponed until Jan/feb to give both sides time for further technical-level discussion of key issues. Authorities 26 Nov announced they had charged 93 people in connection with Oct anti-Muslim violence in Rakhine State town of Thandwe that left 7 dead, many homes destroyed. Opposition NLD 25 Nov proposed quadripartite talks (NLD, President, legislature, military) on amending constitution; rejected by President Thein Sein, who indicated he did not want to overstep legislature, and that outcome of its constitutional review committee, due to report end-Jan, should be awaited. NLD 28 Dec announced it would contest 2015 general election even if constitution is not amended to remove article disqualifying candidates whose spouse or children are citizens of a foreign country from becoming president/VP – which would bar NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi; ruling USDP 30 Dec submitted recommendations to constitutional review committee, reportedly including suggestion to amend article. Govt 10 Dec pardoned 41 political prisoners, leaving an estimated 44 in prison; President 31 Dec issued pardon releasing people charged under several old repressive laws. U.S. 17 Dec blacklisted Myanmar army officer and 2 military-linked companies it accused of continuing illegal arms trading relations with DPRK.

- "Compromise important in Myanmar peace process: chief negotiator", Channel News Asia, 27 Dec. 2013.

New Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°142, *Not a Rubber Stamp: Myanmar's Legislature in a Time of Transition*, 13 Dec. 2013. Although Myanmar's nascent legislature has proved more vibrant and influential than many expected, serious individual and institutional capacity constraints are impeding the effective, efficient lawmaking necessary for the country's full democratic transition.

Philippines Govt, Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) 8 Dec signed 3rd of 4 annexes to complete peace agreement for Muslim-majority areas in south; agreement outlines powers of national govt and proposed autonomous Bangsamoro govt. Both sides "confident" of signing final annex on normalisation, decommissioning MILF forces in Jan; UNSG Ban praised progress. MILF attacks reported during month, including several people abducted 5 Dec, 1 person killed 6 Dec in attack on police station in Marawi City; MILF leadership pledged to punish perpetrators. Reports of clashes between MILF factions in Maguindanao. Communist New People's Army (NPA) leader killed in clash with army in Camarines Sur 5 Dec. NPA rebels 12 Dec killed policeman in Bukidnon. NPA and govt announced holiday ceasefire 18 Dec. 2

soldiers killed in suspected NPA attacks 24, 26 Dec. Abu Sayyaf leader killed resisting arrest in Sulu 23 Dec. 4 people including mayor of southern Labangan town shot dead at Manila airport 20 Dec. U.S. announced \$40mn in maritime security assistance for Philippines, said "firmly committed" to security there.

- "Zamboanga, the Bangsamoro and the southern Philippines peace process", *Interpreter*, 20 Dec. 2013.

Thailand Political crisis escalated with major protest movement demanding Yingluck govt step down and allow appointed council to reform electoral system, threatening to block general election scheduled for 2 Feb and seize Bangkok. People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), led by former Democrat Party secretary-general Suthep Thaugsbhan, continued anti-govt protests, staged massive marches 9, 22 Dec. Criminal Court 2 Dec charged Suthep with sedition. Protesters 2 Dec attempted to breach police barricades at Govt House and Metropolitan Police HQ. Opposition Democrat Party MPs resigned en masse 8 Dec. PM Yingluck dissolved House 9 Dec, general election scheduled for 2 Feb. PDRC seeking to oust Yingluck's caretaker govt, derail election, "eradicate Thaksin regime"; calling for establishment of 400-member People's Council to implement political reform. Democrat Party 21 Dec announced election boycott, support for PDRC protests. Protesters blocked Bangkok candidate registration site 23-24 Dec, attacked police 26 Dec; 1 policeman, 1 protester shot dead, many injured. Election Commission 26 Dec called for delay of poll. Army chief 27 Dec refused to rule out coup. Suthep threatened to shut down Bangkok starting 13 Jan. Protester killed in shooting at protest site 28 Dec. Militants stepped up attacks in Deep South including 5 soldiers killed in IED attack in Kapho District, Pattani Province 11 Dec. Coordinated bombings 22 Dec targeted 3 towns in Songkhla's Sadao District injured at least 27; first attack in district. Police 22 Dec found two 50kg IEDs inside truck parked at police station on tourist island Phuket.

- "Thailand in another round of turmoil", *Economic & Political Weekly*, 28 Dec. 2013.

