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Global Overview

FEBRUARY 2019

February saw a dangerous escalation between India and Pakistan. In Yemen, the warring parties took a small step to cement a ceasefire in Hodeida, but a breakdown of talks could trigger new clashes. Fighting in Libya's south intensified and could worsen, and Chad called in French airstrikes to halt a rebel advance. Al-Shabaab stepped up deadly attacks in Somalia, and in South Sudan a government offensive against rebels in the south is picking up steam. Sudan's President al-Bashir took a harder line against persistent protests. Suspected jihadists stepped up attacks in Burkina Faso; violence escalated in Cameroon's Anglophone region; and Angola's separatists announced a return to arms. In Nigeria, election-related violence rose and could flare again around polls to elect governors in March, while there are growing concerns around Ukraine's upcoming presidential vote. The confrontation hardened between Venezuelan President Maduro and opposition

Outlook for This Month March 2019

⚡ Conflict Risk Alerts

South Sudan, Sudan, Nigeria, Kashmir, Ukraine, Yemen, Libya

🐦 Resolution Opportunities

Nicaragua, Yemen, Western Sahara

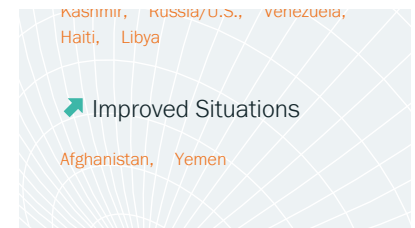
Trends for Last Month February 2019

📉 Deteriorated Situations

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development for the future of mine control. On a positive note, Taliban and U.S. officials resumed talks on a deal for Afghanistan, negotiations aimed at ending the Western Sahara conflict are planned for March, and Nicaragua's government resumed dialogue with opposition leaders, raising hopes for an end to the political crisis.



Trends and Outlook

PRESIDENT'S TAKE

A Ray of Hope from Doha as Tensions Rise Elsewhere



ROBERT MALLEY
PRESIDENT & CEO

In his introduction to this month's edition of CrisisWatch, Crisis Group's conflict tracker, our President Robert Malley highlights the concerning crisis unfolding between Pakistan and

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In February, relations between India and Pakistan deteriorated dramatically after Pakistani-based militants drove a suicide car bomb into a convoy of Indian security forces in **Kashmir**, killing at least 40 security personnel in the deadliest terrorist attack there in over 30 years. Tensions spiked as both countries carried out airstrikes across the Line of Control that divides Indian and Pakistan-administered Kashmir, while India carried out security sweeps and arrested scores of alleged militant sympathisers in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir. While both sides have said they want to avoid further escalation, their armies continue to clash across the Line of Control. **We call on both Pakistan and India** to exercise restraint and rethink policies that have contributed to this conflagration.

Yemen's warring parties moved an important inch forward in implementing the December Stockholm Agreement: the government and Huthis agreed to redeploy their forces from frontline positions in and around the Red Sea port of Hodeida. But they haven't done so yet because **they can't agree on what should happen next**. They may work it out, but equally talks could collapse, potentially triggering new violence. In **Afghanistan**, U.S. and Taliban negotiators resumed peace talks in Doha in meetings the U.S. described as productive, while Taliban representatives and a wide range of Afghan political figures met in Moscow in an unprecedented public meeting.

Libya's south saw heavy fighting as strongman Khalifa Haftar's forces continued to consolidate control. Worse could follow in coming weeks if his move sparks a tribal war or if groups in the north allied with the Tripoli-based government retaliate. In early February, Chadian rebels based in southern Libya launched an incursion into north east **Chad**, their sights set on overturning Déby's regime. At the government's request, French airstrikes halted their advance, but Déby's call for help shows his army, often portrayed as strong, **has its weaknesses**.

Facing the longest wave of protests since independence, **Sudan's** President al-Bashir

[Somalia](#). Western partners and Gulf states should urge Buhari to remain firm in a steady crackdown and step aside to make way for a broad-based transitional government that can usher in reforms.


Election-related violence rose around **Nigeria's** polls leaving at least 40 dead, with a [last-minute delay heightening tensions](#). President Buhari has won a second term, but his main challenger Atiku Abubakar rejected the result. With the political temperature still at boiling point, more violence could erupt around governorship polls set for 9 March. In **Cameroon's** Anglophone west, over 100 separatists, security personnel and civilians were killed and Boko Haram upped attacks in the Far North. Separatist militants in **Angola's** Cabinda exclave announced they would resume their armed struggle.

Al-Shabaab stepped up attacks in **Somalia's** capital Mogadishu and rural areas, as more African Union troops pulled out. Despite an overall easing of **South Sudan's** war, a government offensive against rebels in the south gained momentum and fighting could escalate in March. Security in **Burkina Faso** continued to deteriorate as suspected jihadists increased attacks on civilians and security forces, especially in the north and east.

Deteriorating relations between the **U.S. and Russia** took a worrying turn as Washington announced it was suspending its obligations under the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, raising concerns about the future of arms control. As **Ukraine** prepares for presidential elections in late March, an increasingly contentious campaign marked by allegations of irregularities and warnings of Russian interference prompted concerns over potential disputes around the result.

Venezuela's turmoil continued as the confrontation between President Maduro and opposition leader Juan Guaidó – recognised by dozens of countries as the country's interim president – hardened, and several people were killed in a standoff over deliveries of international humanitarian aid. [We continue to call](#) for all sides to give priority to genuine negotiations leading to free and fair elections. Violent anti-government protests swept **Haiti**, fuelled by anger over deteriorating economic conditions and a scandal involving embezzlement of public funds.

On a more hopeful note, after talks between Morocco and the Polisario Front independence movement resumed in December after six years, a second round planned for March presents an opportunity to move toward settling the contested status of **Western Sahara**. And in a welcome development in **Nicaragua**, President Ortega's government agreed to resume the national dialogue with opposition leaders, giving hope for a route out of the country's devastating political crisis.

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U.S. suspension of 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) and Russian rhetoric regarding possible deployments of new weapons marked further deterioration of U.S.-Russia relations and raised concerns about future of arms control. U.S. 1 Feb said it was suspending its obligations

under INF starting 2 Feb, giving Russia six months to return to “real and verifiable” compliance before U.S. ultimate withdrawal from INF. Washington earlier announced plans of withdrawal in Oct 2018, arguing Russia has been developing 9M729 missile system in violation of INF, and amid years of mutual accusations of non-compliance. President Putin 2 Feb announced Moscow would follow suit and in his 20 Feb state of the nation address promised deployment of new and powerful missiles targeting U.S. and European countries, although only in response to any U.S. deployments of intermediate-range missiles on European continent; NATO accused Russia of “unacceptable” threat and called on Russia for full compliance.

Africa

As attacks against civilians and security forces attributed to jihadists continued to rise, especially in Sahel region in north and East region, security forces stepped up response and President Kaboré reshuffled army leadership. Notably, suspected members of jihadist coalition Group to Support Islam and Muslims (JNIM) 3-4 Feb attacked Kain village, North region, reportedly killing fourteen civilians. Army 5 Feb said it killed 146 militants in air raids in Louroum and Yatenga provinces, North region and Sourou province, Boucle du Mouhoun region in north; local witnesses and NGO Human Rights Watch reported that 57 of 146 killed were civilians. JNIM 5 Feb attacked Oursi, Sahel region in north, killing five gendarmes; security forces said they repelled attack and killed 21 militants in counter-offensive. Military 19-20 Feb killed 29 suspected Islamist militants in Kompienbiga-Kabonga area, East region. Unidentified assailants 15 Feb killed Spanish priest and four customs officers in Nohao, Centre-East region, near border with Togo. After new govt was formed 24 Jan, Kaboré 7 Feb reshuffled army’s top command, notably Colonel Gilles Bationo appointed chief of land army and Colonel Major Oumarou Sawadogo as commander of Central Army Grouping. Former President Compaoré’s PM Kadré Désiré Ouédraogo 16 Jan announced his candidacy for 2020 presidential election. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said number of displaced persons in country reached 110,000 in Feb – nine times more than in Feb 2018 – and 1,025 schools were closed due to jihadist intimidation campaign. G5 Sahel summit in capital Ouagadougou 5 Feb marked start of Burkina Faso’s presidency of regional grouping; G5 Sahel leaders called for closer cooperation with UN, including assistance to G5 Sahel joint force.

In rare move, President Keita 14 Feb spoke on phone with main opposition leader Soumaila Cisse; can followed meetings between leaders of ruling coalition Together for Mali (EPM) and opposition coalition Front for the Salvation of Democracy (FSD), including 12 Feb meeting, to discuss constitutional revision, electoral and redistricting reforms, and legislative and district elections in 2019. Two prominent Muslim leaders, president of High Islamic Council Mahmoud Dicko and Chérif of Nioro Bouyé Haidara, 10 Feb held rally of estimated 60,000 people in capital Bamako to denounce govt's mishandling of violence in centre; protesters demanded PM Maiga resign. In centre, French Barkhane airstrike in Diakourou, Mopti region 13 Feb killed around ten suspected jihadists and allowed armed forces to free two NGO workers. Barkhane and Malian forces 23 Feb killed fifteen suspected members of Islamist group Katiba Macina near Diakourou. Former prefect of Ténenkou, Mopti region, abducted in May 2018 by Katiba Macina jihadists, freed 18 Feb in unclear circumstances. Unidentified assailants 26 Feb killed man in Diankabo town, Mopti region, and booby-trapped his body, bomb killed seventeen civilians. Suspected Islamist militants 24 Feb attacked Koulikoro military camp outside Bamako where EU training mission is based, security forces repelled assailants, killing several. In north, two factions of pro-national unity Platform coalition clashed in Gao early Feb, four killed. Under pressure from other parts of country and international actors, ex-rebel Coalition of Azawad Movements (CMA) 18 Feb withdrew regulations on social and political life introduced 30 Jan in Kidal region. In east, army killed mayor of Andramboukane 4 Feb in Ménaka region, allegedly after his vehicle refused to stop at checkpoint. Govt and armed groups took small steps to implement Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) element of 2015 Algiers Peace Agreement; govt 6 Feb said 5,000 combatants in centre had registered for DDR, and 600 demobilised combatants and eighteen high-ranking rebel officers had been selected to join security forces. Army 11 Feb said 420 officers who deserted during or after 2012 crisis had accepted to rejoin army, as provided for in peace deal.

➔ Niger FEBRUARY 2019

Violence continued to plague several border areas. In south east near Nigeria and Chad, Boko Haram (BH) attacks continued in Diffa region: suspected BH militants 1 Feb killed six in Bagué Djaradi village in reported settling of scores between rival BH factions; BH militants 15 Feb attacked military barracks in Chétimari, killing seven soldiers; two female BH militants 17 Feb blew themselves up in refugee camp near Bosso, killing four civilians; suspected BH militants 22 Feb attacked Garin-Amadou village near Bosso, at least four killed and seven missing. In Dosso region in south bordering Nigeria, unidentified assailants 13 Feb attacked security forces near Dogondoutchi, killing two gendarmes and one civilian. In Agadez region in north east near Libya, 121 members of Tebu rebel Movement for Justice and Rehabilitation of Niger (MJRN) 3 Feb surrendered to army at Madama after leaving southern Libya. MJRN 8 Feb denied any defections and said those who surrendered were economic migrants. Unidentified assailants ambushed and killed commander of military base of Dirkou, Agadez

region on his way back from capital Niamey between Agadez and Dirkou in north 18 Feb. Ahead of 2021 presidential election, ruling Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS-Tarayya) 10 Feb chose Interior Minister Mohamed Bazoum as its candidate to succeed President Issoufou, who according to constitution cannot run since he will have completed second term. Issoufou dismissed Finance Minister and PNDS Secretary General Hassoumi Massaoudou from govt 1 Feb without giving reason.

➔ Burundi FEBRUARY 2019

standoff between govt and opposition, govt refused to repatriate soldiers from African Union Mission in Somalia, and Congolese army fought Burundian rebels in eastern DR Congo. At EAC heads of state summit 1 Feb facilitator of inter-Burundian dialogue, former Tanzanian President Mkapa, delivered his final report; it denounced boycotts by govt and opposition in exile of different rounds, lack of EAC summit dedicated to crisis, unclear funding mechanisms and lack of coordination among regional and international stakeholders. EAC leaders pledged to consult internally to decide next step and designated presidents of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania to head mediation. Govt 14 Feb approved creation of new party, National Congress for Freedom (CNL), by opposition leader Agathon Rwaso. Attorney General and police spokesman 15 Feb accused civil society activist in exile Pacifique Nininahazwe of instigating BBC documentary “Kamwe Kamwe – Inside Burundi’s Killing Machine” released Dec 2018 allegedly to incriminate authorities at International Criminal Court. During visit by Somali President Farmajo 18-19 Feb, Farmajo and President Nkurunziza called for heads of state summit of countries contributing troops to African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). As part of AMISOM drawdown, 1,000 of some 5,400 Burundian troops were supposed to leave Somalia by end-Feb; some 400 returned home 21-23 Feb, but govt refused to repatriate more, denouncing “injustice” of withdrawing only Burundian soldiers, claiming withdrawal would endanger remaining troops and threatening to repatriate all its troops. Following flare-up of fighting between Burundian military and Burundian rebels in eastern DR Congo in Jan, Burundian military 3 Feb reportedly began withdrawing from Congo. Congolese army 5 Feb reportedly launched offensive against Burundian rebel group RED-TABARA in South Kivu province, forcing latter to retreat within South Kivu.

