NONVIOLENT CHANGE
Journal of the Research/Action Team on Nonviolent Large Systems Change
Vol. XXXVI, No. 3
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Nonviolent Change helps to network the peace community: providing dialoguing, exchanges of ideas, articles, reviews, reports and announcements of the activities of peace related groups and meetings, reviews of world developments relating to nonviolent change and resource information concerning the development of human relations on the basis of mutual respect.

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NONVIOLENT CHANGE JOURNAL (NCJ) ON THE WEB

Nonviolent Change is on the web at: http://www.nonviolentchangejournal.org, along with several years of back issues. To be notified by E-mail when new issues are posted, send a request to be added to the NCJ notification E-mail list to Steve Sachs at: ssachs@earthlink.net. Issues are usually posted: Fall, in late August or early September; Winter, in January or early February; Spring in mid-March to end of April.

The International Society for Organization Development and Change (ISODC) and the Nonviolent Change journal agreed May 2, 2016 to associate, making members aware of each other’s activities and announcing each other’s events. Readers of Nonviolent Change are offered reduced a membership fee in ISODC, which provides access to the Organization Development Journal (ODJ). ISODC is the successor to the Organization Development Institute, whose former President, Don Cole, initiated the Research/Action Team on Nonviolent Large Systems Change, which launched NCJ, as an interorganizational vehicle for behavioral scientists to do their part in moving toward peace.

EDITORS COMMENTS

Wishing you a fine spring. The world continues to go through many shifts producing a great many developments in areas of our concern.

Most of the reports in the Activities and Developments sections of NCJ are abbreviated or executive versions of longer reports that can be accessed at the web sites indicated. This is especially true of International Crisis Group (ICG) reports of which we only publish the executive summaries, which include the web addresses for accessing the full report.

WE WELCOME YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT ALL THAT IS IN PROGRESS. These pages serve as a networking and dialoguing vehicle. We strongly encourage you to contribute articles (up to 2500 words), news, announcements, comments, queries, responses and artwork. It would be very fine if we could develop ongoing discussion from issue to issue. WE ESPECIALLY INVITE YOU TO SEND US A BRIEF NOTE ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE DOING, YOUR CONCERNS AND QUERIES, RELATING TO NONVIOLENT CHANGE, FOR OUR "WHAT WE READERS ARE ABOUT" COLUMN." Whenever possible, please make submissions on disk or via e-mail (ssachs@earthlink.net).

Please SEND WRITINGS AND ART WORK FOR NONVIOLENT CHANGE electronically to Steve Sachs (E-mail address top of p. 2). Steve puts together a draft of each issue, then undertakes e-mailing, while Ruby Quail posts the issue on the web. (Unsigned writings are Steve’s). We welcome additional editors and column writers to cover geographic or topic areas on an ongoing or one time basis. We would very much like to have additional people share in the compiling of information in each issue.

Submissions that have notes, must have them as end notes put in the text manually. We cannot work with automatic notes that use footers (as we cannot work with footers or headers). It is helpful to us...
if submissions are in 9 point Geneva, justified left and right, single spaced with a space between paragraphs, titles and sub titles; and paragraphs indented.

DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE IS August 8

UPCOMING EVENTS


* * * *

The UN DPI-NGO (Department of Public Information – Non-Governmental Organizations), United Nations, DPI/NGO Resource Centre, Room L-18-31, (212)963-7233, 7234, 7078, Fax: (212)963-2819, dpingo@un.org, www.un.org/dpi/ngosection, publishes a provisional briefings and events calendars, usually taking place at the UN in New York City.

The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) offers an ongoing series of short courses listed at: http://www.usip.org/academy/courses/date. USIP, 2301 Constitution Ave. NW, Washington, DC, puts on numerous events beyond those listed here. For details go to: http://www.usip.org/events.

The Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies in Notre Dame, IN puts on regular lectures and other events related to getting to peace. For information go to: http://kroc.nd.edu.

HREA - Human Rights Education Association runs a series of workshops and on-line trainings. HREA offers self-directed e-courses and tutored e-learning courses in the following 13 areas: Armed Conflict; Human Rights and Humanitarian Law; Children's Rights; Child Development; Participation and Protection; Communications and Advocacy; Corporate Social Responsibility; Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Environment; Human Rights and Sustainable Development; Financial, People and Project Management; Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment; Governance and Human Rights; Human Rights Policy; Human Rights in Education; Human Rights in the Administration of Justice; Human Rights, Disaster Relief and Humanitarian Aid; Migration and Asylum. HREA also organizes two annual training programs: Four Freedoms Summer Program and Advocacy Institute. For details go to: http://www.hrea.org/learn.

The National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD) puts on monthly free Tech Tuesdays, a series of learning events from NCDD focused on technology for engagement. These 1-hour events are designed to help dialogue and deliberation practitioners get a better sense of the online engagement landscape and how they can take advantage of the myriad opportunities available to them. For information, visit: http://ncdd.org/events.

The Nuclear Age Peace Foundation offers a series of lectures and seminars throughout the year. For details go to: https://www.wagingpeace.org.

The International Center for Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC) offers a series of on line and other courses. For information go to: https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org.

University for Peace, San Jose, Costa Rica, UPEACE offers a series of on-site and online courses, year-round, including two summer institutes. For details visit: https://www.upeace.org/.
Monthly meetings of the Circles of Nonviolence/Community Collaborative and their adopted projects in Arizona into Texas: Circles of Nonviolence/Community Collaborative in Southern Arizona can be found through: Moji Agha (moji.agha@gmail.com, (520)325-3545 http://mossadeghlacyinstitute.blogspot.com/p/america-for-nonviolence-av.html.

The Ahimsa Center Upcoming Programs and Events on the teaching and learning of nonviolence and nonviolent social change, at the Ahimsa Center in the College of Letters, Arts and Social Sciences at Cal Poly Pomona include Conferences and Symposia. For details visit: https://www.cpp.edu/~ahimsacentre/ahimsa_home.shtml.

A large number of Human Rights Conferences is listed at, International Conference on Human Rights 2019: https://internationalconferencealerts.com/conference/human-rights.

The Archbishop Desmond Tutu Centre for War and Peace Studies at Liverpool Hope University, in Liverpool, England, puts on numerous peace related lectures, discussions and seminars. For details go to: http://tutu.hope.ac.uk/events/.

The Center for Global Justice puts on summer and winter seminars and holds numerous other events. For information visit: https://www.globaljusticecenter.org.

International Institute for Restorative Justice (IIRP) puts on numerous trainings and short courses, in addition to its conferences. For details visit: https://www.iirp.edu.

J Street offers numerous live conversation on Facebook. For more information go to: http://jstreet.org.

Peace Education Course: EMU Summer Peacebuilding Institute at Eastern Mennonite University, 1200 Park Rd., Harrisonburg, VA 22802, are as follows:

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International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) Europe Conference: Community Wellbeing and Resilience is May 15-17, 2019, in Kortrijk, Belgium. For information go to: https://www.iirp.edu.

Venture Peacebuilding Columbia: Dialogue Discussion and Cooperation is May 15-19, 2019, in Columbia. For details go to: https://ipsinstitute.org/symposiums/.

Campaign Nonviolence: Training/Speaking Event, Anne Lamott in Conversation with John Dear on Peace and Nonviolence, May 20, 2019, 7:00-9:00 pm, at 1100 California St., San Francisco, CA. For information, go to: https://paceebene.org/events/.


Global Peace Research Summit may be in June 2019. For details go to: https://iprafoundation.org.

Fletcher Summer Institute for the Advanced Study of Nonviolent Conflict (FSI) may be in June 2019, at Tufts University, 419 Boston Ave, Medford, MA 02155. For information go to: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org.


INCORE Summer School 2019 on the dynamic and constantly changing field of conflict resolution and peacebuilding may be at INCORE University of Ulster, Northern Ireland, UK, may be in June 2019. Details can be found at: https://www.ulster.ac.uk/incore/summer-school.

The 13th Annual Global Solutions Lab: Human Rights, the Sustainable Development Goals and Eliminating Extreme Poverty by 2030 is June 16-24, 2019, at the United Nations in New York and Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia, PA. Participants, from around the world, will be briefed by, interact with and question UN experts (from the UN Development Program, UN Environmental Program, UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO, FAO and other UN agencies) and then, working collaboratively in small teams, develop designs, programs and strategies that deal with one of the critical problems facing our world. The participants present their work to a group of UN corporate and foundation leaders. After this their work is published in a book.

The Global Solutions Lab is a structured learning experience that fosters creativity, disruptive innovations, global perspectives and local solutions. It is intense, fast-paced, and for many, transformative.

For information visit: Global Solutions Lab: www.designsciencelab.com.

20th Annual Kingian Nonviolence Summer Institute is at The University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Kingston, RI, may be in June 2019. For details visit: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/calendar/.


UPEACE Summer Peace Institute – Session 2: may be at University for Peace, San Jose, Costa Rica, perhaps in June and July 2019. UPEACE offers a series of online courses. For details visit: https://www.upeace.org/

5th International Summer School may be in June and/or July 2019, at International University of Sarajevo, Hrasnička cesta 15, Ilidža, Bosnia and Herzegovina. For details go to: www.ius.edu.ba.

The Women Deliver 2019 Conference is in Vancouver, BC, Canada, June 3-6, 2019. For more information go to: https://wd2019.org.

The University of Notre Dame’s Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies and the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) 11th Annual Summer Institute for Faculty in Peace Studies is June 10-14, 2019, at the Kroc Institute at the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN.

Campaign Nonviolence: Journey of Peace to Northern Ireland is June 12-20, 2019. For information, go to: https://paceebene.org/events/.

Campaign Nonviolence: Pace e Bene Peace and Nonviolence Pilgrimage to Assisi, in Italy, June 23-30, 2019. For information, go to: https://paceebene.org/events/.

Caux Scholars Program: A multi-disciplinary approach to conflict transformation, transitional justice, and principled leadership may be in June and/or July 2019, at Initiatives of Change conference center, Rue du Panoram, 1824 Montreux, Switzerland. For details go to us.iofc.org/caux-scholars-program-iofc.

JEAN MONNET@CRONEM SUMMER SCHOOL 2019 may be in June and July 2019 at University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey, UK. For details go to: http://www.surrey.ac.uk/cronem/.

2019 Bologna Symposium on Conflict Prevention, Resolution, and Reconciliation may be at Johns Hopkins SAIS Bologna Center, Bologna, Italy, in June and July 2019. For details visit: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org or http://ipsinstitute.org.

The Centre for Research on Nationalism, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism (CRONEM), Centre for Research on Nationalism, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism (CRONEM), 14th Annual Conference 2019, is likely in June or July 2019, likely at the University of Surrey, UK; details may become available in late January. For details go to: http://www.surrey.ac.uk/cronem/.

Summer School in a variety of course with different beginning dated from June through July, include some on alternative dispute resolution and on sustainability at Central European University, Budapest, Nádor u. 9, 1051 Hungary. For information go to: https://summeruniversity.ceu.edu/.

Kennesaw State University Conflict Management at Kennesaw State University, Summer Institute on Conflict Management in Higher Education is in Savannah, GA, June 17-21, 2019. For details visit: http://ccm.hss.kennesaw.edu/events-programs/.

The 19th International Conference on Diversity in Organizations, Communities & Nations is at University of Patras, Patras, Greece, June 5-7, 2019. For more information visit: http://ondiversity.com/2018-conference.

The Kroc Institute 10th Annual Summer Institute for Faculty is June 10-14, 2019, at the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN. For information go to: https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/events/summer-institute/.


2019 Canadian School of Peacebuilding Session II is June 10-14, 17-19, 2019, at Canadian School of Peacebuilding, 500 Shaftesbury Blvd, Winnipeg, MB R3P 2N2, Canada. For information visit: csop.cmu.ca,

The 16th Annual Global Solutions Lab is June 16–24, 2019, at the United Nations in New York and Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia, PA. Participants from around the world will be briefed by, interact with, and question UN experts (from the UN Development Program, UN Environmental Program, UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO, FAO and other UN agencies) and then, working collaboratively in small teams, develop designs, programs and strategies that deal with one of the critical problems facing our world’s urban environments. At the end of the program the participants present their work at the UN. After this, their work is published in a book. This year’s theme is Eliminating Urban Poverty by 2030. For information go to: http://designsciencelab.com.

Stony Point Center 10th Annual Summer Institute: Farm the Land, Grow the Spirit: A Multifaith Peace, Justice and Earthcare Program for Young Adults is at Stony Point Center, Stony Point, NY, June 17 – August 2, 2019. For details go to: https://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/event/stony-point-center-10th-annual-summer-institute/.


Move to Amend National Leadership Summit 2019: Free the People from Corporate Rule is June 21-24, 2019 in Washington, DC. For details go to: https://movetoamend.org/summit-registration.

Ahimsa Center in the College of Letters, Arts and Social Sciences at California State Polytechnic University, Leading Nonviolent Change Projects: A Residential Summer Institute for Educators is on campus, June 23-30, 2019. For details go to: https://www.cpp.edu/~ahimsacenter/institute/summer_institute_2019.shtml.


CIP 16th Annual Imiscoe Conference: Contesting Local Asylum – Transatlantic Perspectives is June 26-28, 2019, at Malmö University, Sweden. This panel focuses on the structures and forms of governing forced migration on the local level in North American and European localities. This session seeks contributions which study policies and practices of local institutions and organizations that address the needs of asylum seekers and refugees after arrival, preferably in a transatlantic comparison. This includes research on the position of localities in immigrant-unfriendly national environments and studies on current conflicts between federal anti-immigration politics and progressive responses of local actors. It also seeks papers which theoretically and/or empirically examine the process of arrival on the local level, including reflections of the reception situation from the forced migrants’ perspectives. For details visit: http://www.imiscoe.org/.


8th National Conference on Restorative Justice, is likely in the summer of 2019. Details are at: www.restorativejusticenow.org.

The 7th International Conference on Financing for Development may be in July 2019. For more information visit: http://www.un.org/.


2019 Summer Peace Leadership Courses at the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, Santa Barbara, CA, may be in July 2019. For details on this and other events go to: http://www.wagingpeace.org/programs/peace-leadership/.

A Residential Summer Institute for K-12 Educators: Journeys of Nonviolence: Gandhi and Mandela may be at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (Cal Poly Pomona), may be in July 2019. For details visit: http://www.cpp.edu.

Fellowship of Reconciliation Conference/61st Regional FOR Seabeck Conference "Persevering FOR Peace" may be in July 2019. For details, including scholarships, visit: forseabeck.org or www.forusa.org.

Global Youth Rising Peace Summer Camp may be in July 2019, at Somesul Rece, Cluj, Romania. For information go to: http://globalyouthrising.org/.

Sarajevo Symposium on Post Conflict Transitions is in Sarajevo, Bosnia may be in July 2019. For information visit: http://ipsinstitute.org.

2019 DC Symposium on the New Frontiers of Peacebuilding may be in July and/or August 2019, at American University’s School of International Service (SIS), Washington, DC. For details visit: https://ipsinstitute.org/

2019 Melaka International Youth Dialogue may be in July 2019. For information go to: https://www.youthhop.com.

Summer Institute on Conflict Transformation Across Borders is July 1-19 2019, at the FLASCO campus in Quito, Ecuador, Ave Diego de Almagro, Quito 170517, Ecuador. For information visit: https://www.umb.edu/academics/caps/international/conflict_transformation.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu Centre for War and Peace Studies, Annual International Conference 2019: Peace, Conflict and Pedagogy is July 2, 2019, at Liverpool Hope University, Hope Park Campus, Liverpool L16 9JD. For details visit: http://tutu.hope.ac.uk/.

Mahatma Gandhi Summer Institute: Building Peaceful Communities, is July 2-11, 2019 at Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, 11210 87 Ave NW, Edmonton, AB T6G 2T9, Canada. For details go to: https://www.ualberta.ca/registrar/registration-and-courses/spring-and-summer-studies/available-courses/mahatma-gandhi-summer-institute.
Summit Series: Cultivating the Globally Sustainable Self is July 5-8, 2018 at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Banff, Canada, and hosted by the University of Alberta and James Madison University. For details visit: www.jmu.edu/summitseries.


Teaching for Peace: An Indian Immersion Experience in Practical Nonviolence is July 9-30, 2019 at the International School for Jain Studies (India: Delhi, Jaipur & Pune). For information go to https://www.isjs.in.


Human Rights Education Associates, HREA Advocacy Institute 2019 may be in August 2018. For information visit: http://www.hrea.org/.

Campaign Nonviolence National Conference is August 6-9, 2020, at Hotel Albuquerque, Albuquerque, NM. For details go to: https://paceebene.org/events/?category=Training%2FSpeakingEvent.

Peace Education Conference Melbourne, is August 14-16, 2019, at St Joseph’s Center, Edmund Rice Education Australia, 9 Vaucluse, Richmond, Victoria, Australia. For details go to: https://paceebene.org/events/?category=Training%2FSpeakingEvent.

Women’s Human Rights Education Institute is in Quito, Ecuador, from August 19 – 30, 2019. For details visit: http://learnwhr.org/programs/whri/.


The inaugural Fortune Global Sustainability Forum will be held September 4-6, 2019 on the shores of Fuxian Lake in Yunnan, China. For information go to: https://www.fortuneconferences.com/global-sustainability-forum-2019/.


Campaign Nonviolence: Action Week - a global event is September 14-22, 2019. For information, go to: https://paceebene.org/events/.

International Day of Peace: September 21, 2019.

Common Bond Institute and collaborating organizations: International Muslim Mental Health Conference is October 20, 2018, in Amman, Jordan. For details go to: http://cbiworld.org/conferences/.

Common Bond Institute and collaborating organizations: 8th Annual International Conference on Transgenerational Trauma: Communal Wounds and Victim Identities is October 24-26, 2019 in Amman, Jordan. For details go to: http://cbiworld.org/conferences/.

Peace and Justice Studies Association Conference 2018 is October 4-6, 2019 at Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, Canada. For details go to: https://www.peacejusticestudies.org.

NoWar 2019 is in Limerick, Ireland, October 5-6, 2019. For information go to: worldbeyondwar.org.

The Conference of the European Peace Research Association (EuPRA) 11th Biennial Conference is 10-12 October 2019, at Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Catania, Italy. For details visit: http://euprapeace.org/eupra/.

Campaign Nonviolence: The Psalms of Peace: A Weekend Retreat with Rev. John Dear is October 11-13, 2019. For information, go to: https://paceebene.org/events/.

International Institute for Restorative Practice Community Leadership: IIRP World Conference is in Bethlehem, PA, October 21-23, 2019. For details visit: http://www.iirp.edu.

World Resources Forum (WRF) 19 will take place in Geneva, Switzerland, October 22-24, 2019. For information visit: https://www.wrforum.org

The 15th International MEDCOAST Congress on Coastal and Marine Sciences, Engineering, Management & Conservation is in Marmaris, Turkey, October 22-26 2019. For details go to: http://www.medcoast.net/.

J Street’s National Conference is October 26-29, 2019, in Washington, DC. For information, go to: https://jstreet.org/conference/#.XFOAly3My9R.

6th International Center for Ethnic and Religious Conflict and Economic development: Is There a Correlation (ICERM) International Conference is in New York City, October 29-31 2019. Peace and conflict resolution scholars, practitioners, traditional rulers and leaders, indigenous leaders, policy makers, and students from many countries around the world are gathering for the first time in New York City to exchange ideas on the traditional systems of conflict resolution. For details visit: www.icermediation.org.
10th International Conference on Human Rights Education may be in November 2019. For details go to: https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/equity_diversity/equity_and_diversity/conferences/international_hu
mann_rights_education_conferences.


The National Conference on Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD) Conference may be in November 2019. For details visit: http://ncdd.org


The 10th International Conference of Museums for Peace will be held in Japan in 2020. Details are at: http://inmp.net.


World Sustainable Development Summit 2020 Sustainability Lessons in the “Global South”: Priorities, Opportunities, and Risks is 29–31 January 2020, at Pontifical Catholic University of Chile & University of Chile, Santiago, Chile. For details go to: http://wsds.teriin.org.

World Resources Forum (WRF) may be in February 2020. For information visit: https://www.wrforum.org.


The Psychology and Peace 2018 Conference may be in March 2020 and is sponsored by the APA Peace Psychology Division 48. More information is available at www.peacepsychology.org.

The 2020 Asia-Pacific Peace Research Association Conference may be in March 2020. For details contact: http://appra.net/.

The Fourth International Symposium on Strengthening Peace through Education may be in August 2019. For details visit: http://www.esdfocus.org/education-sustainability-asia-conference/.

Coastal Promise Humanitarian and Peacebuilding Field Simulation may be in March 2020. For details visit: http://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/event/2018/03/the-forage-center-for-peacebuilding-and-humanitarian-educations-annual-coastal-promise-field-simulation/.

The 9th International Conference on “Livelihoods, Sustainability and Conflict: Religion, Conflict, and Reconciliation,” may be in March 2020. For more information go to: http://ccm.hss.kennesaw.edu/events-programs/.

2020 Gandhi-King Conference may be in March or April 2020, at The University of Memphis, 3720 Alumni Ave, Memphis, TN, for details visit: http://www.gandhikingconference.org or http://www.peace-ed-
79th Annual Meeting, Society for Applied Anthropology, is in Albuquerque, NM, March 17-21, 2020 at Hotel Albuquerque. For information go to: www.sfaa.net.

9th International Conference on Engaging The Other: The Power of Compassion may be in April 2020, by the Common Bond Institute. Details will become available at: http://cbiworld.org/conferences/eto/.

10th International Conflict Management Conference may be at Kennesaw State University (Atlanta suburb), at KSU Center, in April 2020. For details visit: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/calendar/, or http://ccm.hss.kennesaw.edu/events-programs.

The annual workshop of Rising Voices: Collaborative Science with Indigenous Knowledge for Climate Solutions may be in April 2020. For details go to: itc.org.

14th International Conference on Conflict Resolution Education may be in April 2020. For details go to: https://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/calendar/.


Regional Institute for the Study & Practice of Strategic Nonviolent Action in the Americas is at FLACSO, Quito Ecuador, April 7-13, 2019. For details go to: https://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/calendar/.

The 12th International Conference on Climate: Impacts and Responses: Adaptations: Lessons from Venice is 16–17 April 2020, in Venice, Italy, at Ca’ Foscari University of Venice. The Climate Change Conference is for any person with an interest in, and concern for, scientific, policy and strategic perspectives in climate change. It will address a range of critically important themes relating to the vexing question of climate change. Plenary speakers will include some of the world’s leading thinkers in the fields of climatology and environmental science, as well as numerous paper, workshop and colloquium presentations by researchers and practitioners. For details go to: http://on-climate.com/the-conference. For details visit: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/calendar.

The 9th World Sustainability Forum (WSF2020) will be June 1-6, 2020. The conference will cover areas like the globe, extreme poverty and hunger have been reduced, and infant, child, and maternal mortality have decreased. For details, visit: https://10times.com/world-sustainability-forum.

WCCI 19th World Conference in Education is July 9-15, 2020 at Holiday Inn San Diego - Bayside. For details visit: http://www.wcci-international.org.

The Campaign Nonviolence National Conference, is in Albuquerque, New Mexico, August 6-9, 2020, in partnership with the August 6 and 9 peace vigils at Los Alamos, NM, marking the 5th anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. For information go to: https://paceebene.org/events/2020/8/6/campaign-nonviolence-national-conference.


Biennial Performing the World 2020 may be in September 2020 in New York, NY.

The Ahimsa Center in the College of Letters, Arts and Social Sciences at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (in suburban Los Angeles) Ninth biannual conference may be on campus, in November 2020. For details visit: http://www.cpp.edu/~ahimsacenter/ahimsa_home.shtml.
ONGOING ACTIVITIES

Steve Sachs

350.org is more engaged than ever in a variety of activities concerning, "Stop Fossil Fuels. Build 100% Renewables." This includes working for "green new deals" worldwide that stop new, and reduce current, fossil fuel production, while scaling up use of renewable energy to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees C, while obtaining environmental justice.

Some 350.org foci in early May 2019 included: supporting the Torres Strait Islanders in bringing a case against the Australian government to cease activities contributing to global warming, the largest of which is permitting and encouraging coal mining, an extraction activity in which Australia leads the world; Supporting and assisting organizing actions in Africa for May 25, 2019, calling for a rapid move to a fossil free future for Africa; and Supporting peaceful resistance to stop the Keystone XL and other oil and gas pipelines.

For details go to: http://act.350.org/.

"Liberal Democrats Formally Call for a ‘Green New Deal,' Giving Substance to a Rallying Cry," The New York Times, February 7, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/07/climate/green-new-deal.html, reported, "Liberal Democrats put flesh on their 'Green New Deal' slogan on Thursday with a sweeping resolution intended to redefine the national debate on climate change by calling for the United States to eliminate additional emissions of carbon by 2030." The initial draft is more of a broad blueprint than a detailed plan, and is intended to be a beginning of developing specific plans by changing the political debate.

The resolution draft is available at: https://int.nyt.com/data/documenthelper/604-green-new-deal-resolution/e0c468643280097e630e/optimized/full.pdf#page=1.

Isla Hirsi, US Youth Climate Strike, stated via E-mail, March 6, 2019," We've said it before and we'll say it again: climate change is one of the defining issues of our time.

It’s going to take bold action to bring about bold solutions to this crisis, and we’re not afraid to show our elected officials that we mean business. On March 15th, youth in the US will join thousands of youth across the globe striking from school for climate action. And we need your support.


Decades of climate inaction has left the most marginalized communities exposed to the threats of the climate crisis. As this crisis gets exponentially worse, my generation will face extreme impacts like worsening storms, and will be left to clean up the mess we’ve created.

Youth across America will strike in pursuit of a bold set of demands that include a Green New Deal, a fair and just transition to 100% renewable energy, and no new fossil fuel infrastructure.


Youth across the world are taking power into their own hands. Are you with us?"
One of the largest climate change strikes in the world is happening!

Climate change is a global, existential threat. This climate strike, organized by and ran by STUDENTS, is taking place in more than 100 U.S. cities and more than 100 countries.

You don’t need to pick up a poster or lace up your sneakers to join these incredible students protesting: Sign your name to digitally join the #ClimateStrike: https://secure.314action.org/page/s/314_EM_EN_190315_ClimateStrike_U2_X1?email=ssachs@earthlink.net&zip=87110&utm_medium=email&utm_source=naughton&utm_content=6&utm_campaign=314_EM_EN_190315_ClimateStrike_U2_X1.

The latest estimate had it that more than ONE MILLION students, from Brooklyn to Seoul, took to the streets to demand action on climate change.

Ceylan Yeginsu, "Skipping School to Save the Earth," The New York Times, February 14, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/14/world/europe/student-protest.html reported, "Thousands of young people in Britain are expected to abandon their classrooms and take to the streets on Friday to join a growing movement to protest the lack of action on climate change.

Inspired by a 16-year-old Swedish climate activist, Greta Thunberg, who cut class on a weekly basis last year to stage sit-ins outside Sweden’s Parliament, young climate campaigners are planning to walk out of British schools, colleges and universities across 40 towns and cities on Friday.”

Jessica Corbett, "Decrying 'Toxic Alliance' of Macron and Polluters, Climate Campaigners Stage One of France's Largest Ever Acts of Civil Disobedience: 'Instead of regulating the activities of these polluting multinationals, Emmanuel Macron is rolling out the red carpet!'" Common Dreams, April 19, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/04/19/decrying-toxic-alliance-macron-and-polluters-climate-campaigners-stage-one-frances reported, "Parts of a major business district just outside of Paris city limits were 'paralyzed' Friday when more than 2,000 climate campaigners staged what organizers described as one of France's largest ever acts of civil disobedience.

Peaceful demonstrators descended on La Défense to protest government complicity and companies fueling the global climate crisis.

Carrying signs that condemned Emmanuel Macron as 'president of polluters,' the protesters blocked access to the buildings of three major businesses and the Ministry for the Ecological and Inclusive Transition.

The direct action was organized by Action Non-Violente (ANV) COP21 and the French chapters of Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, but members of at least 14 climate groups reportedly joined the mass mobilization.

'Through this action of extraordinary civil disobedience, the French climate movement denounces the toxic alliance that Emmanuel Macron and his government maintain with the large companies whose activity accelerates climate change, while radical and immediate action is needed to limit global warming to +1.5°C by the end of the century,' organizers said in a statement in French, referencing a key target of the Paris climate accord.

The demonstration in France came as the climate activism group Extinction Rebellion is spearheading an International Rebellion Week featuring similar civil disobedience in London. The group's French arm supported the action Friday:
The three companies campaigners targeted were fossil fuel giant Total, a major producer of planet-warming emissions; investment bank Société Générale, which pours billions of dollars into dirty energy projects each year; and Electricité de France (EDF), the state-run electric utility that, according to protest organizers, produces only about 10 percent of renewable energy compared with more than 70 percent of nuclear energy.

"Instead of regulating the activities of these polluting multinationals, Emmanuel Macron is rolling out the red carpet," said Cécile Marchand of Friends of the Earth France.

Marchand pointed out that last year, Macron's government gave Total the green light to import palm oil, despite the European Parliament's decision to ban such imports by 2021. She also slammed government investment in nuclear power and failures to block big banks from funding dirty energy development.

The French president, Marchand said, "firmly defends banks like Société Générale against any attempt to regulate and refuses to supervise them to put an end to their investments in fossil fuels."

"By displaying Emmanuel Macron at La Défense, and blocking the activity of several strategic locations in this business district," said Greenpeace France climate campaign manager Clément Sénéchal, "we want to show that in reality, it is here that France's climate policy is decided, in the offices of the big bosses." 1

The blockades in France came as students across the globe skipped classes and took to the streets as part of the weekly #FridaysForFuture school strikes—inspired by the Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg’s solitary protests launched last year to demand bolder efforts from global policymakers to stave off climate catastrophe.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 License."  

Yanis Varoufakis and David Adler, published in The Guardian, "It's Time for Nations to Unite Around an International Green New Deal: Several countries have proposed their own versions of a Green New Deal, but climate change knows no borders. We need a global response," Portside, May 8, 2019, "https://portside.org/2019-05-08/its-time-nations-unite-around-international-green-new-deal," reported that children have now taken the lead in battling climate change and other interrelated environmental degradation, "Our survival now depends on the prospects for a global movement to follow their lead and demand an International Green New Deal.

Several countries have proposed their own versions of a Green New Deal. Here in Europe, DiEM25 and our European Spring coalition are campaigning under the banner of a detailed Green New Deal agenda. In the UK, a new campaign is pushing similar legislation with MPs such as Caroline Lucas and Clive Lewis. And in the US, dogged activists in the Sunrise Movement are working with representatives such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to push their proposal to the front of the political agenda.

But these campaigns have largely remained siloed. Their advisers may exchange notes and ideas, but no strategy has emerged to coordinate these campaigns in a broader, global framework."  

"Instead, we need an International Green New Deal: a pragmatic plan to raise $8tn – 5% of global GDP – each year, coordinate its investment in the transition to renewable energy and commit to providing climate protections on the basis of countries’ needs, rather than their means.

Call it the Organization for Emergency Environmental Cooperation – the namesake of the original OEEC 75 years ago. While many US activists find inspiration in a 'second world war-style mobilization', the International Green New Deal is better modeled by the Marshall plan that followed it. With financial assistance from the US government, 16 countries formed the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), dedicated to rebuilding the infrastructure of a devastated continent and coordinating its supply of energy.

But if the original OEEC entrenched an extractive capitalism at Europe's core –protecting the steel and coal cartel – the new organization for an International Green New Deal can empower communities around the world in a single transformational project."

Ocean River Institute, "Stop the Destruction of Our Waterways & Help Takedown Roundup: Beautiful green lawns can coexist with cleaner water, thriving marine life, and healthier communities," March 25, 2019, https://www.oceanriver.org/causeres/fertilizer-pollution-
Throughout Massachusetts, we are witnessing our bodies of water being polluted with nutrients causing the degradation of water quality and the destruction of wildlife. The goal of the Clean Water Project is to stop nitrogen and phosphorus pollution, to restore and preserve healthy waterways.

We are calling for regulation of fertilizer on established lawns, bylaws that limit fertilizer use to no more than a half pound of slow-release nitrogen fertilizer a year (https://www.oceanriver.org/slow-release-nitrogen/).

We are also urging implementation of an education program that explains when grass cuttings are left on the lawn, it amounts to the equivalent of one pound of fertilizer per year. Our goal is for all 351 municipalities in Massachusetts to modify their lawn care practices to have both clean water and healthy lawns that don’t pollute.

Falmouth, MA, has modified their lawn care, reducing greatly fertilizer application in 2012 in response to discovering sixteen striped bass, a horseshoe crab and an unidentified crab dead in Little Pond. (“Poor Water Quality Suspected in Death of Fish at Little Pond,” https://www.capenews.net/falmouth/poor-water-quality-suspected-in-death-of-fish-at-little/article_4da8e64-0159-5303-98dd-902965c26050.html)

Six years later, Falmouth’s lawns are just as green as in neighboring towns proving that their fertilizer bylaw has not harmed the grass. Here, green lawns coexist with cleaner water and healthy marine life. There has not been another fish kill.

Let us follow Falmouth’s lead and enact sustainable lawn care laws that stop nitrogen and phosphorus pollution of our waterways and groundwater.

Roundup is a widely used herbicide that has harmful human health and environmental effects. Glyphosate, the main ingredient of Roundup, is a known carcinogen and has also been linked to hormone disruption and antibiotic resistance. Dewayne Johnson, a former school groundskeeper, was recently ordered to receive $289 million from Monsanto (the maker of Roundup) after Johnson developed non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma as a result of using Roundup. While Monsanto is currently appealing this decision, let’s stop using Roundup.

Roundup, technically the chemical glyphosate, has been found everywhere! It’s in our environment; it’s in rainwater, streams and on down into the ocean. It’s in the food that we eat, found in soy and other produce. Most alarming is that Roundup is found in people and concentration levels are rising. (“A Weed Killer Is Increasingly Showing Up in People’s Bodies,” http://time.com/4993877/weed-killer-roundup-levels/humans/).

There are alternative herbicides that are much safer and will not bio-accumulate in our bodies.

We’ve got a recipe that you may make at home with vinegar, salt and dish soap. Pulling weeds, weed-whacking, and mulching kills weeds faster than herbicides. For more information, check out our page on Roundup Alternatives.

Join us in asking for better lawn care practices.

Jessica Corbett, “'Radical Agents of Physical and Social Chaos': Campaigners Target Big Banks Over Destructive Fossil Fuel Projects: 'It is simply nuts for banks to keep financing the ongoing destruction of the planet’s climate,’” Common Dreams, April 9, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/04/09/radical-agents-physical-and-social-chaos-campaigners-target-big-banks-over-ctd-origin=rss&utm_term=%7Carbon%20Footprint%20and%20Climate%20Change%20&%20Fossil%20Fue...
recognize that protecting wild fish is the only way to ensure that fishing will be there for hatcheries, fish extinction?signed=true, stated, "https://www.change.org/p/wild-target-fish-and-ocean-waters-to-end-fishing-overfishing"

...and ocean wildlife."

"The road to extinction is paved with good intentions," Patagonia, April 7, 2019, https://www.change.org/p/wild-salmon-and-southern-resident-killer-whales-are-on-the-brink-of-extinction?signed=true, stated, "Artificial [at the above web address], is a film about the high cost of hatcheries, fish farms and human arrogance. We made this film for several reasons. As anglers, we recognize that protecting wild fish is the only way to ensure that fishing will be there for future..."
generations. As taxpayers, we are dismayed at the gross misuse of public money being wasted on a system that not only doesn't work, but actually contributes to the problem it claims to solve. And finally, as concerned residents of our home planet, we view hatcheries and fish farms as part of a disturbing trend to willfully ignore scientific fact for the sake of political expediency.

Wild salmon and southern resident killer whales are on the brink of extinction. Now a misguided plan to feed the starving whales with hatchery salmon will push both endangered species closer to the edge, while costing taxpayers millions of dollars per year.

Hatcheries and over harvest, along with net-pen fish farms and dams, are key contributors to the catastrophic decline of wild Chinook salmon and southern resident killer whales in the Pacific Northwest. Now, Washington state's Orca Task Force recommendations include a plan to "feed the orcas" with 60 million more hatchery salmon per year. The proposed budget requests up to $87 million dollars to fund this plan for 10 years. Science tells us this won't work: orcas need larger wild salmon, while adding more hatchery fish further weakens the wild-salmon gene pool.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA) and Department of Fish and Wildlife have the power to make this change.

It’s time for directors Barry Thom and Kelly Susewind, to listen to their constituents and invest in science-based solutions: reduce hatchery production, remove dams and change how we harvest salmon.


Outdoor clothing brand Patagonia is done selling co-branded clothes to companies that fail to prioritize the health of the planet.

The company told BuzzFeed that it will only sell to certified B Corporations, which put social good over profit; companies that have joined the 1% for the Planet pledge, meaning they donate 1% of sales to environmental organizations; and companies with charity arms that help the planet.

The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), in addition to dealing with specific issues as they arise, UCS has been heavily focused on countering attacks on science and working to have governmental decisions made on the basis of science. This most particularly involves the environment, but all other areas as well.

For more information visit: www.ucsusa.org.

Carbon Fund is engaged in a variety of project to limit climate change. Recent reports on them are available at: carbonfund.org.

Win Without War stated in an April 20, 2019 E-mail. "we are gearing up for one of the most important fights of this generation: stopping deployment of a terrifying new nuclear weapon that blurs the lines between conventional and nuclear war.

President Trump and his nuclear policy cronies want this new nuclear weapon precisely because they think they could use it and get away with it.

We cannot go down this road. The silver lining is, the Pentagon doesn’t have the funding to finish the project — and that gives us an opening to get Congress to say no way.

Our team has been furiously building opposition with lawmakers, raising the alarm in the media, and getting progressive partners on board."

The Pentagon has been pitching the Easy Fire Nuke as a 'usable' weapon — smaller than the enormous pay loads typically used in nuclear weapons. But there's no such thing as a 'usable' or 'safe' nuclear weapon. Once a nuclear weapon is used, there's no guarantee that larger, more powerful nukes won't be used. You cannot control escalation to a full-scale nuclear war.
But if Trump THINKS his new nukes are somehow easier to use, then he is more likely to launch them. And that fact alone makes Trump’s ‘usable’ nukes unimaginably dangerous.


And what’s more, is there’s zero need for more dangerous nukes. We already have a nuclear stockpile of roughly 4,000 nuclear weapons that the Pentagon plans to spend $1.7 TRILLION on in the coming three decades!

Last year we got unprecedented support for a bill that would reject the use of nukes. This year we helped send the Democrats’ Pentagon funding plan back to the drawing board. We’ve built an unprecedented amount of opposition among lawmakers to military spending, and a key committee chair has already said he’s against the idea of an Easy Fire Nuke. [2] Now we need to take this easy fire nuke option out of the President’s reach.”

Win Without War is a project of the Center for International Policy, 1 Thomas Circle NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20005. (202)656-4999, info@winwithoutwar.org, https://winwithoutwar.org.


As of this writing, there are over 260 events planned in 47 states, with most actions kicking off at noon local time. Organized by a large coalition of groups—including MoveOn, CREDO, Win Without War, United We Dream, Indivisible, the Working Families Party, Greenpeace, and others—the rolling actions are a rapid-fire response to the president’s Friday declaration, and are meant “to fight Trump’s fake crisis and racist deportation force.”

‘The protestors,’ say organizers, ‘will share their vision of an America that welcomes people seeking asylum and stands with immigrant, Muslim, and Black and brown communities. People are ready to demand an end to the fake emergency, the racist wall, and Trump’s harmful deportation force.’

The nationwide events come as a wave of lawsuits challenges the emergency declaration. The ACLU was swift in its announcement of intent to sue, doing so on Friday. ‘Let’s get something straight upfront,’ wrote the organization’s deputy legal director, Cecilia Wang. ‘There is no emergency. Members of Congress from both parties, security experts, and Americans who live at the border have all said so. What the president is doing is yet another illegal and dangerous power grab in service of his anti-immigrant agenda.’

In addition to the rights group, environmental advocacy organizations as well as a number of states have vowed legal challenges to the emergency declaration.

‘The only emergency here is Trump’s assault on the Constitution,’ said Brian Segee, a senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity. His organization along with Defenders of Wildlife and Animal Legal Defense Fund filed suit on Saturday, calling(pdf) the proclamation ‘unlawful on its face.’

‘Separation of powers is at the heart of our democracy and the power of the purse is a critical check on the president. Trump’s authoritarian attempt to build his destructive border wall is a flagrant abuse of that constitutional structure,” Segee continued. “If he gets his way, it’ll be a disaster for communities and wildlife along the border, including some of our country’s most endangered species.’

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 License,”
who approached th...th troops used live ammunition, rubber coated metal bullets, and tear gas to try and disperse demonstrators who approached the fence. According to the Gaza Ministry of Health, Israeli snipers killed three 17-year-old Palestinians and injured tens of others.

As of April 3, demonstrations were planned in at least 280 U.S. Cities.

MoveOn.org (https://www.trumpisnotabovethelaw.org/event/mueller-firing-rapid-response/search/?source=dailykos&link_id=0&can_id=2304a48b2891e77b9b6c14d1ce535f4f&email_referrer=email_522773___subject_674349&email_subject=firstname-default-friend-are-you-available-tomorrow-thursday-april-4-at-5pm), Public Citizen, Indivisible, March for Truth, Stand Up America, Common Sense, People for the American Way, and other organizations, on April 3, 2019, stated, "Last night, Trump’s hand-picked attorney general, William Barr, missed the deadline set by Congress to release the full Mueller report. We are calling for a National Day of Action on Thursday, April 4, to demand that Barr #ReleaseTheReport. Barr has offered an alternate timeline for a redacted version of the report—but we deserve the full report and congressional leaders and the American people expect it now."

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United for Peace & Justice (UFP) current major issues in early May 2019 involved: end endless war, military spending, injustice at home, and nuclear disarmament. Current campaigns concerned: The Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival, Divest from the War Machine, No Foreign Bases Campaign, Global Days of Action on Military Spending, and Korea Peace Network. UFP has been active in opposing U.S.: military intervention in Venezuela, going to war with Iran, continuing involvement in supporting the Saudi led coalition in the war in Yemen, and in moving to develop new atomic weapons.

For more information go to: www.unitedforpeace.org/.

CODEPINK, as of early May 2019, had been involved in many actions, some concern: Avoiding U.S. going to war with Iran or intervening militarily in Venezuela, Saudi Arabia and its involvement in Yemen. Justice for Palestinians, and building a Local Peace Economy. CODEPINK continues to run international activists’ journeys including to Honduras, Cuba, the Greek Island of Lesvos and Iran.

For more information visit: http://codepink.org.

Gush Shalom and other Israeli and Palestinian peace organizations, supported by internationals, have remained extremely active over the last three months. A list of links to many of these organizations is on the Gush Shalom web site: http://zope.gush-shalom.org/home/en/channels/links. For example, Adam Keller of Gush Shalom announced via E-mail, "Today, Saturday March 30 at 7.30 PM, Gush Shalom activists will be joining a demonstration in solidarity with the people of Gaza, opposite the Defense Ministry (HaKoya) in Tel Aviv.

Already for a whole year, the two million inmates of the world’s biggest prison - the Gaza Strip - are beating against the bars of their prison cell - and are answered by the live bullets of Israeli Army snipers.

This evening, Israeli demonstrators in Tel Aviv will share in commemorating a year to the ‘Great March of Return’ demonstrations at the fence surrounding Gaza.

We will call for:
* Full civil and political rights for the Palestinians living under Israeli control and occupation
* An end to the systematic shooting of unarmed civilians
* An end to criminal bombings
* An end to the siege which is suffocating Gaza’s economy and society

Transportation from Jerusalem - 6.00 at Gan HaPaamon (Liberty Bell Park)

Register here https://forms.gle/P9GMBAbgunKXVatZ6. Contact: Yosef Kitton +972-(0)54-4777063."

At the same time in Gaza, “Hundreds of Israelis protest Gaza blockade outside IDF headquarters: The demonstration in the heart of Tel Aviv was in solidarity with Palestinians taking part in the Great March of Return,” 972 Magazine, March 30, 209, https://972mag.com/israel-protesters-demand-end-gaza-blockade-outside-idf-headquarters/140801/ reported, “The demonstration came hours after tens of thousands of Palestinians protested at several locations along the fence surrounding the Gaza Strip. Israeli troops used live ammunition, rubber-coated metal bullets, and tear gas to try and disperse demonstrators who approached the fence. According to the Gaza Ministry of Health, Israeli snipers killed three 17-year-old Palestinians and injured tens of others."

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boys during the protests, and more than 300 others were wounded, including five who were in critical condition."

For more information on the Israeli peace movement contact Gush Shalom, P.O. Box 3322, Tel-Aviv 61033, 972-3-5221732, info@gush-shalom.org, www.gush-shalom.org, Adam Keller of Gush Shalom launched a blog, at: http://adam-keller1.blogspot.com/ in Hebrew and http://adam-keller2.blogspot.com/ in English.

Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR), stated April 30, 2019, "Psychologists for Social Responsibility Statement Endorsing Roy Eidelson’s Article, "Is the American Psychological Association Addicted to Militarism and War?"

Psychologists for Social Responsibility expresses its strong endorsement of PsySR member and former president Roy Eidelson’s recent article for Counterpunch—"Is the American Psychological Association Addicted to Militarism and War?" That article is copied [on the PsySR web site at: http://www.psysr.org.

We believe this PsySR endorsement is particularly critical given that, when this essay was posted to an APA divisional list, it was the target of censure for an official APA committee. A division president on the list, who also happens to be a PsySR steering committee member, posted the essay on the APA Presidential Trio listserv which includes the president elect, president, and past president of each division. A few days later, the chair of APA’s CODAPAR, the committee on divisional and APA relations, posted new and contradictory listserv rules. A separate notice was sent to our PsySR member, stating the post was officially determined to be inappropriate for the list. Yet the post was no different from a host of other posts on the list, prior and since, differing only in its critique of the APA and its militarism.

PsySR believes, moreover, that it is essential for the profession of psychology to heed the call for fundamental transformation that Eidelson’s article presents. Eidelson echoes the voices of those who have made it their life’s work to demilitarize the profession, and those of many other supporters of a psychology rooted in nonviolence and respect for human rights.

PsySR is engaged in many activities. For more information go to: at: www.psysr.org.

Global Exchange, has continued to be engaged in many activities. As of early May 2019 these included: "Voices for Global Justice" series is bringing together movement leaders, experts and organizers to discuss vital issues of our time and how ordinary people can get involved. We’re giving the mic to people with a vision for a future that includes justice, human rights and dignity for all."

"Top Corporate Criminals" list to highlight some of the world’s corporate worst-of-the-worst on issues like violations of human rights and workers’ rights, environmental destruction, war profiteering, and tax evasion and other white-collar corporate crime, just to name a few. More importantly, we create this list to bring your attention to these gross violations and call on you to act."

Stop U.S. Arms to Mexico fueling violence there.

A variety of Global Reality Tours, including, "Engaging with Cuba: From People-to-People to Policy Change: Since 1990, Global Exchange has been at the forefront of a movement seeking to fully normalize U.S. relations with Cuba and end the embargo (or bloqueo, as it’s called by the Cubans) of more than 50 years. Global Exchange’s grassroots education programs, Cuba Reality Tours Program, publications, speaking tours, and campaigns have informed the debate about US-Cuba relations for more than twenty-five years;:


For information go to: http://www.globalexchange.org.

The Center for Global Justice, https://www.globalexchangecenter.org, which regularly sends out numerous report and commentaries by E-mail, announced, April 12, 2019, "Join us in an exploration of Green Cuba, December 1-11, 2019.

Cuba has converted much of its land to organic and regenerative agriculture. It also has developed a significant cooperative sector in its economy, both agricultural and urban. This sun drenched
island is developing alternative energy and efficiency. This 10 day visit to Cuba will give you an in depth look at all this and more.

On the front line for climate change impact, Cuba is facing super hurricanes and rising sea levels. You will learn how the country prepares for these natural disasters. You will also drink in the natural beauty of the island by visiting an ecological preserve."

For more information Contact Cliff at cuba@globaljusticecenter.org.

WORLD DEVELOPMENTS

Environmental Developments

Julia Conley, ""Terrifying": Rapid Loss of Biodiversity Placing Global Food Supplies at Risk of 'Irreversible Collapse': 'This should be at the top of every news bulletin and every government's agenda around the world,' Common Dreams, February 22, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/02/22/terrifying-rapid-loss-biodiversity-placing-global-food-supplies-risk-irreversible?utm_term=%27Terrifying%27%3A%20Rapid%20Loss%20of%20Biodiversity%20Placing%20Global%20Food%20Supplies%20at%20Risk%20of%20%20Irreversible%20Collapse%27&utm_campaign=Daily%20Newsletter%20-%20During%20Fundraiser%20-%20WITH%20Fundraising%20Message&utm_content=email&utm_source=Act-On%20Software&utm_medium=email&cm_mmc=Act-On%20Software-%20email-%20Biodiversity%20Loss%20Puts%20Global%20Food%20Supplies%20at%20Risk%20of%20%20Irreversible%20Collapse%20-%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20...
According to FAO, at least 24 percent of nearly 4,000 wild food species, including plants, fish, and mammals, are declining in abundance—but the report is likely giving a best-case scenario of the crisis, as the status of more than half of wild food species is unknown.

Changes in land and water management, pollution, the warming of the globe and the climate crisis are among the factors that FAO is blaming for the catastrophic loss of biodiversity.

Declining plant biodiversity on working farms has meant that out of 6,000 plant species that can be cultivated for food, fewer than 200 are used significantly as food sources. The report pointed to The Gambia as a country where the loss of wild food sources has led the population to rely heavily on industrially-processed foods.

If insect species losses cannot be halted, this will have catastrophic consequences for both the planet’s ecosystems and for the survival of mankind, according to FAO, while nearly a third of fish species have been overfished and about half have reached their sustainable level, meaning humans must immediately stop driving them toward extinction in order to save the species.

In the United Kingdom, MP Caroline Lucas of the Green Party pronounced FAO’s findings "terrifying" and demanded that governments take notice immediately to save world food sources.

Leaders must incentivize the use of sustainable practices for farming, Lucas argued, as well as pushing for a worldwide ban on dangerous pesticides like neonicotinoids, which have threatened the world’s pollinators and in turn have put at risk every third bite of food that humans take.

Combating the loss of biodiversity “relies on combining modern knowledge and technology with its traditional counterparts, and redefining our approach to agriculture and food production, placing the preservation of biodiversity and ecology on equal footing with profit and productivity,” said Slow Food. “On every level, from small-scale farmers and producers, to the highest levels of government, and through regulations like those in the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), must be geared towards a food system that protects biodiversity.”

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Jon Queally, “Scientists Warn Crashing Insect Population Puts ‘Planet’s Ecosystems and Survival of Mankind’ at Risk: “This is the stuff that worries me most. We don’t know what we’re doing, not trying to stop it, [and] with big consequences we don’t really understand,”” Common Dreams, February 11, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/02/11/scientists-warn-crashing-insect-population-puts-planets-ecosystems-and-survival?cd-origin=rss&utm_term=Scientists%20Warn%20Crashing%20Insect%20Population%20Puts%20%27Planet%27%20at%20Risk&utm_medium=Email&cm_mmc=Act-On%20Software_-_-_email--Because%20%27Now%20%2C%20%20Time%20%20%20Be%20Bold%20And%20Unapologetic%27%2C%20Views%20%2526%20News%20%2526%20Views&utm_content=email&utm_source=Daily%20Newsletter&utm_medium=Email&cm_mmc=Act-On%20Software_-_-_email--Because%20%27Now%20%2C%20%20Time%20%20%20Be%20Bold%20And%20Unapologetic%27%2C%20News%20%2526%20News%20%2526%20Views&utm_campaign=Because%20%27Now%20%2C%20%20Time%20%20Be%20Bold%20And%20Unapologetic%27%2C%20Views%20%2526%20News%20%2526%20Views&utm_term=Scientists%20Warn%20Crashing%20Insect%20Population%20Puts%20%27Planet%27%20Ecosystems%20And%20Survival%20%2C%20Mankind%27%20at%20Risk, reported, "The first global scientific review of its kind reaches an ominous conclusion about the state of nature warning that unless humanity drastically and urgently changes its behavior the world’s insects could be extinct within a century."

Presented in exclusive reporting by the Guardian’s environment editor Damian Carrington, the findings of the new analysis, published in the journal Biological Conservation, found that industrial agricultural techniques— particularly the heavy use of pesticides—as well as climate change and urbanization are the key drivers behind the extinction-level decline of insect populations that could herald a "catastrophic collapse of nature’s ecosystems" if not addressed.

‘If insect species losses cannot be halted, this will have catastrophic consequences for both the planet’s ecosystems and for the survival of mankind,’ report co-author Francisco Sánchez-Bayo, at the University of Sydney, Australia, told the Guardian. Sánchez-Bayo wrote the scholarly analysis with Kris Wyckhuys at the China Academy of Agricultural Sciences in Beijing.

Calling the current annual global insect decline rate of 2.5 percent over the last three decades a ‘shocking’ number, Sánchez-Bayo characterized it as ‘very rapid’ for insects worldwide. If that continues,
he warned: ‘In 10 years you will have a quarter less, in 50 years only half left and in 100 years you will have none.’

Isn’t this a bit alarmist? Anticipating that concern, Sánchez-Bayo said the language of the report was intended ‘to really wake people up,’ but that’s because the findings are so worrying.

Not involved with the study, Professor Dave Goulson at the University of Sussex in the UK, agreed. ‘It should be of huge concern to all of us,’ Goulson told the Guardian, ‘for insects are at the heart of every food web, they pollinate the large majority of plant species, keep the soil healthy, recycle nutrients, control pests, and much more. Love them or loathe them, we humans cannot survive without insects.’

As Carrington reports:

The planet is at the start of a sixth mass extinction in its history, with huge losses already reported in larger animals that are easier to study. But insects are by far the most varied and abundant animals, outweighing humanity by 17 times. They are ‘essential’ for the proper functioning of all ecosystems, the researchers say, as food for other creatures, pollinators and recyclers of nutrients.

Insect population collapses have recently been reported in Germany and Puerto Rico, but the review strongly indicates the crisis is global. The researchers set out their conclusions in unusually forceful terms for a peer-reviewed scientific paper: ‘The [insect] trends confirm that the sixth major extinction event is profoundly impacting [on] life forms on our planet.’

Doug Parr, the chief scientist for Greenpeace U.K., responded to the reporting by saying these are the climate-related developments that concern him most of all.

‘I spend so many hours a week concerned climate change,’ he said in a tweet linking to the story. ‘But this is the stuff that worries me most. We don’t know what we’re doing, not trying to stop it, [and] with big consequences we don’t really understand.’
According to Sánchez-Bayo, the "main cause of the decline is agricultural intensification," and he put special emphasis on new classes of pesticides and herbicides that have been brought to market over the last twenty years alongside a global surge in industrialized monocultures. "That means the elimination of all trees and shrubs that normally surround the fields, so there are plain, bare fields that are treated with synthetic fertilizers and pesticides," he said.

As campaigners worldwide intensify their collective demand that elected leaders, governments, communities, and businesses do significantly more to address the crisis of a warming planet and halt the destruction of the Earth’s natural systems, journalist David Sirota contrasted evidence of species loss—and the threat it contains—with those voices who say something like a Green New Deal would somehow be "too expensive" or disruptive to the status quo:

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Brad Plumer, "Humans Are Speeding Extinction and Altering the Natural World at an ‘Unprecedented’ Pace," The New York Times, May 6, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/06/climate/biodiversity-extinction-united-nations.html, reported, "Humans are transforming Earth’s natural landscapes so dramatically that as many as one million plant and animal species are now at risk of extinction, posing a dire threat to ecosystems that people all over the world depend on for their survival, a sweeping new United Nations assessment has concluded."
The 1,500-page report, compiled by hundreds of international experts and based on thousands of scientific studies, is the most exhaustive look yet at the decline in biodiversity across the globe and the dangers that create for human civilization. A summary of its findings, which was approved by representatives from the United States and 131 other countries, was released Monday in Paris. The full report is set to be published this year.

Tremendous loss has already taken place as a result of over use of resources, destruction of forests and other lands, pollution and climate change. The loss to date is world wide and increasing, with an average loss in abundance of native animal life and plants over the hundred years of at least 20%.

Expansion of logging, mining, drilling, fishing, poaching and farming are major causes.

Especially with increasing global warming induced climate change, loss of biodiversity is expected to accelerate through 2050, especially in tropical areas, unless nations drastically increase their conservation efforts.

The report clearly shows that the degradation of the environment and loss of species has grave consequences for humans, as it is creating food scarcity and greatly diminishing increasingly scarce supplies of clean water, along with causing resuctions of other important resources. In economic terms, the significant cost of investing in conservation and adequate reduction of production of greenhouse gases is far less than the cost of the damage from not acting sufficiently. It is currently estimated that, just in the Americas, nature provides $24 trillion in non-monitized benefits a year, which would increasingly be lost, while additional trillions of dollars worth of damage would occur - as human beings increasingly suffer harm and death.

One example of the damage is that while agricultural production has risen world wide, land has been degraded - made less productive - on 23 percent of the world’s agricultural land. The report found that, "Unless nations step up their efforts to protect what natural habitats are left, they could witness the disappearance of 40 percent of amphibian species, one-third of marine mammals and one-third of reef-forming corals. More than 500,000 land species, the report said, do not have enough natural habitat left to ensure their long-term survival.”


While a growing body of recent research warns the human-caused climate crisis will cause general worldwide 'environmental breakdown,' a study published Thursday in the journal PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases focuses specifically on a related public health threat: how a hotter world will enable disease-carrying mosquitoes to reach more people.

The study’s lead author Sadie Ryan of the University of Florida—joined by researchers from Georgetown University, Stanford University, and Virginia Tech—examined how projected temperature rise for 2050 and 2080 could impact the global distribution of the yellow fever mosquito (Aedes aegypti) and the tiger mosquito (Aedes albopictus).

The team estimates that currently, about six billion people are exposed for a month or more annually to climates suitable for those mosquitoes to transmit diseases. As temperatures climb, colder
regions such as parts of Canada and Northern Europe will become more hospitable to mosquitoes, at the human population's expense.

'Plain and simple, climate change is going to kill a lot of people,' coauthor Colin Carlson of Georgetown told Nexus Media News. 'Mosquito-borne diseases are going to be a big way that happens, especially as they spread from the tropics to temperate countries.'

Lead author Ryan emphasized that public health experts should be preparing now for the outbreaks predicted to occur in new places over the next few decades. As the study explains:

Aedes-borne virus expansion into regions that lack previous exposure is particularly concerning, given the potential for explosive outbreaks when arboviruses are first introduced into naïve populations, like chikungunya and Zika in the Americas. The emergence of a Zika pandemic in the Old World; the establishment of chikungunya in Europe beyond small outbreaks, or introduction of dengue anywhere a particular serotype has not recently been found, is a critical concern for global health preparedness.

'These diseases, which we think of as strictly tropical, have been showing up already in areas with suitable climates,' Ryan noted, 'because humans are very good at moving both bugs and their pathogens around the globe.'

For example, she told Nexus, 'We've seen dengue showing up in Hawaii and Florida, then we saw Zika arrive in Florida and really grab public attention.'

While the study echoes warnings from past papers, Carlson pointed out the limitations of their research—especially given the rapid rate at which the planet is already warming.

'We've only managed to capture the uncertain futures for two mosquitoes that spread a handful of diseases — and there's at least a dozen vectors we need this information on,' he said. 'It's very worrisome to think how much these diseases might increase, but it's even more concerning that we don't have a sense of that future. We have several decades of work to do in the next couple years if we want to be ready.'

Though their findings suggest a bleak future, Carlson was also optimistic about the potential for broader public health reforms.

'Facing something as massive as climate change gives us a chance to rethink the world's health disparities, and work towards a future where fewer people die of preventable diseases like these,' he concluded. 'Facing climate change and tackling the burden of neglected tropical diseases go hand-in-hand.'

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Stratocumulus clouds cover about two-thirds of the Earth and help keep it cool by reflecting solar radiation back to space. Recent research has suggested that planetary warming correlates with greater cloud loss, stoking fears about a feedback loop that could spell disaster.

For this study, researchers at the California Institute of Technology used a supercomputer simulation to explore what could lead these low-lying, lumpy clouds to vanish completely. As science journalist Natalie Wolchover laid out in a lengthy piece for Quanta Magazine titled 'A World Without Clouds':

"The simulation revealed a tipping point: a level of warming at which stratocumulus clouds break up altogether. The disappearance occurs when the concentration of CO2 in the simulated atmosphere reaches 1,200 parts per million [ppm]—a level that fossil fuel burning could push us past in about a century, under ‘business-as-usual’ emissions scenarios. In the simulation, when the tipping point is breached, Earth’s temperature soars 8 degrees Celsius, in addition to the 4 degrees of warming or more caused by the CO2 directly…"

To imagine 12 degrees of warming, think of crocodiles swimming in the Arctic and of the scorched, mostly lifeless equatorial regions during the [Paleocene-Eocene Thermal Maximum or PETM]. If carbon emissions aren’t curbed quickly enough and the tipping point is breached, ‘that would be truly devastating climate change,’ said Caltech’s Tapio Schneider, who performed the new simulation with Colleen Kaul and Kyle Pressel.

Quanta Magazine also broke down the study’s key findings in a short video shared on social media: The study elicited alarm from climate campaigners along with calls for the ‘radical, disruptive changes’ to society’s energy and economic systems that scientists and experts have repeatedly said are necessary to prevent climate catastrophe:

Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the amount of carbon dioxide in Earth’s atmosphere has surged from about 280 ppm to more than 410 ppm today. Although concentrations will continue to rise as long as the international community maintains unsustainable activities that generate greenhouse gas emissions, some observers pointed out that atmospheric carbon hitting 1,200 ppm is far from a foregone conclusion.

And, as Penn State University climatologist Michael E. Mann noted, ‘if we let CO2 levels get anywhere near that high we’re already in big trouble.’

However, as Washington Post climate reporter Chris Mooney concluded in a series of tweets, ‘the point is not that this scary scenario is going to happen. Given the current trajectory of climate policy and renewables, it seems unlikely. Rather, the key point—and it’s a big deal—is that there are many things we don’t understand about the climate system and there could be key triggers out there, which set off processes that you can’t easily stop.’

In other words, as MIT professor Thomas Levenson put it: ‘The really terrifying aspect of this research is the reminder that we do not yet know all the ways catastrophic outcomes can emerge from this uncontrolled experiment on our only habitat.’

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Scientists at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California found that the information available can now be classified as "five-sigma"—a standard in the scientific community meaning that there is a one-in-a-million chance that the same data would be observable if humans were not causing the planet to grow warmer through activities like fossil fuel extraction. The classification represents a "gold standard" level of certainty.

"The narrative out there that scientists don't know the cause of climate change is wrong," Benjamin Santer, who led the study, told Reuters. "We do."

Scientists applied the same 'five-sigma' measure to research confirming the existence of the Higgs boson subatomic particle in 2012, a finding that was received with applause from the science community and the press.

The report, which was published in the journal Nature Climate Change, builds on the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report from 2013, which found that it was 'extremely likely' that humans were causing the climate crisis—with a 95 percent chance.

In recent years, although President Donald Trump and other Republican lawmakers have attempted to cast doubt on the scientific consensus that human activity is causing global warming and the climate crisis, the American public has increasingly believed scientists.

In a 2018 survey by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, 62 percent of Americans believed that man-made climate change was taking place, versus just 47 percent convinced that was the case just five years earlier.

The Nature Climate Change study also comes on the heels of reports that the melting of ice in Antarctica and the warming of the ocean are both occurring much faster than previously thought; that the last four years have been the hottest on record; and that the warming of the globe could cause clouds to disappear from the sky in the next generation, leading to an 8º Celsius (14.4º Fahrenheit) jump in temperature.

'Humanity cannot afford to ignore such clear signals,' the authors of the most recent study wrote in Nature Climate Change.

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Kendra Pierre-Louis and Nadja Popovich, "Ocean Heat Waves Are Threatening Marine Life," The New York Times, March 4, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/04/climate/marine-heat-waves.html, reported that deadly heat waves in the ocean are occurring more often, and at higher temperatures with global warming induced climate change. They create considerable harm to marine life, including being destructive of coral reefs to kelp forests to sea grass beds, the framework of many ocean ecosystems. "An earlier study by some of the same researchers found that, from 1925 to 2016, marine heat waves became, on average, 34 percent more frequent and 17 percent longer. Over all, there were 54 percent more days per year with marine heat waves globally."

Moreover, "There’s also some indication that El Niños have been getting more extreme with climate change."

The Earth's heating up continued in 2018, which was the fourth hottest year since world temperature began being recorded in 1880, with all of the 10 hottest years being recent (John Schwartz and Nadja Popovich, "2018 Continued Warming Trend As Fourth Hottest Year Since 1880," The New York Times, February 7, 2019).
Jon Queally, "Researchers Warn Arctic Has Entered 'Unprecedented State' That Threatens Global Climate Stability: 'Never have so many Arctic indicators been brought together in a single paper,' And the findings spell trouble for the 'entire planet,' Common Dreams, April 8, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/04/08/researchers-warn-arctic-has-entered-unprecedented-state-threatens-global-climate?


Researchers%20Warn%20Arctic%20Has%20Entered%20%27Unprecedented%20State%27%20That%20Threatens%20Global%20Climate%20Stability, reported, "A new research paper by American and European climate scientists focused on Arctic warming published Monday reveals that the 'smoking gun' when it comes to changes in the world's northern polar region is rapidly warming air temperatures that are having—and will continue to have—massive and negative impacts across the globe.

The new paper—titled Key Indicators of Arctic Climate Change: 1971–2017—is the work of scientists at the International Arctic Research Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and the Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland in Copenhagen (GUES).

'The Arctic system is trending away from its 20th century state and into an unprecedented state, with implications not only within but beyond the Arctic,' said Jason Box of the GUES, lead author of the study. 'Because the Arctic atmosphere is warming faster than the rest of the world, weather patterns across Europe, North America, and Asia are becoming more persistent, leading to extreme weather conditions. Another example is the disruption of the ocean circulation that can further destabilize climate: for example, cooling across northwestern Europe and strengthening of storms.'

John Walsh, chief scientist at AUF's research center, was the one who called arctic air temperatures the 'smoking gun' discovered during the research—a finding the team did not necessarily anticipate.

'I didn't expect the tie-in with temperature to be as strong as it was,' Walsh said. 'All the variables are connected with temperature. All components of the Arctic system are involved in this change.'

The study, published Monday as the flagship piece in a special issue on Arctic climate change indicators published by the journal Environmental Research Letters, is the first of its kind to combine observations of physical climate indicators—such as snow cover, rainfall, and seasonal measurements of sea ice extent—with biological impacts, such as a mismatch in the timing of flowers blooming and pollinators working. According to Walsh, 'Never have so many Arctic indicators been brought together in a single paper.'

This three-and-a-half minute video put together by the research team, explains its methodology and findings in detail: https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/04/08/researchers-warn-arctic-has-entered-unprecedented-state-threatens-global-climate?


The new study comes as temperature records in the polar regions continue to break record after record. Last week, climatologists said Alaska experienced the highest March temperatures ever recorded.
Statewide temperatures averaged 27°F degrees last month, a full 4 degrees higher than the record set in 1965. Brian Brettschneider, a climatologist with the International Arctic Research Center at University of Alaska Fairbanks, told the Anchorage Daily News, "We're not just eking past records. This is obliterating records."

Also last month, as Common Dreams reported, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) warned in a far-reaching report that winter temperatures in the Arctic are already 'locked in' in such a way that significant sea level increases are now inevitable this century.

Rising temperatures, along with ocean acidification, pollution, and thawing permafrost threaten the Arctic and the more than four million people who inhabit it, including 10 percent who are Indigenous. But, as UNEP acting executive director Joyce Msuya noted at the time, "What happens in the Arctic does not stay in the Arctic."

That warning was echoed by the researchers behind the new study out Monday. Their hope, they said, is that the findings about air temperatures and the delicate interconnections between the climate and other natural systems in the Arctic will 'provide a foundation for a more integrated understanding of the Arctic and its role in the dynamics of the Earth's biogeoophysical systems.'

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And in an era of climate change, break-up has been coming too soon, especially this year. The ice has become unpredictable, creating new, sometimes deadly hazards and a host of practical problems that disrupt the rhythms of everyday life.

The ice roads that carry freight in winter and spring have been going soft prematurely. Hunters cannot ride safely to their spring camps. Sled-dog races have been canceled. People traveling on frozen rivers by A.T.V. or snowmobile are falling through; some have died. Rescuers trying to reach them have been stymied by thin ice."

The most comprehensive report to date on the melting of Himalayan glaciers, by the UN science panel on climate change found that two thirds of these glaciers may completely melt by 2100 at the current pattern of increasing global warming. That would bring increasing flooding, and then very wide spread increasing reductions of water in much of Asia, with disastrous consequences (Kai Schultz and Bhadra Sharma, "Climate Crisis' May Melt Most Himalayan Glaciers by 2100," The New York Times, February 5, 2019). A Briefing on the finding of the report is in, "Himalayan glaciers: What if they melt," The Christian Science Monitor, April 1, 2019.

A study published in Nature Climate Change in early February 2019 found that across the northern latitudes around the world, already 1.4 million lakes that used to freeze regularly in winter no longer do so (Nadiia Popovich, "Hockey on the Lake May Soon Be a Freezing Memory," The New York Times, February 8, 2019).

Brad Plummer and Blacki igliozzi, "How to Cut U.S. Emissions Faster? Do What These Countries Are Doing," The New York Times, February 13, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/02/13/climate/cut-us-emissions-with-policies-from-other-countries.html, pointed out that even before the Trump administration, the U.S. was lowering its greenhouse gas emissions much too slowly to do its part in averting the worst impacts of global warming. The U.S. could come much closer to doing so simply by adopting seven of the strongest climate policies already being undertaken by other nations.

Modeling by Energy Innovation, indicates that if the United States put in place an economy-wide carbon tax similar to British Columbia’s, which started small and is set to rise to $37.50 per ton, emissions would start to fall significantly. The U.S. as a whole could follow California’s lead in requiring all production of electricity only from zero-carbon sources — such as wind, solar or nuclear.
Adopting Norway’s electric-vehicle incentives, which have resulted in plug-in cars now comprising half of all new sales, would further lower global warming causing emissions, though this would be a slow process, as it would require many years for millions of older cars to be retired. Following China’s lead, the U.S. could greatly increase industrial energy efficiency by setting efficiency targets for industries such as cement, steel and petrochemical, requiring them to utilize the most efficient current technologies.

Again spreading a California policy nationwide, the country could greatly reduce greenhouse gas emissions stemming from heating and cooling by adopting strict energy efficiency standards for all new construction.

If the United States returned to moving to force the gas and oil industry to cut the huge amounts of methane, a far more atmospheric warming gas than carbon dioxide, that are currently leaking, the impact would be a significant reduction in warming, which would save the oil and gas companies from losing billions of dollars’ worth of natural gas.

The United States could duplicate the European Union’s legislation to end the use of hydrofluorocarbons, powerful greenhouse gases used in air-conditioners, refrigerators and foams. Currently the U.S. pollutes considerably in this way, having so far only cut previous use of hydrofluorocarbons in half.

Adoption of these seven policies would reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the United States about 29 percent below 2005 levels by 2025, and approximately 50 percent by 2050. To reduce warming emissions further and faster, something the United Nations scientific panel has said is necessary to keep total global warming below 2 degrees Celsius, the United States and other nations would need to adopt policies exceeding anything that has been put into practice so far. Additional measures might include a much greater tax on carbon, investing in advanced clean-energy technologies, retrofitting older buildings, reducing energy use (including increasing energy efficiency) in sectors such as air travel and shipping, deploying carbon capture systems in industry and from the atmosphere, revitalizing forests and curbing methane and nitrogen pollution from livestock and farming.

Costa Rica has launched a plan to end fossil fuel use by 2050. Already most of the country’s electric production is from hydroelectric, geothermal, wind and solar generation, and forest cover has been doubled in the last 30 years, pulling large amounts of carbon dioxide out of the air. The plan includes switching rapidly to electric trains, busses and cars - but the changeover to all electric automobiles may be difficult to achieve fully (Sonimi Sengupta and Alexander Villegas, "With Green Deal, Costa Tries to Show the World How It's Done," The New York Times, March 12, 2019).

Eric C. Evarts, "Pumped hydro could deliver 100 percent renewable electricity," GreenCarReports, April 3, 2019. https://www.greencarreports.com/news/1122395_pumped-hydro-could-deliver-100-percent-renewable-electricity, reported, "Achieving 100 percent renewable power, as Congressional Democrats’ Green New Deal and other proposals around the world envision, will require a lot of energy storage. And while the cost and availability of a storage batteries has made significant progress lately, they may not be the best solution to store renewable energy.

A new study by researchers at the Australian National University have identified 530,000 sites around the world suitable for pumped hydro storage that can store up to 22 million gigawatt hours of electricity—coincidentally about what other studies show would be needed to support a reliable electric grid powered entirely by renewable energy.

The storage would be needed to take full advantage of renewable wind and solar power even when consumers are not demanding peak power, and then supply that power back to the grid at times when they do.

Lithium-ion batteries similar to those made for electric cars, such as Tesla’s commercial Powerpacks, are being installed on the grid around the world, including at large wind and solar farms as well as local transformer stations. Some automakers, utilities, and EV charging networks are also installing used electric-car batteries to buffer the grid on a trial basis.

Pumped hydro storage is a much older and larger technology. It uses excess electricity produced at night to pump water uphill into reservoirs or storage tanks, then works like conventional hydro-electricity to spin turbines as the water flows back downhill during the day. Unlike conventional hydro, it
doesn’t generate net new power, but does improve grid reliability and enable new sources of renewable electricity to come online, according to the U.S. Energy Information Agency.™

As of 2014, the latest year for which numbers are available, the U.S. had almost 24 gigawatt-hours of pumped hydro storage at 40 locations around the U.S.™

The May 2019 Issue of In These Times, to be available at: inthesetimes.com, “Getting to Zero,” presents a number of interrelated articles on how a Green New Deal might work successfully.


Averting catastrophic global warming and devastating declines in biodiversity, scientists warn, requires not only overhauling human activities that generate planet-heating emissions—like phasing out fossil fuels—but also cutting down on the carbon that is already in the atmosphere.

In a letter to governments, NGOs, the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity, and the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Natural Climate Solutions campaign calls for tackling these crises by not only rapidly decarbonizing economies, but also by ‘drawing carbon dioxide out of the air by protecting and restoring ecosystems.’

‘By defending, restoring and re-establishing forests, peatlands, mangroves, salt marshes, natural seaboas, and other crucial ecosystems, very large amounts of carbon can be removed from the air and stored,’ the letter says. ‘At the same time, the protection and restoration of these ecosystems can help to minimize a sixth great extinction, while enhancing local people’s resilience against climate disaster.

The letter urges the politicians, nonprofits, and international bodies to support such solutions with research, funding, and political commitment—and to ‘work with the guidance and free, prior and informed consent of indigenous people and other local communities.’

The campaign also put out a short video that outlines ‘how nature can save us from climate breakdown.’

The video notes that ‘exotic and often dangerous schemes have been proposed’ to reduce atmospheric carbon—referencing controversial geoengineering suggestions favored by some politicians and scientists—but there’s a better and simpler way: let nature do it for us.’

Writer and environmentalist George Monbiot, a leader of the campaign, laid out the scientific support for this approach to carbon drawdown in an essay on the campaign’s website as well as in his Wednesday column for the Guardian.

Detailing the potential impact of restoring lands worldwide, Monbiot wrote for the newspaper:

The greatest drawdown potential per hectare (though the total area is smaller) is the restoration of coastal habitats such as mangroves, salt marsh and seagrass beds. They stash carbon 40 times faster than tropical forests can. Peaty soils are also vital carbon stores. They are currently being oxidized by deforestation, drainage, drying, burning, farming, and mining for gardening and fuel. Restoring peat, by blocking drainage channels and allowing natural vegetation to recover, can suck back much of what has been lost.
'Scientists have only begun to explore how the recovery of certain animal populations could radically change the carbon balance,' he acknowledged, pointing to forest elephants and rhinos in Africa and Asia and tapirs in Brazil as examples.

Instead of making painful choices and deploying miserable means to a desirable end, Monbiot concluded, 'we can defend ourselves from disaster by enhancing our world of wonders.'

Key supporters of the campaign include youth climate strike leader Greta Thunberg; journalist Naomi Klein; author and activist Bill McKibben; Penn State climate scientist Michael Mann; former Maldives President Mohamed Nasheed; and activist Yeb Saño, along with more than a dozen others who signed the letter.

'Healing and restoring the natural world is key to carbon drawdown,' Klein tweeted Wednesday, 'plus it makes life fuller and richer and can create millions of jobs.'

Despite the high profiles of many supporters, the campaign launch did not attract the attention of the corporate media.

Monbiot took to Twitter to call out broadcast outlets for failing to cover not only the climate and ecological crises, but also potential solutions like those offered by the new campaign. As he put it, 'They are living in a world of their own.'

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While the case has a lofty goal, 'we do feel that we can win,' he said. As he explained in a statement, this could have far-reaching effects.

'If successful, the uniqueness of the case would be that Shell, as one of the largest multinational corporations in the world, would be legally obligated to change its business operations. We also expect that this would have an effect on other fossil fuel companies, raising the pressure on them to change.'

'That change can't come fast enough, added Carroll Muffett, president of the Center for International Environmental Law.

'Today's suit against Shell sends a clear signal that business as usual is no longer acceptable.'

—Carroll Muffett, Center for International Environmental Law. 'The IPCC has warned that window of action for avoiding irreversible and truly catastrophic climate harms is narrow and closing rapidly. Today's suit against Shell sends a clear signal that business as usual is no longer acceptable. Companies that continue ignoring climate risks can and will be held legally accountable and financially responsible for their actions.'

'Investors and corporate decision-makers who ignore this new reality,' she said, 'do so at their peril.'

To hear more about the case, watch the video below from Friends of the Earth:

The People vs Shell from Friends of the Earth on Vimeo: https://vimeo.com/friendsoftheearthuk.

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Brad Plumer, 'A ‘Green New Deal’ Is Far From Reality, but Climate Action Is Picking Up in the States," The New York Times, February 8, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/08/climate/states-global-warming.html, reported that with the election of more Democratic governors in November, more states are moving to counter global warming, including a few with Republican governors."

'Even though talk of a “Green New Deal” is getting louder in Congress, the odds of major federal climate legislation passing in the next two years remain extremely low.

It’s a different story at the state level, however: The midterm elections in the fall brought in a new wave of governors who are now setting climate goals for their states and laying out more ambitious plans to cut emissions and expand low-carbon energy.

In the past month, newly elected Democratic governors in Michigan, Illinois and New Mexico have joined the United States Climate Alliance, a group of 19 states and Puerto Rico that has vowed to uphold the Paris climate agreement despite President Trump's disavowal of the accord. With the new additions, the alliance now covers one-third of America's greenhouse gas emissions and nearly half its population.'

"States can only do so much to tackle global warming by themselves. But they can serve as laboratories of sorts, testing which climate policies work well and which ones are ineffective or too costly. And, by advancing technologies like wind, solar or electric vehicles, they could pave the way for more ambitious federal action — should that moment ever arrive.

Here are some of the biggest steps states have taken recently on climate policy."

Michigan's governor, Gretchen Whitmer, has moved to establish an office of climate and energy. With the rapid reductions in the cost of renewable energy, numerous states have been to requiring utilities to use more renewable electricity.

In Maine, new Democratic governor, Janet Mills, has pledged to reinstate incentives for rooftop solar and to increase wind power locally — actions that had been stopped by her Republican predecessor.

In New Mexico, Democratic Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, is supporting a legislation requiring electric utilities to obtain 50 percent of their power from renewable sources by 2030, as has been required in neighboring states, such as Colorado and Nevada. (Nevada voters in November approved a requirement for 50 percent renewables by 2030).

The most forward looking action has come from governors who are proposing plans for their states to achieve 100 percent electricity generation from zero-carbon sources. Legislators in California and Hawai'i have required utilities to meet this target by 2045, while the governors of Colorado, Illinois, New Jersey and New York have stated they will introduce similar requirements.

To achieve these objectives will require innovative developments, so there is no guarantee of success. Moving to 100 percent zero-carbon electricity will require extensive new nationwide transmission
lines, a variety of the developing energy storage techniques or help yet to be developed or proven technologies. Some favor advanced nuclear power, which is strongly opposed by others.