Europe

Balkans

Kosovo Run-off elections for 25 of 38 municipalities 1 Dec; no incidents reported, amid heavy security in North Mitrovica; some irregularities. Democratic Party of Kosovo won total of 10 municipalities in elections; Democratic League of Kosovo 9; Belgrade-backed "Srpska" 8. During 19th round of EU-mediated talks, Serbian and Kosovo PMs 5 Dec agreed that a Serb will command regional police in Serb-majority northern Kosovo.

- "Kosovo run-off polls produce dramatic changes", *Balkan Insight*, 2 Dec. 2013.

Macedonia European Council 17 Dec again postponed discussion on opening Macedonian EU membership talks until June 2014, due to Greek position on name dispute.

- "Macedonian PM calls for pressure on Greece", *Balkan Insight*, 4 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Serbia** EU FMs 17 Dec agreed Serbia can start EU membership talks Jan following implementation of April 2013 EU-mediated agreement with Kosovo.

- [“Serbia to start EU membership talks in January”](#), *Wall Street Journal*, 17 Dec. 2013.

Caucasus

➡ **Armenia** Russian President Putin visited Yerevan 2 Dec for meeting with President Sargsyan, agreed deal on low-cost Russian gas; around 1,000 protested visit. Turkish FM in Yerevan for meeting of Black Sea Economic Cooperation group 12 Dec, met with Armenian FM, first high-level Turkish visit since 2009.

- [“Protesters and all, a home away from home for Putin”](#), *Eurasianet*, 3 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Azerbaijan** Border officer killed in shoot-out along Iranian border 1 Dec, latest in sporadic incidents along border; countries’ relations strained over Baku’s charges of Iranian sponsorship of fundamentalist Islamists in Azerbaijan. Hundreds protested rising food, fuel prices 15 Dec; govt 2 Dec announced petrol price hike. Authorities arrested Anar Mammadli, head of Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre, questioned on tax evasion, illegal business activity. FM denounced U.S. criticism of rights issues as “blackmail”. 2 disabled Karabakh war veterans committed self-immolation 25, 28 Dec; first died.

- [“Azerbaijan details election watchdog chief”](#), *Reuters*, 17 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** Following Nov meeting between Armenian and Azerbaijan presidents, countries’ FMs met in Kiev 4 Dec, agreed to continue talks on resolution of N-K conflict. In attempt to sustain resumed talks, OSCE Minsk Group representatives visited both countries mid-month, part of increased diplomatic activity by U.S. and Russia. Armenian President Sargsyan told state media meeting with Azerbaijan President Aliyev involved serious discussions, proposals to make progress on ending 25-year conflict. Baku and Yerevan say next presidential meeting scheduled March. Both sides accused other of continued ceasefire violations. Armenian officer killed 14 Dec along front lines, Azerbaijani soldier killed 29 Dec, according to defence ministries.

- [“Minsk co-chair cites mutual Armenian, Azerbaijan ‘respect’ on Karabakh”](#), *RFE/RL*, 19 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Georgia** 26th round of Geneva talks involving Tbilisi govt and Abkhazia and South Ossetia (SO) authorities ended in another deadlock 18 Dec, after previous round saw sides express cautious optimism on possible “non-use of force” agreement. Entity representatives blocking discussion of other issues including fate of Georgian IDPs unless such an agreement is reached, but Tbilisi insisting that Russia also signs agreement, pledge non-use of force; Russia refuses. Tbilisi again raised issue of “borderisation” of SO administrative boundary line by Russian troops, emphasising resulting hardship for local residents. European monitors early Dec reported almost 50km of heavy fortifications erected by mid-Nov, some 1km into Georgian-held territory, also Russian drone activity. European Council President Van Rompuy said EU willing to speed up signing of Association Agreement with Georgia by Aug 2014. Russian President Putin raised possibility of lifting visa requirements for Georgians. New series of charges and questioning of political figures from former governing UNM party began

mid-Dec, including Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava charged with misappropriation of funds; former Deputy Prosecutor-General Davit Chkhatarshvili detained, charged with abuse of power and other charges over alleged role in 2012 prison abuse scandal. Former PM Merabishvili, arrested in May on charges including abuse of power, claimed authorities pressuring him to inform on former President Saakashvili.

- [“Former Georgian PM accuses Prosecutor of threatening him”](#), *RFE/RL*, 17 Dec. 2013.