- [COMMENTARY: Eight Priorities for the African Union in 2019](#)

🇨🇲 Cameroon FEBRUARY 2019

Violence in Anglophone areas intensified, Boko Haram stepped up attacks in Far North, and govt continued to detain opposition leader Maurice Kamto. In Anglophone regions, violence escalated, partly because some separatist fighters imposed ten-day lockdown 5-14 Feb to prevent celebration of 11 Feb National Youth Day; violent incidents left over 100 civilians, separatists and military dead. Notably, soldiers 6 Feb reportedly shot fourteen civilians in Meme, Southwest; govt 10 Feb said six soldiers, 47 separatists and sixteen civilians killed in previous four days; unidentified assailants 11 Feb set fire to Kumba district hospital in Southwest; suspected separatists 16 Feb kidnapped 170 schoolchildren in Kumbo, Northwest, released them two days later after negotiations. Abubakar Shekau’s Boko Haram faction stepped up attacks in Mayo Sava and Mayo Tsanaga departments in Far North, killing at least seventeen civilians and three members of vigilante groups 2-14 Feb. Military court in capital Yaoundé 13 Feb charged opposition leader Maurice Kamto, arrested 28 Jan, and 130 of his supporters with rebellion, insurrection and “hostility against the fatherland”; civil society, international partners and rights groups called for Kamto’s immediate release, some opposition parties called for his release, others sought to take advantage of his detention.

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➡ Central African Republic FEBRUARY 2019

After talks in Sudanese capital Khartoum, President Touadéra and fourteen armed groups signed peace agreement in capital Bangui 6 Feb but violence continued in provinces. “The Political Agreement for

responsibilities relating to natural resource management. Agreement foresees creation of mixed security units, comprising soldiers, armed group members and UN peacekeepers, and of Inclusive Commission to examine evidence and suggest to national Truth and Reconciliation Commission “viable judicial action”. In line with deal, govt resigned 22 Feb. Touadéra 25 Feb appointed Firmin Ngrebada, previously his private secretary, as new PM, replacing Simplicie Sarandji. Ex-Seleka armed group Popular Front for the Central African Renaissance (FPRC) 21 Feb demanded several positions in new cabinet including defence and foreign affairs ministries. In south centre, anti-balaka militiamen clashed with fighters of ex-Seleka faction Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC) near Kouango 24 Feb. According to leaked report by UN mission’s human rights section, Russian military instructors “allegedly tortured a CAR citizen”. Russian deputy ambassador to UN late Feb rejected accusations, which he said were intended “to harm Russian efforts in CAR”.

- [COMMENTARY: Eight Priorities for the African Union in 2019](#)

🇸🇩 Chad FEBRUARY 2019

Govt requested French airstrikes to halt rebel advance in north east and Boko Haram continued attacks in Lake Chad region in west. At Chadian govt’s request, French air force 3-6 Feb carried out strikes on Union of Resistance Forces (UFR) rebels in north east halting advance of some 50 pick-ups from southern Libya toward capital N’Djamena; group led by Timan Erdimi, President Déby’s nephew and former chief of staff living in Qatar. Military 9 Feb said it had arrested over 250 rebels. Opposition and civil society criticised France’s intervention as proof of its unconditional support for Déby. Déby 15 Feb dismissed army battalion commander reportedly for refusing to take part in offensive against Tebu self-defence group in Miski, Tibesti region in north west. Déby 18 Feb replaced several high-ranking military personnel. Security forces 19 Feb arrested five foreign Boko Haram members in N’Djamena. In Lake Chad region in west, Boko Haram attacked three villages night of 19-20 Feb killing five people and kidnapping thirteen, and next night abducted seven people and stole some 200 cattle from Bohoma village. Some 500 Chadian troops, part of regional Multinational Joint Task Force, 22 Feb crossed into Cameroon to support Nigerian and Cameroonian troops in fight against Boko Haram in northern Nigeria.

- [Q&A: Au Tchad, l’incursion des rebelles dévoile les fragilités du pouvoir](#)

🇨🇩 Democratic Republic of Congo FEBRUARY 2019

Following his inauguration late Jan, President Tshisekedi began to appoint staff and engage international partners and security slightly improved. Tshisekedi began to fill key positions in presidency while govt remained in place awaiting replacement. Former President Kabila’s alliance maintained majority in parliament. Tshisekedi met Kabila for talks 17 Feb. Tshisekedi 4 Feb visited military camp in capital Kinshasa, which houses units of republican guard. Tshisekedi 4-6 Feb visited Angola, Kenya and Congo-Brazzaville and 10-11 Feb attended African Union heads of state summit in Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, where he met UN Sec-Gen Guterres and EU foreign policy chief Mogherini; Tshisekedi 11 Feb expressed his wish that EU head of delegation – expelled in Dec 2018 – return to Kinshasa. Opposition leader Martin Fayulu, who according to official results came second in Dec presidential poll, continued to reject results and hold rallies; several parties have left his Lamuka alliance. Some members of foreign armed groups and local Mai-Mai groups in North Kivu, South Kivu

100 militants surrendered late Jan. Burundian military 3 Feb reportedly began withdrawing from Congo. Congolese army 5 Feb reportedly launched offensive against Burundian rebel group RED-TABARA in South Kivu province, forcing latter to retreat within South Kivu. Uganda 26 Feb repatriated 70 former members of Congolese rebel group M23 to Congo under voluntary repatriation program.

Ebola epidemic in North Kivu and Ituri provinces continued: World Health Organization 26 Feb reported 872 cases (807 confirmed) and 548 deaths since outbreak in Aug 2018; new cases mostly reported in Katwa and Butembo health zones in North Kivu. Unidentified assailants 24 Feb partially burnt down Médecins Sans Frontières treatment centre forcing suspension of activities.

- [COMMENTARY: Eight Priorities for the African Union in 2019](#)

➔ Gabon FEBRUARY 2019

Following 7 Jan failed coup attempt, President Bongo continued recuperating in Morocco from late Oct stroke; recovery reportedly expected to last six more months. Bongo 25 Feb briefly returned to Gabon for second time since Oct to chair cabinet meeting, but made no public appearances. Authorities 5 Feb released anti-govt activist Hervé Kinga, arrested in govt crackdown on opposition 31 Aug 2017, after judge dismissed charges of “propaganda aimed at disturbing public order” and “insulting president”.

➔ Rwanda FEBRUARY 2019

Tensions rose between Rwanda and Uganda. After Ugandan govt deported senior employee of telecoms company MTN in Jan, countries continued to exchange mutual accusations of spying. Govt 27 Feb closed Katuna border crossing on Ugandan border for cargo trucks, and 28 Feb for private individuals in both directions; Revenue Authority 28 Feb said closure due to upgrading of border post, but Uganda questioned Rwanda’s motive and called on authorities to allow people to cross border.

➔ Eritrea FEBRUARY 2019

Following reopening of Eritrea-Ethiopia border in Sept 2018, President Afwerki and FM Osman Saleh 22 Feb met Ethiopian PM Abiy in Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa to assess Oct-Jan trial period for trade and transport relations and work toward deeper cooperation. Ethiopian ambassador in Eritrea 19 Feb said two countries were close to signing comprehensive cooperation agreement to institutionalise trade, immigration and transport links. EU 8 Feb announced €20mn program to build roads linking Eritrean ports and Ethiopian border.

Fighting eased between govt forces and rebel group Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in Oromia region; state media 14 Feb reported 1,000 former OLF rebels gave up their arms and entered rehabilitation camps. Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), armed group fighting for secession of Somali region in east which declared unilateral ceasefire in Aug 2018, 8 Feb signed agreement with Somali region to disarm and reintegrate ONLF members into security forces and civil service; PM Abiy 19 Feb held first official meeting with ONLF leadership in capital Addis Ababa. PM Abiy 22 Feb met Eritrean President Afwerki and FM Osman Saleh in Addis Ababa to discuss planned cooperation agreement to institutionalise trade, immigration and transport links.

- [REPORT: Managing Ethiopia's Unsettled Transition](#)

➔ Kenya FEBRUARY 2019

Maritime border dispute between Kenya and Somalia flared and intercommunal violence continued in northern Rift Valley province. Kenya 16 Feb claimed Somalia had auctioned offshore oil blocks in disputed maritime area at 7 Feb London conference, summoned its envoy to Somalia back to Kenya and expelled Somali ambassador; Somalia denied accusation and said it would not offer any blocks in disputed area for exploration until International Court of Justice had ruled on border dispute. In north west in northern part of Rift Valley province, intercommunal violence continued. Gunfight between Turkana and Pokot communities near Kainuk 17 Feb left at least six dead, calm returned after security forces deployed on border between Turkana and West Pokot counties. In Baringo South sub-county, suspected Pokot raiders 21 Feb attacked ethnic Ilchamus inhabitants of Kapindasum village, killing five.

🇸🇴 Somalia FEBRUARY 2019

Al-Shabaab stepped up attacks in capital Mogadishu and rural areas, President Farmajo lobbied regional leaders to delay withdrawal of African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) as Burundi refused to withdraw troops as planned, and maritime border dispute with Kenya flared. In Mogadishu, suspected Al-Shabaab detonated car bomb 4 Feb killing nine; killed Deputy Attorney General 20 Feb; opened fire on street cleaners 25 Feb killing nine; and 28 Feb launched suicide bomb and gun attack near hotel and judge's residence, killing at least 29, militants continued to exchange fire with security forces 1 March. In Middle Shabelle region in south, roadside bomb targeting AMISOM convoy in Balcad 16 Feb reportedly killed two soldiers. Al-Shabaab 20 Feb attacked Balcad, heavy casualties reported. Al-Shabaab 17 Feb attacked bases of Djibouti AMISOM troops in Jalalaqsi in Lower Shabelle, Djibouti forces 18 Feb retaliated, casualties undisclosed. In Jubaland state in south, roadside bombs 20 Feb targeted Ethiopian AMISOM convoy in Baardheere, no casualties reported. U.S. conducted at least five airstrikes on Al-Shabaab in Lower Shabelle and Hiran regions, killing over 90 militants. Farmajo met Burundian President Nkurunziza in Burundian capital Bujumbura 19 Feb to discuss planned withdrawal of 1,000 of some 5,400 Burundian troops from AMISOM by end-Feb. Farmajo and Nkurunziza, both opposed to withdrawal, 19 Feb called for summit of leaders of AMISOM troop contributing countries to revisit security transition plan. Burundi withdrew some 400 soldiers 21-23 Feb but refused to repatriate more, denouncing "injustice" of withdrawing only Burundian soldiers, claiming withdrawal would endanger remaining troops and threatening to withdraw all its troops.

expelled Somali ambassador, Somalia denied accusation and said it would not offer any blocks in disputed area for exploration until International Court of Justice had ruled on border dispute.

- [COMMENTARY: Eight Priorities for the African Union in 2019](#)

➔ Somaliland FEBRUARY 2019

Somaliland President Bihi 20 Feb met Ethiopian PM Abiy in Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa to discuss status of Somalia/Somaliland talks; Somali President Farmajo unable to attend, but welcomed meeting.

➔ ⚡ South Sudan FEBRUARY 2019

Amid overall continued de-escalation, govt forces pursued offensive against rebels in south, raising risk of more intense fighting in March. Govt forces continued offensive launched mid-Jan in Yei River and Amadi states, Equatoria region against rebel group National Salvation Front (NAS) led by Thomas Cirillo, which did not sign Sept 2018 peace deal. Fighting reported to have displaced thousands and govt forces accused of brutality against civilians. EU 18 Feb condemned violation of Dec 2017 Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) and of Sept 2018 peace deal, and called on all parties to immediately cease hostilities and step up efforts to come to political solution. IGAD Special Envoy for South Sudan Ismail Wais 25 Feb met NAS leader Thomas Cirillo and 26 Feb met leader of non-signatory opposition group People's Democratic Movement (PDM) Hakim Dario in bid to halt violence. Acts of intercommunal violence and banditry continued across rural areas: armed group in Lon Mawei area of Tonj state in centre-west 7 Feb reportedly killed four herders, cattle raids in Eastern Lakes state in centre 8 Feb left eight people dead and raids 10-11 Feb in Padiak county, Bieh state in north east killed two. Pilot project to canton govt forces and rebels and train 3,000-strong joint unit in Yei River state in south agreed in Jan stalled for lack of funding.