Meanwhile, a number of states are experimenting with varied approaches. Hawaii, for example, wants to achieve its goal solely through renewable energy. By contrast, New Jersey Governor Philip D. Murphy signed legislation to continue operation of the state’s nuclear plants as portion of a low-carbon portfolio. Meanwhile, New York has begun soliciting bids to construct large new offshore wind farms.

Electricity produces about a third of United States carbon dioxide emissions. To achieve sufficient greenhouse gas reduction, states also will need to reduce emissions from the cars and trucks on their roads, which produce another third.

In December 2018, nine Eastern states and the District of Columbia announced they would cooperate in placing a price on emissions from transportation fuels, and investing the revenue in lower-carbon solutions. These might encompass mass transit, electric buses or charging stations for plug-in vehicles.

A number of states, such as Pennsylvania and Maryland, will have to stop the stubborn rise in driving emissions if they are to meet their self-imposed climate goals.

Many of the states are following the lead of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, a cap-and-trade system in the Pacific Northeast that auctions a steadily reduced supply of carbon pollution permits to power plants and applies the revenue to invest in energy efficiency and clean energy programs.

Cutting carbon emissions in transportation is complicated, with its many factors, and thus more difficult to achieve, but steps are already being taken to deal with the problem, including by three Republican governors, in Maryland, Massachusetts and Vermont.

Additional proposals are being considered to cut greenhouse gas emissions in a number of states.


"The nation’s largest and most economically influential city passed a historic bill Thursday capping climate-changing pollution from big buildings and mandating unprecedented cuts to greenhouse gases.

The City Council approved the legislation in a 45-to-2 vote Thursday afternoon, all but ensuring its passage by a mayor eager to burnish his climate bona fides ahead of a potential run for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2020."

"The legislation sets emissions caps for various types of buildings over 25,000 square feet; buildings produce nearly 70% of the city’s emissions. It sets steep fines if landlords miss the targets. Starting in 2024, the bill requires landlords to retrofit buildings with new windows, heating systems and insulation that would cut emissions by 40% in 2030, and double the cuts by 2050."


'Residential and commercial buildings are considerable power hogs, accounting for 39 percent of U.S. energy use, more than either the industrial or transportation sectors,' explains the environmental
While acknowledging scientists’ increasingly urgent warnings about the necessity of rapidly transitioning global energy systems away from fossil fuels in favor of clean renewables like solar and wind, the report focuses on the far-reaching and positive consequences of improving the energy efficiency of buildings across the country.

Food & Water Watch lays out the impact of investing about $33.3 billion a year in a nationwide initiative from 2020 to 2035. That funding, along with ‘aggressive and robust energy efficiency policies,’ would be complementary to broader efforts designed to curb planet-warming emissions and prevent climate catastrophe.

Researchers found that ‘this substantial investment would reap dramatic economic benefits, create good jobs that foster a fair and just transition to clean energy, reduce energy use, and save money—all while reducing climate emissions.’

Food & Water Watch executive director Wenonah Hauter tied the report’s recommendations to the national discussion about climate policies, including the Green New Deal resolution introduced earlier this year by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) and Sen. Ed Markey (D-Mass.).

With all the talk about a Green New Deal, one critical piece of any effective climate policy that has largely been left out of the conversation is energy efficiency, Hauter said. ‘It is the low-hanging fruit in terms of technological feasibility and cost-benefit gain.’

Responding to the report, Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) said in a statement from Food & Water Watch, ‘Energy efficiency has enormous potential to create millions of jobs, reduce carbon pollution, and save American families money on their energy bills—a real win-win-win.’

Sanders, a cosponsor of the Green New Deal resolution who is seeking the Democratic Party’s nomination for the 2020 presidential race, added, ‘We must immediately come together to take bold action to transform our energy system away from fossil fuels toward energy efficiency and sustainable energy.’

By 2035, building upgrades would cut carbon dioxide emissions by more than 300 million metric tons, compared with current projections, and cumulatively reduce utility bills by an estimated $1.3 trillion, according to the report.

‘Both the investment and the savings on utility bills,’ it states, ‘would spur economic growth and job creation—necessary for a fair and just transition for fossil fuel workers and a needed economic jolt to America’s communities that have not shared in the economic growth over the past 40 years.’

This plan could generate more than 20 million full-times jobs, boosting U.S. job creation by about 20 percent, and ‘the majority of these jobs would be high-quality construction and manufacturing jobs that can support families and provide future career opportunities.’

Food & Water Watch emphasizes the importance of supporting workers whose jobs will be lost in the transition away from fossil fuels, specifically calling for ‘100 percent wage and benefit insurance for five years to ensure that workers and their families do not face catastrophic economic shocks from job displacement.’

In addition to outlining the benefits of funding energy efficiency improvements, the report also features a blueprint for upgrading buildings. ‘Existing buildings need to be retrofitted and upgraded.’ it says, ‘and states and localities must update building codes to ensure that new construction maximizes energy efficiency.’

Suggestions for both new and existing structures include: weatherizing building envelopes to prevent heating and cooling leaks; upgrading heating and cooling equipment; modernizing lighting; and replacing inefficient appliances and devices.

The report urges Congress to:

- fully fund the Weatherization Assistance Program to upgrade all eligible homes by 2035;
- target investments in socially and economically disadvantaged areas and in environmental justice communities with disproportionate pollution burdens;
- robustly invest in upgrading the energy efficiency of all federal buildings;
- expand funding for energy efficiency research at the Department of Energy;
strengthen and require regular upgrades to mandatory energy efficiency requirements for appliances, building shell technologies and other equipment, as well as further incentivize efficiency improvements; and

provide sufficient incentives for building owners to upgrade the efficiency of their appliances, equipment, and buildings.

States and localities, according to the report, should "ensure that landlords and owners of multi-family housing make retrofits and keep their tenants"; "invest in energy-efficient technology by allocating their own grants and other monetary incentives to local companies and communities"; and "strengthen and regularly upgrade building codes to ensure that newly constructed buildings are energy-efficient."

For the sake of our planet and economy, the report concludes, "energy efficiency must be a national and regional priority in the United States."

This post has been updated with the proposed annual investment from a newer version of the report.

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Putting a price on carbon dioxide emissions to help tackle climate change has been slow,
reported, "Can a city cancel out its greenhouse gas emissions? Copenhagen intends to, and fast. By 2025, this once-grimy industrial city aims to be net carbon neutral, meaning it plans to generate more renewable energy than the dirty energy it consumes."

The not so green side of green energy is illuminated in, Lauren Villagran, “In hot water: The dangerous side of a renewable energy project,” Searchlight New Mexico, March 26, 2019, http://searchlightnm.com/2019/03/26/in-hot-water-the-dangerous-side-of-a-renewable-energy-project/. In reporting the serious water polluting aspect of a geothermal energy project that was not properly accounted, it is pointed out, "The dark side of renewable energy is that every form of production carries its own environmental baggage. Without an ecological review, wind farms can put native and migratory birds at risk. Solar farms can interrupt ecosystems by fencing off and shading swaths of desert acreage. And geothermal energy, which has some advantages over wind and solar, can jeopardize freshwater resources."

Thus it is critical in every case of attempting to do something positive, to take the negative into account, properly considering the particulars of the particular location. To make something function well, one has to know what to do (and not to do) where and when, and to properly and sufficiently control the negative effects that always occur.

"Where Glaciers Melt Away, Switzerland Sees Opportunity,” The New York Times, February 14, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/02/13/climate/switzerland-glaciers-climate-change.html, reported. “The Trift is a casualty of climate change, one of tens of thousands of glaciers around the world that are shrinking as the earth warms. Melting glaciers are adding to rising sea levels and causing floods, and will eventually mean less water for drinking and agriculture.

But glacial retreat will also have an impact on hydropower, as glaciers shrink to the point where meltwater flows start to decline.” For some time hydropower will increase, but eventually, it will decline to very low levels. Currently, 16 percent of the world’s electricity is hydroelectric, in Switzerland it is 60 percent.

"In Switzerland, where the Alps are warming faster than the global average, most of the country’s 1,500 glaciers have retreated every year since 2001; many are expected to all but vanish by 2090. The great melting was especially bad in 2017, when 20 monitored Swiss glaciers lost about 3 percent of their volume because of a dry winter and an extremely hot summer. Last year was bad as well, according to Glacier Monitoring in Switzerland, which tracks changes."

"These Countries Have Prices on Carbon. Are They Working?" The New York Times, April 2, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/04/02/climate/pricing-carbon-emissions.html?ref=cmb=edit_clim_20190403&ref=climate-fwd&n_art=0&mid=5233581c&ch=edit_clim_20190403&ref=cmb=edit_clim_20190403, reported. "The idea of putting a price on carbon dioxide emissions to help tackle climate change has been slowly spreading around the globe over the past two decades."

This week, Canada’s federal government took the latest step when it extended its carbon-pricing program nationwide by imposing a tax on fossil fuels in four provinces that had declined to write their own climate plans.
More than 40 governments worldwide have now adopted some sort of price on carbon, either through direct taxes on fossil fuels or through cap-and-trade programs. In Britain, coal use plummeted after the introduction of a carbon tax in 2013. In the Northeastern United States, nine states have set a cap on emissions from the power sector and require companies to buy tradable pollution permits.

Economists have long suggested that raising the cost of burning coal, oil and gas can be a cost-effective way to curb emissions. But, in practice, most countries have found it politically difficult to set prices that are high enough to spur truly deep reductions. Many carbon pricing programs today are fairly modest. In France and Australia, efforts to increase carbon taxes were shelved after a backlash from voters angry about rising energy prices.

Partly for that reason, carbon pricing has, so far, played only a supporting role in efforts to mitigate global warming. For some efforts to date, go to: https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/04/02/climate/pricing-carbon-emissions.html?em_pos=small&emc=edit_clim_20190403&nl=climate-fwd&art=0&nid=52235981c%3Dedit_clim_20190403&ref=headline&te=1.

Megan Guuss, "MIT says we’re overlooking a near-term solution to diesel trucking emissions: All-electric semis may take too long to get on the road, researchers say. ARS Technica, April 11, 2019, https://arstechnica.com/cars/2019/04/mit-says-were-overspending-a-near-term-solution-to-diesel-trucking-emissions/, reported, "Transportation is one of the major causes of greenhouse gas emissions in the US, and medium- and heavy-duty trucks account for about a quarter of all transportation-related emissions. At present, semis and other long-haul trucks are mostly diesel-powered. so they emit nitrogen oxides and particulates that aren’t just bad for the climate; they’re bad for human health as well. Tesla made a splash in 2017 when it introduced its all-electric semi truck, and announcements from other trucking companies followed. Daimler sold small electric delivery trucks and has an electric Cascadia in development, Nikola announced a hydrogen-powered fuel cell truck, and Siemens debuted a catenary system for freight. Yet two years later, trucking in the US is still driven by diesel-fueled, compression-ignition (CI), internal combustion engines. "

Jonathan Blitzer, "How Climate Change Is Fuelling the U.S. Border Crisis: In the western highlands of Guatemala, the question is no longer whether someone will leave but when," The New Yorker, April 3, 2019, https://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/how-climate-change-is-fuelling-the-us-border-crisis?utm_campaign=aud-dev&utm_source=nl&utm_brand=tny&utm_mailing=TNY_Daily_040319&utm_medium=email&bxid=5bd66dc2ddf9c61943827d5&user_id=11826467&esrc=&utm_term=TNY_Daily, reported, "In February, citing a ‘national-security crisis on our southern border,’ Donald Trump declared a state of emergency, a measure that even members of Congress from his own party rejected. Three months earlier, with much less fanfare, thirteen federal agencies issued a landmark report about the damage wrought by climate change. In a sixteen-hundred-page analysis, government scientists described wildfires in California, the collapse of infrastructure in the South, crop shortages in the Midwest, and catastrophic flooding. The President publicly dismissed the findings. ‘As to whether or not it’s man-made and whether or not the effects that you’re talking about are there, I don’t see it,’ he said. There was a deeper layer of denial in this, since overlooking these effects meant turning a blind eye to one of the major forces driving migration to the border. ‘There are always a lot of reasons why people migrate,’ Yarsinio Palacios, an expert on forestry in
Guatemala, told me. “Maybe a family member is sick. Maybe they are trying to make up for losses from the previous year. But in every situation, it has something to do with climate change.”

The western highlands, which extend from Antigua to the Mexican border, cover roughly twenty per cent of Guatemala and contain a large share of the country’s three hundred microclimates, ranging from dank, tropical locales near the Pacific Coast to the arid, alpine reaches of the department of Huehuetenango. The population in the highlands is mostly indigenous, and people’s livelihoods are almost exclusively agrarian. The malnutrition rate, which hovers around sixty-five per cent, is among the highest in the Western Hemisphere. In 2014, a group of agronomists and scientists, working on an initiative called Climate, Nature, and Communities of Guatemala, produced a report that cautioned lawmakers about the region’s susceptibility to a new threat. The highlands, they wrote, 'was the most vulnerable area in the country to climate change.'

In the years before the report was published, three hurricanes had caused damage that cost more than the previous four decades’ worth of public and private investment in the national economy. Extreme-weather events were just the most obvious climate-related calamities. There were increasingly wide fluctuations in temperature—unexpected surges in heat followed by morning frosts—and unpredictable rainfall. Almost half a year’s worth of precipitation might fall in a single week, which would flood the soil and destroy crops. Grain and vegetable harvests that once produced enough food to feed a family for close to a year now lasted less than five months. 'Inattention to these issues,' the report’s authors wrote, can drive 'more migration to the United States' and 'put at grave risk the already deteriorating viability of the country.'

Guatemalan migration to the U.S., which had been steady since the late nineteen-seventies, has spiked in recent years. In 2018, fifty thousand families were apprehended at the border—twice as many as the year before. Within the first five months of the current fiscal year, sixty-six thousand families were arrested. The number of unaccompanied children has also increased: American authorities recorded twenty-two thousand children from Guatemala last year, more than those from El Salvador and Honduras combined. Much of this migration has come from the western highlands, which receives not only some of the highest rates of remittances per capita but also the greatest number of deportees. Of the ninety-four thousand immigrants deported to Guatemala from the U.S. and Mexico last year, about half came from this region.'

Sandra E. Garcia, "Seattle Hit by Unusually Heavy Snowfall Moving Across Pacific," The New York Times, February 9, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/09/us/seattle-snow.html, reported, "An unusual group of storm systems battering the Pacific Northwest has halted dozens of flights and knocked out power for thousands, hitting Seattle with as much snowfall in one day as it usually receives in a year, according to the National Weather Service."
Mitch Smith and Adeel Hassan, "Snow in Forecast for a 2,500-Mile Path From California to Maine: You thought spring was on the horizon, didn't you?" The New York Times, March 1, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/01/us/snow-weather-forecast.html, reports that in a year of extreme weather, where very large storms are compatible with global warming, "Spring may be within sight, but the calendar flipped to March, forecasters on Friday predicted a wallowing storm this weekend, with snow and icy rain expected to coat a 2,500-mile path from Northern California to southern Maine. Rain was also forecast to drench Southern California and much of the South, from Texas to Virginia."

While the Midwest and Northeast were hit by another heavy snow, followed by cold, the southern portion of the huge storm complex cast what used to be well out of season tornadoes, of category 4, across the South. Alan Blinder, Jack Healy and Matt Stevens, "Across Alabama, 'There Wasn't Even Time to Be Afraid': A warning, and then winds of about 170 miles per hour cut a swath of destruction across Alabama, killing at least 23 and injuring dozens of others?", The New York Times, March 4, 2019, "The tornado ripped a mile-wide gash through the heart of this rural community in eastern Alabama, killing at least 23 people in the deadliest tornado to hit the United States in six years, including three children and several members of some families. Dozens of others were injured, and the authorities said Monday that an untold number still had not been accounted for."

Radio reports on a number of days in March 2019 indicate that in this year of large winter storms, sometimes record amounts of snow followed by extreme cold were continuing in the Midwest and Eastern U.S. As of March 17, the huge amounts of snow in the Northern Midwest were melting, with many rivers already at or over flood stage, threatening great flooding, increasing as the rising waters converge going South into the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. The floods began as the next large storm hit.

Andrea Germanos, "'Off the Charts': Catastrophic Flooding Wallops Midwest: A 'bomb cyclone' storm along with warm temperatures contributed to still-unfolding disaster," Common Dreams, March 18, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/03/18/charts-catastrophic-flooding-wallops-midwest?cd=2019/03/01/us/snow-weather-forecast.html reports that in a year of large winter storms, sometimes record amounts of snow followed by extreme cold were continuing in the Midwest and Eastern U.S. As of March 17, the huge amounts of snow in the Northern Midwest were melting, with many rivers already at or over flood stage, threatening great flooding, increasing as the rising waters converge going South into the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. The floods began as the next large storm hit.

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"Nebraska residents are bracing for more record-breaking river levels as major flooding continues to affect portions of the Midwest. The still-unfolding catastrophe caused at least three known deaths across the region. The Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) said Sunday that 17 locations across the state had been hit by record flooding, and more records could be broken over the next two days. Flooding in some areas may continue until next weekend, the agency added."

'Major to historic river flooding is expected to continue across parts of the Missouri and Mississippi River Basins,' the National Weather Service warned Monday, 'due to rapid snow melt the past few days.'

Suggesting the still-unfolding catastrophe is a sign of a 'hot new world,' climate activist and author Bill McKibben tweeted: 'The Midwest flooding is off the charts—at places in Nebraska, the Missouri is four feet higher than it's ever been before.'

Copernicus, the European Union's Earth Observation Program, captured images of the flooding in the Cornhusker State, and said its magnitude was 'biblical':

'This really is the most devastating flooding we've probably ever had in our state's history, from the standpoint of how widespread it is.' Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts said Monday.

While Nebraska may be the most intensely affected at the moment, it is far from the only state hit by flooding, Iowa and Wisconsin also declared states of emergency as a result of major flooding, and the graphics below show others in the Missouri and Mississippi River Basins that are facing rising waters:
The Weather Channel attributed the flooding to "a perfect storm of meteorological factors" including a "bomb cyclone" storm that brought snow and rain.

Meteorologist Jeff Masters broke down the details last week:

The heavy rains from the bomb cyclone were accompanied by very warm temperatures which melted a snowpack of 5-13" of snow. The snowpack had a high liquid water content—equivalent to an extra 1-3" of rain falling—since the snow had been accumulating and compacting since early February. When Wednesday's warm temperatures in the 50s and 60s and heavy rain melted the snow, the runoff flowed very quickly into the rivers, because the frozen ground was unable to absorb much water to slow things down. Many of the flooding rivers had thick ice covering them, due to the long stretch of cold weather the Midwest endured this winter. When the huge pulse of floodwaters entered the rivers, this caused the ice to break up and create ice jams, which blocked the flow of the rivers, causing additional flooding.

'Throughout Nebraska and the Midwest, our friends are dealing with the worst flooding in half a century,' Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) said in tweet over the weekend. 'We must provide immediate help to those suffering. Long-term, we must take bold steps to stop climate change, which makes extreme flooding much worse.'

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The flooding has been extremely damaging to many Midwest farmers and ranchers, who have lost livestock, equipment and buildings, as well as suffering damage to fields. Coming at a time when they are already under financial pressure, it is likely to force many out of business (Mitch Smith, Jack Healy and Timothy Williams, "It's Probably Over for Us": Record Flooding Pummels Midwest When Farmers Can Least Afford It," The New York Times, March 18, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/18/us/nebraska-floods.html?ref=collection%2Fbyline%2Fmitch-smith&action=click&contentCollection=undefined&region=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=1&gpttype=collection).

Anna Schaverien, "Britain Experiences Summer Temperatures on Hottest Winter Day," The New York Times, February 26, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/26/world/europe/climate-change-hottest-day-uk.html, reported, "Two days of unseasonable sunshine in Britain this week have resulted in more than the shedding of hats, scarves and winter coats: They have also brought the highest temperatures ever recorded in the country in winter.

Temperatures peaked on Tuesday at 21.2 degrees Celsius (70.16 Fahrenheit) in Kew Gardens, London, the hottest February day in Britain since records began in 1910, according to the Met Office, the national meteorological service.

Anna Schaverien, "Wildfires Rage in Britain After Record Temperatures: Firefighters tackle blazes in some of the country’s most beloved nature spots, including the woodland that inspired the Hundred Acre Wood of the 'Winnie the Pooh' novels," The New York Times, February 27, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/27/world/europe/uk-fires-temperature.html, reported, "On the same day that Britain experienced record winter temperatures, wildfires broke out at some of the nation’s most beloved nature spots."


Heavy rain began in mid-March in the northeastern province of Golestan, which received 70 percent of its average annual rainfall in one day. The flooding has steadily spread across the nation, inundating communities in at least 26 of Iran’s 31 provinces."

The number of victims is expected to rise as rescuers search for survivors in the town of Sentani, which was hit by the flood Saturday evening.”

• Manuela Andreoni, "Rio de Janeiro Storm Kills 6, Turning Roads Into Rivers and Burying Bus in Mud," The New York Times, February 7, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/07/world/americas/rio-de-janeiro-storm-mudslides.html, reported, "A[nn unusually] powerful summer storm swept through Rio de Janeiro on Wednesday night, leaving at least six people dead, as streets turned into rivers and mudslides destroyed homes and buried a bus, where two of the dead were found.”


Then came the alligators — or, more precisely, their South American cousins, the caimans.

The storm knocked down the walls of a caiman farm in a neighborhood, or favela, that is controlled, like others in Rio de Janeiro, by a heavily armed criminal paramilitary group. This made the local authorities reluctant to enter — and left the creatures, which can grow to be 11 feet long, to swim through the flooded streets, terrifying residents.”

As an unusually large (up until now) hurricane created tremendous damage and considerable death as it roared across three countries in Southern Africa, in mid-March, 2019: Jessica Corbett, "'Everything Is Destroyed': 90% of Mozambique Port City Wrecked by Tropical Cyclone Idai: 'The people who've done the least to change the climate suffer the most.'" Common Dreams, Monday, March 18, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/03/18/everything-destroyed-90-mozambique-port-city-wrecked-tropical-cyclone-ida?cd-origin=rss&utm_term=%27Everything%20Is%20Destroyed%27%2090%25%20of%20Mozambique%20Port%20City%20Wrecked%20by%20Tropical%20Cyclone%20Idai&utm_campaign=For%20Brazil%27s%20Bolsonaro%2C%20It%20Was%20Bring-Your-Son-to-the-CIA%20Day%20%7C%20News&utm_medium=Email&cm_mmc=Act-On%20Software--email--For%20Brazil%27s%20Bolsonaro%2C%20It%20Was%20Bring-Your-Son-to-the-CIA%20Day%20%7C%20News&utm_source=Daily%20Newsletter&cm_mmc=Act-On%20Software--email--For%20Brazil%27s%20Bolsonaro%2C%20It%20Was%20Bring-Your-Son-to-the-CIA%20Day%20%7C%20News&utm_content=email&utm_source=Daily%20Newsletter&utm_term=%27Everything%20Is%20Destroyed%27%2090%25%20of%20Mozambique%20Port%20City%20Wrecked%20by%20Tropical%20Cyclone%20Idai, reported, "Hundreds of people were killed and many more remain missing after a tropical cyclone destroyed 90 percent of the port city of Beira, Mozambique, before moving on to Malawi and Zimbabwe — eliciting fresh demands for bolder efforts to battle the climate crisis that is making extreme weather more common and devastating.

An initial assessment from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) on Monday found that 90 percent of the city and the surrounding area 'is completely destroyed' after experiencing a direct hit from Cyclone Idai last Thursday.

The situation is terrible. The scale of devastation is enormous,” said Jamie LeSueur, who is leading the IFRC team into Beira. 'Communication lines have been completely cut and roads have been destroyed. Some affected communities are not accessible.'

'I think this is the biggest natural disaster Mozambique has ever faced,’ Celso Correia, the country’s environment minister, told the South Africa-based Mail & Guardian. ‘Everything is destroyed. Our priority now is to save human lives.”

Citing the Red Cross and government officials, The Associated Press reported Monday that across the three African countries, 'more than 215 people have been killed by the storm, hundreds more are missing, and more than 1.5 million people have been affected by the widespread destruction and flooding.'
However, Le Sueur noted, aid workers and government officials are still working to access the damage: "Beira has been severely battered. But we are also hearing that the situation outside the city could be even worse. [Sunday], a large dam burst and cut off the last road to the city."

Speaking to state-owned Radio Mozambique on Monday, President Filipe Nyusi said the death toll may surpass 1,000 people in his country alone.

As aerial footage began to circulate online Monday, the emerging sense of devastation provoked calls for the world to 'wake up' to the reality of the global climate crisis:

Bill McKibben, co-founder of the environmental group 350.org, tweeted a reminder on Monday that "the people who've done the least to change the climate suffer the most."

An editorial published Monday by Zimbabwe's state-owned daily newspaper, The Herald, called the storm a 'wake-up call to climate change.' As the editorial reads:

The increase in cyclones and other extreme weather phenomena like droughts and floods, clearly indicate that climate change effects are intensifying... While we cannot completely stop climate change, there is much the government can do to adapt to the weather phenomenon. After all the tumult surrounding Cyclone Idai dies down, it will be critical for government to have a re-look at the adaptive strategies to climate change which it has put in place.

While recognizing that in the short term, 'there is urgent need for medicines, shelter, food, and new homes for the survivors of Cyclone Idai,' the editorial calls for a long-term 'holistic approach to fighting the effects of climate change and ensure that communities are cushioned even in the event of devastating cyclones.'

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Many roads were washed out, and aid officials said they had been able to reach some badly affected areas only by helicopter."

The until recently unprecedented, many days of brushfire causing heat that grilled Australia in its summer were followed by days of torrential rain, bringing serious flooding in Northern Australia. From January 26 to February 4, a record almost four feet of rain fell in Townsville in Queensland, equivalent to a normal year's rainfall (Livia Albeck-Ripka, "In Australia, Relentless Rains Force Hundreds to Evacuate," The New York Times, February 5, 2019).

Coral Davenport, "Trump's Order to Open Arctic Waters to Oil Drilling Was Unlawful, Federal Judge Finds," The New York Times, March 30, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/30/climate/trump-oil-drilling-arctic.html, reported, "In a major legal blow to President Trump's push to expand offshore oil and gas development, a federal judge ruled that an executive order by Mr. Trump that lifted an Obama-era ban on oil and gas drilling in the Arctic Ocean and parts of the North Atlantic coast was unlawful." The decision, by Judge Sharon L. Gleason of the United States District Court for the District of Alaska, concluded late Friday that President Barack Obama's 2015 and 2016 withdrawal from drilling of about 120 million acres of Arctic Ocean and about 3.8 million acres in the Atlantic 'will remain in full force and effect unless and until revoked by Congress.' She wrote that an April 2017 executive order by Mr. Trump revoking the drilling ban 'is unlawful, as it exceeded the president's authority.'"

Snubbing Eric Loewenkamp and the Climate Action Team, the President issued a permissive permit to allow for construction of the controversial Keystone XL pipeline.

"This is a ridiculous attempt by Trump to skirt due process to benefit an oil corporation," said 350.org executive director May Boeve in a statement.

The permit states that pipeline company TransCanada has the authority "to construct, connect, operate, and maintain pipeline facilities at the international border of the United States and Canada at Phillips County, Montana, for the import of oil from Canada to the United States." Trump added that the permit he issued for the pipeline on March 23, 2017 was revoked.

"That permit," as The Hill reported, "was invalidated by a Montana federal judge in November. The ruling is being appealed in the 9th Circuit."


Biodiversity Loss Puts Global Food Supplies at Risk of 'Irreversible Collapse' Indigenous tribes and green campaigners were angered but not surprised Friday when Canada's National Energy Board (NEB) recommended that the government move ahead with its planned expansion of the Trans Mountain Pipeline—despite acknowledging that the project will negatively affect the environment.

The decision paved the way for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s administration to increase fossil fuel emissions, endanger wildlife, and threaten the lives and livelihoods of the eight million people who live in the pipeline's path.

The NEB argued that the pipeline is in the public interest and provided the government with a list of 16 conditions that it must meet as it prepares to expand the 1,150 kilometer (714 mile) pipeline, tripling the amount of oil the tar sands pipeline will carry from Edmonton, Alberta to Burnaby, British Columbia—but critics including Burnaby mayor Mike Hurley argued that the NEB has no intention of protecting the environment or wildlife by enforcing strict regulations on the construction.

"The conditions will not 'prevent significant public safety risks and harms to marine life and other environmental impacts,' Hurley told the Vancouver Sun."

The Utah Lands Trust Administration, in spring 2019, dropped plans to lease some 5700 acres of Bears Ears National Monument, after pressure from the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, The Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration ("Utah Lands Trust Administration Backs Off Plan for New Leasing in Bears Ears," Redrock Wilderness, Spring 2019).
The Trump Administration, in March 2019, loosened the rule protecting sage grouse habitat in 10 western states, allowing oil and gas extraction in previously excluded nine million acres (Coral Davenport, "Grouse Habitat Is Opened for Oil and Gas Production," The New York Times, March 16, 2019).


China has undertaken large scale fracking for oil and gas drilling, as has the United States, bringing all the same problems including polluting water and earthquakes. In February 2019 fracking caused earthquakes in Sichuan Province, producing serious damage and destruction, including of homes, triggering large local protests (Steven Lee Myers, "China Experiences a Fracking Boom, and All the Problems That Go With It," The New York Times, March 8, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/08/world/asia/china-shale-gas-fracking.html).

Jacqueline Williams, "Oil Spill Threatens a Treasured Coral Atoll in the South Pacific," The New York Times, March 6, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/06/world/australia/solomon-islands-oil-spill-unesco.html, "An oil spill from a cargo ship that ran aground near a World Heritage site in the South Pacific is spreading, alarming environmentalists and government officials about the threat to the delicate local ecosystem and to people living there.

The Hong Kong-flagged ship, Solomon Trader, was carrying more than 770 tons of heavy fuel oil when it ran aground last month on Rennell Island, one of the Solomon Islands, which Unesco says is the largest raised coral atoll in the world. The ship is leaking just outside the boundaries of the World Heritage site, called East Rennell."

Sue Sturgis, "The South Pays Dearly for Nuclear Industry's Failed 'Renaissance:' The estimated cost of the project below doubled and now stands at $27 billion, which Georgia Power customers are already paying for thanks to a state law — since overturned — that allowed utilities to collect payment before a project is completed," Portside, April 20, 2019, https://portside.org/2019-04-20/south-pays-dearly-nuclear-industry's-failed-renaissance, reported, "In the decade after the meltdown at Pennsylvania's Three Mile Island nuclear power plant, which took place 40 years ago this week, number of nuclear plant orders that U.S. utilities canceled nationwide amid skyrocketing costs: about 100.

In today's dollars, estimated amount those abandoned plants cost taxpayers and ratepayers: over $40 billion.

Amount ratepayers shouldered in cost overruns alone for the approximately 100 nuclear power plants built around that time: over $200 billion.

"Between 2007 and 2009, number of applications for new reactor construction projects submitted to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission by utility companies: 18.

Of those proposed projects, number that were in the South, where electricity markets are dominated by the monopoly utility model with guaranteed profits, and where some states allow utilities to force customers to pay in advance for construction projects: 13.

Of the 18 proposed reactor projects, number that are still proceeding today, with others canceled amid skyrocketing costs driven in part by the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster in Japan: 1.

Amount Duke Energy wants to charge its South Carolina customers for a decade of planning for two reactors that were never built at its Lee plant in Cherokee County: $240 million.

Amount Florida Power & Light has already charged Florida ratepayers for two new proposed reactors at its Turkey Point plant in Miami-Dade County, construction of which is on hold and may never resume: over $300 million.

Amount South Carolina ratepayers must pay for SCE&G's and Santee Cooper's now-canceled project involving construction of two new reactors at the Summer plant in Fairfield County: $2.3 billion.
Number of powerful 5 kilowatt home solar electric systems that could be installed with $2.3 billion: more than 65,000.

Initial cost estimate for the one commercial nuclear project that’s still proceeding, Georgia Power’s construction of two reactors at Plant Vogtle in Burke County: $14 billion.

Current cost estimate for the Vogtle project, now set to finish in 2022: over $27 billion.

Because of Georgia’s nuclear prepayment law, approximate amount the Vogtle project has already added to the average annual Georgia Power electricity bill: $120.”

Julie Turkewitz, Toxic ‘Forever Chemicals’ in Drinking Water Leave Military Families Reeling,” The New York Times, February 22, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/22/us/military-water-toxic-chemicals.html, reported, “the Defense Department has admitted that it allowed a firefighting foam to slip into at least 55 drinking water systems at military bases around the globe, sometimes for generations. This exposed tens of thousands of Americans, possibly many more, to per-and polyfluoroalkyl substances, a group of man-made chemicals known as PFAS that have been linked to cancers, immune suppression and other serious health problems.

Though the presence of the chemicals has been known for years, an announcement last week from the Environmental Protection Agency for the first time promised regulatory action, a significant acknowledgment of the startling scope of the problem that drew outrage from veterans and others living in contaminated communities.

Acting administrator Andrew Wheeler said that the agency would begin the process of potentially limiting the presence of two of the compounds in drinking water, calling this a ‘pivotal moment in the history of the agency.’

The admission drew some praise, but many said that it was not enough and that millions of people would keep ingesting the substances while a regulatory process plods along.

"While the military has used the chemicals extensively, it is far from the only entity to do so, and in recent years, companies like DuPont have come under fire for leaking PFAS into water systems.

All told, 10 million people could be drinking water laced with high levels of PFAS, according to Patrick Breysse, a top official at the federal Centers for Disease Control. Mr. Breysse has called the presence of the chemicals ‘one of the most seminal public health challenges’ of the coming decades.’

Steven Lee Myers, "China’s Voracious Appetite for Timber Stokes Fury in Russia and Beyond: After sharply restricting logging in its own forests, China turned to imports, overwhelming even a country with abundant resources: Russia,” The New York Times, April 9, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/section/todayspaper, reported, "From the Altai Mountains to the Pacific Coast, logging is ravaging Russia’s vast forests, leaving behind swathes of scarred earth studded with dying stumps.

"Since China began restricting commercial logging in its own natural forests two decades ago, it has increasingly turned to Russia, importing huge amounts of wood in 2017 to satisfy the voracious appetite of its construction companies and furniture manufacturers. ‘In Siberia, people understand they need the forests to survive,’ said Eugene Simonov, an environmentalist who has studied the impact of commercial logging in Russia’s Far East. ‘And they know their forests are now being stolen.’

Russia has been a witting collaborator, too, selling Chinese companies logging rights at low cost and, critics say, turning a blind eye to logging beyond what is legally allowed.”

A study published in Nature, April 3, 2019, showed that with global warming, not only are the increased heat waves destroying coral, but also limiting the coral’s ability to recover and regenerate after a heat wave subsides. This is bringing changes in the ecosystem supported by the coral reef (Livia Albeck-Ripka, "The Great Barrier Reef Was Seen as ‘Too Big to Fail.’ A Study Suggests It Isn’t.,” The New York Times, April 3, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/03/world/australia/great-barrier-reef-corals-bleaching.html). Here is the finding of the study:

Terry P. Hughes, James T. Kerry, Andrew H. Baird, Sean R. Connolly, Tory J. Chase, Andreas Dietzel, Tessa Hill, Andrew S. Hoey, Mia O. Hoogenboom, Mizue Jacobson, Alisa Kerswell, Joshua S.
March 18, 2019, The New York Times, "Global warming impairs stock recruitment dynamics of corals," Nature, April 3, 2019, Global warming impairs stock-recruitment dynamics of corals, found, "Abstract: Changes in disturbance regimes due to climate change are increasingly challenging the capacity of ecosystems to absorb recurrent shocks and reassemble afterwards, escalating the risk of widespread ecological collapse of current ecosystems and the emergence of novel assemblages. In marine systems, the production of larvae and recruitment of functionally important species are fundamental processes for rebuilding depleted adult populations, maintaining resilience and avoiding regime shifts in the face of rising environmental pressures. Here we document a regional-scale shift in stock-recruitment relationships of corals along the Great Barrier Reef—the world’s largest coral reef system—following unprecedented back-to-back mass bleaching events caused by global warming. As a consequence of mass mortality of adult brood stock in 2016 and 2017 owing to heat stress, the amount of larval recruitment declined in 2018 by 89% compared to historical levels. For the first time, brooding pocilloporids replaced spawning acroporids as the dominant taxon in the depleted recruitment pool. The collapse in stock-recruitment relationships indicates that the low resistance of adult brood stocks to repeated episodes of coral bleaching is inexorably tied to an impaired capacity for recovery, which highlights the multifaceted processes that underlie the global decline of coral reefs. The extent to which the Great Barrier Reef will be able to recover from the collapse in stock-recruitment relationships remains uncertain, given the projected increased frequency of extreme climate events over the next two decades.

With Lake Erie suffering a number of serious environmental problems, the City of Toledo, OH has a ballot measure, which if passed - and upheld by the courts - would give the lake the rights of a person, allowing people to sue on its behalf. This is one of an increasing number of such attempts to give personhood to natural entities, to allow paw suits to be brought for harms to them. Timothy Williams, "Legal Rights for Lake Erie? Voters in Ohio City Will Decide, The New York Times, February 17, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/17/us/lake-erie-legal-rights.html, reported "The peculiar ballot question comes amid a string of environmental calamities at the lake — poisonous algal blooms in summer, runoff containing fertilizer and animal manure, and a constant threat from invasive fish. But this special election is not merely symbolic. It is legal strategy: If the lake gets legal rights, the theory goes, people can sue polluters on its behalf."

Julia Conley, in "Historic Vote,' Ohio City Residents Grant Lake Erie Legal Rights of a Person: 'What Toledo voters and other places working on rights of nature are hoping is to not only change laws but to change culture," Common Dreams, February 27, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/02/27/historic-vote-ohio-city-residents-grant-lake-erie-legal-rights-person?cdo=Act-On%20Software---email--%27Time%20for%20Medicare%20%26%20Views---%27Historic%20vote%2C%20Ohio%20City%20Residents%20Grant%20Lake%20 Erie%20Legal%20Rights%20of%20a%20Person&utm_campaign=--%27Time%20for%20Medicare%20%26%20Views---%27Historic%20vote%2C%20Ohio%20City%20Residents%20Grant%20Lake%20Erie%20Legal%20Rights%20of%20a%20Person, reported, "Tired of receiving notices warning that their drinking water may have been compromised and having little recourse to fight corporate polluters, voters in Toledo, Ohio on Tuesday approved a measure granting Lake Erie some of the same legal rights as a human being.

Sixty-one percent of voters in Tuesday’s special election voted in favor of Lake Erie’s Bill of Rights, which allows residents to take legal action against entities that violate the lake’s rights to “flourish and naturally evolve” without interference.

reported, "A beached whale found in the Philippines on Saturday died with 88 pounds of plastic trash inside its body, an unusually large amount even by the grim standards of what is a common threat to marine wildlife. The 1,100-pound whale, measuring 15 feet long, was found in the town of Mabini with plastic bags and a variety of other disposable plastic products inside its stomach.

Palko Karasz, "Gibraltar Bans Releasing of Helium-Filled Balloons to Protect Marine Wildlife," The New York Times, March 26, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/26/world/europe/gibraltar-ban-balloons.html reported: "For years, 30,000 red and white balloons flooded into the blue sky above Gibraltar each September, symbols of the joy and pride of the small community jutting into the sea as it celebrated its National Day.

But what goes up must come down — sometimes as a hazard to wildlife — and Gibraltar, the tiny British territory at the southern tip of Spain, has become the latest community to take action by banning the release of helium-filled balloons.

Antipollution campaigners have long warned coastal communities that these festive accessories pose a deadly threat to marine wildlife once they end their flight in the oceans. In recent years, the authorities on Gibraltar, which stands at the only gateway from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean, became aware of the damage the balloons were doing."

Thom Cole, "More trees dying in New Mexico," Santa Fe New Mexican, March 24, 2019, reported, "Forest mortality increased nearly 50 percent across New Mexico in 2018, the first jump in five years, according to an annual report on the health of the state’s forests. More than 120,000 acres of ponderosa pine, spruce, pinyon and other trees were lost, said the recently released report.

Near-record heat and a drought across the state weakened the ability of trees to fight off beetles and other pests, according to John Formby, an entomologist who heads the state forest health program."

Andrew E. Kramer, "Polar Bears Have Invaded a Russian Outpost, and They’re Hungry," The New York Times, February 11, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/11/world/europe/russia-polar-bears-emergency.html, reported on polar bears, hungry because of loss of Arctic ice resulting from global warming, "Dozens of polar bears have laid siege to a small military settlement deep in the Russian Arctic, leaving residents afraid to send their children to school, or even open their front doors. The settlement, Belushya Guba, on a finger of land stretching into the Arctic Ocean, has declared a state of emergency as the bears have attacked people, broken into homes, menaced schools and feasted at a local dump."

Stephen Nash, "Vietnam’s Empty Forests: The Asian nation is a hot spot of biological diversity, but local and international conservation groups are struggling to halt what amounts to animal genocide," The New York Times, April 1, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/01/travel/vietnam-wildlife-species-ecotravel-tourism.html reported, "Despite long and tragic wars with the Japanese, the French, the Chinese and the United States during the last century, Vietnam is a treasure house. It is one of the world’s hot spots of biological diversity, according to the science research. There are 30 national parks in a country a bit larger than New Mexico, and about as many kinds of animals as in those pre-eminent safari destinations, Kenya and Tanzania.

In fact, hundreds of new-to-science species of plants and animals have been discovered in Vietnam during the last three decades, and more are recorded each year." However, illegal poaching has been underway for some time in the national parks, often undertaken by park rangers, making Vietnam a major center for world criminal wildlife tracking. That, combined with loss of habitat from an expanding human population has led to huge animal losses. This has reached the point of creating "empty forest syndrome," in which in good wildlife habitat, even small animals and birds are hunted to extinction.

Stephen Nash, "Vietnam’s Empty Forests: The Asian nation is a hot spot of biological diversity, but local and international conservation groups are struggling to halt what amounts to animal genocide," The New York Times, April 1, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/01/travel/vietnam-wildlife-species-ecotravel-tourism.html reported, "Despite long and tragic wars with the Japanese, the French, the Chinese and the United States during the last century, Vietnam is a treasure house. It is one of the world’s hot spots of biological diversity, according to the science research. There are 30 national parks in a country a bit larger than New Mexico, and about as many kinds of animals as in those pre-eminent safari destinations, Kenya and Tanzania. In fact, hundreds of new-to-science species of plants and animals have been discovered in Vietnam during the last three decades, and more are recorded each year." However, illegal poaching has been underway for some time in the national parks, often undertaken by park rangers, making Vietnam a major center for world criminal wildlife tracking. That, combined with loss of habitat from an expanding human population has led to huge animal losses. This has reached the point of creating "empty forest syndrome," in which in good wildlife habitat, even small animals and birds are hunted to extinction.

The tree-planting project, which has been dubbed The Great Green Wall of Africa, stretches across roughly 6,000 miles (8,000 kilometers) of terrain at the southern edge of the Sahara desert, a region known as the Sahel.

The region was once a lush oasis of greenery and foliage back in the 1970s, but the combined forces of population growth, unsustainable land management, and climate change turned the area into a barren and degraded swath of land.”

Eleven countries launched the project in 2007, which has since grown to plant the wall of trees across the continent. To lost just a few of the achievements, in Nigeria, 12 million acres of degraded land has been restored in Nigeria. In Senegal, some 30 million acres of drought-resistant trees have been planted. In Ethiopia, 37 million acres of land has been restored.

The results have included:

Growing fertile land, one of humanity’s most precious natural assets.
Growing a wall of hope against abject poverty.
Growing food security, for the millions that go hungry every day.
Growing health and wellbeing for the world’s poorest communities.
Growing improved water security, so women and girls don’t have to spend hours everyday fetching water.
Growing gender equity, empowering women with new opportunities.
Growing sustainable energy, powering communities towards a brighter future.
Growing green jobs, giving real incomes to families across the Sahel.
Growing economic opportunities to boost small business and commercial enterprise.
Growing a reason to stay to help break the cycle of migration.
Growing sustainable consumption patterns.
Growing to protect the natural capital of the Sahel.
Growing resilience to climate change in a region where temperatures are rising faster than anywhere else on Earth.
Growing a symbol of peace in countries where conflict continues to displace communities.
Growing strategic partnerships to accelerate rural development across Africa.”


Environmental groups are opposing the action.

Many of the adults relocated nearby, satellite imagery shows, but the fact that emperor penguins are vulnerable in what had been considered the safest part of their range raises serious long-term concerns, said Phil Trathan, the paper’s co-author and head of conservation biology with the British Antarctic Survey in Cambridge, England.

Eoin Higgins, "We Can't Trust the Permafrost Anymore": Doomsday Vault at Risk in Norway, 'Not good," Common Dreams, March 27, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/03/27/we-cant-trust-permafrost-anymore-doomsday-vault-risk-norway?cd-origin=rss&utm_term=%27We%20Can%27t%20Trust%20the%20Permafrost%20Anymore%27%3A%20Doomsday%20Vault%20at%20Risk%20in%20Norway&utm_campaign=%27This%20Is%20About...%20All%20of%20Our%20Lives%22%20%7C%20Your%20Week%20in%20Review&utm_content=email&utm_source=Weekly%20Newsletter&utm_medium=Email&cm_mmc=Act-On%20Software--email---%22This%20Is%20About...%20All%20of%20Our%20Lives%22%20%7C%20Your%20Week%20in%20Review---%27We%20Can%27t%20Trust%20the%20Permafrost%20Anymore%27%3A%20Doomsday%20Vault%20at%20Risk%20in%20Norway, reported, "Just over a decade after it first opened, the world’s ‘doomsday vault’ of seeds is imperiled by climate change as the polar region where it’s located warms faster than any other area on the planet.

The Svalbard Global Seed Vault, which opened in late February 2008, was built by the organization Crop Trust and the Norwegian government on the island of Svalbard next to the northernmost town in the world with more than 1,000 residents, Longyearbyen.

'Svalbard is the ultimate failsafe for biodiversity of crops,' said Crop Trust executive director Marie Haaga.

Northern temperatures and environment on the island were a major reason for the construction. According to in-depth reporting from CNN, the project planners hoped that the permafrost around the construction of the underground vault would, in time, refreeze. But the planet has other plans. Longyearbyen and, by extension, the vault, is warming more rapidly than the rest of the planet. That’s because the polar regions of Earth—the coldest areas on the planet—are less able to reflect sunlight away from the polar seas due to disappearing ice and snow cover. It's an ironic turn of events for the creators of the vault, who chose the location for the vault “because the area is not prone to volcanoes or earthquakes, while the Norwegian political system is also extremely stable,” said CNN.

Because of the warming, the permafrost around the underground vault’s tunnel entrance has not refrozen. That led to leaking water in the tunnel in October 2016, which then froze into ice. In response, CNN reported, "Statsbygg [the Norwegian state agency in charge of real estate] undertook 100 million Norwegian krone ($11.7 million) of reconstruction work, more than double the original cost of the structure."

But the warming now may become unsustainable for the structure. It's already forcing changes to Longyearbyen's population of 2,144 as the people in the town find themselves scrambling to avoid avalanches and deal with a changing climate that’s more often dumping rain rather than snow.

'We can’t trust the permafrost anymore,' said Statsbygg communications manager Hege Njaa Aschim.

British advocacy group Global Citizen was more to the point.

'Not good,' the group tweeted.

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World Overview


Lowering Israeli-Palestinian Tensions

In the wake of Israel’s legislative elections, which appeared to hand another victory to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his right-wing partners (coalition negotiations are ongoing), the mood in the occupied Palestinian territories is tense. In Gaza, as in 2014, Hamas and Israel appear close to a conflagration that neither party desires. After an escalation on 26 March, the UN and Egypt have worked to guide the parties back to the ceasefire concluded indirectly in November. On 30 March, the one-year anniversary of the Great March of Return, Israeli soldiers killed four Palestinians and wounded 300 others near the line separating Israel from Gaza. Since then, calm seems to have returned. Even if the truce holds, however, another forthcoming anniversary looms. On 15 May, Palestinians commemorate al-Nakba, the catastrophe that befall them with the establishment of the State of Israel, which could be a flashpoint of disruption.

So, too, could tensions elsewhere. At Jerusalem’s Holy Esplanade (Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount), Israeli authorities and Palestinian worshippers are struggling over control of a building next to the Gate of Mercy. Shuttered by Israel in 2003, it was forcibly reopened in February by Palestinians who turned it into a prayer hall. Israel seeks to reverse the change, risking a major escalation with Jordan, which manages the area through the Islamic waqf. Along with the release of the Trump administration’s peace plan, which was slated to happen sometime after the Israeli elections, these factors have converged to heighten the sense of volatility throughout the territories, with direct implications for EU programs and EU policy in support of a negotiated two-state outcome.

To help lower tensions, the EU and its member states should:

- Encourage Israel to move toward the second and third phases of the November ceasefire agreement.
- Discourage the Palestinian Authority from imposing sanctions on the Gaza Strip with the intent of undermining Hamas.
- Announce support for both legislative and presidential elections in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as a first step toward reunification of the Palestinian political establishment.
- Publicly call upon Israel and Jordan to reaffirm their commitment to the Status Quo – in place since Ottoman times and accepted by both states – regulating worshippers’ access to the Holy Esplanade. Continue to affirm the waqf’s right to use the building as it sees fit, while also affirming the historical and religious connections of both sides to the site.

Gaza

On 25 March, a rocket fired from the Gaza Strip landed in Mishmeret, north of Tel Aviv, destroying a family house and wounding seven Israelis, including a twelve-year-old girl and two infants. Hamas said it had launched the 25 March rocket in error, but few in Israel believed this claim. Many Israelis interpreted the rocket’s firing as an attempt by Hamas to deflect growing domestic criticism of its rule. Unless there is progress in more expansive efforts to address Gaza’s economic plight, it is likely that other escalations will ensue.

The latest escalation was likely an attempt by Hamas to force Netanyahu to fulfill Israel’s obligations under the November ceasefire. In that agreement, Hamas committed to end rocket fire into Israel and promised to restrain the intensity of the ongoing protests. Israel in turn said it would extend the nautical limit for Gaza fishermen and allow Qatar to pay Gaza government salaries and supply fuel to Gaza’s power plant for a period of six months, to end in April. This was to be followed by secondary and
ternary phases once the risk of war had passed. The latter phases were to include measures to restore Gaza's electricity, increase the number of Palestinians allowed in and out of the strip, expand the entry of merchandise, further extend the range off the coast in which Gazans can fish, and generally ease the blockade.

While Israel has allowed the passage of Qatari fuel and funds, and Hamas has demonstrated its capacity to restrain protests undertaken as part of the Great March of Return, Israel has shown little willingness to take further steps beyond the initial ceasefire agreement. Since November, the talks have stalled without progress toward fulfilling Hamas's central demand – that Israel loosen the economic stranglehold on the strip. Recommitment to the indirect ceasefire agreement that followed the last escalation at the end of March succeeded in calming the situation in Gaza ahead of the Israeli elections. Yet unless there is progress in more expansive efforts to address Gaza's economic plight, it is likely that other escalations will ensue.

**Jerusalem**

In Jerusalem, Israeli authorities and Palestinian worshippers continue to struggle over control of a building at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade (Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount), next to the Gate of Mercy. In February, Palestinians forcibly regained access to the site, which Israel closed in 2003, turning it into a prayer hall. Israel seeks to close the building once more. It is important to rapidly resolve this crisis because minor incidents at the esplanade have previously triggered major escalations, especially at times of relative volatility in Gaza and the West Bank. Moreover, if the incoming Israeli government formulates its strategy while a crisis is festering at the site, it might decide to further erode the historical Status Quo at the site, which is necessary for stability because it is a framework for managing the site that all parties have stated they are committed to upholding.

Israel and Jordan have negotiated an agreement over the building: to close it for repairs and then reopen it for daily use. Israel also committed not to carry out an Israeli court order to forcibly close the site until the 9 April elections. The parties continue to negotiate, hoping to reach a mutually acceptable solution. But the parties' positions remain apart regarding the duration of the closure before repairs commence; Israeli archaeological supervision of waqf-executed works; and the building's ultimate function. Worse, the recently expanded Islamic waqf, which runs the esplanade under Jordanian auspices and became more representative of Palestinian Jerusalemite views following a reshuffle in February, has been effectively excluded from the negotiations. Its exclusion bodes ill for Palestinian Jerusalemite support of any agreement reached.

**Policy Recommendations for the EU and its Member States**

The EU and members of the international community should take immediate steps to alleviate the economic strain on Gaza. European aid to the Gaza Strip must take the form of long-term support, for instance through infrastructure funds, as well as immediate measures that could meet short-term demands. Key for the latter is the need to address the shortage of medical supplies that are allowed into the Gaza Strip. Gaza's sagging health care sector is facing unprecedented pressure as a result of the widespread injuries caused by Israel's response to the return marches.

The EU and member states should try to persuade the Palestinian Authority to drop its policies of sanctioning the Gaza Strip with the intent of undermining Hamas. The EU's economic intervention in the Gaza Strip must be coupled with a political response aimed at long-term resolution to issues of access. Israel and Hamas drew up the blueprint for the required measures in the November ceasefire agreement, but have yet to put them into practice. The EU and its member states should encourage Israel to move toward the second and third phases of the agreement by loosening restrictions on freedom of movement of people in and out of Gaza, encouraging the greater passage of exports from the Gaza Strip to Israel and the West Bank, expanding access to the Mediterranean for Gaza fishermen, and advancing infrastructure for electricity supply to Gaza's power plant. Israel should take these steps assuming that Hamas holds up its end of the bargain: no rocket attacks into Israel, and a reduction in intensity of protests near the fence that marks the boundary between the Gaza Strip and Israel.

Alongside these measures, the EU and member states should try to persuade the Palestinian Authority (PA) to drop its policies of sanctioning the Gaza Strip with the intent of undermining Hamas. These policies have included steps to cut the salaries of civil servants and pensioners (most of those
affected are not affiliated with Hamas, but the salaries of Fatah and other PA employees are critical to keeping the Gaza economy afloat). The EU could, for example, threaten to withdraw funding from various EU-funded initiatives in the West Bank if such measures by the PA are not reversed.

The EU should also publicly announce that it is encouraged by the PA’s call for elections, and signal that it would expect such elections to be administered in the near future in Gaza and the West Bank, while calling on Israel to allow these elections to also take place in East Jerusalem. Hamas has indicated willingness to allow legislative elections in Gaza at the same time as in the West Bank as long as the PA agrees to stage a presidential election in both territories as well. The EU should encourage the PA to announce its willingness to also carry out presidential elections, as well as call on both parties to allow for free campaigning in their respective territories.

It would also be important for the EU to signal its willingness to revisit the principles of the Quartet, first applied in 2006, in a manner that incorporates lessons learned from 2006 and makes room for Hamas’s engagement in the Palestinian political process (these principles do not apply to Hamas as a party but to the PA). Perhaps the most significant contribution that the EU could make toward opening up the possibility of stabilising Gaza and averting a new war would be to signal its willingness to fund any PA government that meets one of the Quartet principles – ‘acceptance of previous agreements and obligations’, recognising that the other two conditions (recognition of Israel and commitment to non-violence) are subsumed within these past agreements – and that a PA government would be deemed to be in compliance with the Quartet principles if it committed to “respect past agreements”. In 2007, a PA unity government that included Hamas pledged to “respect” past agreements, and the Quartet deemed the promise insufficient. It is long past time for the EU and the Quartet to signal that a PA commitment to ‘respect past agreements’ is sufficient to secure EU funding.

In terms of the tense standoff in Jerusalem, Jordan should include the recently expanded Islamic waqf in its negotiations with Israel over the building. According to the Status Quo, the Islamic waqf is to decide on the building’s function. Following overdue repairs, Israel should remove all obstacles to the waqf in designating the building as it sees fit, including as a waqf-operated Islamic educational institute or as a prayer space. Doing so would lower the risk of future violence. The waqf has already rejected Western offers of technical and expert support, fearing that it would lead to the esplanade’s internationalisation, which Israel also opposes. The EU should therefore limit its role to publicly calling upon the parties to respect the Status Quo at the Holy Esplanade and to reaffirming the historical and religious connections of both sides to the site.

**Treat Mexico's Epidemic of Violence under the López Obrador Government**

Rising violent crime rates remain the greatest threat to public security and stability in Mexico. Over the past twelve years, large criminal syndicates have fragmented into smaller groups, sparking a plethora of lethal, region-specific armed conflicts. President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, in office since December, has made the reduction of violence a centrepiece of his governing platform. But homicide rates in 2019 are on track to surpass the record levels of previous years, peaking in states such as Guanajuato and Jalisco. The tide of killings is partly due to the breakdown of cartels into approximately 200 smaller armed groups, which has generated competition among those groups and undercut the ability of crime bosses to enforce discipline. At the same time, the Mexican state, and its security services in particular, continue to suffer from corruption, collusion with illegal actors or even criminal capture of local police forces. In the absence of deep reforms to the country’s security and justice institutions, Mexico is likely to continue suffering enormous violence. President López Obrador still enjoys the political capital and popularity to set a new course, but his administration has yet to lay out clear policies toward critical issues such as scaling back the role of the military in providing security and curbing human rights violations by the security forces.

As the EU and its member states define their cooperation with the new government, they can help address Mexico’s security crisis by:

- **Recommending that Mexico reframe its ‘war on drugs’ as a set of internal armed conflicts, which would allow a shift to regionally tailored security policies, including peacebuilding tools such as young combatant demobilisation in the country’s most embattled regions.**
Encouraging the Mexican federal government to return public security provision to civilian police forces following reinvigorated efforts to reform the security and justice system. These reforms should stress above all the implementation of effective oversight and accountability mechanisms led by independent civilian appointees with the power to impose disciplinary measures on state actors, most urgently police, armed forces, and prosecutorial services.

Backing the creation of elite task forces, comprising thoroughly vetted and trained officers, within the federal police and prosecutorial bodies to give oversight and accountability mechanisms teeth by specialising in investigating corruption, collusion, and violence within security forces. These units should also help protect local reform efforts.

Supporting security reform through technical assistance and sharing best practices with Mexican policymakers, including during the regular political dialogues on security and justice between the EU and Mexico. Specifically, the EU could offer assistance for local mediation and demobilisation efforts, women-led victims’ collectives searching for disappeared persons, the National Search System for People, and promising police reform initiatives at the local level.

The Search for Security and Accountability

Though Mexico’s security crisis has mutated, government policies remain anchored in the narrative of a ‘war on drugs’ against professionalised trafficking cartels that the state expects to win largely through military might. Offensives against specific criminal targets have succeeded on their own terms: more than 150 arrested or killed over the past twelve years and many larger criminal structures fractured as a result. But insecurity remains rampant. The government’s failure to re-establish and strengthen local civilian institutions has allowed smaller criminal groups to continue operating and re-emerge in even more violent ways. In Michoacán, for example, at least a dozen armed groups broke from a larger organisation following a federal civil-military intervention launched in 2013. Similar patterns are evident elsewhere: with neither the state nor any single criminal actor dominant enough to impose order, smaller groups have become locked in conflict over patches of markets, territories, and populations.

The result is an expanding patchwork of region-specific armed conflicts. The toll on civilians is high, with ordinary citizens caught up in the crossfire, families of criminals targeted and internal displacement on the rise. Violence is exacerbated by cycles of personal revenge, for instance in the mountains of Guerrero, where blood feuds, involving killings and forced disappearances, can stretch on for decades. Criminal groups exploit entrenched networks of corruption to collude with state officials, with public institutions becoming participants in criminal conflicts. In some regions, these groups bribe security forces to act against their rivals and overlook their own crimes.

Ending enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings [...] should be a priority.

Reversing Mexico’s growing violence requires that the state undertake reforms at federal and local levels. This would require negotiating gradual civilian scrutiny of the military's conduct and abuses. However, the López Obrador administration’s dependence – at least in the immediate term – on the army and navy to provide public security hinders such efforts. The creation of a National Guard as the cornerstone of López Obrador’s new security policy in March 2019 appears unlikely to help. Indeed, with that force’s core personnel and high command stemming from the military, its design and creation suggest that López Obrador has opted for greater militarisation in the hope of quick results rather than to take on the uphill task of creating effective oversight of the conduct and performance of Mexico’s security forces.

Exactly how the government will work to stop abusive conduct in the security forces and dismantle criminal structures within them is unclear. Despite López Obrador’s promises, the government has produced no concrete proposals to monitor or prevent future human rights abuses perpetrated by the police or army. Ending enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, which have been documented by the UN High Commission on Human Rights and others, should be a priority. Exposing those most responsible for criminal misconduct in the security services requires finding ways of protecting lower-ranking officers forced into criminal activity by their commanders. As the government establishes the National Guard it should ensure adequate training for new officers and enforce internal rules through the establishment of independent civilian oversight with teeth, potentially in the shape of ombudspersons with disciplinary powers, acting in close coordination with prosecutorial task forces dedicated to investigating wrongdoing by the security forces.
Aside from these reforms, the Mexican government must look beyond centralised strategies and the use of force to resolve the country’s internal conflicts. Earlier security policies, such as the military offensive against organised crime initiated in 2006 and the creation of a new Federal Police in 2009, have emphasised grand, top-down solutions. But tackling localised violence requires a regionally tailored approach.

Given fiscal constraints on the Mexican state and flawed federal institutions, targeted support for promising local security and justice reforms and peacebuilding initiatives offers an alternative. Such local initiatives include, for example, recent efforts to reconstruct police forces in municipalities such as Xalapa in Veracruz, where police have worked closely with independent security experts but are unable to confront rising criminal violence on their own. The government should also strengthen initiatives, such as those led by community organisations, to mediate among feuding armed groups and clans to interrupt cycles of revenge killing. These efforts should also endeavour to reach local agreements on how to demobilise young combatants, who are the main victims and perpetrators of lethal violence and form the operational backbone of armed groups. Any move in this direction would have to establish when pledges of non-repetition and redress for victims by former combatants constitute sufficient grounds for offering support to get a job, resume normal civilian life and, where necessary, benefit from reduced sentences and state protection against criminal leaders.

Over 40,000 have disappeared in Mexico according to the most recent official figures.

At the federal level, one important step to protect and nurture such local reforms and initiatives would be the establishment of elite task forces within police and prosecutorial services. Such task forces, by providing focused support and coordinating tightly with each other and with local authorities, could help contain the inevitable violent opposition from criminal leaders who will resist any attempts to restrict their activities. In conjunction with independent civilian oversight within security forces, they could also spearhead efforts to tackle corruption, collusion and illegal violence within the police and the newly established National Guard, and pave the way for an eventual return of public security provision in Mexico into civilian hands.

The recent reactivation of Mexico’s National Search System for People – over 40,000 have disappeared in Mexico according to the most recent official figures – with search commissions to be installed in each federated state, offers another opportunity. If equipped with sufficient funds as well as a robust mandate, these commissions could identify remains in clandestine graves and seek to clarify the circumstances leading to the disappearances. This would help shed light on local conflict patterns, foster victims’ access to truth and justice, help restore communities torn apart by violence and rebuild trust between state and society. Such measures are particularly important given the López Obrador administration’s estrangement from civil society after its February announcement that the state was ending all funding for civil society organisations. In particular, support for women-led victims’ collective searching for disappeared people through the National Search System would mark a clear commitment to collaboration with civic initiatives for an urgent but previously neglected cause. It would also boost proceedings in criminal investigations by incorporating the knowledge acquired by women’s collectives over years of searching for loved ones despite a lack of state support.

**How the EU Can Support Mexico’s Reforms**

In its political dialogue with Mexico, the EU should express support for López Obrador’s turn toward comprehensive security policies, including policies oriented toward peacebuilding, and recommend that his initial efforts be extended in order to tackle the reality of multiple internal armed conflicts. It should recommend concentrating resources on a limited number of pilot projects aiming to test specific regional policies toward insecurity, including municipal police reforms as well as mediation and demobilisation initiatives involving local communities and civil society organisations.

EU support should reinforce both local initiatives and critical federal level reforms. The reactivated National Search System for People merits particular attention and support, given its potential role in establishing the truth as to the violence that has ravaged various regions, restoring trust in the state and offering a model for future collaboration with civil society. Supporting women’s collectives searching for the disappeared, for instance through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), represents a potent practical and symbolic measure aimed at backing the government’s efforts to address past injustices. This would also highlight the essential role of civil society in reducing violence in Mexico at
a time when its relations with the new government are under strain. At the federal level, the EU should provide technical support and political backing for creating the elite task forces within federal police and prosecutorial bodies. At the same time, it should emphasise the importance of civilian oversight of the armed forces, calling for civilian jurisdiction in the case of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings involving the military and greater overall transparency through the creation of civilian ombudsmen offices.

North Korea: Getting Back to the Table

The tensions between Washington and Pyongyang that flared dangerously in 2017 have significantly abated, but for the moment so have hopes for a breakthrough that would end decades of conflict. North Korea and the U.S. pivoted from escalation to dialogue in 2018, resulting in the first leader-level summit between the two states and agreement on a broad set of shared principles. The summit might have paved the way for a diplomatic process to negotiate steps to denuclearise the North (Washington’s ultimate goal) in return for phased sanctions relief and other steps toward ending North Korea’s political and economic isolation (Pyongyang’s chief aim). But no such process has yet emerged, and a failed second summit in Hanoi in February 2019 has left each side waiting for the other to make the next move. While tensions remain manageable, the diplomatic stalemate has costs and risks, and it will be important for the parties to find their way back to the table. A return to escalation on the Korean peninsula would have global security implications, and the EU therefore has a stake in supporting the peace process, as well as a humanitarian interest in easing the plight of the North Korean people.

Recommendations for EU action include:

Supporting the U.N. Security Council’s goal of North Korean denuclearisation by implementing the sanctions regime it has created, while also underscoring to Washington that a maximalist approach to negotiations – in which the U.S. demands full denuclearisation prior to any sanctions relief – is doomed to fail.

Voicing its support for China’s and South Korea’s preferred “measure-for-measure” approach to negotiations – in which concessions by one side are rewarded with concessions from the other.

Making clear the willingness of the EU and member states to lend technical and financial support to implement any agreement that may be reached between the U.S. and North Korea.

Expanding support for humanitarian and development projects in North Korea, where the sanctions regime permits.

Ensuring that human rights concerns about the North Korean government’s treatment of its people continue to be raised in international forums, recognising that neither Washington nor Seoul is likely to do so in their direct negotiations with Pyongyang.

High-level Diplomacy: Progress, Pitfalls and Possibilities

A period of dangerously high tensions between Washington and Pyongyang in 2017 gave way to welcome dialogue in 2018. The first important advance centred on South Korea’s successful hosting of the Winter Olympics in February. The U.S. and North Korea agreed informally to an “Olympic Truce”, with each side freezing activities that the other found most provocative – missile and nuclear testing in the case of the North, and most joint U.S.-South Korean military exercises in the case of the U.S.

The mutual freeze remained in place after the Olympics were over, and the thaw in relations expanded. In June 2018, President Trump and Chairman Kim met at the first leader-level summit between the U.S. and North Korea. It produced no dramatic breakthrough, but generated a joint statement that set out the broad mutual goals of the two sides, and potentially opened the way for more diplomacy to further ease tensions. The year also saw three inter-Korean summits (in April, May, and September), and a series of modest confidence-building steps from North Korea, including the demolition of its only nuclear test site and returning the remains of 55 service personnel lost in the Korean War of 1950-53 to the U.S.

But efforts to move beyond the progress made in 2018 in the first quarter of 2019 were not a success. The collapse of the second U.S.-North Korea summit in Hanoi on 27-28 February this year without any outcome document or other sign of agreement highlighted the disconnect that still exists between Washington and Pyongyang. In spite of prior warnings that its terms would be unacceptable, North Korea proposed a deal that asked Washington to go well past its comfort zone on sanctions relief in return for measured steps on denuclearisation. For its part, the U.S. seemed to row back from the pragmatic stance signalled by the U.S. special representative for North Korea prior to the summit, pushing North Korea
beyond plausible limits on denuclearisation in return for comprehensive sanctions relief only after denuclearisation is complete.

For the time being, the year-old mutual freeze that emerged in early 2018 appears to be keeping tensions at manageable levels. Trump and Kim also seem to have a degree of personal goodwill, and the heated rhetoric of 2017 has not returned. But the diplomatic impasse has costs and risks. The unwritten freeze-for-freeze is vulnerable to misinterpretation or being disregarded if either side decides it would serve its interests to ratchet up pressure on the other to make concessions; either could put the parties back into an escalatory cycle.

Meanwhile, the impressive progress in relations between North and South that had developed over the course of three inter-Korean summits in 2018 is starting to erode. North Korea has shown less willingness to participate in the process of retrieving remains from within the demilitarised zone, and recently withdrew – albeit only temporarily – from an inter-Korean liaison office at Kaesong. In addition, a weakening South Korean economy could diminish President Moon Jae-in’s domestic political standing and ability to play the peacemaker between Pyongyang and Washington. Finally, the longer the impasse persists, the more the people of North Korea will suffer the effects of sanctions.

As for Kim, though he is striving not to show it, economic difficulties at home are growing, increasing the appeal of sanctions relief.

That said, both the U.S. and North Korea still have incentives to make progress in negotiations. On the U.S. side, Trump has counted the stabilisation of the Korean crisis as a major foreign policy triumph. While he is hemmed in to some extent by hawkish advisors and a watchful Congress that is deeply sceptical of his ability to reach a deal that protects U.S. interests, he has made clear that he wants to avoid reverting to heightened tensions and likely still harbours grandiose ambitions of a full-fledged deal. Although he may become leery about risking another Hanoi as 2020 elections draw near, for the present he is seemingly open to a third summit. At a minimum concrete steps that allow him to highlight his claim that he has defused the Korean situation could be attractive.

As for Kim, though he is striving not to show it, economic difficulties at home are growing, increasing the appeal of sanctions relief. A weak harvest in 2018 and the reported closure of several industrial enterprises in the first quarter of 2019 indicate that the country is chafing beneath sanctions put in place in 2016 and 2017 – essentially because China, North Korea’s biggest trading partner, continues in large part to implement them. In December, the UN sanctions regime imposes a deadline for all member states to expel North Korean migrant labourers who remain on their territory, which – if implemented by China and Russia (where the vast majority reside) – will dry up an important remaining source of foreign currency revenue for the North Korean economy. Like Trump, the Kim regime has stated a willingness to participate in a third summit, though Pyongyang also signalled that it could lose patience with efforts at dialogue if the U.S. makes further demands it considers unrealistic and talks show no progress by the end of 2019.

The Way Forward

While each side now appears to be eyeing the other and waiting for it to make the first move back toward the negotiating table, if and when they get there, it will be important to come with realistic goals. As Crisis Group has previously suggested, seeking a modest deal to build confidence and generate momentum would be a good next step.

The contours of such a deal might be as follows: North Korea could offer the fully verified closure of all or part of its Yongbyon nuclear facility – the only known facility in the country that produces plutonium, although not the only facility that produces fissile material. The U.S. could support sanctions relief sufficient to allow the reopening of the Kaesong Industrial Complex, a light manufacturing zone on the inter-Korean border, the resumption of inter-Korean tourism at North Korea’s Mt. Kumgang and in the city of Kaesong, as well as some South Korean investment in North Korean transport infrastructure. To sweeten the deal, the U.S. could agree to a declaration formally ending the Korean War, and the two sides could embark on discussions about opening diplomatic liaison offices in each other’s capitals.

The viability of such a deal rests on the proportionality of mutual concessions. While Yongbyon is an important facility, it does not represent the entirety of North Korea’s fissile material production, and is therefore not overwhelmingly valuable. Similarly, while restarting Kaesong would generate useful revenues
for Pyongyang, and the limited rolling back of some UN sanctions would have some symbolic weight, it would not involve anywhere near the level of sanctions relief that Kim has been seeking.

The approach would also signal acceptance by Washington of an essential fact, which is that a measure-for-measure approach to negotiations with North Korea is the only way to diminish its nuclear capacity. Although eliminating all of North Korea’s weapons of mass destruction is a laudable long-term goal, and consistent with directives from the UN Security Council, it is hard to imagine Pyongyang acquiescing in the foreseeable future to complete renunciation of the nuclear program that it regards as the ultimate guarantor of the regime’s security against a range of existential threats.

The EU and member states could encourage the parties to re-engage in dialogue and to approach the process with realistic goals.

**A Role for the EU**

Although the EU is less centre stage than the Six-Party Talks countries (South Korea, U.S., Japan, North Korea, China, and Russia), it can act pragmatically behind the scenes to generate momentum for U.S.-North Korea dialogue, and to offer support to the people of North Korea, who are whipsawed between international sanctions and the repressive policies of the Kim regime. Helpfully, Pyongyang regards the EU as a relatively benign actor on the Korean peninsula and, although it did not respond positively to some recent actions taken by EU member states that it saw as meddling in Korean affairs (the UK decision to launch BBC World Service programming in Korean in 2017, for example), the perceived overall impact of the EU in peninsula politics remains positive.

First, the EU and member states could encourage the parties to re-engage in dialogue and to approach the process with realistic goals. While continuing to implement sanctions in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions, they can also make clear to the U.S. that maximalist approaches toward diplomacy with Pyongyang – in which the U.S. seeks to achieve full denuclearisation prior to any sanctions relief – cannot succeed. Consistent with this position, they can also voice support for a measure-for-measure approach to negotiations favoured by Seoul and Beijing, and argue to Washington that such an approach is the only way to gain near-term concessions on fissile material production and the corresponding proliferation risk – an issue of global concern, including to the EU.

Second, at a more practical level, the EU and member states could lend technical expertise and capacity, as well as financial assistance in support of whatever deal might emerge. The UK and France – which as nuclear weapons states have extensive technical capabilities – have already discussed the former possibility with Washington and Seoul, respectively.

Finally, the EU and its member states are well-positioned to keep the people of North Korea front and centre in their thinking about the ongoing situation on the North Korean peninsula. Where permitted under the sanctions regime (which includes a broad exemption for humanitarian assistance), they can help counter the growing trend toward food insecurity in the North through humanitarian aid. Another worthwhile investment – but one that in many cases would require a loosening in the sanctions regime – would be in projects that make North Korean communities more resilient to natural disasters and other unexpected shocks (some European projects of this nature closed down following the spike in missile and nuclear weapons testing by Pyongyang in 2017).

Given their traditional leadership in this area, the EU and member states could also work to keep international attention focused on human rights abuses in North Korea – detailed in a report mandated by the UN Human Rights Council in 2014 – which are not issues that Washington or Seoul are likely to raise as they focus on the core topics at stake in the peace process. This can mean working to advance discussion and, when appropriate, putting forward resolutions in UN bodies like the Human Rights Council that could help Kim understand that, ultimately, improving North Korea’s performance on human rights is the price of its full acceptance by European states and others.

**Supporting Young Syrian Refugees in Turkey**

Of the 3.6 million Syrian refugees Turkey is generously hosting, some 65 per cent are aged 24 or younger. Within this population, the 15-24 age group is particularly vulnerable to abuse, as well as to exploitation by criminals and militant groups.

As outlined in Crisis Group’s February 2019 report, young Syrian refugees are at risk for several reasons. They face high rates of poverty and unemployment, many drop out of school, and vast numbers suffer from untreated wartime trauma as well as neglect where they live today. In provinces such as
Şanlıurfa, along Turkey’s border with Syria, criminals, smugglers and Islamist militants seek to enlist Syrian youth in illicit activities. Young Syrian women and girls are at risk of being coerced into exploitative marriages and survival sex. These threats not only imperil young Syrians, but they may also endanger Turkish citizens and exacerbate intra-communal tensions.

In March 2016, the EU and Turkey concluded a deal to curb the flow of refugees into Europe. The €6 billion in support the EU has pledged in this framework, known as the EU-Turkey Refugee Facility, has helped Ankara meet humanitarian needs and build its institutional capacity to foster refugee integration. But integrating Syrians will become more difficult as Turkey’s economic plight worsens. Jobs for Syrian youth, already scarce, could grow scarcer, pushing more young people into illicit activity or enhancing the appeal of clandestine migration to Europe.

Turkey and the EU must continue to cooperate if they are to respond effectively. While the EU has already contracted the €3 billion first tranche of the Refugee Facility, €1.8 billion in the second tranche has yet to be committed. The EU should ensure that the programming supported by these remaining funds and any future EU member state funding helps address the needs of youth aged 15-24 and offers productive employment opportunities for both Syrians and Turkish citizens.

In particular, the EU and its member states, as well as non-EU international donors can support the Turkish government by:

Sustaining funding and technical assistance to Turkey to meet the needs of Syrian refugees, with emphasis on mitigating risks to Syrians aged 15-24 and to women of all ages, especially those who are widowed or for other reasons ‘unaccompanied’.

Continuing to support Turkey’s strained educational system so that the state builds more schools and schools hire more teachers. Integrating more Syrian teachers and counsellors (including women) into the public school system can help Syrian youth stay in school after age twelve, when many drop out. Increasing stipends to families with children in school can also help improve enrolment rates – particularly for girls – beyond primary school.

Aiding the development of Turkish public institutions, so that they are better able to provide effective psychosocial support to refugees:

To help meet the needs of traumatised Syrian youth and women in abusive circumstances, the EU and member states should allocate more funding and technical assistance for local psychosocial support and protection services provided by the Ministry of Education’s Counselling Research Centres and the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Policies’ Social Services Centres.

Support for improved counselling in public schools or temporary education centres can help reach enrolled youth.

Support for NGO-run community centres that offer psychosocial programs – either in the form of counselling or community engagement activities – can help reach refugees who are not in school and who are reluctant to seek help from official bodies for a variety of reasons (including past trauma).

Supporting programs to raise refugees’ awareness of their rights and recourse in the face of various risks. In particular, the EU can help Turkey design programming that alerts Syrian youth to the dangers of criminal predation and educates Syrian women and girls about the precarious legal status of wives and mothers in marriages not sanctioned by the state. Further programming is needed to better reach women who are already facing such exploitation, as they are often socially isolated.

Stimulating job creation through programs that strengthen Turkey’s apprenticeship system, offer training and micro-credit for setting up agricultural businesses, and support small-scale business cooperatives.

Emphasising, through regular counter-terrorism dialogues and in other forums, the need for effective anti-bribery measures to curb illegal crossings by criminals and jihadists who exploit Syrian youth and threaten Turkish citizens – and making available more technical assistance and expertise.

Continuing to appeal to Turkey to allow principled humanitarian operations in neighbouring Turkish-controlled parts of Aleppo, which would allow European donors to expand their humanitarian support to the area and could help accommodate a new displacement should violence escalate in Idlib.

Many Syrian youth suffered greatly before they fled their home country. They lost family members and friends and saw their homes and livelihoods destroyed.
Vulnerabilities of Syrian Refugee Youth

Syrian refugees in Turkey – particularly young people and women and girls of all ages – are made especially vulnerable by their poverty and by the trauma they have faced.

Around 50 per cent of Syrian refugees in Turkey live below the poverty line. It is very difficult for Syrian refugees to find work, and when they do, employers often exploit their economic vulnerability. In an economy in which nearly 35 per cent of Turkish citizens work informally, earning low wages in precarious conditions, Syrians who often lack local networks and language skills face even greater struggles to find employment. Roughly 65 per cent of Syrian households now rely on unregistered jobs, mostly in textile, furniture and shoemaking workshops, on construction sites, and in seasonal agriculture.

As for trauma, the sources are many. Many Syrian youth suffered greatly before they fled their home country. They lost family members and friends and saw their homes and livelihoods destroyed. Together, trauma and poverty push young people out of school, where they could gain skills and be less exposed to the illicit networks that might otherwise seek to exploit them. While primary school enrolment is high, teenagers often drop out to marry, seek work or both. Exploitative marriages, including extralegal unions with already married men, too often seem to poor, devastated families like a way to achieve economic security for their daughters, but leave women and girls exposed to abuse and with truncated legal rights vis-à-vis their husbands.

Trauma and poverty also make young people targets for criminal groups running smuggling, drug and prostitution rackets, as well as for organisations that promote armed struggle and sometimes sectarian hatred. Civilian extensions or affiliates of jihadist groups fighting in Syria (mostly those linked to Hei’at Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, the erstwhile al-Qaeda branch in the north-western Idlib region), may try to recruit or indoctrinate youth under the guise of religious and cultural education. If measures are not put in place, in the long run this could present a danger to the security and cohesion of the communities in which Syrians live.

Adapting Europe’s Response

European support can help Turkey deploy more effective programs to keep Syrian youth in school, address their psychological needs, strengthen protection services, better inform them of their rights, and help them earn higher, more reliable incomes. Such programs can help refugees youth in Turkey grow up safe and learn skills that they can use either in Turkey or, for those who someday return, in Syria. Policies that address youth refugee needs now can also strengthen Turkey’s institutional capacity in the long term.