➡ **North Caucasus (Russia)** Southern Russian city Volgograd hit by 2 terrorist attacks late Dec: 17 killed in suicide attack on main train station 29 Dec, at least 14 killed in suicide attack on trolleybus next day. Kabardino-Balkaria governor Arsen Kanokov unexpectedly replaced by former head of Federal MIA’s anti-extremism department Yury Kokov 6 Dec, supposedly related to security concerns over upcoming Sochi Olympics. Repression, harassment of activists in and around Sochi continued. Counter-terrorist operations in Kabardino-Balkaria saw insurgent leader Arsen Khandokhov and 3 associates killed mid-Dec in Elbrus district; 4 suspected militants killed 5 Dec in Baksan district; attack on Department of Federal Penitentiary Service (UFSIN) 10 Dec left 2 officers dead; folk healer killed in Baksan district 24 Dec. In Dagestan, leader and member of local terrorist group killed during special operation in Shamil district 10 Dec; 5 alleged insurgents killed in Khasavyurt district 5 Dec. Head of Teletl village found dead 6 Dec; 2 militants allegedly involved in his murder killed. Senior FSB officer shot dead in Khasavyurt, Dagestan 9 Dec. 3 police killed in clash with militants in Tsuntinsky district 16 Dec; 1 policeman killed, 2 civilians taken hostage by insurgents, later released in Akhvakhsky district 13 Dec. Pressure on moderate Islamists continues, with mosque-goers detained in Chontaul village and Untsukul district. Makhachkala-based Salafi Children’s Club Amanat searched by police 4 Dec, asked to stop activities. At least 10 Salafis detained in Leninkent 20 Dec. 52 suspected members of Hizb ut-Tahrir detained 9 Dec during police raid in Makhachkala, 3 leaders arrested.

- Ekaterina Sokirianskaia, [“Winter Games, Caucasian Misery”](#), *New York Times*, 5 Dec. 2013.
- [“Bombings jolt Russia, raising Olympic fears”](#), *New York Times*, 29 Dec. 2013.

Eastern Europe

➡ **Ukraine** Pro-Europe protests continued following govt’s 21 Nov decision against signing association agreement with EU in favour of ties with Russia. Hundreds of thousands of people protesting in largest rallies since 2004 Orange Revolution. European Commission continued negotiations with govt over possible agreement, but 15 Dec announced it was suspending talks due to contradictory signals from President Yanukovych. Violence broke out 11 Dec as govt deployed thousands of riot police to remove protesters’ barricades, drawing international condemnation. Russia 18 Dec announced \$15mn aid package to help faltering economy, including lowering Russian gas price.

- [“Tale of two nations for country locked in struggle over whether to face east or west”](#), *Guardian*, 15 Dec. 2013.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➤ **Cyprus** Attempts to restart reunification talks reached impasse over definition of “single sovereignty” in proposed joint statement that would set goals for talks. During visit to Athens Turkish FM Davutoğlu 14 Dec echoed Turkish Cypriot view of future bizonality as sovereignty divided between 2 constituent states; Greek Cypriots insist on single sovereignty as precondition to resume talks. Greek and Turkish FMs reportedly agreed to simultaneous visits by Turkish Cypriot chief negotiator to Athens and Greek Cypriot chief negotiator to Ankara, but process held up by disagreement over content of joint statement from FMs.

- “[Turkish and Greek foreign ministers meet for talks on Cyprus](#)”, Euronews, 13 Dec. 2013.

➤ **Turkey** In perceived proxy battle within AKP, more than 50 people detained 17 Dec for alleged involvement in corruption ring, including sons of 3 cabinet ministers, 1 municipal leader, prominent businessmen, more than 24 formally arrested; 4 ministers implicated replaced in 25 Dec 10-minister cabinet reshuffle. Separate probe delayed after govt reassigned hundreds of police, prosecutor says unable to order detentions for questioning. Peace process between govt and Kurdish insurgency PKK remains fragile, with occasional flare-ups of violence in SE: protests 6 Dec against alleged vandalism of PKK militants’ graves in Yüksekova, Hakkari; 2 protesters killed in clashes during police crackdown, 3rd died later. Further clashes at funeral for killed protesters 7 Dec in Şırnak and Yüksekova, several wounded, including police. PKK 8 Dec kidnapped 4 soldiers in retaliation, released 9 Dec. PKK leader Cemil Bayık 2 Dec said peace process heading off course due to governing AKP delaying tactics, signalled PKK would take up arms again if process not accelerated by spring 2014. Continued tensions along Syrian border: 1 Syrian child killed 3 Dec by Turkish soldiers firing warning shots to stop group illegally crossing back to Syria. Committee to Protect Journalists 18 Dec announced Turkey “world’s leading jailer of journalists”, some 40 journalists imprisoned, mainly Kurdish. Turkey and EU 16 Dec signed readmission agreement obliging Turkey to take back illegal immigrants who enter EU via Turkey, in exchange for start of visa exemption talks.