- [COMMENTARY: Eight Priorities for the African Union in 2019](#)

➔ ⚡ Sudan FEBRUARY 2019

In response to continued protests that began mid-Dec, President Bashir declared state of emergency giving freer rein to security forces and raising risk of more violent crackdown against protesters in March. Bashir 22 Feb declared state of emergency, dissolved cabinet and sacked all eighteen provincial governors to replace them with army and intelligence officials. Bashir's announcement differed considerably from what intelligence chief Salah Gosh hours before said Bashir would say, namely that he would step down as head of ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and cease attempts to change constitution so that he could run for president again in 2020. Security forces 23 Feb stormed doctors' complex, fired tear gas and detained several: dozens of other protest and opposition leaders detained

general conference. U.S. Sec State Pompeo 14 Feb told media that, if there was a transition, U.S. hoped Sudanese people and not outsiders would lead it. Special Assistant to U.S. President Cyril Sartor 18 Feb met Sudanese officials as part of discussions on U.S.-Sudan dialogue and reportedly told officials that U.S. could propose resolution to UN Security Council to defer Bashir's case at International Criminal Court, if he agreed to step down.

- [STATEMENT: Bashir Moves Sudan to Dangerous New Ground](#)

➔ Tanzania FEBRUARY 2019

Parliament 29 Jan voted for amendment of law regulating political parties, granting new powers to govt-appointed registrar including enabling him to de-register parties and impose jail sentences of up to one year for unauthorised civic activities. Opposition leaders said new legislation prevented future challenges to President Magufuli and ruling party Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM). Following 21 Feb arrest of Joseph Mbilinyi, leader of main opposition party Chadema, authorities 23 Feb detained MP Halima Mdee; authorities released both opposition members one day after their arrests. Chadema party accused govt of crackdown against critics.

➔ Uganda FEBRUARY 2019

Tensions rose in Apaa region in north over boundary dispute between Amuru and Adjumani districts; after late Jan attacks between Acholi and Madi communities, security forces 9 Feb arrested several Acholi MPs during their peaceful protest in Gulu calling for resolution of conflict. Central Executive Committee of ruling party National Resistance Movement (NRM) 19 Feb endorsed President Museveni – in power for 33 years – as party's candidate in next presidential elections in 2021; choice to be confirmed at party's National Delegates' Conference in Nov. Relations between Uganda and Rwanda deteriorated further: after govt deported Rwandan senior employee of telecoms company MTN in Jan, countries continued to exchange mutual accusations of spying. Rwanda 27 Feb closed Katuna border crossing for cargo trucks, and 28 Feb for private individuals in both directions; Rwanda's Revenue Authority 28 Feb said closure due to upgrading of border post, but govt questioned Rwandan motive and called on authorities to allow people to cross border. Govt 26 Feb repatriated 70 former members of Congolese rebel group M23 to DR Congo under voluntary repatriation program.

🇦🇴 Angola FEBRUARY 2019

Movement for secession of Cabinda exclave in west, Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC), and its armed wing, Armed Forces of Cabinda (FAC), 28 Feb announced resumption of armed struggle, claiming govt has turned its back on dialogue and stepped up violent repression. Throughout month police reportedly arrested 77 separatist militants and supporters of smaller Cabinda Independence Movement (MIC), including nine members of local church and its pastor who preaches

➔ Madagascar FEBRUARY 2019

National Assembly 1 Feb passed law enabling President Rajoelina, elected in Dec, to legislate by decree until election of new parliament on grounds that existing parliament's mandate would end 5 Feb; date of parliamentary polls not yet fixed. Parliament 5 Feb confirmed law in final session. Opposition MPs close to former President Ravalomanana, defeated in Dec polls, denounced break in separation of powers.

➔ Mozambique FEBRUARY 2019

Suspected Islamist militants continued attacks in Cabo Delgado province in far north. Suspected militants 1 Feb beheaded four people in Nangade district; 8 Feb reportedly hacked seven men to death and abducted four women in Piqueue village, Macomia district; 21 Feb carried out two attacks on workers of oil and gas company Anadarko on road between Mocimboa da Praia and Afungi, killing one; 23 Feb killed six people in Macomia district. U.S. late Jan said it was ready "to increase cooperation" to assist fight against militants. Following attack on Anadarko workers, govt deployed Special Forces to Cabo Delgado province. Govt 20 Feb detained journalist reporting on insurgency; next day, NGO Human Rights Watch report alleged widespread intimidation, detention and prosecution of journalists covering attacks in Cabo Delgado by security forces. Authorities 14-18 Feb arrested at least six people in connection with govt's attempt to hide \$2bn debt including son of former President Guebuza, in power when govt made debt deals, and former head of intelligence. Leader of former armed opposition movement Renamo, Ossufo Momade, elected in Jan, sacked party secretary and other officials 15 Feb. Momade and President Nyusi resumed talks 27 Feb to review progress in integration of Renamo cadres into police and army.

➔ Zambia FEBRUARY 2019

In run-up to 13 Feb by-election in Sheseke in south west, supporters of President Lungu's party Patriotic Front (PF) 8 Feb clashed with supporters of opposition United Party for National Development (UPND), leaving several injured and prompting police intervention.

➔ Zimbabwe FEBRUARY 2019

Following security forces' violent repression of mass protests in Jan, govt tried to engage opposition in

opposition party movement for Democratic Change (MDC), rejected invitation, saying he would only attend dialogue held by neutral entity. Church 7 Feb held meeting of gov't and opposition representatives to reconcile political parties, which Mnangagwa missed despite saying he would attend; Chamisa attended along with diplomats, several cabinet ministers and business leaders. Gov't 20 Feb announced it would introduce new currency known as Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) dollars to address economic crisis; trading of currency began 22 Feb. In continuing unrest, teachers 5 Feb began nationwide strike demanding increased salaries; with security forces and ruling ZANU-PF supporters reportedly intimidating some teachers to go back to work, strike suspended after one week. International condemnation of suppression continued: U.S. 12 Feb said it was concerned by human rights violations and called for national dialogue. EU 19 Feb resolved not to extend targeted sanctions against gov't officials but warned it would review decision if situation deteriorated further. NGO Amnesty International 8 Feb released report on suppression of protests detailing security forces' "lethal and excessive use of force" and alleging they had committed torture and rape; report claimed authorities had detained arbitrarily over 1,000 people since protests began mid-Jan. Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 6 Feb reported 1,803 violations, including seventeen extra judicial killings. Mnangagwa 11 Feb said allegations of abuse were fabricated. In reshuffle of security forces, Mnangagwa 18 Feb retired four senior military officers close to VP Chiwenga.

➔ Côte d'Ivoire FEBRUARY 2019

Political landscape continued to shift ahead of 2020 presidential elections as former rebel leader Guillaume Soro resigned from position of parliamentary speaker and said he was open to meeting his former enemy, former President Laurent Gbagbo. President Ouattara 10 Feb said he had until July 2020 to announce whether he will run in presidential elections later that year. Guillaume Soro 8 Feb resigned from position of parliamentary speaker and said he was looking for "more comfortable chair to sit in", fuelling speculation that he intends to run for president in 2020. Soro 15 Feb launched new movement, Political Committee, "to reflect on major issues of national interest" and work toward "promotion of democracy... consolidation of the rule of law" and "strengthening of republican values". Soro same day said he was open to meeting former President Gbagbo. Belgium 4 Feb agreed to host Gbagbo after International Criminal Court (ICC) 1 Feb ordered his conditional release, pending possible appeal against his acquittal. Soro's supporters 16 Feb transformed association into new party, Rassemblement pour la Côte d'Ivoire (RACI). Soro 23 Feb met head of opposition Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) and former President Henri Konan Bédié in Daoukro, Tchologo area in north; Soro and Bédié said they would work together to build opposition coalition against President Ouattara ahead of 2020 election. Soro's close collaborator, former minister and current MP Alain Lobognon, who was sentenced to one year in prison in Jan for "spreading false news and inciting hatred", was freed 13 Feb after court of appeal revised sentence to six-month suspended prison sentence. In 11 Feb report, Amnesty International criticised violations of freedom of expression, saying arbitrary arrests and imprisonment, harassment of opposition, civil society and critical media were common practices.

➔ Guinea FEBRUARY 2019

Supporters of opposition leader Cellou Dalein Diallo who had gathered to welcome him back on return from foreign trip clashed with security forces in capital Conakry 16 Feb, about 30 injured. Diallo's lawyers 20 Feb filed complaint against security forces for attempt on Diallo's life. Results of communal

mayor, 600 RUF members, clashed in Noro-Ossa, Kankaran region 15 Feb, several reportedly injured. Several political parties including Union of Republican Forces (URF) 22 Feb created alliance Convergence of the Democratic Opposition in attempt to counter political polarisation.

→ Guinea-Bissau FEBRUARY 2019

Strikes and protests continued in run-up to legislative elections in March. Journalists working for public media went on strike 1-4 Feb to denounce censorship and demand payment of salaries. Teachers' union 5 Feb said authorities had failed to keep commitments made in Jan, threatened to resume strike. Angry at paralysis of schools, students protested in capital Bissau 8 Feb; protests turned violent, protestors looted shops, ruling party headquarters and minister's house, security forces arrested eight. Govt 8 Feb said funds needed to pay teachers' Dec and Jan salaries were available, but teachers resumed strike 14 Feb. Campaigning for 10 March legislative elections started 16 Feb. UN Security Council representatives visited country 15-16 Feb, urged President Vaz, PM Gomes, political party leaders and electoral commission officials to work for free, fair and peaceful legislative and subsequent presidential elections.

→ Liberia FEBRUARY 2019

Two central bank officials including son of ex-president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Charles Sirleaf, were detained 28 Feb in connection with \$104mn intended for central bank that allegedly went missing.

🇳🇮 ⚡ Nigeria FEBRUARY 2019

Election-related violence rose around delayed polls raising risk of further escalation around governorship polls set for 9 March, ethnic violence spiked in north centre and Boko Haram (BH) continued attacks in north east. Election-related violence rose in run-up to and on day of presidential and federal legislative elections 23 Feb. Clashes involving thugs and supporters of political parties, especially President Buhari's ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and main challenger Atiku Abubakar's People's Democratic Party (PDP), escalated; over 40 killed in election-related violence, including about twenty in Rivers and Akwa Ibom states in south east on election day. Electoral commission 27 Feb said Buhari had won presidential poll with 56% of vote; Atiku rejected result. In north centre, ethnic violence flared in Kaduna state. Governor 19 Feb said attacks on mainly Fulani hamlets in Kajuru area left 130 dead; ethnic Adara said governor, a Fulani, had inflated figures to trigger Fulani attacks on Adara or lower voter turnout; gunmen 26 Feb stormed four villages of ethnic Adara in same area, killing 29. In Benue state, gunmen killed seventeen in Agatu area 20 Feb. In north east, both Boko Haram (BH) factions continued to attack military and civilians in Borno and Yobe states. Notably, in Yobe state, army 4 Feb repelled attempt by BH faction known as Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) to enter Kanama town, several insurgents reportedly killed. Three BH suicide bombers 16 Feb attacked mosque in Borno state capital Maiduguri, killing eleven people including

mostly in Zamfara state, but also Sokoto, Katsina and Niger leaving at least 50 dead. Notably, bandits 19 Feb stormed Danjibga village, Zamfara state, clashed with civilian vigilantes, seven residents and at least 59 bandits reportedly killed; bandits 25 Feb attacked three villages in Sokoto state, sixteen reportedly killed.

- [Q&A: Winning Back Trust in Nigeria's Rescheduled Elections](#)

→ Senegal FEBRUARY 2019

Following 24 Feb presidential election, electoral commission 28 Feb declared President Sall winner with provisional result of 58.27% of vote. Runner-up Idrissa Seck conceded defeat. Tensions rose ahead of vote. Former President Abdoulaye Wade, father of barred candidate Karim Wade, 8 Feb called for boycott. In Tambacounda, 400km east of capital Dakar, clashes between President Sall's supporters and those of opposition candidate Issa Sall 12 Feb left two dead; 24 people arrested, including twenty of Issa Sall's bodyguards.