The EU and its member states must think beyond the €6 billion now promised through the Refugee Facility. The recommendations above can help the EU and its member states take into account the needs of Syrian youth as they continue to program the second tranche of the EU-Turkey Refugee Facility and can also help member states meet these needs through further bilateral support in areas that the Facility does not cover. The EU and member states should also prepare for a possible new influx of refugees if the Syrian regime attacks the Idlib area in Syria’s north west. Currently, a bilateral deal agreed by Turkey and Russia in September 2018 has forestalled attack. Although key provisions of the deal have not been fulfilled, Turkey and Russia’s investment in their burgeoning bilateral relationship discourages Russian support for an attack on Idlib. Should these conditions change, however, open conflict in Idlib remains a possibility, and could push large numbers of refugees toward Turkey’s Syrian border or into Turkish-controlled areas in northern Aleppo.

At the same time, the EU and its member states must think beyond the €6 billion now promised through the Refugee Facility. They need long-term plans to facilitate continued cooperation to help Turkey ensure that Syrian refugee youth and the Turkish citizens among whom they live are secure. The EU’s assistance can be more effective if it were to frame its recommendations to Ankara concerning Syrian refugees’ integration in the broader context of how to shore up Turkey’s long-term stability and security. In discussions of refugee integration with Turkish authorities, the EU and its member states should emphasise the shared interest in tamping down crime, social tensions and other risks to both Syrians and Turkish citizens. Turkish officials are well aware of these challenges. Ankara will be more receptive to EU prescriptions that are framed accordingly.
The International Crisis Group (ICG), CrisisWatch, May 2, 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=1c5582247e-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_05_02_06_33&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-1c5582247e-359871089#overview

Robert Malley, President & CEO. The President’s Take, “As Crisis Group has noted in the past, the reordering of the international system has meant that global powers either show indifference to conflicts or deliberately fuel them to undermine their rivals; that some regional powers both feel threatened by the ensuing vacuum and seek to exploit it to promote their interests; and that local actors simultaneously are manipulated by and manipulate the resulting global and regional players’ proxy wars. The consequence is to further complicate conflict resolution. This past month provided ample proof.

In Sudan, months of peaceful, diverse, nationwide protests achieved what many had thought unachievable: an end to Omar al-Bashir’s three-decades old rule. The transition’s fate largely hinges on internal dynamics: whether military leaders will divert it in a direction more amenable to their interests; whether the various security forces, already jostling for power, will fragment; and whether protesters and the opposition can stay united. But regional and global powers have been playing a part as well, and hardly for the better. Reports have surfaced of Russian efforts to spread disinformation and help the regime remain in power. More importantly, uncertainty in Khartoum is compounded by interference from the Gulf, which itself is compounded by confusion in Washington. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) appear to be tipping the scales in favour of military leaders with whom they (and Egypt) enjoy closer ties, a reflection of both their concern over popular protests toppling established regimes and their desire to keep Qatar and Turkey at bay. As for Washington, the U.S. largely has been missing in action and it is noticeable that this is the first administration since George H. W. Bush not to have named a special envoy to Sudan. The question is whether this is a symptom of deference to Gulf allies, of disinterest and disengagement, or of a disconnect between the State Department (which called for a civilian transition) and the White House (which stayed silent on Sudan, though has tended to evince greater sympathy toward its Gulf partners’ overall preferences). This much is clear: among Sudanese protesters, the perception is growing that the U.S. is lining up behind Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE in backing the military. That’s not only unlikely to endear the U.S. to Sudan’s next generation of politicians, but also risks encouraging military elites to hunker down and avoid the compromises necessary to avert further unrest. Similar factors are at play in Libya, only with deadlier consequences. In early April, forces loyal to Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar launched an assault on the capital, Tripoli. There is good reason to believe he did so wrongly convinced it would be an easy affair, and dangerously emboldened by signals of support from regional and major powers. Of these, the most important seem to have emanated not only from his traditional Emirati and Egyptian allies, but from a more surprising convergence among Saudi Arabia, Russia and the U.S. In this case too, Washington’s thinking remains somewhat opaque: the State Department initially expressed concern over Haftar’s move, only to be undercut by both National Security Advisor John Bolton and, more crucially, President Trump, who voiced support for the Libyan military leader after a meeting with Egypt’s President Sisi. The end result: already over 200 people killed; the prospect of a bloody war of attrition between Haftar on the one hand and the Tripoli-based internationally-recognised government along with local militias on the other; and the threat of an escalating proxy war also involving Qatar and Turkey. All outside actors should stop pouring fuel on the fire, press their respective Libyan allies for a quick ceasefire and support a return to the UN-led process.

As of this writing, Venezuela stands as exhibit C in this list of counterproductive outside interference. Little is known about what transpired on 30 April, when an effort to oust President Nicolás Maduro appears to have quickly collapsed. But this much appears clear: Venezuelans are paying the price of Latin American division and impotence; Russian, Cuban and Chinese support for Maduro; as well as U.S. interference, threats and intimations of possible military intervention. The best way out of the country’s chronic political and humanitarian crisis is for outside actors to encourage pro-Maduro and pro-Guaidó forces to return to talks, with the goal of establishing an inclusive interim power-sharing arrangement with representatives of both chavismo and the opposition, leading to credible elections under reformed electoral authorities and with international monitoring.
Our colleague Michael Kovrig remains in detention in China – held for 144 days without formal charges, the ability to leave his detention centre or access to his lawyer or loved ones. This must end.

Global Overview at the end of April 2019

Outlook for This Month May 2019
Conflict Risk Alerts: MaliCameroonSomaliaSouth SudanBeninVenezuelaYemenAlgeriaLibya
Resolution Opportunities: None

Trends for Last Month, April 2019
Deteriorated Situations: MaliCameroonSomaliaSudanBeninSri LankaVenezuelaYemenEgyptLibya
Improved Situations: None

In April, war broke out in Libya, a failed opposition uprising in Venezuela increased fears of violent escalation, and over 250 people were killed in terror attacks in Sri Lanka. In Sudan, the end of President Bashir’s almost 30-year rule gave way to a tense standoff between military chiefs and protest leaders. Now that Algeria’s long-time ruler has resigned, the country runs the risk of violent confrontations between protesters and the military, while Egyptian President Sisi consolidated his authoritarian rule. Political tensions rose in Mali and Benin amid opposition protests. Fighting escalated in Yemen on multiple front lines, with risks of more clashes around Hodeida and in the south, and conflict could resume in South Sudan if President Kíir unilaterally forms a new government. In Somalia, security forces clashed with protesters and Al-Shabaab could step up attacks in Ramadan starting early May. In Cameroon, Boko Haram intensified attacks in the north, while violence between state forces and Anglophone separatists could spike around National Day on 20 May.

Robert Malley, President & CEO, President’s Take, “Proxies And Manipulators Vex More And More Wars”

In Libya, war broke out when forces loyal to Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar advanced on the capital Tripoli in early April, intent on taking the city from the UN-backed Government of National Accord. As we have warned, the fighting, which has already claimed the deaths of at least 300, could escalate further. Both sides consider the fight an “existential war” that leaves no opportunity for a cessation of hostilities. Regional powers could also add fuel to the fire seeking to protect their own allies and interests. To prevent a protracted proxy war, regional powers should refrain from militarily backing their Libyan allies and instead support calls for a ceasefire and UN-led talks, while the UN should work toward a new negotiating format with political, military and financial tracks.

A failed uprising by Venezuela’s opposition leader and “interim President” Juan Guaidó on 30 April led to clashes between troops and defecting soldiers and protesters, leaving scores injured. Further polarising the country’s dangerous political standoff, these latest developments raise the risk of violent escalation by domestic and even international actors, underlining the need for all stakeholders to support a negotiated settlement between chavistas and the opposition.

The ouster of Sudan’s President Bashir after almost 30 years in power triggered celebrations, but also friction between the military council that stepped in and the protest movement demanding civilian rule. As we have argued, Sudan needs a civilian-led transitional authority that includes the opposition, security forces and civil society. In Algeria, Abdelaziz Bouteflika stepped down, but weekly protests continued, calling for an end to military control of the transition. To mitigate the risk of violent confrontations, the regime should open dialogue with protest leaders and agree on a transition broadly acceptable to all parties. In Egypt, President Sisi entrenched his authoritarian rule—a referendum endorsed his changes to the constitution that could see him stay in power until 2030—and the authorities intensified a crackdown on civil society and opposition voices.

In Sri Lanka, over 250 people were killed in coordinated suicide bomb attacks on churches and hotels on Easter Sunday, which the government blamed on a little-known Islamist militant local group acting with foreign support; Islamic State also claimed responsibility. The attacks represent a departure from previous conflict dynamics, and threaten to open up new tensions between the overwhelmingly peaceable Muslim community and other ethnic and religious groups.

In Yemen, fighting continued to escalate on multiple front lines. With negotiations over military redeployments in Hodeida stalled, rival forces could resume their battle for the strategic port and city, while tensions between nominally allied pro-government forces could spark conflict in the south.
In Somalia’s capital Mogadishu, a police killing sparked clashes between protesters and security forces that left another five civilians dead, as Al-Shabaab attacks continued. We fear the insurgency could escalate in the Muslim holy month of Ramadan that starts on 5 May. South Sudan’s fragile peace agreement could come under severe strain this month, risking collapse. President Kiir has said he will form a transitional government on 12 May as scheduled, while rebel leader Riek Machar – who should be part of the new government according to the agreement – has called for a six-month delay. If Kiir goes ahead and forms a government absent a new deal, the peace plan could derail and fighting resume.

Mali’s government resigned in the wake of mass protests denouncing its failure to stop ethnic violence in the centre. Attacks could intensify there in May as tensions between ethnic Fulani and Dogon communities continue to fester. In Benin, security forces cracked down on opposition protests before and after parliamentary elections on 28 April, prompting fears that unrest could escalate in coming weeks.

In Cameroon, Boko Haram stepped up attacks in the Far North and Anglophone separatists continued to clash with security forces in the west. Violence could escalate there around 20 May, Cameroon’s National Day. To get to talks, a first step in ending the bloodshed, Cameroonian and international actors should pressure those who stand in the way of dialogue and reward the more flexible.

Latest Updates
Africa
Burkina Faso
Deadly incidents continued almost daily in several areas, especially in north and east, attributed to jihadist activity, banditry or intercommunal violence, and President Kaboré began talks with opposition ahead of 2020 elections. Notably in Sahel region in north, killing of ethnic Fulce religious leader in Arbinda 31 March by suspected ethnic Fulani jihadist militants triggered intercommunal violence that according to govt left over 60 dead. Also in north, suspected jihadist attack on Djika village 19 April left at least seven people dead; suspected jihadists shot dead four people in Liki 23 April; suspected jihadists attacked church in Silgadj 28 April killing priest and five worshippers; some twenty unidentified gunmen attacked town hall and burned police station in Gorgadji 29 April. In east, suspected jihadists attacked school in Maytagou 26 April killing six. Burkina Faso and Mali 11 April said joint operation Kapidgou in border area killed 24 militants. Kaboré initiated political dialogue to prepare for 2020 general elections and facilitate constitutional referendum; Kaboré 4 April met Zéphirin Diabré, head of opposition party Union for Progress and Change (UPC). Kaboré 12 April met Ivorian Minister of Defence Hamed Bakayoko to discuss security issues in sub-region. As part of Accra Initiative aimed at fostering regional cooperation against common security threats, Burkina Faso took part in meeting in Togolese capital Lomé 18 April to plan deployment of joint forces along Burkina Faso’s borders; representatives from Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Niger and Togo also attended. Trial of those responsible for Sept 2015 failed coup attempt opened 9 April, next session postponed to 30 April.

Mali
Massacre of ethnic Fulani late March spurred pressure on govt, including mass protests, forcing PM Maïga and cabinet to resign; ethnic violence continued in centre and could escalate in May, as violence and banditry continued in north. Heeding calls of political and religious leaders, tens of thousands protested in capital Bamako and other cities 5 April to denounce govt’s failure to stop violence in centre and demand PM Maïga’s resignation. President Keïta 16 April said govt would increase troops, UN peacekeepers and French Barkhane forces in centre. PM Maïga and cabinet resigned 19 April, hours before parliament was set to vote on no-confidence motion. Keïta 22 April appointed former Minister of Economy and Finance Boubou Cissé as new PM. In centre, massacre of Fulani at Ogossagou late March exacerbated tensions between Fulani and Dogon communities and fuelled support to their respective militias. Dogon self-defence group Dan Na Ambassagou announced withdrawal from Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reinsertion program 8 April citing insecurity. Residents in Koro 13 April prevented arrest of local Dan Na Ambassagou commander, French Barkhane vehicle detonated mine in Fouléré, Mopti region 2 April, one doctor killed. Bombings in centre 1-22 April killed six civilians, five soldiers and one UN peacekeeper. Unidentified gunmen 11 April attacked Tifoli in Mopti region killing one. Al-Qaeda linked militants 21 April killed at least eleven soldiers in Guiré, claiming attack was revenge for Ogossagou massacre. In Mopti region, unidentified gunmen 25 April killed at least fifteen in Boudé; 27 April attacked military vehicle in Acharane, killing one soldier. In north, unidentified assailants 3 April fired at UN camp in Kidal, injuring two peacekeepers. Two
Unidentified gunmen night of 5-6 April killed one civilian in Gao region. Unidentified assailants killed local commander of pro-govt armed group Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA) in Talataye, Gao region 7 April. Unidentified gunmen 11 April killed one MSA officer and at least one other in Ménaka region. Army vehicle detonated mine in Ménaka region 18 April, two soldiers killed. Pro-govt armed group Self-Defence Group of Imrad Tuareg and Allies (GATIA) 24 April accused army of arresting and executing three Tuaregs in Gao region. Expert committee on constitutional reform 1 April submitted new draft constitution, which includes creation of senate and permanent electoral commission and substitution of regional council with regional assembly.

**Niger**

Boko Haram (BH) continued attacks in south east near border with Nigeria and suspected jihadists kept up attacks in west near border with Mali. In Diffa region in south east, BH militants 9 April attacked gendarmerie camp, killing two. Unidentified gunmen 13 April killed one in Biri Boulou, Diffa region. After governor of Diffa region imposed stricter curfew, civil society organisations 15 April launched “ville morte” protest against restrictive security measures, shutting down economic activity in Diffa town; governor 19 April reverted curfew to previous hours. BH 26 April attacked Doctors without Borders office in Mainé Sorou, Diffa region. In west, bombing killed at least five soldiers in Tahoua region bordering Mali 20 April. Suspected jihadists night of 26-27 April killed Tuareg chief in Inatés, near border with Mali. Thousands of school students protested in capital Niamey 9 April against poor education conditions; protests turned into riots, with students burning tyres and vandalising and looting public and private goods. Security forces used teargas to disperse protesters and arrested 92; all released ten days later.

**Burundi**

Authorities and ruling party continued to intimidate opposition using violence and arrests, as insecurity persisted in border areas. Notably, police and intelligence officers 4 April arrested four members of opposition party National Congress for Freedom (CNL) in Kizuka area, Rumonge province in south west; police 5 April rearrested CNL member in Gitega province in centre; authorities 15 April assaulted and arrested three CNL leaders in Mutumba, Karuzi province in centre; ruling party youth wing Imbonerakure 16 April assaulted CNL leader in Mutaho commune, Gitega province. Insecurity persisted in Burundi-Rwanda and Burundi-DRC border areas. After heavy gunfire reportedly heard on Rwandan side of border 3 April, armed men seen 8 April near Ruhororo military position, Mabayi commune, Cibitoke province in north west. Unidentified armed group 6 April attacked police station in Gihanga commune, Bubanza province in west near DRC border, reportedly injuring six officers. Congolese army 11 April said it had killed 36 members of Burundian rebel groups National Liberation Forces (FNL) and Burundian Republican Forces (FOREBU) during operation 6-8 April in Uvira territory, South Kivu province in DRC. France 11 April froze for six months assets of four officials already sanctioned by EU, accusing them of attacks on democracy or responsibility for violence in 2015. International partners in joint statement 5 April expressed concern at govt’s late March decision to withdraw BBC’s licence to operate in country and maintain suspension of Voice of America’s licence.

**Cameroon**

Boko Haram (BH) intensified attacks in Far North, Anglophone separatists continued to clash with security forces in west and violence could escalate around 20 May National Day, commemorating 1972 vote to transform federal state into unitary one. In Far North, BH attacks left ten soldiers and at least 24 civilians dead. BH fighters 6 April killed five soldiers near Fotokol, Logone and Chari department; four soldiers killed 12 April when they detonated bombs laid by BH on Gouzda-Vreket-Vouzi road, Mayo Tsanaga department, and same day one killed in same way on Kerawa road, Mayo Sava department. BH killed eleven civilians in Tchakamari, Mayo Sava 19 April; killed at least seven civilians in Blangoua, Longone and Chari department 22 April; one vigilante member in Malloumri, Mayo Sava 26 April; one civilian in Bourouvare, Mayo Sava 27 April; four civilians in Kofia, Logone and Chari 28 April. Security forces killed two BH in Sanda-Wandjiri 14 April. Conflict in Anglophone regions continued. Clashes between separatists and soldiers in Bali, Northwest region 15 April left three separatists and four soldiers dead. Appeals court of Centre region in capital Yaoundé 9 April rejected detained opposition leader Maurice Kamto’s demand for temporary release; police same day arrested seventeen members of Kamto’s party Cameroon Renaissance Movement who protested outside court building. European Parliament 18 April passed resolution calling on govt to immediately release Kamto and members of his party, start inclusive dialogue.
with Anglophone leaders and reform electoral system; it called on EU Commission to assess EU support to security forces and, in absence of progress, put Anglophone crisis on UN Security Council agenda. Govt rejected resolution as “biased, unfounded”.

**IMPACT NOTE: A Household Name in Cameroon**

**Central African Republic**

Insecurity persisted in provinces as international actors increased pressure on govt to implement Feb peace agreement. In west, UN mission (MINUSCA) 5 April conducted operation in Zoukombo, Mambere Kadei prefecture against members of Abdoulaye Miskine’s rebel group Democratic Front of the Central African People (FDPC), who took control of town in early March; MINUSCA dislodged rebels, including from road leading to Cameroon. In south east, clashes between members of rebel group Union for Peace in Central African Republic (UPC) and self-defence groups at Zangba, Basse-Kotto prefecture left tens dead 17-23 April, some report over 100. Heads of regional bloc Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and UN Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) 2-5 April visited capital Bangui to support Feb deal’s implementation. African Union (AU) Commissioner for Peace and Security Tchekniort and UN Under-Sec-Gen for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix visited country 14-18 April; they and PM N’giri travelled to Centre and East provinces to present future members of special mixed security units to comprise soldiers and former rebels; Ali Darassa, leader of UPC rebel group and appointed military adviser late March, also attended. Joint AU-UN-EU mission visited Bangui 17 April for second meeting of International Support Group for CAR aimed at reinforcing international support for implementation of Feb agreement. UN Security Council 9 April fixed conditions for partial lifting of UN arms embargo, imposed in 2013: in July UN will assess authorities efforts to improve security sector, advance disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, and set up protocol for management of weapons and Security Council will re-examine arms embargo by 30 Sept.

**Chad**

Boko Haram (BH) kept up attacks on security forces in west as authorities continued to repress opposition and civil society nationwide. In Lake Chad province in west, BH militants 15 April attacked army position at Bohama killing at least twelve soldiers, unknown number of militants also killed; unidentified assailants 16 April attacked gendarmarie position at Dabansali killing one gendarme; BH 23 April attacked army at Tettewa, fighting left four soldiers and six militants dead. Supreme Court 12 April ruled that Romadoungnar Félix Nialbé should replace Saleh Kebzabo as parliamentary opposition leader on grounds that, following defection of one MP from Kebzabo’s party, Romadoungnar’s party had more MPs than Kebzabo’s. Governor of Guera province banned congress of Kebzabo’s party planned for 12 April citing security concerns. Govt 23 April rejected request of youth-led movement Les Transformateurs to become political party. Govt 22 April banned protest against three-month shortage of butane gas that civil society collective had scheduled for 25 April. Authorities 23 April arrested collective leader Dingamnayal Versinis after he continued to call for protest, but released him next day when he postponed it. Authorities 25 April arrested thirteen protesters for defying protest ban; released twelve 28 April after public prosecutor dismissed cases against them, but one still detained, reportedly for having contacts with rebel group. President Déby 23 April met in Bangui to support Feb peace deal.他们 and PM N’giri attended ceremony 15 April in Bambari in centre to present future members of special mixed security units to comprise soldiers and former rebels; Ali Darassa, leader of UPC rebel group and appointed military adviser late March, also attended. Joint AU-UN-EU mission visited Bangui 17 April for second meeting of International Support Group for CAR aimed at reinforcing international support for implementation of Feb agreement. UN Security Council 9 April fixed conditions for partial lifting of UN arms embargo, imposed in 2013; in July UN will assess authorities efforts to improve security sector, advance disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, and set up protocol for management of weapons and Security Council will re-examine arms embargo by 30 Sept.

**Democratic Republic of Congo**

Govt formation remained stalled as coalitions led by President Tshisekedi and former President Kabila failed to agree on PM and cabinet appointments; insecurity continued in centre and east. Officials from Tshisekedi’s Heading for Change (CACH) alliance and Kabila’s Common Front for Congo (FCC) met in Kisantu, Kongo Central province 6-7 April to negotiate PM and cabinet, but failed to reach agreement; Tshisekedi refused to appoint FCC’s proposed PM Albert Mulimbi, chairman of state-owned mining company Gecamines. In 31 March legislative elections in Beni, Butembo and Yumbi (postponed from Dec due to Ebola and violence), Lamuka opposition platform won ten of fourteen parliamentary seats and Union for the Congolese Nation (UNC) of Tshisekedi’s Chief of Staff Vital Kamerhe and FCC won one seat each. In governorship elections, FCC won in sixteen of 22 provinces 10 April; governor elections postponed in North Kivu, Mai-Ndombe, South Ubangi and Sankuru. In document made public 30 April, prosecutors dropped investigation into allegations opposition leader in exile Moïse Katumbi hired mercenaries, opening
way for his return. Tshisekedi made first domestic tour as president 12-16 April to Lubumbashi in south east, and Goma and Beni in east. In U.S. 3-5 April, Tshisekedi met International Monetary Fund head Christine Lagarde who promised resumption of cooperation, suspended since 2012, and Belgian Deputy PM Reynders who pledged to revive ties. In east and centre, over 2,600 Mai-Mai militiamen surrendered 25 March-9 April. In South Kivu in east, army 2 April arrested leader of Raia Mutomboki armed group; 29 more Raia Mutomboki units surrendered 8 April. In North Kivu in east, clashes between three rival armed groups – Nduma Defence of the Congo/Rénové de Guidon, Alliance of Patriots for a Free and Sovereign Congo (APCLS) and Mai-Mai Nyatura – caused escalation in killings, rapes and robberies. Army 11 April said it had killed 36 members of Burundian rebel groups, National Liberation Forces (FNL) and Burundian Republican Forces (FOREBU), 6-8 April in Uvira territory, South Kivu. In Ituri province in north east, unidentified attackers killed eight people in Kalo 5-7 April.

Republic of Congo
Govt late April lifted suspension of party led by Frédéric Bintsamou, known as Pasteur Ntumi, imposed in April 2016 when rebels led by Ntumi resumed attacks in Pool region; peace agreement signed in Dec 2017.

Rwanda
Relations between Rwanda and Uganda remained tense as Ugandan security forces continued crackdown on Rwandans. In western Uganda, following 2 April kidnapping of U.S. citizen and Ugandan tour guide in Queen Elizabeth National Park, Ugandan authorities 4 April arrested over 40 Rwandans near park for being in country without necessary papers. After Rwanda late Feb restricted travel across two of three principal border crossings with Uganda (Gatuna and Cyanika), Rwanda relaxed restrictions at Gatuna, allowing Rwandans to enter Uganda during daytime, returning before end of day.

Eritrea
Govt closed two border crossings with neighbouring Ethiopia without giving reasons: Omhajer-Humera crossing 18 April and Bure-Assab crossing 22 April.

Ethiopia
APRIL 2019
Inter-ethnic fighting erupted in Amhara region in north leaving some 25 people dead and govt reshuffled key positions. Ethnic Oromo and Amhara militias reportedly clashed in Oromo-administered zone and North Shewa Zone in Amhara region particularly around Kemissie and Ataye towns 5-7 April leaving around 25 dead before military put stop to fighting. Former President of Amhara region Gedu Andargachew was appointed FM 18 April. Same day president of Oromia region Lemma Megersa was appointed defence minister. Finance Minister Ahmed Shide was confirmed as chair of Somali People’s Democratic Party 2 April. Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), one of four parties in ruling coalition Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), 13 April said it was opposed to plans to convert EPRDF into one party, while EPRDF Council meeting 15-17 April failed to address coalition’s key challenges. Attorney General Berhanu Tsegaye 12 April announced arrest of 59 people for corruption including agency heads and mid-ranking officials. Berhanu same day said National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) had foiled planned attacks in capital by suspected Al-Shabaab militants. PM Abiy 15 April received members of Sudan’s Transitional Military Council and praised it for respecting popular will. Eritrea 18-22 April closed two border crossings with Ethiopia. Former rebel group Gambela People’s Liberation Movement 21 April returned from Eritrea.

Kenya
Suspected Al-Shabaab militants 12 April abducted two Cuban doctors in Manda town in north east, shooting dead one of two police officers escorting them, and took them into Gede region in Somalia; security forces launched operation to rescue them. After Kenya mid-Feb recalled its envoy to Somalia and expelled Somali ambassador over maritime border dispute, officials from both countries in Nairobi 3 April agreed to allow ambassadors to return to station.

COMMENTARY: The Hidden Cost of Al-Shabaab’s Campaign in North-eastern Kenya

Somalia
Clashes between security forces and protesters in capital Mogadishu left five civilians dead, as Al-Shabaab kept up attacks in Mogadishu and rural areas and could escalate insurgency in month of Ramadan starting 5 May. In Mogadishu, after police shot dead young rickshaw driver at checkpoint in Howl-Wadag 13
April, residents same day protested against govt; protests led to clashes between protesters and security forces, that left five civilians dead. President Farmajo accused opposition of orchestrating protests. In Mogadishu, Al-Shabaab car bombing near police academy 4 April killed at least one person; car bombing near police station and hotel 17 April killed four; unclaimed car bombing 22 April injured at least two civilians. In Lower Shabelle region in south-centre, following heavy fighting between army and Al-Shabaab in Sabid 1 April, govt forces seized truck loaded with explosives. In Bosaso town, Bari region, Puntland, at least six soldiers injured in roadside bombing 11 April; also in Bosaso unclaimed land mine targeting governor of Bari region 24 April injured at least three security guards. In Lower Juba, Hiraan, Lower Shabelle and Middle Shabelle regions, suspected Al-Shabaab attacks 17-23 April killed a dozen Kenyan soldiers in African Union mission (AMISOM), seven Somali soldiers and one local official. Senior Al-Shabaab official Aden Abdi Mohamed “Aden Obe” 23 April surrendered near Bardhere in Gedo region in south. U.S. airstrikes continued, killing five Al-Shabaab militants four Islamic State (ISIS)-Somalia militants including deputy leader of ISIS-Somalia 9-26 April. Following late March allegations by NGO Amnesty International that U.S. airstrikes had caused civilian deaths, U.S. conducted internal review and 5 April for first time admitted that airstikes in 2018 caused two civilian deaths. After Kenya mid-Feb recalled its envoy to Somalia and expelled Somali ambassador over maritime border dispute, officials from both countries in Nairobi 3 April agreed to allow ambassadors to return to station.

South Sudan
Sept 2018 peace agreement held, but could collapse triggering resumption of fighting if President Kiir forms transitional govt at scheduled end of pre-transitional period 12 May against wishes of main rebel leader Riek Machar. Machar 12 April called for six-month extension of pre-transitional period. Kiir and Machar alongside other political and church leaders from South Sudan attended “spiritual retreat” at Vatican in Rome 11-12 April; Pope Francis entreated leaders to keep disagreements behind closed doors. Following 11 April ouster of Sudanese President Bashir, guarantor of South Sudanese peace process, South Sudanese delegation 17 April travelled to Khartoum and stressed importance of continued free flow of oil from South Sudan into Sudan for export. Kiir 23 April travelled to United Arab Emirates to discuss improving bilateral relations.

Sudan
Military’s ouster of then President Bashir 11 April after almost 30 years in power led to tense stalemate between military council and protest movement leaders over composition and leadership of joint civilian-military body to oversee transition. Thousands marched in capital Khartoum 6 April – anniversary of 1985 popular uprising – and began sit-in outside military headquarters, resisting security forces’ attempts to break up crowds. Army adopted policy of non-intervention and junior and mid-ranking military defied orders to disperse protesters; some soldiers reportedly clashed with members of National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS). Police 9 April also adopted non-intervention policy. First VP and Defence Minister Ahmed Awad Ibn Auf 11 April announced ouster and arrest of Bashir, creation of Transitional Military Council (TMC) to rule for up to two years before elections, suspension of constitution, three-month state of emergency and curfew. Protesters rejected curfew and Ibn Auf as ruler, and demanded immediate transition to civilian rule. Next day Ibn Auf resigned and was replaced by Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah Burhan. Burhan 13 April announced overhaul of military leadership, notably head of Rapid Support Forces paramilitary group Mohamed Hamdan “Hemedti” appointed TMC deputy chair. Salah Gosh resigned as NISS head 13 April. Bashir reportedly transferred to prison 17 April and next day two of Bashir’s brothers arrested. African Union 15 April gave TMC fifteen days to hand over power to civilians to avoid Sudan’s suspension; summit of several African leaders chaired by Egyptian President Sisi in Cairo 23 April gave military leaders three months, Protest leaders led by Sudanese Professionals Association late April engaged TMC in talks on formation of joint transitional council, but said protests would continue until TMC accepted to form civilian-led transitional body.

STATEMENT: Charting a Way Forward in Sudan’s Unfinished Transition

Uganda
Authorities re-arrested opposition leader Robert Kyagulanyi and relations between Uganda and Rwanda remained tense. Police 22 April placed under house arrest singer-turned-opposition MP Kyagulanyi, known as Bobi Wine, after banning his concert in capital Kampala. Court 29 April charged Kyagulanyi for his involvement in illegal protest in 2018 and remanded him in prison. Protests in several areas of Kampala
against his arrest 30 April led to clashes between police and protesters. Highest court 18 April endorsed constitutional changes removing age limit of 75 years for presidential candidates, enabling President Museveni to contest 2021 elections. In west, following 2 April kidnapping of U.S. citizen and Ugandan tour guide in Queen Elizabeth National Park on border with DR Congo, Ugandan authorities arrested eight people for involvement in kidnapping and 4 April arrested over 40 Rwandans near park for being in country without necessary immigration papers; unidentified kidnappers 7 April released American and Ugandan after safari company paid ransom. After Rwanda late Feb restricted travel across two of three principal border crossings with Uganda (Katuna and Cyanika), Rwanda relaxed restrictions at Gatuna, allowing Rwandans to enter Uganda during daytime, returning before end of day.

Angola
Court 24 April ordered release of 40 supporters of Cabinda Independence Movement (MIC), which seeks independence for Cabinda exclave in west, arrested in Feb; eleven supporters remained detained.

Comoros Islands
Opposition continued to reject President Assoumani’s win in March presidential elections and, alongside EU and African Union (AU), called for inclusive dialogue, but govt pursued repression of opposition and media. AU, regional bodies, EU and other international actors reported irregularities in polls, and opposition challenged results at Supreme Court, but latter confirmed results 2 April. Opposition body challenging Assoumani’s rule, National Transitional Council (NTC), welcomed EU and AU backing for inclusive dialogue, calling on international bodies to impose sanctions and nullify results. Govt continued repression; court 6 April said NTC chairperson Mohamed Soilihi, arrested in March, and eight others would be prosecuted for seeking to “destabilise state”. After govt released Soilihi 8 April, he withdrew accusations of election rigging and distanced himself from NTC. In protest at govt’s clampdown on media, private media outlets 2 April declared two-week boycott of govt press conferences and other events.

Lesotho
PM Thabane 6 April suspended parliament in apparent attempt to avoid vote of no confidence

Madagascar
President Rajoelina 21 April scheduled referendum on whether to change constitution, disband senate and give more powers to regions for 27 May, same day as legislative election, but in face of opposition from judiciary and opposition parties he 26 April postponed referendum without setting new date.

Mozambique
Security forces kept up operations against suspected Islamist militancy in Cabo Delgado province in far north. President Nyusi 12 April visited Mocimboa da Praia and Palma districts, Cabo Delgado province, promising to reinforce patrols and saying security forces had captured several militant bases, including one in Nangade district early April, killing seven militants. Court 23 April released on bail two journalists detained in Jan while reporting on insurgency. Attorney general 24 April said govt would intensify cooperation with northern neighbour Tanzania to halt “cross-border” attacks. Court 25 April sentenced 37 people to prison for involvement in attacks. Court in South Africa 8 April ruled that former Mozambican Finance Minister Manuel Chang could be extradited from South Africa to U.S. where he is wanted for alleged involvement in govt’s undisclosed $2bn loan that U.S. says was fraudulent.

South Africa
Ahead of 8 May general elections, residents protested against lack of services early April in townships around Johannesburg and Tshwane, as well in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth; in several places protesters blocked roads and clashed with police, who used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse them.

Zimbabwe

Amid persistent economic crisis, govt continued efforts to implement political and economic reforms. Govt-led national dialogue that started in Feb continued, but main opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and five smaller parties still refused to take part. Police 4 April said 375 protesters had been convicted on charges relating to Jan protests which security forces violently suppressed. Govt mid-April published draft Maintenance of Peace and Order Bill to replace much criticised Public Order and Security Act (POSA); NGOs highlighted that new draft bill retained some controversial provisions and parliament 24 April opened public consultations on draft. Amid deteriorating economic situation, govt and International Monetary Fund (IMF) 10 April agreed on reforms designed to facilitate
Zimbabwe’s reengagement with international community. UN human rights experts 4 April said economic reforms were hurting poorest in country most. Govt 8 April said it would begin to pay compensation to thousands of farmers who lost land under former President Mugabe. Tensions continued within opposition ahead of MDC congress in May; violent incidents reported at local MDC party offices since late March. MDC Sec Gen Douglas Mwonzora and VP Elias Mudzuri announced their intention to challenge incumbent President Nelson Chamisa, but in all provinces party nominated Chamisa as candidate for party leader.

Benin
Security forces cracked down on opposition protests before and after 28 April parliamentary elections which voters largely boycotted after authorities banned opposition parties from taking part; unrest could escalate in May. Electoral commission early March banned five opposition parties from participating in poll, with result that all candidates came from two parties, both allied to President Talon. NGOs documented violent repression of opposition protests 1 and 4 April. Former presidents Nicéphore Soglo and Thomas Boni Yayi 19 April called for election boycott and led protests against ban, prompting violent crackdown. Following internet blackout on election day 28 April, initial results 29 April showed two Talon-allied parties, Progressive Union and Republican Bloc, winning 47 and 36 seats respectively; voter turnout 29%. Opposition supporters protested results in economic capital Cotonou 1 May, setting up barricades; authorities dispersed crowds with tear gas and soldiers reportedly encircled home of Boni Yayi.

Côte d’Ivoire
Political leaders continued efforts to strengthen their hands ahead of 2020 presidential elections. President Ouattara 3 April appointed 33 new senators, including some politicians who had defected from opposition party Democratic Party of Côte d’Ivoire (PDCI) of former President Bédié, notably former PDCI MP Allomo Paulin Kouassi and former president of Gbeké council Abonouan Jean Kouassi. PDCI disciplinary council 4 April expelled from party VP Duncan, Presidency Sec Gen Patrick Achi and four other officials for creating pro-Ouattara branch, PDCI-Renaissance, in Dec. Former President Gbagbo – in Belgium on conditional release from International Criminal Court (ICC) – made efforts to regain control of party he founded, Popular Ivorian Front (FPI), from legally-recognised president Pascal Affi N’Guessan; latter late March refused to step down, but three FPI executives resigned to side with President Ouattara in support of Abin. International Criminal Court 11 April said it would release Gbagbo if he was accepted by country that would cooperate in enforcing any future court decisions, thus including sending Gbagbo back to The Hague for retrial. Defence Minister Bakayoko 12 April met Burkina Faso President Kaboré in Ouagadougou to discuss regional security; spokesman of former parliament speaker and now opposition leader Guillaume Soro 14 April said meeting part of plan by Ouattara to deliver Soro to authorities of Burkina Faso, where Soro has been mentioned in trial of those held responsible for 2015 failed coup.

Guinea
More intense confrontation loomed between camp of President Condé and opposition as 81-year-old leader looked intent on changing constitution so that he can run for third term in 2020 elections. Leading opposition and civil society figures 3 April launched coalition National Front for the Defence of the Constitution (FNDC) to oppose constitutional reform; figures included Cellou Dalein Diallo leader of main opposition party Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UDFG). Diallo 4 April asked security forces not to follow Condé blindly. Three people who were arrested late March in Coyah for unveiling banner saying “No to a third term” were released 5 April. PM Fofana 6 April said “God gave health to our leader... to push Guinea to happiness”.

Guinea-Bissau
Following 10 March legislative elections, ruling party and opposition faced off over appointment of two vice presidents of parliament. Opposition parties Movement for a Democratic Alternative G-15 (MADEM G-15) and Party for Social Renewal (PRS) 24 April announced court action against ruling African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) due to its attempts to block their nominees for first and second vice presidents. Mission from regional bloc Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) arrived in capital Bissau 30 April to help break impasse.

Nigeria
Boko Haram (BH) continued attacks in north east, security forces ramped up operations against bandits in north west and herder-farmer violence flared in some north central and southern states. In north east, two BH factions kept up insurgency in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states despite operations by
military and troops from neighbouring countries in Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). Notably, Islamic State West Africa Province 1 April claimed it had killed five soldiers and posted video of killing online; military said three of five killed in video were vigilantes. In Adamawa state, BH attacked village near Madagai 29 April, killing 26 people. In Yobe state, army 9 April repelled BH attack on Damaturu killing some twenty militants. Shekau faction continued suicide attacks in Borno state: two suicide bombers 6 April killed nine people in Jere near state capital Maiduguri; two suicide bombers 11 April killed themselves and two others in Monguno. Army early April reported MNJTF had killed sixteen BH in Borno state, including “high-ranking commander” Malloum Moussa. Army 13 April said joint Nigeria-Cameroon operation killed 27 insurgents in Borno state. In north west, security forces stepped up operations to counter banditry and other criminal violence; airstrikes and ground operations killed estimated 120 suspected bandits mainly in Zamfara state, but also some in Katsina and Kaduna states. Bandit attacks continued, particularly in Zamfara and Katsina states, killing over 50 people. Clashes between bandits and vigilantes 7 and 9 April in Katsina state left 44 people dead. Violence between herders and farming communities continued in north central zone – Nasarawa, Kaduna and Kogi states – leaving some 45 people dead; incidents also reported in Anambra and Delta states in south, leaving eleven people dead. Significant communal violence in Rivers, Taraba, Benue and Ebonyi states left at least 72 people dead, as kidnapping for ransom continued in several states. Buhari 23 April began 11-day “private visit” to UK, where he has spent several months since 2015 for medical treatment. Police 30 April reported over 1,000 people killed in crime-related violence and 685 kidnapped countrywide Jan-April 2019.

Togo
Opposition launched new protests calling for constitutional reforms to limit number of presidential terms. Clashes between security forces and protesters in Bafilo, Kara region in north, where govt had denied opposition authorisation to protest, left one protester dead 13 April. As part of Accra Initiative, aimed at fostering regional cooperation against common security threats, representatives of Burkina Faso, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Niger and Togo met in capital Lomé 18 April to plan deployment of joint forces along border of Burkina Faso to stem spread of suspected jihadist insurgency. Using intelligence from Burkina Faso authorities, Togolese security forces early April arrested over twenty suspected jihadists from Burkina Faso in northern Togo and transferred them to Burkina Faso.

Asia
China/Japan
Ahead of proposed visit of Chinese President Xi to Japan in June, Japan and China continued efforts to improve relations; at bilateral talks in Beijing 14-15 April, Chinese FM Wang urged his counterpart not to restrict Chinese technology companies such as Huawei, adding countries should turn “competition into coordination". Chinese defence ministry 25 April said govt was willing to enhance defence exchanges with Japan. Military exercises and operations continued; Japan Air Force 1 April scrambled jets to intercept Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) electronic warfare and surveillance plane and two bombers passing through Miyako strait in East China Sea, second scrambling of jets against Chinese aircraft in 48 hours. Japanese defence ministry 9 April announced F-35A stealth jet disappeared during training drill over Pacific, later confirming plane had crashed; amid concerns China and Russia were searching for wreckage to test classified technology of F-35A jets, Japan and U.S. sent out coastguard vessels and military aircrafts to search for plane.

Korean Peninsula
Diplomatic tensions persisted as North Korea responded angrily to U.S.-South Korean military exercises, while Chairman Kim Jong-un secured Russian diplomatic support during late-April summit with President Putin. U.S. and South Korea 22 April began combined military air exercise, prompting strong criticism from Pyongyang, which accused them of violating self-imposed 2018 freeze on joint military exercises, raising concerns that Pyongyang may respond militarily in coming weeks. Diplomatic manoeuvring continued; Kim 24-26 April travelled to Vladivostok, Russia to meet with President Putin, first joint summit since Putin and former leader Kim Jong-il met 2011. Kim secured unambiguous Russian support, with visit widely perceived as message to U.S. that govt can look to other sources of international back-up. Kim also ended visit early, implying possible dissatisfaction at outcome. Earlier, Pyongyang responded angrily after U.S. Sec State Mike Pompeo agreed with characterisation of Kim Jong-un as a “tyrant” during Senate hearing; 18 April said it would not negotiate with U.S. if Pompeo was present and
accused him of hypocrisy and incompetence for alleged failures at Hanoi summit; Pyongyang also commented on “fortunate… personal relationship” between Kim and President Trump. North Korean Vice FM Choe Son-hui 30 April said U.S. will face “undesired consequences” if it fails to revise its position by end 2019. South Korean lawmaker 24 April told media that North Korea had replaced hardline general Kim Yong-chol as chief negotiator and head of United Front Department (UFD, which manages relations with South Korea), installing in his place former head of civilian inter-Korean exchanges Jang Kum-chol, generally regarded as more diplomatic; Pyongyang also conducted “ideological audit” of UFD and according to some reports executed four officials over failed Hanoi summit. Japan 23 April abandoned its calls for “maximum pressure” on North Korea and removed description of “grave and imminent” threat from North Korea’s missile program in its annual foreign policy report, seen as attempt to encourage dialogue.

COMMENTARY: North Korea: Getting Back to the Table

Taiwan Strait

President Tsai 4 April promised “forceful expulsion” of Chinese jets from Taiwanese airspace after two Chinese J-11 fighter jets crossed median line of Taiwan Strait 31 March, reportedly China’s first breach of traditionally-agreed maritime border since 1999; Chinese govt 10 April defended flights as routine and dismissed Tsai’s comments. Beijing 15 April said Chinese warships, bombers and reconnaissance aircraft conducted day of drills around Taiwan; Tsai denounced manoeuvres as “coercion”. Taiwanese Defence Ministry 15 April announced ten-year budget, rising annually to over $13bn; U.S. State Department same day announced renewal of training of Taiwanese F-16 pilots and maintenance support ahead of July decision on Taiwan’s request to buy 66 F-16V fighter. American Institute in Taiwan 3 April announced U.S. Marines will guard Institute’s new compound in Taipei, due to be opened May. Tsai and U.S. officials 10 April commemorated 40th anniversary of Taiwan Relations Act in ceremony in Taipei. French defence ministry 5 April announced American Institute’s new compound due to be open May.

Afghanistan

Intra-Afghan peace dialogue stalled and spring fighting season began, while political tensions grew amid competition for influence over nascent peace process, delayed presidential election and extension of President Ghani’s mandate. Planned intra-Afghan dialogue on peace between Taliban and Afghan representatives scheduled for 20-21 April was postponed indefinitely 18 April, with organisers citing “lack of agreement around participation and representation”. Taliban accused govt of breaching agreements that participants could join in personal (not official) capacity and sabotaging dialogue, while opposition figures said they were not sufficiently represented. U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalilzad 24 April returned to Kabul, building support for anticipated U.S.-Taliban talks in Doha early May. Seven out of eighteen candidates registered to contest presidential election mid-April announced boycott of govt’s 29 April national consultative meeting (jirga) aimed at rallying support behind govt’s position in process. Taliban dismissed meeting as “fake”, but gathering of thousands bolstered Ghani ahead of expected challenges to his legitimacy after expiry of his five-year mandate. After announcing start of its annual spring offensive 12 April, Taliban advanced on Kunduz city before being repelled by govt forces 14 April. Taliban targeted several district centres, attacking Murghab in Badghis province 31 March-20 April, and Ab Kamari district centre 5-6 April; security forces claimed to have retaken both. Govt sources reported more than 1,000 security forces killed in single month at start of annual fighting season. Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP) continued attacks on urban centres, killing ten in Jalalabad 6 April, and attacking govt ministry in Kabul 20 April, killing at least seven. IS-KP clashes with Taliban in Kunar province late March-early April reportedly displaced more than 21,000. UN 24 April reported govt and international coalition attacks were responsible for majority of civilians killed in first three months of 2019. Political tensions remained high: Supreme Court 22 April announced Ghani could stay in office beyond 22 May end of mandate until 28 Sept presidential election; eleven of eighteen presidential candidates said mandate extension was illegitimate and called for interim govt.

Bangladesh

Amid continuing political tensions, govt 1 April moved imprisoned opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP) leader and former PM Khaleda Zia to hospital due to ill-health; Minister of Home Affairs 6 April told media that govt would release Zia on bail if application was filed. BNP 6 April said negotiations with
nepal army 12 April denied reports of requesting to withdraw 231 soldiers from border with china dominated by tensions over lack of devolution of power to provinces, security arrangements and violation of constitutionally mandated mechanism to resolve disputes between federal and provincial governments. second meeting of inter-state council (constitutionally mandated mechanism to resolve disputes between federal and provincial govt) 26 April dominated by tensions over lack of devolution of power to provinces, security arrangements and appointment of local administrators. nepal army 12 April denied reports of requesting to withdraw 231 soldiers from border with china.

BRIEFING: Building a Better Future for Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh

India (non-Kashmir)

Maoists attacked officials around general election being held in phases 11 April-19 May. Suspected Maoist roadside bomb killed five people, including MP from ruling-Bharatiya Janata Party, in Dantewada district, Chhattisgarh state (east) 9 April; suspected Maoists 18 April killed polling official in Kandhamal district, Odisha (east). Maoist attacks on security forces continued; in Chhattisgarh, suspected Maoist rebels 4 April killed four members of security forces in Kander district and next day killed soldier during gunfight in Dhamtari district. Maoists and security forces 15 April clashed in Giridih district, Jharkhand state (east), leaving three suspected rebels and one soldier dead.

Kashmir

Relations between Pakistan and India remained tense with continued clashes across Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir), while within Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir (IJK), Indian security forces continued repression of separatists. In cross-LoC clashes, Pakistan claimed Indian fire killed three soldiers and one civilian 2 April and one civilian 15 April, while claiming retaliatory Pakistanis fire killed five Indian troops 5 April. India 18 April suspended cross-LoC trade claiming it was used by “Pakistan-based elements” to traffic weapons, drugs and money. Pakistan 27 March formally rejected India’s dossier holding militant group Jaish-e-Mohammed responsible for Feb attack on Indian security forces in J&K, saying it failed to prove involvement of Pakistan-based elements and asking for further evidence. Pakistan FM Qureshi 2 April asked U.S. to broker dialogue with India and 7 April said govt had informed UN Security Council that India intended to launch attack inside Pakistan later in month. Inside I&K, suppression continued with over 1,000 people reportedly arrested since deadly Feb attack; security forces 25 April claimed to have killed two militants in gunfight in Anantnag district (centre). J&K residents 18 April voted in general election amid calls from separatists for boycott and threats from militants, and reports of clashes between protestors and security forces; reported turnout 45.5% in J&K but under 10% in some constituencies including Srinagar. Ruling-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) 8 April released election manifesto supporting abrogation of articles 35-A and 370 of Constitution that give J&K special status, while main opposition Indian National Congress committed to amending law that gives impunity to special forces in J&K.

Nepal

Concerns about nepal Communist Party (NCP) govt’s restrictions on civil liberties grew with new proposed legislation granting attorney general (AG) discretionary powers to decide on implementation of recommendations made by National Human Rights Commission (NHRC); legislation would empower AG to request further evidence before registering NHRC-recommended cases. NHRC officials rejected move and claimed it would curtail commission’s authority and undermine constitutionally-guaranteed autonomy. Rights activists also criticised govt demand that media houses share payroll and bank details of journalists as latest attempt to restrict press freedom; govt claim effort aimed at ensuring journalists being paid over minimum wage. Following widespread criticism of govt for previously ruling out negotiations with Communist Party of nepal (CPN) led by hardline Maoist leader netra Bikram Chand, reports claimed some ruling NCP leaders are reaching out to CPN leaders for informal talks. Second meeting of Inter-state Council (constitutionally mandated mechanism to resolve disputes between federal and provincial govt) 26 April dominated by tensions over lack of devolution of power to provinces, security arrangements and appointment of local administrators. Nepal Army 12 April denied reports of requesting to withdraw 231
troops guarding UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) HQ amid unrest in Tripoli and concerns about inadequate evacuation arrangements (see Libya).

Pakistan

Authorities opened corruption investigations into opposition leadership amid heightened political tensions, while militant attacks continued and tensions grew with Afghanistan and U.S. govs. National Accountability Bureau (NAB) launched new investigations into opposition figures, filing corruption cases against Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) president Shahbaz Sharif 8 April and Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) co-chairman and former President Asif Ali Zardari late March. Investigations come amid increased domestic criticism of govt: PPP strongly opposed govt’s 18 April appointment to interior minister of former Intelligence Bureau chief Ijaz Hussain Shah, accused by former PM Benazir Bhutto of conspiring to kill her. PM Khan 9 April announced push to seize 30,000 madrasas in compliance with Financial Action Task Force (FATF) sanctions, reiterating govt stance against militant groups. Assurances coincide with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) govt’s attempts to gather opposition support for constitutional amendment to allow third two-year term to military anti-terrorism courts which expired 30 March. Karachi Union of Journalists 5 April expressed concern over criminal investigations by intelligence agencies into four journalists; Reporters Without Borders 16 April criticised intimidation of media by security agencies. Militant attacks continued. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, assailants 8 April killed World Health Organization polio worker, and unclaimed bomb attack 27 April killed three paramilitaries, while clashes between Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants and security forces in Peshawar 16 April killed six suspected militants and one police officer. In Balochistan province, explosive device killed nineteen in Quetta 12 April, including eight Shia Hazaras; TTP claimed collaboration with anti-Shia Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Islamic State (ISIS) also claimed responsibility; bomb blast targeted convoy in Chaman same day, killing one; gunmen 18 April shot dead fourteen bus passengers, eleven of them from security forces; three Baloch militant groups claimed responsibility. Afghan govt responded angrily to Khan’s 26 March call for “neutral interim govt” in Kabul to hold “free and fair elections”, recalling its ambassador, while U.S. Afghan envoy accused him of undermining negotiations with Taliban.

Sri Lanka

Series of coordinated suicide bomb attacks on churches and hotels claimed by Islamic State (ISIS) killed at least 253 and injured hundreds 21 April in country’s deadliest terror attack. Three suicide bombers attacked Easter Sunday morning church services in Negombo (west), Batticaloa (east) and Colombo (west) while three others simultaneously targeted luxury hotels in Colombo. Later same day, two smaller explosions occurred in Colombo suburbs. Over 250 people killed in total, mostly Christians, some tourists, 500 injured. Govt shut down social media messaging services and declared national curfew; by end of month arrested more than 150 suspects linked to small Islamist militant group, National Towheed Jamaat (NTJ), which govt said carried out attacks with foreign support. Discovery of NTJ safe house in eastern town Sainthamaruthu 26 April led to gun battles and explosions that killed fifteen suspects. Govt 22 April declared state of emergency, giving police and military new broad powers of detention; president 29 April issued ban on face coverings, targeting niqab and burqas worn by some Sri Lankan Muslim women. ISIS 23 April claimed responsibility for attacks, releasing video of men it says were bombers. Govt’s failure to act on multiple intelligence reports warning of attacks, including 4 April report based on Indian intelligence, prompted widespread criticism and speculation that president’s ongoing battles with his prime minister contributed to failure to share information within govt. President Sirisena 25 April sacked Defence Secretary and took steps to remove Inspector General of police. Claiming govt had ignored threat of “Islamic extremism”, former defence secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa 26 April reiterated his candidacy for president, promising to prioritise “national security” over “human rights”. Tensions ran high amid fears of intercommunal violence; Pakistani (Christian and Ahmadi Muslim) refugees living in Negombo forced to flee homes and live in makeshift camps after attacks by local Christians.

COMMENTARY: Sri Lanka’s Easter Bombings: Peaceful Coexistence Under Attack

Indonesia

Violence continued in Papua province, where tensions increased around national elections 17 April. Both incumbent President Widodo and his challenger, retired general Prabowo Subianto, claimed victory in presidential election; official results due 22 May, with private polls suggesting decisive lead for Widodo; Subianto continued to claim widespread fraud, raising concerns over contested result. Tensions heightened
around general election in Papua's Nduga regency as military pursued West Papua Liberation Army (WPLA); WPLA claimed it had killed two Indonesian soldiers early April, denied by military; military reported gun attack on election organisers and security forces in Alama district 18 April. WPLA claimed to have prevented voting in 32 districts, but military said voting not affected despite some exchanges of gunfire in Timika district. Two soldiers reported injured in ambush 24 April. Nduga local administration 3 April investigation report concluded that military committed human rights violations during crackdown that started in Dec 2018, and urged govt to withdraw. Report claimed almost 20,000 displaced by fighting, while Front Line Defenders NGO reported over 32,000; military said just over 3,500 displaced by armed group and rejected the report’s findings. Group of Papuan lawyers 12 April submitted judicial review to Constitutional Court challenging legality of Indonesia’s 1969 incorporation of Papua, saying that “Act of Free Choice” referendum was conducted in a way that “grossly violated the human rights of Papuans”.

**Myanmar**

Regular, serious clashes between Arakan Army (AA) and Myanmar military continued, particularly in Mrauk-U, Buthidaung and Kyauktaw townships, Rakhine state. AA ambush in Buthidaung 5 April reportedly resulted in deaths of Myanmar army captain and some 20 soldiers he was leading; AA 9 April overran police compound and nearby artillery base in Mrauk-U, reportedly killing at least a dozen police and abducting family members. Military reportedly suffered heavy losses while retaking bases and called in airstrikes by fighter jets; civilian casualties reported. Rohingya villagers also caught in crossfire; at least seven and possibly many more killed when they came under helicopter fire in southern Buthidaung 3 April, believed to be case of mistaken identity. Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army militant group also ambushed police vehicle 22 April; no deaths reported. Rakhine State govt 1 April imposed overnight curfew in urban and rural areas across five townships (Ponnagyun, Rathedaung, Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U, and Minbya). Ahead of anticipated arrival of monsoon, small number of Rohingya continued efforts to cross Bay of Bengal to Malaysia before sea conditions deteriorate. UN Sec-Gen António Guterres 2 April appointed U.S. citizen Nicholas Koumjian to head UN-established Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM), which is expected to start work by end of 2019 to collect evidence and prepare prosecutorial files “on the most serious international crimes committed in Myanmar since 2011”. President Win Myint issued amnesties for more than 17,000 prisoners to mark Myanmar new year; only four of estimated 364 political prisoners included. Supreme Court 23 April upheld sentence of two Reuters journalists, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, jailed for breaking Official Secrets Act in case that has attracted widespread international condemnation and concern over free speech.

**BRIEFING: Building a Better Future for Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh**

**Philippines**

Clashes between Communist New People’s Army (NPA) and security forces continued in Mindanao and in central regions as govt continued efforts to initiate local level negotiations following termination of peace talks with Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), while military operations continued against Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and Abu Sayyaf Group in Mindanao. Speaking at campaign rally for 13 May general (not presidential) elections 13 April, President Duterte said he would create new peace panel to manage local-level negotiations with NPA. National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, established by Executive Order in Dec 2018, met for first time 15 April; Duterte ordered that cabinet member be assigned to each region to oversee peace and development efforts. Jose Maria Sison, exiled founding chair of CPP which has long rejected idea of local-level talks, described peace panel as “war panel”. Several military and suspected NPA fighters killed in clashes during month, including two NPA killed in Davao del Sur 5 April; three suspected NPA in Negros Occidental 17 April; at least six soldiers in Samar 23 April. UN Humanitarian Agency reported almost 50,000 displaced by military operations against BIFF and remnants of Maute Group in Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur during last week of April. Military continued offensive against Abu Sayyaf in Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi; several police, soldiers and suspected Abu Sayyaf fighters killed in clashes; at least three Abu Sayyaf and two hostages killed following rescue attempt off Banguanui, Smis Island 5 April. Security forces arrested two brothers in Cagayan, northern Luzon 28 March, first arrest of suspected ISIS sympathisers outside Mindanao. As part of “normalisation” annex of Bangsamoro peace agreement, Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) 29 March announced it had submitted names of 12,000 fighters to be decommissioned, representing 30% of total
fighters to be decommissioned. Police 4 April killed four MILF in “miscounter” in Lanao del Sur; MILF said it would investigate. Tensions increased with China over maritime disputes (see South China Sea).

South China Sea
Amid Beijing’s reported deployment of hundreds of vessels in vicinity of Pag-asa (Thitu) Island in Spratly archipelago, confrontation between Philippines and China in South China Sea (SCS)/West Philippines Sea since late March evoked unusually stern rhetoric from President Duterte’s govt. Manila reportedly filed protest with Chinese embassy 29 March noting presence of Chinese vessels, many believed to be part of China’s maritime militia, near Pag-asa, where Philippines has been refurbishing facilities and repairing airstrip since late 2018; senior official 4 April called presence of Chinese vessels “illegal”, while Duterte same day said China should “lay off the Pag-asa”, and that he would tell soldiers to prepare for “suicide mission” if China were to attack or arrest Filipinos in area. Philippines govt spokesperson 12 April invoked Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague’s 2016 ruling that China has no legal basis to claim historical rights to area encompassed by “nine-dash line”; Duterte has previously preferred to set it aside in interests of stronger ties with China. In Beijing for Belt and Road Initiative Forum 25 April, Duterte and President Xi agreed to resolve issue bilaterally. Tensions coincided with 35th annual Balkan joint military exercises 1-12 April, which saw U.S. deploy amphibious assault ship with twenty F-35B jets near disputed Scarborough Shoal which China seized from Philippines in 2012, marking new level of U.S. assertiveness in South China Sea. Philippines FM 16 April tweeted that country would take unspecified legal action against China for violating conventions on environmental protection. Two Vietnamese coastguard ships 27 April reportedly rammed Indonesian navy patrol vessel after it attempted to intercept illegal Vietnamese fishing boat off coast of Borneo; Indonesian navy detained twelve Vietnamese fishermen following clash.

Thailand
Ahead of final results of 24 March election due 9 May, ruling National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) initiated raft of legal challenges against Future Forward Party, which came in third place with almost seven million votes on anti-junta platform, in apparent attempt to prevent it forming govt with Pheu Thai Party and five smaller parties. NCPO 3 April charged Future Forward Party leader Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit with “sedition” in connection to role in 2015 anti-junta protest and violating regime orders prohibiting political gatherings of five or more people; Election Commission 23 April unanimously resolved to press charge against Thanathorn for alleged violation of media shareholding rules, which could disqualify him. Insurgent violence continued in southernmost provinces. In Pattani province, motorcycle-borne bomb wounded four policemen and villager in Khok Pho district 12 April; Muslims defence volunteer killed in drive-by shooting in Kapho district 16 April; two people killed in separate attacks 25 April. In Yala province, gunmen executed two Muslim border police in mosque in Than To district 5 April; gunmen killed assistant village headman in Muang district 17 April; gunmen shot dead rubber tapper in Bannang Sata 25

Solomon Islands
Riots broke out in capital Honiara 24 April after parliament appointed three-time PM Manasseh Sogavare, previously removed from office in 2017 no-confidence vote, for another term as PM following elections 3 April. Police used tear gas to disperse protesters and reportedly detained some 50 people, many in connection with looting and destruction of property.

Europe & Central Asia
Bosnia And Herzegovina
Amid ongoing failure to form state-level govt, tensions grew over draft legislation in majority Bosnian Serb entity Republika Srpska (RS) to establish its own reserve police force, and murder of prominent businessman and govt critic in entity. RS Parliament 18 April adopted Draft Law on Amendments to Law on Police and Internal Affairs which would establish new reserve police force; move came despite concerns from Bosniak-Croat Federation entity, which signalled possible response with similar step. Office of the High Representative, international overseer of implementation of 1995 peace agreement, criticised RS draft law and expressed concern over “negative spiral of mistrust” undermining stability, urging RS not to proceed with legislation. Amendments also ban photos of public servants including police performing their duties, prompting concerns from media and international partners. Three main political parties’ leaders continued efforts to form new state-level govt following Oct 2018 elections, reportedly agreeing on ministries, but disagreements continued over activation of NATO Membership Action Plan to help prepare for possible future membership of alliance, which party of Bosnian Serb
member of presidency Milorad Dodik opposes. Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly 8 April announced it had suspended Bosnia due to its failure to appoint new delegation. Main political parties in RS 2 April signed declaration condemning 29 March constitutional court ruling that again banned annual RS “statehood day” celebrations. Prominent Bosnian Serb businessman and critic of ruling Bosnian Serb nationalist party Slavisa Krunić shot dead in his car near his home north of RS capital Banja Luka 22 April; bodyguard and suspected attacker also killed in subsequent shoot-out. Media watchdog NGO Reporters Without Borders’ 2019 World Press Freedom Index noted hostile environment for press freedom in Bosnia.

Kosovo
Tensions increased around early elections in Serb-majority municipalities in May, while attempt to relaunch stalled normalisation dialogue with Serbia failed. President Thaçi 8 April announced early local elections 19 May in four Serb-majority municipalities in north, where mayors resigned Nov 2018 in protest at gov’t’s introduction of 100% tariff on Serbian imports. Despite calling early polls a “provocation”, main Serb party Srpska Lista 10 April said it would participate in polls. Opposition Vetëvendosje party 23-24 April tried to block Central Election Commission (CEC)’s certification of Srpska Lista candidates, saying that three of them had resigned as mayors in Nov in breach of constitution, and were now running again in same municipalities. PM Haradinaj 9 April announced he had dismissed Kosovo Serb Minister of Local Govt Administration for using hate speech after he described ethnic Albanians as terrorists and accused them of fabricating crimes against them in 1998-99 war; gov’t 11 April moved to criminalise denial of crimes committed by Serbian forces during war. Western Balkans Summit in Berlin 29 April, aimed at relaunching stalled EU-facilitated Kosovo-Serbia normalisation dialogue, ended without agreement on restarting negotiations; next meeting planned for early July in Paris; President Thaçi called for U.S. to be included in dialogue. Media watchdog NGO Reporters Without Borders’ 2019 World Press Freedom Index noted improvement in media freedom in country. Court ordered arrest of four out of 110 citizens (including 32 women and 74 children) returning from Syria 19 April suspected of involvement in terrorism, and placed ten women under house arrest.

North Macedonia
First round of presidential election 21 April saw virtual tie between two leading candidates, pro-Western Stevo Pendarovski who is backed by ruling Social Democrats, and conservative Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova, backed by opposition VMRO-DPMNE party; second round scheduled for 5 May. Greek PM Tsipras visited Skopje 2 April, first official visit by a Greek leader to capital since North Macedonia’s 1991 independence, for talks on improving trade and defence ties. Media watchdog NGO Reporters Without Borders’ 2019 World Press Freedom Index noted improvement in media freedom in country.

Armenia
In ongoing govt efforts to reform state structures and reduce budget, National Assembly 18 April approved amendments reducing number of ministries from seventeen to twelve and deputy PMs from three to two. National Security Service 18 April brought corruption charges against senior official and leading figure in April 2018 “Velvet Revolution” Davit Sanasaryan, who strongly denied any wrongdoing; PM Pashinyan expressed support for investigation, calling it proof that no one in his govt was immune to prosecution. Portuguese parliament and Italy’s Lower House both passed resolutions during month recognising Armenian genocide in Ottoman Empire at start of twentieth century.

Azerbaijan
EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini 4 April expressed hope that EU and Azerbaijan would conclude new framework agreement soon, intensifying debate among Azerbaijani opposition groups and observers on content of new agreement, which reportedly does not explicitly mention Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan, but will state support for territorial integrity of Azerbaijan (see Nagorno-Karabakh). Civil society groups mainly expressed concerns about human rights and role of civil society; Azerbaijan govt promised to EU authorities it will release all political prisoners aside from religious activists and members of Muslim Unity Movement.

Georgia
Breakaway republics Abkhazia and South Ossetia criticised late-March NATO drills in Georgia. Moscow deployed squadron of attack and transport helicopters to Abkhazia 22 April to take part in joint drills with Abkhaz forces, reportedly along with some 3,000 servicemen and over 400 pieces of hardware, including tanks, self-propelled artillery and Russian Black Sea Fleet ships.
Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)
Meeting between Azerbaijani and Armenian FMs in Moscow 15 April resulted in agreement on further measures to de-escalate tensions, mitigating negative environment created by aggressive rhetoric by both sides’ military leaderships that followed late March commitments between Azerbaijani and Armenian leaders. At Moscow talks, Armenian and Azerbaijani FMs agreed to encourage people-to-people contacts including visits by journalists, and further stabilisation of situation in conflict zone, in particular during agricultural activities including through contact with military leaders. Azerbaijani foreign ministry stated support for mutual visits by journalists, despite opposition among Azerbaijani journalists and opposition groups, particularly hardline Karabakh Liberation Committee, which declared it will prepare list of Azerbaijanis who wish to visit Armenia.

Russia/North Caucasus
Concerns continued to grow over tensions within Ingushetia and with its neighbouring republic Chechnya over controversial Sept 2018 border delineation deal between the two republics. After late March mass protests in Ingushetia against border deal, during which reports emerged of clashes with police and some police refusing to stop protests, security forces reportedly searched homes of five Ingush activists, members of NGO Ingush Congress of National Unity, 3 April, and detained two activists. Several activists also fined or jailed early April over March rallies; eight reportedly sent to Kabardino-Balkaria regional capital Nalchik for pre-trial detention; arrests continued throughout month. Protesters planned more demonstrations, but authorities denied permits. Chechnya and Dagestan 16 April announced they had suspended ongoing negotiations over border delineation in light of unrest in Ingushetia. Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) 23 April detained five suspected members of Islamic State (ISIS) in Dagestan and Chechen capitals, alleged to have been planning terrorist attacks including one involving a drone, and seized arms, ammunition and bomb components. National Antiterrorism Committee 3 April reported that police had shot dead two suspected militants in Kabardino-Balkaria who refused order to stop their car and opened fire on police. Russian Security Council head Nikolai Patrushev 19 April reported that in 2018 security services had killed 64 alleged militants and detained and convicted 285 in North Caucasus, and disrupted 37 terrorist cells. U.S. imposed travel ban on Chechen PM Muslim Khuchiyev, citing “credible information” that he “was involved in torture”; Moscow said decision reflected “further deteriorating” bilateral relations and said it would “not be left unanswered”.

Belarus
Tensions emerged again with Russia after Moscow announced ban on imports of apples and pears from Belarus; President Lukashenka subsequently suggested govt may need to start repairs on pipeline that delivers Russian oil to Europe, which would suspend its use. Amid ongoing concerns over restrictions on independent media, police 9 April raided office of independent television company Belsat TV, reportedly as part of investigations into libel case.

Ukraine
Comedian Volodymyr Zelensky’s decisive victory in presidential run-off election prompted speculation over implications for conflict with Russia and prospects for reintegration of Donbas conflict zone in east, while Russia’s announcement of simplified passport procedures for residents of separatist-controlled areas, and parliament’s passing of Ukrainian language law, signalled immediate challenges facing president-elect. Zelensky won 73% of vote in 21 April presidential election run-off, following campaign characterised by absence of information on his policies beyond desire to resolve Donbas conflict but continue to move country toward West; and allegations by incumbent President Poroshenko that Zelensky is Russia appeaser and tool of oligarch Ihor Kolomoyskyi. Immediately ramping up pressure on president-elect, Moscow 24 April announced it would simplify Russian citizenship applications for residents of non govt-controlled areas, prompting condemnation from Kyiv and international partners including U.S., Canada and EU member states. Poroshenko called move preparation “to annex Ukrainian Donbas or create a Russian enclave” and said he had appealed to UN Security Council to discuss issue; Security and Defence Council Secretary Oleksandr Turchynov said Russia was preparing “legal conditions” to openly use force against Ukraine with pretext of protecting Russian citizens. Parliament 25 April passed controversial law on quotas for use of Ukrainian language in news, media and print publications, and stating that “attempts to establish multilingualism on an official level” will be considered unconstitutional. Move seen partially as response to election of Russian-speaker Zelensky, who previously voiced opposition to promoting Ukrainian
candidates from pro-Democratic Party, 26 April announced it will boycott polls in protest at participation of "puppet" Tokayev as party's presidential candidate; of April 2020), said he would "guarantee a free and fair election". Nur Otan party 23 April nominated EU WATCH LIST compatible NATO systems.

President Erdo

Kılıçdaroğlu. Meeting with Russian President Putin in Moscow 8 April; two injured near Maiorsk 9 April. Amid continued concern over govt’s flagging battle against corruption, Poroshenko 11 April appointed 38 judges to newly-established High Anti-Corruption Court, including eight whom independent experts assessed as unqualified.

COMMENTARY: A Shadow over Ukraine’s Presidential Election

Cyprus

UN Sec-Gen Guterres continued to push for new round of reunification talks, including in his 16 April report to UN Security Council. UN Special Envoy Jane Holl Lute 8 April met with Greek Cypriot President and Turkish Cypriot leader; Turkish Cypriot side and Ankara remain sceptical of “federal solution” and call for “new formats”. Following significant late-Feb hydrocarbon discoveries in Republic of Cyprus’ Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), Turkish Cypriot leadership 21 April announced new seismic exploration within parts of EEZ, conducted by Turkish company.

Northern Ireland (UK)

Dissident republicans shot dead journalist during rioting in Londonderry, increasing concerns over escalation of dissident violence amid tensions surrounding UK’s departure from EU and implications for border, and longstanding deadlock over Northern Ireland power-sharing govt. Following police raids searching for weapons and ammunition, dissident republicans 18 April rioted in republican neighbourhood of Creggan, Londonderry, throwing over 50 petrol bombs at police and setting two vehicles on fire; gunman shot at police, killing journalist and LGBT activist Lyra McKee who was observing riots. Police next day blamed “New IRA” group for murder and said they were treating it as terrorist incident. Leaders of six biggest Northern Irish political parties 19 April issued joint statement rejecting murder and attack on “peace and democratic processes”. “New IRA” 22 April admitted it was responsible for murder.

Turkey

Security forces continued operations against the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) in south east Turkey and northern Iraq, while contested results for Istanbul in 31 March local elections led to increased domestic tensions, and relations with U.S. remained strained over purchase of Russian air defence systems. In south east, operations against PKK continued: four Turkish soldiers were killed in PKK attack on military base in Hakkâri 19 April. Turkish military responded with ground operations in south east and air raids into northern Iraq targeting PKK. Tensions followed 31 March local elections as ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) contested opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP)’s narrow victory in Istanbul, alleging election irregularities. High Election Board (YSK) partial recount resulted in narrowed margin of victory for CHP; AKP and MHP also demanded re-run of Istanbul vote. In majority-Kurdish south east, AKP increased its overall vote share especially in rural areas, while pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) largely maintained or increased its votes in urban areas. YSK 10 April refused to grant mandates to HDP mayors-elect in six district municipalities in Erzurum, Van and Diyarbakir, and two town municipalities in Kars and Siirt, allowing AKP runners-up to assume mandates. In Ankara, mob 21 April attacked CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu during the funeral of a Turkish soldier; police briefly detained nine people, including an AKP member who was seen punching Kılıçdaroğlu. Meeting with Russian President Putin in Moscow 8 April, President Erdoğan announced imminent delivery of Russian S-400 air defence systems, also discussing situation in northern Syria’s Idlib province and Russia-Turkey Investment Fund. This followed U.S.’s 2 April pledge to suspend transfer of F-35 fighter jets to Turkey, amid U.S. warnings that S-400s are not compatible NATO systems.

EU WATCH LIST: Watch List 2019 – First Update

Kazakhstan

Interim President Tokayev 9 April announced early presidential elections to be held 9 June (instead of April 2020), said he would "guarantee a free and fair election". Nur Otan party 23 April nominated Tokayev as party’s presidential candidate; country’s only registered opposition party, Nationwide Social Democratic Party, 26 April announced it will boycott polls in protest at participation of “puppet” candidates from pro-govt parties. Police arrested activists calling for fair elections during Almaty marathon 21 April; two of them jailed for fifteen days for protesting without permit. Tokayev met with Russian
President Putin in Moscow 3 April, discussed cooperation including on new nuclear power plant in Kazakhstan.

**Kyrgyzstan**

Amid ongoing tensions between President Jeenbekov and his predecessor former President Atambayev, parliament 4 April approved bill preserving former presidents’ immunity from prosecution, but also stating that former presidents can be stripped of ex-president status and prosecuted if suspected of "especially serious crimes". Following March incident around disputed segment of border with Tajikistan, State Border Service reported that Tajik man had forcibly taken eight-year-old Kyrgyz boy into Tajik territory 22 April, inflaming tensions in area.

President Rahmon and Russian President Putin 17 April agreed to continue security cooperation and joint efforts to “fight against terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, and the illegal trade in weapons”.

Tensions around disputed area of border with Kyrgyzstan inflamed with further incident 22 April (see Kyrgyzstan).

**Turkmenistan**

Russian state-owned energy company Gazprom 15 April said it had resumed imports of natural gas from Turkmenistan following three-year gap.

**Latin America & Caribbean**

Colombia

Congress rejected President Duque’s objections to transitional justice mechanism in show of support to 2016 peace deal with Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), while violence between armed groups continued to cause mass displacement. Lower House 8 April rejected Duque’s objections and call for changes to Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP), transitional justice mechanism created under peace deal to handle cases deriving from govt-FARC conflict, with representatives voting 110-44 against. Ruling Democratic Centre party successfully delayed vote in Senate, which is also expected to reject objections.

UN Security Council 16 April gave unanimous support to SJP and asked Congress to immediately pass law outlining its working systems; U.S. voiced support for SJP at meeting, despite U.S. ambassador early April pressing MPs to approve Duque’s objections. Conflicts between armed groups including FARC dissidents and drug traffickers displaced or confined over 5,000 during month. Fighting between Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC, country’s main drug trafficking group) and AGC splinter group “Caparrapos” that began 22 March reportedly led to over 2,250 people fleeing their homes in Córdoba (north). In Chocó (west), fighting between AGC and National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla group moved toward town of Bojayá, trapping some 2,800 people. Clashes between FARC dissident group Oliver Sinisterra front and local drug trafficking group the “Accountants” in Tumaco (south west) 12 April displaced some 700, while 250 people were displaced by clashes between AGC and dissident Estiven González front in Nariño 16 April (south west). ELN 12 April announced unilateral ceasefire 14-21 April, leading to drop in violence, but bombed oil pipeline in Norte de Santander (north east) 13 April. ELN also clashed with dissident Carlos Patiño front throughout April in El Plateado, Cauca (south west), leading to deaths of six fighters. Army 16 April killed one FARC dissident in clash in Guaviare (south). Army also killed civilian and former FARC fighter in Norte de Santander (north east) 22 April, leading to widespread condemnation; army general 28 April apologised for killing.

**Venezuela**

Failed uprising by opposition leadership 30 April led to clashes and further polarised political standoff, increasing fears of violent domestic or international escalation in coming days and weeks amid worsening humanitarian crisis. Opposition leader and “interim President” Juan Guaidó 30 April appealed to security forces to join “final phase” to remove President Maduro, in move govt labelled “attempted coup”. Defecting soldiers and protesters clashed with pro-govt troops around military air base, leaving scores injured; pro- and anti-govt protests took place elsewhere in capital and other cities. Security forces subdued uprising, however Guaidó reiterated calls for mass nationwide demonstrations for 1 May; Maduro promised events would “not go unpunished”, leading to concerns over further outbreaks of violence. Earlier in month, International Federation of the Red Cross 16 April began first shipment of humanitarian aid intended to assist 650,000 Venezuelans, following late March agreement with govt and opposition, who both claimed credit for arrival of aid. UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock 10 April told UN
Security Council 7mn people needed assistance, while some local NGOs say figure is higher; Lowcock also said 1.3mn of total 1.9mn requiring food aid are children under five; further deterioration anticipated as full impact of sanctions hits. Organization of American States 9 April voted 18-9 to recognise representative of Guaidó as ambassador, unseating Maduro’s representative. Guaidó toured west of country 13-16 April, drawing large crowds despite alleged harassment by paramilitaries and authorities. Gov’t’s attempts to disrupt opposition continued; government-controlled Constituent Assembly 2 April removed Guaidó’s parliamentary immunity following Supreme Court’s call for it to be lifted on grounds he defied ban on leaving country. Following Feb nationwide electricity blackouts, Information Minister 11 April alleged leading opposition members including Guaidó planned acts of sabotage against electrical grid and banking system. Gov’t’s international isolation continued with U.S. and Canada imposing additional sanctions against govt figures; U.S. also imposed sanctions on companies and vessels involved in shipment of oil to Cuba, and sanctioned Central Bank.

COMMENTARY: Will Pressure Bring Down Venezuela’s Government?

Guatemala

Political tensions and manoeuvring intensified ahead of June general elections, with Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) revoking presidential candidacy of former attorney general and candidate for Movimiento Semilla party Thelma Aldana over investigations into alleged fraud and cronysim, widely believed to be politically motivated. Judge from Feminicide Tribunal forbade prosecutors from approaching second presidential contender Sandra Torres, candidate of Unidad Nacional de La Esperanza (UNE), who is under investigation for illicit electoral financing in 2015, despite Constitutional Court 1 April ruling that her immunity should be lifted – prompting speculation over institutional effort to block challenges against her. International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) continued to face political hostility despite high public approval; Sec Gen of Organization of American States Luis Almagro 8 April met Torres and discussed need for transparent elections with TSE working without interference from bodies such as CICIG, drawing criticism from CICIG chief Iván Velásquez.

Honduras

Political tensions continued amid protests over corruption allegations and unpopular reform program. Some 5,000 demonstrators participated in anti-govt protests in capital Tegucigalpa 5 April calling for President Hernández’s resignation over allegations of graft and links to drug trafficking. Protesters 26 and 29 April staged further rallies in response to govt approval of reforms to health and education systems that may lead to mass dismissals; 29 April burnt three buildings in centre of Tegucigalpa; Congress next day suspended reforms and invited protest leaders to dialogue. Gov’t continued moves to bolster public security and increase capacity of Honduran Military Police. At least 30,000 Hondurans reportedly deported from U.S. and Mexico since beginning of year, with ambassador to Mexico predicting total deportations could reach up to 80,000 in 2019.

El Salvador

Security situation remains critical with enduring high levels of killings and widespread gang violence. National Police 27 April reported 1,006 homicides since start of year, 228 less than same period in 2018, however homicide rate rose again during April. In anti-gang operations, police early April arrested MS-13 leader accused of extortion and 117 alleged members of group. Minister of Security and civil society 8 April called on Legislative Assembly to approve law recognising internal displacement, in line with 2018 Constitutional Chamber ruling; govt has previously refused to recognise phenomenon of internal displacement resulting from criminal violence. Anti-corruption drive focussing on high-level former officials continued with Supreme Court late March approving attorney general’s request for former President Funes’ extradition from Nicaragua on corruption charges, which Nicaragua rejected, saying Funes has political asylum; Funes and former President Saca among ten Salvadorans on U.S. blacklist of corrupt officials published 4 April.