- Didem Akyel Collinsworth, “[Turkey Wins New Space for Kurdishness](#)”, Today’s Zaman, 6 Dec. 2013.
- “[Corruption scandal is edging near Turkish premier](#)”, *New York Times*, 25 Dec. 2013.

Latin America/Caribbean

➤ **Colombia** Peace talks between govt and FARC continued with discussions centred on illegal drugs; FARC 3 Dec presented 10 “minimal proposals” for counter drug policy, calling for immediate halt of areal fumigation, adoption of public health focus and stimulation of traditional, medical and industrial uses of coca leaf, marihuana and poppy. Talks concluded for year 20 Dec, set to resume 13 Jan. FARC 8 Dec announced unilateral 30-day ceasefire effective 15 Dec-15 Jan; 4 alleged violations occurred by 23 Dec. President Santos declared military offensive against guerrillas “will continue” following 7 Dec attack on police station in Inzá (Cauca) which left 9 dead, 40 injured. Prosecutor General 9 Dec dismissed Bogotá mayor and former M19 guerrilla member Gustavo Petro

over allegations of “incompetence” and violating free enterprise principles in 2012 row with private garbage collectors; Petro also banned from holding public office for 15 years. FARC 10 Dec slammed decision as “heavy blow” for peace process. Talks with ELN again appeared to move closer; ELN 1 Dec released engineer abducted in Antioquia dept July 2012, 24 Dec released kidnapped oil worker in Arauca dept. ELN commander Gabino said group had accepted as “challenge” to negotiate without ceasefire, but later retracted. Ombudsman’s Office 11 Dec said clashes between ELN and NIAG Urabeños in Chocó dept could cause displacement of 1,900 residents. Police closing in on Urabeños leader Otoniel with 12 Dec detention of cousin and sister. Security forces 27 Dec killed at least 10 FARC, including regional commander Jhon 26, in Meta dept. UN 30 Dec accused FARC of continuing to recruit children.

- “[Farc announces unilateral ceasefire](#)”, BBC, 8 Dec. 2013.

➤ **Guatemala** Head of Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) Ivan Velásquez 5 Dec said commission will initiate investigations of corruption in customs and political campaign financing; means commission will take on new cases despite assertions by president and VP that it should devote last 2 years of its mandate to training prosecutors and investigators. Elite Tecún Umán Task Force began operations in west 16 Dec; President Pérez Molina said joint military/police force will combat drug traffickers and other smugglers operating along Pacific coast and Mexican border, said plans to create 2 more task forces operating along borders with El Salvador and Honduras. Pérez Molina 17 Dec announced govt studying possibility of legalising and regulating cultivation of opium poppies for medicinal use, would allow “controlled planting” while offering alternative crops to farmers now involved in illegal production. Authorities 27 Dec arrested Edgar Rolando Saguil, lieutenant of Felix Pimentel Lopez, himself arrested 8 Dec, on suspicion of links to Sinaloa cartel.

- “[Guatemala’s anti-impunity commissioner thinks big](#)”, CNN, 21 Dec. 2013.

➤ **Mexico** Attorney General revealed names of 69 top drug traffickers arrested or killed in President Peña Nieto’s first year of govt from list of 122. Human Rights Commissioner Raúl Plascencia 17 Dec warned local vigilante groups gaining strength in Pacific state of Guerrero, armed groups operate in over half of state’s municipalities. New guerrilla group Revolutionary Armed Forces-People’s Liberation (FAR-LP) appeared in Guerrero early month, demanded release of “political prisoners”, asked people to take up arms against “oppressive govt”. Authorities continued to find bodies buried near border between Jalisco and Michoacán states; 64 bodies found so far in search initiated to find 2 federal agents who went missing early Nov; 10 burned bodies found 14 Dec inside car in indigenous community troubled by land disputes in Oaxaca state; 5 decapitated bodies found in Michoacan state 28 Dec, believed to be victims of Jalisco New Generation drug cartel. 4 municipal officers from Arcelia town, Guerrero killed in clash with army 6 Dec. Mayor-elect of San Pedro Totolapan town, Oaxaca state killed by gunmen outside city hall 5 Dec. Gonzalo Inzunza Inzunza, alias El Macho Prieto, high-ranking leader of Sinaloa Cartel killed 18 Dec in shoot-out with security forces in northern Mexico resort.