Asia

→ China/Japan FEBRUARY 2019

Japan and China continued efforts to improve security relations amid ongoing maritime tensions. Senior Japanese and Chinese officials met in Beijing 1-2 Feb for security dialogue, committing to deepening mutual trust and promote exchanges; reportedly also discussed plans for Chinese President Xi to visit Japan later in 2019. Japanese coast guard apprehended Chinese fishing boat captain suspected of violating fishing laws in Japanese waters 2 Feb. Japan also lodged new complaints with Beijing 7 Feb after Chinese oil drilling vessel was found still deployed in disputed waters of East China Sea (ECS), having previously been sighted nearby in Nov 2018. Japan again scrambled jets 23 Feb to intercept Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) electronic warfare and surveillance plane passing through Tsushima Strait, which connects Sea of Japan, East China Sea and Yellow Sea. U.S. 29 Jan approved sales of two Aegis Weapon Systems to Japan.

→ Korean Peninsula FEBRUARY 2019

Second U.S.-DPRK summit on denuclearisation in Hanoi 27-28 Feb unexpectedly cut short on second day; U.S. President Trump told press conference that North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's demand for U.S. to lift "all" sanctions was unacceptable, and Pyongyang's offer to destroy only its main nuclear complex Yongbyon did not go far enough; said relationship between leaders was good; no commitment to hold another summit. North Korean foreign minister and vice minister held terse late-night press conference in Hanoi to deny some of Trump's claims, especially request for full sanctions relief; state media mirrored Trump's positive comments about summit atmosphere and leaders' personal relations. In lead-up to summit, U.S. Special Representative for North Korea Steve Biegun

complete denuclearisation, transforming U.S.-DPRK relations, and building a lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula”. Further meetings held in Hanoi starting 19 February. U.S. and South Korea 5 Feb tentatively agreed revised Special Measures Agreement, one-year deal under which South Korea is to raise its annual cost-sharing contribution to nearly \$1bn, up from approximately \$800 million during previous five-year agreement. Gen. Robert Abrams, new commander of U.S. Forces Korea, told Senate Armed Services Committee hearing 13 Feb that North Korea remains a threat, saying “despite a reduction in tensions along the DMZ and a cessation of strategic provocations coupled with public statements of intent to denuclearize, little to no verifiable change has occurred in North Korea’s military capabilities”.

- [Q&A: All Eyes on Tangible Results from U.S.-North Korea Summit](#)

→ Taiwan Strait FEBRUARY 2019

In CNN interview 19 Feb, President Tsai warned of growing military threat posed by China and confirmed plans to run for second term in 2020 general elections; came after her poll ratings improved in wake of Beijing’s strong language on reunification early Jan. Following Tsai’s calls in Jan to develop Taiwan’s indigenous defence industry, Taiwan News 11 Feb reported govt requests for budgetary approval on new military procurement including domestically produced drones and missile-equipped ships to support asymmetric warfare strategy against a larger force. Discussing 40th anniversary of U.S. Taiwan Relations Act, Brent Christensen, Director of American Institute in Taiwan and most senior U.S. diplomat in Taipei, 30 Jan said he expected U.S.-Taiwan relations to continue to deepen, including in security cooperation. In statement before Senate Armed Services Committee 12 Feb, Indo-Pacific Commander Admiral Philip Davidson recommended supporting and improving interoperability with Taiwan’s military, alongside strengthening partnerships with other regional allies. U.S. conducted its second freedom of navigation operation through Taiwan Strait in two months 25-26 Feb, prompting Chinese protest.

→ Afghanistan FEBRUARY 2019

Talks resumed between U.S. and Taliban and month also saw unprecedented talks between Taliban and Afghan political figures in Moscow, however political tensions continued over fallout of Oct 2018 parliamentary elections and upcoming July presidential polls. Following Jan agreement in principle on framework for peace deal, U.S. and Taliban officials resumed discussions in Doha 25-28 Feb; U.S.

envoy Zalmay Khalilzad described talks as productive. Taliban representatives and range of Afghan political figures – including former President Karzai and opposition leaders but excluding govt – held unprecedented meeting in Moscow 5-6 Feb, declaring support for talks in Doha, reform of institutions including security sector and withdrawal of foreign forces. Amid ongoing concerns over Taliban’s refusal to engage in negotiations with Kabul, and latter’s continued insistence that it should have ownership of dialogue, govt 11 Feb held first National Advisory Meeting on Peace in Kabul and announced national consultative meeting to be held 17-20 March, to include representatives from across Afghan society. Hostilities continued across country without significant changes in control of territory; Taliban attacked govt positions including near provincial capitals of Kunduz 4-5 Feb and Farah 14-15 Feb, while govt continued to claim arrest or killing of key insurgents. UN 24 Feb reported

chair and members of Independent Election Commission and Electoral Complaints Commission, both criticised for problems with Oct 2018 parliamentary elections. Former National Security Advisor and current presidential candidate Hanif Atmar criticised move, which threatens presidential elections set for 20 July, and accused govt of “illegally cleaning govt offices of political opposition”.

➔ Bangladesh FEBRUARY 2019

Tensions continued over Dec general election results, with fears political violence could worsen amid planned local elections 10-18 March. Some 74 defeated candidates from Dec election – 66 of them from main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) – challenged results before High Court’s electoral tribunal 14 Feb, alleging widespread electoral rigging including with intimidation and ballot box stuffing; with eight successful candidates from BNP-led opposition alliance Jatiya Oikya Front (United National Front) refusing to take parliamentary oath in protest, PM Hasina 12 Feb rejected allegations and called boycott “politically wrong”. BNP late Jan announced it would boycott March local elections, prompting concern over potential for increased violence between govt and opposition supporters. International concern over credibility of elections continued. Hundreds of religious hardliners 12 Feb protested planned religious convention of minority Ahmadiya sect in north and attacked Ahmadiyas, injuring seven. Intense fighting in Myanmar’s southern Chin State between military and Arakan Army caused several hundred to flee across border to Bangladesh’s Chittagong Hill Tracts, prompting Dhaka to send strongly worded letter to Myanmar 5 Feb expressing concern over security situation, possible new exodus, and impact on stability of area with long history of tensions between different communities (see Myanmar). Bangladesh FM told UN Security Council 28 Feb that it cannot accommodate any more refugees from Myanmar.

➔ India (non-Kashmir) FEBRUARY 2019

In Gadchiroli district, Maharashtra state (centre), suspected Maoist rebels shot dead two civilians 2 Feb and another 6 Feb, reportedly suspected of being police informers. Security forces claimed to have killed ten Maoists in clash in Bijapur district, Chhattisgarh state (east) 7 Feb, and three during gunfight in Gumla district, Jharkhand state (east) 23 Feb. Senior Maoist commander Oggu Satwaji alias “Sudhakar” surrendered to police in Telangana state (centre) 11 Feb.

- [Q&A: Deadly Kashmir Suicide Bombing Ratchets up India-Pakistan Tensions](#)

🚒 ⚡ Kashmir FEBRUARY 2019

Deadliest terror attack in over 30 years in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and Indian and Pakistani airstrikes across Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir), first since 1971 India-Pakistan war, led to spike in tensions between India and Pakistan and within J&K, with fears of further escalation. Pakistani-based Jaish-e-Muhammad 14 Feb launched suicide car bomb attack on convoy of Indian paramilitaries in Pulwama district, 30km from capital

Kulgam district 24 Feb; several members of security forces also killed during security operations. Separatists in J&K held strikes in protest at operations; New Delhi 17 Feb removed security protection from five separatist leaders, prompting fears that attack on separatist leadership could further destabilise region. Indian govt accused Pakistan of complicity in 14 Feb attack, with PM Modi warning of “befitting reply” and giving security forces “permission to take decisions about the timing, place and nature of their response”; Pakistan rejected role in attack; both sides withdrew diplomats. Pakistani PM Khan 19 Feb offered to cooperate in investigation but warned of immediate retaliation if attacked. Indian air force 26 Feb claimed to have carried out “pre-emptive” airstrikes on Jaish-e-Muhammad training camp in Balakot in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, claiming to have killed “large number” of militants. Pakistan military denied Indian airstrikes had caused casualties and responded with airstrikes across LoC 27 Feb, claiming to have shot down two Indian planes in Pakistan airspace, and capturing pilot; India claimed to have shot down Pakistani fighter jet in Indian-Kashmir. China and EU urged both nations to show restraint, calling on Pakistan to end support for jihadist groups; U.S. warned further military action by both countries posed “unacceptably high” escalation risks. Supreme Court 22 Feb called on authorities to protect Kashmiris facing intimidation and attacks in Hindu-majority J&K and other northern Indian states.

- [Q&A: Deadly Kashmir Suicide Bombing Ratchets up India-Pakistan Tensions](#)

➔ Nepal FEBRUARY 2019

Concerns about KP Oli-led govt’s curtailing of civil liberties continued to grow with two new bills proposed by govt in Feb – one imposing numerous restrictions on content shared via social networks and granting govt sweeping powers to block social media platforms not registered in Nepal; and another barring current and retired civil servants from expressing their opinions on any public or social platforms. Both draft bills were criticised for attempting to restrict freedom of speech, increase state surveillance, and silence dissent. Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) – led by hardline Maoist leader Netra Bikram Chand – claimed responsibility for series of attacks 22 Feb on telecommunications company; attacks included IED explosion in southern Kathmandu valley where one person was killed and two more injured; arson attacks also carried out on company’s telephone towers in several districts; attacks came amid reports of CPN growing in strength in some midwestern districts. Parliament 6 Feb formally endorsed legislation extending terms of two transitional justice bodies by one year; differences over future of transitional justice mechanisms reportedly contributing to tensions between the two leaders of the ruling Nepal Communist Party – PM Oli and former Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

➔ Pakistan FEBRUARY 2019

Govt faced tensions with India and Iran following terrorist attacks blamed on Pakistani-based militants, while attacks also continued inside Pakistan. Pakistani-based Jaish-e-Muhammad 14 Feb killed some 45 Indian paramilitary troops in suicide attack in Kashmir, followed by Indian and Pakistani airstrikes across Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir) (see Kashmir). Iranian Sunni militant group Jaish al-Adl – reportedly based in Balochistan – killed 27 Iranian soldiers in 13 Feb suicide attack near border (see Iran); Iranian army 16 Feb accused Pakistan of providing Jaish al-Adl safe haven and warned Iran would retaliate if “Pakistan does not carry out its

local and provincial govts to prosecute those who violate law, and emphasised constitutional bar on members of armed forces engaging in “any kind of political activity”. Leader of Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (Pashtun protection movement, PTM) killed during demonstration in Loralai city, Balochistan (south west) 2 Feb, with PTM leaders alleging police had beaten him to death; police denied allegation, 6 Feb arrested PTM protesters in Islamabad. Attacks continued inside Pakistan including Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan-claimed attack that killed four police in Dera Ismail Khan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (north west) 12 Feb. In coastal city Karachi, targeted attacks on politicians and sectarian violence increased including killing of Pak Sarzameen Party leader 19 Feb and murder of local leader of Sunni hardline group Sipah-e-Sahaba 4 Feb.

- [Q&A: Deadly Kashmir Suicide Bombing Ratchets up India-Pakistan Tensions](#)

➔ Sri Lanka FEBRUARY 2019

President Sirisena continued actions challenging democratic institutions and human rights provisions in advance of presidential, parliamentary and provincial elections set for late 2019-2020. Sirisena 6 Feb attacked National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in speech to parliament, accusing it of protecting only criminals’ rights and blaming alleged NHRC procedural delays for Jan death of two Sri Lankan UN peacekeepers in Mali; NHRC expressed “deep concern” at “unjust criticism”. Sirisena also alleged Constitutional Council bias following Council’s rejection of his nominees for judicial positions; charges repeated by former President Mahinda Rajapaksa and supporters, in apparent campaign to weaken public support for 19th amendment, which re-established Constitutional Council and independent commissions such as NHRC, and set term, age and nationality limits on presidency. In bid to maintain support of Tamil National Alliance (TNA), following collapse of hopes for new TNA-backed constitution, PM Wickremesinghe 14-16 Feb visited Northern Province with ministers and TNA MPs, promising to expedite economic development initiatives. UK 11 Feb announced intention to present draft resolution “rolling over” terms of existing UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) resolution for Sri Lanka, with UNHRC meeting starting 25 Feb; major protests 25 Feb by Tamil groups in northern province rejected extension of UNHRC process, called for international justice for wartime abuses. In 14 Feb Joint Commission meetings with Sri Lanka, EU reiterated “need to repeal and replace the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA)” with new legislation “in line with international standards” and urged Sri Lanka to “maintain its moratorium on executions”.