Nicaragua

Political situation remained volatile as second dialogue attempt between govt and opposition Civic Alliance ended 3 April without reaching agreements on issues including justice and electoral calendar. Talks broke down over justice mechanisms for victims of govt repression, govt’s opposition to return of international human rights monitoring bodies to oversee implementation of possible agreement, and opposition’s desire to hold early elections. Implementation of agreements reached 29 March on release of
all political prisoners and strengthening of rights also stalled; govt recognised 230 of 700 prisoners on opposition list, failed to coordinate with International Committee of the Red Cross which is supposedly overseeing prisoners’ release, and continued repressive tactics including temporarily detaining 160 people 14-21 April. Civic Alliance 23 April met with representatives of church and Organization of American States (OAS), mediators of dialogue, to discuss govt’s failure to abide by agreements. Govt 24 April announced it would not hold early elections despite OAS and opposition pressure. International condemnation of govt continued; UN Human Rights Council 22 March approved resolution condemning human rights abuses and requesting UN High Commissioner to produce report on country. U.S. 5 April convened OAS Permanent Council to discuss situation and expressed threats of further action. Amid deteriorating economic situation, U.S. 17 April imposed sanctions on recently nationalised banking regulator Bancorp and President Ortega’s son.

Haiti

Amid political tensions and worsening economic situation, President Moïse confirmed Jean-Michel Lapin as permanent PM 9 April, third PM since Moïse’s election in Feb 2017. Ayiti an Aksyon party 1 April joined other opposition parties in rejecting Moïse’s invitation to national dialogue, citing Moïse’s indifference to public demands and calling for meaningful change and advances in investigation of embezzled funds from PetroCaribe (alliance giving Caribbean states access to cheap Venezuelan oil) and case of seven mercenaries arrested in Port-au-Prince in Feb, who were reportedly hired by Moïse to secure PetroCaribe funds. Gang-related insecurity remained high: clashes between armed groups in Cité Soleil neighbourhood of Port-au-Prince left some seven dead 30-31 March; police 29 April announced they had killed gang leader alias “Tigre”, suspected of killing five people and injuring seven in attack in Port-au-Prince 24 April. Ahead of end of UN security and police reform mission mandate in Oct 2019, UN Under-Sec-Gen for Peace Operations 3 April told UN Security Council that UN trusts national police to manage security without international support.

Mexico

Amid widespread concerns over govt’s militarisation of public security and record levels of violence, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) 11 April presented “retiring” army general Luis Rodríguez Bucio as head of new National Guard (NG), controversial main instrument of security plan, and announced NG’s core personnel will come from active army and navy groups. Controversial move drew widespread criticism and appeared to undermine Feb deal between govt and opposition defining NG as having “civilian character”. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet 5-9 April visited Mexico, signed memorandum with govt establishing unspecified role of UN in human rights training for NG and promised UN would monitor NG’s human rights standards. AMLO 5 April reiterated govt’s priority would be tackling root causes of violence through economic and educational policies rather than fighting crime or drug trafficking groups. Over 11,000 murders officially recorded since AMLO took office in Dec 2018, higher rate than three preceding govts. Gang-related insecurity continued with criminal groups clashing with one another over control of territories. In Veracruz state (Gulf coast) – where fighting between at least six groups over control of extortion and kidnapping markets, trafficking routes and oil-siphoning has led to over 600 homicides since Dec – lawyer and activist Abiram Hernández was assassinated in Xalapa 30 March, while armed commando attack on party in Minatitlán killed thirteen people 19 April. Alliance of criminal groups led by Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CJNG) clashed with another alliance in Paracuaro, Michoacán (centre) first week of April, displacing some 100 people, while violence continued in Guanajuato state (centre), area of competition over oil siphoning between criminal groups including CJNG and Lima Cartel. Police 22 April detained some 400 migrants from Central America near Pijipapan town, Chiapas (south), in operation targeting migrant caravans attempting to reach U.S. border.

COMMENTARY: Treating Mexico’s Epidemic of Violence under the López Obrador Government

Middle East & North Africa

Israel/Palestine

Low-level violence continued between Israel and Palestinians in Gaza, new Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority (PA) cabinet took office and Israeli PM Netanyahu, after resounding win in legislative polls, began negotiations to form right-wing coalition. In Gaza, after Israel and Hamas recommitted to ceasefire and previous agreements late March, Israeli army forcibly suppressed Palestinian protests at Gaza-Israel fence area 12 April killing one protestor, and in response to Palestinian shots 20 April struck
Hamas target in Gaza, no casualties reported. In West Bank, Palestinian Authority (PA) PM Shtayyeh’s new cabinet - composed predominantly of members of President Abbas’s Fatah - took office 13 April. During cabinet’s first session, Abbas 15 April announced new Fatah delegation for reconciliation talks with Hamas in Cairo; FM Malki same day declared PA’s readiness to engage in peace talks with Israel if under Russian and international auspices, rather than that of U.S. Israeli settlers 3 April killed Palestinian man, after attempted stabbing; Israeli security forces 16 April arrested five men for “hostile activities”; 24 April destroyed home of teenager suspected to have carried out deadly attack against Israeli soldier in March. Palestinian prisoners 8 April launched hunger strike over disruptive technology Israel installed to prevent prisoner usage of smuggled mobile phones in prison; Israeli authorities conceded usage of public phones 15 April on condition that they supervise calls. Following 9 April Israeli legislative election, PM Netanyahu’s Likud party increased parliamentary seats from 30 to 35, strengthening Netanyahu as he prepared to begin negotiations to form right-wing coalition. U.S. Senior Advisor to President Trump Jared Kushner 17 April announced U.S. would not release Israeli-Palestinian peace plan before end of Ramadan 5 June.
COMMENTARY: Lowering Israeli-Palestinian Tensions

**Lebanon**

President Aoun 9 April criticised U.S.’s recognition of Israeli sovereignty over Golan Heights, Israeli-occupied Syrian territories. Govt 6 April rejected U.S. “maximum pressure” policy toward Iran and allies, pointing out that Hizbollah is legitimate political party in Lebanon.

**Syria**

Govt continued bombardment of Idlib in north west, Islamic State (ISIS) stepped up attacks in east, while negotiations on fate of north east after U.S. withdrawal remained stalled. In north west, govt continued bombing in southern Idlib province and rebels continued to retaliate against pro-govt forces. In Idlib province, govt shelling 3-4 April killed around 29 civilians; 18 April killed ten, including three children. Jihadist coalition Hizb’at Tahrir al-Sham killed at least twelve pro-govt fighters near Aleppo city 21 April. Russia and Turkey 9 April announced start of joint patrols across demilitarised strip around de-escalation zone. Iran, Russia and Turkey held new round of talks in Nursultan, renamed capital of Kazakhstan (formerly Astana) 25-26 April, no significant outcome. In east, ISIS stepped up low-level insurgency: in Raqqaa, twin bombing killed at least eight people 9 April; militants 18-19 April launched separate attacks in Homs and Deir al-Zour provinces, killing at least 35 pro-govt fighters; ISIS killed around 60 local SDF fighters in attacks throughout April. In north east, Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) sought to strengthen control while U.S. retained presence on ground. U.S. remained vague on timing and extent of troop withdrawal. U.S. Special Envoy James Jeffrey visited region mid-April to advance negotiations between U.S. and Turkey on one hand and YPG and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on other toward creation of safe zone along Turkish border in which local Arab and Kurdish forces would replace YPG. U.S. Sec State Pompeo 3 April warned of “devastating” results if Turkey took unilateral action against SDF. Facing fuel shortages, govt 15 April reduced petrol rations; PM Imad Khamis held U.S. and Egypt responsible for blocking passage of Iranian oil tankers through Suez Canal, Israel continued attacks on pro-govt infrastructure; Syrian state media 13 April reported airstrikes and damage to buildings in Hama governorate.

**Bahrain**

In mass trial 139 defendants (of which 60 outside country) convicted of working to establish “Bahraini Hizbollah” 16 April, 138 defendants to be stripped of citizenship and 69 sentenced to death. King Al Khalifa 21 April issued order to restore citizenship to 551 people previously stripped of it, many in mass trials, without giving reason.

**Iran**

Tehran maintained focus on strengthening regional ties particularly with Iraq as U.S. stepped up ‘maximum pressure’ campaign toward Iran. International Atomic Energy Agency 5 April reiterated assessment that Iran was complying with terms of 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Nevertheless, U.S. designated Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Iranian security force primarily responsible for Iran’s regional policies, as Foreign Terrorist Organisation, effective 15 April; Iran promptly blacklisted U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), U.S.’s military command covering Middle East and Central Asia, and President Rouhani 9 April approved for now mostly symbolic installation of more advanced IR-6 centrifuges in Natanz. U.S. Sec State Pompeo 22 April said U.S. would not grant any more sanctions
waivers allowing countries to import Iranian oil; current waivers due to expire 2 May. Iraqi PM Mahdi in Tehran 6 April met Supreme Leader Khamenei and Rouhani. Iranian FM Zarif 16 April met Syrian President Assad in Damascus, and visited Ankara 17 April. While in New York 23-28 April Zarif proposed swap of Iranians jailed in U.S. for U.S. detainees in Iran. Iran, Russia and Turkey held new round of talks on Syria in Nurnsultan, renamed capital of Kazakhstan (formerly Astana) 25-26 April, no significant outcome. In response to flooding that reportedly caused 80 deaths, foreign aid included donations from Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates; Pompeo 2 April expressed condolences to victims while blaming Tehran for mismanagement in urban planning and emergency preparedness; govt blamed U.S. sanctions for impeding humanitarian relief.

COMMENTARY: The Risks of Maximising Pressure on Iran

Iraq
Govt pursued efforts to expand relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia, and continued operations against Islamic State (ISIS) remnants. PM Mahdi 6 April visited Iranian President Rouhani in Tehran to discuss expansion of energy imports from Iran and boost trade. In reaction to U.S. President Trump’s 8 April decision to designate Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as Foreign Terrorist Organisation, Shiite paramilitary groups and members of al-Fatah parliamentary coalition same day visited Iranian consulate in Najaf in show of solidarity. After Saudi delegation visited Iraq 3 April reopening consulate in Baghdad and promising $1bn grant, Mahdi 17 April visited Saudi Arabia and met Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman; two leaders signed thirteen agreements on trade, energy and political cooperation. PM Mahdi 10 April appointed leader of Ba’ad Organisation and al-Fatah member Hadi al-Ameri as his Special Representative in Ba’ara province in south, tasked with improving services. Basra Council 3 April voted to hold autonomy referendum and residents of Basra staged mass protests against federal govt 13 April. Operations against ISIS continued: in Kirkuk and Diyala provinces, counter-terrorism forces 11 April began operations in Hamrin mountains against ISIS remnants, killing twelve militants and Abu Idris, ISIS head of “general security” in Diyala. In Anbar province, security forces arrested twelve suspected terrorists. ISIS 14 April published video of execution of seven Sunni militiamen and village chiefs accused of collaboration. In north, Turkish military conducted cross-border raids against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) targets: in Mount Qandil 1 April and in Gara region 5 April.

Kuwait
Govt 27 April said Kuwait-based Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development agreed to loan Sudan $200mn for development projects.

Qatar
Govt 16 April called for enforcement of arms embargo against Libyan Field Marshal Haftar leading offensive against capital Tripoli backed by Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, and called for his troops to withdraw from areas they have occupied (see Libya). Intra-Afghan dialogue between Afghan representatives and Taliban planned to take place in Doha 20-21 April postponed indefinitely 18 April amid disagreement over participation and representation (see Afghanistan).

Saudi Arabia
37 citizens, including many from Shia community, executed 23 April for terrorism-related crimes, largest number of executions in one day since Jan 2016. NGO Human Rights Watch 24 April reported convictions relied on confessions extracted through torture; UK 24 April condemned “repulsive” mass executions; U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom 26 April said U.S. must stop giving Saudi govt “free pass”. Yemen-based al-Qaeda affiliate 26 April promised to retaliate for executions, indicating presence of some Sunni militants among convicted. U.S. Congress 5 April passed bipartisan War Powers Resolution that would withdraw U.S. support to Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. U.S. President Trump vetoed bill 16 April. Five days after Sudanese President Bashir ousted 11 April, high-level joint delegation from Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (UAE) 16 April met Sudanese Transitional Military Council (TMC) in Sudan, TMC praised Sudan’s “distinguished ties” with both countries; Saudi Arabia and UAE 21 April said they would give Sudan aid worth $3bn ($500mn in central bank and $2.5bn worth of food, medicine and fuel).

Yemen
Fighting escalated along multiple front lines as negotiations over military redeployments around Hodeida remained stalled, increasing risk that fighting resumes there, while tensions within anti-Huthi camp
could spark further conflict in south. Govt and Huthis said phase one will not take place until they agree on phase two redeployments and on composition of local security forces due to control of city and ports after redeployments. Violence around Hodeida continued while clashes escalated along Red Sea coast, in particular in Tuhayta and Hays districts. UK FM Hunt 26 April held meeting in London with Saudi and Emirati counterparts and U.S. and UN representatives to discuss next steps in UN-led process. Fighting intensified across much of country, including in Haja governorate in north west along border with Saudi Arabia, and in al-Jawf governorate in north. Coalition airstrikes on capital Sanaa 10 April reportedly killed thirteen, highest number of civilian casualties in capital in over a year. Clashes between Huthis and southern fighters also intensified in al-Dalia governorate in south. Secessionists allied to Southern Transitional Council (STC), organisation working for secession of south, accused army of withdrawing from key positions and ceding ground to Huthis, exacerbating tensions between rival factions in anti-Huthi bloc. President Hadi 13 April held parliamentary session in Seyoun in east; pro-STC activists organised protests against meeting, having said they would block proposed session in Aden. Huthis also opposed what they called “illegitimate” session on grounds that it did not meet quorum; Huthis responded with elections for 24 parliamentary seats in areas they controlled. U.S. President Trump 16 April vetoed War Powers Resolution that would have withdrawn U.S. support to Saudi-led coalition, despite U.S. Congress passing bipartisan bill 5 April. BRIEFING NOTE: Crisis Group Yemen Update #9

United Arab Emirates

Five days after Sudanese President Bashir ousted 11 April, high-level joint delegation from United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia 16 April met Sudanese Transitional Military Council (TMC) in Sudan, TMC praised Sudan’s “distinguished ties” with both countries; UAE and Saudi Arabia 21 April said they would give Sudan aid worth $3bn ($500mn in central bank and $2.5bn worth of food, medicine and fuel). In response to launch of military offensive led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar to take Libyan capital Tripoli, UAE 4 April co-signed statement with France, Italy, UK and U.S. calling for de-escalation around Tripoli. Algeria

Following President Bouteflika’s resignation early April, nationwide weekly protests called for end of military’s control of transition and continued to grow, raising risk of more violent confrontation and political instability in coming weeks. After five weeks of protests, Bouteflika resigned 2 April; leader of upper house of parliament Abdelkader Bensalah was declared interim president for three months to prepare for presidential elections. Authorities 8-11 April suppressed protests in capital Algiers in bid to regain control, using tear gas and water cannon and arresting 108; having been forced out, protesters 12 April retook Grande Poste Square. Despite increased repression, hundreds of thousands took part in Friday demonstrations 5, 12, 19 and 26 April throughout country, many shouting slogans against army Chief of General Staff Gaid Salah and security forces. Twelve autonomous unions 12 April joined demonstrations and went on strike. 100 magistrates 13 April announced they would boycott supervision of upcoming presidential election; in Bouira city, about 100km south east of Algiers, lawyers 17 April organised march demanding end of regime. In Hassi Messaoud and Hassi R’Mel, both in centre, oil and gas workers 14 April went on strike to support protest movement. Civil society organisations and activists 13 April called for citizen committees to work toward democratic transition. Several Islamist and centre-left opposition parties 16 April jointly called for election boycott in absence of reforms, including creation of independent election commission. Authorities removed some regime figures from power; Algerian media 1 April published list of businessmen under investigation for corruption; authorities 22 April arrested Algeria’s richest man Issad Rebrab and four brothers from influential Kouninef family; head of Constitutional Council Tayeb Belaiz resigned 16 April. Ruling National Liberation Front (FLN) party 30 April named 50-year-old businessman Mohamed Djemai as new leader. BRIEFING: Post-Bouteflika Algeria: Growing Protests, Signs of Repression

Egypt

Entrancing President Sisi’s authoritarian rule, referendum endorsed constitutional changes that will enable Sisi, elected in 2014, to rule until 2030 and authorities intensified repression of civil society. Following referendum 20-22 April, National Election Authority (NEA) 23 April declared 88.8% voted in
favour of constitutional changes that would enable Sisi to rule until 2030 by extending his current four-year mandate by two years to 2024 and allowing him to stand for third term of six years; NEA reported turnout of 44%. Vote came after 531 of 596 MPs voted in favour of constitutional changes 17 April. Opposition bloc Civil Democratic Movement 18 April called proposed changes “assault on democracy” and urged people to vote “no”. Referendum spurred new crackdown on civil society and opposition: NGOs 15 April reported authorities had blocked estimated 34,000 internet domains, including newly-launched opposition campaign site; in east Cairo, authorities 21 April arrested lone protester for holding sign against referendum. Amid reports of bribes and coerced voting, NGO Human Rights Watch 20 April said referendum lacked legitimacy. EU 24 April urged Egypt to maintain commitments on rule of law. ISIS-Sinai Province attacks continued in north Sinai: in Sheikh Zuweid marketplace, suicide bomber 9 April killed seven, including four soldiers and one six-year-old; near provincial capital Arish, twin bombs same day killed four people.

**Libya**

War broke out as Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar’s Libyan National Army (LNA) advanced on capital Tripoli intent on taking city from UN-backed Govt of National Accord (GNA), but pro-GNA forces held LNA at bay; fighting could escalate if both sides continue to mobilise and external actors strengthen Libyan allies. LNA 3 April launched advance on Tripoli from east with apparent backing of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE, France and Russia taking control of surrounding countryside. By making deals with local commanders, LNA took Garyan, 80km south of Tripoli, 3-5 April and set up base there; in same period LNA took Tarhunah and ‘Aziziya south east of Tripoli, Sabratah and Sorman east of Tripoli, and reached city’s outskirts. GNA’s PM Serraj mobilised loyalist militias under banner of Tripoli Protection Force (TPF) and armed groups from Misrata. TPF by 14 April had pushed LNA out of Zahra and Suwani on Tripoli’s western outskirts; same day shot down LNA warplane; 19 April expelled LNA from ‘Aziziya and Ain Zara in south-eastern outskirts, prompting LNA to withdraw to Qasar bin Ghashir and Wadi al-Rabia south of city. Artillery fire killed six civilians in Tripoli residential area 16 April, LNA and GNA blamed each other. In southern Libya, pro-GNA Southern Protection Force 18 April attacked LNA air base at Tamanhint near Sebha and withdrew. Same day, LNA crushed uprising in Garian. World Health Organization 23 April said 264 people killed around Tripoli since start of offensive, including 21 civilians. LNA reportedly used armed drones, provided and possibly controlled by foreign backer, for precision strikes on GNA military installations in Tripoli. GNA also received some military assistance. U.S. shifted from opposition to apparent support for Haftar: Sec State Pompeo 7 April condemned LNA offensive; U.S. 18 April objected to draft UNSC resolution calling for ceasefire; President Trump reportedly had phone conversation with Haftar 15 April, reportedly praising his efforts in counter-terrorism and to protect oil fields.

**REPORT:** Addressing the Rise of Libya’s Madkhali-Salafis

**Mauritania**

Govt 17 April said first round of presidential election will take place 22 June and possible run-off vote 6 July.

**Morocco**

Casablanca appeals court 5 April upheld sentence of 42 activists of Hirak protest movement that formed in Rif region in north in late 2016 to demand jobs and denounce state corruption and repression; court confirmed 20-year prison sentences for Hirak leader Nasser Zefzafi and three other activists for threatening state security; also confirmed other sentences ranging from one to fifteen years. Thousands demonstrated 21 April in capital Rabat to demand release of Hirak activists. Police 25 April used water cannon to disperse some one thousand teachers protesting in capital. Authorities 23 April arrested seven suspected Islamic State members in Sale, near Rabat.

**Tunisia**

Political rivalry between Islamists and anti-Islamists continued ahead of legislative and presidential elections in Oct and Nov, as escalation in neighbouring Libya raised security concerns. Govt 5 April prolonged state of emergency citing persistent threat of terrorism and said it had reinforced military along Libyan border in south east to prevent “terrorist infiltration”. President Essebsi’s Nida Tounes sought to elect central committee and representatives for Nov 2019 legislative elections, but party leadership struggle between head of parliamentary bloc Sofian Toubel and president’s son Hafedh Caid Essebsi saw each hold their own separate congress 6-7 April; both congresses elected separate central committees.
President Essebsi 6 April said he would not stand for re-election in Nov vote. After arresting member of UN panel of experts on Libya 26 March, authorities 10 April charged him with “Spying for foreign parties”.

**Western Sahara**
Moroccan FM Bourita 17 April reiterated that Morocco would only accept Western Sahara to have autonomy, rejecting calls by Polisario Front for referendum on independence. UN Security Council 30 April renewed mandate of UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for additional six months until 31 Oct.**

Going back over the previous two months, International Crisis Group (ICG), *CrisisWatch*, Tracking Conflict Worldwide, March 1, 2019

**Global Overview, following February 2019**
**Outlook for This Month March 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 harsher 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 leader Juan Guaidó. In Haiti, anti-government protests turned violent. U.S.-Russia relations deteriorated further in a worrying development for the future of arms 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.

**President’s Take: A Ray of Hope from Doha as Tensions Rise Elsewhere**
Robert Malley, President and CEO

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 declared a state of emergency, empowering the army. The decision signals his intent to confront protesters with violent repression and moves Sudan onto dangerous new ground. Western partners and Gulf states should
urge Bashir to refrain from a bloody 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 antigovernment 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.

**Latest Updates**

**Global**

**U.S./Russia**

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 noncompliance. 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**

**Burkina Faso**

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 Lourooum 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 Batioho 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. GS Sahel summit in capital Ouagadougou 5 Feb marked start of Burkina Faso’s presidency of regional grouping; GS Sahel leaders called for closer cooperation with UN, including assistance to GS Sahel joint force.

Mali

While jihadist and intercommunal violence continued in centre and north, govt and ruling coalition increased consultations with opposition aimed at facilitating reforms and elections scheduled in 2019. In rare move, President Keïta 14 Feb spoke on phone with main opposition leader Soumala Cissé; call 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 Niore Bouyé Hadara, 10 Feb held rally of estimated 60,000 people in capital Bamako to denounce govt’s mishandling of violence in centre; protesters demanded PM Maïga resign. In centre, French Barkhane airstrike in Dialloubé, 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 Dialloubé. 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 Dankabou town, Mopti region, and booby-trapped his body, bomb killed seventeen civilians. Suspected Islamist militants 24 Feb attacked Koulkoro 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 Andéramboukane 4 Feb in Ménaka region, allegedly after his vehicle refused to stop at checkpoint. Unidentified Islamist militants 24 Feb attacked Koulkoro 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 Andéramboukane 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

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 Bague Djariadi village in reported settling of scores between rival BH factions; BH militants 15 Feb attacked military barracks in Chetimari, 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 Agadirt region in north east near Libya, 121 members of Tebu rebel Movement for Justice and Rehabilitation of Niger (MURN) 3 Feb surrendered to army at Madama after leaving southern Libya. MURN 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


East African Community (EAC) leaders pledged to consult further on next step to resolve political 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 Rwasa. Attorney General and police spokesman 15 Feb accused civil society activist in exile Pacifiche 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

Central African Republic

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 Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic”, seventh peace deal since conflict erupted in 2012, aims at dissolution of armed groups and nationwide disarmament and envisages more inclusive govt comprising some armed group leaders. Govt agreed to advance decentralisation, including of defence and foreign affairs ministries. In south central, 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

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

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 and Tanganyika provinces in east demobilised; 48 militants surrendered in South Kivu 3–17 Feb. In Kasai region, where Tshisekedi has strong base, 600 Kamuina Nsapu militants gave up their weapons saying they were satisfied with peaceful handover of power and three Kamuina Nsapu leaders and over 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

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

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
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.

**Ethiopia**

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**

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**

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 Jalaalqi 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. Farmajo visited Djibouti 19 Feb to ask for delay in withdrawal of Djibouti troopers. Maritime border dispute with Kenya flared: 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.

**COMMENTARY**: Eight Priorities for the African Union in 2019

**Somaliland**

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

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 Padeik 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

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 22-23 Feb. Authorities 25 Feb banned unlicensed gatherings and protests, 26 Feb established emergency prosecutors and courts across country; over 800 reportedly put on trial 28 Feb. Bashir 1 March handed leadership of ruling NCP to deputy head, Ahmed Mohamed Haroun, until party’s next 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

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

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**

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 for self-determination. Prosecutors 13 Feb summoned two MPs including former governor of capital Luanda over alleged corruption; first MPs to be investigated since President Lourenço began anti-corruption drive in 2017.

**Madagascar**

National Assembly 1 Feb passed law enabling President Rajelina, 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**

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**

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**

Following security forces’ violent repression of mass protests in Jan, govt tried to engage opposition in dialogue while limited strikes and protests continued. President Mnangagwa 6 Feb invited leaders of twenty political parties, including opposition parties, that stood in general elections in 2018 to meeting in capital Harare to “begin process of national dialogue”; Nelson Chamisa, leader of main 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 govt 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. Govt 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 govt 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

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

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 elections continued to raise tensions; in Conakry court 7 Feb validated victory of ruling party Rally for the Guinean People’s (RPG) candidate for mayor of Matoto City after main opposition party Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG) filed complaint. In north, supporters of departing and new mayor, both RPG members, clashed in Norassoba, Kankan region 13 Feb, several reportedly injured. Several political parties including Union of Republican Forces (UFR) 22 Feb created alliance Convergence of the Democratic Opposition in attempt to counter political polarisation.

Guinea-Bissau

Stikes 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

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

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 themselves. Suspected members of Shekau’s BH faction 18 Feb killed at least fourteen in Koshebe forest near Maiduguri. Air force strike 24 Feb killed several ISWAP fighters at hideout in Kolloram near Lake Chad, northern Borno state. In north west, banditry and intercommunal violence continued, mostly in Zamfara state, but also Sokoto, Katsina and Niger leaving at least 90 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
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
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

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 tense 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 arrived in Pyongyang 5 Feb for talks on what the two sides might agree at summit, meeting with Special Representative for U.S. Affairs of the State Affairs Commission of the DPRK Kim Hyok-chol 6-8 Feb. U.S. State Department reported they “discussed advancing Singapore summit commitments of 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**

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**

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 3,804 civilians were killed in 2018, highest total since records began in 2009. Amid continued reports of U.S. troop reduction, acting U.S. Secretary of Defence 11 Feb said there were currently no plans for significant change in troop levels. Political tensions increased after President Ghani 12 Feb removed 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**

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 boycot “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
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 Srinagar, killing some 45 security personnel. Govt imposed curfew, sent thousands of paramilitary personnel to region, and detained some 200 opposition leaders and supporters of separatist parties. Security forces claimed to have killed two top Jaish-e-Muhammad in Pulwama 18 Feb, and three in 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’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, 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. *This entry was corrected on 2 March 2019 to place Balakot in Pakistan’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, not Azad Jammu and Kashmir, as first reported by Pakistan.

Q&A: Deadly Kashmir Suicide Bombing Ratchets up India-Pakistan Tensions

Nepal

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 media 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

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 security personnel; 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.
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 responsibilities”; relations with Teheran further strained as Saudi Crown Prince 17-18 Feb visited Islamabad, signing investment agreements worth some $20bn. Landmark Supreme Court ruling 6 Feb condemned Sunni hardline Labaik Ya Rasool Allah’s use of violence in Nov 2017 protests, called on federal and provincial govt 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 Tahafuz 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
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
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 allegations of human rights violations”. Police apologised, said those involved being disciplined. Police 11 Feb announced that counter-terrorist unit Densus 88 early Jan arrested man at Jakarta airport suspected of intending to travel to Syria to join Islamic State (ISIS), having previously served 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).
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
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 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 (MLF) presence and in favour of joining BARMM, to do so, raising concerns over potential tensions and exclusion of major MLF 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 town, reportedly involving around 100 Abu Sayyaf. In clash with Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in Maguindanao 3 Feb, military reported eight militants killed. Interior minister 7 Feb said Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan believed to be new Abu Sayyaf leader. Abu Sayyaf also continued to target 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
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**

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 his party from election.

**Europe & Central Asia**

**Bosnia And Herzegovina**

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**

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**

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”.

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Armenia
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
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
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)
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 Khogajy 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

Russia/North Caucasus
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.

Russia/U.S.
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.

Belarus

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.

Moldova

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

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

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 Akinci 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 Akinci 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’ Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which could further increase tensions.

Turkey
Intensity of Turkish military’s security operations against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in southeast 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 Hejrat 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

Kazakhstan

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

International rights groups 24 Feb claimed Russian security services had aided Tajik counterparts in kidnapping and forcible return to Tajikistan of Tajik opposition activist Sharofiddin Gadoev, who has 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

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

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

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.

**Venezuela**

Tumour 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 tear gas 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.

**Guatemala**

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.

**Honduras**

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**

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**

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.

**Haiti**

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**

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

Israel/Palestine

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. Israeli 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

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

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.

**Syria**

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-Deen 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 gov’t’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

**Bahrain**

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.

**Iran**

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 Security in the Middle East, which focused on countering Iran’s regional policies; meeting failed to deliver diplomatic breakthroughs, but Israeli PM Netanyahu attended alongside Arab leaders. Iran 11 Feb commemorated 40th anniversary of 1979 revolution; President Rouhani said “we have not – and will not – ask for permission from anybody for improving our defensive power” and Supreme Leader Khamenei 13 Feb counselled against trusting European govs 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**

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.

Qatar
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).

Saudi Arabia
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
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

FM Gargash 3 Feb called for implementation of Stockholm Agreement in Yemen and to make 2019 “the year of peace in Yemen”. In joint statement on Yemen 13 Feb, “Quad” comprising UAE, Saudi Arabia, U.S. and UK denounced Iranian support for Huthis and blamed latter for lack of progress in implementation of Stockholm Agreement. Govt and UAE 26 Feb both pledged additional $500mn to UN 2019 humanitarian plan for Yemen. Govt hosted joint military exercise with Oman 3-14 Feb.

Algeria

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 Ouzzou; in Khchela 20 Feb authorities barred opposition figure from holding rally, triggering protests. Following 14 Feb call for nationwide march by Mouwatanat (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

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 14 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 Arsh 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 Eta. 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

Following its mid-Jan advance into south west, Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar’s east-based Libyan 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 Ghaduddawah 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

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

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

Political tensions and societal rift between Islamists and anti-Islamists continued to grow, fuelled by 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

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."
March saw ethnic violence in central Mali rise in scale and frequency, risking escalation in April, and jihadist attacks intensified in Mali, Burkina Faso and Chad. Fighting flared in Yemen’s north and south as de-escalation in Hodeida stalled, jeopardising peace efforts. Retaliatory strikes between Israel and Hamas pushed both sides closer to war. In Myanmar, an ethnic Rakhine armed group ramped up attacks on security forces, and in New Zealand, a far-right extremist killed 50 Muslim worshippers in a terror attack. In Algeria, millions took to the streets as a risky transition got underway. Protests erupted in Comoros following disputed presidential elections; surged in the North Caucasus’s Ingushetia; and continued in Sudan despite hardened repression. Tensions between Uganda and Rwanda rose over Uganda’s alleged harassment of Rwandans, and Venezuela’s people faced nationwide blackouts amid heightened political polarisation. In a positive development in negotiations over Nagorno-Karabakh, a much anticipated summit saw Armenia and Azerbaijan commit to strengthen the ceasefire, improve communications and implement humanitarian projects.

**President’s Take**

Saving the Hodeida deal to increase aid to Yemenis

Robert Malley, President & CEO

In Mali, hostilities between ethnic communities spiralled – at least 173 men, women and children were killed – raising the risk of reprisals in the weeks ahead. Tensions between the Dogon and Fulani over access to land and political positions have deep roots, but the fight against jihadists, with whom Dogons suspect Fulanis collaborate, has unleashed unprecedented violence. To help avert a cycle of killing, the government should disarm ethnic militias and take steps to end impunity for past crimes.

Jihadist violence rose in Burkina Faso where radical militants upped attacks on both security forces and civilians, especially in the east and north. While in southwest Chad, the Boko Haram faction known as Islamic State West Africa Province launched a bold attack on a military position killing 23 soldiers, an unusually high toll. Palestinian militants in Gaza fired several rounds of rockets into Israel, injuring Israeli civilians and provoking retaliatory strikes on over 100 targets in Gaza. Israeli forces pushed back Palestinian protesters at the border, killing four. The escalation comes at a sensitive time as Israel prepares for elections in April. To prevent a war that neither side wants, both should return to implementing measures outlined in their November ceasefire agreement, and do more to ease the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

In Yemen, fighting escalated in the north between Huthi rebels and Hajour tribesmen and in the southern city of Taiz between nominally allied pro-government groups. Meanwhile, the process aimed at de-escalation in Hodeida port city initiated by the December Stockholm Agreement seemed to founder, raising the risk that fighting resumes in April.

In Myanmar, the Arakan Army, an ethnic Rakhine insurgency group, stepped up attacks against security forces across broad areas of Rakhine State and southern Chin State, despite vows by the military and government to crush the insurgency. We fear that serious escalation on the security and political front will greatly complicate efforts to bring peace and stability in the region and further undermines the prospects for repatriation of one million Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh.

In an unprecedented terror attack in New Zealand, a far-right extremist shot dead 50 Muslim worshippers, including four women and four children, at two mosques in Christchurch on 15 March. Algeria’s long stagnant politics entered a potentially volatile new phase. Under pressure from millions of protesters across the country, 82-year-old President Bouteflika – in power since 1999 – decided not to run for a fifth term. The army and ruling party called on the constitutional council to rule him unfit for office, a move that would kick-start a political transition. But protesters demand more, a wholesale change in the ruling elite. To avoid violence, we have argued that any change should take place gradually and in line with the constitution.

In Sudan, nationwide protests calling for President Bashir to step down entered their fourth month, but Bashir dug in. Though he stepped aside as head of the ruling party, he showed no sign of intending to leave power as his regime upped arrests of activists and opposition members. On the Comoros Islands, a far-from-credible election saw President Assoumani claim a fourth term in office. The result sparked
protests in the capital, moved the opposition to try to replace him with a transitional council and triggered fighting between loyal and dissident security forces. With tensions still running high, April could see more confrontation.

Tensions between Uganda and neighbouring Rwanda continued to rise. Objecting to Uganda’s alleged harassment of Rwandans and harbouring of dissidents, Rwanda further curbed trade across their common border.

In Venezuela, a massive electricity grid failure on 7 March left around 90 per cent of the country without power for days, affecting hospitals, cutting off water supplies to major cities and causing communications to break down. Heralding a new and more critical phase of the protracted political crisis, the blackouts are an illustration of how, absent negotiations and compromises for all involved, Venezuela’s prospects are extremely grim.

In Russia’s North Caucasus region, thousands took to the streets in the Ingushetian capital Magas and in Nazran in late March against last September’s controversial border demarcation agreement between Ingushetia and neighbouring Chechnya, prompting concerns over stability in the region. In a positive development, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan held their first official summit on Nagorno-Karabakh at the end of March, where they committed to strengthen the ceasefire, improve communications and implement humanitarian projects. While much more needs to happen to reach peace, including a greater focus on the needs of populations, recent steps are giving rise to cautious hope in diplomacy.

Latest Updates

Africa

Burkina Faso

Suspected jihadist militants increased attacks against security forces and civilians, especially in East, Sahel, North and Centre-North regions, and NGOs’ accusations of security forces’ abuses against civilians intensified pressure on govt. Suspected jihadists 9 March attacked police station in Koumbri, North region, killing police officer; 11 March abducted two teachers in Koutoungou area, Sahel region and later killed them; 13 March killed one gendarme in Tougouri, Centre-North region; next day killed two Dozo vigilantes in Louta area, Boucle du Mouflon region; 28 March killed four gendarmes in Barani, Boucle du Mouflon region. In East region, security forces’ vehicle 16 March detonated mine in Kabonga, Kompienga province, killing police officer and soldier; roadside bomb 17 March killed three soldiers in same area. Authorities imposed curfew in East region 7 March. Army 9 March launched new security operation “Otapuanu” in East and Centre-East regions. In Sahel region, unidentified gunmen 21 March kidnapped two civilians, including mayor of Markoye village in Oudalan province. Unidentified assailants 30 March attacked police station in Niangoloko area, Cascades region in west near border with Côte d’Ivoire; three civilians and two assailants reportedly killed. Govt 16 March said it was holding over 700 terrorists in high security prisons. Burkinabé Movement for Human and People’s Rights (MBDHP) 14 March accused military of summary executing at least 60 people in operation early Feb in Kain and Bahn districts, Yatenga and Loroum provinces of North region. NGO Human Rights Watch 22 March echoed MBDHP allegations, estimating 115 extrajudicial killed by security forces between April 2018 and January 2019. Constitutional commission 14 March confirmed referendum would be held on constitutional reform that would set presidential term limit of two five-year terms, increase PM’s powers, abolish death penalty, and establish constitutional court which could remove president under certain conditions; although referendum initially scheduled for 24 March, was subsequently delayed sine die.

Mali

Communal violence intensified in centre raising risk of escalation in April, and suspected jihadists carried out more deadly attacks in north and centre, as govt tried to win support for constitutional reform. In centre, violence between ethnic Fulani herders on one side and Dogon and Bambara farmers on other in Mopti region left at least 173 dead: clash in Tan Coulé village 2 March left three Dozos (Dogon militants) dead; Dozos reportedly killed four Fulanis in Wendou village same day; at least 160 killed 23 March in attack reportedly by Dozos against Fulani villages of Ogossagou and Welingara, most deadly attack since crisis erupted in 2012; in suspected revenge attacks, armed assailants 25-26 March attacked two Dogon villages in Bankass circle, reportedly killing at least six. In response to Ogossagou attack, President Keïta 24 March replaced army chief of staff and commander of land forces and officially disbanded Dogon self-
...
two civilians in Goulouzivini, Mayo Tsanaga; same day soldiers arrested seventeen BH combatants in Amchide, Mayo Sava; and next day BH burnt primary school of Zeleved, Mayo Tsanaga. U.S. Assistant Sec State for African Affairs Tibor Nagy 4 March called on govt to release opposition leader Maurice Kamto and find peaceful solution to Anglophone crisis, 17-19 March visited Cameroon. EU High Representative Federica Mogherini 5 March made same calls, first time at such high level. Govt 5 and 6 March criticised U.S. and EU positions. Catholic Nuncio 18 March handed over to President Biya letter from Pope Francis regarding Anglophone crisis.

Central African Republic
As security situation remained tense, implementation of Feb agreement between govt and fourteen armed groups stumbled on formation of new govt. PM Ngébada 3 March revealed new govt, which reinstated most ministers from previous govt and included representatives of only six armed groups. Armed groups denounced what they saw as Ngébada’s failure to respect peace deal; in protest five armed groups renounced govt appointments and two – Patriotic Movement for the Central African Republic (MPC) and Democratic Front of the Central African People (FDPC) – announced they would withdraw from agreement. In bid to save deal, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security Smaïl Chergui 18 March held talks with all fourteen armed groups and govt in Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa. Chergui 20 March said govt and armed groups had agreed that Ngébada would form new govt offering increased number of ministries to armed groups. Second new govt, announced 22 March, included twelve armed group representatives, including FDPC leader Abdoulaye Miskine. Miskine later declined his post. President Touadéra 24 and 25 March appointed twelve members of armed groups to positions in PM’s office, three at ministerial level and nine at advisor level, latter including UPC leader Ali Darassa, Mahamat al-Khatim of Central African Patriotic Movement (MPC) and 3R leader Bi Sidi Souleymane; two armed group leaders thereby put in charge of mixed security units foreseen in Feb agreement and of demobilisation. Interior minister 25 March named two new prefects and five new sub-prefects, all from armed groups. No major outbreaks of violence, but security situation remained tense.

Chad
Boko Haram (BH) killed over twenty soldiers in single attack near Lake Chad in south west and govt closed border with Libya in bid to enhance security in north. Militants from BH faction known as Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) night of 21-22 March attacked military position at Dangdala near Lake Chad killing 23 soldiers and taking equipment before departing toward Niger. President Déby 22 March replaced army Chief of Staff Brahimi Mahamat Seid with former police chief Taher Erda and made several appointments or replacements in top-level leadership of army and in president’s office. While visiting Kouri Bougoudi gold mining area in north-western Tibesti region, Territorial Administration Minister Mahamat Abali Salah 3 March announced official closure of Chad-Libya border, planned disarmament of population in Tibesti region and ban on gold panning. Hundreds of militents reportedly deserted from rebel coalition Union of Forces for Democracy and Development (UFDD) in March. Also in north west, Tebu traditional leaders gathered in Miski early March to list grievances of local residents with view to resolve conflict between govt and Tebu self-defence committee over access to gold mining sites. Authorities banned two demonstrations planned for 14 March, to protest shortages of butane gas and use of CFA Franc respectively.

Democratic Republic of Congo
President Tshisekedi struck deal with former President Kabila’s coalition on govt formation and took steps to open political space, as senatorial elections sparked protests and violence persisted in east and centre. Tshisekedi’s coalition and Kabila’s Common Front for Congo (FCC) alliance 6 March agreed Kabila will name “formateur” to appoint new govt. Tshisekedi 13 March pardoned some 700 political prisoners, released some and same day opposition leader Moïse Katumbi received passport, previously denied by Kabila govt. In 15 March senatorial election, FCC won 84 of 100 seats, triggering opposition protests in capital Kinshasa, Goma, Mbuji-Mayi and Lubumbashi. Consequently, electoral commission, national assembly, outgoing senate, prosecuting authority and presidency 17 March suspended senate’s appointment and postponed provincial governor elections sine die; FCC contested decision. Tshisekedi 29 March lifted suspension following investigation by court of cassation. Opposition electoral coalition Lamuka 24 March in Brussels said it would study possible transformation into political platform. Parliamentary and municipal polls, due Dec but delayed due to Ebola and insecurity, held 31 March in Beni and Butembo in
North Kivu in east and Yumbi in Mai-Ndombe province in west. U.S. Assistant Sec State for African Affairs Tibor Nagy 13 and 15 March relayed U.S. support for Tshisekedi presidency; U.S. treasury 21 March imposed new sanctions on electoral commission leadership, constitutional court president and former national assembly speaker for reported involvement in corruption. After Belgium and DR Congo agreed late Feb to revive ties, including to increase flights between Kinshasa and Brussels, visa facility for Schengen area reopened 6 March after over a year. Violence persisted in east and centre, especially in Ituri, Tshopo, North Kivu, South Kivu, former Katanga provinces and Kasais. In Ituri, North and South Kivu, army clashed with Mai-Mai groups. In North Kivu, attacks continued to hamper Ebola response: militants 10 March attacked treatment centre in Butembo for second time, killing police officer. UN Security Council 29 March renewed mandate of UN stabilisation mission in Congo until 20 Dec.

Gabon

President Bongo 23 March reportedly returned to Gabon following five-month stay in Morocco to recuperate after stroke late Oct. Opposition and civil society collective continued to call on authorities to recognise power vacuum and on people to peacefully take action if govt does not remedy situation. Collective 28 March initiated proceedings to mandate medical examination of Bongo; govt 29 March “invited” judicial authorities to take measures against people seeking to destabilise country.

Rwanda

Tensions between Rwanda and Uganda continued to rise after Rwanda restricted trade across shared border late Feb, closing two of three principal border crossings, at Katuna and Cyanika. FM Sezibera 14 March denied Uganda’s accusations that Rwanda had blocked exports from Uganda and established permit system for Rwandan traders exporting to Uganda; he reiterated that Uganda still needed to address its harassment of Rwandan citizens in Uganda through arbitrary arrests and irregular deportations, and its harbouring of Rwandan dissidents. A dozen bodies found late Feb on Burundian side of Lake Rweru that separates Burundi and Rwanda; local Burundian authorities said bodies had floated down river that comes from Rwanda, Rwanda denied responsibility.

Eritrea

President Afwerki 3 March hosted trilateral meeting of Kenyan and Ethiopian leaders to discuss regional and bilateral issues. President Afwerki and Ethiopian PM Abiy 4 March met South Sudanese President Kiir in South Sudan capital Juba to discuss country’s peace deal. Eritrean delegation 18 March met Somaliland President Bihi in Hargeisa, Somaliland, and agreed to step up bilateral relations.

Ethiopia

PM Abiy undertook intense diplomacy to mediate regional tensions and boost ties with Gulf states and France. Abiy 6 March mediated talks between Kenyan President Kenyatta and Somali President Farmajo in Nairobi, Kenya, on dispute over maritime border; parties failed to agree on how to settle dispute. French President Macron visited Ethiopia and 12 March signed what he called “unprecedented defence cooperation agreement” providing for naval and air cooperation. Authorities 19 March postponed indefinitely pre-elections census scheduled for 7 April. In Oromia region, ethnic violence eased, but unidentified gunmen 19 March killed five miners, including two foreigners, near Nedjo.

REPORT: Bridging the Gap in the Nile Waters Dispute

Kenya

Communal violence continued in north and Kenya and Somalia leaders met but failed to agree on how to settle maritime border dispute. Clashes between ethnic communities erupted in several counties in north; Meru and Borana communities 7 March clashed on disputed Isiolo and Meru counties border, leaving three dead; 13 March, clashes between Garb and Borana communities in Marsabit county left three dead; 19 March clashes between two groups of armed herders from Samburu and Borana communities in Kom area, Isiolo county left three dead; 22-24 March clashes between Borana and Somali herders in Janju area at border between Garissa and Isiolo counties left three dead. In Turkana county, unidentified armed men 18 March killed two National Police Reservists, raising tensions between Turkana and West Pokot communities. President Kenyatta and Somalia President Farmajo 6 March held talks on disputed maritime border mediated by Ethiopian PM Abiy in Nairobi; leaders failed to agree on how to settle dispute, but Abiy said both sides agreed “to work towards peace”. Kenyatta met Abiy in Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa 1 March to open Ethiopia-Kenya Trade and Investment Forum and held talks with Abiy and Eritrean President Afwerki in Eritrea 3 March to discuss regional and bilateral issues.
Somalia

Al-Shabaab attacks continued in Mogadishu and rural areas, while govt stepped up diplomacy in bid to improve relations with neighbours and federal states. In Mogadishu, Al-Shabaab car bomb attack 7 March left four people dead; Al-Shabaab detonated suicide car bomb and stormed govt building 23 March, at least fifteen reported killed including assistant labour minister. Road side bomb same day killed three, including one soldier, at security checkpoint in Mogadishu. Car bomb 28 March exploded near restaurant and hotel, reportedly killing at least fifteen. In Middle Shabelle, Al-Shabaab land mine targeted African Union (AU) mission (AMISOM) military convoy in Balac, 16 March, no casualties. In Lower Shabelle, Al-Shabaab 27 March executed five, including three Kenyans, for allegedly spying for AMISOM and U.S. military and 31 March clashed with security forces backed by AU, after militants ambushed military checkpoint in Qoryoley; number of casualties unclear. U.S. continued airstrikes targeting Al-Shabaab: airstrike killed eight militants in Gambale area, Middle Shabelle state 8 March, according to local media; in Lower Shabelle state, airstrike killed eight 11 March, two 12 March and three 18 March; and in Malayle, Jubaland state, airstrike killed three militants 13 March. NGO Amnesty International 20 March called on U.S. to investigate "credible evidence" its air strikes have killed numerous civilians. In Jubaland, PM Khayre 13 March met Jubaland's state leader in Kismayo to discuss restoration of cooperation between federal govt and federal member state; parties agreed to end standoff. In Galmudug state, clan fighting erupted 18 March in Xeraale, leaving thirteen civilians dead. President Farmajo discussed strengthening regional peace and security with Ethiopian PM Abiy in Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa 5 March and held talks with Kenyan President Kenyatta mediated by Abiy to restore diplomatic ties 6 March after dispute over maritime border escalated in Feb; parties failed to agree on how to settle dispute.

Somaliland

Somaliland President Bihi 18 March met Eritrean delegation in Hargeisa and agreed to step up bilateral relations.

South Sudan

As security situation remained tense, severe delays in implementation of Sept 2018 peace deal threatened to provoke its collapse and regional bloc Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) made efforts to bring on board non-signatory opposition groups. Head of UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) David Shearer 8 March briefed UN Security Council expressing concern with delayed implementation in three areas: delineation of internal state boundaries, creation of unified army and ensuring security of returning opposition leaders. IGAD Special Envoy Ismail Wais 12 March met leader of opposition group South Sudan United Front (SSUF/A) Paul Malong to discuss how he could join peace deal; in joint statement Malong expressed willingness to negotiate with govt. IGAD representatives met leader of rebel group National Salvation Front (NAS) Thomas Cirillo in Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa 14 March, with no major breakthrough. Cattle raids and disputes over grazing lands in Epoto, east of capital Juba, left at least twenty dead 26-27 March. UN Security Council 15 March renewed mandate of UNMISS, including new language to enable peacekeepers to protect vulnerable returnees. President Kiir met Ethiopian PM Abiy and Eritrean President Afwerki 4 March in capital Juba to discuss peace deal.

REPORT: Salvaging South Sudan's Fragile Peace Deal

Sudan

President Bashir hardened repression of continued nationwide protests calling for him to step down. Dozens of activists and senior members of opposition National Umma Party (NUP) arrested 10 March; emergency court sentenced NUP deputy chief Mariam al-Mahdi to a week in prison; appeals court 13 March released her. PM Mohammed Taher Eyla 13 March announced new cabinet; most new ministers belong to ruling National Congress Party (NCP). NCP 30 March suspended indefinitely its general convention planned for April at which party was to elect new chief after Bashir handed leadership to his deputy 1 March. State news service 17 March said govt had secured $300mn in loans to address economic crisis; $230mn from Arab Monetary Fund and $70mn Arab Trade Financing Programme, both based in United Arab Emirates. U.S. Congressional delegation in capital Khartoum 16 March held series of meetings with govt officials including head of National Intelligence and Security Services Salah Gosh, opposition, civil society, journalists and rights defenders; called for release of political prisoners. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov during his visit to Khartoum 17 March said Russia would stand by Bashir.

REPORT: Bridging the Gap in the Nile Waters Dispute

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Uganda
Tensions between Uganda and Rwanda continued to rise after Rwanda restricted trade across shared border late Feb, closing two of three principal border crossings, at Katuna and Cyanika. Rwanda 8 March reportedly destroyed all bridges crossing to Uganda at Katuna. Ugandan foreign ministry 13 March accused Rwanda of blocking exports from Uganda and establishing export permit system for Rwandan traders exporting to Uganda. Rwandan FM Sezibera 14 March denied accusations and reiterated that Uganda still needed to address its harassment of Rwandan citizens through arbitrary arrests and irregular deportations, and its harbouring of Rwandan dissidents.

Angola
Following Feb arrest of supporters of Cabinda Independence Movement (MIC), who seek independence for Cabinda exclave in west, police 13 March released a dozen activists but some 50 remained in detention and began hunger strike in protest. Delegation from main opposition party National Union for Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) visited Cabinda early March to assess situation, with UNITA leader Adalberto Costa Júnior 11 March criticising security forces for arbitrary arrests.

Comoros Islands
President Assoumani’s win in disputed presidential elections sparked protests, his attempted ouster by opposition candidates and clash between dissident and loyal security forces raising risk of greater confrontation in April. Assoumani won re-election in disputed presidential poll 24 March with 60.77% of vote; nearest rival Ahadmi Mahamoudou secured 14.62%. Observers including from African Union 25 March said voting process was tainted by many irregularities and lacked credibility or transparency; Supreme Court in Feb had barred six opposition candidates from standing, including main contender. Police 25 March fired tear gas to disperse those demonstrating against result in capital Moroni, leading to some dozen injuries, and briefly detained two opposition candidates. Interior Minister 26 March accused opposition of causing unrest and ordered mayor of Moroni to prohibit public gatherings without prior permission; opposition 26 March announced plans for civil disobedience campaign to demand re-run of vote. Opposition candidates 28 March announced creation of National Transitional Council, led by former army chief of staff Mohamed Soilihi, to take over from Assoumani, “resolve the post-election crisis, [and] ensure a peaceful transition”. Authorities reportedly arrested Soilihi soon after announcement. Same day, group of soldiers, jailed for involvement in attempted coup in 2018, broke out of prison and went to military base near Moroni seeking support; subsequent exchange of fire there between these renegade soldiers and other security forces left three dead, reportedly including leader of dissident soldiers, Major Fayssol Aboussalam.

Mozambique
Suspected Islamist militants continued attacks in Cabo Delgado province in far north. Militants 14-15 March killed some thirteen civilians in attacks in Mocimboa da Praia district, burning down 120 homes; 22-24 March carried out four attacks in Macomia, Ancuabe and Meluco districts, with reports of injuries but no deaths. NGO Amnesty International 5 March alleged police had denied food and medical treatment to journalist detained without charge since Jan while reporting on displacement of people due to attacks. President Nyusi 12 March denied assertion of former FM Pacheco that 400 officers from former armed opposition movement Renamo had been incorporated into armed forces, saying true number was fourteen. Tropical cyclone Idai hit 15 March, flooding much of central Mozambique and cutting off port city of Beira; over 700 reportedly killed and estimated 500,000 displaced; govt mounted humanitarian response amid reports of outbreaks of cholera and concerns that displacement could lead to widespread food insecurity.

Zimbabwe
Amid economic crisis and international criticism of political repression, govt continued to move toward reforms. President Mnangagwa 12 March said country would continue national dialogue started in Feb, in which main opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and five smaller parties refused to participate. Govt early March reportedly established ministerial taskforce to accelerate political, electoral and legislative reforms. To address economic crisis, central bank 3 March announced govt had borrowed $985mn from African banks including Mozambique’s central bank and African Export and Import Bank. Govt and civil servants continued salary renegotiations as value of new currency known as Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) dollars further weakened against USD; govt mid-March offered to increase salaries for April-Dec 2019. NGO Human Rights Watch 12 March released report on security forces’
suppression of Jan protests detailing their “killings, rape, torture and other grave abuses”; report noted that although protests have ended, “security force crackdown continues”. Head of EU delegation 25 March said Jan crackdown soured EU-Zimbabwe relations and tainted country’s image in Europe. U.S. President Trump 4 March extended sanctions for another year, saying sanctions will remain in place until govt relaxes laws on media freedom and protests. Mnangagwa 17 March again called for lifting of sanctions against ruling ZANU-PF party, proposal supported by regional partners including South African President Ramaphosa.

Côte d’Ivoire
Gaïa Soro, former rebel leader who resigned from post as parliamentary speaker in Feb, positioned himself as pivotal figure of opposition to President Ouattara ahead of 2020 presidential election. Following Soro’s late Feb meetings with opposition figures, including head of Democratic Party of Côte d’Ivoire (PDCI) and former President Henri Konan Bédié, former pro-Ouattara youth movement Alliance for Change (APC) 2 March formed political party under same name in support of Soro. Ouattara’s Rally of Republicans (RDR)’s former secretary general Amadou Soumahoro elected parliamentary speaker 7 March to replace Soro. Opposition boycotted session to contest 5 March revision of voting procedure. Twenty-four opposition parties, which call for reform of electoral commission to correct govt overrepresentation, 11 March proposed that commission presidency be entrusted to member of civil society and that institution be provided with administrative and financial autonomy. At trial of failed Sept 2015 coup in Burkina Faso 13 March, Burkinabé Defence Minister Chérif Sy said Soro had recognised authenticity of phone recordings on which Soro reportedly discussed plans for assassinations in support of putschists with former Burkinabé FM Djibrill Bassolé. Soro’s spokesperson 16 March denied accusations.

Gambia
President Barrow reshuffled cabinet after months of tension with his party; 15 March sacked VP Ousainou Darboe and two ministers, appointed Health Minister Isatou Touray as new VP. New cabinet members sworn in 28 March.

Guinea
Possible candidacy of President Condé in 2020 presidential election divided society. Opponents of third mandate disturbed gathering of Condé supporters 14 March in capital Conakry. Supporters of Condé demonstrating in Kankan in east 16 March confronted opponents chanting “no to third term”.

Guinea-Bissau
Legislative elections took place 10 March after four years of political stalemate. In provisional results published 13 March, ruling African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) came first with 47 of 102 seats. PAIGC 12 March forged agreement to form govt with other parties which hold seven seats. Teachers’ unions 2 March ended public schools strike, saying govt had met demands, namely payment of salary arrears and publication of official status of teacher’s career. Classes resumed 6 March. Security forces 9 March seized almost 800kg of cocaine near Safim, country’s biggest ever seizure; arrested four men in connection with drugs, including adviser to Niger’s parliamentary speaker.

Liberia
Three former Central Bank officials 4 March appeared at Monrovia City court, were charged with criminal conspiracy, economic sabotage and misuse of public money following probe into missing banknotes.

Nigeria
Elections-related tensions continued while ethnic and herder-farmer violence flared in north centre, banditry continued in north west and Boko Haram (BH) continued attacks in north east. Violence tainted 9 March governorship and state legislative elections; at least 27 killed on election day and four others during supplementary elections 23 March. President Buhari’s ruling party won in fifteen states, main opposition People’s Democratic Party (PDP) won in thirteen; election suspended in Rivers state following disruptions. PDP’s presidential candidate Atiku Abubakar 18 March lodged legal challenge against Feb presidential result. In north centre, intercommunal and herder-farmer violence left at least seven killed 2 March in Sabon Sarsa; seventeen killed 10 March in Ungwan Barde; 52 reportedly killed 11 March in Kajuru area; at least ten killed 16 March in Nandu-Gbok. In Benue state, armed attacks on farming villages left at least sixteen killed 2 March at Agagbe and ten killed 19 March in Tser Uorayev. In north east, BH continued attacks in Borno and
Adamawa states, with Abubakar Shekau-led faction seemingly using more landmines and female suicide bombers. In Borno state, farmers’ vehicle 6 March detonated landmine outside state capital Maiduguri, at least five killed; BH 19 March killed four farmers near Lassa; landmines around Warabe village in Gwoza area 18 March killed eight; military truck 25 March detonated landmine in Gwoza area, at least thirteen soldiers killed; military mid-March caught 13-year-old girl in Maiduguri who said she was one of four female suicide bombers. In Adamawa state, female suicide bomber 10 March blew herself up in Madagali area. Military 8 and 11 March reportedly killed scores of BH fighters. In north west, banditry-related violence killed at least 95 people, notably in Anka and Shinkafi local govt areas (LGAs), Zamfara state 2 and 30 March; Isa LGA, Sokoto state 8 March; and Birnin Gwari LGA, Kaduna state 11.

Asia Country/Region

Amid ongoing diplomatic efforts on both sides, Chinese FM Wang 8 March noted relations improving and both countries would work to “deepen mutually beneficial cooperation”. Beijing 28 March said Japanese restrictions on Chinese technology companies such as Huawei could damage relations. Military exercises and operations continued; Japan Air Force 20 March scrambled jets to intercept Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) electronic warfare and surveillance plane passing through East China Sea, and again 30 March to intercept PLA aircraft flying through Miyako Strait. Japanese island of Iejima 11-14 March hosted U.S. Marines training exercises (see South China Sea), while U.S. flew B-52 bombers in joint training exercise with Japan Air Force over East China Sea 19 March.

Korean Peninsula

Uncertainty over denuclearisation talks continued following abrupt end of late Feb U.S.-North Korea summit in Hanoi, also setting back inter-Korean ties. Observers blamed unrealistic expectations on both sides, while North Korean Vice FM Choe Son-hui 15 March told press conference in Pyongyang that U.S. President Trump had been prepared to consider sanctions relief with provisions to reapply them if Pyongyang violated commitments, but Sec State Pompeo and National Security Advisor John Bolton blocked move; also said Pyongyang may rethink ban on nuclear and missile tests absent concessions from Washington. U.S. General Abrams told House Armed Services Committee that observed North Korean activities were “inconsistent with denuclearisation”. Following fraught discussions, South Korea and U.S. 8 March signed new one-year Special Measures Agreement, under which South Korea is to raise its annual cost-sharing contribution for U.S. Forces Korea to nearly $920mn, up from approximately $800 million during previous agreement; U.S. used opportunity to publicly reaffirm strength of alliance. Inter-Korean liaison office in Kaesong thrown into turmoil as North Korean staff 22 March informed South Korea of intention to withdraw from operations, allegedly under direction of Kim Jong-un, leading to concerns of abandonment of key aspect of broader inter-Korean talks; however half of North Korean staff came to work 25 March, reportedly after Trump attempted to reverse sanctions on two Chinese entities accused of doing business with DPRK. Pyongyang 31 March said that 22 Feb break-in at its embassy in Spain was a “terrorist attack” and called for investigation, intimating the possibility of state-level involvement.

Taiwan Strait

President Tsai 21-28 March travelled to Palau, Nauru and Marshall Islands – three of Taiwan’s seventeen remaining diplomatic allies – to “deepen ties and friendly relations”, making stopover in Hawaii in sign of warming U.S.-Taiwan ties. American Institute in Taiwan 19 March announced new annual U.S.-Taiwan dialogue focused on increasing cooperation, with senior U.S. State Department officials to attend first iteration Sept 2019. Tsai 19 March announced gov’t had made request to U.S. to buy F-16 Viper fighter jets. U.S. navy 24 March sailed two ships through Taiwan Strait in third freedom of navigation operation in 2019, prompting Chinese formal complaint. Pro-independence former PM Lai Ching-te 18 March announced he would challenge Tsai for nomination for ruling Democratic Progressive Party for presidential elections in 2020, saying Taiwan did not want to be “second Hong Kong or Tibet”.

Afghanistan

Amid major Taliban attacks on security forces and continued political tensions, negotiations between U.S. and Taliban saw some progress, but Taliban’s rejection of govt involvement remains major sticking point. U.S. and Taliban negotiations in Doha 25 Feb-12 March concluded with U.S. envoy Khalilzad and Taliban representatives agreeing “in draft” on U.S. military withdrawal and Taliban assurances to prevent country from becoming platform for international terrorism. U.S. said key obstacle was Taliban
demand of three-to-six month withdrawal window, with U.S. suggesting three years. Taliban continued to reject engagement with Kabul, while govt also rejected negotiation formats not controlled by itself. President Ghani 8 March refused to participate in talks not led by govt, including “Moscow track” involving former President Karzai, and 11 March delayed national consultative meeting to 29 April. “Moscow track” meeting remains scheduled for mid-April, involving Taliban and major anti-Taliban factions. Tensions between Kabul and Washington increased with Afghan National Security Advisor Mohib 14 March accusing Khalilzad of delegitimising govt. Hostilities continued, with major Taliban attacks including on Afghan Army HQ in Washir district, Helmand province, killing 50 soldiers 1 March; and in Badghis province 11-16 March, killing twenty and capturing over 100 govt forces. Afghan and U.S. night raids and airstrikes reportedly killed at least 24 civilians in Nangarhar and Ghazni provinces 8-12 March; Ghani 13 March issued orders to abort or wait out operations in case of civilian presence; U.S. airstrike 23 March killed fourteen civilians after insider attack in Kunduz province. UN 24 Feb reported 3,804 conflict-related civilian deaths in 2018. Islamic State-Khorasan Province launched two attacks on urban centres, killing sixteen civilians near Jalalabad 6 March, and eleven Shiite Hazaras gathering in Kabul 7 March. Political tensions continued: Ghani 3 March appointed new commissioners and secretaries for Independent Election Commission and Electoral Complaints Commission; authorities 20 March announced another delay to presidential and provincial elections to 28 Sept, despite govt mandate ending late May. In Mazar-i-Sharif, clashes over appointment of new police chief killed at least one 14 March.

**Bangladesh**

Political tensions continued in aftermath of Dec 2018 general election and around local elections 10-24 March marred by deadly violence. Seven people shot dead and over a dozen injured in attack on election officials in Chittagong Hill Tracts, Chattogram division (south east) during first phase of polling 10 March; police blamed supporters of local candidate who had boycotted polls. Ahead of 18 March second phase, supporters of two rival Awami League candidates 16 March clashed in Joypurhat district, Rajshahi division (north), killing two. Sporadic violence and allegations of vote rigging in third phase 24 March; post-poll violence 25 March included killing of supporter of independent candidate Projpur district; Awami League activists reportedly attacked houses of Hindu community supporting independent candidate Jhenidah district. Main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) – who continue to contest Dec election result – and other opposition groups boycotted polls. U.S. 13 March released report on human rights in Bangladesh in 2018, highlighted enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and “widespread impunity for security forces” alongside restrictions on assembly; FM Abulkalam Abdul Momin 18 March rejected report as one-sided. Hundreds of students 20 March demonstrated in Dhaka after a student was killed by speeding bus, following similar protests in 2018.

**India (non-Kashmir)**

Security forces 7 March claimed to have killed three Maoist rebels in Jharkhand state (east) and same day killed a Maoist leader in gunfire in Wayanad district, Kerala state (south west). Police 16 March claimed to have killed two Maoist rebels in Visakhapatnam district, Andhra Pradesh state (south east). Suspected Maoist IED blast 18 March killed one member of security forces in Dantewada district, Chhattisgarh state (east).

Q&A: Calming India and Pakistan’s Tit-for-Tat Escalation

**Kashmir**

Despite reduction in India-Pakistan tensions, cross-Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir) clashes continued, along with Indian security forces’ repression of separatists within Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). In what it called “goodwill gesture”, Pakistan 1 March released captured Indian pilot whose plane it had shot down 27 Feb, while Pakistan and India High Commissioners returned to their posts 9 March. In first major diplomatic encounter since escalation, delegations from both countries met in Indian border village 14 March to discuss technical modalities of Kartarpur corridor facilitating Indian Sikh pilgrims visiting Pakistan-based religious site; Indian Foreign Ministry said meeting did not represent resumption of bilateral dialogue. Cross-LoC clashes between Pakistan and Indian militaries continued; Pakistan claimed Indian fire killed one civilian 1 March and two soldiers 2 March; India 24 March claimed one Indian soldier killed in cross-LoC clash. Pakistani navy 5 March claimed to have prevented Indian submarine entering Pakistani waters. U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton 11 March called for “meaningful steps” against Jaish-e-Muhammad militant group that carried out
Feb terror attack in J&K, and “other terrorist groups operating from Pakistan”. China 13 March placed “technical hold” on UN Security Council resolution proposing to list Jaish chief Masood Azhar as global terrorist. Inside J&K, security forces continued sweeping operations against suspected militants and detained scores of separatist leaders and supporters, particularly targeting Jamaat-i-Islami, which it banned 28 Feb; govt 22 March banned separatist Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front. Police 19 March announced teacher arrested as part of “terror case investigation” had died in custody, leading to large demonstrations in Pulwama district (south) and clashes with security forces. Security forces 29 March claimed to have killed two Jaish “terrorists” and four militants in Budgam, Shopian (west) and Kupwara (north west) districts. Govt 10 March excluded J&K from general elections scheduled to begin 11 April on security grounds; Kashmiri leaders criticised move as extending central govt’s control over state.

Q&A: Calming India and Pakistan’s Tit-for-Tat Escalation

Nepal

Govt intensified response to Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) following multiple IED and arson attacks by party since Feb including 8 March bombing at a foreign employment agency official’s Kathmandu residence (no injuries). Several CPN leaders and cadres arrested following cabinet 12 March ban on party’s activities; concerns growing about CPN reportedly possessing conflict-era weapons. Govt softened decision on ban following calls by both ruling Nepal Communist Party and opposition Nepali Congress leaders for dialogue. CPN 25 Mar announced protests against govt crackdown. Madhesi activist and leader of Alliance for Independent Madhes (AIM) CK Raut – arrested various times for controversial secessionist campaign – joined mainstream politics, launched Janamat Party following 8 March agreement with govt that withdrew all cases against AIM cadres in exchange for Raut’s commitment to respect Nepal’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. Tensions between provincial and federal govts escalated with plan by Province 2 to appoint district-level administrators in parallel to federally appointed officials. Several provincial chief ministers threatened to legally challenge proposed legislation on federal control over provincial security and perpetuation of administrative structures not recognised by 2015 constitution; provincial leaders claim retaining outdated structures undermines transition to decentralised federal model central to new constitutional project.

Pakistan

Authorities continued crackdown on militant groups in response to international pressure, following Feb attacks in Kashmir by Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Muhammad and subsequent military escalation with India (see Kashmir). PM Khan’s Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) govt 4 March promulgated “UN Security Council (Freezing and Seizure) Order”, to streamline procedure for implementation of UN Security Council sanctions against individuals blacklisted by Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which is due to review govt’s performance again in June. Interior Secretary 5 March ordered preventive detention of 44 members of proscribed anti-India groups pending investigation, including Jaish leader Masood Azhar’s son Hamad Azhar and brother Mufti Abdur Rauf, both mentioned in Indian dossier on Pulwama attack, given to Pakistan on 28 February. Following 4 March meeting by National Security Council, Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial govs 7 March took over administration of mosques and madrassas affiliated with suspected terrorist groups and seized some assets including hospitals. However, authorities did not arrest Jaish leader Masood Azhar, who was excluded from UN Security Council Resolution 1267 list due to Chinese veto 14 March. Govt responded strongly when opposition Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) chairman Bhutto Zardari questioned its anti-terrorism actions 13 March and demanded dismissal of three govt ministers with ties to proscribed groups, provoking Railways Minister Rashid to issue apparent threat against him. In Balochistan province (south west), Sunni militant and Baloch nationalists increased attacks: three police officers injured in bomb blast in capital Quetta 11 March; two civilians killed in bomb blast in Panjgur town 14 March; in Dera Murad Jamali area, bomb on passenger train killed four 16 March; in Ziarat district, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants 20 March killed six paramilitary officers in attack on guard post. Security forces 21 March rescued four hostages in clashes with Jaish al-Adl militants, part of fourteen Iranian border guards kidnapped 16 Oct.

Q&A: Calming India and Pakistan’s Tit-for-Tat Escalation

Sri Lanka

Month dominated by political manoeuvring ahead of Nov presidential elections, while UN Human Rights Council passed resolution giving Sri Lanka two additional years to fulfil its commitments on
reconciliation and accountability. Former defence secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa continued campaign to be nominated as presidential candidate for Sri Lanka People’s Front, amid uncertainty over degree of support from his brother, former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, possible bid for a second term by President Sirisena as nominee of Sri Lanka Freedom Party, and increased lobbying by leftist party Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna for constitutional amendment abolishing executive presidency. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Bachelet 8 March called on Human Rights Council to maintain Sri Lanka on its agenda, noting slow progress in govt’s commitments to transitional justice and addressing impunity, and arguing that “lack of accountability for past actions likely contributed” to anti-Muslim violence in March 2018 and to late 2018 constitutional crisis. Human Rights Council 21 March passed new resolution to “roll over” Sri Lanka’s commitments on reconciliation and accountability, giving it two more years to fulfil pledges it made in 2015. Even as Sri Lanka co-sponsored resolution, FM Tilak Marapana 20 March challenged aspects of High Commissioner’s report to council and rejected key aspects of 2015 resolution, including foreign judges in special court to investigate and try alleged war crimes. Reflecting deep divisions in govt following failed 2018 constitutional coup, Sirisena 27 March rejected resolution as “betrayal” of military and Sri Lankan people, claimed he was not informed and did not approve of its contents.

Indonesia
Violence continued in Papua’s Nduga regency, site of Dec 2018 killing by separatist rebels of sixteen road construction workers and subsequent security operations. Military 7 March reported three soldiers and seven to ten rebels killed as estimated 70 members of “armed criminal group” with military-grade weapons as well as spears ambushed group of 25 soldiers in Nduga area; West Papua National Liberation Army reported at least five soldiers killed, accused military of burning houses and interrogating villagers, sparking violence. Military 5 March said 600 soldiers to be deployed to finish building trans-Papua highway. Thousands of villagers reportedly remain displaced. West Papua National Committee spokesperson 13 March told session of UN Human Rights Council that military was targeting indigenous Papuans and committing human rights violations; govt spokesperson blamed separatist rebels for displacements. Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) provincial leader jailed for ten years 18 March for role in May 2018 Surabaya bombings which killed 28. Ahead of 17 April presidential and legislative elections, presidential challenger Prabowo Subianto claimed massive irregularities in voter roll, raising questions over credibility of result.

Myanmar
Arakan Army (AA) ramped up attacks across broad area of Rakhine State and southern Chin State, despite troop surge and vows by military and govt to crush insurgency. Over a dozen soldiers reportedly killed in clashes with AA in Paletwa township, southern Chin State 7 March; AA 9 March attacked police station in Ponnagyun, western Rakhine State, killing nine officers; same day reportedly occupied military tactical operations base in southern Chin State, capturing eleven prisoners and significant equipment; clashed on streets of Mrauk U town in west of Rakhine State 18 March. Six people killed in Buthidaung as army and AA clashed 21 March, shortly after peace talks in capital Naypyitaw with eight northern armed groups including AA. Court in Sittwe 19 March sentenced prominent Rakhine political leader and a co-accused to 20 years prison for high treason, in move seen as likely to fuel tensions. UN and local aid groups report nearly 20,000 civilians temporarily displaced in Rakhine State due to fighting in recent weeks; also reported that 95,000 people affected by govt restrictions on humanitarian aid to area. Govt 14 March announced new fourteen-member committee led by deputy upper house speaker (an ethnic Rakhine) tasked with bringing stability to Rakhine State and facilitating dialogue between govt, lawmakers and local people. Myanmar military 18 March announced appointment of three-member military “investigation court” to look into Aug 2017 ARSA attacks and security response. Bangladesh continued to move ahead with preparations to relocate some Rohingya refugees to camp on Bhasan Char, silt island 30km offshore. International Criminal Court prosecutor’s office visited Bangladesh 6-11 March as part of its preliminary examination of situation to determine whether to move ahead with formal investigation into alleged crimes against Rohingya.

Philippines
Dozens of suspected militants and several soldiers reported killed and thousands of civilians displaced as army clashed with Islamic State (ISIS)-linked militants in Maguindanao, while govt announced end of peace talks with communist rebels. Several soldiers reported killed in attacks by Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom
Fighters (BIFF) early March, with fighting escalating as military launched operations against group in Maguindanao 9 March; military 13 March said it had killed some 20 militants in air and ground assaults, including two BIFF leaders and Singaporean national belonging to Indonesian Jemaah Islamiya group; one soldier also killed. Two militants killed 14 March, one believed to be Abu Dar, senior Maute Group leader who escaped Marawi City siege in 2017; two soldiers killed. UN Humanitarian Agency reported over 35,000 fled fighting in Maguindanao, while clashes between military and Maute group in Lanao del Sur 11 and 14 March displaced almost 9,000. Military launched airstrikes and clashed with Abu Sayyaf group in Sulu and Basilan. Clashes continued with communist New People’s Army (NPA), including in eastern Mindanao and Northern Samar, and military reported mass NPA surrenders including in Negros Occidental and Mindanao; fourteen NPA reported killed in Negros Occidental 30 March. President Duterte 21 March announced permanent termination of dialogue with Communist Party of the Philippines, although govt said still open to localised peace talks with NPA rebels. Duterte 4 March approved executive order for implementation of final “normalisation” annex of Bangsamoro peace agreement, including, under security component, decommissioning and disarming of thousands of former MILF rebels and transformation of their camps; other components are development, confidence-building measures and transitional justice and reconciliation. Security officials 12 March warned first meeting of Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao regional peace and order council that Abu Sayyaf is still region’s top security threat, particularly in Sulu. Bangsamoro Transition Authority held inaugural session 29 March. Ahead of 13 May midterm poll, election commission 19 March declared Mindanao “category red” hotspot for risk of “election-related incidents” and “serious armed threats” by rebel groups.

South China Sea

U.S.-China tensions continued amid ongoing U.S. military exercises and Chinese and American diplomatic overtures to Philippines. U.S. flew B-52 bombers near contested islands in South China Sea (SCS) 4 and 14 March as part of its “continuous bomber presence mission” based in Guam. Following Jan reports that U.S. Marine Corps is developing conflict capabilities for taking “natural or man-made” island, U.S. Marines 11-14 March conducted training exercises on Japanese island of lejima. U.S. Sec State Pompeo 1 March said U.S. would defend Philippines from “armed attack” on its ships or aircraft in SCS during meeting with Philippines President Duterte. Philippines Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana 4 March said current Philippines-U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty was vague, risked “confusion and chaos” during crises and needed to be re-examined. Meeting in Beijing, Chinese and Philippines FM’s 20 March agreed to finish negotiations for Code of Conduct for behaviour in SCS by 2021 during meeting in Beijing, Chinese vessel 6 March reportedly rammed and sunk Vietnamese fishing boat in disputed waters near Paracel Islands chain; Vietnamese govt 21 March submitted official protest to China, while China asserted sovereignty over Paracel Islands and said Vietnam should stop illegal fishing activities in area. Two former Philippine govt officials 21 March filed case at International Criminal Court against Chinese President Xi for mass island-building causing irreversible environmental damage in SCS and undermining “food and energy security” of surrounding states. Malaysia PM Mahathir 7 March said China should define “so-called ownership” of SCS so other countries can gain benefits, stressing importance of freedom of navigation.

Thailand

24 March general election, widely criticised for irregularities, resulted in stand-off between junta and pro-democracy parties, while southern insurgent violence continued, including series of bombings outside conventional conflict zone. Pro-junta Phalang Pracharat Party exceeded expectations, gaining 8.4 million votes and 97 constituency seats, positioning it to lead a coalition govt with PM Prayuth Chan-ocha returning to premiership with electoral mandate. Pheu Thai Party (PT, pro-former PM Thaksin Shinawatra) won 7.9 million votes but most constituency seats (137). Seven pro-democracy parties united to form “democratic front” led by PT and 27 March announced they could form majority in lower house of parliament; final vote count to be reported 9 May together with calculation of party-list seats. King Maha Vajiralongkorn 30 March stripped Thaksin of royal decorations, which observers believe could influence political parties’ decisions on joining a coalition. More than 180 complaints of irregularities lodged with Election Commission (EC). EC halted vote counting on election night, and later twice posted – then removed – tallies marked by inconsistencies, casting doubt on EC’s competence and impartiality; protesters gathered in Bangkok 31 March to demand removal of election commissioners, while online petition demanding commissioners resign reached 830,000 signatures. In southern insurgency, Malay-
Muslim militants on night of 9-10 March staged series of bombings in Satun and Phatthalung provinces, north of four southernmost provinces that constitute traditional insurgent area of operations; no casualties reported. Deadly attacks continue in deep south; in Narathiwat, attacks included clash between rangers and several militants in Reusoh district 2 March, one suspected insurgent killed; no casualties in gunbattle next day in nearby Dusongyor; roadside IED wounded ranger in Cho Airong district 11 March; militants 12 March attacked military outpost in Tak Bai, wounding two soldiers and civilian; and on 13 March threw pipebombs at police barracks in Yi-ngo district, again no casualties. Woman killed in IED targeting ranger patrol 14 March, Bacho district. Army officer wounded in ambush in Sungai Padi district, 30 March.

New Zealand
Far-right terrorist 15 March shot dead 50 Muslim worshippers, including four women and four children, and wounded over 40 in attack on two mosques in Christchurch. During attack, which he live-streamed, and in anti-Muslim, anti-immigration “manifesto” posted online, attacker made references to other far-right extremists, white nationalists and ultranationalists in Europe and the U.S., and historical battles against Muslim armies in eastern Europe.

Europe & Central Asia

Bosnia And Herzegovina
Leaders of country’s three main nationalist parties agreed to talks to form new govt following Oct 2018 elections; during 28 March visit, EU Commissioner for European Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn urged members of tripartite presidency to form new govt quickly to resume reforms. Court in The Hague upheld genocide conviction of former Bosnian-Serb wartime leader Radovan Karadžić and extended his prison sentence to life.

Kosovo

U.S. and EU continued calls on Pristina to revoke 100% customs tariff on imports from Serbia, and for the two countries to resume normalisation talks; visiting U.S. envoy David Hale early month said U.S. and its Western allies would support any accord they reached, and called for end to “mutual provocations”. Parliament 7 March adopted eleven-point platform for negotiations with Serbia, stipulating need mutual recognition between countries and maintenance of current borders. Serbian President Vučić 8 March condemned platform, saying it was not compatible with the dialogue. EU Parliament 28 March voted again in favour of granting Kosovo citizens visa-free travel to bloc.

North Macedonia

Skopje court 15 March sentenced sixteen people to jail for role in April 2017 attack on parliament, including former interior minister Mitko Cavkov, jailed for eighteen years for “terrorist endangerment of the constitutional order”.

Armenia

PM Pashinyan 5 March met with European Council President Donald Tusk in Brussels for talks on EU-Armenia relations and Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, reportedly discussing comprehensive and enhanced partnership agreement and possible visa-free travel.