- “[Mexico rights body warns of growth in vigilantes](#)”, AP, 8 Dec. 2013.

➤ **Venezuela** 8 Dec municipal elections saw opposition MUD alliance make important advances, especially in big cities; MUD held metropolitan Caracas and Maracaibo and won Valencia and

Barquisimeto, now controls 9 of 23 state capitals, plus greater Caracas including 4 of 5 Caracas municipalities. But controversial bid to turn election into plebiscite on President Maduro's gov't via national vote total backfired: ruling PSUV obtained almost 49% of votes, MUD less than 41%. MUD leadership insisting country split and gov't lacks mandate for radical political and economic programs, also pointed to unfair election conditions and Maduro's Nov move to force down retail prices.

- ["Tras las elecciones, Venezuela sigue igual: dividida"](#), BBC, 9 Dec. 2013.

Middle East and North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

 **Israel-Palestine** U.S. Sec State Kerry intensified diplomatic efforts to resolve impasse in peace negotiations, 5 Dec presented security proposal purportedly entailing demilitarised Palestinian state, Jordanian border crossings under joint Israeli-Palestinian control, limited Israeli military presence in Jordan Valley. Palestinian Authority (PA) President Abbas 13 Dec rejected continued Israeli military presence in Jordan Valley. Israel 27 Dec issued instructions for construction of 1,400 West Bank units in advance of late Dec Palestinian prisoners' release; met with strong criticism from U.S., EU, PA. Gaza humanitarian situation deteriorated due to fuel shortage, aggravated by extreme winter weather, floods; Qatar provided funds for fuel; over 5,000 evacuated from N Gaza, Gaza City 13 Dec. UNRWA called for end of Israeli blockade to allow recovery efforts, Israel opened Gaza crossing to allow entry of gas, water pumps. Bomb exploded in Tel Aviv bus 22 Dec shortly after vehicle evacuated; Palestinian militants suspected. Several killed in shootings, retaliatory attacks between Israeli forces and Palestinians. Lebanese soldier 15 Dec shot dead Israeli soldier at border near Rosh Hanikra; Israel retaliated shooting 2 Lebanese soldiers. Gunmen 2 Dec fired from Syria on Israeli soldiers in Quneitra, prompting retaliation. Roadside bomb attack on IDF jeep on Israel-Syrian Golan border 6 Dec; perpetrators unknown. French and Russian inquiries ruled out poisoning as cause of death of ex-PLO leader Yasser Arafat.

- ["Abbas rejects U.S. plan for Israeli troops"](#), Al Arabiya News, 13 Dec. 2013.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°147, [Leap of Faith: Israel's National Religious and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict](#), 21 Nov. 2013.

 **Lebanon** Car bomb in Beirut 27 Dec killed senior "March 14" figure and former finance minister Mohammad Chatah and 7 others; March 14 alliance accused Syrian regime and Hizbollah, both denied. Assassination derailed cabinet formation process: March 14 alliance 28 Dec rejected unity gov't, called for cabinet excluding Hizbollah. 13 killed, dozens wounded in sectarian clashes between Sunni Bab al-Tebbaneh and Alawite Jabal Mohsen neighbourhoods of Tripoli 30 Nov-2 Dec; gov't ordered army to preserve security in city. Lebanese troops fired at Syrian military aircraft violating its airspace in Bekaa Valley 30 Dec. Saudi Arabia 29 Dec granted Lebanese army \$3bn. President Suleiman 7 Dec again called on Hizbollah to withdraw from Syria, abide by Baabda declaration. Prominent Hizbollah commander Ali Bazzi and 3 militants killed in firefight with Syrian rebels near Nabuk on Syrian Qalamoun front 8 Dec. Gunmen 4 Dec assassinated

Hizbollah commander Hassan al-Laquis in Hadath. Armed men and suicide bomber 15 Dec attacked 2 army checkpoints in Sidon, killing 1 soldier; army detained 5 suspects, claimed men part of al-Qaeda-linked Abdullah Azzam Brigades. Unidentified militants 29 Dec fired 5 rockets from Hasbaya toward Israel, 2 exploded near Kiryat Shmona; Israel blamed Hizbollah, shelled Rachaya border area in retaliation, no injuries reported. Lebanese sniper 16 Dec killed Israeli soldier on border, army said soldier acted alone (see Israel/Palestine). Residents of Qsar Naba village near Syria 2 Dec torched ad hoc Syrian refugee camp, forced hundreds of refugees from campsite. Authorities arrested head of group that claimed Nov Iranian embassy bombing.