➔ Indonesia FEBRUARY 2019

Tensions continued in Papua province, while reports of terrorist activity highlighted concerns over return of foreign fighters elsewhere. In Papua, NGO Humanitarian Volunteers for Nduga 20 Feb said

hundreds of students had fled fighting in Papua province’s Nduga district since Dec, although military continued to reject reports that it had fired on civilians during search for rebels suspected of Dec killing of road construction workers. Military reported that suspected separatists had opened fire on aircraft carrying military personnel and govt officials in Nduga 28 Jan, killing one soldier. Video of Papuan police threatening suspected petty thief with a snake early Feb provoked outrage; UN human rights officials 21 Feb called for independent probe into “alleged killings, unlawful arrests, and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of indigenous Papuans” by police and military in West Papua and Papua provinces, noting concern over “culture of impunity and general lack of investigations into

jail term for helping 2002 Bali bomber. Police announced that govt had sent counter-terrorist unit to Philippines, whose govt claimed that attackers in 27 Jan bomb attack in Jolo, Philippines, were Indonesian couple, although Jakarta denied (see Philippines).

➔ Myanmar FEBRUARY 2019

Deadly clashes between military and Rakhine and Rohingya armed groups continued in overlapping areas of northern Rakhine State, with both communities caught in crossfire, with fears conflict will escalate ahead of monsoon season in April/May. Rakhine State govt late-Jan granted permission to police and military to carry out household search operations in seven townships to search for members of Arakan Army; authorities have charged dozens of young men with unlawful association for having contacts with group. Intense fighting between military and Arakan Army in southern Chin State's remote Paletwa township early Feb caused several hundred Rakhine and Chin villagers to flee across border to Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts, prompting Dhaka to send letter to Myanmar 5 Feb expressing concern over security situation and possible new exodus. Bangladesh FM told UN Security Council 28 Feb that it cannot accommodate any more refugees from Myanmar. Attempted IED attack on military convoy in Ann township 4 Feb, some distance from Arakan Army's normal area of operations, prompted concerns over possible expansion of attacks to other parts of Rakhine State. Govt statements on destroying Arakan Army, and reports and photos of Rakhine civilian casualties, seen as likely to further alienate many Rakhine and harden their support for group. Indications continued that Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army militant group also becoming more active, with several small attacks in Maungdaw area in Jan and Feb bearing hallmarks of group. With ethnic peace process moribund, four Ethnic Armed Organisations constituting Northern Alliance – Arakan Army, Kachin Independence Organisation, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, and Ta'ang National Liberation Army – said they offered military a ceasefire during meeting with govt's National Reconciliation and Peace Centre in China 25 Feb. Parliament 19 Feb formed joint committee to amend 2008 military-drafted constitution ahead of 2020 elections, despite opposition from military MPs; committee began work 25 Feb; military has veto on any amendments.

➔ Philippines FEBRUARY 2019

Month saw second phase of plebiscite on new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) and appointment of interim regional govt, while military campaign against militant groups continued. Following Jan plebiscite in Mindanao creating BARMM, Lanao del Norte province and parts of Cotabato province 6 Feb held plebiscite on whether to join entity: 63 out of 67 villages in North Cotabato voted to join, while majority-Christian Lanao del Norte province voted against allowing six municipalities, all with strong Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) presence and in favour of joining BARMM, to do so, raising concerns over potential tensions and exclusion of major MILF camp from BARMM area. Lanao del Norte hit by three explosions on eve of plebiscite, no casualties. Duterte 22 Feb led swearing in of 80 members of Bangsamoro Transitional Authority (BTA), 41 of them appointed by MILF and 39 by govt, with MILF chair Murad Ebrahim chief minister. Military continued campaigns against militant groups and pursuit of individuals suspected of involvement in 27 Jan Jolo church bomb attack, reporting some suspects killed and some surrendered. Interior minister 1 Feb said Indonesian couple carried out attack assisted by Islamic State (ISIS) and Abu Sayyaf, Jakarta denied. Three suspected Abu Sayyaf militants and five soldiers killed in 2 Feb clash in Sulu province's Patikul

civilians and threatened to kill three civilian hostages. Military continued campaign to end communist New People's Army (NPA) insurgency, with several soldiers, police and NPA fighters reported killed in clashes during month. NPA also reportedly killed several civilians and freed some hostages. President Duterte again offered to reopen peace talks with Communist Party of the Philippines, in return for stopping attacks on security forces and taxation which govt terms extortion.

➔ South China Sea FEBRUARY 2019

Marking second U.S. freedom of navigation operation of 2019 in South China Sea (SCS), U.S. warships sailed through disputed Spratly islands 11 Feb, passing within twelve nautical miles of Second Thomas Shoal and Mischief Reef, administered by Philippines and China respectively; Beijing responded reiterating its "indisputable sovereignty" over islands and claimed its navy identified and expelled the warships. U.S. stealth aircraft conducted operations in Philippine and East China Seas 26 Jan-6 Feb; followed Jan reports that U.S. Marine Corps is developing conflict capabilities for taking "natural or man-made" island. China continued push for military combat readiness toward maritime forces, with Central Military Commission Vice-Chair 3 Feb calling for further development of Coast Guard. Media 21 Feb reported that China concluded previously unannounced drills in SCS over 34 days, involving naval, air and missile forces. U.S. and UK navies held joint maritime security and logistics training in SCS 18 Feb, their third naval collaboration in region in three months. Philippines defence minister 4 Feb said announced ramp for planned construction on Thitu Island in Spratlys will be completed early 2019. Using satellite imagery, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative 6 Feb reported increased numbers of suspected Chinese fishing militia, Coast Guard and navy vessels around island Dec and Jan. Indonesia 22 Feb outlined plans to build Integrated Marine and Fisheries Centre in its Natuna Islands and station naval patrol boats as part of effort to establish new fishing zone and assert sovereignty over area.

➔ Thailand FEBRUARY 2019

While country prepared for 24 March general election, MARA Patani umbrella group of Malay-Muslim separatist fronts suspended moribund peace-dialogue process with Bangkok. After Thai dialogue chief General Udomchai Thammasaroraj refused to meet group in Kuala Lumpur 3 Feb, saying he would only meet with MARA Patani chief Sukri Hari, MARA released statement condemning what it called "hidden agenda" and Udomchai's "unacceptable attitude", and suspended participation in process until after election. Several killed in continuing violence in deep south. Incidents included: security forces killed two suspected militants in Chanae district, Narathiwat, 11 Feb, believed to be involved in 18 Jan slaying of two monks in Sungai Padi district; gunmen killed two Muslim farmers in Yaha district, Yala province 14 Feb; bombing killed ranger and wounded two other people in Bannag Satar, Yala, 26 Feb; and two plainclothes police officers were abducted from tea shop and executed in Cho Airong, Narathiwat 27 Feb. Shock announcement 8 Feb that Princess Ubolratana, older sister of King Maha Vajiralongkorn, would stand for PM for recently formed Thai Raksa Chart Party, which is aligned with former PM Thaksin Shinawatra, roiled political landscape. Move prompted speculation that king had broken with ruling National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), however he issued statement hours later quashing her candidacy. With election widely viewed as a contest between pro- and anti-junta parties, NCPO 20 Feb filed criminal charges against popular leader of anti-junta Future Forward Party. for critique of junta posted on his Facebook page in June 2018, potentially disqualifying him and

Europe & Central Asia

➔ Bosnia And Herzegovina FEBRUARY 2019

Federation entity 20 Feb formed its upper chamber of parliament, four months after Oct 2018 elections, allowing it to adopt delayed 2019 budget and appoint delegates to state-level House of Peoples. U.S. embassy and Office of the High Representative, international overseer of implementation of 1995 peace agreement, criticised Republika Srpska (RS) entity's 7 Feb announcement that it has set up controversial commission to investigate 1992-1995 wartime crimes in Srebrenica, which international and domestic courts have ruled a genocide; RS Aug 2018 annulled previous report into Srebrenica massacre.

➔ Kosovo FEBRUARY 2019

Govt faced growing pressure from U.S. and EU to withdraw its 100% tariff on Serbian imports that has amplified tensions with Serbia. Senior U.S. State Department officials 12 Feb sent letter to govt warning that its position was putting bilateral relations at risk, and confirmed cancellation of planned visit by U.S. National Guard commander; PM Haradinaj reiterated that Kosovo would only scrap tariff once Serbia recognises Kosovo's independence. U.S. also criticised govt for hiring newly-released convicted war criminal as adviser to Haradinaj. President Thaçi continued to discuss "correction" of border with Serbia in context of ongoing normalisation dialogue with Serbia, and in 14 Feb interview said he saw "good momentum" in dialogue. Kosovo's new negotiating team for dialogue 15 Feb presented its negotiating platform to parliamentary speaker to be put to vote, including demand that Belgrade pledges to recognise Kosovo and agree on new tribunal for wartime crimes, and principle that Kosovo's territory will not be altered. Kosovo marked eleven year anniversary of its declaration of independence 17 Feb with parade by its new Kosovo Security Force.

➔ North Macedonia FEBRUARY 2019

Country changed name to "North Macedonia" 12 Feb in accordance with June 2018 Prespa agreement with Greece, after Greek parliament 8 Feb ratified North Macedonia's NATO accession protocol, which was signed 6 Feb. North Macedonia to become full NATO member once all member countries ratify protocol. Police 20 Feb arrested former parliament speaker and two former govt ministers allegedly involved in violent invasion of parliament by govt supporters in April 2017, constituting "terrorist conspiracy to undermine constitutional order and security".

Defence Ministry 8 Feb sent 83 doctors and demining experts to Syria to support ongoing humanitarian operations in and around Aleppo, previously populated by local ethnic Armenian population, requested by Syrian govt and with strong support from Russia; U.S. State Department criticised move saying U.S. did not support any engagement with Syrian military.

- [COMMENTARY: Old Conflict, New Armenia: The View from Baku](#)

➔ Azerbaijan FEBRUARY 2019

In rare interview with national TV channel, President Aliyev 12 Feb announced new stage of reforms aiming to improve socio-economic situation, in line with recent govt attempts to shrink state apparatus and promote social benefits. Aliyev 8 Feb signed order to increase minimum monthly wages by 38.5% to 180 Azerbaijani manat (\$106), and issued decree 28 Feb ordering state budget to cover dollar loans that were not paid back following 2015 devaluation of national currency.

- [COMMENTARY: Old Conflict, New Armenia: The View from Baku](#)

➔ Georgia FEBRUARY 2019

Both breakaway republics maintained controversial restrictions on crossing points with regions controlled by Tbilisi, which are mostly used by ethnic Georgians. Abkhazia de facto authorities 5 Feb agreed to soften limits and allow people to use crossings, subject to further consideration in two months. In South Ossetia, de facto authorities 20 Feb gave people three days to leave region before closing border again.

➔ Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan) FEBRUARY 2019

Preparations continued for first official meeting of Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders, as Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group co-chairs 20-21 Feb visited the two leaders to monitor progress of their recent informal meetings and discuss possible official summit between them on Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) peace process. Other positive steps included de facto NK's 2 Feb release of Azerbaijani soldier arrested after crossing Line of Contact in 2017; and Armenia's accreditation to journalist from leading Azerbaijani news agency to conduct interviews with officials and experts in Yerevan. Tens of thousands marched with Azerbaijani leadership in Baku 26 Feb to commemorate 1992 Khojaly massacre, which took place during NK war and in which hundreds of ethnic Azerbaijani civilians including women and children died. In ongoing arms race, Armenia 4 Feb announced new deliveries of light rifles and fighter jets from Russia, and Azerbaijan 17 Feb signed new contract with Israeli drone maker.

- [COMMENTARY: Old Conflict, New Armenia: The View from Baku](#)

Following controversial Sept 2018 border agreement between republics of Chechnya and Ingushetia, Chechen and Dagestani officials 5 Feb agreed in Chechen capital Grozny to clarify their border by end of 2019; officials reported that they did not discuss any territorial concessions but Dagestani residents expressed concerns that delimitation process is unfolding without their consultation. Dagestani commission on demarcation reported dispute between local businessman who was developing a construction project on border and Chechen residents. European Parliament 14 Feb passed resolution calling on Chechen authorities to release Oyub Titiyev, director of human rights group Memorial who was arrested in Chechnya in Jan 2018 and is being held on drug possession charge. In Dagestan, authorities 19 Feb reported counter-terrorism operation in Derbent district resulted in one suspected militant killed. In Kabardino-Balkaria, three militants reportedly killed in shootout during counter-terrorism operation in capital Nalchik 27 Feb. North Caucasus district military court 28 Feb sentenced five Ingushetian men, alleged to have ties to Islamic State (ISIS), to prison terms ranging from twelve to twenty years for conspiring to commit terror attacks on French embassy in Moscow and in Ingushetia in 2016; the five men previously said they had testified under torture.