Azerbaijan
Following Feb reform announcement, President Aliyev made further progressive steps, 16 March pardoning 400 prisoners, including 51 political prisoners, ahead of Norouz new year holiday; EU welcomed step, saying it expected that “further similar steps will follow in future in line with Azerbaijan’s international commitments”.

Georgia
Crossings between Georgia and its breakaway regions reopened after two months closure as Russian border guards 15 March lifted all remaining restrictions, allowing regular movement of people and vehicles to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. News made public just hours before visit of foreign mediators of Geneva International Discussions (GID) to South Ossetia; co-chairs praised decision, but said closure “not justified” and asked for more coordination between conflict parties before any similar measures are introduced in future. Among those detained for trying to cross “illegally” was 29-year-old ethnic Georgian found dead at Russian military unit detention centre in eastern Abkhazia, where de facto officials said he committed suicide; Georgian officials launched investigation into case. NATO Sec Gen Jens Stoltenberg 25 March reiterated at joint NATO-Georgia military exercises near capital Tbilisi that “Georgia will become a
member of NATO"; said alliance will not accept “that Russia or any other power can decide what members can do”.

**Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)**

Despite tensions between Armenian and Azerbaijani leaderships over Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) peace process early March, much-anticipated official summit 29 March resulted in commitment to strengthen ceasefire, improve communications and implement humanitarian projects. Armenian defence minister late Feb announced military strategy that would consider possible attacks at enemy positions rather than just self-defence, while Azerbaijani President Aliyev 14 March accused Yerevan of attempting to block Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group-led negotiation process after Armenia proposed discussion on inclusion of de facto NK leadership in negotiations. After Director of Armenia’s National Security Service during visit to NK conflict zone 27 Feb announced full support to local nationalist calls for continued development of Armenian settlements, Azerbaijan 11 March announced launch of large-scale military exercises close to NK conflict zone – first since Armenian PM Pashinyan took office in May 2018. Armenia 12 March convened first-ever joint Security Council meeting with NK leadership in de facto NK capital Stepanakert, during which Pashinyan reiterated support to existing negotiation format and framework, and stated that inclusion of de facto officials not a pre-condition, but necessary for a more effective peace process. Azerbaijan 26 March reported one soldier killed in exchange of fire in southern direction of Line of Contact (LoC) in NK conflict zone. First official summit between Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Aliyev held in Vienna 29 March: both leaders assessed meeting positively and voiced readiness to continue talks. Minsk Group co-chairs released statement together with Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers which highlighted commitment of leaders “to strengthening the ceasefire and improving the mechanism for direct communication”; also mentioned agreement on “a number of measures in the humanitarian field”.

**Russia/North Caucasus**

Protests resumed in Ingushetia over Sept 2018 border agreement with Chechnya, raising concerns about possible threat to regional stability, while EU condemned human rights situation in region, and security operations continued. Ingush activists 20 March refiled petition to hold referendum on border deal with Chechnya to Ingushetia’s Central Electoral Commission; Ingush leader Yunus-Bek Yevkurov 20 March withdrew proposed legislation which would have cancelled need for new referendums on any regional border changes. Despite move, thousands gathered in Ingush capital Magas 26-27 March to protest deal and called for Yevkurov to resign. Several injured in clashes with security forces; demonstrators dispersed after police agreed to sanction new protest. Thousands of protesters also blocked highway at entrance of Nazran city 27 March. In Chechnya, Shali city court 18 March sentenced Oyub Titiyev, director of Chechnya office of Memorial human rights organisation, to four years in penal colony on drug charges; Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner called Titiyev’s conviction “latest example of the hostile and dangerous environment” for rights activists in Chechnya. Council of Europe’s Committee for the Prevention of Torture 11 March released statement condemning alleged widespread use of torture and ill-treatment of persons detained in Chechnya and urged Russia to conduct effective investigations in Chechnya and elsewhere in North Caucasus region. Security operations against militants continued; in Stavropol region, security forces 14 March killed two suspected militants in shoot-out in Shpakovsky district and arrested a third. In Dagestan, authorities 15 March reportedly detained two individuals suspected of financing Islamic State (ISIS) from Makhachkala and Kizilyurt districts, and 25 March detained three others from Khasavyurt district suspected of abetting woman in Nov 2018 suicide attack in Chechen capital Grozny. In Ingushetia, several gunmen 26 March injured three people, including Nazran mayor’s son, in shooting at Nazran town hall.

**Belarus**

Police arrested at least a dozen opposition activists and prevented several hundred from holding unauthorised anti-govt rally in Minsk 25 March to mark 101st anniversary of independence from Russia.

**Ukraine**

Police and protestors clashed on one occasion and hostilities increased slightly in Donbas as Ukraine prepared for first round of presidential elections 31 March. Ceasefire violations increased in conflict zone, with Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) monitors recording average of just under 400 explosions per day compared with under 300 in Feb. Violations peaked in first week of March, fell precipitously following 8
March recommitment to ceasefire, then saw another spurt 19-21 March. SMM reported five civilian injuries, three from explosive device and two from shelling; armed groups reported two additional civilian deaths from shelling; three people reportedly died of natural causes while crossing line of separation. Ukrainian armed forces reported eleven combat deaths 21 Feb-31 March; Ukrainian unofficial sources reported 21 members of armed groups killed in same period. Ukrainian authorities unilaterally opened Zolote checkpoint 24 March, citing 2015 agreement within Normandy Four negotiation format, however no crossings transpired, and head of so-called Luhansk People’s Republic said crossing would remain closed until “coordinated decision” by both sides. Ahead of 31 March first round of presidential election, far-right National Corps party held three “days of rage” during month to call for arrest of former National Security Council deputy head and others recently alleged to have overseen corruption schemes in defence sector. Protestors clashed with police 9 March after reportedly attempting to storm campaign rally by President Poroshenko; police reported 22 officers were injured; subsequent protests largely peaceful. Exit polls showed Volodymyr Zelensky with commanding lead in first round, with Poroshenko in second place. In 20 March interview with The Hill, Prosecutor General Yuriy Lutsenko accused U.S. Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch, who denounced ongoing corruption in 5 March speech, of giving him a list of people who should be immune from prosecution; Yovanovitch denied claim.

Cyprus
Attempts continued to resume reunification talks. Turkish FM Çavuşoğlu 11 March met Turkish Cypriot “foreign affairs minister” counterpart Kudret Özersay to discuss recent developments; same day met with UN Special Envoy Jane Holl Lute, after which he tweeted “all options are on the table for a permanent solution in Cyprus”. ExxonMobil 28 Feb announced discovery of significant (more than double previous estimate) gas reserves in Block 10 of Republic of Cyprus’ Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), prompting analyst warnings of risk of increased tensions with Greece/ Republic of Cyprus and possibly U.S. if Turkish military moves to prevent exploration activities.

Northern Ireland (UK)
Amid growing concerns over possible security implications of UK’s departure from EU for arrangements on border with Republic of Ireland, police 5 March discovered three small parcel bombs at transport hubs in London and another next day at Glasgow University; police 12 March said republican dissident group New IRA claimed responsibility for sending five packages, with fifth package found in post office in Republic of Ireland 22 March. Police 7 March claimed to have uncovered “significant terrorist hide” containing mortar parts in County Armagh (south).

Turkey
Operations against Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) continued in south east and in northern Iraq, authorities maintained crackdown on pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) and Kurdish movement sympathisers, and tensions increased with U.S. over Syria and Ankara’s purchase of Russian missile systems. In south east, security forces continued operations against PKK, with casualties remaining low. Turkish military cross-border air raids 3-6 March targeted PKK positions in northern Iraq’s Haftanin and Hakurk areas. Govt crackdown on HDP and its municipal affiliate continued ahead of 31 March municipal elections. Early results 31 March suggested President Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) lost mayoral race in Ankara and Istanbul to opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP), despite AKP’s electoral alliance securing 51.63% of national vote; pro-Kurdish HDP retained key strongholds in south east, including Diyarbakır, Mardin, and Van, while losing Şırnak, Ağrı, and Bitlis. Strains on U.S.-Turkey relations increased: following Washington’s 22 Feb announcement to maintain residual contingent of forces in support of Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) in northern Syria, Erdoğan 4 March reiterated intention to conduct Turkish military operation to expel YPG from Syria’s north east. Following meetings with U.S. officials in Ankara, Erdoğan 6 March refused to cancel purchase of Russian S-400 anti-aircraft missile system and expressed interest in procuring anti-ballistic S-500 missiles from Moscow at later date; U.S. 9 March warned deal would undermine military cooperation within NATO and jeopardise delivery of F-35s and Patriot missiles to Turkey. Counterterrorism efforts against jihadist cells and foreign terrorist fighters continued; authorities 13 March arrested fourteen foreign nationals in Ankara and a Danish citizen in Bursa, all suspected Islamic State (ISIS) members.

Kazakhstan
In televised address 19 March, President Nazarbayev unexpectedly resigned after almost 30 years in office, retaining positions of head of ruling party Nur Otan and Security Council chairmanship. Senate chair Qasym-Jomart Toqayev sworn in next day as interim president until next presidential election due 2020, while Nazarbayev’s daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva replaced Toqayev as chair of Senate. Parliament 20 March approved proposal by Toqayev to rename capital Astana to Nur-Sultan, prompting some protests in capital and other cities; dozens arrested. EU Parliament 14 March urged govt to end human rights abuses “and all forms of political repression”.

Kazakhstan

Deadly clashes broke out in Ferghana Valley over Kyrgyz construction of new road in disputed area near Tajikistan exclave Vorukh 13-14 March, killing two Tajik citizens and wounding dozens of Tajik and Kyrgyz citizens; border reopened 18 March following talks. Amid ongoing tensions between President Jeenbekov and former President Atambayev, who remains leader of Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK, largest in parliament), SDPK 18 March announced it will join opposition, reflecting apparent split in party. During visit by Russian President Putin late March, leaders agreed to expand Russian military base in northern town Kant.

Tajikistan

Deadly clashes broke out over new road in Tajikistan exclave Vorukh 13-14 March, killing two villagers (see Kyrgyzstan). Opposition activist Sharofiddin Gadoyev, who was reportedly kidnapped while visiting Moscow in Feb, then handed over to Tajik authorities and tortured, returned to the Netherlands early March following international pressure on Dushanbe; said he was pressured to back President Rahmon’s son Rustam in 2020 presidential election.

Turkmenistan

Along with Azerbaijan, Georgia and Romania, govt 4 March established new trade route to Romania, Black Sea-Caspian Sea International Transport Corridor. Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Reporters Without Borders March urged Turkmenistan to stop harassment of journalists following arrest of journalist Soltan Achilova 11 March. Amid signs of increasing economic difficulties, reports emerged late Feb that authorities were restricting internal travel from regions to capital Ashgabat.

Uzbekistan

U.S. charged Gulnara Karimova, daughter of late President Karimov, with conspiracy to violate U.S. foreign corruption laws over her alleged involvement in major international bribery scheme; came after Uzbek court ordered Karimova be transferred to prison for breaking terms of her five-year house arrest on corruption charges. Govt 25 March signed $10bn worth of cooperation agreements with United Arab Emirates on areas including investment, industry and infrastructure development and others.

Latin America & Caribbean

Colombia

President Duque’s objections to Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP), transitional justice mechanism created under 2016 peace deal with Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to handle cases deriving from govt-FARC conflict, fuelled concerns over impact on wider peace deal, while violence along Pacific Coast continued at high levels, particularly involving National Liberation Army (ELN). Duque in live televised address 10 March announced objections to six articles from law establishing SJP. Congress due to consider Duque objections and vote on them or modify SJP; observers voiced concerns that objections could lead to changes to SJP that would overload it with cases or undermine former FARC members’ confidence in transitional justice, and ultimately boost FARC dissident group recruitment. Opposition responded with speech and protests in Bogotá and other cities 18 March, attended by thousands. Constitutional Court announced it will review objections 20 June, regardless of outcome in Congress. In north east, ELN guerrilla group continued attacks on security forces including ambush on soldiers in Catatumbo 9 March, killing three soldiers and two civilians. ELN 8 March carried out numerous attacks in Arauca (east) to coincide with Duque’s visit to region, including improvised explosive devices (IED) that wounded five soldiers, attack on police station in town of Fortul, and reportedly killing an engineer it had previously kidnapped. Fighting broke out 11 March between ELN and Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC, country’s main drug trafficking group) in Chocó (west), trapping indigenous tribes in their territory, blocking access to food and leading to death of five children from starvation. High levels of violence along Pacific coast continued as clashes between armed groups that began 28 Feb caused
disp
lacement of 150 families from Tumaco into Ecuador. Political killings of community activists continued; armed group known as “Accountants” 17 March reportedly killed Argemiro López, local community leader of coca substitution processes, in La Guayacana, Nariño (south west).

Venezuela

govt and opposition maintained hardline stances amid ongoing international efforts to end political crisis, while nationwide electricity blackouts signalled devastating effects of failing to resolve it. Opposition leader and “interim President” Juan Guaidó, recognised by U.S. and allies, returned to Venezuela 4 March following regional tour, arriving at Caracas airport despite speculation he would be arrested. Police 21 March arrested Guaidó’s chief of staff Roberto Marrero, later charged in connection with alleged “terrorist plot”; U.S. Sec State Pompeo warned of “consequences”, although U.S. officials downplayed likelihood of military intervention. Massive electric grid failure 7 March left around 90% of country without power, with Caracas suffering blackout for two days and other areas for over a week; blackout led to cut-off in water supplies and communications, unknown number of deaths in hospitals as back-generators failed, and outbreaks of looting, particularly in Maracaibo city (north west). President Maduro’s govt blamed sabotage by U.S. and local allies, although experts reportedly blamed fire underneath power lines and faulty maintenance. Widespread and lengthy blackouts returned 25 March, which this time govt blamed on “sniper”, and again 29 March. Two Russian military planes landed 23 March, reportedly carrying military equipment and dozens of troops; Russia cited fulfilment of existing military contracts, but U.S. President Trump 27 March said Russia must “get out”. International Federation of the Red Cross 29 March said it had reached agreement with govt and opposition to begin mass aid relief mid-April. Amid increasing tensions with international actors backing Guaidó, govt 6 March declared German ambassador (who accompanied Guaidó on his return from airport in official vehicle) persona non grata, giving him 48 hours to leave. U.S. 14 March removed last diplomats from Venezuela and closed embassy; FM Arreaza said govt expelled them while Pompeo said their presence had been “constraint” on U.S. policy. International Contact Group, headed by EU and Uruguay, met at ministerial level in Quito, Ecuador 28 March, sent mission to Caracas mid-March primarily to discuss humanitarian assistance; Contact Group has given itself until May to determine whether mediated settlement is possible.

COMMENTARY: The Darkest Hours: Power Outages Raise the Temperature in Venezuela

Guatemala

Political tensions continued over International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), particularly its role in corruption case involving family of President Morales, against whom CICIG has also been preparing possible charges over illicit electoral financing. Attorney general’s office 6 March appealed to Constitutional Court to overturn Appeal Court’s Feb ruling that removed CICIG as plaintiff in corruption case of Morales’ brother and son, amid govt’s attempts to ensure CICIG plays no further part in national affairs. Inter-American Court of Human Rights 12 March publicly ordered govt to abandon controversial amnesty bill which would pardon crimes committed during 1960-1996 civil war, which also drew heavy criticism from other domestic and international actors. Group of lawmakers 13 March walked out during third and final reading of bill, forcing its suspension. Govt 12 March confirmed it had dismissed security head overseeing security for at-risk judges following concerns over his appointment in Jan and request from International Commission of Jurists. Regional focus on migration continued with Northern Triangle and U.S. govt 27 March signing agreement to deter international crime and curb irregular migration; however U.S. State Department 30 March announced end of aid to region, day after President Trump claimed Northern Triangle countries had “set up” migrant caravans.

Honduras

In attempt to bolster public security, president’s chief of staff 7 March announced govt preparing bill to increase size of military police and seeking ways to strengthen National Police and National Anti-Gang Force. Following Dec agreements resulting from UN-led dialogue, and after president of Congress put forward motion in support of new National Electoral Council which would be responsible for all administrative, technical and logistical aspects of elections with aim of increasing transparency, Congress received draft bill from Supreme Electoral Tribunal 27 Feb. Experts from Organization of American States (OAS) 25 March arrived in country to provide technical support on reforms. Regional focus on migration continued with Northern Triangle and U.S. govt 27 March signing agreement to deter international crime
and curb irregular migration; however U.S. State Department 30 March announced end of aid to region, day after President Trump claimed Northern Triangle countries had “set up” migrant caravans.

El Salvador

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet 6 March criticised proposed National Reconciliation Law, which Legislative Assembly began discussing in Feb, warning that if it was approved it would grant amnesty to those who may be “responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity” during 1980-1992 civil war, violating victims’ right to justice and reparation. Homicide rate remained lower than in 2018, with police chief 23 March announcing 659 murders since beginning of year, down from 870 in same period in 2018. Regional focus on migration continued with Northern Triangle and U.S. govts 27 March signing agreement to deter international crime and curb irregular migration; U.S. State Department 30 March announced end of aid to region, day after President Trump claimed Northern Triangle countries had “set up” migrant caravans.

Nicaragua

Despite progress in dialogue between govt and opposition, political situation remained tense as govt continued repression and faced further international isolation. Following 27 Feb resumption of govt talks with opposition Civic Alliance, parties 5 March agreed on roadmap for technical and procedural issues in negotiations, and agreed to invite Episcopal Conference (CEN) to act as witness, but CEN 8 March refused. On invitation of govt 14 March, Organization of American States (OAS) appointed Luis Ñgel Rosadilla as special representative to explore possibilities for OAS to act as guarantor, conditioning Rosadilla’s participation on release of political prisoners. Govt 20 March agreed to release all political prisoners over three-month period, with International Committee of the Red Cross overseeing release, to restart negotiation with opposition. Opposition representative 29 March reported govt agreed to restore protest and press freedoms and disarm paramilitary groups. However repression continued as human rights defenders reported govt continued detaining opponents. Opposition Blue and White National Unity (UNAB) 16 March held unauthorised protests in Managua; police violently repressed demonstrations, wounding eight people, arresting more than 100 including two Civic Alliance negotiators, and harassing journalists covering protests, though detainees were released same day; UNAB 30 March said police had suppressed protest in Managua, with ten demonstrators detained and several injured. Govt’s international isolation increased; European Parliament 14 March adopted resolution calling on EU to impose targeted sanctions against govt officials and suspend country’s Association Agreement with EU, which gives Nicaragua preferential trade access. U.S. envoy Todd Robinson 18 March stated U.S. had not ruled out any options, including military action; U.S. Sec State Mike Pompeo 27 March aired possibility of further sanctions. Economic conditions continued to deteriorate.

Q&A: A Thaw or a Trap? Nicaragua’s Surprise Return to Negotiations

Haiti

Political tensions remained high following Feb anti-govt demonstrations and unrest that left some 26 dead, with fears that ongoing calls to topple govt could lead to more violent protests. Opposition grouping Le Secteur Démocratique et Populaire 4 March held funeral in capital Port-au-Prince for four protesters killed during uprisings, leading to fresh protests and clashes with police who fired tear gas; further anti-govt protests 29 March. Amid executive paralysis, rising inflation and continued protests, parliament 18 March removed PM Céant in no-confidence vote; President Moïse 21 March named Jean-Michel Lapin as interim PM. In attempt to placate political tensions, Moïse late Feb announced national dialogue committee with mandate until May 2019, however, parts of opposition rejected initiative; several opposition parties proposed 36-month transition period including creation of constituent assembly to redraw constitution and creation of electoral council to promote electoral reforms and ensure free elections. Gang insecurity continued as violent clashes broke out between armed groups 13 March in La Saline neighbourhood of Port-au-Prince, leaving six dead. UN Sec-Gen Guteres 1 March recommended creation of special political mission for Haiti once UN police force’s mandate ends Oct 2019.

Mexico

Amid record levels of violence, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO)’s National Peace and Security Plan to fight crime moved toward becoming law, though details on strategy and operations, transparency and accountability not yet announced. All state congresses by 14 March had given approval for constitutional reform that allows armed forces to remain active in public security for another five years
and enables creation of National Guard, controversial main instrument of security plan; concerns remain
over militarisation of public security. Criminal violence continued unabated, most prominently Jalisco Cartel
New Generation (CJNG), which continues to push for expansion and territorial consolidation in centre of
country, and was blamed for two high-profile incidents during month: 9 March attack on night club in
Salamanka, Guanajuato state (centre), killing fifteen, and discovery of 27 bodies in Guadalajara, Jalisco
(west) 14 March. CJNG also in violent competition with other armed groups including Sinaloa Cartel over
smuggling routes in Tijuana, Baja California state (north) and against multiple groups for control of
extortion, trafficking and oil-siphoning in Veracruz state (Gulf coast). Mexican NGO 12 March released
report detailing Tijuana as world’s deadliest city, with Acapulco in Guerrero state (south) in second place.
Attacks on security forces continued; in Tierra Blanca (centre), CJNG 14 March ambushed state police,
 killing one officer, and attacked state police HQ with grenades. Migrants travelling through Mexico on way
to U.S. continued to face risks, particular in border state Tamaulipas, where around 20 migrants were
kidnapped from bus outside San Fernando 7 March. Federal govt subsequently announced it had dismissed
30 local agents of National Migratory Institute, acknowledging corruption. Journalist Santiago Barroso
murdered in San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora (north) 15 March, and journalist Omar Iván Camacho murdered

Middle East & North Africa
Israel/Palestine
Flare-up in strikes between Hamas and Israel threatened ceasefire and U.S. President Trump signed
decree recognising Israeli sovereignty over Golan Heights, Israeli-occupied Syrian territories. Palestinian
militants in Gaza fired rockets into Israel 14 and 25 March, both times provoking heavy Israeli strikes in
Gaza. Meanwhile, Egypt continued to mediate between Israel and Hamas. In Gaza, residents protested 14
March against high cost of living and unemployment; Hamas violently cracked down on crowd, and blamed
Palestinian Authority (PA) for instigating protests. Tens of thousands of Palestinians protested 30 March
on first anniversary of Great March of Return protests; Israeli security forces shot dead four at border.
Palestinians launched rockets from Gaza into Israeli night of 30-31 March, Israel responded with tank fire.
Israel 31 March expanded Palestinian fishing zone off Gaza and opened Erez and Kerem Shalom border
crossings. In West Bank, Israeli security forces shot dead six Palestinians in five incidents, including one
suspected of killing Israeli soldier and Rabbi near Ariel 17 March, and 27 March detained thirteen
Palestinians for “suspected involvement in popular hostile activities”. Mohammed Shtayyeh 10 March
appointed PM of PA; Hamas said new govt unconstitutional as not ratified by now dissolved Palestinian
Legislative Council. PA same day announced emergency budget, following late Feb statement that it would
not accept taxes collected by Israel on its behalf as long as Israel withheld taxes owed to families of, what
PA called, martyrs. In Jerusalem, U.S. Consulate General – responsible for Palestinian affairs – 4 March
closed with functions taken over by U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem. U.S. President Trump 25 March signed
decree recognising Israeli sovereignty over Golan Heights, overturning decades of U.S. policy and drawing
global condemnation; UN said “status of Golan has not changed”. Israel 27 March carried out airstrike near
Aleppo in northern Syria reportedly targeting Iranian weapons depot and killing several Iraqi and Iranian
fighters.

Q&A: Stopping an Unwanted War in Gaza
Lebanon
U.S. Sec State Pompeo 21 March met PM Hariri in Beirut, stating “Lebanon faces a choice; bravely
move forward as an independent and proud nation or allow the dark ambitions of Iran and Hezbollah to
dictate your future”. Following UK’s decision to classify Hezbollah in its entirety as “terrorist organisation”
late Feb, Hezbollah 8 March called for donations as it claimed Western sanctions had put it under financial
pressure; party leader warned other countries may follow UK’s example and U.S. sanctions may get
tougher.

Syria
Turkey began patrols in Idlib in north west to help contain violence even as govt and Russia upped
bombing there; Kurdish-led forces took Islamic State’s (ISIS) last holdout in east; and anti-govt protests
erupted in Daraa in south. In north west, govt and Russian airstrikes 13-23 March killed 35 civilians and
damaged Idlib prison, enabling dozens of ISIS and pro-govt prisoners to escape. Russian warplanes 10
March struck “White Helmets” first responders, killing two. Jihadist coalition He’i’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)
and other militants attacked govt forces in areas surrounding de-escalation zone. Turkey-backed rebels 9 March attacked govt positions in Hama governorate. Male suicide bomber 1 March killed seven civilians in Idlib city, prompting HTS to execute ten detained alleged ISIS members. Turkey 8 and 15 March launched first two patrols in demilitarised strip around de-escalation zone. Israel 27 March carried out airstrike near Aleppo, reportedly targeting Iranian weapons depot, killing several Iraqi and Iranian fighters. Regarding north east, U.S. 29 March said it would withdraw half of its 2,000 troops by early May, with further withdrawals dependent on developments. Turkish President Erdogan 6 March reiterated demand for Turkish-controlled 30km-wide safe zone along Turkish border, refusing compromise with Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG). Syrian govt 18 March insisted on full U.S. withdrawal and refused to concede any autonomy to YPG-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). In east, SDF renewed assault on ISIS in Baghouz near Iraqi border; 23 March claimed “total elimination” of ISIS caliphate in Syria. In south, residents of Daraa 10 March protested against govt decision to erect statue of former President Hafez al-Assad, and suspected rebel sleeper cells continued attacks on pro-govt forces. U.S. President Trump 25 March signed decree recognising Israeli sovereignty over Golan Heights, Syrian territories which Israel occupied in 1967, overturning decades of U.S. policy and drawing global condemnation; Syria called move “blatant attack” on its territorial integrity, UN said “status of Golan has not changed”.

REPORT: The Best of Bad Options for Syria’s Idlib

Iran

International Atomic Energy Agency 6 March published quarterly report confirming Iran has continued to abide by terms of 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Special Trade and Finance Institute (STFI), Iranian sister organisation of Instrument for Supporting Trade Exchanges (INSTEX), mechanism created by European JCPOA members in Jan to facilitate Iran’s purchases of humanitarian goods, formally registered in Iran 19 March. President Rouhani 11-13 March visited Iraq, first time as president, meeting senior Iraqi politicians, businessmen and religious leaders, including Grand Ayatollah Sistani. Iran and Iraq signed five memoranda of understanding to deepen economic and diplomatic ties. Iranian officials and counterparts from France, Germany, UK and Italy convened 18 March under Iran-E4 framework in Brussels to discuss regional issues, notably Yemen. Supreme Leader Khamenei 7 March appointed hardliner Ebrahim Raisi as new Chief Justice, to replace Sadegh Larijani, appointed as new chairman of Expediency Council – constitutional arbitrator between parliament and Guardian Council. U.S. 22 March issued sanctions designation against 31 individuals and entities linked to Iranian nuclear program; 26 March issued sanctions on additional companies and individuals in Iran, Turkey and United Arab Emirates for alleged sanctions evasion. Israel 27 March carried out airstrike near Aleppo in northern Syria reportedly targeting Iranian weapons depot and killing several Iraqi and Iranian fighters.

Iraq

Iranian President Rouhani visited Iraq for first time as president and leading Kurdish parties agreed to share power in Kurdistan, as Islamic State (ISIS) kept up insurgency. Rouhani visited Iraq 11-13 March, meeting President Salih and PM Mahdi and signing MoUs for joint projects involving energy sector, trade and railway infrastructure. In Najaf, site of Shiite shrine, Rouhani met Shiite cleric Sistani, who insisted that Iraqi govt must take control of Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) Shiite militias, some of whose factions are considered loyal to Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). U.S. Treasury 6 March blacklisted PMU faction Harakat al-Nujaba close to IRGC. U.S. 19 March granted govt new 90-day sanction waiver so it could continue importing energy from Iran. In Kurdistan, two leading parties, Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), 4 March reached deal to speed up formation of regional govt, allocating high executive and security positions to KDP and making PUK junior partner. Parliament 27 March voted to sack Nineva’s governor Nawfal Hammadi al-Sultan after at least 90 people killed in ferry accident in provincial capital Mosul. ISIS-related clashes continued: insurgents 6 March ambushed PMU on Mosul-Kirkuk road, killing six; in Mosul, car bomb killed two 8 March; in north Baghdad, militants 19 March killed three soldiers; security forces arrested five alleged ISIS members in east Mosul 20 March. After Syrian rebels Syrian Democratic Forces transferred some 400 suspected ISIS foreign fighters from Syria to Iraq, Iraqi authorities 15 March initiated court proceedings against fourteen French nationals. In north, Turkish air raids 3-6 March targeted Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) positions in Haftaran and Hakurk areas; Iraqi army 17-19 March clashed with PKK-backed Yazidi militias in Sinjar district, five militia members and two soldiers killed; talks late month between militias and army chief of staff eased fighting.
REPORT: After Iraqi Kurdistan’s Thwarted Independence Bid

Qatar

During Russian FM Lavrov’s tour of Gulf states, Lavrov 4 March discussed with FM Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani possible sale of Russian S-400 missile defence system to Doha, despite U.S. and Saudi opposition. Govt early March hosted further round of U.S.-Taliban talks in Doha (see Afghanistan).

Saudi Arabia

International pressure on govt mounted due to its role in Yemen war and Jamal Khashoggi’s killing in Oct. Germany 6 March extended temporary ban on arms exports to Saudi Arabia until end month, citing concerns over govt’s military conduct in Yemen; 26 March extended ban for six more months to 30 Sept. U.S. Senate 13 March adopted resolution aimed at ending U.S. support to Saudi-led coalition in Yemen; legislation U.S. President Trump has said he would veto. Interpol 14 March issued arrest warrants for twenty people allegedly involved in killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Saudi consulate in Istanbul in Oct; list includes two of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s close aides. Same day, Saudi human rights commission dismissed international investigation into killing saying govt had already taken necessary measures to resolve matter. Trial of ten female activists for allegedly conspiring with foreign entities began 13 March amid outcry in Western press, particularly amid reports that they had suffered torture and other forms of ill-treatment including sexual abuse. King Salman 27 March met Libyan commander of eastern military coalition Khalifa Haftar. Under pressure from Saudi Arabia, European govts 1 March blocked publication of EU blacklist of jurisdictions at high risk of being used for money laundering and terror financing, which includes Saudi Arabia.

Yemen

Fighting escalated in Taiz and Haja governorates and continued elsewhere, and implementation of Dec Stockholm Agreement stalled, raising risk that warring parties resume combat around Hodeida port and city. Govt and Huthis failed to redeploy forces away from front-line positions in and around Hodeida, as agreed in Feb, as both sides raised objections to redeployment plan; primary point of contention was composition of local security forces due to assume control of city and ports after redeployment. UK FM Hunt 3 March warned Stockholm process “could be dead within weeks” if sides did not stick to commitments. U.S. Envoy Matthew Tueller 21 March publicly blamed Huthis for delays in implementation and said weapons in non-state actors’ possession posed threat to “neighbouring countries”. Huthis 17 March said they had intelligence that Saudi-led coalition planned to escalate violence in Hodeida and that they were ready to strike capitals of Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates if implementation of deal is breached. Other components of Stockholm Agreement also remained stalled, including prisoner exchange and talks over contested city of Taiz in south. Fighting escalated in Taiz in second part of month between nominally allied pro-govt Yemeni groups; medical facilities late March received two dead and 49 wounded in four days. After flaring in Feb, fighting intensified in Haja governorate in north west between al-Hajour tribes and Huthis; UN 11 March reported 22 civilians killed in attacks in Haja’s Kushar district, and Saudi-led coalition reported Huthi shelling of houses killed several tribesmen. Huthis prevailed in Kushar, allegedly killing several key local leaders. NGO Save the Children said missile 26 March struck petrol station near entrance to hospital it supports about 100km from Saada in north killing seven people, including four children; U.S. 28 March urged Saudi-led coalition to conduct transparent investigation into bombing. U.S. Senate 13 March adopted resolution aimed at ending U.S. support to Saudi-led coalition in Yemen; legislation President Trump has said he would veto. Germany 6 March extended temporary ban on arms exports to Saudi Arabia until end month, citing concerns over Saudi Arabia’s conduct in Yemen.

BRIEFING NOTE: Crisis Group Yemen Update #7

United Arab Emirates

During Russian FM Lavrov’s visit as part of 4–7 March Gulf tour, United Arab Emirates (UAE) govt and Lavrov discussed political transition in Syria. Govt end Feb announced it would deploy 5G mobile phone network in partnership with Chinese tech giant Huawei, despite U.S. lobbying against move.

Algeria

Facing nationwide protests, President Bouteflika agreed not to run for fifth term, postponed elections indefinitely and promised reform; army and ruling party called on constitutional council to declare him unfit to rule and initiate transition, but some protesters rejected plan, demanding end of regime,
heightening uncertainty and political volatility in coming weeks. While Bouteflika in hospital in Geneva, his campaign manager 3 March submitted Bouteflika’s candidacy for 18 April elections ahead of his term’s end 28 April. Bouteflika same day promised early elections if he won and reforms including constitutional referendum; protesters rejected promises. Following mass protests 8 March, Bouteflika 10 March returned to Algeria, 11 March postponed sine die presidential elections, withdrawing his candidacy, and said national conference would decide new date for elections. Same day, he replaced PM Ouyahia with Interior Minister Bedoui, and tasked him with appointing new govt. Several Bouteflika allies stepped down: Ali Haddad 28 March resigned as president of Business Leaders’ Forum (FCE), authorities 31 March arrested him after he tried to cross Tunisian border; former Agriculture Minister Sid Ahmed Ferroukhi resigned as MP for ruling party National Liberation Front (FLN) 4 March. Interim FLN leader Moab Bouchareb 20 March backed Bouteflika’s transition roadmap. Over ten million people took part in weekly protests after Friday prayers 15, 22 and 29 March, but opposition struggled to form united front. Loose opposition coalition National Coordination for Change (CNC) 18 March called for dissolution of parliament and urged Bouteflika to hand over power to temporary collective presidency when his term ends. Army Chief of Staff Gaid Salah 26 March called for constitutional council to rule Bouteflika unfit for office; parliament would have to ratify council’s decision with two-thirds majority. Ruling FLN said it backed army’s initiative. Protesters called not just for Bouteflika’s resignation but also end of regime.

Q&A: En Algérie, la rue met le pouvoir face à ses contradictions

Egypt
Parliament continued constitutional amendment process to extend presidential mandate and increase term limits amid ongoing repression of dissenting voices. Following 14 Feb vote to begin deliberation on constitution, parliament 20-28 March held hearings with religious, economic, social and political representatives to propose changes. Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee to draft constitutional articles according to proposed amendments and submit them to vote in parliament by mid-April, followed by national referendum. In Sinai, military 11 March reported 46 Islamic State (ISIS) militants and three soldiers killed, without disclosing dates or locations. In Cairo, prosecutors 25 March referred 28 people to court on charges of joining ISIS and al-Qaeda; 30 March sentenced 30 alleged ISIS members over plot to attack church. Repression intensified after protests over govt response to 28 Feb train crash: authorities 28 Feb-3 March arrested 70 people in Cairo, Giza, Alexandria and Beheira; 4 March released ten and 7 March charged 35 with terrorism and spreading false news. Human rights groups 13-16 March denounced police torture of two transgender activists. Exiled television commentator Moataz Matar 4 March accused authorities of abducting eight of his family members.

REPORT: Bridging the Gap in the Nile Waters Dispute

Libya
Fighting eased in south and UN renewed efforts to mediate agreement between head of eastern military coalition Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar and PM of Tripoli-based internationally-recognised Govt of National Accord (GNA) Faiez Serraj to form new unity govt and unify state institutions, including military. Following Haftar-Serraj meeting 27 Feb in United Arab Emirates under UN auspices, UN Envoy Ghassan Salamé early March shuttled between them or their advisors in Libya. To show support for potential Haftar-Serraj deal, French FM Le Drian visited Tripoli and Benghazi 18-19 March, and commander of U.S. Africa Command Thomas Waldhauser visited Tripoli 19 March. After months of delay, Salamé 20 March said National Conference, part of UN Action Plan, would take place mid-April in desert city of Ghadames in west near borders with Algeria and Tunisia, but did not disclose agenda nor list of invitees. At meeting of Libya Quartet (League of Arab States, African Union (AU), EU and UN) in Tunis 30 March, AU President Moussa Faki announced national reconciliation conference would be held in Addis Ababa in July. Local elections took place in nine municipalities in country’s first voting for five years; turnout low at 38%, electoral commission said local elections would take place in about 60 other municipalities in coming weeks. Fighting eased in south as Haftar’s Libyan National Army consolidated control, following offensive launched in Jan, and oil production resumed in Sharara oil field, closed since Dec.

Mauritania
Ahead of presidential election planned for later this year, Defence Minister Mohamed El Ghazouani 1 March confirmed he would be ruling majority’s candidate. Leaders of opposition platform including National Forum for Democracy and Unity (FNDU) and Rally of Democratic Forces (RFD) 12 March failed to
reach agreement on common candidate; 27 March called for dissolution of electoral commission and formation of new one with greater opposition representation. Former PM Sidi Mohamed Ould Boubacar 30 March said he would stand in presidential election as independent candidate, with support from opposition Islamist party Tewassoul.

Morocco
Police 23 March fired water cannon to disperse some 15,000 teachers protesting low-wage temporary contracts outside parliament in capital Rabat in continuation of month-long protest movement; thousands demonstrated again next day. Govt took part in second round of talks with Western Sahara’s Polisario Front independence movement 21-22 March under UN auspices in Geneva, in presence of Algeria and Mauritania. UN envoy for Western Sahara Horst Köhler said parties had agreed to continue discussions, but there was “still a lot of work ahead”.

Tunisia
Political manoeuvring continued ahead of elections planned for late 2019. Electoral commission 6 March said legislative elections would take place 6 Oct and first round of presidential election 10 Nov. Several centrist politicians joined PM Chahed’s new political party. Authorities detained UN official tasked with investigating alleged violations of UN arms embargo on Libya in Tunis 26 March on suspicion of spying. UN late March asked Tunisia to free UN official, stressed he had diplomatic immunity.

REPORT: Décentralisation en Tunisie : consolider la démocratie sans affaiblir l’Etat

Western Sahara
Morocco and Polisario Front independence movement 21-22 March held second round of talks under UN auspices in Geneva, in presence of Algeria and Mauritania. UN envoy for Western Sahara Horst Köhler said parties had agreed to continue discussions, but there was “still a lot of work ahead.”

International Crisis Group (ICG), Richard Gowan, UN Director, "UN Strengthens Peacekeeping Despite U.S. Scepticism, Q&A / Global 29 March 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/un-strengthens-peacekeeping-despite-us-scepticism?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=b3668847ab-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_03_29_10_34&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-b3668847ab-359871089, commented, "This Friday, the UN hosts the 2019 Peacekeeping Ministerial Conference, an opportunity for politicians and diplomats to fill gaps in blue helmet missions. In this Q&A, Crisis Group’s UN Director Richard Gowan previews the agenda.

What is the point of the conference?
This is the latest edition of a series of conferences that former U.S. President Barack Obama kicked off with other leaders at the UN General Assembly in 2015. Vice President Joe Biden had chaired a trial run the previous year. The basic idea is to get senior figures together to pledge military units, or other forms of help like training, to UN Peacekeeping.

This process was the Obama administration’s response to major gaps in the UN’s forces revealed by crises such as the collapse of South Sudan in 2013. The president used his convening power to get other leaders to pledge high-grade units from advanced militaries that the UN was unlikely to attract otherwise.

The initiative, which included defence minister-level talks in the UK and Canada in 2016 and 2017, has worked quite well. The British sent medics to work with the UN in South Sudan, Portuguese special forces have deployed to the Central African Republic (CAR), and a number of NATO and EU members have sent air assets and intelligence specialists to Mali. Well-established UN contributors, such as Rwanda, have also upgraded the range of forces and types of units – like helicopters – that they offer the UN.

We are likely to see some additional steps in that direction this week. This year’s conference is not quite as high-powered as some of the earlier ones. One hundred and twenty countries will participate, but only half are sending ministers. Nonetheless, there are still countries that want to get involved in blue helmet operations. Mexico, for example, will make its first concrete pledge of a fully-fledged peacekeeping unit this week.

What sort of resources do peacekeepers need?
While peacekeepers often get stereotyped as shambolic and ill-disciplined, the overall picture is actually rather better. Only a limited number of troop contributors – mainly under-resourced African militaries – now consistently deploy ill-equipped or untrained contingents.

These ministerial meetings have helped raise the overall standard of forces. More broadly, the UN is able to be somewhat selective about which troops to deploy, as the total number of peacekeepers worldwide has dropped in recent years. When President Obama hosted his peacekeeping summit in 2015, the organisation was responsible for 105,000 soldiers and police officers worldwide, and UN officials had to scramble to find even quite basic infantry battalions to meet this level of demand. That figure has dropped to 88,000 as missions in places where they are no longer needed, like those in Liberia and Haiti, have closed down. This has allowed the UN to reject particularly ill-prepared contingents. The global number of peacekeepers is likely to drop further – the Security Council is slowly winding down its mission in Darfur, which has been a huge drain on the UN and is now well past its prime.

I facilitated a warm-up conference for this week’s meeting focusing on training peacekeepers in Uruguay last December, and it was striking that major UN troop contributors are working hard to standardise and upgrade deployment systems so that their troops will be attractive candidates for UN missions (a useful source of income for some militaries).

Nonetheless, the UN still has difficulties finding enough troops and military equipment for especially risky missions. Mali, where over 120 personnel have been killed in hostile acts by jihadist insurgents, is the most pressing case. UN officials hope that ministers attending this week’s conference will pledge help on problems like countering roadside bombs for the Mali force. They also need helicopters there, but these aircrafts are perennially difficult to find, and governments often place burdensome caveats on how these costly assets can be used.

UN officials also want to use this opportunity to push governments to deploy more female troops and police as peacekeepers. The UN Secretariat would like to double the number of women in its military and police units. The current figure is under 5 per cent. Defence officials – including Western ones – gripe that this request is unreasonable given the overall lack of women in their forces. But militaries including the Ethiopians, Rwandans, Ghanaians and Tanzanians have made good progress against the UN’s target. Angelina Jolie will be at the UN on Friday to encourage the laggards to do better.

Is the U.S. still a fan of the process?

The Trump administration’s attitude to this Obama legacy initiative is ambiguous. The U.S. is still one of the formal co-conveners of the process. Deputy Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan represented Washington at the last meeting in the series in Canada (and his boss, then-Secretary James Mattis, only declined to attend that summit for scheduling reasons). This Friday, the senior American representative will be the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, David Hale. He is a highly experienced diplomat, but it is clear that the U.S. interest in the process is down.

That fits with the administration’s broader and growing scepticism toward UN peace operations. The U.S. has been pushing hard for budget cuts to blue helmet missions since President Trump took office. Washington is now reportedly preparing to call for some hefty reductions to the size and budget of the UN mission in Mali, despite its struggle for security.

It is not clear whether Washington’s dislike for peacekeeping is motivated by budgetary concerns, principled aversion for multilateralism or practical doubts about what the UN can achieve – or all three at once. It is fair to point out that, while the Obama initiative may have motivated NATO members to send high-grade units to Mali and South Sudan, neither is close to stable. National Security Advisor John Bolton gave a harsh speech criticising “unproductive” and open-ended UN missions in Africa in December.

If the U.S. is retreating from this process, will other powers replace it?

European countries, which have a direct security interest in the UN managing threats in places like Mali and Lebanon, are taking this conference reasonably seriously. France has pressed its European allies to send personnel to Mali, and French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and his German counterpart Heiko Maas will be in New York. The UK is sending a comparatively junior minister, but London is a little busy with other political concerns right now. British officials thought that their recent deployment in South Sudan was good operational experience, and would like to make another significant contribution to the UN fairly soon.
But as so often happens when the U.S. steps back from multilateral institutions, eyes will turn to China this week. There are currently 2,500 peacekeepers from the People’s Liberation Army on UN missions, which is 1,000 more than deployments by all the other permanent Security Council members combined. Beijing is not sending a top political figure to this week’s meeting, and may not make any big new pledges. But back in 2015, President Xi Jinping promised to deploy up to 8,000 new troops on UN missions. Chinese and UN officials have taken some time to identify and assess suitable additional units, but this technical process is now largely complete. There is a good chance that the number of Chinese peacekeepers will expand quite considerably in the coming years, and Beijing has signaled that it wants senior UN posts and envoy-ships in recognition of this investment.

That could make the current U.S. administration, which has repeatedly raised concerns about China’s rising influence in international institutions in recent months, uncomfortable. But if Washington’s mounting scepticism toward UN peace operations creates a vacuum, it should not be surprised to see others start to fill it."

International Crisis Group (ICG), Isabelle Arradon, Director of Research & Special Adviser on Gender, "Protecting Women’s Space in Politics," Commentary / Gender, Peace And Security  6 March 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/protecting-womens-space-politics?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=d5fd3d5596-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_03_06_09_21&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-d5fd3d5596-359871089, commented, “Women human rights defenders around the globe are facing heightened threats of violence and repression. Sometimes they are targeted for being activists, and sometimes just for being women. World leaders should do much more to secure space for women’s safe participation in public life.

In early January 2019, unknown gunmen shot dead Maritza Isabel Quiroz Leiva, a 60-year-old Colombian land rights activist on a small farm near the Caribbean city of Santa Marta. Her killing was a stark reminder that speaking out on social and political issues in Colombia – whether land disputes, women’s rights, or the political violence that endures despite the 2016 peace agreement between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrilla movement – is dangerous business. For Maritza’s death is not an isolated incident: in the last three years, guerrillas (FARC remnants and others), criminals and mystery assailants have killed more than 300 activists (both men and women) like her.

Nor is Colombia the only country in its neighbourhood where violence against all human rights defenders is putting prominent women activists at risk of physical attack and other abuse. In 2018, our global conflict tracker CrisisWatch recorded several such murders elsewhere in Latin America – including that of Guatemalan indigenous activist Juana Raymundo in July and that of Colombian women’s rights activist Maria Caicedo Muñoz in October.

Women who are in the public eye as they challenge established norms and interests, from governments to insurgencies to criminal gangs, are prominent targets; and women leaders representing neglected constituencies – such as the poor, ethnic and sexual minorities, displaced persons or migrants – are also preyed upon. The murder in March of Brazilian Marielle Franco, a Rio de Janeiro city council member, is a case in point. In addition to being a campaigner against corruption and police brutality, Franco was a powerful advocate for black women, the LGBT community and youth. The investigation has moved slowly.

In a global perspective, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Michel Forst, highlighted in a 2019 report that in the current political climate – where there has been both a backlash against human rights around the world and a rise in misogynistic rhetoric among political leaders – human rights defenders who are women ‘have been facing increased repression and violence across the globe.’ The report suggests that these women are sometimes targeted for the causes they promote, and sometimes simply because they are women who are publicly asserting themselves.

Moreover, in addition to the risk of attack that all activists face, women activists are vulnerable to gender-specific abuse – which can include stigmatisation, public shaming (as a perceived way to damage their ‘honour’), threats of sexual violence, online harassment and killings. In April 2018, individuals seeking to undermine and intimidate Indian investigative journalist Rana Ayyub threatened her with sexual violence
on social media and used a fake pornographic video to tarnish her reputation. In June, unknown individuals ransacked the home of journalist and activist Marvi Sirmed, who has done much to highlight the central role of women’s rights and the rule of law in Pakistan’s political transition. In July, an unknown man attacked with sulfuric acid anti-corruption campaigner Kateryna Handzyuk in Kherson, Ukraine; with burns over more than 30 per cent of her body, she died from her wounds in November. And in September, masked attackers opened fire on Soad al-Ali, a leading human rights activist and mother of four in her mid-forties, in broad daylight in the southern Iraqi city of Basra. During roughly the same period, three other influential Iraqi women, including social media leader Tara Fares, were killed, or found dead in suspicious circumstances, at other locations.

One concern about the threat of violence or attack on women activists is that it not only affects their safety, but could chill their participation in public life, where women are already under-represented. Globally, only a quarter of parliamentarians are women, and nearly all heads of state or government leaders are men. This is not to say that addressing risks of political violence will by itself increase women’s representation in politics, as there are many possible reasons for the low numbers on women’s political participation worldwide. Nor does progress in this regard necessarily correlate with lesser danger to women. (Latin America, which has some of the highest rates of violence against human rights defenders in the world, boasts a vibrant women’s rights movement, and several of its parliaments have relatively high levels of female representation.) But making it safer for women to participate in public life can only help. States and their leaders should use the tools at their disposal – from good laws to strong enforcement to hold those responsible for abuse to account, to ensuring that security forces are attuned to the protection needs of women – to combat violence against women activists.

Protecting women’s space in politics is especially important in the conflict resolution area. Despite women’s longstanding role in informal dispute resolution, their near absence from peace talks and similar international security processes and mechanisms, as in Yemen or Afghanistan, requires particular attention. Sideline conflict-affected women – or women representing those with perceived low status in society due to their socioeconomic status, age, education, ethnicity or religion – is no way to build inclusive and lasting frameworks for peace.

As we celebrate International Women’s Day on 8 March, world leaders should speak out more forcefully about the critical importance of women’s participation in political life. They should take more measures to prevent and condemn verbal and physical attacks on women human rights defenders or political leaders and their families. They should also carve out greater and safer space for civil society, including women’s groups, to enable them to have a say in government policies affecting their lives.

The implications of violence against women activists and politicians are broad, not just for families, but also for the well-being of societies at large. Failure to protect women like Maritza Isabel Quiroz Leiva and Marielle Franco sends a terrible signal to women and girls wanting to raise their voice in the public square. Chilling their participation in public life would be a tragedy not just for the women whose potential is being squandered but for the communities in which they live.”

ICG, Robert Malley, President & CEO, “Why Research on Gender and Conflict Matters,” Commentary / Gender, Peace And Security 8 March 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/why-research-gender-and-conflict-matters?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=bcf3ed5a85-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_03_06_02_31&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-bcf3ed5a85-359871089, commented, “At Crisis Group, we believe the interaction of gender and conflict is of central importance. But we consider carefully what a gender perspective entails and the conceptual pitfalls we should avoid. For instance, women are not just victims, but have agency and choice.

Last October, Ethiopia appointed its first woman president, the only female leader of an African state today. In many national parliaments, from Mexico to Rwanda, women now match or outnumber men. One of the most powerful transitional justice forums in recent memory, held in Tunisia, is overseen by a woman. That’s the good news. Yet alongside these visible gains for women in the realm of high-powered leadership, women also continue to fill the ranks of conflict victims and targets of sexual violence. They also more visibly join insurgent movements, helping fuel violent conflicts that are traditionally seen as the preserve of male fighters. And, in the international backdrop, patriarchal populist leaders are rising to
power across a range of countries, their rhetoric laced with hostility to the very idea of women’s rights and equality.

In short, at this moment of great upheaval in the world order, gender is at the very forefront of a large number of political contestations, from struggles for the upper hand in American politics to fragile post-conflict states in Africa and the Middle East. To celebrate International Women’s Day, Crisis Group has published a short series of pieces this week aiming to set out a more nuanced vision and understanding of how gender dynamics interact with conflict and political violence, as well some of the intricate challenges we face working on this terrain. Much has changed since the UN Security Council passed its landmark Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security almost two decades ago.

How Gender Identities Shape Conflict

As a general matter, there appears to be greater awareness of how gender identities – in effect, what it means to be an ‘ideal’ man or a woman in a given society, and what are the accompanying assumed responsibilities and aspirations – often shape and sometimes even drive the way conflicts over land, power and resources emerge and are fought across the world. In contexts where governments are acutely failing citizens through either extreme repression and corruption, for example, militant groups often exploit the gap created by state failure to aid young people in getting married, establishing themselves as better providers of a key status marker and expectation: the ability to be a husband or a wife. States themselves sometimes use honour sensibilities and sexual violence as a way to punish and repress political opponents, male and female alike. And in conflicts from Somalia to Afghanistan, insurgent movements often challenge the legitimacy of federal governments by casting questions of gender equality or women’s status as Western impositions.

In our work, Crisis Group increasingly is focusing on the interplay of gender and conflict. But we also believe in taking a careful, nuanced view, considering precisely what a gender perspective entails and, importantly, some of the conceptual pitfalls it should take care to avoid. We seek to look at how men and women experience the effects of corruption, state collapse, criminal gang violence and displacement in disparate ways. We highlight the sometimes discreet and unremarked roles women play in pushing for dialogue among warring parties, and try to push for their inclusion when serious peace negotiations get underway.

But we also look at women’s roles as conflict actors – not merely as victims, but as perpetrators, with agency and choice. Indeed, one of our key lines of reporting and analysis involves women and militancy and the dilemmas faced in understanding the roles women play in insurgent groups. This is especially urgent today, as the Islamic State (ISIS) is losing the last of its territorial hold in northern Syria, and as many governments confront the return of their female ISIS citizens, tasked with prosecuting and rehabilitating women whose degree of culpability and involvement in the group’s evolution and atrocities is poorly understood.

As our fieldwork over the years has demonstrated, many other societies and states deal with similar challenges across their own insurgencies and wars. Whether in the context of north-eastern Nigeria’s Boko Haram movement or of the enduring hold of Al-Shabaab throughout many swatches of Somalia, women join and then exit armed groups, their own social vulnerabilities and grievances often merging with the broader grievances and fissures such groups reflect and exploit. Women form an intimate part of the story of the emergence of many of these armed movements: many Somali women, for instance, initially affiliated with the early Al-Shabaab movement for protection from warring clan violence. In Nigeria, Boko Haram militants have appealed effectively to women’s yearning for some independence and opportunity by offering them religious education and some matrimonial choice amid a corrupt, impoverished milieu of state failure. More recently, we have tried to grapple with the active, operational and support roles women play in these insurgencies, building that knowledge into our assessments of the groups themselves and the strategies we propose to counter their appeal.

There are further complexities. Acknowledging women’s influence and centrality to militant groups also requires a nuanced assessment of their varied levels of accountability. The challenge is to refine one’s understanding of women’s involvement without swinging from one binary view to another, seeing women as either passive wives or so-called jihadist brides on the one hand, or as predatory combatants responsible for a militant group’s most dreadful atrocities, on par with male fighters, on the other. Our work in Nigeria in particular has tried to address this question, writing into the story of Boko Haram – so
often memorialised by the #BringBackOurGirls movement that focuses on the group’s victims – a portrayal of women members who have consciously swelled the group’s ranks while suffering its viciousness themselves.

These questions only scratch the surface of our Gender, Peace and Security project, which we are determined to develop and deepen. Our 6 March essay surveys the shrinking space for women’s activism across Latin America and beyond. The “Our Journeys” travelogue from 5 March explores the growing civil society sphere in Iraq through a cast of young men and women who are finding new pathways to social and political influence. This is just a start to continued work on this topic throughout the coming year and beyond.”


His references to those attacks placed him in an informal global network of white extremists whose violent attacks are occurring with greater frequency in the West.

An analysis by The New York Times of recent terrorism attacks found that at least a third of white extremist killers since 2011 were inspired by others who perpetrated similar attacks, professed a reverence for them or showed an interest in their tactics. The connections between the killers span continents and highlight how the internet and social media have facilitated the spread of white extremist ideology and violence.”

Maps showing the sites of and connections between the attacks are in the Times article.


“Abstract

Conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa region increasingly intersect. A compilation by cause, type and principal actors would yield a bewildering list that obscures rather than clarifies. Instead, this chapter offers a new way of looking at MENA conflicts since World War I through five distinct conflict ‘clusters’, each with its unique genealogy, as mediated by external interventions. Each cluster is set off by a political ‘earthquake’ that generates rolling tremors and new fissures, and unleashes secondary struggles. The 2011 Arab uprisings were the latest such earthquake, precipitating the breakdown of the state in several Arab countries. The resulting civil wars invited external intervention, upon which local conflicts started to bleed into one another. The global retreat of the United States as unipolar power is leaving the region prey to a multiplication of conflict nodes without an actor capable of imposing overall dominance.

Yet conflicts can and must be managed and brought to an end, whether through negotiation or victory/defeat. This chapter proposes a way forward but insists that the first impulse should always be: Do no (further) harm.”

International Crisis Group (ICG), “Council of Despair? The Fragmentation of UN Diplomacy,” special Briefing 1 / Global 30 April 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/b001-council-despair-fragmentation-un-diplomacy?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=7ed80cede2-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_04_29_03_1&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-7ed80cede2-359871089, commented, “Wracked by divisions and political infighting, the UN Security Council is failing to respond to some of the world’s most pressing crises. To overcome dysfunction and retain credibility, the council’s members should prioritise the few cases where international cooperation is still possible.

What’s new? Longstanding doubts about the effectiveness of the UN Security Council are intensifying, due to deepening tensions among the U.S. and its allies and between Western powers and Russia and China.
As tensions build on the Security Council, there is a risk that irreconcilable differences over select issues – Israel-Palestine and Ukraine, for example – could paralyse the body, undermining its broader credibility.

What should be done? Security Council members should preserve the forum’s utility by finding compromises where possible – such as on Sahel military missions, Libya and Venezuela – while accepting that some disputes may be intractable.

I. Overview

In the first four months of 2019, the UN Security Council faced a series of significant crises in the world – and failed to make a significant impact on any of them. Council members have sparred bitterly over Venezuela, struggled to sustain the Yemeni peace process, and failed to come to common positions on events in Sudan and Libya. This lacklustre performance is symptomatic of worsening tensions between the forum’s five veto-wielding permanent members and the wider erosion of international cooperation. The Council’s inaction means that current crises have the potential to escalate international tensions, further eroding the UN’s credibility. If Council members want to preserve some leverage – and act as a vehicle for their own influence – they need to restore some sense of common purpose.

Council ambassadors are attending an annual retreat on 2 May 2019, which offers a chance for them to discuss ways to ease relations. They should take steps to de-escalate simmering arguments on issues where agreement among the permanent five could be within reach. First, France and the U.S. should end a cycle of unproductive disputes in the Council about the costs and goals of UN and non-UN military missions in the Sahel, instead settling on a joint approach to stabilising the region, which is in both their interests. Secondly, the Council as a whole should overcome dangerous splits over how to handle the worsening violence in Libya, with an immediate focus on securing a ceasefire and relaunching UN-brokered talks. Lastly, all Council members should suspend their public arguments over Venezuela, which have made it harder to agree on political and humanitarian strategies there. Even if the Council can ease tensions on these crises, it may well split over issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But to retain a minimum of credibility, Council members need to hang together where possible.

Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan


European diplomats in touch with senior officials in Tehran said Iran would most likely resume research on high-performance centrifuges used to produce nuclear fuel and put restrictions on nuclear inspections in Iran. It would be Iran’s most significant reaction to date as President Trump has steadily increased sanctions.”

A number of commentators believe that, intentionally or not, President Trump is moving toward war with Iran.
Philip Gordon and Robert Malley, "Tensions with Iran are escalating into a dangerous chain of events," The Hill, May 8, 2019, https://thehill.com/opinion/international/442701-tensions-with-iran-are-escalating-into-a-dangerous-chain-of-events?utm_source=Sign-Up-to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=57b87f2571-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_01_28_06_41_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab6c11ea-57b87f2571-359871089, commented, "The new announcement by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani that Tehran would cease compliance with parts of the 2015 nuclear agreement is the logical consequence of the decision that President Trump made to walk away from the landmark deal one year ago today. The move increases the prospects that the deal will collapse entirely, which could in turn lead to a dangerous escalation, or even war. The reckless foreign policy decision by Trump to walk away from a deal that was working has now placed the United States into a corner with no realistic strategy for how to get out."

International Crisis Group (ICG), Ali Vaez, Iran Director, "Trump's Iran policy could prop up regime in spite of economic harms," Axios, May 8, 2019, https://www.axios.com/trumps-iran-policy-could-prop-up-regime-in-spite-of-economic-harms-98bb843c-ca91-4e26-b033-f281afc33227.html, commented, "The announcement by President Hassan Rouhani on Wednesday that Iran will partially cease to comply with the 2015 nuclear deal was a foreseeable outgrowth of draconian sanctions imposed by the U.S. after its withdrawal from the agreement last year.

Why it matters: The Trump administration's 'maximum pressure' campaign has increased the threat of a nuclear escalation across the Middle East. Even short of that nightmare scenario, it could be self-defeating in the long term, hurting Iran's pro-Western middle class at the expense of hardliners who control both the black market and a repressive state apparatus to stifle dissent.

Where it stands: U.S. policy has undoubtedly inflicted economic harm on Iran. Economic growth that followed the lifting of sanctions in 2016 has given way to an inflationary recession. The Iranian currency has lost two-thirds of its value, as oil exports have dropped by more than half and will likely fall further.

Although food and medicine are exempt from sanctions, lack of access to the global financial system is giving rise to a humanitarian crisis. Some families have been unable to afford meat or obtain specialized medicine.

Yes, but: There is no sign Iran is shifting its regional policies or willing to bow to the Trump administration's demands. Nor is there any hint that economic hardship has triggered popular unrest of a magnitude that would threaten the regime's survival.

In the absence of visible changes in Tehran's political calculus, Washington is defending the sanctions based only on their quantity and severity.

Between the lines: The current U.S. approach is unlikely to succeed.

The one thing Tehran would find more intolerable than suffering from sanctions is surrendering to them. Its counterstrategy: resist and survive, as it has in other collapses of oil revenue over the last 4 decades.

Iran will not negotiate without a strong hand. During the nuclear deal talks, President Obama took regime change off the table and let Iran enrich uranium on its own soil. Coercive diplomacy needs inducements of a kind the Trump administration has not offered.

The bottom line: The net effect of maximum pressure is an Iran with its economy in ruins but its regime intact. To prevent a costly war of choice, the U.S. may need to step aside from maximalist demands and preconditions and use staggered sanctions relief to advance win-win negotiations."

A combination of the high cost to Iran, and the militias its supports, of the wars in Syria and Yemen and the impact of U.S. sanctions (possibly along with other lesser factors) has been causing a severe economic strain on Iran and the country's population. This, in turn, has drastically reduced the finances of Hezbollah, which has used up many of its resources in Syria, and other militias it supports beyond its borders (Ben Hubbard, "Iran's Allies Feel the Pain of American Sanctions," The New York Times, March 28, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/28/world/middleeast/iran-sanctions-arab-allies.html).
International Crisis Group (ICG), "Iran Challenges Remaining Partners to Save Nuclear Deal," Statement / Middle East & North Africa 8 May 2019, commented, "Responding to the Trump administration’s “maximum pressure”, Iran has announced it will no longer respect all the limits placed on its nuclear research activities by its 2015 deal with world powers. With Washington having renounced the deal, the remaining signatories should hasten to save it.

One year ago today, President Donald Trump announced that he was withdrawing the U.S. from the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Until now, Iran, as repeatedly confirmed by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), has abided by the restrictions placed by the nuclear agreement on its proliferation activities, despite rapidly declining returns. That status quo was increasingly untenable; Iran’s decision today is the predictable and unwelcome result. As Crisis Group has long argued, the burden now falls on the JCPOA’s remaining signatories to cooperate with one another on finding ways to provide Iran with a meaningful economic incentive that in turn could allow Tehran to come back into full compliance with the JCPOA and avoid a much more dangerous escalation.

In a statement issued on 8 May by the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), which sets the country’s major domestic and foreign policies, Iran announced that it would no longer “commit itself to respecting the limits on the keeping of enriched uranium and heavy water reserves at the current stage”. It went on to present a 60-day ultimatum to the deal’s remaining participants (Russia, China, France, Germany and the UK) to ensure that the economic normalisation envisioned under the JCPOA’s terms, increasingly curtailed in the face of a withering unilateral U.S. sanctions campaign, is addressed. Should the two months pass without a breakthrough by the P4+1, the SNSC warned, "Iran will suspend compliance with the uranium enrichment limits and measures to modernise the Arak Heavy Water Reactor". In remarks to the Iranian cabinet, President Hassan Rouhani asserted that “we are announcing the reduction of our commitments, not withdrawal from it”.

The response from Iran’s JCPOA interlocutors has thus far been cautious and concerned. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who has been hosting his Iranian counterpart Javad Zarif in Moscow, put the blame for the looming crisis on Washington, citing “the U.S.’s irresponsible behaviour”. The Chinese government, too, suggested that “the U.S. has further aggravated the tension on the Iranian nuclear issue”, while urging that cooler heads prevail. The latter sentiment is also clear in the statements of European parties, but not without an accompanying warning. "There are no sanctions today from Europe because Iran has so far always respected the commitments it has taken", France’s defence minister explained. “If these commitments were not respected, naturally this question would be asked”.

There are several lessons from today’s developments:

1. Iran has opted for minimum retaliatory measures in response to U.S. maximum pressure. This suggests that Tehran hopes to keep the deal alive until the outcome of the U.S. presidential election becomes clear in November 2020. The framing of these measures as in line with the JCPOA’s paragraphs 26 and 36 proves that Iran is trying to remain within the deal’s framework. In essence, Iran is signalling its desire to maintain its strategic patience policy, but coupling that gesture with a warning that its patience is wearing very thin, especially given rising domestic criticism of the Rouhani administration’s restraint.

2. The two measures announced today pose different proliferation risks. Heavy water overproduction would not in the short run enhance Iran’s capabilities to dash for nuclear weapons, if it decided to do so. A new IAEA report is expected later this month, but according to the last one Tehran had 124.8 metric tonnes of heavy water back in February. If Iran continues producing at the same average pace as before (two tonnes per month), it would not reach the threshold before 7 July. As to the low enriched uranium (LEU) threshold, Iran had 163.8kg of uranium enriched to 3.67 per cent. Tehran has the capacity to produce around 100kg of LEU per month. If it does so, it will surpass the limit before the 60-day deadline, and thus start shortening its breakout timeline (the time needed to enrich enough uranium for a single nuclear weapon) from one year to less than that. But Tehran remains in control of how fast it desires to escalate. The good news is that because Iran is still implementing the Additional Protocol to the Nonproliferation Treaty, the IAEA can monitor all of these activities closely.

Washington is no position to complain about these Iranian violations, because it committed the original sin by unilaterally withdrawing from the deal last year. Moreover, by revoking waivers for countries to purchase excess production of Iran’s heavy water and LEU last week, the Trump administration had
rendered compliance with these commitments nearly impossible for Tehran. So by choosing these two measures as its first response, Iran is making clear where the blame lies.

The bigger concern is the 60-day deadline, which raises risks of an escalatory spiral. This agreement’s erosion could well pick up pace in the next few months as Washington doubles down on its sanctions and Iran digs in. If Iran restarts work on the Arak heavy water reactor or increases the volume or level of its uranium enrichment in July, it will compel the Europeans to trigger the snapback of the UN sanctions.

With Iran insisting that they step up their efforts to salvage the deal, and threatening otherwise to withdraw, the ball is now in the court of the deal’s remaining signatories. Europe has done a lot to establish a banking channel, but this step is only one of many to which Brussels committed, and it is not yet operational. The reality is that Russia and China have not done much, either, and the latter seems to have given in to U.S. pressures by reducing its oil imports from Iran. Now is the time for Russia, China, France, Germany and the UK to intensify their cooperation with one another and implement steps that could provide Iran with a meaningful economic incentive that in turn would allow Tehran to come back into full compliance with the JCPOA. For instance, China could continue to buy oil from Iran or Russia could engage in oil swaps with Tehran (with the latter providing some of Russia’s energy needs in the south in return for the former exporting the same amount of oil on Iran’s behalf) and inject the proceeds as credit into the European special banking channel that would allow Iran to import goods from Europe.

The Trump administration’s continuous tightening of the economic squeeze and repeated calls on Europe to exit the agreement always carried the risk of provoking an Iranian response. The administration’s self-proclaimed goals were to change Iran’s behaviour and get a better deal. As should have been clear from the outset, those stated aims were always wholly unrealistic. But they were not the real objectives. For at least some senior U.S. officials, escalation with Iran is and always has been the name of the game. That is precisely what the remaining parties to the deal should strive to avoid.


The U.S. decision on 22 April to end sanctions exemptions for Iran’s remaining oil customers, following on an earlier designation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), significantly escalates the Trump administration’s coercive campaign against Tehran. The intent is clear: bankrupt Iran into acceding to unilateral U.S. demands or, even better, imploding its economy.

First of all, the strategy’s success now depends more on China, India and Turkey – Tehran’s remaining key oil customers – than either the U.S. or Iran.

Historically, China dislikes unilateral sanctions, which could one day target its own economy. Beijing also has little interest in facilitating regime change in the only country in the energy-rich Gulf region where Washington lacks a foothold. India is in the middle of a general election. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has little interest to take steps that would increase fuel prices or depict him as subservient to U.S. whims. For its part, Turkey appears loath to alienate a neighbour with whom it has had four centuries of peaceful relations in favour of an unreliable ally, which supports Syrian Kurds affiliated with the PKK (Ankara’s arch enemy) and threatens to cut off the sale of F-35 fighter jets if Turkey purchases and deploys the S-400 Russian missile defence system.

Of course, Washington can try both persuasion and – if necessary – pressure to compel the trio to fall in line. The former requires credibility and apt diplomacy, which have been rare commodities with the current occupants of the White House. The latter could backfire. Under U.S. law, the Trump administration can sanction any company or bank engaged in energy-related purchases with Iran’s Central Bank.
could derail U.S. trade negotiations or sour relations with these three major countries; or push them to channel their transactions with Iran through banks that would not mind being sanctioned, as China did in 2012 with Kunlun bank. They could also join the European special purpose vehicle, or establish a new one, to bypass U.S. restrictions through a barter system using credits from Iranian exports to pay for exports of goods to Iran without requiring monetary transfers.

Washington’s present approach makes possible two scenarios, neither of which is promising: either Iran digs in, prompting a frustrated White House to double down yet again on measures that alienate key allies and risk regional escalation; or Iran calculates that it has little left to lose – especially if its remaining oil customers toeing Washington’s line – and decides to restart its nuclear program to increase its leverage or challenges the U.S. and its regional partners across one of the many tense flashpoints scattered across the region. In other words, between present realities and the idealised outcome of Iranian capitulation wished for by the Trump administration lies a fraught and dangerous path.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates’ explicit support for cutting off Iran’s oil exports by flooding the market entails risks too. By encouraging and abetting Trump’s maximum pressure policy they are aiming not only to weaken their regional rival but to turn a neat financial profit, as the oil price rises along with their exports. But as Iranian leaders, both pragmatists and hardliners, have repeatedly warned, Iran is not going to sit on its hands and starve. Options for disturbing an already tense oil market abound. As Sadollah Zarei, a prominent Iranian strategist and advisor to Qassem Soleimani, the commander of Iran’s elite Quds force, recently wrote, Iran could push militants to disrupt Saudi and Emirati oil shipments to Europe through the Bab al-Mandab and the Red Sea, without closing the Strait of Hormuz, through which Iran ships its own oil to Asia. This could not only rattle the markets, but also result in a military clash between the U.S. or its allies and Iran (which, of course, could be the outcome some Iran-hawks in Washington and some of their regional allies seek). Cyber-attacks on Saudi and Emirati oil facilities is another possibility. Neither of these scenarios is far-fetched and both have precedent.

U.S. strategy might make sense if a quick and easy win were assured. But if past is prelude, Iran will not negotiate with Washington unless it has a strong hand, for which it likely would have to restart its nuclear program to accumulate leverage. This means that only a nuclear crisis could lead to a return to the table. But Iran’s abandonment of the nuclear deal is more likely to trigger war than diplomacy given the mood in the U.S. and Israel. In the same vein, there is a long track record of Iran pursuing regional policies it deems critical to its national security, regardless of its economic well-being. And finally, even in the unlikely event that the Islamic Republic collapses, there is no guarantee that a pax Americana emerges from the ruins of the Iranian economy and its shattered middle class. If this is the expectation, then the lessons of Iraq may have been lost on the architects of the 2003 invasion, some of whom are once again in the saddle in Washington.

Unfortunately, history shows that Washington’s response to a policy that fails to deliver is often to double down on it.”

International Crisis Group, ICG, Maria Fantappie, Senior Adviser, Iraq (Consulting), "A New Generation of Activists Circumvents Iraq’s Political Paralysis," Our Journeys / Middle East & North Africa 5 March 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/new-generation-activists-circumvents-iraqs-political-paralysis?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=d42edd9c79-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_03_05_01_S4&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-d42edd9c79-359871089, commented, "Researching the talks on forming a new Iraqi ruling coalition, our Senior Adviser for Iraq Maria Fantappie finds a country whose youth, women, civil society, officials and even politicians are hungry for bottom-up change to a stalemated, top-down system of governance. I have spent much of my career – as an academic, an adviser to the EU and a policy analyst – speaking with high-level policymakers in Iraq. In many meetings, I have tried to get a grip on the complex political structures of a country ravaged by war, sanctions, foreign occupation and internal conflict. It is easy to be caught into a general tendency to look closest at what is going on at the top, focusing on the government, the challenges it faces inside Iraq and beyond, and the shortcomings of the political system that arose after the U.S.-led invasion of 2003. We tend to forget that when a political system fails to deliver, societies may organise and find solutions on their own.
I visited Baghdad between October and February to research the difficult and lengthy process of forming a government, which has yet to be completed. The cabinet’s composition is new but sadly familiar as well. Appointing technocrats rather than members of the political class to ministerial posts marked an attempt to trigger a transition from a dysfunctional political system. Yet technocrats remain dependent on the old political figures who have little interest in reforming a system that serves them. In that sense, Iraq is at a crossroads. A sense of hope and a readiness for reform run parallel to a stubborn belief that a broken system will continue to sputter along.

Washington’s post-invasion attempt to remake Iraq has entrenched ethno-sectarian politics in the country. It empowered political parties organised along ethnic or sectarian lines, and rendered it almost impossible to rise through government ranks without affiliating with one of these parties. Ethno-sectarian politics, together with the oil-based economy, has discouraged meritocracy in the public sector, which employs the majority of the working population. Instead it has encouraged patronage, which consigns public sector employees and (indirectly) everyone else to dependence on the political class for access to quality health care, education and jobs. This political class is largely discredited, its policies dysfunctional and unpopular, but Iraqis feel the system would not work without it.

Because the political class generally benefits from this vicious cycle, I am not surprised when some of them openly say: “We want to keep things this way. It is more convenient for everyone”. But some of the newly appointed technocrats are desperate to break out of the cycle. I am here to understand how that might be done.

The Green Zone

A typical week begins with a meeting with a newly appointed government minister. He sends an armoured car for me, making it easier to get through the checkpoints that abound in the city. The driver takes me into the Green Zone, a fortified area in which many Iraqi officials live and work, though most ministries are located elsewhere in the city. Parts of it have long been off limits, but since the U.S. invasion, this section of the city was cut off from the rest of Baghdad, its high walls and barbed-wire fencing translating the stark disconnect between government and society into a concrete geographical division.

One of the new government’s first decisions, taken in December, was to reopen parts of the Green Zone to the public in the early mornings and late evenings. My driver, Abbas, recalls the moment as exhilarating, and insists that today we traverse the 14 July bridge – a privilege the U.S.-led occupation authority and subsequent Iraqi governments once restricted to persons with the appropriate government-issued badge. “This bridge was closed to us for 15 years,” he says as he drives across it. “They wanted to keep this part of the city for themselves”.

At my appointment the minister leads us into a meeting room and we begin talking about his role in the government. He is a technocrat, and claims that he did not want his job, but that the new prime minister, Adil Abdul-Mahdi, an old friend, pressured him to accept. He is keen to improve service provision, yet describes himself as doomed to fail or with little chance of success. He insists that he will be thwarted by a senior cadre of officials in his ministry, who have vested interests in keeping things exactly as they are.

He says: "Whatever reforms I may have in mind I cannot implement through my ministry. Before starting any reform from the top, I would need to replace all general directors [senior posts in the Iraqi administration] or to appoint them to different tasks. Several gained their positions through affiliation with parties that are powerful in parliament or connected to militias. Firing them is impossible". This system is so entrenched that he has little choice but to play the same game.

He also has to watch his own back, taking care not to alienate others within the government who might become vindictive rivals, or to make a misstep that an adversary might be able to characterise as corrupt. In a system rife with abuse, accusations of corruption – whether warranted or not – are a common way to dispose of political enemies. "Look at that," he tells me, pointing at a black briefcase on the floor.

Every day at 5:30pm, a car comes to my home with paperwork for me to sign. I have to read each paper, carefully, making sure that none of what I sign will incriminate me later. That is half a day of work right there lost in signing papers ... without improving anything".

A Generational Shift

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Iraqis, and especially millennials, have grown up in a political system that offers little participation or representation. Yet, regardless of their level of education, many also have developed an aspiration for realising civic rights and accountability, whose absence has fuelled disillusion and disengagement across society.

As a female professional, I am particularly sensitive to this challenge. Many women of my generation are disillusioned with ossified political institutions resistant to change. In our youth, we were taught to believe in equal opportunity. But as we grow older, we find that change takes much longer than we expected, even in institutions that purport to champion equal opportunity.

As I research how to break the stalemate of Iraq’s political system, I see similar patterns. Merely speaking about political reform is not going to generate solutions. Political elites too often manipulate these ideas to serve their own purposes, emptying them of content. Most of the leaders I speak with fit a similar profile: male, middle-aged, their roots in the same political establishment. This is not where solutions to Iraq’s deep challenges will come from.

As my days of meetings turn into a week, I wonder what new forces might be brought to bear to make change. I think I need to look at Iraqi politics from a new perspective. Maybe it is time to identify who from outside the political class could drive change.

A Somewhat Self-governed Society

It is clear that society is not sitting back and watching, but already organising itself from the bottom-up. Iraqis have had practice at this. During the 1990s, the decade of UN-imposed sanctions, Iraqis developed an impressive ability to adapt to hardship. The younger generation learned from their parents’ experience.

To be sure, the crisis of political representation has not energised every person in this new generation. For some, it has fostered disengagement, if not nihilism. This alienation is what has led many youths to take up arms – against other Iraqis during the civil war from 2005 to 2007 and to fight the Islamic State, or ISIS, between 2014 and 2017 – or to leave the country.

But in others, the representation crisis has triggered a pragmatic, constructive response. ‘If the government won’t do it, we will,’ one 22-year-old tells me. Young Iraqis and women, for whom it is hardest to gain access to formal politics while staying independent, have found in civil society opportunities for political participation, and have launched or joined initiatives that develop solutions to policy problems that the political class has been unable to address. Some of these organisations have been operational for years, but many of them formed in 2014, when accumulated governance failures allowed ISIS to conquer large swathes of the country. Eventually, the government, with the aid of paramilitary groups, retook all this territory. But the organisational energy generated by the 2014 shock endures, and a new generation of civil society activists is emerging.

Many of these civic activists argue for a new social contract based on citizenship and merit instead of patronage and unquestioned loyalty. They put forward a civil and social rights agenda, with top priority on improving education and health care and a renewed focus on climate change.

A Lawyer’s Story

I decide to meet a group of women activists, all leading members of civil society organisations working on everything from improving women’s rights to political participation. It is to take place at Hanaa Edwar’s home and office in Baghdad’s Karrada neighbourhood. Hanaa heads Amal (“hope” in Arabic), an association committed to development and the respect of human rights in Iraq.

I enter a small, impeccably trimmed garden. Six poodles run around excitedly, but there is no sign of Hanaa or anyone else. I make my way through the quiet, austere interior to the reception area.

I am soon welcomed by Shaima (all names of activists mentioned below are pseudonyms), a 28-year-old freshly graduated from the College of Law in Baghdad. Together with other young lawyers, Shaima began volunteering in 2016 and then established an NGO dedicated to advancing a women’s rights agenda in parliament. She explains, “For a long time women have been waiting to be granted their rights. We want to [make women] an active part of the solution through the skills and knowledge we offer”. The group is working to speed up passage of the domestic violence law in parliament, amending discriminatory articles in the penal code (some clauses prescribe different punishments for men and women who have committed the same offence) and contesting religious courts’ authority over marriage and divorce. “We are also
A Water Activist’s Story

My next meeting with the new civil society generation is at the headquarters of the Iraq Civil Society Solidarity Initiative. It is located in an ordinary house in central Karrada that has been transformed into a shared working space for various initiatives. One undertaking is devoted to the protection of Iraq’s water resources. The government has been in negotiations with Turkey over the Tigris and the Eufrates waters – both rivers originate in Turkey – and with Iran over waters of Tigris tributaries. Turkey and Iran are rerouting the rivers and building dams, greatly reducing the flow of water into Iraq. Since the government has made little progress toward restoring the flow, Hussein, a volunteer, says his organisation has focused efforts on water management inside Iraq.