- ["Funeral turnout shows Lebanon's ebbing morale"](#), *New York Times*, 29 Dec. 2013.

 **Syria** Rebel forces in disarray as increasingly powerful Islamist groups moved to marginalise Western-backed militias: largest rebel alliance Islamic Front (IF), created late Nov, 3 Dec rejected authority of Supreme Military Council (SMC), 7 Dec seized SMC arms depots and HQ in Babisqa, 11 Dec captured SMC-controlled Turkey border crossing near Bab el-Hawa; U.S. and UK 11 Dec suspended non-lethal aid to SMC out of fear it could no longer protect equipment provided to it. U.S. Sec State Kerry 17 Dec said U.S. negotiations with IF "possible" to convince its militias to join 22 Jan Geneva II peace talks, IF rejected offer. Following recent losses against Kurdish militias, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) 5 Dec kidnapped over 50 Kurdish civilians from Minbej and Jarablus towns near Aleppo. Month saw most significant clashes yet between ISIS and Ahrar al-Sham Islamist group. Syrian army and allied militias continued advances in Qalamoun mountains amid rebel disorder: 9 Dec regained control of key Damascus-Homs highway after capture of Nabak, 10 Dec started offensive towards Yabrud, last rebel stronghold in Qalamoun region. IF, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra 11 Dec attacked town of Adra, near Damascus; ISIS beheaded at least 3 Alawites there, pro-regime media accused rebels of killing dozens of Alawite and Druze civilians. Syrian army and allied militias recaptured parts of town 13-16 Dec. Regime's recent momentum on Aleppo front appearing to lag; army 15 Dec dropped "barrel bombs" on Aleppo, hundreds reported killed; Aleppo activists called scale of raids "unprecedented". Syrian gov't 4 Dec said Assad will lead any transition agreed at Jan Geneva peace talks; opposition National Coalition remains divided on whether to attend talks, to meet early Jan to make final decision. UN rights chief Pillay 2 Dec said "massive evidence" implicates regime in war crimes and crimes against humanity, UN humanitarian chief Amos 3 Dec said gov't should allow greater access to trapped civilians.

- ["Growing strength of Syria's Islamist groups undermines hopes of ousting Assad"](#), *Guardian*, 14 Dec. 2013.

Gulf

 **Bahrain** Courts handed series of prison sentences to Shiite activists. Gov't denied entry to UK rights lawyer who was to observe trial of opposition Al-Wefaq leader Khalil Al-Marzooq. Gov't 29 Dec detained Al Wefaq leader Ali Salman on charges of "inciting hatred", imposed travel ban after his release. Homemade bomb wounded 2 police near Manama 17 Dec.

- ["Trouble Ahead"](#), *Economist*, 14 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Iran** Govt, P5+1 and IAEA 9-13 Dec met to discuss technical details of 24 Nov Geneva nuclear deal, but Iran pulled out of talks after U.S. 12 Dec blacklisted 19 companies linked to Iran's nuclear program; Tehran said new sanctions "violated" the spirit of Geneva agreement. Talks further jeopardised after bipartisan group of U.S. senators 19 Dec introduced new sanctions bill that would strengthen existing sanctions if Iran breaks interim deal; President Obama threatened to veto bill if it passed. 100 hardline Iranian parliamentarians 25 Dec introduced bill obliging govt to increase uranium enrichment to 60% if U.S. introduces new sanctions. Head of Iranian negotiating team 1 Jan said sides had proposed 20 Jan for Geneva deal to go into effect. IAEA 8 Dec inspected Arak nuclear plant; govt and IAEA 12 Dec agreed to meet 21 Jan to discuss "practical steps" to improve transparency of nuclear program. Public row erupted between President Rouhani's govt and Revolutionary Guards commander Ali Jafari: FM Zarif 3 Dec said U.S. could eliminate Iran's defensive systems "with one bomb"; Jafari called comments "incorrect", said govt "infected by Western doctrine" and "fundamental change must occur". Nuclear chief Salehi 1 Dec said govt in talks with Russia to build another nuclear plant at Bushehr, construction to begin in 2014. Govt 5 Dec announced it executed 4 Ahwazi Arab political activists on charges of enmity against God and threatening national security. Upsurge in violence on Iran's eastern and western borders: gunmen killed 15 Iranian and 3 Iraqi workers on gas pipeline near Balad Ruz village NE of Baghdad 13 Dec; 3 Revolutionary Guards killed in SE by roadside bomb believed to be planted by Baluchi Sunni separatist group Jaish al-Adl 18 Dec.