U.S. suspension of 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) and Russian rhetoric regarding possible deployments of new weapons marked further deterioration of U.S.-Russia relations and raised concerns about future of arms control. U.S. 1 Feb said it was suspending its obligations under INF starting 2 Feb, giving Russia six months to return to “real and verifiable” compliance before U.S. ultimate withdrawal from INF. Washington earlier announced plans of withdrawal in Oct 2018, arguing Russia has been developing 9M729 missile system in violation of INF, and amid years of mutual accusations of non-compliance. President Putin 2 Feb announced Moscow would follow suit and in his 20 Feb state of the nation address promised deployment of new and powerful missiles targeting U.S. and European countries, although only in response to any U.S. deployments of intermediate-range missiles on European continent; NATO accused Russia of “unacceptable” threat and called on Russia for full compliance.

Tensions with Russia over Moscow’s demand for faster integration between the two countries eased; after talks with Russian President Putin in Sochi, President Lukashenka 15 Feb stated Belarus “is ready to integrate with Russia to the extent the Russian and Belarusian peoples would want”. Lukashenka 18 Feb told visiting EU Commissioner that Belarus will “always be a reliable partner of the EU”. EU 20 Feb extended for another year 2011 arms embargo against Belarus and sanctions on four citizens.

Preliminary results of 24 Feb parliamentary elections saw pro-Russia Socialist Party win 35 out of 101 seats, ruling Democrats 30 seats and pro-European ACUM 26 seats, with turnout reported at 49%. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) monitors 25 Feb declared elections “competitive” but “tainted by allegations of pressure on public employees, strong indications of vote buying and the misuse of state resources”. Media reported dozens of buses from pro-Russia breakaway region Transnistria – where vote was not held – brought over 30,000 voters, allegedly paid to cast ballots.

➔ ⚡ Ukraine FEBRUARY 2019

Month saw concerns around integrity of 31 March presidential elections and potentially disputed poll amid allegations of high-level corruption in the defence sector, along with rise in casualties among military and separatists in conflict zone and continued tensions with Russia over Azov Sea. Military reported ten soldiers killed in fighting with Russian-backed separatists in east since end-Jan; about 20 separatist fighters also reported killed. Two civilians killed and three injured after bus hit anti-tank mine near checkpoint in Donetsk People’s Republic 23 Feb; at least three elderly civilians died while waiting to cross contact line. As of 20 Feb, number of explosions recorded by Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) had tripled since end-Jan. OSCE monitors also reported several aircraft sightings in apparent violation of Minsk agreements. In 20 Feb address to UN General Assembly, Poroshenko called for fact-finding mission for a peacekeeping contingent in Donbas. Interior Ministry announced investigations into reports of attempted vote-buying ahead of presidential elections, particularly by incumbent’s campaign; Poroshenko and various govt institutions also warned of possible Russian interference through disinformation, agent provocateurs; Kyiv and its Western allies concerned about possible Russian cyberattacks; official sources claim govt may stage military provocation ahead of vote. Front runners remain comedian Volodymyr Zelensky, incumbent Petro Poroshenko, and former PM Yulia Tymoshenko. Media investigation published 25 Feb outlined scheme, allegedly overseen by deputy head of Security and Defence Council, to supply military with contraband equipment from Russia at inflated prices; presidential challenger Tymoshenko 26 Feb called for Poroshenko’s impeachment. Constitutional Court 26 Feb abolished criminal liability for illegal enrichment, possibly putting IMF funding at risk. Tensions continue to simmer between Russia and Ukraine in Azov Sea, Kerch Strait and Black Sea; EU 18 Feb confirmed new sanctions against eight Russian citizens due to Russia’s Nov 2018 use of force on Ukrainian naval vessels and ongoing imprisonment of 24 sailors and security personnel.

- [COMMENTARY: Reducing the Human Cost of Ukraine’s War](#)

➔ Cyprus FEBRUARY 2019

Trying to forge dialogue on possible resumption of reunification talks, UN Special Envoy Jane Holl Lute met separately with Greek Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı early Feb, as well as with representatives of guarantor states; discussed terms of reference for resumption of talks and issues related to guarantor states but no progress reported. Anastasiades and Akıncı came together at informal meeting hosted by the UN 26 Feb. Tensions over hydrocarbon explorations in Eastern Mediterranean continued; ExxonMobil reportedly expected to announce finding of major gas resources as a result of three months of explorations in Cyprus’

➔ Turkey FEBRUARY 2019

Intensity of Turkish military's security operations against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in south east remained low with few fatalities, while air raids by Turkish military targeting PKK positions in northern Iraq continued. Ahead of 31 March municipal elections, govt intensified crackdown on pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) members and suspected PKK sympathisers. Court 14 Feb sentenced two HDP MPs to fifteen and eighteen months in prison over terrorism charges. Differences between Ankara and Washington over U.S. withdrawal and "safe zone" in north east Syria (see Syria) continued; President Erdoğan 5 Feb criticised U.S. for delays in withdrawal of militants belonging to the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) from U.S.-patrolled town of Manbij and for lack of clarity on safe zone; also renewed threats to carry out military offensive in area to clear YPG, and vowed to set up "terror-free zone". Erdoğan 14 Feb discussed situation in Syria's Idlib province with Iranian and Russian presidents in Sochi, Russia, stressing that joint operations by Turkey, Russia and Iran against jihadist alliance Hei'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) possible if needed. Inside Turkey, detentions of alleged Islamic State (ISIS) and HTS-linked individuals continued, including armed forces' capture of four ISIS suspects 3 Feb and four HTS suspects 7 Feb attempting to enter Syria.

- [REPORT: Mitigating Risks for Syrian Refugee Youth in Turkey's Şanlıurfa](#)
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➔ Kazakhstan FEBRUARY 2019

President Nazarbayev 21 Feb dismissed govt citing failure to diversify economy and raise incomes, in response to public anger and protests in Astana and other cities over living conditions, triggered by death in housefire early Feb of five children while their parents were working night shifts. Govt 15 Feb published controversial proposed amendment to media legislation, imposing additional requirements for journalist's accreditation and empowering authorities to set standards of coverage; union of journalists criticised proposal.

➔ Kyrgyzstan FEBRUARY 2019

Amid tensions between President Jeenbekov and his predecessor Almazbek Atambayev, Atambayev 22 Feb issued statement admitting "many mistakes" while in office. Bishkek court 19 Feb initiated preliminary hearings for corruption trial of eight former senior govt officials, including two former PMs.

➔ Tajikistan FEBRUARY 2019

asylum status in the Netherlands, while he was visiting security official in Russia. During early Feb visit to Dushanbe, Russian FM Lavrov said Moscow ready to assist with modernisation of Tajik military and strengthening of border in light of continued threats from Afghan territory. Tajik foreign ministry 12 Feb said it was trying to repatriate all children born to Tajiks who travelled to Syria or Iraq to join Islamic State (ISIS), as well as women, estimated to number at least 50.

➔ Turkmenistan FEBRUARY 2019

Meeting in Ashgabat, President Berdymukhamedov and Afghan President Ghani 21 Feb signed strategic partnership; Berdymukhamedov reportedly offered to help bring Taliban negotiators and Afghan officials together for peace talks. Opposition news website 8 Feb alleged that govt figures on 2018 cotton and wheat harvests were highly inflated, with real figures less than half those reported.

➔ Uzbekistan FEBRUARY 2019

President Mirziyoyev 11 Feb announced State Security Chief Ikhtiyor Abdullayev had resigned for health reasons; media reported that authorities 8 Feb had opened criminal investigation into Abdullayev over bribery and abuse-of-office allegations.

Latin America & Caribbean

➔ Colombia FEBRUARY 2019

National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla group continued attacks on security forces, while Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissident-related violence and attacks on social leaders remained high. ELN 18 Feb killed two policemen along bridge connecting Colombia and Venezuela in Arauca (east) and two more next day in Nariño (south west). ELN also bombed Caño Limón, Colombia's longest oil pipeline in north east, three times during month following similar attacks in 2018. Relations with Venezuela remained strained over alleged Venezuelan support for ELN, continuing mass exodus of Venezuelans across border and Bogotá's support for Venezuelan opposition (see Venezuela). Army 2 Feb bombed camp belonging to FARC dissidents led by Gentil Duarte in Caquetá province (south), killing Duarte's second-in-command alias "Cadete" along with nine other fighters. Dissidents reportedly from First Front faction 3 Feb killed policeman in Arauca. In Tumaco (south west), violence between dissident groups and drug traffickers continued with clashes along Mejicano River 2-3 Feb, in which at least two and possibly up to nine fighters were killed. Dissidents 4 Feb killed two people in attack on town of Llorente, Tumaco. Murders of community activists continued with three activists murdered in Antioquia province (north west), two in Cauca and one each in La Guajira (north east), Norte de Santander (north) and Nariño.

Turmoil continued as govt and opposition hardened their positions and clashes sparked by opposition's attempted delivery of humanitarian aid prompted fears of further violence. Large quantities of international aid including medical supplies and food, mostly transported by U.S., arrived at Colombian border and opposition leader and regionally supported interim President Juan Guaidó announced 23 Feb as date for first aid shipment into country; govt shut all border points including main planned delivery routes; President Maduro 21 Feb called aid a "provocation" and suggested it was precursor to U.S. military invasion. Army 22 Feb opened fire on indigenous protesters attempting to keep border with Brazil open in Gran Sabana region, killing at least two. Clashes broke out as opposition activists and civilians 23 Feb attempted to bring aid across borders with Colombia and Brazil, with security forces firing teargas and rubber bullets and masked civilian paramilitaries firing live rounds; more people reported killed in Santa Elena de Uairén on Brazilian border, hundreds injured in all; over 400 members of security forces, mostly National Guard, deserted by crossing border near Cúcuta, according to Colombian govt. Armed forces mostly maintained loyalty to Maduro govt during month, although largely refrained from attacking massive opposition demonstrations taking place across country; however, severe repression continued, including police death squads' reported use of summary executions. International opinion remained divided, with most actors rejecting military intervention. UN Sec-Gen Guterres 22 Feb met with FM Arreaza in New York, urging govt to refrain from using force against protesters, while Guaidó 25 Feb met regional members of Lima Group and U.S. VP Pence in Bogotá to discuss crisis, during which Latin American countries voiced opposition to military intervention; Pence announced further sanctions against members of govt and called on other nations to increase pressure. EU accelerated creation of International Contact Group at meeting in Uruguay 7 Feb, with stated purpose to seek path to free and fair elections under external observation. Guaidó 22 Feb left country clandestinely for Colombia, stating intention to return after visiting Brazil, Europe and U.S.

- [OP-ED: Will Maduro's Supporters Abandon Him?](#)

Tensions remained high between govt and International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG, which has been preparing case and possible charges against President Morales and others for illicit electoral financing) following Morales' attempted cancellation of CICIG's mandate in Jan. Head of State Prosecutor's office 16 Feb reiterated govt does not recognise CICIG as a valid actor in national affairs, after CICIG representatives were present at initial hearing 13 Feb in case of former prosecutor accused of obstruction of justice. Sweden 17 Feb recalled ambassador for consultations citing political situation and state of bilateral relations; in May 2018 govt had claimed ambassador had interfered in domestic politics. Political violence increased with attacks on candidates in lead up to June presidential elections, including unknown assailants 11 Feb shooting dead Marvin Giovanni Peña, Fuerza party's mayoral candidate for Tiquisate, Escuintla department (south); Fuerza presidential candidate Mauricio Radford warned of chronic absence of authority in municipalities such as Dolores y Las Cruces, El Petén department (north). Govt late-Jan appointed Morales ally to oversee security of at-risk judges, leading to concerns Morales may use provision of security to pressure judges. In attempts to stem flow of Central American migrants northward, Morales and foreign and economy ministers 15 Feb met delegation of U.S. senators and congressmen to review Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle plan to address structural problems fuelling irregular migration.

Following Dec agreements resulting from UN-led dialogue, parties began to discuss and approve reforms. Member of Congress 12 Feb proposed Electoral Procedural law to regulate operations of Electoral Supreme Court. Liberal Party 24 Jan proposed bill that would use plebiscites to decide on issues such as presidential re-election and electoral second round if parties cannot reach agreement. Political tensions remained high following late-Jan protests demanding President Hernández's resignation; NGO 19 Feb reported 171 protesters detained in aftermath of Hernández's election in 2017 have been prosecuted so far. Hernández 12 Feb claimed govt is liberating Honduras from gangs, with no homicides reported in 177 out of 298 municipalities in 2019. However, Church 7 Feb expressed concern over rise of femicides with some 40 murders of women 1 Jan-7 Feb; human rights commissioner 15 Feb stated 90% of cases go unpunished. Hondurans continued to set off in "caravans" attempting to reach U.S. border, with 200 people leaving San Pedro Sula (north) 8 Feb; officials 7 Feb reported 4,610 Hondurans deported from Mexico and U.S. in Jan.