‘The idea of environmental activism is relatively new in Iraq,’ says Hussein, who is still in his twenties and in 2016 became the executive director of an initiative for the protection of the Tigris. He notes, ‘Sectarianism and terrorism might end as politics evolve, but the issue of water is going to last. The protection of water resources is going to affect the very existence of Iraq. We need to make people responsible for the way they manage and use water’. Hussein’s goal through his organisation is to work with farmers whose livelihood depends on the two rivers to improve irrigation and raise awareness about the importance of water management.

One of his organisation’s activities is holding youth camps in Iraq’s southern marshes, which offer young people from different parts of the country a chance to observe agricultural practices in this sensitive ecosystem. “We are also engaging with activists from Iraqi Kurdistan and bringing them to the south. When it comes to nature, we should work together regardless of political differences,” Hussein declares. I ask Ali, another activist, what sparked his interest in protecting the environment. He says he was deeply touched by a vist to a family in the marshes whose cow had died due to lack of water.

Intrigued, I want to find out if youth activism on the water issue is matched by equal attention on the government’s side. Hussein arranges an appointment for me at the Ministry of Water Resources.

At a section of the Ministry of Water Resources in central Baghdad I’m welcomed by Marwa, a 32-year-old agricultural engineer. I have requested an appointment with the national director of irrigation projects. She welcomes me in the reception area and escorts me to the general director’s office. It is crowded with visitors. When she presents my request to the director’s secretary, he responds bureaucratically: “If she wants to meet the general director, she will have to provide me with a written request”. We turn and leave the noisy room behind us.

Marwa invites me to her office on the second floor. We walk through dark corridors with broken windows, flickering neon lights and a makeshift cardboard ceiling. Marwa shares an office with a female colleague. The two desks are loaded down with papers. Maps of Iraq’s waterways are stacked on the floor next to a kettle, a computer made in 1998 and a defunct keyboard. She proudly shows me the origami figurines with which she has decorated her office. ’I learned this on YouTube,’ she says of her hobby.
The ministry has its own water management initiative. It selects local leaders and puts them in charge of water distribution. The initiative is similar to the one started by the civil society activists, but the ministry’s version usually involves local leaders who are close to major political forces, and it appears to end up benefiting some who are closer to the local parties’ representatives.

While describing the initiative’s limited impact, Marwa pauses to say: ‘I volunteered to sit on a committee in charge of cooperation with civil society initiatives on water. At least, we can see some results through them. I often use the ministry’s data and pass this on to the activists. They might make better use of it.’ She smiles. The depth of cooperation with civil society initiatives depends on the government official. Marwa is somewhat unusual. Many Iraqi officials distrust civil society organisations because they suspect them of being foreign-funded and because they resent outside oversight of their work.

Bridging the Gap

I never get my appointment with the general director. But as Marwa accompanies me back to the foyer, she shows me pictures on her phone of an initiative of her own at the ministry. She has distributed red lapel pins representing the campaign to stop violence against women, office by office, to everyone throughout the ministry. As she bids me goodbye, she says: “I really can’t stand doing nothing”.

As a public sector employee and part-time activist, Marwa is struggling against the odds to bridge the yawning gap between government and society, connecting a sluggish bureaucracy to civil society initiatives. And while hers may be an individual endeavour, linking the grassroots to the state bureaucracy is a departure from years of failed top-down reforms.

Now it is time for the government to step up as well, and make the issues that civil society has championed its own priority, working in coordination with organisations and individuals like the ones I met. After all, these issues—from women’s equality to water management—are critical to Iraq’s future. In working to address them, the country’s political leaders should know that they have allies. And these are not just in faraway capitals, but close by, in their own communities, primed to help.”


What’s new? Elections in 2018 confirmed that the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) remain the dominant forces in Iraqi Kurdish politics. But fallout from the 2017 Kurdish independence referendum has undermined inter-party cooperation and thus weakened the two parties’ bargaining position vis-à-vis Baghdad.

Why does it matter? Depending on how KDP and PUK leaders renegotiate their relationship, overdue reforms in the Kurdish region and talks with Baghdad could both move forward. Progress would allow Kurdish leaders to minimise the region’s vulnerability to external threats and help it recover from the damage caused by the referendum.

What should be done? Backed by the U.S. and EU member states, the UN should seize the opportunities presented by government formation in Erbil to encourage institutional reforms in the Kurdish region and a sustainable settlement with Baghdad on the two main outstanding issues: revenue sharing and the status of the disputed territories.

Executive Summary
The furious reaction to the September 2017 Kurdish independence referendum – in the wake of which Iraqi forces recaptured most of the country’s disputed territories – has forced the leadership of Iraqi Kurdistan’s two main political parties to consider rebuilding their partnership and jointly re-engaging with Baghdad about outstanding differences. These steps are a strategic necessity if these parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), are to advance the Kurdish region’s interests. Yet inter- and intra-party rivalries, as well as leadership contests, are undermining any inclination in that direction. The referendum backlash also accelerated the erosion of both the parties’ internal democratic processes and the region’s governing institutions, while strengthening family-based rule. Any international effort to advance negotiations between Erbil and Baghdad should begin by encouraging renewed KDP-PUK partnership and reinvigorating the push for political reform in the Kurdish region.

The year 2017 was disastrous for Iraq Kurdistan. The KDP and PUK had hoped to trade their fight alongside the Western coalition to defeat the Islamic State (ISIS) for Western support for the Kurdish independence drive. But the two parties frittered away any advantage they might have derived from the battlefield victory over ISIS with an ill-timed, KDP-led referendum initiative. Not only did they lose control of large swathes of the disputed territories and incur the wrath of just about every important global or regional power except Israel, but they also deepened political polarisation in the Kurdish region amid reciprocal cries of betrayal when the curtain came down on the referendum gamble.

In October 2018, the appointment of Adel Abdul Mahdi, a man known as friendly to the Kurds, as Iraq’s prime minister presented the Kurds with an opportunity to settle outstanding issues such as the disputed territories and revenue sharing. Yet the KDP and PUK cannot seize it if their engagement in Baghdad remains disjointed. For the time being, they seem more inclined to prioritise unilateral deals with powerful Shiite political-military networks in Baghdad. These may deliver quick but only fragile gains.

The two parties’ erstwhile strategic partnership, forged by their respective leaders Masoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani more than a decade ago and an anchor of the region’s stability since then, did not survive the turmoil of 2017 and Talabani’s death that same year. It is proving difficult to resuscitate the partnership or to create a solid alternative foundation for the region’s future. The intra-Kurdish rift complicates relations not only with the Iraqi prime minister, but also with the new president, Barham Salih of the PUK, whose appointment the KDP opposed. Iraqi Kurdistan’s principal weakness is the fact that, since the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime in 2003, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has failed to build institutions that could regulate the region’s political system autonomous of the two former rebel parties. Today the region is moving backward. Both institutions and political parties are in crisis, hostage to a web of party figures who are inter-connected through family and/or patronage interests.

The problem starts with the parties themselves, and the erosion of internal democratic procedures that could ensure stable leadership renewal. Leadership councils and political bureaus have ceased to perform as platforms of consultation. Instead, personal and family interests prevail in putting forward candidates for office or taking policy decisions. If this trend continues, it will further empower leaders who think that Kurdistan could re-emerge from the post-referendum crisis through party and family networks rather than intra- and inter-party cooperation and accountable institutions. Hardliners also aim at regaining ground lost after the referendum through party-led deals with Shiite parties in Baghdad rather than by engaging, jointly, with the Abdul Mahdi government. Such deals empower parties over institutions in both the Kurdish region and Baghdad and thus diminish the prospects of either the Erbil or Baghdad governments delivering on negotiated settlements on outstanding issues.

In 2018, national and regional parliamentary elections reaffirmed the KDP’s and PUK’s dominance in Iraqi Kurdistan, despite the referendum stumble. They won to a large extent because the population appears to feel alienated from politics, and thus resigned to the KDP-PUK condominium, while the opposition is divided and short on strategic vision. Yet the continuation of politics as usual promises no solution for the region’s deep political crisis. Reforms that would reinstitute oversight mechanisms, such as independent commissions and an independent judiciary authority to check the executive, are overdue.

The course of Iraqi Kurdistan’s politics depends on whether reformist or hardline forces prevail within the two leading parties, the KDP in particular because of its overall dominance. So does the course of talks with Baghdad. If KDP reformists are able to overcome party and family allegiances and make common cause with kindred spirits in the PUK, they could together push for institutional changes in the
KRG and open the way for negotiations with Baghdad on a host of outstanding issues. But if anti-reform elements impose themselves in the KDP, the party might try to slake its apparent thirst for hegemony in the Kurdish region, as exemplified by the referendum drive. Such a move, in turn, would bolster the PUK’s hardliners.

International partners that have heavily invested in the Kurdish region in the fight against ISIS should be concerned that the region’s democratic governance and its institutions’ strength will backslide now that the jihadist group is defeated. To prevent such regression, they should encourage revival of oversight mechanisms that would enable the Kurdish population to hold their leaders accountable.

The U.S., whose influence in Iraq largely depends on smooth intra-Kurdish cooperation in both Erbil and Baghdad, should be particularly concerned by this matter. So, too, should EU member states, which are committed to the strategic objective of strengthening a balanced, accountable and democratic system in Iraq. The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq will also need intra-Kurdish cooperation as it readies itself to mediate discussions between Erbil and Baghdad on disputed territories and revenue-sharing.

These institutions could help the Kurdish region overcome internal divisions, preserve accountability mechanisms vis-à-vis an increasingly disenfranchised population and reinvigorate reformist elements who are better positioned and prepared to negotiate with Baghdad’s central authorities. This way, the self-inflicted wound of the independence referendum will have a chance to heal and the Kurdish body politic to regenerate.

ICG, Maria Fantappie, Ali Vaez, "Don’t Let Iraq Fall Victim to U.S.-Iran Rivalry: Baghdad must insulate itself from the fallout by weaning itself from exclusive dependence on two outside backers, Foreign Policy, April 30, 2019, commented, "There has been a constant in Iraqi politics since the 2003 U.S. invasion: the stronger the antagonism between the United States and Iran, the weaker the Iraqi government becomes. Competition between Iraq’s two main external backers polarizes its politics and paralyzes day-to-day operations. Today, with tensions between Tehran and Washington on the rise, Iraq once again could be a political and physical battleground, upsetting its fragile internal balance and deepening regional turmoil.

While the United States and Iran are likely to pursue this mutually reinforcing escalation, the Iraqi leadership does not have to acquiesce in becoming collateral damage. It must reduce its binary dependency on Washington and Tehran.”


The rest of the international force in Afghanistan would leave at the same time, after having mixed success in stabilizing the country since 2001. The plan is being discussed with European allies and was devised, in part, to appeal to President Trump, who has long expressed skepticism of enduring American roles in wars overseas.

The plan calls for cutting by half, in coming months, the 14,000 American troops currently in Afghanistan. It would task the 8,600 European and other international troops with training the Afghan military — a focus of the NATO mission for more than a decade — and largely shift American operations to counterterrorism strikes.

Fatima Faizi and David Zucchino, "700 Afghan Women Have a Message: Don’t Sell Us Out to the Taliban Years," The New York Times, February 28, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/28/world/asia/afghanistan-women-taliban.html "It was a rare sight, even after 18 years of progress in Afghanistan: more than 700 women from across the country, gathered to send an unequivocal message to the men now negotiating with the Taliban.

We want peace, the women said, but not at the cost of our rights."
The security situation in Afghanistan, and the condition and position of the Afghan Army and police were continuing to decline in mid-March 2019. Najim Rahim and Rod Nordland, "Taliban Capture About 150 Afghan Soldiers After Chase Into Turkmenistan," The New York Times, March 17, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/17/world/asia/afghanistan-soldiers-taliban-turkmenistan.html, reported, "The Taliban carried out the biggest known capture of Afghan soldiers of the war, taking 150 prisoners after they chased units into neighboring Turkmenistan and that country forced them back, Afghan officials said on Sunday.

The operation took place in the northwestern Afghan province of Badghis, and brought to 190 the number of soldiers captured by insurgents in the hotly contested district of Murghab — with 16 more soldiers killed — in less than a week.

Maria Abi-Habib, "Terrorism Watchdog Castigates Pakistan Over Aid to Militants," The New York Times, February 22, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/22/world/asia/pakistan-terrorism-funding.html, reported, "Pakistan is not doing enough to curb terrorism financing and money laundering, a global financial watchdog said Friday in a stern warning that reflects renewed scrutiny of the country’s links to militant groups."

Salman Masood, "Mired in Crisis, Pakistan Vows to Move Against Militant Groups," The New York Times, March 5, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/05/world/asia/pakistan-terrorism-blacklist-sanctions.html, reported, "Pakistan said on Tuesday that it would take new steps to seize and freeze the assets of people and militant groups who are on the United Nations’ list of designated terrorists, after months of international criticism."

The announcement came as India and Pakistan were still on edge after a suicide bombing in Kashmir last month led to a military clash between the two. And last month, a financial watchdog group, the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force, said Pakistan was still not taking enough concrete steps to curb financing and money laundering by terrorist groups.

Pakistan risks being blacklisted by the task force, which would open the door to international sanctions that would be devastating to the country’s already teetering economy."

Jeffrey Gettleman, "Pakistan Premier: ‘No Use’ for Armed Militias Anymore," The New York Times, April 9, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/section/todayspaper, reported on Pakistan’s Prime Minister, Imran Khan, who stated, "‘We have decided, for the future of our country — forget the outside pressure — we will not allow armed militias to operate anymore.’"

ICG, "Mitigating Risks for Syrian Refugee Youth in Turkey’s Şanlıurfa," Report 253 / Europe & Central Asia 11 February 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkey/253-mitigating-risks-syrian-refugee-youth-turkeys-sanliurfa?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=c8823d3a1f-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_02_11_12_52&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-c8823d3a1f-359871089, commented, "Turkey hosts 3.6 million Syrian refugees, half of whom are under eighteen. Despite European aid, tensions are rising as the countrystrains to accommodate the influx. The answer is smarter integration policies aimed particularly at meeting the needs of vulnerable youth.

What’s new? A generation of young Syrians in Turkey is not receiving the support it needs to integrate successfully into Turkish society. Exposure to discrimination and exploitation, unaddressed psycho-social trauma, and lagging support for skill acquisition and job training further increase this group’s vulnerability.

Why does it matter? The lack of support makes the substantial Syrian refugee youth population susceptible to exploitation by criminals and militant groups. Left unaddressed, this exploitation can feed tension and heighten insecurity for both Syrian refugees and Turkish citizens.

What should be done? Better policies can help ensure that young Syrian refugees become productive members of society, be it in Turkey or (one day) in Syria. Ankara and outside donors should redouble efforts to keep refugee youth in school, treat their traumas, help them build durable livelihoods and protect them from predatory elements.

Executive Summary
Turkey has taken important steps toward integrating more than 3.6 million Syrian refugees. But the youth population – which represents at least half of that number – presents special challenges that have received insufficient attention. Syrian youth displaced to Turkey face enormous difficulties. Too many are not in school. Most are coping with anger, trauma and loss. Vast numbers are or will be in need of jobs. These factors increase young Syrian refugees’ susceptibility to exploitation by criminal networks and militant groups that view them as potential recruits. Young women and girls are at additional risk of being forced into exploitative marriages and sex work. Because the numbers of Syrian youth are so large, failure to meet the needs of this population today could feed tensions for years to come. Along with its international partners, Turkey should adopt measures to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable youth, enhance their future prospects and promote their integration into the communities where they live.

Şanlıurfa, the province in south-eastern Turkey with the longest border with Syria, presents a graphic illustration. Even before the influx of Syrians, this socially conservative, ethnically diverse province of two million faced high levels of poverty, wide educational gaps and severe underemployment. Now with over 450,000 Syrians, most of them young and traumatised, Şanlıurfa is grappling ever more with insufficient jobs, inadequate school capacity, early marriages and public administration deficiencies, as well as an increase in crime. Inter-communal strains are emerging in Şanlıurfa that could lead to clashes and presage similar tensions elsewhere.

The Turkish government and its international partners can lay the ground-work for a more secure future for Şanlıurfa, and Turkey as a whole, by taking steps now to better protect and integrate young Syrian refugees. Such steps would address the underlying factors that feed young Syrians’ vulnerability as well as more direct threats to them and their Turkish citizens hosts.

Priority attention should focus on broadening registration of refugees; increasing school enrolment through to graduation and beyond; raising awareness among (and offering resources to) those at risk of exploitative marriage; and improving access to sustainable livelihoods through training programs, voluntary relocation to areas with labour shortages, and targeted grants to support agricultural initiatives and cooperatives. In addition, Ankara could strengthen its fight against illicit networks that exploit Syrian youth and threaten Turkish citizens through more robust anti-bribery measures at borders, enhanced mechanisms for preventing jihadist and other militant indoctrination, and better access to law enforcement and safe haven for victims. Donors should also take care, as always, to ensure that their support is aligned with Turkey-wide and local development strategies.”


Mark Landler and Helene Cooper, “In Latest Shift, Trump Agrees to Leave 400 Troops in Syria,” The New York Times, February 22, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/22/world/middleeast/trump-troops-syria.html, reported, “First, President Trump was going to pull all 2,000 American troops out of Syria immediately. Then he was going to slow down the withdrawal. Then he was going to leave troops in neighboring Iraq. Now, in the latest about-face, Mr. Trump has agreed to leave about 400 troops in Syria — 200 in a multinational force in the northeastern part of the country and another 200 at a small outpost in the southeast, where they will seek to counter Iran’s influence throughout the country.”

ICG, Azadeh Moaveni, "The West Should Let Islamic State Recruits Come Back Home," Bloomberg, It’s easy to see why Britons are hostile to a teenage girl who went to Syria. But barring the door would feed the next round of jihadist recruiting, February 15, 2019, is available at: https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2019-02-15/islamic-state-recruits-should-be-allowed-to-return-from-syria.

What's new? When the Syrian regime retook the south from rebels in mid-2018, Russian mediation limited the violence. Six months later, security and living conditions remain precarious; the regime has re-established authoritarian rule; and Iran-aligned groups may be trying to establish a presence near the armistice line with Israel.

Why does it matter? The regime is determined to reclaim remaining areas of Syria outside its control. Negotiated solutions may avoid further bloodshed but require far better conditions to enable safe refugee returns and reconstruction. Iran-backed activities near the Golan Heights could become triggers for an escalation with Israel.

What should be done? International actors should demand better humanitarian access to the south and not encourage refugee returns until conditions improve. Russia should provide better security guarantees to people in areas that revert from rebel to state control. Countries with influence over Iran and Israel should work with both to prevent inadvertent escalation.

Executive Summary

In July 2018, with the help of Russia, the Syrian regime retook the country’s south, where the popular uprising was born seven years earlier. State institutions, including security agencies, returned, and the population—civilians and defeated rebels—had to adjust. Six months later, recovery is moving at a snail’s pace; Russia is doing nothing to prevent the regime’s reversion to repressive rule; and Iran-aligned fighters reportedly are establishing a presence inside state security forces, raising the risk of Israeli intervention. Russia—urged by Western countries—to press Damascus to improve humanitarian access and conditions for safe refugee return, which Moscow purportedly supports. Russia and Western countries enjoying relations with Iran should try to dissuade Tehran from moving its proxies into the area. The south’s experience also carries lessons for the rest of the country: it suggests that negotiated solutions for areas still outside regime control will require more extensive involvement of external actors to prevent regime reprisals, enable aid to reach vulnerable populations and allow safe refugee returns.

The regime’s reconquest of the south was faster and less destructive than previous offensives against rebel strongholds. An important reason was that rebel commanders in many locations opted to accept Russia-mediated surrender deals (taswiyat) that returned areas they controlled to the Syrian government’s nominal authority, and enabled fighters to keep their light weapons and undergo a vetting process that would take them off security agencies’ wanted lists. Russia said it would guarantee these agreements by deploying its military police, as it has since done.

At first, the southern agreements looked moderately successful: people displaced by the fighting returned in short order and many rebels joined the Syrian army’s 5th Corps, sponsored by Russia, ostensibly to fight the Islamic State (ISIS) in nearby areas. Yet a closer look six months later reveals a more complex picture.

Two principal factors discourage refugees and the displaced from returning. The first is the glaring lack of functioning infrastructure, services and employment. Roads are open and supplies are coming in. Yet the state’s return also meant the end of cross-border assistance from Jordan, which the regime rejected as an infringement on its sovereignty. Medical and educational services that had been supported by international organisations operating out of Amman stopped. Thousands of southerners employed by NGOs running the cross-border response lost their jobs. Though aid provided by Damascus-based humanitarian groups has closed the gap somewhat, the regime’s restrictions on international aid access to the south have limited the type and quality of assistance to the area’s poorest and most vulnerable. Post-conflict recovery of critical infrastructure is halting, uneven and clearly insufficient.
The second factor is the evolving security situation. Upon its return, the regime arrested hundreds of formally cleared rebels and civilians with a track record of unarmed opposition activity, marking the reappearance of unaccountable security agencies. The Russian presence has somewhat mitigated the latter's behaviour, but not knowing how long that engagement will last, people are anxious about the future. Moreover, residents of the south report a covert presence of Iran-aligned fighters in state security forces, which suggests that the area could become yet another flashpoint in the confrontation between Iran and Israel in Syria.

As long as the situation in the south does not improve significantly, refugees and the internally displaced will not return in substantial numbers, fearing joblessness, homelessness and arbitrary arrest. Opposition forces in other parts of Syria remain outside regime control, such as the Turkish-controlled Afrin and Euphrates Shield areas further north, and the north east, held by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, are watching. What they see is a cautionary tale. Negotiating a return of the state to the north and north east with Turkey and Kurdish forces, respectively, will require more solid guarantees of what would follow, and potentially a more extensive role for external actors than what Russia has provided in previous agreements. In the meantime, pushing for better humanitarian access would be the best way to alleviate the plight of the people in the south.”

ICG, "The Best of Bad Options for Syria’s Idlib," Report 197 / Middle East & North Africa 14 March 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/197-best-bad-options-syrias-idlibutm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=7a8c2508f9-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_03_14_03_51&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-7a8c2508f9-359871089, commented, "The Syrian regime vows to reconquer Idlib, the north-western zone hosting its hardest-core remaining jihadist opposition. But an all-out offensive would be calamitous. Turkey and Russia should recommit to their 'de-escalation' deal for Idlib, bolstering it with measures that buy time for a lasting solution.

What’s new? An agreement between Turkey and Russia that protects Syria’s rebel-held Idlib governorate from a regime offensive is under increasing stress. Clashes between jihadists and other militants inside Idlib and regime forces have escalated. Newly launched Turkish patrols mark progress toward implementing the bilateral deal, but more has to be done.

Why does it matter? The Idlib area is the Syrian opposition’s last main bastion, and home to nearly three million people. There is no obvious way to neutralise Idlib’s jihadists without exacting a terrible human toll. A regime offensive would send waves of refugees toward the Turkish border and potentially scatter Idlib’s jihadists globally.

What should be done? Turkey and Russia should recommit to their Idlib agreement, staying off a disastrous military confrontation and containing the area’s militants. Turkey should expand its patrols inside the area, as both Turkey and Russia push the regime and rebels to halt violence. Lastly, they should secure Idlib’s major highways for trade.

Executive Summary
Syria’s north-western governorate of Idlib and surrounding areas have avoided an all-out military assault – for how long, though, is unclear. This last opposition-held stronghold in Syria is home to nearly three million people, mostly civilians. It also hosts thousands of jihadist militants, alongside some of the Syrian regime’s most committed oppositionists. Russia and the Syrian regime have indicated they are keen to retake the area at the earliest opportunity. But a Russian-backed regime offensive would create a humanitarian catastrophe, driving out huge numbers of refugees that could destabilise neighbouring Turkey and scatter militants who could wreak havoc globally. Turkey and Russia should instead recommit to their jointly guaranteed ceasefire in Idlib. Turkey should demonstrate more progress on the terms of the agreement, including by bolstering its military presence and expanding its patrols inside Idlib to discourage violations of the ceasefire, and by reopening the area’s major highways to trade.

Since September 2017, a partial ceasefire under a 'de-escalation' agreement among Turkey, Iran and Russia has protected Idlib. A September 2018 deal between Turkey and Russia, announced in the Black Sea resort of Sochi, headed off a seemingly imminent regime offensive and reinforced the earlier deal. Importantly, however, the original 'de-escalation' agreement committed all sides to isolating and
combatting jihadist groups, and the Sochi deal specified further measures to clear “radical terrorist groups” from a demilitarised zone inside Idlib. The burden of implementing the Sochi deal falls mostly on Turkey, which so far has fallen short in discharging its responsibilities. Meanwhile, mutual attacks between Idlib militants and regime forces have escalated. A Turkish patrol of the demilitarised zone on 8 March marks new and significant progress, but the Sochi deal requires more.

Inside Idlib, Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the latest iteration of Syrian al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra, is the dominant armed faction. After rebel rivals broke HTS’s monopolistic control of Idlib in early 2018, it reconsolidated its grip over the entire Idlib area in January 2019. Aside from HTS, some of Idlib’s other armed groups are jihadists with global ambitions, but most are only vaguely Islamist and are better understood as popular, armed manifestations of Idlib’s local communities. As for HTS, what exactly it represents today is unclear. With military victory in Syria out of reach, the group has instead invested in a local Islamist governing project. Its leading figures publicly voice commitment to ‘jihad’, but, in practice, they have demonstrated some pragmatism and flexibility. HTS has repeatedly reached accommodations with Turkey that violate jihadist orthodoxy but, for the time being, ensure the group’s survival.

A military assault on Idlib does not seem imminent. A Russian-backed regime offensive would be hugely costly, both militarily and, given an offensive’s likely humanitarian toll, politically. Russia seems inclined instead to prioritise its relations with Turkey and to sustain Syria’s political process.

But the Sochi deal is nonetheless under strain, as clashes intensify on the ground. Turkey needs to do more in Idlib if the ceasefire is to last. Turkey should expand its patrols inside the Idlib area to cover the entirety of the demilitarised zone and reinforce its static observation points, thus discouraging violence by both Idlib’s militants and the regime. Turkey and Russia should push both sides to stop their back-and-forth attacks. In addition, Turkey should press HTS to relinquish control of Idlib’s major cross-cutting highways and, together with Russia, secure the roads for trade.

Avoiding a disastrous military confrontation in Idlib and containing the area’s militants does not constitute a lasting solution. For now, though, it is the best, most life-saving choice available.”

ICG, “Crisis Group Yemen Update #3, Briefing Note / Middle East & North Africa 8 February 2019”, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/crisis-group-yemen-update-3?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=a4dda5fa83-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_01_24_03_55_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-a4dda5fa83-359871089, commented, “This is Crisis Group’s third weekly update published as part of our Yemen Campaign. The trend we identify in this edition is new hope for a political compromise to end the four-year-old civil war and ease the country’s grave humanitarian crisis.

Trendline: A Shift to the Political in 2019?

After a year of unrelenting military pressure along Yemen’s Red Sea coast, there are some indications that the Saudi-led coalition may be pivoting toward a greater recognition that a political compromise is needed to end the war. Military pressure succeeded in bringing the Huthis to the table, the coalition argues, but a different toolkit will be needed to end the war.

The language marks a shift from the rhetoric of mid-to-late-2018, when United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia officials argued that the only way to end the war in Yemen was by removing the Huthis from Hodeida port and city by military force, sparking fears of a battle for Hodeida that could cut off the flow of some 70 per cent of all goods shipped into the heavily import-dependent country.

Opinion within the coalition is not uniform and not all signals point in this direction. UAE officials express particular concern that Huthi ceasefire violations are wearing down trust and straining the forces it backs on the ground. One UAE official signalled that coalition patience could run out by late March or early April, if the current impasse on mutual redeployments from Hodeida cannot be overcome. Still, the pivot appears to be at least partially credible, and both Riyadh and Abu Dhabi seem to have concluded that the Stockholm Agreement serves their interests better than military action in Hodeida – for now.

The shift comes as the result of a combination of factors. International outcry from humanitarian organisations in late 2018 highlighted the risk of famine. The U.S. and other coalition allies increased their scrutiny of Saudi behaviour after the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the country’s consulate in Istanbul in early October. And UN negotiations in Sweden reached a deal that served the coalition’s
primary objective in Hodeida of removing it from direct Huthi control. Under the Stockholm Agreement, Huthi and rival coalition-backed Yemeni forces are meant to pull their main frontline units back from the vital Red Sea trade corridor, including a redeployment of Huthi forces from Hodeida, Ras Issa and Saleef ports.

The coalition and the government of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi appeared reluctant backers of the Stockholm Agreement. But Saudi and Emirati officials have since come to play up its importance as a potential game-changer in the war. In an optimistic telling, both countries’ officials say they hope the agreement’s implementation would lead to a cascade effect accelerating broader negotiations between the Huthis and the Hadi government, and then a widely inclusive political process.

For their part, the Huthis remain suspicious of the coalition’s intentions, believing that Riyadh and Abu Dhabi are more interested in changing perceptions and public narratives than the conflict’s trajectory. The group has been the major proximate barrier to implementing the agreement and helping open a humanitarian corridor, but Huthi insiders argue that the blockages are either misunderstood or being deliberately misrepresented. With no agreement on which “local forces” will control the ports and eventually Hodeida city within the Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC) it is functionally impossible for the Huthis to redeploy, they argue, beyond replacing frontline fighters with Huthi-aligned security forces (a distinction that is hard to make or verify). And the group’s military leaders are leery of reopening the Sanaa-Hodeida road to the east of the city, as they believe doing so will make them vulnerable to coalition attack. The group alleges that coalition-backed forces have violated the ceasefire as many times as the Huthis – a claim that, absent a full UN monitoring mission, is impossible to judge.

What happens next will be defined, at least partially, by the outcome of discussions that took place on a ship anchored just off Yemen’s Red Sea coast between 3-6 February. Representatives of the Huthis and Hadi government to the RCC gathered on board to find a way forward in implementing the Stockholm Agreement’s demilitarisation of Hodeida. The UN announced on 7 February that the two sides had reached an agreement in principle, but that their political masters would need to give the go-ahead. If Lt. Gen. Michael Anker Lollesgaard, the newly-installed UN chair of the RCC, can convince the parties to at least partially break the deadlock in the coming days and weeks, UN officials and diplomats argue that the progress could serve as a bridge to a broader political process. The redeployment plan is expected to be finalised within the coming seven days.

Bottom line: If the Stockholm Agreement can be made to stick and Hodeida demilitarised, there will be increasingly little territory for the coalition to fight for with game-changing consequences. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, as well as the government of Yemen and the Huthis, should reiterate their support for the UN process and work to properly implement the ceasefire if they do not wish to prolong the conflict indefinitely at growing cost for Yemen’s people. And in implementing the Stockholm Agreement, the UN should remain alert to the risk of spoilers and ensure that any newly arising political questions are addressed through diplomacy, rather than scuffles behind the scenes.

Political and Military Developments

Gen. Patrick Cammaert, the UN’s point man in Hodeida, handed over his responsibilities to his successor and the head of the newly-constituted UN Mission to support the Hodeida Agreement (UNMHA) Lt. Gen. Michael Anker Lollesgaard on 5 February with talks over the port and city at a crucial juncture. Cammaert had arranged for the Huthi and Hadi government delegates to the RCC to meet on a World Food Programme vessel moored in the Red Sea. (After two initial meetings in Huthi-controlled territory, the Huthis refused to cross the frontlines into coalition-held areas. This forced Cammaert to shuttle between the two, a process that yielded diminishing returns.) His plan was to negotiate a compromise that would keep the Stockholm Agreement alive by having both parties redeploy forces, the Huthis from Hodeida, Ras Issa and Saleef ports, and the government from key positions to the east of Hodeida city and around the main Sanaa-Hodeida highway. If a deal can be brokered, UN officials expect it to translate into almost immediate movement on the ground.

Lollesgaard’s next task will be to deploy the people he needs for the newly-initiated UNMHA, including a team of up to 75 monitors and support staff. Beyond the usual logistical constraints, this will also require the Huthis to show more flexibility on visas to UN staff and UN movement around Hodeida than they have done to date.
Meanwhile, the prisoner swap agreed as part of the Stockholm Agreement is 'hanging in the balance', according to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The Huthis and Hadi government delegations met in Amman on 5 February, with the ICRC struggling to verify the lists of up to 8,000 detainees provided by the two sides. Each says it has a “significantly lower” number than listed; further complicating matters, the ICRC does not have full access to detention centres in Yemen and Saudi Arabia where detainees are held.

Beyond Hodeida, the often-ignored competition for control of state institutions – and the legitimacy they bestow – between the Huthis and the Hadi government heated up this week with a series of tit-for-tat moves aimed at demonstrating control of Yemen’s House of Representatives. On 1 February, the newly-appointed head of the Supreme Commission for Elections and Referendum (SCER) in Huthi-held Sanaa announced plans to hold elections to fill “vacant seats” in the House of Representatives. The Huthi move came in apparent response to Hadi’s long-rumoured attempts to convene the House of Representatives in Aden. Hadi insiders claim that he has enough MPs to pass new laws, including an extension of his presidential term. On 3 February, Hadi announced that he was relocating the SCER headquarters to Aden in an apparent attempt to undercut Huthi manoeuvring.

The Yemeni riyal, which had regained some steam at the end of 2018 after falling to a record low of YR800 to the U.S. dollar in September-October, has started to decline again, falling this week to YR600 to the dollar. Crisis Group contacts blame a mix of currency market manipulation by traders and an ongoing spat between Hafez Mayad, the head of the powerful Hadi-appointed Economic Committee, and Mohammed Zammam, the Central Bank of Yemen governor. The decline of the riyal, coupled with ongoing logistical constraints – particularly access issues around Red Sea Mills (see Crisis Group Update #2) – is likely to edge the humanitarian situation closer to famine.

The Huthis continue to crack down on civil society and non-governmental organisations in northern Yemen, meanwhile, detaining Awfa al-Naami, the country director of Saferworld, a peacebuilding NGO, on 28 January, after a series of threats against her. This tracks a wider campaign of intimidation.

Bottom Line: As the chances of UN-led political dialogue in 2019 increase, political and institutional manoeuvring between the Huthis, Hadi government and other political and military players is likely to become more pronounced, as are efforts to control territory (see Crisis Group Update #2) and the public narrative. The UN and international diplomats, who will make a critical contribution to the success or failure of a political process in the longer term, should show they take these machinations seriously by seeking to prevent further gamesmanship of this kind in the coming months.

Regional and International Developments

Anwar Gargash, the UAE minister of state for foreign affairs, was in the U.S. last week, meeting with U.S. officials, Congress, UN officials and others in Washington and New York. Gargash was clear in messaging that the UAE position has changed, that the UAE sees Stockholm as a turning point, and that if implemented it will mean a “transitional 2019” that sees the war give way for a UN-led political process. A touted end to major Saudi and UAE combat operations in Yemen would not necessarily mean an end to the conflict: other local battlegrounds could be revived, and neither country has any intention to stop backing the – often competing – armed groups they have been cultivating since 2015.

Meanwhile, the UN was active in the Gulf. On 29 January, the Resident Coordinator of the UN in Yemen, Lise Grande, held meetings in Riyadh with Saudi and Emirati aid authorities to discuss aid distribution and access concerns. On 30 January, UN Secretary-General António Guterres called Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to discuss Yemen. The Yemeni government, Saudi Arabia and the UAE sent a letter to Guterres on 31 January reiterating support for the Stockholm process while asking the UN to expand its reporting on ceasefire violations to include attribution of responsibility.

Scrutiny of coalition activities in Yemen continues unabated. On 4 February, Amnesty International and CNN both ran stories on the UAE and Saudi Arabia supplying arms and other materiel to allied Yemeni armed groups, which subsequently have leaked into the local and regional arms market, and at times have ended up in the hands of the Huthis.

In New York, the UN Security Council published a press statement on 4 February stressing the importance of implementing the Stockholm Agreement, including redeployments around Hodeida and prisoner swaps, and expressing concern at ceasefire violations. Council members told Crisis Group that the statement reflected frustration at the agreement’s slow pace of implementation, and growing pressure...
from the coalition on the UN Secretariat to identify the parties breaking the ceasefire and blocking implementation. With Lollesgaard now in place, and UNMHA scheduled to issue its first report on 14 February, it is possible that the UN could take a more critical line in the coming weeks.

Negotiations on the renewal of the Security Council-imposed sanctions regime in Yemen are due to begin soon, with a renewal scheduled by the end of February. Members of the Council’s sanctions committee on Yemen have largely endorsed the latest UN Panel of Experts report on Yemen, but the U.S. and others are likely to attempt to add language on Iran.

In Washington, Congressional activity around Yemen is once again gathering momentum. The House Foreign Affairs Committee held a hearing on 6 February on U.S. Policy in the Arabian Peninsula, where Yemen was a principal topic of debate. The committee discussed a resolution introduced by Representative Ro Khanna aimed at using the War Powers Resolution to force a removal of all U.S. forces from a direct or indirect role in Yemen, and agreed to pass it out of the committee for discussion among all House members, in a vote that broke down along party lines, 25-17. It is unclear when the full House will act on the bill. The Senate passed a similar bill in December but a vote was not held on the legislation in the House of Representatives before the new Democratically-controlled House was seated in January. The Yemeni parties, meanwhile, will keep a close eye on a U.S.-organised meeting on the Middle East in Warsaw on 13-14 February, which will reportedly focus on Iran’s role in the region and will be followed by a discussion by the Yemen “Quad”: the U.S., UK, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Bottom Line: With negotiations over Hodeida finely poised, statements by the UN Security Council, White House and Congress can have important knock-on effects on the ground in Yemen. Congress in particular has an important role to play in maintaining pressure. All efforts should be concentrated on seeing the Stockholm Agreement implemented.

ICG, "Crisis Group Yemen Update #4," "Briefing Note / Middle East & North Africa, 14 February 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/yemen?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=d7659f219-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_01_28_08_41_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ee-d7659f219-359871089, commented, "Below is the fourth weekly update as part of Crisis Group’s Yemen Campaign. This week we look at fighting near the Saudi-Yemeni border and strains on the ceasefire around Hodeida, as well as international developments.

Though the battle for the Red Sea port and city of Hodeida is paused until the UN-brokered deal to demilitarise the area succeeds or collapses, fighting on other fronts has intensified, particularly along the Saudi-Yemeni border.

Since the Hodeida ceasefire took effect in December, the battleground has partly shifted to the northern governorates around the Huthi rebels’ heartland of Saada. According to the Yemen Data Project, an independent data collection initiative that tracks airstrikes in Yemen, Saada governorate has faced more Saudi bombardments than any other part of Yemen since the war began in March 2015, with the majority of strikes taking place near the border.

In particular, fighting has escalated in Baqim and Al-Bigua, towns located along a main highway to Saudi Arabia, and along the internal border separating Saada governorate from Al-Jawf to the east. Here, tribal fighters backed by Saudi Arabia are pushing westward along a highway that runs along the border from Al-Jawf to Al-Bigua.

Further west, toward Yemen’s Red Sea coast, some of the fiercest fighting is taking place around the Saudi border in Hajja governorate, namely the port town of Midi and nearby Haradh, close to Al-Tuwal, the main border crossing. In recent weeks, tensions have grown between the Huthis and members of the previously neutral Al-Hajour tribe in the Kushar district of Hajja, just 25km east of Haradh. Hostilities started when the Hajour detained Huthi fighters who had entered tribal territory. This incident triggered a series of tit-for-tat detentions and skirmishes, which now reportedly involve Sawdah tribesmen from neighbouring Amran governorate.

The Huthis and the Yemeni government of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi regularly claim major victories against one another in the north while little changes on the ground. But what momentum there is lies with Saudi-backed forces, which have gradually gained territory since late 2016. They have
made the most progress in Al-Buqaa, where they have come within 10km of Kitaf, until 2013 the site of a local outpost of Dar al-Hadith, a Salafi religious institute whose members were forced out of Saada by the Huthis in 2014. Some of those fighting the Huthis on the border, and in Hajja and Al-Jawf, are former Dar al-Hadith students. Others come from tribal and military networks affiliated with Islah, Yemen’s main Sunni Islamist political party. Although these are not the only forces arrayed against the Huthis along the northern border, their presence has led the Huthis to paint these battles as a sectarian campaign sponsored by Saudi Arabia.

The Huthis are also defending their home turf that holds meaning for all sides: the Hadi government sees military success in Saada as a way to demoralise the Huthis if they manage to ‘raise the Yemeni flag in Marran’, as President Hadi has said his forces intend to do. Marran is the Huthi family’s hometown, where government forces killed the movement’s first leader, Hussein al-Huthi, in 2004. If the Hadi government is serious, then it is willing to fight in Saada for a long time to come. For its part, Saudi Arabia says it is trying to defend its border from Huthi encroachment, and restore the authority of the Yemeni government in the north.

**Bottom Line:** If the Stockholm Agreement brokered in December succeeds in preventing a fight for Hodeida, diplomats hope that a broader political process on the country's future will soon follow. But fighting in the north could undermine that outcome, as both sides see control of the Saudi-Yemeni border as important leverage. De-escalating violence along the border should therefore be a medium-term priority for the UN and international actors. In the longer term, the Huthis, Saudi Arabia and government of Yemen will need to negotiate a lasting security agreement on the border as part of wider political talks.

**Political and Military Developments**

Lieutenant General Michael Anker Lollesgaard had an eventful first week as head of the newly formed UN Mission to Support the Hodeida Agreement (UNMHA). He convened the Huthi and government of Yemen delegations to the Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC) he now heads on a boat moored in Hodeida’s harbour, before sailing south to Aden with the government delegation. After meeting political leaders in the Hadi government’s temporary headquarters, he flew to Sanaa with Martin Griffiths, the UN special envoy, for meetings with Huthi officials.

Griffiths and Lollesgaard hope to convince the government and the Huthis to implement a plan put forward by General Patrick Cammaert, the outgoing RCC chair who laid the groundwork for UNMHA, to redeploy front-line forces away from Hodeida city and nearby ports. Both sides appear to accept the proposal. The RCC is due to meet again in the coming days, and initial redeployments from Hodeida and Saleef ports could start shortly after.

On 11 February, Griffiths and Mark Lowcock, the UN humanitarian chief, issued a joint statement urging the Huthis and government of Yemen to permit access to the Red Sea Mills compound on the eastern edge of Hodeida, which holds around 25 per cent of all World Food Programme (WFP) wheat supplies in Yemen. The WFP evacuated staff from the compound in September 2018 as fighting along the Red Sea coast reached the city’s outer limits. UAE-backed Yemeni fighters now control the mills, and the UN has been trying to arrange for access via heavily mined roads crossing the frontline. Lowcock and Griffiths warned that because the UN was unable to access the compound, food for 3.7 million people for a month was “at risk of rottin”. Four days earlier, Lowcock had issued a separate statement calling out the Huthis for failing to clear a path for the UN to reach the mills from Hodeida city, which they still hold.

Some UN officials saw the statements as an attempt to mollify the UAE and Saudi Arabia, who have shown growing signs of frustration at what they perceive as the UN’s failure to criticise the Huthis for violating the Stockholm Agreement and blocking access to Red Sea Mills – and also as a means of pressuring the Huthis.

The Huthis have done some work on demining the area around Red Sea Mills, but have repeatedly voiced concerns that opening the main Sanaa-Hodeida highway would make them vulnerable to coalition-backed attacks. In the meantime, the WFP negotiated access to the compound via an alternative route that did not entail crossing frontlines; a convoy stood ready to travel from Aden to Hodeida to inspect the facility on 13 or 14 February. But senior UN officials cancelled the journey following the two statements from Lowcock and Griffiths, citing unspecified security concerns. The statements angered the Huthis, who perceive a coalition campaign aiming to paint them as the only intransigent party and diminish their concerns about reopening the highway.
The Huthis saw a communique (see below) issued by the Quad – the U.S., the UK, Saudi Arabia and the UAE – on 13 February as further evidence of such a campaign. They fear that attempts to shift the public narrative could become a precursor to a renewed coalition assault on Hodeida if the ceasefire collapses, for which they believe they will be blamed.

The Huthis are doing themselves few favours, however, tightening their grip on all aspects of life in areas they control. Security police affiliated with the movement cracked down on banks this past week, detaining senior staff at the Tadhamon International Islamic Bank, one of the biggest private financial institutions in the country. The Huthis take issue with Sanaa-based banks cooperating with the government of Yemen-run Central Bank of Yemen in Aden over access to a Saudi-funded import credit facility, and hope to extract preferential exchange rates in currency transactions by increasing their control over the main banks.

**Economic conditions are barely improving.** While the Yemeni riyal gained slightly against the dollar in the week prior to 14 February – trading at around 595-597 to one, compared to 600 to one a week earlier – the Famine Early Warning System is forecasting a deeper decline in the value of the riyal over the course of 2019 due to an ongoing shortage of foreign currency. Meanwhile, the government of Yemen announced that it expects to produce an average of 110,000 barrels per day of oil in 2019 and to export 75,000 barrels per day. At current market prices, that would generate around $1.7 billion in revenues this year, which is insufficient to cover imports.

**Bottom Line: A key issue for Lollesgaard is closing the huge trust deficit between the Huthis, the government of Yemen and the coalition.** If he can at least get an agreement on the first phase of Huthi redeployments from the Red Sea ports, he would ease current tensions a great deal. Conversely, further delays and provocations from the parties could cause at least a temporary resumption of fighting around Hodeida. Diplomats should carefully calibrate their pressure on the Huthis and should be ready to restrain and pressure both sides if violence around Hodeida worsens. If the current stasis continues, the already catastrophic humanitarian situation is likely to worsen.

**Regional and International Developments**

The U.S. House of Representatives passed a joint resolution spearheaded by Representative Ro Khanna (D-CA) on 13 February that directs the U.S. to remove its armed forces from “hostilities in or affecting the Republic of Yemen, except United States Armed Forces engaged in operations directed at al-Qaeda or associated forces” within 30 days of enactment. The bill now heads to the Senate, which adopted a similar resolution during the previous Congress. Its prospects are unclear, though proponents have indicated they are hopeful for a narrow victory. The White House said on 11 February that it “strongly opposes” the legislation and that it would veto any similar bill or resolution. Trump administration officials have also indicated that they do not believe U.S. armed forces are engaged in “hostilities” for purposes of war powers legislation.

Separately, reports suggest that the Trump administration does not intend to reissue the certification it made to Congress in September 2018 that the Saudi-led coalition is taking adequate precautions to avoid civilian casualties. Absent such a certification, the U.S. is legally barred from resuming the refueling support that it suspended in late 2018.

As the U.S. government struggled internally to define the boundaries of its participation in the Yemen conflict, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was at the Quad meeting in Warsaw, where a related conversation was taking place. Beyond boilerplate diplomatic language welcoming recent UN Security Council action on Yemen and expressing support for Griffths, Quad members issued a communique on 13 February. The Quad accused the Huthis of creating bureaucratic hurdles that have prevented the UN from setting up its monitoring mission in Hodeida and interfering in the banking sector. The Quad also discussed efforts to “reduce illicit fuel imports by the Huthis” from Iran and, citing a new UN Panel of Experts report made public the same day, accused Tehran of supplying the Huthis with money, ballistic weaponry and other advanced weapons systems, including unmanned aerial vehicles.

The Quad made no mention of allegations by CNN and Amnesty International earlier in February that the UAE and Saudi Arabia have supplied advanced weapons systems to their local allies, which have reportedly ended up in the hands of jihadist groups, including al-Qaeda, and leaked into the local arms market. The coalition issued a standard denial of the CNN report on 9 February, with the UAE saying it takes all reports of arms leakages “seriously”.

Meanwhile, even as they reaffirm their determination to end the war through diplomacy, UAE officials repeat that their forces are positioned to resume hostilities in Hodeida in case redeployments do not progress. In briefings in late January, coalition officials said they saw the Stockholm Agreement as a stepping stone toward a political process to end the war, so the uptick in bellicose language may well be a means of maintaining pressure on the Huthis. This tactic could backfire, however, if the Huthis respond with bellicosity of their own.

While the UAE and Saudi Arabia are pressing UN Security Council members to be more forceful in their public criticism of the Huthis, the UN sanctions committee for Yemen, composed of Security Council member states is due to renew the sanctions regime on Yemen by 26 February. Members do not expect major changes to the sanctions regime, but worry that the U.S. could attempt to insert new language on Iran.

**Bottom Line:** Actions and statements by the U.S. Congress and the Quad ended up balancing each other out, apportioning blame to the Huthis and coalition equally for delays in implementing the Stockholm Agreement and the ongoing human suffering in Yemen. Outside players need to keep pressing the Huthis and coalition to end the war, and Congressional action is helpful in this respect.

ICG, "Crisis Group Yemen Update #5," "Briefing Note / Middle East & North Africa, 22 February 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/crisis-group-yemen-update-5?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=7d7fc2764f-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_01_28_08_41_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-7d7fc2764f-359871089, commented, "This is the fifth weekly briefing note in Crisis Group’s Yemen Campaign. This week, we look at how simmering tensions in the south of the country threaten the prospects for long-term peace, and give insight into ongoing attempts to demilitarise the country’s Red Sea trade corridor.

**Trendline:** Yemen’s Southern Transitional Council Isn’t Backing Down

As the UN makes progress on mediating a redeployment of rival fighters from areas in and around Hodeida on the Red Sea coast (see below), tensions in southern Yemen between the government of Yemen and secessionist groups continue to simmer with the potential to undermine any peace process that emerges in the north.

A year ago, many foreign officials working on Yemen were asking what could be done about the southern question. In January 2018, fighting broke out between loyalists of the Southern Transitional Council (STC), a self-styled breakaway southern government in waiting, and the internationally recognised government of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi in the southern port city of Aden, the country’s temporary capital. At stake was control of the city and de facto authority over Yemen’s southernmost governorates. Had the STC won, they might well have declared independence in southern Yemen, 28 years after the Arab nationalist north and socialist south merged. The south of Yemen, long considered a low priority, temporarily rose up diplomats’ to-do lists.

Twelve months later, the south is again largely forgotten. Most diplomatic efforts are focused on the Red Sea coast, particularly Hodeida, the site of the most active, and fluid, frontline of 2018. With an agreement in December to freeze the fighting and demilitarise Hodeida making gradual progress, the south is likely to become a pressing issue once more, as cracks emerge in the region’s fragile détente. A meeting of the STC’s National Assembly on 16-17 February laid bare many of the long-gestation divisions at play between the STC and Yemen’s internationally recognised government.

After a period of relative quiet, the STC has made its presence known once again, holding a third meeting of its National Assembly, which it hopes will one day become the legislature of an independent southern Yemeni state, in the port city of Mukalla. The meeting is a reminder that Yemen’s “southern question” remains an important one, particularly if the Stockholm Agreement negotiated last December succeeds in demilitarising Hodeida. As rival fighters return to their homes in the south from Hodeida, the political temperature of the region will rise.

**Southern grievances**

Tensions between Hadi, who himself hails from the south, and the STC leadership stem from Hadi’s stated commitment to maintaining north-south unity and his apparent closeness with Islah, Yemen’s main
Sunni Islamist party. Many southerners see Islah as part of a brutal amalgam of what they consider tribal northerners, whose central aim is controlling the south’s resources, including its ports and oilfields. Although this view of northern Yemen is something of a caricature, the traumatic legacy of two civil wars since unification in 1990 means that many southern grievances are valid and heartfelt.

Tensions also linger between the winners and losers of the 1986 civil war between rival factions in the then-independent southern socialist People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) – north and south Yemen merged in 1990 – and their roles in the 1994 civil war between the north and south. Hadi was on the losing side of the 1986 war, which cost an estimated 10,000 lives, and fled north to Sanaa afterwards. He would later take the side of the northern regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh in a 1994 north-south war sparked by a southern attempt at secession. Many in the south rallied behind Hadi in the early days of the current civil war, which started in 2014, between northern Huthi rebels and a wide range of rival groups, but cooled on him as he replaced southerners with northerners as appointees to key government posts and did little to improve security or the economy in Aden or the wider south.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is widely seen to support the STC, or at least key members such as STC president Aydrous al-Zubaidi and his deputy Hani bin Breik, both of whom maintain residences in Abu Dhabi. This is likely because of Abu Dhabi’s antipathy to the Muslim Brotherhood (and political Islamism more widely) and their frustrations with Hadi’s track record in the south. UAE special forces and conventional military units helped liberate Aden from the Huthis in 2015, and UAE leaders were surprised that Hadi, who had named the city his temporary capital, did not focus on restoring basic services and security. Three and a half years after the Huthi rebels were forced out of Aden and the south, the local economy continues to languish and basic service delivery, although somewhat improved, is far from the ‘new Dubai’ many southerners perhaps hoped would emerge through an influx of Gulf funding. Many southerners have also come to criticise the Saudi-led coalition, whose agenda is under increasing scrutiny as Riyadh and Abu Dhabi support local armed factions but are perceived to do little to help rebuild the south or the rest of the country.

Islah is often described – not entirely accurately – as “Yemen’s Muslim Brotherhood”, and Hadi has leaned on the party for support in northern Yemen, where Islah-linked tribal and military forces have done most of the fighting against the Huthis. In April 2016, Hadi named Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, a powerful military leader closely linked with Islah, vice president, replacing a southerner, Khaled Bahah. The STC regularly rails against both Islah and what they call the “corruption government” Hadi has installed in Aden since replacing Bahah, who was also prime minister. At the Mukalla meeting, National Assembly president Ahmed bin Breik warned Hadi against attempting to hold a session of the national House of Representatives in Aden, as he is considering. The STC would prevent such a meeting, he said, implying the House of Representatives no longer has any legitimacy, while issuing a call for MPs from the south to abandon the national legislature and join the STC’s National Assembly.

Yemen’s legislature

The reformation of the House of Representatives has become an increasingly live issue in recent months, with Hadi pushing for a meeting of the legislature in the apparent hope that it will underpin his legitimacy and maybe even formally extend his term as president. Elections for the Yemeni legislature’s 301 seats were last held in 2003, but it remains the only institution in Yemen whose authority is derived from a freely contested vote (Hadi was the only candidate in the election that brought him to power for what was widely understood to be a two-year transitional term in February 2012). The Huthis are considering holding elections in territories they control in a similar play for legitimacy.

In a communiqué issued at the end of the meeting, STC members also warned of “terrorist” and “political extremist” elements disrupting life in the south, in particular in Wadi Hadramawt, Ataq and Bayhan in Shabwa governorate, and elsewhere in the country – areas where Islah-affiliated forces linked to Ali Mohsen and Hadi loyalists are present. They also accused the Hadi government of “tampering with the security, stability and social peace in the south”, and called for a recalibration of the relationship with Hadi, although the president’s allies claim that the STC has rebuffed his attempts at reconciliation. The STC also demands representation at future UN-led peace talks on an equal footing with the Hadi government and the Huthis, who are currently the only groups invited to negotiations. At the talks, the STC hopes to raise the issue of southern independence.
If the Stockholm Agreement brokered in December is successfully implemented and the area around Hodeida port demilitarised, large numbers of heavily-armed and well-equipped fighters drawn from the south are likely to return to Aden and their home governorates. Though UAE-backed, some of these fighters are Salafists who feel duty-bound to support Hadi either because of their quietist beliefs that encourage loyalty to one’s rulers while others are from the president’s home governorate of Abyan. Many others are hard-line separatists aligned with the STC.

If tensions between the government and the STC boil over again in the coming months, the fighting in Aden could be even more intense than in 2018 and would likely spread to other governorates, and cross over into neighbouring territory controlled by Mohsen and his allies, drawing in Islah-affiliated forces from northern Yemen. This would not only destabilise southern Yemen, it would also complicate the UN’s attempts to broker a political settlement for all of Yemen. Bottom Line: if diplomats want to maximise the benefits of the Stockholm Agreement, they should start thinking about second-order effects, including a potential struggle for dominance in the south. This should also inform their thinking on a wider peace process for Yemen once the initial steps agreed in Sweden have been implemented.

**Political and Military Developments**

After close to two months of negotiations, representatives of the Hadi government and the rebel Huthi movement agreed on the format for a first phase redeployment of frontline forces from the Red Sea coast city of Hodeida and nearby ports. The compromise that the Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC) reached helps restore some cautious optimism for the Stockholm Agreement, brokered by UN envoy Martin Griffiths in December, which aims to demilitarise the crucial Red Sea trade corridor. Redeployments could start before the end of February; the first phase should be completed in less than two weeks. If past experience is a guide, however, the process is unlikely to be smooth and both sides may backslide on their commitments.

At the 16-17 February meeting, led by Lt. Gen. Michael Anker Løllesgaard, a Danish general who serves as RCC chair and the head of the newly-constituted UN Mission in support of the Hodeida Agreement (UNMHA), the Huthis agreed to redeploy frontline forces first from Saleef and Ras Issa ports, to the north of the city, then Hodeida port itself. After this, UAE-backed forces will pull back from the eastern edge of Hodeida city, once the Huthis themselves have pulled back several hundred meters from the frontline there. These forces will vacate the so-called “Kilo 8 triangle” and the Red Sea Mills wheat storage, milling and distribution compound that is a vital cog in the World Food Programme’s aid delivery machinery in Yemen (See Update #2), moving about 1km eastwards of the facility (see map below). A second phase of redeployments will then be negotiated.

The agreement, announced by the special envoy’s office, came after sustained pressure from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the Hadi government’s main backers, for the UN to publicly criticise the Huthis – who they claim have routinely violated the ceasefire agreed at Stockholm, in place since 18 December – and for the UN to report on its progress implementing the deal. In January, the UAE, which in effect manages the anti-Huthi forces on the ground, had warned that it could return to hostilities if there was no movement, while also signalling that it expected a political track of negotiations to open up in 2019 if the Stockholm Agreement was implemented.

While much of the rhetoric from the Yemeni government and coalition was devoted to arguing that the Huthis were impeding the deal by not withdrawing from Hodeida, under the terms of the Stockholm Agreement the RCC first needed to agree on a technical plan before force redeployments could begin. The Huthis, who under the Stockholm Agreement are required to redeploy their forces first, initially posed the biggest barrier to such a plan, refusing for example to cross frontlines to meet with Yemeni government representatives (who had crossed lines twice before). In later phases of negotiations, the sticking point became deciding on which “local forces” should take control of areas that fighters vacate, as the Stockholm Agreement stipulates. The government of Yemen argued that the Huthis could not be trusted to redeploy from the ports absent a clear monitoring mechanism and a plan for who should replace them and secure the ports and city. The two sides essentially agreed to postpone a decision on both issues for the time being, but it will likely resurface as a bigger obstacle when discussions begin over the second phase of redeployments, intended to demilitarise the city and create a cordon around it.
The devastating humanitarian and economic conditions in Yemen will garner some much-needed attention on 26 February when donor countries meet in Geneva for the annual UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) donor conference. As in previous years, the UAE and Saudi Arabia are likely to be the biggest donors, and therefore will want a say in how and where their funding is used. Reflecting the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, OCHA will make its largest ever single country funding appeal at $4.2 billion for the calendar year. Donors and Yemeni experts will also meet in the coming weeks to discuss improving the performance of the Central Bank of Yemen and reintegrating its two rival branches in Sanaa and Aden. They will also discuss ways to stabilise the riyal and make it easier for traders to import food into the country.

The weakness of the riyal has been a major factor in Yemen’s humanitarian crisis, pushing food and other basic goods even further out of reach of ordinary Yemenis. The riyal has been extremely volatile in recent months, falling to YR800 to the dollar in September 2018 before rising to around YR450 in early 2019 and then falling again to YR600. It is currently around YR590 to the dollar. The split between the two central banks in Sanaa and Aden has seen the rival branches attempt to undermine one another’s policies, likely contributing to the riyal’s woes. While many Central Bank staff are open to deeper cooperation, the political divide is likely to prevent any substantive movement on the issue.

The EU and its member states meanwhile issued Council Conclusions on Yemen, which endorsed implementation of the Stockholm Agreement and offered EU political and financial support to the UN. Member states called on partners to launch the UN Mission in support of the Hodeida Agreement swiftly, and encouraged conflict parties to engage with the RCC. The EU also called for greater support to the Central Bank of Yemen, quick monetary reforms and the payment of public salaries – all urgent steps to avert the looming famine.

Bottom Line: Funding for the OCHA appeal will be crucial to preventing what is already the biggest humanitarian crisis in the world from spiralling further out of control, and the work on the Central Bank is similarly important. But the humanitarian crisis is unlikely to see major improvements absent a broader political accord.

ICG, “Crisis Group Yemen Update #6,” Briefing Note / Middle East & North Africa 28 February 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/crisis-group-yemen-update-6?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=5bcb33574-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_02_22_03_41_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-5bcb33574-359871089, commented, “This is the sixth weekly briefing note in Crisis Group’s Yemen Campaign. This week, we look at how economic issues will affect future peacebuilding efforts.

Trendline: Putting Yemen to Work

Late February brought some hope to Yemen’s embattled population, large segments of which were on the verge of starvation at the end of 2018. The UN announced that it had both raised billions of dollars to pay for its humanitarian work over the coming year and had regained access to the Red Sea Mills, an important food storage and distribution hub outside the port city of Hodeida for the first time in five months. But without a peace deal and, in the longer term, significant economic reform, the most the UN and other organisations can do is arrest the sharp humanitarian decline of the past eight years.

Donors, led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), pledged a combined $2.6 billion in funding for the UN’s 2019 humanitarian plan for Yemen on 26 February. This represents a significant sum but falls well short of the $4.2 billion the UN says it needs for the single largest humanitarian appeal in its history. On the same day, the UN completed a long-delayed operation to access the Red Sea Mills, crossing from Huthi-controlled Hodeida city into coalition-controlled territory on the city’s eastern outskirts. UN staff are now assessing the condition of grain at the site for spoilage and residue from unexploded ordnance. The UN had not been able to access the Red Sea Mills compound, where the World Food Programme stores around 25 per cent of its food aid in Yemen, since September 2018.
Infrastructural bottlenecks created by the conflict are almost as much of a threat to starving Yemenis as their current economic plight (see Update #2).

The huge sums of money the UN requires reveal the sheer scale of Yemen’s humanitarian crisis. According to the UN and the World Bank, around 80 per cent of Yemenis now live in poverty, up from more than 50 per cent in 2014, and require some form of aid. This represents a total of around 24.1 million people of whom 14.3 million are in acute need of help. The World Bank estimates that about eight million Yemenis have lost their jobs since the war began in 2015. The official unemployment rate already stood at more than 50 per cent in 2014. It is now likely to be far higher.

Humanitarian aid is necessary in the short term, but is ultimately a very expensive fix for a problem no amount of money can solve: an already weak and poorly managed economy that has atrophied since 2014. ‘The UN can’t feed 28 or 29 million people for a year, let alone forever’, a senior humanitarian official said. ‘Until people are earning wages and food prices are affordable, the entire country is going to be below the [poverty] line’.

Economic output measured in GDP has more than halved by some measures, while inflation has soared. The rival authorities in Sanaa and Aden have each struggled to pay salaries for an estimated 1.2 million civilian and military staff employed before the war, whose incomes underwrite the livelihoods of about a quarter of the population.

Equally worrying is that the government is prioritising salary payments to the military and security services, which have been the only employers creating new jobs since the war began. This further incentivises unemployed men to take up arms and creates huge problems for the government in the long term, leaving it with a heavily armed and expensive workforce that it will need to move off the payroll in the future.

World Bank

Citing figures from the ministry of civil service and insurance, the Yemeni Development Champions – a group of economic experts – report that a little over half of the country’s 472,353 pre-war civil servants received wages from the government of Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi in 2018. At the same time, salaries for the military and security services increased. The Hadi government now spends more on defence ministry employees than in 2014, despite high rates of defections (the military payroll was also likely heavily padded by so-called “ghost soldiers”). Official figures for the rival Huthi administration in Sanaa are unavailable, but an official based in Sanaa during the early years of the war said that the Huthis also prioritise payments to fighters. Meanwhile, some of the many Yemeni armed groups on the ground are paid directly by the Saudi-led coalition. The UAE alone pays the salaries of around 40,000-45,000 men in arms in Yemen.

The conflict has taken a sharp toll on subsistence and commercial farming – a huge if unsteady source of work in rural Yemen before the war. Shocks to the oil and gas industry, once another important engine of economic growth, have shrunk the foreign currency reserves the government used to help pay for food imports. The World Bank estimates that 35 per cent of businesses have closed since the war began, most of them citing insecurity and financial constraints. As a result of these economic hardships, household income has plummeted, often to zero, while the cost of living has shot up thanks to reduced trade and a weakened rial.

The Hadi government hopes that it will be able to pay more wages in 2019 using revenues from oil and gas exports and savings made on fuel imports, thanks to a $60 million monthly fuel grant from Saudi Arabia. Several oilfields in the south have been producing since 2017, and the government is trying to connect other oilfields with export terminals along the south coast. The Hadi government has said it hopes to produce 110,000 barrels of oil a day in 2019 and export 75,000 barrels a day, netting about $1.7 billion in export earnings, a reasonable estimate. France’s Total may also restart a big gas export project in 2019, which would boost that income.

World Bank

In a new state budget, the government forecasts that it will spend 3.1 trillion riyals ($5.6 billion) in revenues in 2019, set against estimated earnings of 2.1 trillion riyals ($3.9 billion), already indicating a deficit of more than $1.7 billion. How the state will finance this budget gap is unclear, given little domestic or international appetite to extend credit to the Yemeni government. A government official acknowledged that both budgeted spending and revenues are ‘unrealistic’. 
Even if oil income increases, the government is still likely to keep suffering from poor economic management, a troubling prospect considering that economic grievances played a central part in the 2011 uprising and 2014 Huthi takeover of Sanaa. The country already faced successive fiscal and currency crises before the war, caused in no small part by its overreliance on oil exports, huge fuel subsidies, a massive public sector wage bill and mounting dependence on imported basic goods such as food. Simply replicating these policies only means storing up the problems of yesterday for tomorrow.

Once the war is over, Yemen will need more work opportunities to absorb ex-combatants and provide livelihoods, but how those will be generated remains unanswered. Local and international organisations have been trying to create jobs at the local level to get money into the hands of the poorest through cash transfer programmes. These kinds of projects are important and have impressive track records. The Small and Micro Enterprise Promotion Service (SMEPS), founded in 2005, estimates it helped create and sustain around 75,000 agricultural jobs in 2017 and 2018, and believes it can increase the scale of its work rapidly. The World Bank says its cash transfer programmes reach about 1.45 million households and help support 9 million people. But absent a growing economy and new avenues for employment, it is unclear how Yemen will be put back to work in the event of a peace deal.

Bottom Line: Getting Yemenis back to work is a crucial task, especially the tens or hundreds of thousands of ex-combatants who will be out of work in the event of a successful peace deal. Simply replicating the failed economic policies of the pre-war years could sow the seeds of future unrest. Donors should already be thinking about a mix of future initiatives, ranging from local job creation schemes to international support for the state budget and infrastructure development, to help Yemen’s transition to peace.

Political and Military Developments

The issue of force redeployments in and around the Red Sea port city of Hodeida and two nearby ports, Ras Issa and Saleef, still looms large. After agreeing on a plan for a first phase of redeployments on 17 February, the government of Yemen, Huthis and the coalition quibbled in public and private over details. The December 2018 Stockholm Agreement did not stipulate who would ultimately control the Red Sea trade corridor, only mentioning “local forces”, so Huthi and government of Yemen representatives are each trying to impose their interpretation of the deal. This has been a recurring theme since December.

Having agreed to postpone discussions of which “local forces” will secure Hodeida city and the three ports once frontline forces have been redeployed away from the area, the government of Yemen subsequently backtracked, telling Lt. Gen. Michael Anker Lollesgaard that they would not implement their part of the deal until the issue had been resolved. Lollesgaard, who chairs the Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC) – a joint Huthi-government of Yemen working group formed to hammer out details of the agreement on the ground in Hodeida – and heads the UN Mission to Support the Stockholm Agreement (UNMHA), was forced to undertake yet another round of last-minute negotiations along with Martin Griffiths, the UN special envoy to Yemen, to prevent the deal’s collapse.

Then the Huthis raised their own objections. Their main issue is who will control the so-called “Kilo 8 triangle”, an industrial zone on the eastern edge of Hodeida that is currently one of the main frontlines. As part of the first phase of redeployments, the Huthis are meant to pull back 300 metres west from the area, and government of Yemen and coalition-backed forces are meant to pull back at least one kilometre east from the Red Sea Mills wheat storage and processing facility adjoining the industrial area. The Huthis want the area to be a “neutral zone” with no Yemeni security presence, but the government wants policemen loyal to Hadi to secure it, according to a government official.

The Huthis are also worried that the Yemeni government will try to renege on its part of the deal during the first phase of redeployments. They have asked Lollesgaard for more clarity on how a planned “monitoring mechanism” will confirm to the government’s satisfaction that they have redeployed their forces from the port. They also claim that if talks over a second phase of redeployments begin before the first has been completed, the government will use the discussion as a pretext to delay pulling back its forces. The UN is hopeful that it will be able to break the impasse by 1 March.

Though Huthi and Yemeni government officials have been engaged in a public spat over who is to blame for the delay in redeploying forces, they are not incapable of cooperation. On 26 February, the UN travelled from Huthi-controlled Hodeida to the Red Sea Mills compound on the outskirts of Hodeida, which is controlled by the government of Yemen. For this to happen, the Huthis had to demine a section of the Sanan-Hodeida highway leading to the Kilo 8 triangle. They had resisted doing this since the Stockholm
Agreement was signed, arguing that reopening the road would allow their rivals to retake Hodeida. UN officials say that they were surprised that the UN team, which was sent to assess damage to the facility and the volume and quality of grain stored there, was able to enter and leave with little difficulty, the most encouraging signal rival forces have sent since December.

Elsewhere in Yemen, UAE-backed Security Belt forces said they pushed al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) out of a key stronghold in Wadi Omran, in the Mudiya district of Abyan governmorate. This and other recent operations are discomfitting groups affiliated with the government and not aligned with the UAE. The Security Belt and Elite Forces the UAE backs in the south are nominally under the command of the Hadi government, but in reality operate independently and have clashed repeatedly with Hadi loyalists, most notably during the January 2018 battle for Aden between the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and the government (see Update #5). The Hadi government and Islah, Yemen’s main Sunni Islamist party, which holds sway over tribal areas in the north, worry that there is a bigger agenda at play, with UAE-backed secessionist forces now pushing into border zones that once divided north and south. The day after the Wadi Omran operation, Hadi’s transport minister Saleh al-Jabwani said on social media that the government should bring lawsuits against “militias and mercenaries”, in what local media described as a clear reference to the UAE-backed troops.

Fierce clashes continued in the north between the Huthis and al-Hajour tribesmen in Hajja governmorate. Some observers had predicted that the conflict, now a month old, might lead to a tribal uprising against the Huthis but thus far, the fight has not expanded significantly beyond Hajja. The Huthis meanwhile claim to have fired several ballistic missiles into Asir and Najran on 24 February, targeting Saudi troops near the border.

Bottom Line: The Stockholm Agreement has survived another week, but not without challenges.

Ongoing delays in implementation are frustrating but restoring UN access to Red Sea Mills was an encouraging development. Meanwhile, ongoing tensions and clashes on the northern border and in the south are a reminder that the Yemen war is about much more than Hodeida.

Regional and International Developments

Donors pledged $2.6 billion toward the UN’s 2019 humanitarian relief plan for Yemen, with the UAE and Saudi Arabia promising $500 million each. This is in addition to the $250 million they had both announced in November 2018, meaning that the two Gulf states are funding more than half of the UN appeal.

The UN Security Council issued a presidential statement on 22 February once again requesting that the Secretary-General report on non-compliance with the Stockholm Agreement and noting that the council stands ready to consider further measures against violators. The statement came after concerted pressure from Saudi Arabia and the UAE to condemn Huthi ceasefire violations and delaying tactics. However, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi were both angry that Lollesgaard reportedly apportioned equal blame to the forces the UAE controls in Hodeida for ceasefire violations during his 22 February oral briefing to the Security Council, also suggesting that the Yemeni government delegation to the RCC was impeding progress (Lollesgaard’s briefing was held during so-called closed consultations, and there is no public record of his comments). In other news from New York, on 26 February, the Security Council extended its Yemen sanctions regime by one year and the mandate of the Panel of Experts reporting to the sanctions committee until 28 March 2020. The Council also asked the Panel to next report on sanctions implementation and violations by 28 July 2019.

In Washington, a joint resolution passed by the House of Representatives, which would direct the U.S. to ‘remove its armed forces from hostilities in or affecting the Republic of Yemen, except U.S. armed forces engaged in operations directed at al-Qaeda or associated forces’ within 30 days of enactment, had its status as a privileged bill revoked because of last-minute amendments. The bill has been remanded to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, where it is unlikely to be brought to a vote anytime soon. Senators Bernie Sanders, Mike Lee, and Chris Murphy plan to push legislation with similar text in the Senate, but that bill would then have to return to the House for action. This means a bill is not headed to the President’s desk for signature or veto in the near term.

The EU and the League of Arab States (LAS) held their first-ever summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, on 24-25 February. In a joint declaration, the EU and the LAS gave their full support to the UN special envoy for Yemen and called for the implementation of the Stockholm Agreement. In November
2018, Germany’s ruling coalition rejected licenses for future arms exports to Saudi Arabia and imposed a temporary moratorium on deliveries of previously approved equipment to Saudi Arabia after the killing of Jamal Khashoggi. This moratorium will expire on 9 March. Germany is under pressure from Britain and France to exempt big defence projects from its moratorium on arms sales to Saudi Arabia.

Reacting to a recent jihadist attack in Iran by Jaish ul-Adl, which the Islamic Republic claims to be backed by the UAE and Saudi Arabia, Sadollah Zarei, the head of the Iranian Qods force’s think tank, warned that those two countries ‘should know that if hurting Iran from Pakistan’s soil is a ‘good opportunity’, Iran has better access to the ‘good opportunity’. If it is needed, Iran can be present in a friendly country to hurt the many Saudi and Emirati forces there and make them leave that country,’ a comment that would appear to reference Yemen.

**Bottom Line:** The UAE and Saudi Arabia have been less vocal this week about their frustration on the slow pace of implementation of the Stockholm Agreement, either because they have been sufficiently mollified or because they recognise the limits of what Security Council members are willing to say – and the dangers of demanding that ceasefire violators be named and shamed. Bellicose rhetoric from Iran is a reminder that the alternative to slow, painful implementation of the agreement could be a more violent conflict in which Tehran is more openly involved.

IGC, "Crisis Group Yemen Update #7," Briefing Note / Middle East & North Africa 8 March 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/crisis-group-yemen-update-7, commented, "This is the seventh weekly briefing note as part of Crisis Group’s Yemen Campaign. This week, we look at how tribal dynamics in the north could affect the stalled peace process.

**Trendline:** As Stockholm Stutters, a Tribal Showdown in Yemen’s North

As UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths continued to push for the implementation of the Stockholm Agreement to demilitarise the Red Sea port city of Hodeida, images circulated on social media on 4 March purporting to show Katyusha missiles hitting houses in Kushar, a small settlement in Yemen’s northern Hajja governorate.

The alleged Huthi missile strikes marked an escalation in a local conflict that has been gathering momentum for almost two months. The trigger of the fighting around Kushar remains uncertain, with Huthis and members of the Hajour, a tribe based in the Kushar basin, each blaming the other for breaching a truce instituted between them in 2013.

The Huthis claim that elements of the Hajour with ties to Islah, Yemen’s main Sunni Islamist party, have been stockpiling weapons provided by Saudi Arabia and bringing fighters into the area, a breach of the six-year-old truce that has seen the Hajour remain neutral throughout the current civil war. In January, they allege, Hajouri tribesmen from Alabaaisah village set up checkpoints along an important highway and detained Huthi loyalists, sparking the violence.

Hajour tribesmen opposed to the Huthis have a different story. Noting that the tribe’s numerous leaders have widely varying political affiliations, including to the General People’s Congress and Nasserist party (the main link between the tribes and the coalition has been the head of the GPC in Hajja), they claim that the Huthis violated the agreement in January after becoming unnerved by gains made by rival forces backed by Saudi Arabia in surrounding areas. Having freed up fighters previously deployed to Hodeida following the Stockholm Agreement, the Huthis, they say, decided to attempt a takeover. The Huthis, who have long coveted Kushar – an area surrounded by mountains that form a natural fortress – held a meeting with Hajour tribal leaders in early January and demanded they allow Huthi forces to set up positions on mountains around the district. When they were rebuffed, they began to force their way into the area.

Saudi airstrikes on Huthi positions and airdrops of desperately needed food, medicine and arms followed soon after. Whether or not they sought Saudi support before the fighting began, the Hajour are now receiving it.

The stakes in Kushar are high. The Huthis fear a government offensive from positions in northwestern Hajja, originating from Miadi port and Haradh city and now deep inside the ‘Ahem triangle’ to the east of the two, could extend along a highway that cuts into Amran governorate, a tribal area that sits between the Huthi heartland of Saada and the capital Sanaa. Kushar, in eastern Hajja, bisects the road. If government-backed forces were to move further east and gain control of Kushar, the Huthis’ main supply line to the Ahem front (see map below) would be under threat. This in turn could allow Saudi-backed
forces to advance further along the Amran road, threatening the Sanaa-Saada supply line. In short, if the Huthis are unable to assert their control over the hitherto neutral area, they will struggle to sustain the fight against Saudi-backed Yemeni forces in other parts of the northern highlands. If they win, they will have demonstrated their dominance in north-western Yemen and will further consolidate their control of territory in advance of any political settlement.

Key positions and areas of conflict in Hajja, Yemen. Map data © 2019 Google.

The fight for Kushar is also a litmus test for the Saudi-led coalition’s “tribal strategy” in northern Yemen, a long-gestating plan to convince tribes in Huthi-controlled areas to rise up against the de facto authorities. President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi’s government has repeatedly claimed that it is deploying more fighters to the nearby towns of Midi and Haradah, and that it will soon break through to Kushar. In reality it has made very little progress. The government and the Saudis hope that a Huthi loss in Kushar will prompt other tribes to take up arms against the Huthis, sparking a tribal uprising that they have long predicted, but which has failed to materialise.

A late February announcement from Yemen’s government that it would send seven additional battalions to the main front in Hajja, combined with a call to arms by Yahya al-Hajouri, a prominent Salafi sheikh from Hajja who was among the Huthis’ chief antagonists before the war, likely prompted the Huthis to make a stronger push for Kushar. The Huthis now hold the upper hand after a major show of force and the rebels predict that internal resistance will not last long. On 7 March the Huthi-controlled interior ministry in Sanaa announced that the “outlaws” had been cleared from the area. Their rivals agree that the Huthis are in the stronger position, but warn that fighting in the area could still be bloody and destructive. Of an estimated population of 114,000, about 33,000 people have been displaced by the fighting and more than 10,000 have arrived in nearby Amran city in recent weeks, according to UN officials.

Kushar, the Huthis say, is one of a final few pockets of internal tribal resistance in areas they control, and their assault, they believe, will dampen the likelihood of future internal threats to their position in the north. This assessment of theirs is probably optimistic. Instead, fighting in Kushar demonstrates the lengths the Huthis will go to in order to demonstrate their dominance. The government, meanwhile, holds up recent events in Kushar as an example of the Huthis’ bad faith. The Huthis have used deliberations over implementing the Stockholm Agreement as a stalling tactic, they say, and are using the truce around Hodeida as an opportunity to consolidate their position elsewhere. While accurate, this analysis is selective: it ignores the government’s and coalition’s own attempts to gain ground in the north and other areas.

Bottom Line: Fighting around Kushar is a reminder that even if the deal to demilitarise Hodeida can be implemented, elsewhere the war continues and in some cases has intensified. Should it continue, the conflict in Hajja will, at a minimum, exacerbate the lack of trust between the warring parties. Should the fighting become bloodier, it could precipitate the Yemeni government’s or the Huthis’ withdrawal from the Stockholm Agreement. In the longer term the fighting likely foreshadows the nature of post-Hodeida conflict: battles for much smaller prizes that nonetheless have national ramifications.

Political and Military Developments

Another week passed without visible progress in implementing the Stockholm Agreement. UN officials believe they are close to finalising details of a first phase of redeployment from in and around Hodeida and two nearby ports (See Update #6, Update #5) after a series of delays. The major sticking point among the Huthis, the Yemeni government and its backers in Abu Dhabi and Riyadh remains how to secure territory after both sides have redeployed their military forces. While they have agreed to postpone detailed negotiations over the issue for the time being, the first phase of redeployments requires front-line forces to pull back from the “Kilo 8” triangle on the eastern edge of Hodeida. The UN is struggling to find a security arrangement for the area that is suitable for both sides.