- "U.S. senators make move toward more sanctions on Iran", Reuters, 19 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Iraq** Daily violence continued with UN reporting over 700 killed including over 661 civilians: at least 42 killed, 84 injured in series of bomb attacks 25 Dec; series of bombings in Baghdad Shia neighbourhoods 30-31 Dec killed 23; over 70 killed 16 Dec; at least 18 military personnel killed 21 Dec in ambush by Islamic State of Iraq. UN reported at least 7,818 civilians killed in 2013, marking deadliest year since 2008. Security forces 28 Dec raided home of Sunni lawmaker Ahmed al-Alwani, arrested him on terrorism charges; 7 killed in ensuing gun-battle. At least 10 killed 30 Dec when security forces dismantled Sunni protest camp in Ramadi, al-Anbar province, calling for removal of PM Maliki. 44 MPs resigned 30 Dec over demolishing of camp, arrest of Alwani. U.S. reportedly shipped Hellfire missiles, reconnaissance drones to help govt combat militants. Govt 25 Dec closed border with Syria following start of military operation against al-Qaeda in western desert.

- "Iraq in 2014: back to civil war?", Al Jazeera America, 21 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Yemen** Security deteriorated after armed forces early-month killed prominent Hadrami sheikh; Hadrami tribes, supported by Hiraak, set 20 Dec as deadline for handing over killer, transferring governorate security responsibilities to them. Thousands protested in South, including Qaten, Seiyun and Tarim cities in Hadramout, and clashed with armed forces. Army 27 Dec struck funeral of southern separatist in al-Dalia, killing 19 including 4 children. Tribal attacks on oil pipelines continue: unknown assailants 27 Dec blew up main oil pipeline from Masila field. At least 56 killed, 215 injured 5 Dec in al-Qaeda attack on defence ministry complex in Sanaa. At least 4 soldiers killed 31 Dec in suicide bombing of security HQ in Aden. 15 killed 12 Dec in U.S. drone strike on

reported wedding convoy; parliament 15 Dec issued non-binding agreement banning drones. In north, fighting between Huthis and Salafis continued. Several political parties 23 Dec signed agreement granting some autonomy to South and supporting federalism as basis of new state structure. New as-yet undrafted constitution to decide on number of regions and their authorities.

- "Al-Qaeda branch in Yemen regrets hospital attack", AP, 22 Dec. 2013.

North Africa

➡ **Algeria** Security forces 4 Dec killed leader of AQIM Ennour brigade Khalil Ould Addah (aka Abou Bassen) and 4 terrorists in Tamanrasset desert; 6-8 Dec continued combing operations near Ghardaïa in effort to root out "important AQIM group"; 13 Dec killed 2 alleged terrorists near Tizi Ouzou; 15 Dec shoot-out near Tizi Ouzou left 1 soldier injured. Intelligence services mid-month reportedly contacted Ansar Dine leader Iyad Ag Ghali to seek his assistance in liberating hostages abducted by MUJAO in Gao in April 2012. PM Abdelmalek Sellal 7 Dec said country will bolster security cooperation with Libya to stem arms proliferation. Govt 17 Dec said 220 terrorists killed since Jan 2013. Intercommunal clashes in Ghardaïa 25-27 Dec between Chaâmbis (Arabs) and Mozabites (Berbers) left dozens injured, including 40 policemen; govt deployed gendarmerie; president 31 Dec called for calm, dialogue.

- "AQIM members killed in Algeria", Magharebia, 9 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Egypt** Govt 25 Dec formally declared Muslim Brotherhood (MB) a terrorist group, made MB membership and participation in anti-coup protests a crime; move effectively rules out possibility of reconciliation with MB, further complicating political scene. Declaration followed bomb explosion at govt building in Mansura 24 Dec in which at least 12 killed, scores injured; govt blamed MB despite lack of evidence of its involvement. Political transition roadmap moved ahead as constitutional committee 1 Dec finalised controversial draft constitution. Committee president 15 Dec said draft gives unprecedented rights to women and removes religious clauses included in Dec 2012 constitution. MB 2 Dec and Islamist Alliance for the Support of Legitimacy (ASL) rejected draft. April 6 Movement criticised draft over powers granted to military and defence minister, inclusion of military trials for civilians; Coptic church, Salafi Nour Party and Tamarrod movement voiced support for draft. Interim President Mansour 14 Dec said referendum on draft constitution scheduled 14-15 Jan; April 6 movement and ASL announced boycott. Secret talks between authorities and ASL faltered. Govt 18 Dec charged ousted President Morsi with treason, espionage, sponsoring terrorism, collaborating with Iran, Hizbollah and Hamas. Sweeping arrests against Islamists continued; govt crackdown on dissidents expanding to include rights groups, secular political activists. Anti-govt protests ongoing on near-daily basis, several killed in clashes with police late-month. Police 8 Dec staged rare protest demanding higher wages, defying new protest law. Militant attacks continued: in Ismailia suspected Islamists shot dead policeman 17 Dec, car bombs exploded 12 Dec killing 1 policeman; car bomb in Cairo 17 Dec; suspected al-Qaeda-affiliated militants shot dead soldier during clashes in Sinai Peninsula 20 Dec. 5 injured in Cairo bomb attack 26 Dec. Army 17 Dec shot dead alleged Islamist militant Abou Khaled wanted for Aug 2012 terror attack in Sinai Peninsula.