→ El Salvador FEBRUARY 2019

In presidential election result 3 Feb, former San Salvador mayor Nayib Bukele, won in first round with 53.1% of votes, disrupting traditionally dominant bipartisan system. Bukele won with support of minority party GANA, whose low representation in Legislative Assembly raises concerns over challenges he will face in governing. Bukele met with U.S. ambassador 7 Feb, stated govt and U.S. would curb migration through economic development. Another migrant caravan of 105 people left San Salvador 16 Feb, in continuing attempts by Salvadorans to reach U.S. border. Gang-related and other violence remained high, though daily homicide totals fell; national police chief 14 Feb announced 46 women were killed 1 Jan-13 Feb.

→  Nicaragua FEBRUARY 2019

Facing mounting international pressure and economic crisis govt resumed National Dialogue 27 Feb, following visits of delegations from U.S., EU, and Organization of American States (OAS), and an exploratory meeting with private sector representatives 16 Feb. But situation remained volatile as govt alternated between repression of opposition and NGOs and détente measures. Police raided local NGO 7 Feb, withholding its equipment and detaining two workers. Judge 19 Feb sentenced two peasant leaders to over 200 years in prison. Police 25 Feb harassed José Pallais, negotiator for opposition Civic Alliance, and his wife. Govt 27 Feb released into house arrest some 100 political prisoners; previously, Committee for Liberation of Political Prisoners 19 Feb reported govt was holding total of 777 political prisoners. Among other controversial bills, National Assembly late-Jan approved Law on Dialogue, Reconciliation, and Peace in Nicaragua, which Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1 Feb said is incompatible with international standards on truth, justice and reparations. Govt's international isolation increased; U.S. 30 Jan imposed sanctions on Albanisa oil company (joint venture with Venezuela's state oil company) while EU diplomats aired possibility of EU sanctions 20 Feb if govt did not cease repression and release political prisoners. Organization of American States (OAS) Expert Group 19 Feb suggested victims could press for trial of President Ortega in another country. Economic conditions continued to deteriorate.

Amid worsening economic situation and fuel shortages, violent anti-govt protests gripped country and left some 26 people dead. Opposition 7-17 Feb held mass “Operation Lockdown Haiti” demonstrations in capital Port-au-Prince and other cities, demanding President Moïse’s resignation; protests followed late-Jan court of auditors report alleging that former officials and senior ministers, including Moïse, had mismanaged and embezzled funds from PetroCaribe (alliance giving Caribbean states access to cheap Venezuelan oil). Police threw tear gas at crowds and clashed with demonstrators, while some protesters set fire to vehicles and looted stores; 78 prisoners escaped from jail in Aquin (south) 12 Feb, reportedly during protests in front of adjoining police station. In his first speech addressing protests, Moïse 14 February said he refused to resign and leave country in “hands of armed gangs and drug traffickers”, while PM Céant 16 Feb announced economic measures including cutting privileges for government officials. Gang and drug-trafficking related insecurity continued; police and U.S. drug agency 11 Feb arrested former police commissioner in Port-au-Prince on trafficking charges. Police 17 Feb announced they had arrested group of eight armed men, including five U.S. citizens, on “conspiracy” charges at checkpoint in Port-au-Prince.

➔ Mexico FEBRUARY 2019

Amid record levels of violence, public security secretary Alfonso Durazo 1 Feb presented National Public Security Strategy, which many fear will cement use of armed forces in public security, although it also contains commitment to maintain and strengthen municipal police forces. Senate 21 Feb approved bill limiting deployment of armed forces to five years and establishing National Guard – controversial main instrument of AMLO’s National Peace and Security Plan to fight crime and violence – as civilian-police institution under aegis of Public Security Secretary. Govt 1 Feb announced deployment of 1,800 army and federal police officers under banner of National Guard to violent neighbourhoods in city of Tijuana, Baja California state (north), which saw 2,518 homicides in 2018, 41% increase from 2017; 6 Feb announced deployment of 600 officers each to seventeen regions affected by rising homicide rates. Amid continued opposition to National Guard from civil society and experts, AMLO 18 Feb formalised end of all state financing for civil society bodies. Govt continued operations to curb oil siphoning, with over 2,400 troops now deployed to Guanajuato state (centre), area of competition over oil siphoning between criminal groups including Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CJNG) and Lima Cartel. Criminal group-related violence remained high, including attack by armed commando on bar in Cancún killing five, amid growing violent competition for extortion and drugs retail markets in this and other tourist hotspots in Quintana Roo (south east), where 2018 total homicides number (774) more than double that of 2017. Targeted killings of activists and journalists continued including journalist Jesús Eugenio Ramos, murdered in Emiliano Zapata, Tabasco (south) 9 Feb, and murder of indigenous environmental activist Samir Flores, in Amilcingo, Morelos (centre) 20 Feb. Interior ministry 4 Feb presented Plan for Attending to Victims of Disappearances, reporting total of 45,000 disappeared people and pledging \$21mn for search and identification, and establishment of National Forensic Institute by July.

- [Q&A: Mexico’s New Neutrality in the Venezuela Crisis](#)

Middle East & North Africa

Tensions mounted at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade and Palestinian protests in Gaza flared mid-month. In Jerusalem, Jordan's newly reconstituted and enlarged Waqf Council, leadership of Islamic organisation that administers Holy Esplanade, met for first time 14 Feb, giving larger role to Palestinian national institutions. Ending meeting, Waqf Council held prayers in area to which Israel has restricted access since 2003, Israel removed worshippers. Protest prayers 19-21 Feb led to clashes between worshippers and Israeli police, over 60 arrested. In Gaza, after week of increased protests in Jabaliya region, organisers of Great March of Return weekly demonstrations 15 Feb escalated protests at Gaza-Israel border, citing Israel's failure to fulfil its side of ceasefire agreement. Hamas 17 Feb took control of Kerem Shalom crossing on Gaza-Israel border, expelling Palestinian Authority (PA) employees. Hamas and Islamic Jihad delegation 3 Feb met Egyptian authorities in Cairo to discuss ceasefire agreement, opening of Rafah border and disbursement of Qatari funds to Palestinians in Gaza. PA early Feb cut salaries of 5,000 employees, prisoners and families of martyrs in Gaza for alleged links to Hamas, Islamic Jihad or Mohammed Dahlan. In West Bank, following PM Hamdallah's resignation in Jan, several political factions 4 Feb announced boycott of new Fatah govt line-up citing what they viewed as Fatah's agenda to centralise power and deepen national rifts. Palestinian factions, including Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Fatah, 11-13 Feb met in Moscow to discuss Palestinian unity, but failed to agree on closing statement. Israel 17 Feb affirmed its decision to withhold \$130mn of tax money owed to PA in bid to stop transfer of funds to families of prisoners and martyrs. Regarding peace process, U.S. 14 Feb said it would unveil peace plan after 9 April Israeli elections. Ireland 19-20 Feb hosted meeting of several European and Arab countries committed to traditional peacemaking positions and Palestine Liberation Organization to coordinate stances ahead of EU and Arab League summit in Egypt 24-25 Feb in which participating states declared commitment to traditional peace-making positions.

➔ Jordan FEBRUARY 2019

Two blasts in Wadi Al Azraq area, Balqa governorate in west 14 Feb killed five people, including four security officers; govt 15 Feb said explosives matched material used by militant cell in Fuheis, Balqa governorate in Aug 2018. Arrest of two men who refused to show identification in Anjara, Ajloun governorate in north west 15 Feb triggered riots and clashes with police 16 Feb, one person killed.

➔ Lebanon FEBRUARY 2019

Parliament 15 Feb gave vote of confidence to new govt formed late Jan; PM Hariri's policy declaration underscored need for urgent economic reforms and right of citizens to "resist Israeli occupation and repel its aggression," providing cover for Hizbollah's separate military structures. Army 17 Feb detained in Hermel in north east two suspected Islamic State (ISIS) leaders who had fled eastern Syria, where U.S.-backed forces are waging offensive against ISIS's last Syrian stronghold. UK 25 Feb announced decision to put Hizbollah's political arm on its list of proscribed groups, classifying Hizbollah in its entirety as "terrorist organisation"; Hizbollah's military arm already on list. About 1,300 Syrian refugees returned from Lebanon to Syria 27 Feb through govt-run programs at Masnaa, Abboudieh and Qaa border crossings in centre and north.

Govt forces continued to bomb jihadist-held Idlib in north west, U.S. announced 400 troops would remain in north east, and U.S.-backed Kurdish forces launched push to take Islamic State's (ISIS) last stronghold in east. In north west, jihadist group Hei'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and al-Qaeda loyalist splinter Hurras al-Din 10 Feb reached new agreement after public spat. Leadership of HTS-linked civilian administration Salvation Govt took part in opposition conference in Bab al-Hawa on Syria-Turkey border 10 Feb; closing statement called for election of Shura council to form new civilian administration to replace Salvation Govt and for creation of military council including all Idlib's armed factions. Govt forces 15-28 Feb shelled opposition areas in Idlib, killing at least 40 civilians. Unclaimed bombings next to Salvation Govt offices in Idlib 18 Feb killed 24 people. Russian President Putin hosted summit on Syria with Turkish and Iranian counterparts in Sochi 14 Feb; after summit, Russia said military operations against HTS in Idlib were inevitable. U.S. military 11 Feb said troop withdrawal from north east could begin in weeks. President Assad 17 Feb rejected Kurdish autonomy in north east. Russia 18 Feb insisted Turkey needed Syrian govt's approval for military action against Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), backbone of Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). U.S. 21 Feb said France and UK refused U.S. request to deploy coalition "observer force". U.S. President Trump 22 Feb said 400 U.S. troops would remain in Syria as residual peacekeeping force to set up safe zone. Following Trump's announcement, Turkish President Erdoğan 23 Feb evoked 1998 Syria-Turkey Adana agreement which apparently allows Turkey to conduct cross-border antiterrorist operations up to 5km into Syria, while stressing proposed safe zone in north east should be under Turkish control. In east, SDF 9 Feb launched push against ISIS's last holdout in Baghouz area near Iraqi border; besieged fighters 20 Feb began allowing civilian evacuation. In south west, Israeli tank 11 Feb fired at alleged

Hizbollah observation posts in Quneitra governorate, despite Russia's 8 Feb warnings against Israeli attacks in Syria.

- [OP-ED: 'Jihadi bride' doesn't fit: we need a new language for female militants](#)
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Govt 9 Feb said it would cut costs to meet deficit reduction targets mandated by \$10bn aid package from fellow Gulf states agreed Oct 2018 aimed at eliminating budget deficit by 2022.

On 40th anniversary of 1979 revolution, govt insisted on right to develop "defensive power", meanwhile rift between U.S. and Europe over Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) widened. Following 31 Jan launch by European JCPOA participants (Germany, France and UK) of Instrument for Supporting Trade Exchanges (INSTEX), mechanism to facilitate trade with Iran avoiding unilateral U.S. sanctions, U.S. VP Pence at Munich Security Conference 16 Feb urged Europeans to "stop undermining U.S. sanctions" and to "withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal". U.S. and Poland chaired ministerial meeting in Polish capital Warsaw 13-14 Feb titled Ministerial to Promote a Future of Peace

and will not – ask for permission from anybody for improving our defensive power” and Supreme Leader Khamenei 13 Feb counselled against trusting European govts and negotiating with U.S.. FM Zarif resigned 25 Feb without giving reasons; Rouhani 27 Feb rejected resignation and Zarif continued duties. Satellite launch failed 5 Feb. Suicide attack claimed by Sunni militant group Jaish al-Adl against Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps vehicle 13 Feb killed 27 in south east, govt accused Pakistan of sheltering group and accused Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (UAE) of involvement.