Elsewhere, Aydrous al-Zubaidi, president of the Southern Transitional Council (STC), Yemen’s self-styled southern government-in-waiting, was touching down in London, where he made a series of high-profile appearances. In an interview with The Guardian, Zubaidi argued that a peace process in Yemen can be effective only if it includes southern representatives. Tensions have been rising in the south in recent weeks. Reports emerged on 6 March of fighting between the Hadi-loyalist Presidential Guard and STC-affiliated Security Belt forces in Aden’s Khormaksar district. The fighting came after protests a day earlier over the alleged killing of a witness in a sexual assault case by local counter-terrorism forces affiliated with
the STC. It also followed unrest, understood to be STC-led, over fuel and power shortages in the city, reportedly caused by wrangling between the government and a powerful local businessman over payments for fuel.

In Mukalla, the capital of Yemen’s eastern Hadramawt governorate, yet more protestors called for a unified security cordon across the province. The protestors demanded that STC-affiliated Hadrami Elite forces oversee security in the governorate and called for the removal of security forces loyal to Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar, Hadi’s vice president and de facto leader of anti-Huthi military forces in northern Yemen. Hadi loyalists held meetings of their new Southern National Congress, a purported counterweight to the STC, in Cairo on 6–7 March.

Marib governorate was rocked by the reappearance of the conservative Salafi cleric Yahya al-Hajouri. Hajouri made a public call for support of the Hajour tribes from his new base in Marib, a reconstituted version of Dar al-Hadith, the Salafi training centre he led in the Huthi heartland of Saada until he was forced out in February 2014. Marib has long been dominated by groups affiliated with Islah, which has had an uncomfortable relationship with Salafi thinkers like Hajouri who preach against engagement in politics. Islah is viewed with suspicion by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which sees political Islamism as a threat to its stability and has backed quetist Salafi groups in southern Yemen. A number of Islah members see Hajouri’s reappearance in Marib as an attempt to counteract their influence. Further complicating matters, one of the two most powerful tribes in Marib, the Murad, is hosting Hajouri, while a rival Salafi cleric, Abu Hassan al-Maribi, has a close relationship with the other, Abidah. The two tribes put aside their historical differences to mount resistance to the Huthis at the beginning of the war. Now local observers worry that the clerics’ rivalry could undermine the tribal détente.

**Bottom Line:** Implementing the Stockholm Agreement rightly remains a top priority for the UN and the wider international community in Yemen. But it will be important to keep an eye on the internal politics in ostensibly government of Yemen-controlled areas, where multiple factions continue to jostle for power, a process that will intensify if the Stockholm Agreement transitions into a political process.

**Regional and International Developments**

Saudi Arabia and the UAE continue to complain in public and private that the Stockholm Agreement is not being implemented and they criticise the UN for failing to maintain sufficient pressure on the Huthis to redeploy their forces from Hodeida. On 4 March, Abu Dhabi, Riyadh and the Yemeni government sent a joint letter to the UN Secretary-General António Guterres highlighting their concerns and outlining allegations of ceasefire violations around Hodeida. The UN Security Council might hold closed consultations with the UN envoy to discuss the slow pace of progress in the coming days.

In Europe, Der Spiegel reported on Friday that German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Vice Chancellor Olaf Scholz agreed to extend the moratorium on German arms exports to Saudi Arabia for another two weeks. The government spokesperson confirmed that a new agreement on the extension will be needed in the course of March. The controversy over the extension of the export freeze is increasingly splitting Germany’s ruling coalition: Scholz’s Social Democrats are calling for another extension of the moratorium while Merkel’s Christian Democrats, including party leader Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, argue that Germany needs to cooperate with European partners on joint security and that the export ban is hurting these partnerships.

**Bottom line:** Pressure continues to mount on Saudi Arabia over its role in Yemen. If sustained, this is likely to help prevent a collapse of the shaky truce around Hodeida and the gradual implementation of the evolving demilitarisation plan. Public pressure on the Huthis from the coalition has also served as a useful tool during the process.”

ICG,”Crisis Group Yemen Update #8,” Briefing Note / Middle East & North Africa 5 April 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/crisis-group-yemen-update-8, commented, “This is the eighth briefing note in Crisis Group’s Yemen Campaign. This week, we explain why ending the internal conflict in Taiz should be a priority step toward national-level peacebuilding efforts.

**Trendline: Trouble in Taiz**
Taiz, Yemen's largest pre-war manufacturing hub and cultural capital nestled in the country's central highlands, is widely regarded by its inhabitants as a forgotten city. Any future political settlement will have to include a mechanism to end the struggle for Taiz, but internal wrangling among anti-Huthi forces may prove as much of a barrier to progress as their rivalry with the Huthis.

The site of some of the fiercest front-line fighting in the ongoing four-year war, Taiz was besieged by an erstwhile Huthi-Saleh alliance from 2015 until 2017 and has since connected to the outside world through a single, winding mountain road linking it with Turbah, a town 70 kilometres south. The battle for Taiz is now as much for control of the main highways that extend west to the Red Sea coast, north to Sanaa and south to the government controlled city of Aden and the city's surrounding mountains – over which the Huthis maintain a stranglehold – as of the city itself, which is largely under the control of forces backed by the Yemeni government and the Saudi-led coalition. With a pre-war population of 600,000, thought to have dwindled to a third of that over the course of the conflict, Taiz is roughly the same size as the Red Sea port city of Hodeida in terms of both pre-war and current population. The Hawban industrial zone to the north east of Taiz, which is under Huthi control, is a crucial processing, packaging and distribution hub for foodstuffs, which traders say play an important role in feeding the country. Residents of Taiz complain that the battle for their city has not attracted anything like the international attention Hodeida commanded when a battle for that coastal city loomed in 2018, sparking fears of catastrophic humanitarian fallout. As the country’s busiest port and also a centre for food storage and distribution, the focus on Hodeida was well justified, but Taiz too is a humanitarian disaster with ripple effects on the rest of the country. Although not as significant to the overall humanitarian picture as Hodeida, it is fair to say it has not attracted a proportionate level of outcry.

Along with other major front lines in the broader conflict, an accord on Taiz city and the wider eponymous governorate will be a key component of any political settlement to end the war, not least because so many of Yemen's warring factions and parties are present there. Taiz was discussed during UN-led talks between the Huthis and government of Yemen in December 2018. But with most energy in Sweden directed at brokering a deal on Hodeida, the parties made no substantive agreement beyond committing to create a new committee to discuss the status of the city.

UN officials say that this has led to constructive discussions that are now centred around reopening the main highway linking Taiz with Aden, currently cut off by fighting. Doing so would allow for huge improvements to daily life in Taiz, cutting an at times perilous six-plus hour journey to a one- or two-hour drive. Yet internal tensions among the loose coalition of anti-Huthi forces inside the city – and their wider tensions with the broader Yemeni government coalition – continue to pose an additional obstacle to improving life.

On 20 March, Taiz governor Nabeel Shamsan issued an order calling for 'outlawed' groups to leave the city and hand over their positions to formal security forces. The order notably included groups loyal to Abu al-Abbas, a Salafi leader who says he is backed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and whose men have repeatedly clashed in the past with government military units allegedly affiliated with Islah, Yemen’s main Sunni Islamist political party. All of these groups are nominal allies in the fight against the Huthis.

Shamsan’s order was part of a wider initiative aimed at transferring control of the city to a civilian police force. But members of the Islah-affiliated 22nd Brigade, a military unit, then reportedly advanced into Taiz’s old city where Abu al-Abbas’s men are based, leading to several days of clashes that reportedly killed six people, left dozens wounded and caused significant damage to Al-Mudhaffar Hospital, including the destruction of its generator. Shamsan had not intended to precipitate violence in heavily-populated parts of the city, and repeatedly called on both groups to end the fighting, threatening to resign if they did not.

The two sides agreed to a truce after four days of fighting. Abu al-Abbas’s men agreed to redeploy heavy weapons to front lines to the west of Taiz, but will retain a presence in the old city. Meanwhile, the Fifth Presidential Protection Brigade, widely regarded as loyal to President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, is expected to serve as buffer, taking over security duties in Taiz city. But this may not be enough to prevent further fighting between Abu al-Abbas’s men and their Islah-affiliated rivals.

Many Yemeni observers believe that the UAE, a major powerbroker in nearby Aden and an adversary of Islah, objects to the city’s domination by Islah-affiliated forces. Abu al-Abbas’s presence in
the city acts as a brake on Islah’s consolidation of power there, as does the presence of the 35th Brigade, a UAE-backed military unit of which Abu al-Abbas’ men are nominally a part. Adenis sceptical of Islah’s intentions and Taizis who question the UAE’s agenda in Taiz both worry that if the main highway between Aden and Taiz is reopened, it may have the unintended consequence of deepening hostilities in the two cities between Islah-affiliated groups and Hadi loyalists who oppose the UAE’s influence in south Yemen on one hand and UAE-linked groups on the other. The two sides have come to blows in Aden as well as Taiz recently. In January 2018, UAE-backed forces fought Hadi loyalists they labelled Islah supporters in Aden for several days. Opening the Aden-Taiz highway would allow the different groups to cooperate with their respective allies and heighten suspiscions among their rivals that they plan to displace their rivals in the two cities, Crisis Group contacts worry.

Violence in Aden prompted a backlash by Islah supporters against the UAE and its affiliates in Taiz. On 25 March, Islah-affiliated groups held a protest, reported to be thousands strong, calling for the “liberation” of the city and echoing a longstanding Islah claim that its forces can defeat the Huthis if provided the necessary military equipment – including armoured vehicles – and if rival forces withdraw. Many Islah leaders believe that the UAE has blocked the delivery of such materiel to their allies, not wanting the group to gain a military edge that it could use elsewhere.

Bottom Line: Yemen’s war is complex and multifaceted, as Taiz demonstrates. De-escalating the conflict in the city and wider governorate requires the UN and other international players not only to reach an agreement between the Huthis and their adversaries, but also to achieve a compromise within the anti-Huthi front, namely between Islah, the Hadi government and UAE-backed groups. Taiz was also part of the Stockholm Agreement and its importance should not be lost amid the focus on Hodeida. Any success in Taiz, for example in opening roads, would help buttress the chances for future nation-wide de-escalation and the prospect of peace talks.

Political and Military Developments

Hodeida continues to be the centre of gravity for diplomatic efforts in Yemen. UN Envoy Martin Griffiths and Michael Anker Lollesgaard, head of the UN Mission to support the Hodeida Agreement (UNMHA), have spent much of the past month working through a series of proposals to ease the concerns of Huthi and Yemeni government regarding the details of mutual redeployments and the status of the local security forces that will control the city after redeployments take place.

The Hadi government has reportedly agreed to a series of compromises the UN believes are required to enable the first phase of redeployments. But the Huthis are seeking more clarity on who will secure the city after redeployments begin – an issue left unresolved during the December talks in Sweden. Underlining the need to move ahead with force redeployments, intense clashes broke out on the outskirts of Hodeida on 24-25 March, among the heaviest seen since a ceasefire was announced in December 2018, signalling heightened tensions and eroding patience with the status quo. Fighting also intensified in Al Dhale governorate in March, with Huthi and coalition-backed forces claiming victories against one another in Damt and Al Qatabah districts. Fighting in both areas is focused on taking control of highway intersections that the Huthis worry could be used for a coalition-backed assault into Taiz and Ibb governorates.

On the northern border, local media reported fierce clashes between the Huthis and Yemeni government and allied Saudi forces in Najran and Asir governorates, at the border crossings at Baqim and Buqa, as well as in Al Jawf governorate. A 26 March coalition airstrike reportedly killed 8 people after hitting a gas station adjacent to a hospital in the Ritaf area of Kitaf in Saada governorate. The next day, UAE-backed Shabwa Elite Forces launched an assault on a suspected AQAP base in the locally-named ‘White Mountain’ range in the west of the governorate.

Elsewhere, the Hadi government named a new central bank governor on 20 March. Hafedh Mayad, a prominent and sometimes controversial member of the pre-war economic elite, replaced Mohammed Zammam. The two had been locked in an increasingly public war of words before Mayad’s appointment, with the new governor accusing his predecessor of corruption. Mayad is seen as the architect of a plan to wrest control of the levers of Yemen’s economy from the Huthis, leading the formation of the government’s powerful Economic Committee and the formulation of the controversial Decree 75 announced in September 2018. The decree calls for all imports to be approved by the committee and for all dollar transactions to be conducted through the Central Bank of Yemen in Aden, allegedly leading to...
delays in imports. Mayad is said to believe that he can tip the economic balance of power toward the government with additional measures that may cause some short-term economic pain, including measures to further consolidate control over imports and currency markets.

Separately, humanitarian organisations warned in late March that Yemen’s cholera epidemic was worsening after earlier improvements, with both Médecins Sans Frontières and Save the Children reporting a 150% increase in cholera cases over the course of a month. Save the Children says 124,493 suspected cases of cholera have emerged since the beginning of 2019.

Bottom Line: Griffiths hopes to pivot toward a political process to end the war later in 2019, but he will need, at a minimum, to convince the Huthis and the Hadi government to implement the first phase of redeployments, which includes the Huthis redeploying from Yemen’s Red Sea ports. To do this, the local security force issue – which has as much to do with longer-term matters of sovereignty and legitimacy as with control of Hodeida itself – may have to be fully postponed and settled during discussions over a wider transitional arrangement. Hodeida has absorbed most diplomatic energy focused on Yemen, and for good reason given that both sides view it as a litmus test for moving forward with broader political discussion. As fighting in Hodeida has been limited since the agreement was signed, however, battles have intensified in other parts of the country. Still, and for better or worse, shifting toward talks largely hinges on Hodeida implementation.

Regional and International Developments

The U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill directing the U.S. to “remove its armed forces from hostilities in or affecting the Republic of Yemen, except U.S. armed forces engaged in operations directed at al-Qaeda or associated forces” within 30 days of enactment on 4 April. The bill, which passed the Senate in February, will now move to President Trump’s desk.

Trump has said in the past that he will veto the bill if passed, and in a statement issued on 1 April, the White House’s Office of Management and Budget again indicated that the President’s senior advisors will recommend he veto it. The Statement of Policy argues that the premise of the legislation is wrong because the U.S.’s provision of limited support to the coalition has not caused U.S. forces to be introduced into “hostilities”. It also argues that to withdraw support would impinge the president’s constitutional prerogatives, harm bilateral relations with partners in the region, negatively affect U.S. counterterrorism efforts, and “establish bad precedent” by broadening the definition of “hostilities” for war powers purposes. A veto – only the second President Trump will have made since taking office – seems highly likely.

Brussels has also been active on Yemen, with the war on the agenda of the first EU-League of Arab States summit at Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt in late February. EU foreign ministers met to discuss developments in Yemen on 18 March and officials also debated it during EU–Iran talks the same day. However, differing European positions on arms exports continue to drive internal tensions. Germany has decided to maintain its ban on weapons transfers to Saudi Arabia for another six months despite pressure from France and the UK – whose arms industry supply chains rely on some German components and as such are affected by the ban – to reverse its decision.

ICG, “Crisis Group Yemen Update #9, Briefing Note / Middle East & North Africa 19 April 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/crisis-group-yemen-update-9?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=be1be8d136-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_04_19_04_11&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-be1be8d136-359871089, commented, “This is the ninth briefing note in Crisis Group’s Yemen Campaign. Notes are published fortnightly. This week, we return to the UN’s efforts to make the Hodeida agreement stick.

Trendline: Holdup in Hodeida

It is almost a year since an anticipated battle for the Red Sea port of Hodeida became the centre of gravity in Yemen’s civil war, as well as international efforts to end it.

In June 2018, Crisis Group described the conflict as having reached an inflection point. Along with other observers, we feared that a bloody battle between Huthi fighters in Hodeida and UAE-backed forces outside it would push the war into a new, more perilous phase and likely trigger a devastating famine. We
argued instead for a UN-brokered deal to prevent the fight and, possibly, to lay the groundwork for a nationwide peace process.

The good news, ten months later, is that the battle for Hodeida has not occurred. But the threat of renewed fighting still looms. In December 2018, UN-sponsored talks in Sweden between the northern Huthi rebels, who prefer to be known as Ansar Allah, and the internationally recognised government of Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi put the battle on ice, shifting the focus of fighting elsewhere in Yemen as the UN struggled to implement the terms of the Hodeida ceasefire and military redeployment there.

Some pronounced the December Stockholm Agreement as a breakthrough deal. Following two years of no talks and no agreements, in some ways, it was. But from the start it was clear that turning the agreement to demilitarise Hodeida and the Red Sea trade corridor into reality on the ground would be an uphill battle (Crisis Group’s analysis of the deal is here). One challenge has been ambiguities in the deal itself. The agreement was brokered in a rush, with the Huthis and Hadi government accepting it at the very last minute and under intense international pressure. As a result, the language is vague on some crucial details and the two parties have radically different interpretations of its meaning. A UN-chaired Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC), made up of Huthi and Hadi government representatives, meanwhile, was tasked with turning the accord’s ‘mutual redeployment of forces’ into a technical agreement on who would move what, when, where and in what order – a huge task in and of itself.

The main political sticking point for both sides has been the question of the ‘local security forces’ meant to secure Hodeida port and city, along with two nearby ports at Saleef and Ras Issa, once redeployments are completed. The Hadi government generally sees the agreement as stipulating that these forces should be drawn from pre-2014 police force and coast guards and fall under their interior ministry’s supervision. The Huthis’ interpretation is that current security forces – which include many of their supporters – will remain in the city and ports, with minimal changes, once military forces have been removed. They view discussion of changing the local security forces as a Trojan horse – a way for the Hadi government to use the cover of agreed-upon military redeployments to claim sovereignty over the city and prejudice any future peace settlement. In fairness, both readings of the written agreement are defensible. That said, many who were present in Stockholm say the spirit of the agreement was to prioritise military redeployments, not sovereignty questions, which are to be addressed later, during national political negotiations.

Over the past four months, the RCC’s two chairs, Patrick Cammaert and his successor Michael Anker Lollesgaard, have worked to resolve technical disagreements over redeployments by working with the military-security representatives of the two sides on the committee, while Martin Griffiths, the UN envoy, pushes the political leadership to reach a deal on the local security forces issue. Some progress has been made within the RCC: in February, they agreed to the outlines of the two-phase redeployment plan. Phase one, step one involves Huthi redeployment from Ras Isa and Saleef ports; phase one, step two involves simultaneous redeployments from Hodeida port and an area called Kilo 8; and phase two involves mutual redeployments from the city and its surroundings, with the local security forces taking over control. On 13 April, the RCC finalised technical details of phase one almost to the metre. Yet the thorny issue of local security forces remains unresolved.

The announcement of agreement on the details of phase one redeployments at the 15 April UN Security Council meeting buys time, but frustration is growing. A series of holdups over the past four months have seen the early euphoria of Stockholm dissolve into deepening impatience among international and Yemeni players. In a Security Council meeting on 15 April, the UK’s Permanent Representative Karen Pierce channelled this sentiment, describing the lack of follow-through as “very worrying” and warning of “stronger measures” the next time the Council meets if the impasse persists.

Diplomats working on Yemen face a dilemma. They are searching for new ways of pressuring the Yemeni parties, particularly the Huthis, over whom they have the least leverage, to compromise. But they have a limited toolkit at their disposal for doing so and do not want to inadvertently cause the collapse of a process that, while painfully slow-moving, has yielded progress since December. They also understand that the Hodeida plan’s failure would have far-reaching consequences, including renewed hostilities between the Huthis and their rivals in Hodeida and on other fronts, rapid deterioration of what is already the world’s biggest humanitarian crisis and a return to the political paralysis that plagued the peace process between 2016 and 2018.
In recent weeks, diplomats, some UN officials and even some leaders of the Saudi-led coalition had come to quietly acknowledge that the best-case scenario for the Stockholm Agreement in the medium term is that the first phase of redeployments comes off as planned. This minimum achievement would stave off the threat of a battle for Hodeida. It could precede a much slower march toward agreements on the second phase and the composition of local security forces, with the latter likely becoming part of a broader political process.

But there is no trust between the Huthis and the Hadi government, and neither side is willing to move forward without greater clarity on what comes afterward. The Huthis worry that they will be militarily vulnerable after the redeployments’ first phase, which will leave the Red Sea ports and Kilo 8 triangle on the eastern edge of the city undefended, patrolled only by UN monitors, while the city would still be encircled by the numerically and technologically superior UAE-backed force. The Huthis do not want a gap between the phases, which they fear that

The technical plan for the redeployments’ second phase, which would be even more intricate than the first, could take months, as could talks about local security forces. Thus the parties and international officials will either have to wait even longer for any movement on the ground, or ram through initial redeployments that would leave the UN monitors forced to act as a de facto security cordon between rival fighters on either side of the Kilo 8 triangle. This is something the Huthis are unlikely to trust as it provides no guarantee against their rivals exploiting the vulnerability in their defences created by the first phase of redeployments. Guarantees that the international community will not allow this to happen may be needed.

The final conundrum for international policymakers is that of leverage. Western diplomats acknowledge that they can apply only calibrated pressure on the Hadi government, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. They have fewer tools available to them when it comes to the Huthis, and there is a perception that the northern rebels came to the table in December only because they were on the verge of losing Hodeida – an assertion the Huthis dispute. In effect, a Western diplomat says, international actors’ main source of leverage with the Huthis is the implicit threat that they will allow the Hodeida assault to go ahead – something that would cause international outcry and further convince the Huthis that the UN and Western powers are working against them and cannot be trusted.

Although both the Hadi government and the Huthis have delayed the negotiations with regular nitpicking, many Western diplomats perceive that the Huthis are the proximate barrier to progress. It is true that the Huthis are required to move first in the first phase of redeployments. But both the Huthi and government delegations at the RCC seem to be taking turns raising issues they know their rivals will find unpalatable.

Under mounting pressure from the Hadi government and the coalition to acknowledge the perception of Huthi stubbornness, and have the UN do so, some Western embassies are now tempted to push for public statements calling the Huthis out. But while doing so may satisfy diplomats and the coalition, it is unlikely to help turn the Stockholm Agreement into a reality. Indeed, it could cause backlash from the Huthis and be used as a pretext by Hadi or the coalition to declare the process dead. At the same time, failure to apply pressure in the face of further delays is likely to undermine the credibility of the UN, confidence among the parties and faith that the international community is capable of brokering a solution to the Yemen war.

**Bottom Line:** Progress of some kind on Hodeida is needed – and fast. But full implementation of the Stockholm Agreement is some way off. Ideally, the two sides would reach agreement on phase two redeployments and the local security forces within the next few weeks, so that implementation could start and proceed as a package. More diplomatic pressure on the Hadi government from the US, the UK, Saudi Arabia and the UAE and on the Huthis from Oman is probably necessary if the difficult issue of local security forces is finally to be resolved. But if past is precedent, negotiations may drag on, risking renewed violence and the agreement’s collapse. If negotiators see this happening, one option could be to focus on unilateral Huthi redeployment from Saleef and Ras Issa ports at a minimum (and possibly Hodeida port as well), something the Huthis have offered in the past, before returning to the thornier issue of the city and local security forces. Something needs to happen on the ground to build at least a little trust that the agreement still stands.

**Political and Military Developments**
The Hadi government and the Huthis both made plays to demonstrate their political legitimacy this week, with the government inaugurating a parliamentary session in the eastern city of Seiyun and the Huthis describing this meeting as “illegitimate”, while holding parliamentary elections in the territory they control. The secessionist Southern Transitional Council (STC), which had threatened to derail any attempt by the Hadi government to host parliament in the southern city of Aden, also criticised the meeting.

Some 141 members of the 301-member House of Representatives met in Seiyun, where they nominated a new speaker and deputy speakers, and ratified a budget for 2019. Those present elected Sultan al-Barakani, a senior member of the General People’s Congress, Yemen’s historical ruling party, and a long-time loyalist of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, as speaker. Members also discussed a proposal to name the Huthis a terrorist organisation.

Parliamentary elections were last held in 2003, and since then an estimated 34 elected members have died. The government argues that a parliamentary quorum, the minimum number of members needed to debate and pass legislation, is therefore now 134 members. The Huthis, who have held sessions of parliament in Sanaa and in 2015 announced a “constitutional declaration” that they say overrides the authority of parliament, dismiss this argument. By holding elections for vacant seats, they believe they have further undermined the Hadi government’s claim to parliamentary legitimacy. The STC vice president, Hani bin Breik, also described the meeting as illegitimate, going on to say that the Hadi government held it in “Islah-held” southern territory that is yet to be liberated. (Islah is a predominantly Sunni Islamist party, which encompasses Yemen’s version of the Muslim Brotherhood.) As Islah is a political force nominally backing Hadi, some in the Hadi government regarded this remark as a veiled threat that STC-aligned forces might be sent to attempt a takeover of Seiyun.

Violence continued around Hodeida, with the Huthis reporting repeated attacks on the eastern side of the city and the coalition alleging Huthi attacks in Durayhim district to the south. Fighting has also escalated up and down the Red Sea coast, in particular in Tuhayta and Hays districts. Elsewhere, heavy fighting has been reported in Haja governorate, continuing a recent trend, and along the border and in al-Jawf governorate. A number of coalition airstrikes hit Sanaa on 10 April, causing what is reported to be the highest number of civilian casualties in the capital in over a year.

Bottom Line: As the Stockholm Agreement falters, the power struggle that has consumed the country continues unabated elsewhere. While the push for political legitimacy could be seen as a positive signal that Yemen’s power centres see a political process in the offing, in practice it may trigger renewed violence among purported allies in the anti-Huthi camp.

Regional and International Developments
On 16 April, President Donald Trump announced his veto of a joint resolution of Congress that would have directed the removal of U.S. forces from hostilities in or affecting Yemen, with certain exceptions relating to counter-terrorism operations.

In his veto message, the president suggested that U.S. support for the coalition helps protect U.S. nationals in Saudi Arabia and other coalition countries that have been subject to attack by Huthi insurgents in Yemen. He also suggested concern that the resolution would, among other things, tread on his constitutional prerogatives as commander-in-chief of the U.S. military, damage U.S. bilateral relations with coalition participants and embolden Iran in “malign activities” in Yemen.

With Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell signalling that he will not pursue an override of the president’s veto, the question is what additional measures Congress may take in an effort to curtail U.S. support for the war. In the House of Representatives, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer issued a response to the presidential veto message stating that “the fight is not yet over, and the House will explore further legislation and conduct rigorous oversight”. It is not clear, however, what this might entail. Because of procedural challenges in pursuing stand-alone legislation, the best path forward for enacting legislative restrictions on U.S. involvement in the Yemen conflict may be to include them in must-pass legislation like the annual defence authorisation legislation. Whether or not this is politically feasible, however, remains to be seen.

For Crisis Group’s comprehensive assessment of U.S. involvement in the Yemen war – both the origins of that involvement and how it has evolved under the Trump administration – see our new report, Ending the Yemen Quagmire: Lessons for Washington from Four Years of War.
Humanitarian organisations worry that continued fighting could cause a price spike. Aden airport has been taken over by separatist forces. Fighting on the Damt front has also escalated in recent weeks. Fighting between Huthi (Ansar Allah) and United Arab Emirates (UAE)-backed forces is intensifying in the southern governorate of al-Dhale. Battles have cut off key transit routes connecting the southern port city of Aden, the Huthi-held capital of Sanaa in the north, and the central governorate of Taiz, which houses important food processing, packaging and distribution facilities. If allowed to continue, the fighting could significantly deepen the country’s economic woes and further complicate efforts to revive a national peace process.

Al-Dhale sits on the historic fault line between former North and South Yemen, separate countries before 1990. Formed after Yemen’s unification by combining districts of the two former states, it is a natural battle ground for future north-south struggles. Since the Huthis and their allies were pushed north out of Aden in July 2015, al-Dhale became a front line in the current civil war where fighting flares periodically. Before and after the UN-led talks in Sweden in December 2018, fighting intensified in al-Dhale with Yemeni government and UAE-aligned forces claiming advances against Huthi fighters.

Now the Huthis appear to be making gains. Yemeni media reported on 1 May that Huthi forces had captured two towns along the highway linking al-Dhale with Ibb governorate to the west. After seizing the towns of Fakhir and Shakhab, they were closing in on Qataba, a town near an important junction between the westbound and northbound highways that link southern Yemen with Huthi-held territory. If the Huthis were to take Qataba, the ensuing fighting would also cut off the northbound highway that links rival forces in Damt district in northern al-Dhale with their supplies from the south, weakening the position of separatist forces. Fighting on the Damt front has also escalated in recent weeks.

Blocked highways are yet to cause an increase in food prices in the north of the country, but humanitarian organisations worry that continued fighting could cause a price spike. Aden airport has been taken over by separatist forces.
become the main route in and out of the country for Yemenis, especially those seeking medical treatment abroad, and ongoing violence along the highways would also impede travellers from Huthi-held territory.

Yemeni government officials view ongoing battles in al-Dhale and neighbouring governorates as part of a Huthi plan to exploit the current UN-mediated ceasefire in Hodeida to make gains on the ground in other areas. They claim the attacks are part of a pincer move to pressure UAE-backed forces in the south and to draw UAE-backed front-line forces away from the Red Sea theatre. Indeed, some forces have been redeployed from Hodeida to al-Dhale to help turn the tide against the Huthis. Some suspect the Huthis may even be preparing to push south again toward Aden, the government’s temporary capital.

Huthi officials, however, argue that they are fighting back against a months-long campaign by the Saudi-led coalition and its allies to destabilise territory they control and gain new ground, also under the cover of the Stockholm Agreement reached in Sweden in December 2018. The Huthis are likely trying to seize important supply lines and prevent their rivals from opening new routes into territory they hold while expanding buffer zones between the different cantons of control. Damt in northern al-Dhale has become the de facto border between the warring sides along the Aden-Sanaa highway, while Qataba is similarly important to the westbound routes to Ibb and Taiz city. The buffer zones are important because several tribal and religious groups in Ibb, which borders al-Dhale to the north, have remained neutral throughout the war. Yemeni government officials are convinced that they would join the anti-Huthi cause given a supply line connecting them with the south; the Huthis too are concerned that this might be the case.

Meanwhile, southern separatists have their own interpretation of events. Members of the Southern Transitional Council (STC), a pro-secessionist group closely tied to the main UAE-backed forces who are fighting in al-Dhale, suspect that renewed fighting there is directly linked to the issue of southern separation. Their media outlets reported that government military units fell back in the face of the Huthi offensive, and that some previously government-aligned commanders defected to the Huthi side. They have presented the offensive as a plot to destabilise the south, undermine the STC and UAE-backed southern forces, and pave the way for a joint Huthi-Islah attack on Aden, despite the fact that Huthis and Islah (a Sunni Islamist party aligned with the Hadi government) are fighting on opposite sides of the current civil war. The STC suspects a “northern” Huthi-Islah reconciliation aimed at subduing the south and pre-empting a possible separation bid.

STC suspicions of a new northern alliance against the south are speculative at best, but the Huthis are undoubtedly pressing their advantage to draw forces away from Hodeida. A considerable proportion of the Giants Brigade, the main military force battling the Huthis on the Red Sea coast, are drawn from tribes and families originally from Yafa, a zone that spans modern-day Lahj, al-Dhale and Abyan governorates. Aydrous al-Zubaidi, the STC president and a native of al-Dhale, has visited the front lines there several times since early April, while senior Giants Brigade members have also been photographed near the al-Dhale front. There are reports of some STC-aligned forces already being redeployed from the Red Sea coast to al-Dhale.

Regardless of why fighting has again flared up in al-Dhale, the humanitarian consequences could be dire if it continues. The battle for the governorate has effectively cut off the Aden-Sanaa highway and the westbound highway into Ibb, which in turn links Aden with Hawban, an industrial area to the northwest of Taiz city. As a result, the movement of goods and people between Aden, Taiz and Sanaa is frozen. A great many Yemeni merchants import goods, including foodstuffs, into Aden before transporting them north, often to Hawban, where bulk cargoes are processed and packaged for distribution nationwide. Although food prices have not yet been notably affected by the conflict in al-Dhale, Yemen’s business community warns of a potential “disaster” if the highway remains inaccessible in the coming weeks.

Bottom Line: For better or worse, implementation of the Stockholm Agreement remains the litmus test by which the warring parties judge the chances for returning to national peace talks and as such deserves priority focus. The UN special envoy, Martin Griffiths, may not have the bandwidth to intervene each time fighting escalates along one of the country’s front lines, particularly given the complexity of local dynamics in each location. Still, al-Dhale should not be ignored, given the potential humanitarian consequences and its link to the thorny issue of southern independence/autonomy. While Crisis Group has highlighted other regional battles and political issues in the past, few have the potential to touch as many nerves – or wreak as much economic havoc – as the current battle of al-Dhale. Griffiths has direct contact with both the Huthis and the UAE, who are directing the major frontline forces in al-Dhale. Quiet diplomacy
by his team could help reduce the fighting, prevent an escalation in neighbouring governorates and contain the festering issue of southern independence so that it can be addressed through negotiations.

Political and Military Developments

Since concluding the technical details of the first phase of force redeployments from in and around Hodeida in April, the parties have made no progress implementing the Stockholm Agreement (for a breakdown of the latest developments, see Update #9). The UN continues to try to at least partially implement the deal by seeking agreement on two outstanding issues that have stood in the way: a second phase of redeployments from the main population centres inside the city and from positions encircling it (by, respectively, the Huthis and UAE-backed forces), and the composition of local security forces that should secure areas following military redeployments. Absent a quick agreement on these issues, Crisis Group continues to advocate the redeployment of Huthi forces from Hodeida’s ports (at a minimum from Saleef and Ras Issa) as a good-faith, low-cost initial step that does not expose the Huthis to significant military risk but which buys time to enable progress on thornier issues. If there is no movement on the ground, there is a risk that there could be a renewed military push in Hodeida by UAE-backed forces, likely with U.S. support.

In Taiz, another round of fighting between local government-aligned military units and Salafist fighters saw loyalists of Abu al-Abbas, the UAE-backed Salafist leader, departing the city to a military base to the city’s south. Tensions between rival factions in the city remain high, however (for more details on Taiz, see Update #8). Left unresolved, these internal issues will hamper any attempt to broker a truce in Taiz between the Huthis and the government, as this would require coordination between all anti-Huthi forces on the ground.

Separately, a group of Hadi-affiliated southerners met in Aden on 28 April under the banner of the Southern National Coalition (SNC), which its advocates describe as a necessary counterweight to the separatist-leaning STC. The group’s stated aims are to support President Hadi and implement the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference, a series of UN-led talks held in Sanaa in 2013-2014. In particular, they propose a federal model of government that Hadi himself favours. The meeting had been planned for several months; an earlier attempt to convene members in Cairo in March failed. The coalition is largely formed of Hadi loyalists. STC officials have dismissed the SNC as an insignificant group with little legitimacy on the ground (for details of tensions between the STC and the government, see Update #5).

Bottom Line: The UN needs a win in Yemen, and in particular needs to demonstrate some form of progress on Hodeida so that peace talks can begin. Ongoing negotiations over the different phases of redeployments from in and around Hodeida are likely to take some time, so the UN should pursue the Huthis’ prior public offer to redeploy from the ports – at a minimum Ras Issa and Saleef – as a sign of good faith.

Regional and International Developments

In a communiqué issued after a meeting of the “Quad” – the UK, U.S., Saudi Arabia and the UAE – in London on 27 April, its members again called for implementation of the Stockholm Agreement. The communiqué focussed heavily on the Huthis, calling on them to redeploy from Saleef, Ras Issa and Hodeida ports, in line with Crisis Group recommendations, and to cease the firing of “Iranian-made and facilitated ballistic missiles and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles by Houthi forces into neighbouring countries”. The Quad members said they had an “expectation” that redeployments would be underway by the time the UN Security Council meets on 15 May.

On 2 May, the U.S. Senate voted on whether to override President Trump’s 16 April veto of legislation that invoked the War Powers Resolution of 1973 and would have directed the withdrawal of U.S. forces from hostilities in Yemen. A veto override requires a two-thirds vote from each chamber of Congress. The Senate vote of 53-45 fell short of the mark, and spells the end of this legislation. While some of its champions are now promising to move to new strategies for blocking U.S. support to the Saudi-led campaign – most importantly, by inserting defunding provisions in must-pass annual defence spending and authorisation bills – these do not presently appear to have the same bipartisan support as the vetoed legislation. To the extent that some members of Congress supported the war powers legislation because of outrage over the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, that outrage is beginning to fade. And to the (perhaps greater) extent that some felt comfortable supporting the legislation as a
political gesture primarily because they believed the president would veto it, they cannot repeat this strategy in the context of must-pass legislation.

Separately, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo blamed Iran for delays in implementation of the Stockholm Agreement, and was quoted in the UAE-headquartered The National on 29 April as saying the Huthis “continue to refuse to comply with the agreements that they signed up for in Stockholm, Sweden, they refuse to withdraw from the port of Hodeida...this is because Iran has chosen to direct them to do that”. In the same interview, Pompeo emphasised the Trump administration's intention to continue its support to the coalition, stating “the support we are providing to the Saudis is in America’s best interest”.

**Bottom Line:** The U.S. has been the strongest public critic of the Huthis among UN Security Council members since the Stockholm Agreement was signed in December, and is expected to push the Council to censure the group during an upcoming meeting on Yemen in New York on 15 May. With the Trump administration trying to ratchet up pressure on Iran, many in the U.S. government will continue to view Yemen as a battlefield for countering the Islamic Republic. In the aftermath of President Trump’s recent veto, it remains to be seen how effective Congress will be in pushing back against the administration’s policy of continued support to the Saudi-led campaign.

ICG, Peter Salisbury, Consulting Senior Analyst, Yemen, “Picturing Aden's Fragile Recovery,” Our Journeys / Middle East & North Africa 16 April 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/picturing-dens-fragile-recovery?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=ea6ddf6488-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_04_16_10_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-ea6ddf6488-359871089. commented, "After visiting Aden with a Crisis Group team doing field research and advocacy in Yemen’s interim capital, our Yemen expert Peter Salisbury shares his images of a city struggling to get back on its feet nearly four years after Huthi forces were pushed out. The photos are at the above web address.

Four years after war reached and devastated Aden, Yemen’s southern port city is finally experiencing a fragile recovery.

The battle for Aden was pivotal in the early struggle for Yemen in 2015, when Huthi (aka Ansar Allah) fighters, who were then aligned with forces loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, reached the southern port city after capturing the capital Sanaa and taking over much of the country’s north. For four months they fought in Aden, a city of more than 1.5 million people, before being pushed back by local forces backed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), who are part of the Saudi-led coalition. Aden was reduced to a shadow of its former self by street battles, shelling and airstrikes that wrought havoc on the city’s infrastructure. The Huthis were eventually pushed out of Yemen’s southern governorates, but Aden later suffered from heavy infiltration by al-Qaeda, infighting between rival militias and weak governance.

Returning with a Crisis Group team in March 2019, I found that security had improved markedly since previous trips over the past three years, while there were signs all-around of a rejuvenated local economy. We were told, however, that these recent gains are built on shaky foundations. A truce and improved cooperation between rival UAE- and government of Yemen-backed forces, who fought one another in Aden in January 2018, and a $60m-a-month fuel grant from Saudi Arabia, could both crumble at any moment.

This photo essay shows glimpses of markets springing back to life, families enjoying outings to the seafront and young people visiting a newly reopened mall, complete with a fine bowling alley. They do not represent the totality of life in Aden today. Poverty is still rife and the sound of gunfire remains part of the background noise on at least a weekly basis. But they do show one of the few glimmers of hope Yemen currently has to offer.

After four years of uncertainty, Adenis are now enjoying improvements in security. This has been driven, in part, by growing cooperation between the Hadi government and UAE-backed local security forces. Rivalry between the two helped drive instability in the past and led to street fighting in January of 2018. The number of checkpoints across the city has fallen dramatically over the past year, and uniformed forces have taken over from the old multitude of militias (although some are still in effect non-state actors). Checkpoints have gone from being a source of fear for drivers to an annoyance or formality.
Pictured here is Mohammed Sheikh al-Quaiti, who mans a traffic stop in the Khormaksar district and has even become a popular figure in the city, known for his diligence and sunny disposition.

After a series of false starts, the Central Bank of Yemen headquarters, relocated to Aden by the government in 2017, has become an important hub of the improving economic environment in Aden. The Yemeni Riyal hit record lows in September 2018, but its value has since risen significantly to the benefit of all Yemenis.

The World Bank still estimates that inflation hit 55% in 2018, and the cost of living has more than doubled since 2015. Jobs are still scarce, particularly in the Huthi-controlled north west, the country’s largest population center. Adenis are better off than most Yemenis, but large numbers still struggle to get work or enough to eat. More than 10 million people nationwide suffer from extreme levels of hunger. Some 238,000 Yemenis suffer from what the IPC calls “catastrophic hunger”, meaning that they are starving to death.

Aden is still littered with bullet-riddled walls, broken buildings and other reminders of the brutal street fighting of 2015. The flag of the pre-1990 independent southern Yemeni state, a symbol of secessionist sentiment, is on prominent display across the city. The international community should not ignore such sentiments in the south, not least among local security services. If a political solution does not adequately account for southern grievances, these could only grow and sow the seeds of renewed conflict.

A number of big Yemeni businesses are returning to Aden, having operated abroad for much of the war. The economy is showing signs of recovery, spurred on by much improved electricity supply, which has been ensured thanks to a $60m-a-month fuel grant from Saudi Arabia since October 2018. But continuation of the grant is not guaranteed, and Aden is heading into the hot summer months when demand for electricity hits a peak as air conditioning and fans become a necessity.

Wealthier Adenis are finding new ways to make use of their disposable income. Local entrepreneurs have opened up new espresso bars, even if customers are sometimes slow to appear. Polished new interiors often contrast with the war scars on the walls of the buildings outside.

Reconstruction of the city is still at an early stage. The landmark Aden Hotel, once the city’s only 5-star accommodation and notorious as the site in 1992 of one of the first attempted al-Qaeda attacks on a Western target, is still in ruins.

The current recovery is welcome and long overdue, coming as it does almost four years after Huthi-aligned forces were pushed out of Aden. But in afternoon qat chewing sessions (qat is a mildly narcotic leaf), and in other meetings, many interlocutors told us that the uptick is built on shaky foundations. According to some, the more successful the new Prime Minister Abdalmalek is, the more likely it is that attempts will be made to undermine him by one or more factions. Rivals include the Huthis, separatists who see the city as the future capital of an independent south, and even other members of the Hadi government, which has been beset by internal wrangling and power struggles throughout the war. The present local détente between UAE-backed and Hadi government-aligned security and military forces is seen more as a temporary truce than a long-term solution to the “militia-isation” of Aden and the wider south.

Aden’s old city is once again bustling on weekends. The center of some of the worst street fighting of 2015, Crater -- which lies in a bowl formed of volcanic rock -- has led Aden’s recovery.

Nearly one third of global shipping passes by the mouth of the nearby Red Sea, which has made Aden a strategic entrepôt for centuries. If the city’s long overdue recovery continues, it could increase confidence among Yemenis in the government’s ability to run the country, possibly putting pressure on the Huthis to reach a political settlement. But backsliding is a real risk. Infighting between rival factions of the kind that shut Aden down for several days in January 2018, it could serve to undermine prospects of a viable peace process.”

Rick Gladstone, "Saudi Airstrike Said to Hit Yemeni Hospital as War Enters Year 5," The New York Times, March 26, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/26/world/middleeast/yemen-saudi-hospital-airstrike.html, reported, "A hospital in Yemen supported by Save the Children was hit Tuesday by a deadly airstrike that charity officials blamed on the Saudi-led coalition, an attack carried out on the war’s fourth anniversary."

Even before an American-backed Kurdish and Arab militia ousted the last extremist fighters from the eastern Syrian village of Baghuz on Saturday, the Islamic State had shifted gears. The organization that once staked out a self-proclaimed caliphate across Iraq and Syria has now metastasized into a more traditional terrorist group — an atomized, clandestine network of cells engaged in guerrilla attacks, bombings and targeted assassinations."


Mr. Guterres was opening a donor conference for Yemen where he appealed for $4 billion to help 15 million Yemenis this year — the biggest-ever single country appeal from the United Nations. "Almost 10 million are just one step away from famine," Mr. Guterres said.

David D. Kirkpatrick. "Land Mines Block Saudi-Led Assault in Yemen, Killing Civilians: Hundreds of thousands of land mines have stymied the Saudi-led forces in Yemen, and could pose a danger to civilians for decades to come," The New York Times, February 17, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/17/world/middleeast/mines-saudi-yemen-houthi.html, reported, "Nearly four years after Saudi Arabia plunged into Yemen’s civil war, Saudi and Yemeni commanders say that hundreds of thousands of unmarked land mines planted by their opponents, the Houthis, have emerged as perhaps their most formidable defense. The hidden explosives, the commanders say, have helped keep the conflict close to a standstill despite the superior air power and other resources of the Saudi-led coalition.

The mines have also killed as many as 920 civilians and wounded thousands, according to mine removal experts. Rights groups and other monitors say the minesfields will leave Yemen riddled with buried explosives that could kill or maim unsuspecting civilians for decades before the devices can all be removed, as they have in Afghanistan, Colombia and Cambodia."

ICG, Turkey's PKK Conflict: A Visual Explainer, of April 5, 2019, reported, In July 2015, a two-and-a-half year long ceasefire broke down, and the almost four-decade long conflict between Turkish security forces and militants of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) - recognised as a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the U.S. and the EU - entered one of its deadliest chapters in nearly four decades.

Since that date, violence has devastated communities in Turkey's majority-Kurdish south east and - at times - struck into the heart of the country's largest metropolitan centres. An unprecedented flare-up of fighting and attacks in some south-eastern urban districts in the first half of 2016, was followed by a gradual shift of violence into rural areas.

International Crisis Group has assembled a database of fatalities caused by this conflict since 2011. Our data is based on information available in open sources, including reports from Turkish language media, the Turkish military, local Kurdish rights groups, and the PKK itself. This platform presents some of the information that can be gleaned from this data. For our latest detailed analysis that also draws on this data, click here.

According to Crisis Group's fatality tally, last updated on 5 April 2019, at least 4,330 people have been killed in clashes or terror attacks since 20 July 2015.

Details are at: https://www.crisisgroup.org/content/turkeys-pkk-conflict-visual-explainer?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=d8438e07cb-
Another m... Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government appeared to prefer not to engage in deterrent by proclaiming zero further rockets while avoiding blockade on the coastal enclave. The Islamist movement remains the de facto governing authority and, alongside others Palestinian factions such as Islamic Jihad, leads Palestinian desires primarily for military purposes by Palestinian factions, 14 March, causing no injuries. Israel had responded to the earlier attack by bombing 100 targets used infants. Tel Aviv, destroying a family house and wounding seven Israelis, including a twelve.

Israel maintains deterrence by proclaiming zero tolerance for projectiles coming from Gaza, whether launched intentionally or not.) Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government appeared to prefer not to engage in another military campaign in Gaza, at least until after Israel's 9 April elections.

Seven people were wounded Monday after a family home north of Tel Aviv was hit by a long-range rocket from the Gaza Strip. The IDF immediately prepared to call up troops and Netanyahu canceled his AIPAC appearance, cutting short his celebratory visit with Trump - to laud U.S. recognition of Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights.

As Chemi Shalev notes, Hamas knew exactly how to rain on Netanyahu's victory parade. Netanyahu's rivals were quick to pile on blame and chip away at his security image. Amos Harel explains how this all comes just a day after Netanyahu, in a botched TV interview, raised new questions about his involvement in the "submarine and state secrets' scandal.

Also in the news, Haaretz looked at the future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and found that 42% of Israelis support West Bank annexation as support for the two state solution dips."


Gaza officials said the two-day death toll for Palestinians had reached 22. At least nine militants and as many civilians were killed on Sunday alone. The civilians included a pregnant woman, a 12-year-old boy and 4-month-old girl, health officials said.

The Palestinians said early on Monday that they had reached a cease-fire with Israel."

ICG, Tareq Baconi, Analyst, Israel/Palestine and Economics of Conflict, ""Stopping an Unwanted War in Gaza,"" Q&A / Middle East & North Africa 26 March 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/israel/palestine/stopping-unwanted-war-gaza?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=2377f99d7b-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_03_26_01_23&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-a8438e07cb-359871089, commented, "As in 2014, Hamas and Israel appear close to a conflagration that neither party desires – though now a shaky ceasefire seems to have taken hold. Crisis Group's Israel/Palestine analyst Tareq Baconi explains how the parties got to the brink and how they can step back.

What happened? In the early morning of 25 March a rocket fired from the Gaza Strip landed in Mishmeret, north of Tel Aviv, destroying a family house and wounding seven Israelis, including a twelve-year-old girl and two infants. The rocket launch came not long after two other rockets were fired from Gaza toward Tel Aviv, on 14 March, causing no injuries. Israel had responded to the earlier attack by bombing 100 targets used primarily for military purposes by Palestinian factions, as well as empty buildings, throughout the strip. The largest of those factions is Hamas, which took control of Gaza in 2007, prompting Israel to impose a blockade on the coastal enclave. The Islamist movement remains the de facto governing authority and, alongside other Palestinian factions such as Islamic Jihad, leads Palestinian military attacks against Israel.

Despite the 14 March response's scale, it caused no fatalities and four injuries. It appeared calculated to deter further rockets while avoiding an escalation between Israel and the Palestinian factions in Gaza. Israel declared that the rockets that landed near Tel Aviv had been fired in error. (Israel believes it maintains deterrence by proclaiming zero tolerance for projectiles coming from Gaza, whether launched intentionally or not.) Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government appeared to prefer not to engage in another military campaign in Gaza, at least until after Israel’s 9 April elections.
The rocket launched at Mishmeret seemed, at first, more likely to lead to a significant escalation, though no Palestinian faction assumed responsibility. For one thing, the mere fact that the rocket was fired showed that Israel had failed to deter factions in Gaza with its 14 March response. Secondly, the political pressure on the Netanyahu government to react powerfully was stronger this time because of the attack’s seriousness – this rocket travelled farther than previous ones and caused civilian casualties.

Rocket fire at civilian centres, whether targeted or indiscriminate, is a war crime. Thirdly, the forthcoming elections, which served as a restraint on 14 March, provided reason to retaliate on this occasion, as the government wanted to demonstrate that it could restore deterrence.

Prime Minister Netanyahu announced that he was cutting short his trip to Washington, where he was scheduled to speak at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee conference and attend a White House dinner today. He promised to ‘respond forcefully’. His electoral challengers from the right had already criticised what they say is his past restraint in the face of rockets from Gaza. Education Minister Naftali Bennett, for instance, said Netanyahu’s reactions have ‘caused Hamas to stop fearing Israel’. Former Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Benny Gantz, who is Netanyahu’s main rival in this election, and is running from closer to the centre, similarly lambasted the prime minister for failing to respond ‘aggressively and forcefully’ to previous attacks.

Anticipating major bombardment, Hamas and other Palestinian factions went underground. In a joint statement, however, they warned Israel that they would respond sharply to any escalation. In the past twelve years, since the blockade was imposed, Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip, whether large-scale incursions or efforts to break up popular protests, have also entailed war crimes. Israel closed all the crossings into the Gaza Strip, called up reserves, including two armor and infantry brigades, and restricted sea access for Gaza fishermen until further notice.

Why did it happen?

Hamas and Israel have been engaged in indirect ceasefire negotiations under Egyptian and UN mediation since July of last year. The talks produced a November ceasefire agreement: Hamas committed to end rocket fire into Israel and promised to restrain the intensity of the Great March of Return, the protests in the Gaza-Israel fence area that began on 30 March 2018. Israel in turn said it would extend the nautical limit for Gaza fishermen and agree to allow Qatar to pay Gaza government salaries and supply fuel to Gaza’s power plant. The parties agreed that after the immediate risk of escalation was averted, they would take measures toward a sustainable resolution of Gaza’s economic challenges. Yet while Hamas has demonstrated its capacity to restrain the protests, Israel has shown little willingness to advance the ceasefire beyond the initial agreement to allow Qatari assistance. Since November, the talks have stalled without progress toward fulfilling Hamas’s central demand – that Israel loosen the economic stranglehold on the strip.

Hamas has long used rocket fire as a means of pressuring the Israeli government to return to negotiations and to grant concessions in Gaza. After the two rockets were fired at Tel Aviv ten days ago, the ceasefire discussions resumed. But, if rocket fire has been somewhat effective in bringing Israel to the table, it has largely failed to alleviate the blockade. From 14 March, the Great March of Return Higher Committee, which includes Hamas, expanded its ‘night disturbances’ – whereby demonstrators blast loud noises and explode devices close to Gaza’s periphery in order to disturb Israeli civilians and generate pressure on the Israeli authorities. The latest rocket was likely an attempt by Hamas to force Netanyahu to choose between fulfilling Israel’s ceasefire obligations or suffering greater embarrassment among his political rivals and constituents. Hamas believes its hand is strong at present because the Israeli government wants to avoid an escalation ahead of the elections. In this sensitive period, Hamas assumes it has the best chance of pushing Israel to compromise without getting dragged into a full-scale war.

Then there is the reality that Gaza’s economic straits are increasingly dire. The Palestinian Authority (PA) in Ramallah, dominated by Hamas’s main rival Fatah, is exacerbating the enclave’s plight by imposing sanctions as a means of undermining the Islamist movement’s governance. Sources describe the strip’s economic suffering as ‘unprecedented’, due to these restrictions, giving Hamas’s armed wing incentive to seek some means of alleviating the pressure. The rocket fire might well have been one such means.

It is a very short-term strategy. As sources from Gaza tell Crisis Group, there is a widespread belief that a military assault on the strip is inevitable after the Israeli elections, given that all the main
contenders are running on platforms that proclaim readiness to respond with force to similar provocations in the future. In the view of Gaza militants, the rocket fired at Mishmeret reminds the incoming Israeli government of Hamas’s military capacity and removes Israel’s ability to choose when to escalate. The idea appears to be that the rocket might provide urgent relief from particularly acute economic difficulties, gaining Gaza two weeks of respite and Hamas a bit of political credit. Furthermore, threatening to escalate at a time that is inconvenient for Israel, the factions believe, could enhance their negotiating power and undermine Israel’s ability to decide when the next war will be.

What else helps explain the rocket incident?

The context is not limited to the ceasefire discussions. Hamas and other Palestinian factions view Israeli policies elsewhere within the Occupied Palestinian Territories as provocative violations of Palestinian rights. Particularly notable are the tensions around the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount in Jerusalem, where a standoff between Israel and Muslim religious authorities over access to the Bab al-Rahma/Gate of Mercy building could further mobilise Palestinian protests. In the West Bank, Israeli army incursions have gathered pace over the past few months, as have Israeli settler attacks on Palestinians and Palestinian attacks on settlers and soldiers. The economy is shaky, following Washington’s decision to defund aid projects in the Palestinian territories and Israel’s choice to withhold the PA’s tax revenue. Hamas views all these policies as paving the way for President Donald Trump to roll out his proposal for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Palestinian factions see these factors, alongside Israel’s refusal to honour its ceasefire obligations, as an escalation in their own right.

In this particular instance, however, more immediate events played a role. On 24 March, in the Ketziot prison in southern Israel, Hamas prisoners stabbed two guards as they were being transferred to another location. The ensuing clashes left twelve Palestinian prisoners wounded, with several of them taken to a nearby hospital. The tensions in Israel’s prisons have been building for many months, caused primarily by Israel’s decision to install systems that would prevent communication between prisoners and the outside world through mobile phones that are smuggled into the prison. Israel claims that it put in the blocking devices after catching Hamas prisoners using a contraband phone to orchestrate West Bank attacks. Palestinian factions saw this measure, along with Israel’s decision to disperse prisoners across several wards, as aggressive. Palestinians have long accused Israel of using repressive and often violent tactics against prisoners, including through armed raids, the use of pepper spray and gas grenades to deal with prisoner populations. Prisoners have traditionally played an important role within Palestinian factions, and have a major say in these movements’ decisions even while jailed. Hamas and Islamic Jihad have been vocal in protesting what they view as repression of prisoner rights and have promised to retaliate. In statements issued after the latest rocket fire, Palestinian factions in Gaza reiterated solidarity with the prisoners, ahead of a prisoner hunger strike that is planned for 7 April, suggesting that the missile was also a response to the Ketziot clashes.

Within Gaza, where many people cannot afford basic goods, the economic predicament presents the Hamas government with significant challenges. Popular unrest erupted last week under the banner, ‘We Want to Live’. Though the protests were largely peaceful and civilian-led, Hamas cracked down brutally, beating up and imprisoning activists and journalists amid strong condemnation from human rights organisations. Hamas, for its part, viewed the protests as an existential threat, believing that the PA had instigated them to force its government’s collapse. Hamas officials told Crisis Group that they faced a choice between allowing Gaza to descend into chaos, at a time when both war with Israel and the Trump administration’s peace proposal seemed imminent, or maintaining a firm grip on the strip ahead of various anniversaries around which Palestinians are planning to mobilise and form a united front in the ceasefire discussions with Israel. Hamas has since announced many prisoners’ release. Yet the economic and political causes of the protests have not gone away, and the crackdown has only added to Gazans’ list of grievances.

What could happen next?

On 25 March, the Israeli government began bombing locations throughout the Gaza Strip. These included both military sites used by the Palestinian factions in Gaza as well as commercial and civilian sites. Even if he prefers to avoid an escalation, Netanyahu had to show a strong hand in order to rebuild deterrence and deflect his political rivals’ criticisms. There is a chance that he might employ the strategy from two weeks prior, hitting hard to seek to establish deterrence but in a manner that would allow Hamas
and other factions to limit their response. But the stakes are now much higher, and the factions quickly began firing back. The line Netanyahu now has to walk to satisfy his constituents and rivals without risking an escalation is much thinner. As in 2014, Israel and Hamas are at the brink of a violent confrontation that neither party desires. Egypt continues to mediate between the parties in an effort to contain the escalation and reinstate a ceasefire, which, at best, looks shaky.

If, as Gaza militants hope, the rocket fired at Mishmeret restarts ceasefire discussions while preempting an escalation, if only until after the Israeli elections, there are still several possible triggers of violence on the horizon. Foremost are two major anniversaries: 30 March, the one-year marker of the Great March of Return, which coincides with Land Day, when Palestinians commemorate six Palestinian citizens of Israel who were killed while protesting government confiscation of their lands in 1976; and 15 May, when Palestinians remember the Nakba, or “catastrophe”, their mass flight and expulsion from what is now Israel in 1948. On the first anniversary, 30 March, the Higher Committee has called for a “million-person march” in the Gaza Strip and across Israel, the West Bank and the Palestinian diaspora in Syria and Lebanon. Israel’s lethal response to previous protests, which a recent UN Commission of Inquiry has revealed could amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, underscores the possibility that there will be many civilian casualties in Gaza, and elsewhere, risking further destabilisation.

What should be done?

For the past twelve years, the situation in the Gaza Strip has followed similar dynamics. While Israel seeks “calm” on its southern front, it has been unwilling to relax the blockade’s chokehold. In ceasefire discussions that typically follow short-term threats, such as rocket fire, or major escalations, Israel entertains policies of easing access for people and goods in and out of the strip in order to stabilise the coastal enclave. Yet, as past ceasefires have shown, after the immediate threat of major conflict subsides, Israel typically fails to sustain the momentum toward carrying out such agreements, thereby reinforcing the dynamic of short-term escalation, followed by ceasefire discussions, non-implementation and new flare-ups.

To avoid an immediate confrontation, Israel and Hamas, with Egyptian and UN mediation, should build on the current shaky ceasefires and encourage the parties to return to the implementation of the November ceasefire arrangement. Both sides recommitted to that agreement after the two rockets landed in Tel Aviv on 14 March. This agreement had initiated six months of Qatari funding and fuel transfer into the Gaza Strip as urgent relief. The six-month period was originally planned to end in April, and was to be followed by secondary and tertiary phases once the risk of war had passed. The latter phases were to include measures to restore Gaza’s electricity, increase the number of Palestinians allowed in and out of the strip, expand the entry of merchandise, extend the range off the coast in which Gazans can fish, and generally ease the blockade. Unless the parties adopt these policies, within a political framework that addresses the humanitarian calamity in Gaza, the short-term escalations are likely to recur, and, eventually, lead to a new war.”

ICG, Tareq Baconi, Analyst, Israel/Palestine and Economics of Conflict, “The Deadly Political Paralysis behind the Gaza Flare-up,” Q&A / Middle East & North Africa 7 May 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/israel-palestine/deadly-political-paralysis-behind-gaza-flare, comment, “Fighting in Gaza killed 25 Palestinians and four Israelis on 3-6 May. In this Q&A, our Israel/Palestine Analyst Tareq Baconi links the violence to a continuing failure to ease restrictions on Gaza as agreed in a November ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, Gaza’s dominant Palestinian group.

What happened in Gaza on 3-6 May?

On 3 May, around 5,000 Palestinians in Gaza gathered near the fence area separating the Gaza Strip from Israel for the Great March of Return protests that have been taking place every week since 30 March 2018. During the past year of protests, which were predominantly civilian-led and unarmed yet also included incidents where demonstrators used incendiary kites, burning tires and flaming balloons, Israeli army snipers used live-fire against protesters, killing a total of 275 and injuring more than 17,000 to date. During the protest last Friday, Israeli fire struck a number of protesters in the head and torso, rather than the lower limbs, causing several severe injuries. Hamas and Islamic Jihad, both factions in the Higher Committee of the Great March of Return, retaliated with gunfire, wounding two Israeli soldiers. Israel
responded with strikes against military installations throughout the Gaza Strip, killing two members of al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas’s military wing. Two of the seriously injured protesters who had been targeted by Israeli snipers earlier that day succumbed to their wounds.

Events unfolded rapidly afterward. On Saturday and Sunday, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other factions in Gaza fired close to 600 rockets indiscriminately into Israel, killing four Israeli civilians, the largest number of fatalities by rocket fire from Gaza since the 51-day Gaza war that began on 8 July 2014. Israel’s anti-rocket defence system, Iron Dome, intercepted 250 rockets, the majority of those that targeted populated areas.

In Gaza, Israel carried out more than 320 airstrikes, targeting military sites, weapons manufacturing depots, as well as residential buildings, shops and media institutions. Gaza’s Health Ministry stated that Israel’s attacks killed twenty-five Palestinians, including a fourteen-month-old baby and her pregnant aunt. Israel denied responsibility for the latter two deaths, claiming they were caused by misfired Hamas rockets. Israel also resumed its policy of targeted assassinations, which had been dormant since 2014, killing Hamid al-Khodary, a member of Hamas. The Israeli army claims that al-Khodary had been responsible for the transfer of Iranian funding to Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Throughout the latest escalation, Egypt and the UN sought to mediate a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. The leaders of Islamic Jihad and the Gaza political bureau of Hamas, Ziyad al-Nakhalah and Yahya Sinwar respectively, were already in Cairo, where they had travelled on Thursday to discuss implementation of past ceasefire agreements. By late Sunday night, the parties reportedly agreed on another ceasefire, which came into effect at 4:30am on Monday, 6 May. Although the flare-up has subsided, Palestinian factions issued a statement stressing that there will not be a lasting cessation of fire until Israel implements its obligations under past agreements.

**Why did this outbreak of fighting in Gaza happen?**

This escalation is part of a recurring trend that has been taking place since November 2018, and in other guises for the past twelve years. To a large extent, the current flare-up has its origins in failure to implement fully the ceasefire agreement Israel reached with Hamas, which was negotiated under UN and Egyptian auspices last November. That agreement stipulated that Hamas would restrain the scale and severity of the Great March of Return protests in return for Israel easing the restrictions it continues to impose on the Gaza Strip through a blockade that was officially instituted in 2007, following Hamas’s takeover of Gaza. As Crisis Group reported in November, the agreement was to advance in phases. The first step was to remove the risk of an unwanted escalation, while subsequent phases entailed measures that would address the humanitarian and economic situation in the Gaza Strip in more sustainable ways. Since November, Hamas has largely maintained its side of the bargain, an assessment generally supported by Israeli security officials, who acknowledged Hamas’s cancelation of border protests in mid-March and restraining of them in late March and, on another occasion, stated that a rocket fired at Israel from Gaza was launched by mistake. Hamas has reduced the occurrence of violent and disruptive tactics among protesters, such as the use of incendiary devices, flaming kites and nightly disturbances, and it limited both the number of protesters and their proximity to the fence area. In return, Israel allowed monthly batches of Qatari fuel and funds to enter the Gaza Strip and expanded the naval area that Palestinian fishermen in Gaza can access.

However, the steps above were not consistently implemented (there were incidents of fire from Gaza and incursions by Israel, and at times Israel reversed its expansion of the fishing area and halted some of the Qatari payments) and the parties were not able to move beyond this initial calming of the situation. The ceasefire agreement stipulated other measures to lighten the blockade. These included permanently opening the strip’s two civilian crossings, one bordering Egypt and the other leading into Israel (there is a third crossing used only for goods); granting more permits for Gaza Palestinians to work in Israel; expanding the movement of imports and exports from the strip; and addressing the fuel shortages and electricity crisis in a sustainable manner to allow for the effective functioning of the power plant and other infrastructure in Gaza.

All these measures are fundamental for Gaza’s economy to function. While steps have been taken to address some of these issues – including through the provision of Qatari fuel, the announcement of further humanitarian projects by Qatar, and some progress toward donor-funded projects that have been in the works for years, including desalination and sewage treatment plants – Gaza’s situation remains...
precarious as the blockade has stunted the economy. Recognising this situation, the November ceasefire agreement stipulated that the blockade on Gaza be substantially lifted.

Although the two parties successfully avoided larger escalations, they have remained stuck at the very first phase of the agreement (that of taking the most preliminary steps to ease the blockade and prevent an escalation), thereby increasing the risk of subsequent flare-ups. As Israel failed to take additional measures to ease restrictions, Hamas began to renge on its commitment to restrain protests. This dynamic, evident since November, follows a familiar pattern: the two sides resume their confrontation; it typically ends with both reiterating their ceasefire commitments; Israel then fails to implement them, generally due to domestic constraints; in response, Hamas pressures Israel by removing restraints on the protests and other disturbances, giving rise to a new escalation.

Because even limited, temporary relief such as the injection of funds or fuel prompts Palestinian factions to reduce their protests, the Gaza issues tends to recede from the agenda both in Israel and among international stakeholders such as Egypt, the EU, the U.S. and the UN. This then alleviates the pressure and urgency on Israel to pursue further action in Gaza, leaving Palestinian factions on a treadmill of limited fuel and food relief, which is unsustainable given the general state of the economy.

That dynamic has played out once again. In March, during the most recent escalation prior to the one that ended on 6 May, the factions again reaffirmed their commitment to the ceasefire agreement. Hamas said it would restrain the large-scale “million-person” march that was planned for the one-year anniversary of the Great March of Return on 30 March, coinciding with Israel’s election campaign. For its part, Israel committed to resuming the transfer of Qatari fuel and funds, which were increased from $25m to $30m per month ($10m per month for fuel and $20m per month in funding for jobs and poor families).

Political campaigning in the run up to the hotly disputed 9 April Israeli elections dis incentivised Netanyahu from providing any major relief to the Gaza Strip, although Hamas claims it received assurances that Israel would implement the March ceasefire agreement after the voting. Israeli press also independently reported on such an understanding.

To break the cycle of limited ceasefire implementation, followed by escalations, Palestinian factions are now, as of Monday morning, demanding that all measures of the November ceasefire agreement be implemented comprehensively, in one go, rather than through the phased approach that has so far proven ineffective. It is unclear whether, at the time the latest ceasefire came into effect, Israel had accepted this demand. As of 7 May, Qatar has pledged $480m in funds for development and humanitarian aid to be distributed in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, with reports that $30m will be transferred to Gaza imminently as part of the ceasefire agreement. It remains unclear whether the factions will stick to their threat to escalate even after the passage of Qatari funds. Such an injection of relief could persuade Palestinian groups not to resort to an immediate escalation, yet ultimately leave both sides mired in the same unresolved dynamic, with a return to fighting — and, eventually, war — only a matter of time.

Why did the fighting break out now specifically?

The Gaza Strip has sunk to unprecedented levels of impoverishment and Hamas is hard pressed to demonstrate that its tactics over the course of the past few months are yielding results. Not only had Hamas largely co-opted the Great March of Return protests (which were originally initiated by Palestinian civil society), it had also negotiated with Israel to restrain that popular mobilisation in return for economic relief into the Gaza Strip that has not yet materialised. As Muslims prepare for the beginning of Ramadan this week, misery in the Gaza Strip is acute, with many families unable to afford basic goods and services.

Against this backdrop, several developments within Israel convinced Hamas that it might be able to force concessions in the limited window between the 9 April elections and 29 May, the date by which Netanyahu has to form a new governing coalition. First, during the period before Netanyahu forms his next coalition, which is expected to be more hawkish than his previous one, Hamas believes he may have greater freedom of manoeuvre to make concessions. Second, the flare-up took place days before Israel’s Memorial Day commemoration on 8 May, Independence Day celebration on 9 May, and the Eurovision contest that is set to take place in Israel on 14-18 May. (The Eurovision date coincides with 15 May, the day that Palestinians mourn the anniversary of the Nakba, their dispossession and dispersal that accompanied the creation of the State of Israel; unless there are signs that a ceasefire agreement is being implemented, that anniversary is likely to prove volatile.) Several Israeli ministers took pains to deny speculation in the Israeli press that these events, and especially the Eurovision contest, would give
Israel an incentive to agree to a ceasefire. Contrary to these claims, Israeli defence officials say they were instructed by the political leadership to reach a ceasefire before Independence Day and the Eurovision contest.

What could happen next?
Neither Hamas nor Israel wants a new war. In past escalations, as in the current one, Hamas and Islamic Jihad have relied on rocket fire to try to compel Israel to meet its ceasefire commitments and lessen the blockade. While in this case, the immediate impetus for rocket fire from Gaza was to retaliate against Israel’s use of lethal force during the Friday protests, the overarching objective was to compel implementation of the November and March ceasefire agreements. A ceasefire has come into effect, but it is unclear whether the flare-up will succeed in moving Israel to take steps beyond immediate de-escalation.

The escalation of the past two days has also demonstrated the risk of remaining mired in the preliminary steps of the ceasefire agreement, while putting off implementation of longer-term solutions for Gaza. The careful balancing act that both parties have adopted in past flare-ups appeared a lot less calculated in this round. The deaths of Israeli citizens increased pressure on Netanyahu to respond. Similarly, Israel’s resumption of the use of targeted assassinations, with the killing of al-Khodary, was a significant threat to Hamas, one that could have compelled the movement to react even more forcefully. These developments suggest that the risk of a wider war from future flare-ups is now higher, even if the current cessation of fire holds.

What should be done to prevent further escalation of the Gaza conflict?
In the immediate term, as Crisis Group has repeatedly advocated since November, Israel should stick by the terms of the November ceasefire agreement and allow for greater quantities of goods to enter and especially exit the Gaza Strip; facilitate the transfer of Qatari fuel and funds into Gaza unhindered; and increase the permits it allocates to Gaza Palestinians to travel into Israel and the West Bank. Once these measures are implemented, and assuming Hamas complies with its own commitments under the November ceasefire, Israel should consider means of addressing Gaza’s humanitarian suffering in a more sustainable manner, by allowing large-scale humanitarian aid and economic development projects. Neither Israel nor Hamas is under the illusion that addressing Gaza’s humanitarian needs will bring about a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But in the meantime it will serve the interests of both parties and lessen the suffering on both sides.”

"Israel approves thousands of new West Bank housing units," Jewish Telegraph Agency, APRIL 8, 2019 , https://www.jta.org/quick-reads/israel-approves-thousands-of-new-west-bank-housing-units, reported, "A Defense Ministry committee approved plans for the construction of at least 3,659 new housing units in the West Bank. It is the largest group of West Bank housing units advanced since President Donald Trump took office in January 2017. The Trump administration is expected to roll out an Israel-Palestinian peace plan after the Israeli elections.

Some 73 percent of the units, or 2,656, are in settlements that Israel likely will have to evacuate under a permanent peace agreement, according to Peace Now. Some 1,226 of the homes received final approval for construction."

Steven Davidson "The Palestinian activists protecting Hebron from settler violence: After Israel boots the only internationally mandated human rights observer group in Hebron, Palestinian volunteers step up to monitor settler attacks amid a sense of heightened hostility,” +972 Magazine, February 18, 2019. https://972mag.com/hebron-palestinians-tiph-settler-violence/140190/., reported, "About a dozen Palestinian volunteers in blue vests identifying themselves as "human rights observers" made their way toward the Israeli army’s Checkpoint 56 on Shuhada Street in the occupied West Bank city of Hebron early last week. They were escorting children on their way to the Qurtuba school 100 meters away, enduring harassment and kicking by settlers as they let the schoolchildren pass.

Up until late last month, this was a task for international observers, but on January 28, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that he will not renew the mandate for the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH), accusing the mission of ‘acting against Israel.’"


ICG, “Defusing the Crisis at Jerusalem’s Gate of Mercy,” Briefing 67 / Middle East & North Africa, 3 April 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/israelpalestine/b067-defusing-crisis-jerusalums-gate-mercy, commented, “A standoff looms between Palestinian worshippers and Israeli police over a shuttered building at Jerusalem’s Holy Esplanade. Israeli and Muslim religious authorities should reopen the building to lessen tensions at the sacred site, where small incidents have blown up into prolonged violence before.

What’s new? At Jerusalem’s Holy Esplanade (Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount), Israeli authorities and Palestinian worshippers are struggling over control of a building next to the Gate of Mercy. Shut by Israeli authorities since 2003, Palestinians forcibly regained access in February, turning it into a prayer hall. Israel seeks to reverse the change.

Why does it matter? Previously, minor incidents at the Holy Esplanade have triggered major escalations, especially at times of relative volatility in Gaza and the West Bank. The highly symbolic dispute over the Gate of Mercy building has put significant strain on Israel’s relations with Jordan, the esplanade’s Muslim custodian.

What should be done? Following overdue repairs, Israel should permit the building to reopen and allow the Waqf, which runs the esplanade under Jordanian auspices, to operate it as it sees fit, possibly as an Islamic educational institute or as a prayer space, to help mend Israel-Jordan relations and lower the risk of violence.

1. Overview

Conflicts at the plaza known to Jews as the Temple Mount (Har Habayit) and to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary (Haram al-Sharif) or the al-Aqsa Mosque compound have ignited some of the bloodiest episodes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including the riots in 2000 that triggered the Second Intifada. In recent weeks, tensions at this small site (0.15 sq km or 37 acres), hereafter referred to as Jerusalem’s Holy Esplanade, have flared anew. This time, the strife has centred on a building on the eastern edge of the esplanade, immediately adjacent to an external gate of the compound called Bab al Rahme/Shaar HaRananim, or Gate of Mercy.

In 2003, at the height of the Second Intifada, Israel secured a court order to prohibit access to the Gate of Mercy building, accusing the Islamic Heritage Committee, which used it as an office, of involvement in terrorist activities. Moreover, Israeli officials consider only the southernmost building of the Holy Esplanade to be the al-Aqsa Mosque. Given this, they tend to view the other buildings within the holy site as parts of the Temple Mount with no particular Muslim sanctity. Palestinians condemned Israel’s unilateral closure of the building, as well as its very involvement in administering the Holy Esplanade, because they deem the entire area of the compound part of al-Aqsa mosque. In addition, like all of East
Jerusalem, it is occupied territory according to international law. Hashemite Jordan, which claims Muslim custodianship at the site and has a peace agreement with Israel that accords it a “special role” in the site’s administration, views Israel’s closure of the building as a violation of what is known as the Status Quo.

The Status Quo is a set of unwritten rules, originating with Ottoman decrees pertaining to the administration of holy sites in Jerusalem and Bethlehem and extended to include Jerusalem’s Holy Esplanade during the second half of the 19th century. Since 1967, when Israel began occupying the West Bank including East Jerusalem and the Holy Esplanade within it, all Israeli prime ministers and Jordanian monarchs have declared their commitment to the Status Quo. Yet each party interprets these rules differently, particularly as they relate to three contentious issues: access, non-Muslim prayer, and archaeological excavations and public works.

Beginning in February of this year, the Waqf, the Islamic charitable organisation that administers the al-Aqsa Mosque as well as several schools and Islamic institutions across Jerusalem, has sought to recover access to the Gate of Mercy building, triggering a power struggle between Israeli authorities and Palestinian worshippers.

ICG, Ofer Zalzberg, Senior Analyst, Israel/Palestine, “Israel’s Upcoming Elections and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” Q&A / Middle East & North Africa 5 April 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/israel-palestine/israels-upcoming-elections-and-israeli-palestinian-conflict, commented, “Israel’s parliamentary elections on 9 April seem set to see Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu return to lead a fragile, more right-wing coalition, an outcome unlikely to prompt a dramatic change in the country’s policies in the West Bank and Gaza.

Who will win the upcoming parliamentary election?

Current polls project that the governing Likud party will secure enough seats in the Knesset for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to put together a new right-wing governing coalition, similar to the one he now leads. Netanyahu’s campaign has emphasised his claim to be a strong defender and saviour of Israel and other successes, such as keeping Israel out of new wars and overseeing a period of macroeconomic prosperity and improved standing in the world. Neither the opposition’s charges against him nor the Attorney General’s recommendation to indict him seem to have harmed him much so far.

For Netanyahu to form the next government, he will need the support of right and centre-right parties (60 members of parliament must recommend that he form a government). Should current polls hold, he would have it. So far, the following parties have committed to recommend him to form the next coalition: the national-religious Union of Right-Wing Parties, the secular and religious New Right, the two ultra-Orthodox parties United Torah Judaism and Shas, the mostly Russian-speaking Israel Beitenu and economics-focused Kulanu. The Libertarian Zehut, led by a hawkish former Likud member who has proposed plans to incentivise Palestinian emigration from the West Bank, almost certainly will do the same. Along with the Likud, seats won by these parties will probably add up to slightly more than the 61 parliamentarians (out of 120) that Netanyahu needs to form a government.

A different scenario, less likely given current polling but still plausible, could see Netanyahu’s most serious rival, former Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Chief of Staff Benny Gantz, who united his Israel Resilience party with the centre-left Yesh Atid party under a single list called Blue and White, form a centre-left government. Some polls had shown Blue and White receiving a few more seats than the Likud (around 28 to 31 for Blue and White and 26 to 28 for Likud), while others have shown Likud in the lead (with 29-31 seats for Likud and 28-29 for Blue and White).

The critical question, however, is not whether Likud or Blue and White will receive the most votes, but which party can convince 60 members of the Knesset to recommend its leader to form the next government. Based on current polls, this could only happen if Gantz’s governing coalition were to include a minister from a non-Zionist Arab party, an unprecedented albeit not impossible choice. A record 73 per cent of Israel’s Palestinian citizens support Arab parties joining a coalition, but Gantz has explicitly ruled out forming a coalition with anyone who is not ‘Jewish and Zionist’. Though Gantz’s positions could change after the election – he won’t be the first leader to backtrack on an electoral promise – no Israeli government has ever included an Arab party.

Another possibility is that neither Netanyahu nor Gantz will be able to form a coalition. In that case, either they will establish a government of national unity with a rotating premiership or the President
of Israel will call for a new election after determining that no party leader is able to form a government. Past experience suggests that in a national unity government, Gantz will be inclined to demand control of certain portfolios rather than demand that Netanyahu adopt specific policies toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the event of a new election, the right-wing may well draw the lesson from its current fragmentation that it ought to go to the ballot box more united.

What will determine the outcome of the election?

This election will turn on three issues: the degree of fragmentation within the right and centre-left camps; voter attitudes toward Netanyahu’s likely indictments for bribery, fraud and breach of trust; and voter attitudes toward security challenges on several fronts.

First, the fragmentation or unity of different political blocs will be critical in determining whether Netanyahu can form a new government. The electoral threshold, which right-wing parties raised several years ago as a way to limit the number of Arab parliamentarians, is now more than 50 per cent higher than it was before 2014: a party needs to win four out of 120 seats (3.25 per cent of the popular vote) to enter parliament. The Joint List, a political alliance of Arab-dominated parties, has split in two and its components risk not meeting the electoral threshold. In Israel’s right-wing camp, several parties – Kulanu, Israel Beitenu, Shas and Zehut – have polled at 3.25 per cent or less over the past couple months. In contrast, Israel’s other main camp, which largely refuses to label itself as left-leaning, has consolidated.

Gantz’s alliance with centre-left Yesh Atid faces a different challenge for establishing a future government. Yesh Atid’s leader, Yair Lapid, is detested by the ultra-Orthodox parties for attempting to force yeshiva students to join the labour market and the army (Israel has universal conscription that most ultra-Orthodox have avoided on religious grounds since the state’s founding). The ultra-Orthodox parties, often kingmakers in Israeli politics, are therefore unwilling to join a coalition under Gantz and Lapid (who agreed on a rotating premiership if Blue and White forms the next government).