- “Egypt likely to change roadmap, hold presidential vote first: sources”, Reuters, 30 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Libya** General National Congress (GNC) “roadmap” committee held consultations on length and modality of extension beyond Feb 2014; UNSMIL hosted several closed-door meetings; GNC 23 Dec voted to extend transition one year, set deadline for drafting constitution by Aug 2014. UNSC 19 Dec expressed concern over worsening security, political divisions, called on all parties to end violence and support democratic transition. GNC 4 Dec voted to make Sharia law foundation of national legislation. Militia blockading oil export terminals in east again called for autonomy of region, right to profit from oil exports, refused to end blockade; leader Ibrahim Jedran 15 Dec said he will begin selling oil outside govt channels and redistribute revenues to provinces according to pre-Qadhafi law; Libya Revolutionary Operations Room (LROR) 16 Dec said will liberate terminals by force. Assassination of security force members continued in east: at least 13 soldiers killed 21 Dec in car bomb explosion on checkpoint in Barsis, outside Benghazi. Benghazi military intelligence chief shot dead 21 Dec in Derna; army officer killed 26 Dec in Benghazi.

- “Libya’s brigades”, Al Jazeera, 12 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Mauritania** Electoral commission 3 Dec announced results of legislative and municipal results held 23 Nov, said ruling party Union for the Republic (UPR) won landslide victory with 53 seats in national assembly; Islamist party Tawassoul came second with 12 seats. Thousands of Coordination for Democratic Opposition (COD) supporters protested 18 Dec in Nouakchott against “unilateral” elections.

- “Marche de protestation à Nouakchott en Mauritanie contre le deuxième tour des élections”, RFI, 3 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Morocco** Authorities 26 Dec announced arrests of terrorist cell operating in multiple cities, citing link with Syrian conflict.

- “Morocco says it has dismantled ‘terrorist cell’”, Al-Arabiya, 26 Dec. 2013.

➡ **Tunisia** National Dialogue between governing Troika and opposition parties 14 Dec reached agreement on industry minister Mehdi Jomaa as technocratic caretaker PM to construct interim govt replacing Troika led by an-Nahda, and lead caretaker administration until elections. Jomaa 18 Dec said consultations on forming new interim govt “ongoing”. Compromises still needed on other issues including new constitution, new elections and reviewing some of an-Nahda’s public administration appointments. Landmine exploded 2 Dec during military operation against Islamist militants in Mount Chaambi, killing 1 soldier. President Marzouki provoked outrage with early Dec publication of “black book” detailing collaboration of public intellectuals, journalists and others with ousted Ben Ali regime. National Constituent Assembly 14 Dec adopted draft law on creation of transitional justice authority.

- “Prime Minister announcement baffles Tunisians, divides political parties”, TunisiaLive, 16 Dec. 2013.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°148, *Tunisia’s Borders: Jihadism and Contraband*, 28 Nov. 2013.

➡ **Western Sahara** Polisario Front 10 Dec declared that approval of new Protocol to EU-Morocco Fisheries Partnership Agreement (FPA) amounts to EU support for Morocco’s “illegal claims” on W Sahara; protests against agreement same day in Laayoune violently dispersed by police and army. UNGA 11 Dec adopted resolution reasserting support to negotiation process “to reach solution which allows Saharawi people to exercise right to self-determination”. Morocco, Polisario 1 Jan confirmed new round of talks will be held Jan in Sweden and Morocco.

- “Le Polisario confirme la tenue prochaine d’un round de négociation avec le Maroc”, Yabiladi, 2 Jan. 2014.

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