➔ Iraq FEBRUARY 2019

Debate intensified over U.S. military presence and Islamic State (ISIS) continued insurgency. U.S. President Trump 3 Feb said U.S. military will remain in Iraq “to watch Iran”; President Salih 4 Feb criticised statement and stressed Iraq’s sovereignty. In surprise visit to Iraq, acting U.S. Sec Defence Patrick Shanahan 12 Feb corrected Trump’s remarks saying counterterrorism goals guide U.S.-Iraq partnership. Statements come after Shiite MPs from Sadrist Sayirun alliance and Iran-backed al-Fatah coalition 31 Jan submitted draft legislation demanding end of agreements which govern presence of U.S. troops in Iraq and bilateral security cooperation. Resisting these demands, PM Mahdi 20 Feb stressed Iraq’s sovereign request for presence of U.S. troops and their importance to national security. Parliament 31 Jan passed federal budget for 2019 which signalled improved relations between Baghdad and Kurdistan Regional Govt (KRG): KRG to receive same share of budget as in 2018 but due to overall increase will receive nearly 30% more funds and central govt guaranteed salaries to Kurdish public servants and security forces, even if it makes deductions from budget transfers. Sayirun and al-Fatah 11 Feb said they had agreed to form joint committee to speed up cabinet formation. In Kurdistan, two main parties, Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), 15 Feb announced preliminary agreement on outline for next regional govt, first govt since late 2017 independence referendum. ISIS continued insurgency: near Samarra north of Baghdad, gunmen 3 Feb wounded nine people, including six Iranian Shiite pilgrims, and two roadside bombs 14 Feb killed eight members of Shiite Popular Mobilisation Forces; in Najaf, Anbar and Salah al-Din provinces, ISIS 7-17 Feb kidnapped twenty civilians, reportedly killed nine of them and released five in return for ransom; suspected ISIS sleeper cells 23 Feb killed five fishermen in Therthar Lake, 60km north of Baghdad. In north, Turkey carried out raids against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK); Turkey 22 Feb said it had carried out fifteen operations in Harkuk region of Iraq, destroying PKK hideouts.

- [OP-ED: ‘Jihadi bride’ doesn’t fit: we need a new language for female militants](#)

➔ Qatar FEBRUARY 2019

Qatari forces 20 Feb joined other Gulf countries in Saudi Arabia for Peninsula Shield military exercise. Govt 25-28 Feb hosted U.S.-Taliban talks in Doha following previous meeting in Doha in Jan (see Afghanistan).

In joint statement on Yemen 13 Feb, "Quad" comprising Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), U.S. and UK denounced Iranian support for Huthis and blamed latter for lack of progress in implementation of Dec Stockholm Agreement. U.S. House of Representatives same day adopted resolution aimed at ending U.S. support for Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. FM al-Jubeir 10 Feb denounced what he called congressional efforts to curtail U.S. allies' fight against "terrorist organisations supported by Iran and Hezbollah". Moroccan officials 7 Feb said Morocco had frozen its involvement in Saudi-led coalition. Govt and UAE 26 Feb both pledged additional \$500mn to UN 2019 humanitarian plan for Yemen. Govt 23 Feb appointed Princess Reema bint Bandar bin Sultan as ambassador to U.S., first Saudi woman ambassador. Same day, Khaled bin Salman, outgoing ambassador to U.S., appointed deputy defence minister by royal decree. Govt 20 Feb began hosting joint military exercise Peninsula Shield with Gulf states including Qatar, to conclude 14 March. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman travelled to Pakistan, India and China 17-22 Feb announcing trade and investment agreements. Govt 12 Feb said state oil company Saudi Aramco will develop energy assets outside country for first time.

  Yemen FEBRUARY 2019

Govt and Huthis agreed to redeploy their forces from front-line positions in and around Hodeida, opening opportunity in coming weeks to implement deal, but disagreement over details could lead to breakdown of talks and trigger fighting in and around city, and intense fighting along and across Yemen-Saudi border could escalate further. Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC) comprising UN, govt and Huthis reached deal 16 Feb on first phase of redeployments by both sides from Red Sea ports and infrastructure around Hodeida. But debate over who will secure Hodeida once both sides have made redeployments delayed implementation. World Food Programme 26 Feb regained access, blocked for five months by fighting, to Red Sea Mills, major wheat facility in outskirts of Hodeida. UAE FM Gargash 3 Feb called for implementation of Dec Stockholm Agreement and to make 2019 "the year of peace in Yemen". "Quad" comprising Saudi Arabia, UAE, U.S. and UK 13 Feb denounced Iranian support for Huthis and blamed latter for lack of progress in implementation of Dec agreement. Fighting intensified on Yemen-Saudi border, with govt and Huthis claiming military successes in Hajja, Saada and al-Jawf governorates; clashes escalated in Hajja in north west between al-Hajour tribesmen and Huthis. Huthi Head of Supreme Commission for Elections and Referendum (SCER) in Huthi-held capital Sanaa 1 Feb announced plans to hold elections to fill vacant seats in parliament; President Hadi 3 Feb said he would relocate SCER headquarters to Aden, as he moves to reconvene parliament in temporary capital. In Mukalla in east, Southern Transitional Council (STC), organisation working for secession of south, 16-17 Feb held third meeting of what it calls its National Assembly; its chair warned Hadi that STC would block any attempt to convene parliament in Aden. U.S. House of Representatives 13 Feb adopted resolution aimed at ending U.S. support for Saudi-led coalition. Saudi FM al-Jubeir 10 Feb denounced congressional efforts to curtail U.S. allies' fight against "terrorist organisations supported by Iran and Hezbollah". Moroccan officials 7 Feb said Morocco had frozen its involvement in Saudi-led coalition.

- [BRIEFING NOTE: Crisis Group Yemen Update #6](#)

 United Arab Emirates FEBRUARY 2019

FM Gargash 3 Feb called for implementation of Stockholm Agreement in Yemen and to make 2019

➔ Algeria FEBRUARY 2019

Ahead of presidential elections planned for 18 April, President Bouteflika said he would run for fifth term triggering waves of protests in urban centres. Ruling party National Liberation Front (FLN) 9 Feb declared support for President Bouteflika. Despite declining health, Bouteflika 10 Feb announced his candidacy. In meeting organised by Islamist Justice and Development Front party (MRN) opposition parties 21 Feb failed to agree on joint candidate. Thousands protested against prospect of Bouteflika's fifth term 16 Feb in several places, notably in cities east of capital Algiers like Kheratta, Bordj Bou Arreridj and Tizi Ouzou; in Khenchela 20 Feb authorities barred opposition figure from holding rally, triggering protests. Following 14 Feb call for nationwide march by Mouwatana (Citizenship) movement, thousands of protestors demonstrated peacefully against Bouteflika in Algiers 22-24 Feb; on third consecutive day, security forces fired tear gas, and also detained 40 people. Police in Algiers 28 Feb dispersed journalists protesting against govt censorship of recent demonstrations, arresting several.

➔ Egypt FEBRUARY 2019

Parliament initiated process to extend presidential terms and increase term limit and security forces continued to fight Islamic State (ISIS) in Sinai. 485 of 596 MPs 6 Feb voted to start parliamentary process to change constitution extending presidential terms from four to six years and increasing limit from two to four terms; changes would enable President Sisi – due to step down in 2022 at end of second term – to run for two more six-year terms and potentially stay in power until 2034. If MPs endorse changes in vote expected early March, national referendum would be held on proposed amendments. Former presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabbahi 7 Feb announced new movement, Union for Defending the Constitution, comprising opposition parties, MPs and civil society activists. In Cairo, unclaimed bombings appeared to target security forces: homemade bomb detonated in Giza district 15 Feb wounding three people including policeman, govt blamed Muslim Brotherhood; after attempted bombing of police station, officers pursued suspect, who detonated explosive device upon capture in central Cairo, killing three police officers 18 Feb. In Sinai, attack claimed by ISIS south of provincial capital Arish 16 Feb left fifteen military personnel and seven militants dead; security forces 19 Feb said they had killed sixteen suspected militants in two raids in Arish districts of Obeidat and Abu Eita. Govt continued crackdown on civil society and opposition. Despite repeated reports that authorities used torture to extract confessions, fifteen male prisoners charged with murder executed 7-20 Feb. Prosecutors 14 Feb charged and formally detained journalist Ahmed Gamal Ziada for spreading false news, after his 29 Jan arrest and disappearance at Cairo airport. Authorities failed to provide whereabouts of Australian Hazem Hamouda, detained without charges at Cairo airport 25 Jan and due to be released 21 Feb by order of prosecutor general.

🇱🇮 Libya FEBRUARY 2019

National Army (LNA) continued to consolidate control in area, securing Sebha peacefully but triggering fighting in Murzuq region, 100km south west of Sebha; local armed groups or forces in north allied to Tripoli-based Govt of National Accord (GNA) could retaliate against LNA in coming weeks. Murzuq region saw heavy fighting: clashes between LNA-allied local Arab forces and local Tebu non-Arab armed groups near Ghadduwah from 1 Feb left at least fourteen dead, LNA said at least four LNA soldiers killed. LNA airstrike in outskirts of Murzuq 4 Feb reportedly killed seven Tebu, including civilians. LNA 8 Feb bombed Murzuq residential area, no casualties reported. Fighting inside Murzuq 20-23 Feb between LNA-allied Arab forces and Tebu armed groups left dozens of tribesmen and three LNA soldiers dead, including Murzuq's GNA-affiliated security chief. Tebu accused pro-Haftar forces of attacking them and ransacking houses, LNA accused Tebu of harbouring Chadian armed groups. LNA 6-7 Feb announced it had taken control of Sharara oil field, 200km west of Sebha, reportedly after local Tuareg guards previously aligned with GNA switched sides; LNA 22 Feb said it had taken over al-Feel oil field near Murzuq. GNA made several military appointments 6 Feb allegedly in response to LNA advance: Tuareg general Ali Kanna appointed commander of southern region; Mohammed al-Sharif of Jufra region appointed chief of staff and Salem Joha of Misrata as his deputy. GNA said it and U.S. forces conducted airstrikes on al-Qaeda camp in Ubari in south west 13 Feb, killing four militants; U.S. denied involvement. In eastern city of Derna, clashes between LNA and coalition of Islamist militants Derna Protection Force intensified early Feb, seven civilians reportedly killed 11 Feb. LNA mid-Feb claimed final victory in Derna. Libyan Red Crescent 21 Feb said it had recovered over 30 bodies in Derna in Feb. UN envoy Ghassan Salamé hosted meeting between PM Serraj and Haftar in Abu Dhabi 27 Feb; leaders reiterated need to hold elections.

➔ Mauritania FEBRUARY 2019

Political manoeuvring continued ahead of presidential election planned for later this year. Opposition platform, including among National Forum for Democracy and Unity (FNDU) and Rally of Democratic Forces (RFD), continued consultations to agree on common candidate. In document submitted to govt early Feb, opposition demanded reform of electoral commission, audit of electoral register and national dialogue to ensure free and fair election.

➔ Morocco FEBRUARY 2019

Protests and strikes continued. 42 members of Hirak protest movement that formed in Rif region in north in late 2016 to demand jobs and denounce state corruption and repression 15 Feb boycotted hearing before Casablanca court of appeal for first time since appeal trial started 17 Dec, citing lack of conditions for impartial trial. Thousands demonstrated in Brussels 16 Feb to call for release of Hirak movement activists. Thousands of public school teachers 20 Feb went on strike and demonstrated in capital Rabat against poor working conditions; police intervened to disperse protesters.

➔ Tunisia FEBRUARY 2019

struggle between President Essebsi and PM Chahed. Far-left and Arab nationalist coalition Popular Front 4 Feb called for govt's resignation ahead of late 2019 legislative and presidential elections to ensure transparent poll and accused govt of covering up Islamist party An-Nahda's alleged

involvement in killing of two leftist and Arab nationalist leaders in 2013. An-Nahda President Rached Ghannouchi 17 Feb said Chahed could be forced to resign before elections, signalling that parliament could pass vote of no confidence. Tunis court 6 Feb sentenced in absentia secretary general of Essebsi's party Nida Tounes, Slim Riahi, to five years in prison for involvement in affair of bouncing cheques. Thousands of teachers 7 Feb demonstrated in capital Tunis to demand bonuses and better working conditions. Public sector union UGTT reached agreement with govt on salary increases 9 Feb, called off general strike planned for 20-21 Feb and ended months-long strikes in secondary schools. Libyan militia demanding release of Libyan in prison in Tunisia on drug-related charges 14 Feb kidnapped fourteen Tunisian oil workers in Zawiya city near Libya's capital Tripoli; hostages freed 17 Feb in unclear circumstances. EU Commission 13 Feb kept Tunisia on black list of 23 countries highly exposed to money laundering and terrorist financing. Tunis court 9 Feb sentenced seven people to life in prison for 2015 attacks that killed 60 in Tunis and Sousse, sentenced others to six months to sixteen years in prison, and discharged 27; prosecutors said they would appeal.

- [COMMENTARY: Tunisia in 2019: a Pivotal Year?](#)

➔  Western Sahara FEBRUARY 2019

After direct talks between Morocco and independence movement Polisario Front resumed in early Dec for first time in six years, second round planned for March offers opportunity to advance negotiations over status of Western Sahara. UN envoy for Western Sahara Horst Köhler mid-Feb said he planned to convene second round of talks in March. European Parliament 12 Feb voted in favour of new fisheries partnership between EU and Morocco that Polisario Front, European Court of Justice, European MPs and NGOs have criticised for including waters off Western Sahara.

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