Second, polls so far suggest that Netanyahu remains relatively unscathed by the Attorney General’s 28 February recommendation to indict him for bribery, fraud, and breach of trust. What appeared to have hurt him more, however, was a recent scandal involving allegations of impropriety and financial profit in his decision to agree to Germany’s sale of submarines to Egypt. Netanyahu approved the sale to have hurt him more, however, was a recent scandal involving allegations of impropriety and financial profit in his decision to agree to Germany’s sale of submarines to Egypt. Netanyahu approved the sale of the submarines without consulting top military officials, and he had an undisclosed financial stake in the company supplying the German manufacturer. The Likud’s polling numbers dipped as a result of the scandal, but have since picked up again.

Third, four flashpoints with the Palestinians – Gaza, Israel’s prisons, Jerusalem’s Holy Esplanade (Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount), and the West Bank – are on the cusp of escalation. Historically, an escalation during an election campaign has pushed the Israeli Jewish electorate to vote for right-wing candidates. This election is somewhat different, however, because Netanyahu is facing off against a party led by three former IDF chiefs of staff; criticism from these rivals could undermine Netanyahu’s brand as “Mr. Security”. When rockets from Gaza landed in central Israel, Blue and White’s generals attacked Netanyahu for being soft on Hamas and “paying protection [money] to terrorists” by allowing Qatar to pay salaries to the Hamas-led government in Gaza.

Like all incumbent candidates, Netanyahu enjoys disproportionate media coverage and can use the power of his office during the campaign. The most recent example is his successful push to win President Trump’s recognition of Israel’s de facto annexation of the Golan Heights and obtaining, with Russia’s assistance, the return of the remains of an Israeli soldier who went missing during the First Lebanon War in 1982. Netanyahu showed Israeli voters not only that he can score diplomatic achievements for Israel but that the leaders of two great powers appear to support his re-election.

How will the election result affect Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts?

There is little reason to expect dramatic changes in Israeli policy vis-à-vis the Palestinian Authority or Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), no matter who leads the next governing coalition. If anything, in the most likely scenario of another Netanyahu-led right-wing coalition, the government may well pursue more hardline policies than its predecessor. If the election results reflect the current polls, Netanyahu will have a narrow and fragile coalition. Smaller parties like the National Union, Zehut, and the New Right will therefore be in a strong bargaining position.

Such a government will likely continue to avoid choosing between ending occupation or annexing the West Bank. Netanyahu’s advisers speak with pride of having driven a wedge between the West Bank
and Gaza, noting that Palestinian political and geographic division has diluted the effectiveness of international pressure to establish a Palestinian state. As Likud campaign spokesperson Erez Tadmor told Israel Radio on 31 March: "The split between Fatah in Judea and Samaria [the West Bank] and Hamas in the Gaza Strip is a division that allows Israel to divide and rule, a division that serves Israeli interests’. Leading such a government, Netanyahu will almost certainly seek to avoid having to engage seriously with the peace plan the Trump administration has promised to unveil and which, while doubtless heavily tilted toward Israel, probably will contain elements anathema to the country’s far right. This should be fairly easy to do, given the very high likelihood that it will be rejected by the PLO.

In contrast, a Gantz-led government arguably could take steps to help restore PLO interest in negotiations. Although any resulting negotiations are unlikely to succeed – as Crisis Group has long documented, the Israeli-Palestinian impasse goes far beyond the exact composition of Israel’s coalition – Israeli steps that the PLO sees as positive can open up space for further cooperation. A Gantz-led government – especially if dependent on Arab support as current polls indicate would be necessary – could take steps to redress Arab-Jewish economic inequality in Israel and lessen discrimination against Palestinian citizens in Israel, after a lengthy period of growing discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin. With respect to policy toward the West Bank and Gaza, such a government could for instance restrain construction outside of major settlement blocs (though Gantz has vowed to increase settlement construction within them) and allow Palestinian cities in the West Bank to territorially expand, effectively expanding the Palestinian Authority’s area of operation (in the early days of the Trump Administration, U.S. Envoy Jason Greenblatt asked Prime Minister Netanyahu to make such gestures toward the Palestinians in the town of Qalqilya and was rebuffed).

Any further steps favoured by the Israeli left – such as forcibly evacuating isolated settlements east of the separation barrier – would face fierce opposition from right-wing pro-settler activists, notably in the West Bank, and would be contentious within Blue and White, which contains a number of right-wing figures. But softer policies can still make a difference. A Gantz-led government could, for example, advance a law that would provide financial rewards to settlers residing east of the separation barrier and willing to relocate into Israel proper. Polls suggest that over a quarter of the settlers living east of the barrier would opt to relocate. Their relocation might weaken settler communities and induce additional waves of settlers to relocate. Though such an initiative would fall far short of ending Israel’s occupation or resolving the conflict, the sight of thousands of settlers packing their bags could change Palestinian perceptions of Israel’s willingness to leave most of the West Bank."

"Israel deducts $138m from PA tax revenues," Middle East Monitor (MEMO), February 18, https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190218-israel-trims-funds-to-palestinians-over-militant-stipends/, reported. The Israeli cabinet yesterday approved a bill to deduct $138 million from the Palestinian Authority (PA)’s tax revenue in a bid to stop prisoners’ stipends.

Israel collects customs duties on behalf of the PA under the interim agreements of the Oslo Accords – sums thought to amount to $222 million a month. Yesterday’s decision will see over 500 million shekels ($138 million) deducted from the PA’s revenue in order to strip those Palestinians killed, wounded or arrested by Israel of their stipends, Quds Press reported."

"15 Israelis and one Vietnamese Zen teacher meet with Palestinians: Interfaith Encounter Association, www.interfaith-encounter.org, February 14, 2019, http://www.kibush.co.il/show_file.asp?num=79740, reported. "About 15 Israelis from all over Israel and one Vietnamese Zen teacher gathered to come and hear from the people living on the other side of the fence, in the occupied territories. We met two young men who lived in a small, quiet village in the heart of the mountains and heard about their lives, how much they loved life, cared about the earth and about humanity. Despite difficulties in their lives, their hearts are not bitter and full of hatred. They just want to continue living well. In another village, we had lunch and heard the life story of an older man. He experienced in his life few demolitions. As a child he suffered greatly from repeated uprooting and episodes of violence in all its forms. The hardships he described led many of us to tears and feelings of suffocation."
We then went to another village in the heart of the mountains and sat in a welcoming home. Two young family members opened their hearts to us and to life. They spoke of their desire to live in peace with their neighbors and to get to know them.

These experiences shook up some of our group, but there was also something balanced about the possibility of containing both sides of the equation without deciding which side was right."

Minds of Peace, http://mindsofpeace.org, sponsored the "Israeli-Palestinian Congress of Female Students: 60 Israeli & Palestinian Female Students Negotiating Peace in Tel Aviv, at the Arab-Hebrew Theater, Mifrats Shlomo Promenade 10, April 14, 2019."

"60 Israeli & Palestinian female students will negotiate trust building measures, suspension of the violent struggle, and solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at the Arab-Hebrew Theater, Jaffa-Tel-Aviv. The negotiations are open to all and the public is welcome to join the negotiations as active observers. The congress will be held in the presence of international observers."

Iyad Abuhewila and Isabel Kershner, "Hamas Crackdown on Gaza Protests Instills Fear," The New York Times, March 24, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/24/world/middleeast/gaza-protests-hamas.html, reported that in March 2019, "Hamas security forces moved quickly to quell the protests that brought hundreds of people into the streets in at least four camps and towns across Gaza this month to demand better living conditions.

The security forces beat demonstrators, raided homes and detained organizers, journalists and participants, about 1,000 people in all. Along with the uniformed officers, masked, plainclothes Hamas enforcers armed with pistols, batons and wooden rods attacked the protesters, according to witnesses, and prevented journalists and human rights workers from documenting the events."


The North Korean Economy was functioning worse than previously, as of early April 2019. Choe Sang-Hun, "North Korea’s State-Run Economy Falters Under Sanctions, Testing Elite Loyalty," The New York Times, April 18, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/18/world/asia/north-korea-economy-sanctions.html, reported. The report, in the newspaper Rodong Sinmun, the mouthpiece of the government, followed South Korean media reports of cases of pneumonia and frostbite in Samjiyon [where construction of a large tourist resort was being rushed]. Together they suggest that American-led sanctions over North Korea’s nuclear weapons program are hurting Mr. Kim in a way they haven’t before: by targeting the state-run economy and the party and military elite who support his totalitarian rule."

Maria Abi-Habib, Sameer Yasir and Hari Kumar, "India Blames Pakistan for Attack in Kashmir, Promising a Response," The New York Times, February 15, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/15/world/asia/kashmir-attack-pulwama.html, reported, "India accused Pakistan on Friday of orchestrating a suicide bombing that killed dozens of soldiers in Kashmir, the worst attack there in decades, promising an appropriate response and calling on world leaders to isolate its neighbor. Pakistan has denied involvement in the attack, in which at least 40 Indian soldiers were killed Thursday when a driver slammed an explosives-packed vehicle into a paramilitary convoy. But by Friday afternoon, India had recalled its ambassador to Pakistan for consultations in New Delhi."

Pakistan, a threat it has made before but now seems more determined to carry out in the wake of a suicide bomb attack last week for which India has blamed Pakistan.

Nitin Gadkari, India’s transport minister, said in a Twitter message that “Our Govt. has decided to stop our share of water which used to flow to Pakistan. We will divert water from Eastern rivers and supply it to our People in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab.”

“A full-blown water war could be catastrophic to the hundreds of millions of people in India and Pakistan who depend on river water. But this latest threat was not accompanied by details on when or how India might act to divert more water from Pakistan downstream or how large, in reality, such diversions would be.”


It was the first time that Indian aircraft had crossed the Kashmir Line of Control to strike in decades. But it was unclear what, if anything, the attack jets hit on the Pakistani side, raising the possibility that India was making a calculated bet to assuage public anger but minimize the risk of a major Pakistani military response."

Prime Minister Imran Khan of Pakistan announced on Thursday that his country would be releasing a captured Indian pilot after days of military conflict, offering a way out of the crisis.

Maria Abi-Habib and Hari Kumar, "Pakistan Military Says It Downed Two Indian Warplanes, Capturing Pilot," The New York Times, February 27, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/27/world/asia/kashmir-india-pakistan-aircraft.html, reported, "Pakistan said Wednesday that it downed two Indian fighter jets and captured a pilot, escalating hostilities between the nuclear-armed neighbors a day after Indian warplanes struck inside Pakistani territory for the first time in five decades.

The rapid turn of events raised fears that the historical animosities between India and Pakistan could be steering them toward another war.

Prime Minister Imran Khan of Pakistan said Wednesday that his country would be releasing a captured Indian pilot from India after days of military conflict, offering a way out of the crisis and seeking to position Pakistan as the cooler head in a confrontation that has put the world on edge."

Jeffrey Gettleman, Harih Kumar and Sameer Yasir, "Deadly Shelling Erupts in Kashmir Between India and Pakistan After Pilot Is Freed," The New York Times, March 2, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/02/world/asia/kashmir-shelling-india-pakistan.html, "Intense shelling erupted along the disputed border between India and Pakistan on Saturday, killing several civilians and making it clear that hostilities between the two nuclear-armed nations were hardly over — only a day after Pakistan handed over a captured Indian fighter pilot in what it called a 'good-will gesture.'

At least five civilians and two soldiers were killed, according to officials on both sides."

ICG, Laurel Miller, Program Director, Asia, "Calming India and Pakistan’s Tit-for-Tat Escalation," Q&A / Asia 1 March 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/kashmir/calming-india-and-pakistans-tit-tat-escalation, commented, "Reciprocal airstrikes by India and Pakistan have been accompanied by shelling, troop reinforcements and small arms fire. In this Q&A calling for restraint between the nuclear-armed neighbours, Crisis Group’s Asia Program Director Laurel Miller notes that the airspace violations alone were the worst for 50 years.

What happened exactly?

On Tuesday, 26 February, India claimed that its air force had targeted “the biggest training camp of the Jaish-e-Mohammed ... in Balakot”. The strikes – the most significant airspace violations in nearly 50 years – followed a deadly 14 February suicide car bombing in Pulwama in Indian-administered Jammu and
Kashmir (J&K), which had been claimed by the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed militant group. India said it launched a ‘preventive strike’ based on intelligence that Jaish intended to attack again. At a press conference, Foreign Secretary VK Gokhale said Pakistan ‘failed to take any concrete action against terrorists’ and that the strike on the training facility had ‘killed a large number’. In its official statement on the airstrike in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, the Indian government said, ‘The existence of such massive training facilities, capable of training hundreds of jihadists could not have functioned without the knowledge of Pakistani authorities’.

Pakistan refutes Indian officials’ claims that more than 300 Jaish militants were killed in the attack. It acknowledges however that eight Indian Air Force jets had violated the Line of Control, which divides Pakistan’s Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Indian-controlled J&K. The Pakistan military’s spokesperson said that its Air Force’s “timely and effective response” had forced the Indian planes to retreat, dropping their bombs in an uninhabited area near Balakot in Pakistan’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, causing no casualty or damage.

On 27 February, Pakistan’s foreign ministry said its Air Force had conducted six strikes on “non-military targets” in India to demonstrate the country’s “right, will and capability for self-defence”. Pakistan downed an Indian jet that entered its airspace in pursuit of the Pakistani aircraft, leading to the pilot’s capture. India claimed to have downed one of the intruding Pakistani jets. Although it is clear that cross-Line of Control attacks and aerial skirmishes between the two sides occurred, it is difficult to verify both countries’ claims and counter-claims of targets and impact. Pakistani officials have provided evidence, also circulated on social media, of the downed Indian jet and the captured pilot, but claims of six successful strikes conducted in Indian-controlled Kashmir are more difficult to verify. Despite ample evidence of its cross-Line of Control attacks, Indian claims of killing hundreds in the airstrike on a Jaish training base and downing a Pakistani jet lack credence since New Delhi did not provide any evidence.

Why did it happen?

India’s and Pakistan’s latest skirmishes are as much aimed at assuaging domestic constituency concerns as they are at convincing each other of their capacity to strike and seriousness of intent. Still, resort to military force for political ends increases the risks of escalation, no matter how unintended.

In the Indian context, Narendra Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government felt compelled to react in light of the countrywide outrage in the wake of the 14 February Jaish suicide car bombing. With elections months away, Modi, responding to domestic opinion – particularly that of his hardline BJP constituency – vowed to avenge the dead in Pulwama, including at least 40 Indian paramilitary police officers. “We will give a befitting reply; our neighbour will not be allowed to destabilise us,” he said, giving his security forces “permission to take decisions about the timing, place and nature of their response”. That response came in the shape of the 26 February airstrikes across the Line of Control.

Within Pakistan, given a long history of distrust toward, and war with India, the powerful military establishment had to demonstrate to constituencies at home that India’s hostile designs would be forcefully thwarted. On 22 February, days before the Indian Air Force strikes, the military’s spokesperson warned that, if India were to attack, Pakistan would never “fall short of capacity” and would “dominate the escalation ladder”. The day of the 26 February Indian attack, reiterating these warnings, the spokesperson referred to a meeting of the National Command Authority (NCA), which oversees Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal, saying to India, “I hope you know what the NCA means and what it constitutes”.

What could happen next and why does it matter?

Both sides have left themselves room to climb down. Pakistani and Indian officials insist that their governments have no intention to escalate hostilities further. On 27 February, Pakistan’s military spokesperson said the Pakistan Air Force could have targeted a major Indian military installation in the strike area but chose to attack ‘in open space’, causing no casualties, so as to avoid escalation. The same day, speaking at a Russia-India-China foreign ministers meeting in Beijing, Indian Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj said the 26 February strike, meant to pre-empt another terror attack, ‘wasn’t a military operation, no military installation was targeted’. India, she said, ‘doesn’t wish to see further escalation of the situation’.

For his part, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan called for restraint and diplomatic engagement and at the same time vividly highlighted the risks inherent in the current situation. The same day as his
country’s planes launched strikes across the Line of Control, Khan elliptically referenced the nuclear capabilities in a television interview and said, “With the weapons you have and the weapons we have, can we afford miscalculation? Shouldn’t we think that, if this escalates, what will it lead to?” He also offered to release the captured Indian pilot and to cooperate with India in investigating the Pulwama attack. Despite Khan’s acknowledgement of escalation risks, and Indian and Pakistani claims of responsibility and restraint, their armies are continuing to clash with artillery shelling and small arms fire along the Line of Control. Meanwhile, tensions are also high within J&K due to an Indian crackdown on Kashmiri dissidents, which could provoke more alienated youth to join militants. This apparently was the case of the 14 February suicide bomber, who came from a village close to the site of the Pulwama attack.

What should be done?

The international community, including China, the EU and European governments, have called on India and Pakistan to exercise restraint and prevent further escalation. In Washington, expressing U.S. concern about the tit-for-tat attacks, a White House official said, “The potential risks associated with further military action by either side are unacceptably high for both countries, their neighbours, and the international community”.

If the two sides are to step down from the brink, their leaders, civil and military, should resist the temptation to pander to domestic constituencies and tone down hostile rhetoric. There is little foreseeable prospect, no matter how desirable, of the top Indian and Pakistani leaderships re-establishing direct communication channels and bilateral dialogue. These have been frozen since the 2016 terror attacks in Indian Punjab and Indian-administered Kashmir, which New Delhi attributed to Pakistan-based militants. Nevertheless, New Delhi and Islamabad should immediately and urgently revive the hotline between their Directors General for Military Operations, a crucial mechanism to prevent unintended and inadvertent conflict escalation.

In the short and medium terms, New Delhi should rethink its approach toward and within J&K, ending the heavy-handed militarised response that has contributed to growing local alienation and disaffection. Pakistan should rethink its longstanding policy of supporting anti-India jihadist proxies, such as Jaish, that – as this latest round of escalation shows – are far more of a threat to national security than an asset.”

Tensions remained high and violence continued in Kashmir in Spring 2019. For example, Sameer Yasir, “Kashmiri Militants Attack Polls After Call for India Election Boycott,” The New York Times, May 6, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/06/world/asia/kashmir-india-election-violence.html, reported, “Violence disrupted the Indian election in the disputed Kashmir region on Monday, as separatist militants attacked two polling stations and the police responded with what residents called excessive force. Militants in the Pulwama district hurled grenades at the polling stations, the police said, and protesters threw stones at security forces, hoping to shut down the voting, which is being conducted over five weeks throughout India. The police fired pellet guns in response, injuring at least a dozen people, according to residents.”

“Last week, the Indian police arrested or detained hundreds of people in southern Kashmir after separatist leaders called for the polls to be boycotted.”

Jeffrey Gettleman and Hari Kumar, “India Shot Down a Satellite, Modi Says, Shifting Balance of Power in Asia,” The New York Times, March 27, 2019https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/27/world/asia/india-weather-satellite-missile.html, reported, “Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on Wednesday that India had test-fired a rocket that shot down one of its own satellites, escalating the country’s rivalry with China and Pakistan, and demonstrating a strategic capability in space that few countries possess.”

“But it has potentially ominous repercussions, accelerating the space race with China and destabilizing the uneasy balance of power between India and Pakistan, which are both armed with nuclear weapons. It could allow India essentially to blind an enemy by taking out its space-based communication and surveillance satellites.”

The staunchly Hindu Nationalist government of Narendra Modi, while making some gains in modernizing the economy and reducing corruption, has united and strengthened nationalist Hindus, increasing division in the country and raising fears among minority groups. This is another example of the
xenophobic nationalism and racism that has been increasing world-wide (Jeffrey Gettleman, Kai
elections.html).

David E. Sanger and William J. Broad, "New Images of North Korea Buildup Confront Trump’s
said they had long been telling the White House: Even during eight months of blossoming diplomacy, Kim
Jong-un, the North Korean leader, was steadily adding to his weapons arsenal and nuclear infrastructure."

ICG, Laurel Miller, Program Director, Asia, "Deadly Kashmir Suicide Bombing Ratchets up India-
Pakistan Tensions," Q&A Asia 22 February 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-
asia/kashmir/deadly-kashmir-suicide-bombing-ratchets-india-pakistan-
tensions/utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=63bccc054dc-
EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_10_19_02_09_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-
63bccc054dc-359871089, commented, "A 14 February suicide attack by Pakistan-based militants was
their bloodiest strike in Indian-administered Kashmir in over three decades. In this Q&A, our Asia Program
Director Laurel Miller warns that even a limited Indian retaliatory strike could spark a sharp escalation in
conflict between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

What happened in the Pulwama attack and how has India responded?
A 14 February suicide car bombing claimed by the Pakistan-based militant group Jaish-e-
Mohammed killed more than 45 security personnel in Indian-administered Kashmir’s Pulwama district, some
30 km from the state capital Srinagar. The attack, which targeted a convoy of the paramilitary Central
Reserve Police Force (CRPF), was the deadliest terror incident in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) for over three
decades. Vowing revenge and accusing Pakistan of complicity, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has warned Islamabad that support for jihadist proxies will no
longer be tolerated. Threatening to isolate Pakistan diplomatically, Modi has called on the international
community to take united, concrete action against terrorism and those who spread it. New Delhi has
recalled its high commissioner (ambassador) from Islamabad and withdrawn Pakistan’s Most Favor
Nation trading status. Islamabad also withdrew its top diplomat from New Delhi, accusing India of making
allegations without investigations and denying any role in the attack.

As an already-tense relationship worsens, so too do the risks of conflict between the two nuclear-
armed neighbours. With Indian general elections approaching this spring and emotions running high, the
BJP government is likely to give its security forces an even freer hand than usual in squashing dissent in
Muslim-majority, Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). The resultant alienation could lead more
Kashmiri youth to join the ranks of militant groups such as Jaish-e-Mohammed.

Is Pakistan culpable for the Pulwama attack?
Rejecting Indian allegations of culpability, Islamabad claims that it has banned Jaish-e-Mohammed,
which is led by Masood Azhar and is included in the UN Security Council Resolution 1267 sanctions list.
Alongside Lashkar-e-Tayyaba/Jamaat-ud-Dawa, it is one of the most important anti-India Pakistan-based
jihadist groups. Pakistan formally banned Jaish-e-Mohammed in 2002 following a December 2001 attack
on the Indian parliament, but the group re-emerged under a changed name. Although Pakistan has taken
actions against Jaish individuals responsible for internal attacks, such as on military ruler Pervez Musharraf
in December 2003, the al-Qaeda linked organisation continues to operate freely – recruiting, fundraising
(including through madrasa networks and charity fronts), and planning and conducting attacks in Indian-
administered Kashmir. The permissive environment Pakistan has created for Jaish activities directed
toward India can legitimately be seen as deliberate policy, regardless of whether specific attacks can be
proved to be linked to Pakistani decision-making.

Was Kashmiri homegrown militancy responsible for the Pulwama attack?
The 14 February suicide attacker, Jaish-e-Mohammed’s Adil Ahmad Dar (also known as Waqas
Commando), was a young man from a village close to the attack site who had joined the group last year.
His father claimed he had joined Jaish after Indian troops beat and humiliated him. India’s militarised response to growing local alienation and dissatisfaction in J&K has resulted in an exponential rise in homegrown militancy and local support for the militants. The July 2016 killing of Burhan Muzaffar Wani, a young charismatic Hizbul Mujahideen militant, accelerated these developments.

Rampant rights abuses amid a climate of impunity, highlighted in the June 2018 UN report on Kashmir, and draconian laws such as the Armed Services Special Powers Act serve as recruiting tools for both Kashmiri separatist groups and Pakistani jihadist outfits like Jaish-e-Mohammed. Clearing operations by Indian security forces such as ‘Operation All Out’, launched in mid-2017, led to 2018 becoming the bloodiest year in J&K in a decade. Around 500 people were killed in Kashmir’s conflict-related violence, including militants, civilians and security personnel. Although more than half of those killed were militants, many non-combatants were also killed, injured or disappeared in military operations, resulting in more support by local communities for the militant cause.

How will the Pulwama attack shape New Delhi’s policy toward Indian-administered Kashmir?

Domestic outrage at the killing of more than 40 security personnel by the Kashmiri suicide bomber with admitted links to a Pakistan-based jihadist group has further vitiated already tense relations between Hindus and Muslims in India. In J&K’s Hindu-majority Jammu and elsewhere, particularly in northern Indian states, Kashmiri Muslims have been harassed and attacked. Although failing to rein in such sectarian violence could further increase support for the militants in the J&K’s Muslim-majority areas, as elections approach the BJP will want to appease the sentiments of its hardline constituency that wants to avenge the Pulwama dead.

While security sweeps and arrests of scores of alleged militant sympathisers are further exacerbating tensions within J&K, there are few political avenues to assuage Kashmiri dissent. New Delhi has exercised direct rule in J&K since the governor dissolved the state assembly in November 2018. Although Kashmiri separatists want either independence or merger with Pakistan, even moderates are alienated by the gradual erosion of Article 370 of the Indian constitution, which provides for a special status of greater political autonomy for J&K and the abolition of which the BJP has strongly supported. This lack of autonomy and political freedoms, combined with the heavy-handed security response, will likely lead to more violence and unrest in J&K, which in turn will likely result in more efforts by New Delhi to forcibly suppress Kashmiri dissent.

Will Pakistan rethink support for anti-India jihadist proxies?

A Pakistani rethink on the longstanding policy of backing jihadist proxies, including Jaish, depends on a shift in its powerful military establishment’s internal and external cost-benefit analysis, which as yet appears more tactical than strategic. Since 2016, following attacks on the Pathankot military base in Indian Punjab and security personnel near J&K’s Uri town – which India attributed to Jaish – India has refused to revive its bilateral dialogue with Islamabad unless Pakistan takes decisive action against all such jihadist groups. Following the Pathankot and Uri attacks, India claimed to have launched surgical strikes on terrorist targets across the Line of Control dividing Indian and Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Though Pakistan denies that such strikes took place, there are almost weekly violations of the 2003 ceasefire line by Pakistani and Indian troops, claiming scores of lives of civilians and security personnel each year.

‘We will give a befitting reply; our neighbour will not be allowed to destabilise us’, said Prime Minister Modi, giving his security forces ‘permission to take decisions about the timing, place and nature of their response’. While offering to cooperate with New Delhi in investigating the Pulwama attack, Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan warned that his country would have no choice but to ‘retaliate immediately’ if India attacked.

Concerned about heightened tensions, the U.S. has urged Pakistan to act decisively against all terrorist groups ‘operating on its soil’. However, Pakistan’s strategic location and the role it could play in bringing the Afghan Taliban to the negotiating table could lead the U.S. to lower its pressure. Islamabad’s closest ally, China, which has thus far blocked Indian efforts in the UN Security Council to designate Jaish leader Azhar a “global terrorist”, is also concerned about the outbreak of armed conflict between India and Pakistan. However, it is unlikely to pressure Islamabad given Beijing’s unwillingness to damage its relationship with Pakistan.
If New Delhi were to opt for even a limited military strike across the Line of Control or the international border with Pakistan, that would increase the risk of conflict spiraling rapidly between the two nuclear-armed neighbors.

A wave of vigilante attacks in India against religious minorities, since the Bharatiya Janata Party came to national power in 2014, have not been investigated (Kai Schultz, "Murders of Muslims Go Unpunished, Report Finds," The New York Times, February 20, 2019).


The death toll in the attacks rose to 290, with about 500 people wounded, a police spokesman, Ruwan Gunasekera, said, although he would not give a breakdown of the fatalities. The finance minister, Mangala Samaraweera, called the attacks "a well-coordinated attempt to create murder, mayhem and anarchy."

It was alleged that the well coordinated attack involving a sizable number of people was carried out by an ISIS inspired militant Islamic group. At least 13 people had been arrested in connection with the attacks by the following day.


In a sign of how raw emotions remain after the deadly attacks last month that killed more than 250 people, the clashes in Negombo, a city about 20 miles north of the capital, Colombo, started out as a traffic incident before quickly escalating into mob violence."

Among the several conflicts between the government of Myanmar and a variety of ethnic groups, fighting continues between the Army and the Arakan Army - of the Rakhine, who are Buddhist, in Rakhine state, where the Muslim Rohingya were brutally forced to flee to Bangladesh (Hannah Beech, "Shared Buddhist Faith Offers No Shield From Myanmar Military," The New York Times, March 2, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/02/world/asia/myanmars-rakhine-buddhists-rohingya.html). U.N. Secretary General António Guterres has initiated a special investigative body to prepare case files for prosecuting the most serious crimes arising from the Myanmar army's campaign against the Arakan Army (Nick Cumming-Bruce, "U.N. Condemns Violence in Western Myanmar," The New York Times, April 5, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/05/world/asia/un-myanmar-rakhine.html).


Sri Lankans from all ethnic and religious groups – Sinhalese and Tamil, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian and Hindu – lived through terrible violence during the decades of war and terrorism that ended ten years ago. Still, no one was prepared for Easter Sunday’s atrocities, whose death toll – now over 300, with more than 500 injured – and degree of organisation make them Sri Lanka’s worst-ever terror attack. The damage to the country’s already torn social fabric is likely to be immense.
Amid the shock, grief and anger, there is also bewilderment. For many, the attacks seem to have come from nowhere. The government has arrested twenty-four Sri Lankan Muslim suspects, allegedly part of a hitherto little-known Islamist militant group, National Towheed Jamaat (NTJ), which government officials have said carried out the attacks with foreign support.

Sri Lanka has a long and complex history of inter-ethnic and inter-religious violence. Political struggles between Sri Lanka’s Sinhalese and mostly Buddhist majority and the mostly Hindu Tamil minority, who make up about 15 per cent of the population and are concentrated in the north and east of the island, eventually led to a three-decade civil war, which left some 150,000 dead (a small minority of both Sinhalese and Tamils are Christians). Soon after the government crushed the Tamil Tigers’ separatist struggle in May 2009, Sri Lanka’s Muslim community – about 10 per cent of the population – became the target of violence, hate speech and economic boycotts by groups of Sinhalese Buddhists who claimed that Muslims threatened the island’s stability and Buddhist character. (Historically, Sri Lankan Muslims have been considered and considered themselves a separate ethnic group, but increasingly their identity is defined in religious terms as well.) Nearly a week of anti-Muslim rioting by Sinhalese mobs in March 2018 was contained only after the government declared a state of emergency and deployed the army.

In the face of years of sustained attack, Sri Lanka’s Muslims have displayed calm and restraint, with not a single act of retaliation against Sinhalese. Nor is there any history of serious tension between Muslims and Christians. Indeed, recent years have seen unusual joint advocacy campaigns by Muslim and evangelical Christian groups, as the latter have also suffered violent attacks by militant Buddhists angered by what they see as “unethical conversions”.

Extremist voices have emerged in recent decades among Sri Lankan Muslims, but the limited violence such groups have committed has hitherto been against other Muslims, not Christians or Buddhists. NTJ, for instance, was one of a number of Salafi groups known and criticised for its violent rhetoric and occasional physical attacks on Sufi Muslims, whom it considers not to be true Muslims. Until very recently, however, there were never attacks against Sri Lankans of other faiths. In part for this reason, the police and Sinhala political leadership largely deferred to Muslim political and religious leaders, who did little to challenge such groups.

The first sign that NTJ’s targets might be changing came in December 2018 when Buddhist and Christian statues were vandalised in the central town of Mawanella. Police quickly arrested a group of young Muslim men who reportedly had attended Quran classes taught by the NTJ leader and Salafi preacher M. T. M. Zahran. Worries grew among Muslim community leaders, who were struggling to keep the peace, when police investigations into the statue attacks led to the discovery in January of a weapons cache hidden on a farm in north-western Sri Lanka.

The Easter attacks appear principally to be the fruit of seeds planted by transnational jihadists, which responsible local Muslim leaders failed to effectively uproot. A small number of Sri Lankan Muslims are known to have travelled to Syria to fight with the Islamic State (ISIS). The scale and complexity of the attacks suggest that a small number of local radicals received outside guidance. ISIS has now laid claim online to what it calls Sunday’s “blessed raid”. In statements released over social media, it has celebrated the killing of Christians and “subjects of the countries of the Crusader Coalition” that has combated the group globally. ISIS aims to eliminate any space for tolerance and coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims, and to draw Muslims everywhere into the group’s cataclysmic battle with “infidel” and “apostate” enemies.

Sunday’s atrocities thus do not appear to grow directly from Sri Lanka’s previous complicated history of intercommunal tensions and political violence, though years of pressure on Muslims from Sinhala Buddhist militants have increased the alienation and anger felt by many young Muslims. Now, however, the attacks will likely become an essential part of Sri Lankan conflict dynamics and – as interpreted from within that history and made use of by multiple political actors – could go on to have lasting and destabilising effects. The bombings, shocking in their large number, brutality and high death toll, will now be cited as evidence of the violent Muslim extremism of which militant Buddhists have long warned. The anger felt by Christians – both ethnic Tamil and Sinhalese – at the massacre of their brothers and sisters threatens to strengthen already powerful anti-Muslim sentiments across society.

The attacks will also strengthen the hand of the Sinhala nationalist opposition, led by former president Mahinda Rajapaksa and his brother, and would-be presidential candidate, Gotabaya Rajapaksa,
during whose government militant Buddhist organisations such as Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Force) were allowed to incite violence against Muslims with impunity. Already the front runners in the presidential and parliamentary elections due over the next year or so, the Rajapaksas and their party supporters are certain to argue that during their government, terrorism – in the form of the Tamil Tigers – was defeated, and that only they can save Sri Lanka from the latest brand of terror that the divided government of President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has failed to prevent. The government’s apparent failure to act on intelligence reports warning of the suicide attacks seems to have been at least in part a product of the bitter political infighting between the president and prime minister and the former’s refusal to share police warnings with the cabinet. It has deepened the widespread sense that the government is weak and the country at risk.

Should the Rajapaksas return to power, the current government’s modest efforts at post-war reconciliation and strengthening the rule of law will almost certainly end. Already, in response to the attacks, the president has declared an emergency that provides broad powers of arrest and detention to the security forces, and plans to replace the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act – long criticized by the UN and others for facilitating torture of Tamil detainees – are likely to be scrapped.

Thorough investigations and tightened security measures are essential to reassure a frightened public. The capital Colombo in particular remains tense, with reports of rising anger toward Muslims, particularly after ISIS’s claim of responsibility and police warnings of possible further bombings. A serious and independent inquiry into the failure to act on intelligence warnings must lead to reform of Sri Lanka’s dysfunctional system of intelligence sharing.

Muslim leaders, in turn, need to speak out much more forcefully against the forces of hate within their own community that have until now been reluctant to challenge. The fear of giving ammunition to their antagonists in other communities, which is one reason they have held back, can no longer be accepted. Continued silence, instead, is the greater danger.

Yet at the same time, efforts are needed to avoid demonising Sri Lanka’s overwhelmingly peaceful Muslim community. The alternative would be to erode the authority of Muslim leaders who themselves are horrified by the violence, and wish to contain it, and deepen the sense of alienation that some young Muslims already feel. Interc communal conflict and schism is precisely what ISIS hopes to provoke. Instead, leaders from all ethnic and religious communities must speak out against holding Muslims as a whole responsible for atrocities that a very small number of their community may have committed. All must work to protect Muslims from reprisals that could eventually set off a deadly cycle of intercommunal conflict. In addition to the Christian community that was the direct target of the bombings, what was attacked was Sri Lanka’s strained but still living tradition of inter-religious and inter-ethnic cooperation and friendship. This tradition must be defended in every way possible by Sri Lanka’s political, national security and religious leadership."

ICG,”Building a Better Future for Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh,” Briefing 155 / Asia 25 April 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/b155-building-better-future-rohingya-refugees-bangladesh?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=ae33371635-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_04_25_06_57&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-ae33371635-359871089, commented, ”Bangladesh is hosting nearly a million Rohingya refugees who have little hope of going home any time soon. The government should move to improve camp living conditions, in particular by lifting the education ban and fighting crime. Donors should support such steps.

What’s new? With no near-term prospect of returning to Myanmar, almost a million Rohingya refugees in camps in Bangladesh face an uncertain future. An impressive aid operation has stabilised the humanitarian situation; attention must now turn to refugees’ lives and future prospects, in particular improved law and order and education for children.

Why does it matter? A lack of security and hope creates major risks. Militants and gangs increasingly operate with impunity in the camps, consolidating control to the detriment of non-violent political leaders. Without education opportunities, children will be left ill equipped to thrive wherever they live in the future.
What should be done? Bangladesh should institute an effective police presence in the camps and bring the perpetrators of crimes to justice. It should also lift its ban on formal education in the camps. If it does, donors should help meet the costs of these and other measures to improve refugees’ lives.

1. Overview

Eighteen months on from the mass expulsion of 740,000 Rohingya from Myanmar to Bangladesh, no sustainable solution for the refugees is in sight. Repatriation to Myanmar should remain the long-term goal – not only to relieve the huge burden on Bangladesh but also because that is the strong preference of the refugees themselves. But the unfortunate reality is that Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh will be unable to return home to Myanmar for the foreseeable future. Systems are now largely in place to provide for their essential humanitarian needs in the sprawling refugee camps. It is now time to move beyond the emergency phase of managing this crisis. Shifting focus in this way requires Bangladesh to ease its restrictions on longer-term assistance, specifically:

- The Bangladesh government should lift its ban on the provision of formal education in the camps; local and international organisations are ready to provide such education.

- It should also improve law and order in the camps, where militants and gangs increasingly operate with impunity and are consolidating control to the detriment of non-violent political voices and leaders. This requires instituting a regular and effective Bangladesh police presence in the camps and investigating crimes and bringing perpetrators to justice.

- For their part, donors should help Bangladesh not only to meet the refugees’ immediate humanitarian needs but also to cover the costs of measures that improve their lives and prospects for the future.

ISIS is growing in the jungle areas of the Mindanao island group of the southern Philippines. It claimed responsibility for the January 27 cathedral bombing on the island of Jolo, and has recently broadcast strong opposition to the government of President Rodrigo Duterte (Hannah Beech and Jason Gutierrez, “How ISIS is Rising in the Philippines as It Dwindle in the Middle East,” The New York Times, March 9, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/09/world/asia/isis-philippines-jolo.html).

Jason Gutierrez, “Philippines Officially Leaves the International Criminal Court,” The New York Times, March 17, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/17/world/asia/philippines-international-criminal-court.html, reported, “The Philippines officially withdrew from the International Criminal Court on Sunday, after the country’s highest court declined to overrule President Rodrigo Duterte’s decision to leave the world’s only permanent war crimes tribunal.”

“The court has been conducting a preliminary inquiry into accusations that Mr. Duterte and other Philippine officials committed mass murder and crimes against humanity in the course of the drug crackdown. That inquiry stemmed from a complaint filed by a Filipino lawyer representing two men who said they had been assassins for Mr. Duterte in Davao, the southern city where Mr. Duterte became mayor in the late 1980s.”

In Chris Church, New Zealand, in what has officially been called a terrorist attack, two gunman killed 49 people, wounding at least 48 others at two Mosques, March 16, 2019. 4 Suspects were taken into custody by the police (Meteor Blades, "Update on terrorist attack against two New Zealand mosques: 49 dead, dozens wounded, 4 suspects held," Daily Kos, March 15, 2019, https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2019/3/15/1842308/-Update-on-terrorist-attack-against-two-New-Zealand-mosques-40-dead-48-wounded-4-suspects-held?detail=emaildkre).

Much more needs to happen to reach peace, but Azerbaijan’s old scepticism is giving way to cautious hope in diplomacy.

A series of direct contacts between Azerbaijan and Armenia have brought hope to the two countries’ decades-long impasse over Nagorno-Karabakh, a conflict that began as the Soviet Union collapsed. But while these meetings, on the heels of a change in power in the Armenian capital, bring new dynamism, much has to be done before true progress is possible.

The Azerbaijani and Armenian leaders, Ilham Aliyev and Nikol Pashinyan, last met in person on 22 January 2019 at the World Economic Forum in Davos, their third meeting since the latter came to power in Yerevan last April. Their January discussion, held without mediators, came just six days after the two countries’ foreign ministers met in Paris, where they agreed to take concrete measures to prepare their populations for peace.

Thus far, these meetings’ most significant outcome is a September agreement to build a ceasefire control mechanism and a communications channel between state representatives. These two measures have calmed the Line of Contact, leading to the fewest combat casualties there since 2013. Along with Armenia’s political transformation, the reduced fighting has yielded optimism about the prospect of more meaningful talks to come.

Baku appears to believe that the peace process can now move forward even without the help of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, created in 1992 to help resolve the conflict. In December, Aliyev gave the clearest signal to this effect, saying “2019 can be a breakthrough year”. His statement received little global attention but reverberated at home. But just what breakthroughs may be possible remains uncertain.

For the government, the hopes of progress represent a break with the recent past. Clashes erupted in Nagorno-Karabakh in April 2016, marking a low point in relations between the two governments. Both before and after the exchange of fire, ruling elites in Azerbaijan felt that Pashinyan’s predecessor, former President and Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan, was negotiating in bad faith. Today, they seem to regard their Armenian interlocutors with newfound respect.

The government has matched its rhetoric with actions, making important personnel changes that seem to be laying the groundwork for direct talks with Armenia. Specifically, high-profile appointments in state agencies overseeing displaced persons show that Baku is taking that basket of issues more seriously. In April, Baku named a new chairman of its State Committee for Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, Rovshan Rzayev, an outspoken advocate for meeting the needs of the displaced in education and housing. In December, it designated a capable career diplomat, Tural Ganjaliyev, as chairman of the Community of the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan – a government institution representing Azerbaijanis displaced from the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast. Previously, the Azerbaijani leadership had not considered the Community a priority. Civil society leaders had criticised the Community for its poor public relations, at home and abroad, which allowed the voices of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians to dominate the discourse.

The move to strengthen the Community may also be a reaction to Pashinyan’s demand that Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh – who run the de facto authority in the territory – be officially represented in negotiations. By putting a senior official in charge of the body, Azerbaijan is channelling the statement of the 1992 OSCE Council of Ministers meeting that Karabakh Azerbaijanis are “interested parties” in the conflict just as Karabakh Armenians are. If Armenia demands the de facto Nagorno-Karabakh authorities’ participation in negotiations, it appears, Azerbaijan will counter by insisting that Nagorno-Karabakh Azerbaijanis also have a seat at the table. But crucially, these actions imply expectations that the table will, in fact, exist.

Much of the shift in sentiment is rooted in the change in leadership in Yerevan. Azerbaijani officials see good omens in the new Armenian government’s stated desire to introduce structural economic reforms and raise living standards. To boost its economy, they believe, Armenia would need to participate in regional economic projects. This is impossible as long as conflict persists. Not only is open trade with Azerbaijan precluded, but Turkey, which is central to the energy and transport networks that fuel the region, closed its borders with Armenia in 1993, after the UN Security Council adopted a resolution demanding the withdrawal of local Armenian forces from the Kelbajar district and other recently occupied
areas of Azerbaijan. Baku refers to this state of affairs as the “self-isolation” of Armenia, and believes that the new government in Yerevan wants to end it.

The Azerbaijani authorities hope that economic pragmatism will make Armenia amenable to considering Baku’s plan for a comprehensive peace agreement – a step-by-step approach they call the “six D formula”: de-occupation, de-militarisation, demining, deployment, dialogue and development. Amid the official optimism, some independent Azerbaijani experts have expressed doubts to Crisis Group researchers. They dismiss the recent spate of contacts as just one more round in two decades of on-and-off negotiations. As they see it, the discussions have failed to move beyond basic principles since 2007 – and there is no reason to think that they will now. They argue that the April 2016 clashes, which actually achieved some territorial gains for Baku, raised popular hopes in a military solution to the standoff.

Sceptics of the official optimism also argue that Armenia does not see its economic “self-isolation” through the same lens as do Azerbaijani authorities. Armenia has expressed readiness to open its borders with Turkey, without pre-conditions tied to conflict resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia’s economy, although limited by isolation, has not been destroyed by it, in part thanks to Russian support.

This suggests that economic benefit alone may not be sufficient incentive for the Armenian side to compromise on its core concerns in Nagorno-Karabakh. As for the “six D formula”, authorities in Yerevan have never discussed such grand ideas.

Past attempts to find a solution sound a cautionary note. Most recently, the Lavrov plan-proposed by the Russian foreign minister to the Armenian and Azerbaijani sides in 2015 (and again after the 2016 April escalation as a peace proposal) – postulated the return of some lands to Azerbaijani control, return of Azerbaijani IDPs to their homes, and a peacekeeping mission to Nagorno-Karabakh. It would have left the status of Nagorno-Karabakh unresolved for the time being. In Azerbaijan, the plan was criticised by both independent experts and government officials as “minimalist” and “defeatist” because it would have recovered only five of seven Armenian-controlled territories for Azerbaijan and would bring Russian peacekeepers to the conflict zone.

Armenia also strongly opposed the Lavrov plan, because it provided no clarity on the future legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh. These positions underline the maximalist goals both sides retain for any negotiation, and bode ill for slow, step-by-step processes.

These challenges aside, Crisis Group research suggests that the dramatic changes in Armenia in 2018 and the Azerbaijani authorities’ positive spin have led to growing openness among the Azerbaijani public to a diplomatic solution. This feeling is particularly pronounced among IDPs, the people most affected as the conflict continues. But while public support may make it easier for Baku to come to the table, high public expectations combined with a history of maximalist positions can also constrain government options, particularly if negotiations prove arduous.

Hope or Fallacy

The Azerbaijani authorities should take care to manage public expectations of a process that, no matter what the parties’ intentions, lengthy and incremental. The key will be to reach intermediate understandings with the Armenian side that the government can present as tangible progress without exaggerating these achievements.

Already, local media in Azerbaijan misinterpreted the 16 January commitments of Elmar Mammadyarov and his Armenian counterpart to “prepare the population for peace”. That wording does not mean that the parties have already reached an agreement. The misperception stems in part from the fact that the U.S., French and Russian presidents used similar language at a summit in 2011, which seemed on the verge of a peace deal before talks failed. By recycling this formulation, Baku and Yerevan sent the message that peace once again was close at hand. As Rauf Mirtagirov, a well-known expert, said, “if the sides have not agreed to some elements of a peace agreement, then there is nothing to tell people, Ultimately, you are not preparing the population for anything”. Should the great expectations – especially among IDPs – be dashed, the damage to public faith in diplomacy might be long-lasting.

In fact, the Azerbaijani leadership has not said how it plans to prepare the population for peace. Nagorno-Karabakh Azerbaijanis have expressed the view that such preparation should include contact between Karabakh Azerbaijanis and Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians. But the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians have long rejected the notion of “intercommunity dialogues”.

The fact is that preparation of the public for peace implies preparation of the public for long negotiations and the potential for compromise. This includes both public debate and more transparency
about what is happening at the negotiating table. More engagement of Azerbaijani and Armenian civil society groups alongside official negotiations could also be valuable to underscore the simple proposition that peace is possible with the other side, preferable to a military solution, and should involve some gains for Armenia as well. Moreover, given the likely long-time frame for talks, a symbolic, humanitarian gesture such as an exchange of detainees could help keep the momentum going. As one Azerbaijani official told Crisis Group: “Notwithstanding the population’s decreased trust in diplomatic negotiations, if they see a tangible result, even a minimal one, it could dramatically change their thinking about possibility of resolution via talks”.

Azerbaijan has begun taking necessary steps forward, such as the personnel changes noted above and the marked adjustments to government rhetoric. These tactical shifts, however, sidestep the elephant in the room: both parties must understand – and make sure the respective populations understand – that to succeed, a peace process will be painful and protracted and must at least begin as open-ended.”

European Developments

Steven Erlanger and Katrin Bennhold, "Rift Between Trump and Europe Is Now Open and Angry," The New York Times, February 17, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/17/world/europe/trump-international-relations-munich.html, reported, “European leaders have long been alarmed that President Trump’s words and Twitter messages could undo a trans-Atlantic alliance that had grown stronger over seven decades. They had clung to the hope that those ties would bear up under the strain. But in the last few days of a prestigious annual security conference in Munich, the rift between Europe and the Trump administration became open, angry and concrete, diplomats and analysts say.”

"The most immediate danger, diplomats and intelligence officials warned, is that the trans-Atlantic fissures now risk being exploited by Russia and China.”

North Macedonia became the 30th member of NATO, in early February 2019 (Steven Erlanger and Rick Gladstone, "NATO’s Addition of 30th Member, However Small, Is a Setback for Putin," The New York Times, February 7, 2019).

IGC, Katharine Quinn-Judge, Analyst, EU EasternNeighbourhood, "A Shadow over Ukraine’s Presidential Election,” Commentary / Europe & Central Asia 19 April 2019, https://www危机group.org/europe-central-asia/eastern-europe/ukraine/shadow-over-ukraines-presidential-election?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=ccbd236d8-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_04_19_03_33&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-cbd236d8-359871089, commented, "With Ukraine’s establishment forecasting doom after the presidential runoff, the far right’s influence on politics is impossible to ignore. Its resurgence is both a symptom and a cause of the country’s ills: there is less daylight between it and the political mainstream than either admits.

On 31 March, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko suffered a double-digit defeat in the presidential election’s first round to comedian Volodymyr Zelensky, whose only previous political experience is playing the president on television. The incumbent is widely expected to lose a second and final time in Sunday’s runoff vote. Zelensky’s campaign has hinged on shying away from policy specifics, while appealing to voters who are wary of Poroshenko’s increasingly familiar rhetoric about containing Russian aggression and promises of Westernisation. The comedian blames Moscow for the ongoing war in eastern Ukraine, but says both sides should “just stop shooting”. He says he favours integration with the West, but questions whether European states will ever treat Ukraine as a peer.

Apocalyptic predictions abound about his potential victory. Poroshenko says his opponent is a Kremlin plant who could bring about the death of the Ukrainian state. Poroshenko’s harshest critics, many of them also concerned about Zelensky’s inexperience and flippancy, have claimed that the sitting president could use voter suppression tactics in order to prevail on election day. Some commentators even see a plot by the country’s substantial far right to help elect Zelensky and then seize power in a coup.

Sunday looks increasingly unlikely to bring large-scale violence, as there are no signs of Poroshenko preparing to disrupt voting or rig the results, and the far right does not appear to be planning a show of force. But the dire prognostications and the absurdities of this campaign nevertheless reflect
real concerns with which Kyiv and its friends will have to contend. For the past five years, Kyiv has pledged to restore Ukraine’s territorial integrity after Russia’s invasion, fight corruption and adopt European standards of good governance. Yet amid continuing reports of high-level corruption, including in the defence sector, these pledges have increasingly felt like hollow slogans and ploys to attract Western aid. This has created fertile ground for the rise of protest figures – people who, like Zelensky mock the apparent insincerity of these noble goals – or, like the far-right groups that have played such a noisy role in the campaign season, propose unworkable or destructive paths to achieving them.

Though they do poorly in elections, far-right groups’ patriotic credentials and anti-corruption stances strike a chord with large numbers of Ukrainians who might otherwise be lukewarm, at best, toward their views. At the same time, some of the far right’s positions mirror and may influence mainstream sentiments. In that sense, they are both a symptom of Ukraine’s political system’s sickness and a cause thereof.

**The Far Right Makes Its Mark**

Proponents of Ukraine’s integration with the West tend to downplay the significance of far right groups. But their underwhelming electoral performance obfuscates the major role the various groups and their viewpoints play in public life. The ideas that the far-right parties propagate, from “traditional” values to militarism to disparagement of civilians living in the eastern territories occupied by Russia, are shared by powerful mainstream politicians. The groups themselves are well organised and disciplined; many members own firearms and have combat experience. Crucially, they take visible stands on issues with deep public resonance, from budget transparency to conditions in orphanages, which generates a certain degree of passive support from citizens who may be unaware of their violent, white supremacist, patriarchal ideology – or are unbothered by it.

Ukraine’s far right, in its current iteration, grew out of the 2013-2014 Maidan protests that ousted president Viktor Yanukovych. Then, right-wing groups stood alongside students and frustrated members of the middle class to bring down a regime that had thumbed its nose at them all. After Yanukovych fled the country and a Russian-backed insurgency erupted in the east, far-right and nationalist groups formed militias that helped fend off enemy troops as Ukraine’s weakened armed forces rebuilt themselves. While Kyiv’s new government fashioned itself as centrist and pro-Western, it welcomed the militias’ support. Meanwhile, Moscow’s feverish characterisation of these groups as fascist all but ensured that Kyiv officials and their Western friends would rally to defend these “patriots”.

While many fighters in the Azov battalion – a prominent far-right militia that came together in 2014 – were partly motivated by a desire to defend Ukraine against corrupt leaders and an oppressive neighbour, it was no accident that they wore crests and used rhetoric that had Nazi echoes. Journalists highlighted how fighters’ professions of love for homeland would sometimes dissolve into approving references to Hitler. The conduct of these militias also raised concerns, as rights groups documented their possible war crimes. Still, many of Ukraine’s international supporters as well as its ordinary citizens have tended to see the rightists as self-sacrificing if confused young men, and critics as a product of either Kremlin propaganda or overwrought liberal anxiety.

Though the government took steps to bring the Azov battalion and similar militias under state control, their leaders retained political prominence, and some of the largest groups, including Azov, were integrated into Ministry of Interior forces, often as intact units. National Corps, Ukraine’s largest right-wing party, is led by key Azov figures; its sister vigilante group National Militia is rumoured to have links to Interior Minister Arsen Avakov. (He denies any ties, but has defended the vigilantes’ right to conduct unarmed street patrols.)

It is only recently, when right-wing groups have begun publicly protesting against the incumbent government en masse, that they have faced real pushback.

Protesters from National Corps, which claims it can mobilise 20,000 activists at any given time, clashed with police two weekends in a row in March, compounding pre-existing concerns about election violence. The protests were aimed at Poroshenko and his circle, particularly Oleg Gladkovsky, the former deputy head of the National Security and Defense Council, who was fired in February after press reports exposed his apparent involvement in a defence sector corruption scheme. Activists called on police to arrest him and others suspected of profiting from crooked deals that siphoned off money from Ukraine’s
armed forces, even as its members continue to fight and die in the east. The focus on corruption helped
the protesters portray themselves as legitimate and cast the government in an unflattering light.
Following the 9 March protest, Kyiv accused National Corps of playing into Russia’s hands – the same
charge it had once hurled at the right’s critics. Interior Minister Avakov announced that protesters had
injured 22 police and reprimanded them. A handful of National Corps members were listed on Myrotvorets,
a self-styled non-governmental database, created by two prominent officials, which purports to name “pro-
Russian terrorists, separatists, mercenaries, war criminals and murderers”. The president’s party issued a
statement saying the protest was the work of ‘pro-Russian revanchists and exiled oligarchs’ aiming to
‘bring down the democratic, pro-European government’.

An Uncertain Hold on the Moral High Ground
Despite National Corps leaders’ attempts to draw parallels, their March protests bore little
resemblance to the start of the uprising that overthrew Yanukovych. The idealists who formed the core of
that movement in its early days were absent from the crowds of young men wearing face masks and well-
practiced glares. National Corps is a white supremacist group that talks of “reconquering” European soil
and whose members have attacked Roma camps. Its members appear to have ties to American, European
and Russian neo-Nazi groups. One of their regional leaders on the morning of 15 March posted the
Christchurch mosque shooter’s footage on social media with the words “anti-terrorists win”. That footage
showed one of Azov’s favoured symbols, the black sun, on the shooter’s vest.

But in Ukraine, the government’s ability to hold the moral high ground over groups like National
Corps is uncertain: the far right’s accusations of corruption appear at least partly justified. The protesters’
rowdy calls to arrest Gladkovsky and his associates merely channel the anger many Ukrainians feel at
having chased out their kleptocratic leaders in 2014, only to see their replacements engage in what
appears to be war profiteering. After watching a video of marchers kicking at policemen’s shields on 9
March, a Kyiv intellectual called the footage a vivid embodiment of popular sentiment.

Meanwhile, some – though far from all – of the Poroshenko government’s members and vocal
supporters are themselves ultraconservatives with militaristic and exclusionist ideas. For example, active
members of National Guard units plug the president on social media while posting hate-filled rhetoric about
eastern civilians and rejoicing at attacks on Ukrainians who insist on speaking Russian. One of the country’s
top-ranking security officials reportedly refers regularly to eastern civilians as traitors who are now getting
their just desserts.

The Poroshenko government and their far-right opponents share a view of the war in the east as a
nation-building exercise. They not only recoil at the idea of reintegrating breakaway areas as semi-
autonomous entities through which Russia could maintain leverage over the country’s economic and
foreign policy – a wariness many Ukrainians share – but behind closed doors, speak of the war in positive
terms as a way to forge a national identity distinct from Russia’s. To both groups, the ongoing trickle of
civilian and military casualties – as well as losses among the Russia-backed armed groups, where the vast
majority of those dying on the front lines appear to be Ukrainian citizens – is a cost they are willing to
accept for what they believe history will view as the dawn of the country’s independence.

After Sunday

Sunday’s vote will probably proceed peacefully. But the campaign has highlighted risks that will
persist well beyond. Over the past five years, many talented public servants have pressed hard to reform
corrupt institutions, make the country safer and hasten its reintegration. At the same time, however, the
Poroshenko government has helped legitimise the far right’s ideology by embracing a militaristic brand of
nationalism, strengthened its capacity to use force by loosening the state’s monopoly on violence and fed
its sense of righteous anger by fuelling suspicion that the government is presiding over war profiteering.
Whoever wins on Sunday will need to find a way to remove some of the momentum behind this growing
movement lest it further destabilise the country. Convincing the public that the government’s primary aim
is to strengthen and reunify the country – rather than merely profit off the promise to do so – would be a
good place to start.

Zelensky won the runoff election, which came off fairly well. He campaigned against the large scale
corruption in the government and society.
"Thousands Protest in Serbia to Demand Free Press and Elections," The New York Times, March 17, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/17/world/europe/serbia-protests-belgrade-vucic.html, reported, "Thousands of Serbs protested outside President Aleksandar Vucic’s official residence in the capital, Belgrade, on Sunday to push for greater press freedom and free and fair elections, an intensification of rallies that have been held every weekend for more than three months."


Kimiko de Freytas-Tamura, "Amid Brexit Strains, Anglo-Irish Relations Are ‘Fraying’," The New York Times, February 23, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/23/world/europe/ireland-brexit-britain-uk.html, reported, "In the tortured history between the two island nations, Brexit is just the latest in a long line of perceived slights the Irish have suffered at the hands of the British. And now, with the possible exception of Britain, no country stands to lose more from Brexit, and particularly from a damaging ‘no-deal’ departure, than Ireland.

Not only would that be economically destructive, if it results in the return of a strong international border, it could undermine the hard-won 1998 peace deal with Northern Ireland, known as the Good Friday Agreement, said Diarmaid Ferriter, a historian and author of The Border."


"Mr. Hamilton said the police were attributing the violence and the killing to the New Irish Republican Army, a militant republican group formed several years ago from the merger of several splinter groups. It is not affiliated in any way with the Provisional Irish Republican Army, which renounced violence in 2005."

African Developments


The shift has unnerved African commanders in Burkina Faso and neighboring nations in the Sahel, a vast sub-Saharan scrubland increasingly racked by bombings, massacres, kidnappings and attacks on hotels frequented by Westerners. It is a region in which most Americans were unaware of United States military involvement until four Army soldiers were killed in a deadly 2017 ambush in Niger by Islamic State fighters.

What is emerging, critics said, is a glimpse of what happens when American troops, especially Special Operations forces, pull back before insurgents are effectively subdued, leaving local or allied forces to fend off the Islamic State, Al Qaeda or their offshoots."

In the Central African Republic, where a Russian has been installed as the president’s national security adviser, the government is selling mining rights for gold and diamonds at a fraction of their worth to hire trainers and buy arms from Moscow. Russia is seeking to ensconce itself on NATO’s southern flank by helping a former general in Libya fight for control over his government and vast oil market.”

During the Cold War competition, U.S. and Russian arms supplied to African countries were a major source of instability and violence.

ICG, “Eight Priorities for the African Union in 2019,” Commentary / Africa 6 February 2019, "https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/eight-priorities-african-union-2019?utm_source=Sign-Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=a4b53ca79a-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_12_24_10_06_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-a4b53ca79a-359871089, commented, “In 2019, the African Union faces many challenges, with conflicts old and new simmering across the continent. To help resolve these crises – our annual survey lists seven particularly pressing ones – the regional organisation should also push ahead with institutional reforms.

Introduction by Robert Malley, President & CEO of International Crisis Group.

With this commentary, coming in the wake of our annual Ten Conflicts to Watch and EU Watch List, Crisis Group turns to what 2019 will mean for the African continent and the African Union (AU) ahead of its February summit. The broad trends identified in those two preceding publications are mirrored here as well, to wit: a transition wrapped in a transition, wrapped in a transition.

The first transition is occurring at the local level, where entrenched governments face a perilous mix of social unrest and political contestation. 2019 is still young, but it already bears ugly scars of violent repression, in Sudan, Zimbabwe and Cameroon, as well as older wounds from persistent crises in places like the Central African Republic, Mali, Somalia or South Sudan. The remarkable transition witnessed in Ethiopia stands as a powerful counterpoint, but in too many places – as elsewhere across the globe – autocratic rule, immovable elites, predatory state behaviour and corruption are fuelling popular anger. A question we pose in the pages that follow is whether the African Union is up to the task of dealing with these challenges.

Which brings me to the second transition, taking place at the regional level: faced with persistent and seemingly intractable crises and determined not to allow non-African powers to project their agendas onto the continent, the African Union has been searching for ways to better address issues of peace and security. There were some notable diplomatic advances in the past year, led by Moussa Faki Mahamat, AU Commission chairperson: easing tensions ahead of a fraught election in Madagascar, defusing a crisis around a constitutional amendment process in Comoros, and bringing the parties to the table in the CAR crisis, even if the agreement’s implementation remains a challenge. But cracks have been showing in the AU’s overall approach.

In particular, charged with maintaining continental stability, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) has become more tentative since the AU Assembly overturned its December 2015 decision to send an intervention force to Burundi. Too, its agenda increasingly is packed with thematic deliberations on important topics such as child marriage and illicit financial flows, but at the expense of discussions regarding existing and emerging conflicts. At the AU’s July summit, leaders curtailed the PSC’s work on Western Sahara in order to mollify Morocco, which had re-entered the AU in 2017 following a 33-year absence, and assigned a troika of heads of state plus the AU Commission chairperson to report directly to the AU Assembly. That’s an unfortunate precedent, and one that could severely undercut the PSC’s ability to assert itself in future crises. What is needed now is the kind of institutional reforms championed (with varying and uneven success) by Rwanda’s President Paul Kagame. What is also needed is the kind of
political assertiveness to involve itself in domestic affairs with a legitimacy and sensitivity to local realities which the West typically lacks.

The locus of the third and broadest of these transitions is on the global stage, where shifting power relations revolve around great power politics. The impact on the continent might not be immediately clear, but it is palpable nonetheless: China’s increased economic involvement; Russia’s intermittent political/military forays (see, eg, Libya, the Central African Republic or Sudan); and, after a period of dimming attention to Africa regarding anything but its counter-terrorism priorities, the U.S.’s reawakening, less out of any particular preoccupation with the continent’s well-being than as an offshoot of its intensifying rivalry with Beijing. It would be good, in theory, to see such revived interest in Africa and its affairs; not so good to see it inspired by a scramble for influence rather than a search for stability, peace or development.

2019 is still young, as I noted, but already the AU’s track record has been mixed. In January, faced with an electoral crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), it first hinted at a bold stance before retreating into silence and confusion when its efforts were rebuffed by Kinshasa. Elsewhere – from Sudan to Cameroon – it has struggled to make its influence felt. From reforming institutions, to safely and credibly steering political transitions, to tackling festering conflicts and crises, the list of AU challenges is long. 2019 is still young, and there is ample time to get it right.

Robert Malley, President & CEO

1. Institutional Reforms

Unlike past AU Assembly chairs, who were largely figureheads, Rwanda’s President Paul Kagame energetically pursued his reform agenda and exerted considerable influence over the organisation’s direction in 2018. But there remains much work to be done. Kagame, as the designated champion of reform, should remain actively involved, working with the incoming AU chair Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Commission chairperson Faki, to continue pushing the project forward.

Kagame’s record may well have been mixed, but his efforts in 2018 generated important momentum and produced several concrete achievements. In March, he secured agreement to establish a Continental Free Trade Area, which aims to create a single African market with free movement and a currency union, after more than six years of discussion. Almost 50 countries have signed the treaty, which has so far been ratified by nineteen, just three shy of the 22 it needs to come into force. Although falling well short of his ambitious goals, Kagame’s efforts on organisational streamlining yielded some progress. At November’s extraordinary summit African leaders decided to consolidate the departments of political affairs and peace and security, as well as the departments of economic affairs and trade and industry, bringing the total number of portfolios down from eight to six. Finally, Kagame successfully pushed for changes that will make the selection process for the Commission chairperson, his or her deputy and the six commissioners, more rigorous, although these changes failed to give the chairperson the power to appoint the Commission’s senior leadership or make them directly accountable to the chair, as originally envisaged.

Much work still lies ahead. Attempts to make the AU more financially transparent and self-sufficient are moving, but slowly. At the July summit, leaders adopted measures to make the AU budget process more credible and transparent by, among other things, providing for finance ministers to participate in the drafting process and introducing spending ceilings. The AU also decided to impose more stringent consequences on member states that do not pay their dues in full and on time, which will be increasingly important as the AU decreases its reliance on donor support. At the same time, however, only half of member states are contemplating collecting the 0.2 per cent levy on “all eligible goods” imported to Africa, which is supposed to be used to finance the AU, and some are refusing to put it in place at all.

Meanwhile, little progress has been made on reforms to bolster the AU’s peace and security mechanisms. Of particular concern is continuing confusion about how responsibility is divided among member states, regional economic communities (RECs), and the AU. The AU’s Constitutive Act and guiding documents are unclear. However, the principle of “subsidiarity”, which gives RECs the lead on peace and security matters in their respective regions, was explicitly endorsed for the first time by leaders in November, making it almost impossible for the AU to step in when regions reach an impasse on specific crises unless invited to do so.

The reform process provides an opportunity to reset the working relationship between the AU and the RECs. A clear framework for sharing analysis and information should be established and existing
mechanisms, such as regular meetings between the PSC and its regional equivalents, should be operationalised. This will build trust between the RECs and the AU, ensuring that regional bodies are more fully engaged in AU efforts on peace and security, and might also help mitigate some of the political barriers to collective action and decision-making.

Moves to reform and bolster the PSC have languished. Kagame wanted to ensure that member states sitting on the Council be both committed to and capable of effectively carrying out their responsibilities. He also hoped to review and suggest improvements to the PSC’s working methods. Those efforts have yet to yield fruit, bumping up against member states’ desire to preserve their own power rather than yield it to Addis Ababa. Optimally, the process undertaken by Kagame would continue with the goal that member states select as Council members only countries that meet the criteria set forth in the PSC Protocol, including a commitment to upholding the AU’s principles, respecting constitutional governance, adequately staffing missions in Addis and New York, contributing financially to the Peace Fund, and participating in peace support operations.

With so much left to do on the institutional reform agenda, Kagame’s departure will be keenly felt, all the more so since the incoming AU chairperson, Egypt’s Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, has strongly opposed certain aspects of the agenda. This is in part because Cairo prefers the AU to remain neutral in the continent’s conflicts and crises; it is still smarting from its own suspension from the AU following the 2013 ouster of former President Mohamed Morsi and wishes to reduce the Commission’s influence. Fears that Sisi will seek to reverse progress already made seem exaggerated: Egypt has publicly stated its commitment to continuing the reform process.

2. Burundi

Burundi has been in a state of crisis since President Pierre Nkurunziza’s April 2015 decision to seek a disputed third term in office, which triggered mass protests, a failed coup attempt, armed opposition attacks, targeted assassinations and brutal government reprisals. The government has since engaged in low-intensity warfare against armed insurgents and brutally repressed peaceful dissidents. Violence, rising unemployment, the collapse of basic services and deepening social fractures have forced more than 430,000 Burundians to flee the country, according to UN figures. A referendum in May 2018, held in a climate of fear and intimidation, approved constitutional amendments that consolidate the government’s rule and open the way for the dismantling of ethnic quotas in parliament, government and public bodies (including the army). These quotas are intended to protect the Tutsi minority and were a key component of the 2000 Arusha agreement that brought an end to Burundi’s protracted civil war. In short, risks of a violent deterioration are high and the need for external involvement urgent.

Yet the AU faces considerable obstacles in this regard. Its role in Burundi waned significantly following the PSC’s failed attempt to deploy a protection and conflict prevention force in January 2016. More recently, relations between the AU Commission and Burundi deteriorated sharply. On 30 November, the government issued an arrest warrant for Pierre Buyoya, a former Burundian president and the AU’s high representative for Mali and the Sahel, accusing him of complicity in the 1993 assassination of Melchior Ndadaye, Burundi’s first president representing the Hutu majority. The same day, the government boycotted the East African Community (EAC) summit, which was due to discuss a report on mediation between Burundi’s political forces. Finally, after Faki called on all sides to refrain from measures “likely to complicate the search for a consensual solution”, government-backed protesters took to the streets of the capital in anger. President Nkurunziza, in other words, appears to be pulling Burundi further toward isolation, shoring up his domestic base and pre-empting any attempt by the AU or the EAC to encourage compromise ahead of the 2020 presidential election.

Such hurdles notwithstanding, the AU will need to try to actively reengage ahead of those elections: urging the government to open political space ahead of the 2020 polls and allow political parties to campaign freely; insisting its human rights observers and military experts be allowed to remain on the ground; and urging the government to sign a memorandum of understanding enabling these AU personnel to carry out their mandate in full. As the polls draw nearer, the AU should steadily increase the number of its monitors and advisers to prepare the ground for a long-term election observation mission.

Given December’s events, the role of the Commission and its chair will likely be constrained; intervention will have to take place at the level of heads of state. In particular, the AU should consider resurrecting the high-level delegation it appointed in February 2016 (composed of Ethiopia, Gabon,
Mauritania, Senegal and South Africa), or a similar structure, to help build regional consensus on the mediation process and interact directly with Nkurunziza. Alternatively, the AU could encourage the Arusha guarantors (besides the AU, the DRC, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and the U.S., as well as the EU and the UN) to form a contact group, to fulfil a similar mandate.

In addition, the PSC should meet regularly on Burundi, especially during the run-up to the elections when the risk of an escalation in violence will be heightened. This, however, will be difficult if Burundi is elected to the Council in February, as expected.

3. Cameroon
Cameroon, long considered an island of relative stability in a troubled region, is steadily sliding toward civil war as the crisis in the country’s two Anglophone regions deepens. Demonstrations in October 2016 against the increasing use of French in the regions’ educational and legal systems sparked wider protests against the marginalisation of Cameroon’s English-speaking minority, about one fifth of the population. The central government’s refusal to acknowledge the Anglophones’ grievances or engage their leaders, coupled with violent repression and arrest of activists, fuelled anger and drove many protesters, who had originally advocated autonomy and improved rights, into the arms of separatist groups. October’s disputed presidential election further raised political tensions and exacerbated ethnic cleavages: President Paul Biya, in office for 36 years, won a questionable poll in which few Anglophones were able to vote.

Around eight separatist militias are now battling Cameroonian security forces and pro-government “self-defence” groups. Since September 2017, fighting has killed at least 500 civilians, forcing 30,000 to flee to neighbouring Nigeria and leaving a further 437,000 internally displaced in Cameroon, according to UN figures. At least 200 soldiers, gendarmes and police officers have died in the violence – more than in the five-year fight against Boko Haram in the Far North – and another 300 have been injured. Separatist casualties number more than 600.

For the most part, the government has signalled its determination to crush the insurgency rather than address Anglophone concerns. In a welcome gesture, authorities released 289 Anglophone detainees in mid-December, but it remains unclear whether the government has had a genuine change of heart: hundreds, including separatist leaders, are still incarcerated. Nor is it clear whether this move alone will convince hard-line separatists to talk rather than fight.

Confidence-building measures are an essential first step. These should include the government’s release of all remaining Anglophone political detainees; a ceasefire pledge from both sides; and support for a planned Anglophone conference, which would allow Anglophones to select leaders to represent them in wider negotiations. These measures could open the way for talks between the government and Anglophone leaders, followed by an inclusive national dialogue that would consider options for decentralisation or federalism.

Yet so far the AU has been surprisingly reserved on the Anglophone crisis, despite the high number of casualties and the danger of wider civil conflict. Cameroon is not on the PSC’s agenda; the Council has accepted the government’s characterisation of the crisis as an internal matter even though it threatens regional stability. AU Commission chairperson Faki visited Yaoundé in July and issued statements condemning the escalating violence, but the severity of the crisis calls for greater and more consistent AU engagement. This will require a proactive approach; indeed, it is almost unthinkable that Biya, a long-time AU sceptic who rarely attends the organisation’s gatherings, will invite it to intervene.

Leaders at February’s AU summit could instruct the Council to schedule regular meetings on Cameroon and call on Faki to double down on efforts to bring the parties to the table. They should also call for implementing the confidence-building measures listed above and for beginning a national dialogue. To this end, heads of state should affirm that any obstruction could lead to sanctions against individuals hindering peace, whether government or separatist.

4. Central African Republic
Clashes throughout 2018 in the capital Bangui and a number of major towns illustrate the deadly threat posed by armed groups – a mix of pro-government militias, ex-rebels, bandits and local “self-defence” units – that control much of the country. MINUSCA, the UN peacekeeping force, has failed to neutralise these groups and, as a result, is mistrusted by the general public. Likewise, the national army, slowly being deployed in parts of the country, has been unable to constrain the armed groups’ predatory
activities. The humanitarian situation remains dire, with more than one million people internally displaced or fleeing to neighbouring countries and 2.5 million in need of assistance, according to the UN.

Russian involvement has complicated dynamics further. Since the end of 2017, Moscow has been providing the army with equipment and training and President Faustin-Archange Touadéra with personal protection, as well as organising parallel talks with CAR armed groups in Khartoum. The first two such meetings galvanised the AU into restarting its own mediation efforts, which have been stalled throughout 2016, and to persuade Touadéra of the merits of a single, African-led effort. Intense diplomacy, especially by AU Peace and Security Commissioner Smail Chergui, led the AU to convene new talks between the government and armed groups, also hosted in Khartoum. An accord was signed early February, but still needs ratification. According to media reports, the negotiations led to some agreement on joint patrols and the integration of armed groups into the security forces, as well as on the reshuffling of the cabinet and the inclusion of armed groups’ representatives in the government.

In the past, talks held in foreign capitals – involving some but not all armed groups – degenerated in a cycle of broken promises. In contrast, local peace processes held inside CAR, many initiated by religious organisations, have had modest success, easing intercommunal tensions and instituting temporary truces in certain areas. They have also taken some account of armed groups’ political demands while not losing sight of the concerns of local communities in which they operate.

A sustainable political solution in CAR would benefit from a new approach to mediation that involves greater international military pressure on armed groups, and attempts to negotiate with them at the local level where possible. This approach would also recognise that many have local agendas that cannot be addressed without the participation of the local population. To this end, and in the wake of the Khartoum agreement the AU should bring its mediation efforts back in-country and organise separate talks with those parties that have interests in a particular conflict zone, as well as community dialogues aimed at addressing truly local grievances. Ideally, these local initiatives would lead to a second phase of consultations with groups with national claims and ties to regional states, providing a more realistic framework for a program of national mediation. Chad and Sudan offer backing or safe haven to some insurgent factions, many of whose members originate in these neighbouring countries. Their agreement to cut support and accept the repatriation of fighters will be critical.

The September proposal to appoint a joint AU-UN envoy appears to have been shelved. If so, a structure nonetheless should be put in place to build consensus between Bangui and key regional governments, chief among them Chad and Sudan, with the aim of securing buy-in to the AU-led mediation and reducing support from neighbouring countries to insurgent groups in CAR.

5. Democratic Republic of Congo

A political crisis erupted in the DRC in the wake of last December’s presidential race. The election pitted Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary, outgoing President Joseph Kabila’s preferred candidate, against two opposition leaders, Félix Tshisekedi and Martin Fayulu – the latter supported by Jean-Pierre Bemba and Moïse Katumbi, political heavyweights barred from contesting the vote. Although official tallies gave Tshisekedi a narrow victory, a parallel count by the Congolese Catholic Church confirmed by leaks from the electoral commission indicated that Fayulu had won by a landslide. The clear implication was that Kabila and his allies had rigged the results in favour not of their initially favoured candidate – whose victory would have been met with incredulity and would have united the opposition – but of the opposition candidate they found more palatable. In response, Fayulu filed a challenge with the Constitutional Court, the DRC’s highest.

Initial reactions by most African and Western diplomats were muted. In stark contrast, an ad hoc meeting of African leaders assembled by AU Chairperson President Kagame, issued a surprisingly bold statement on 17 January. Besides raising “serious doubts” about the provisional results, it called for suspending the proclamation of final results and announced the urgent dispatch of a high-level delegation to Kinshasa to help defuse the post-electoral crisis. Kinshasa acted quickly to pre-empt any such action: in a snub to the AU and Kagame, the Constitutional Court refused to delay its decision and rejected Fayulu’s appeal, thereby upholding Tshisekedi’s purported win. SADC (the Southern African Development Community) together with several regional leaders, including some who had appeared to support the AU statement, quickly recognised Tshisekedi’s presidency. The AU cancelled the planned high-level visit, taking
note of the court’s ruling and signalling its willingness to work with the new government. The rest of the international community soon followed suit.

The episode was damaging to the AU. To begin with, its failure to halt the Congolese election’s manipulation raised further doubts about its ability to uphold electoral and governance standards. For the PSC, Kagame’s decision to bypass this organ in favour of a seemingly random gathering of leaders called the Council’s authority into question. But the greatest damage would be to the continent as a whole if the AU, chastened by this embarrassment, were deterred from acting in future situations of this type, giving autocratic regimes an implicit green light to continue to rig elections with impunity.

Even in the DRC itself, the AU’s role is not over. This highly controversial background aside, the new president and government have a responsibility to focus on stabilising the country and avoid spill-over from internal conflicts affecting the rest of the region. Of course, Tshisekedi will have to work with Kabila, who enjoys a large majority in the newly-elected parliament. But AU leaders should strongly encourage Tshisekedi to demonstrate his independence from the former regime and reach out to Fayulu as well as his supporters to build a broad-based coalition. The PSC in particular ought to keep the DRC on its agenda, as unrest in the East is likely to worsen, which could also exacerbate already serious tensions among Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi.

6. Somalia

The Federal Government of Somalia’s manipulation of December’s presidential election in South West state is illustrative of a raft of unresolved tensions in the country, particularly between the federal government and member state governments. It is also likely to sow further instability. After multiple delays, the government held the controversial poll, and Abdiisiss Mohammad “Laftagareen” a former member of parliament and minister, won. His victory was secured when Mogadishu ordered the arrest of his popular Salafi opponent, Mukhtar Robow “Abu Mansur”, a former Al-Shabaab leader, and deployed Ethiopian troops in key towns to suppress the resulting dissent. In doing so, the federal government took a significant risk: that of alienating Robow’s huge clan constituency, inflaming anti-Ethiopian sentiment and signalling to other Al-Shabaab defectors that relinquishing their struggle could land them in prison. Most important, Mogadishu has thrown away an opportunity to build a local power sharing model with a conservative Islamist who could potentially be a bridge to the Salafi community and undercut support for the Al-Shabaab insurgency.

The crisis in South West state exemplifies President Mohamed Abdullahi “Farmajo” Mohamed’s determination to check the power of regional politicians. It also is a manifestation of his government’s increasingly centralising tendencies, of which Crisis Group previously warned. The subsequent decisions to expel Nicholas Haysom, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia, for questioning the legal basis of Robow’s arrest, and to execute a number of Al-Shabaab prisoners, play well with Farmajo’s base but do little to advance the country’s stability. Gains made during the last eighteen months – including agreement on the Roadmap on Inclusive Politics, adoption of the National Security Architecture and commitment to the Somalia Transition Plan – risk being undermined or reversed.

The AU has taken a security-focused approach to Somalia since AMISOM, the AU’s peace enforcement mission in Somalia, was first deployed in January 2007. This in turn has limited the organisation’s ability to effectively contribute to a lasting political solution to the conflict. (The UN Assistance Mission in Somalia, UNSOM, has managed the politics to date.) The planned drawdown of AMISOM forces, which is supposed to be completed in 2020, makes it all the more imperative to strengthen the political dimension of the AU’s engagement to ensure territorial and political gains achieved by the use of force against Al-Shabaab are not lost. The PSC has acknowledged the importance of the undertaking, calling on the Commission in a February 2018 communiqué to “ensure a coherent and unified political approach on Somalia”. The AU is coming late to the party, however, so any political strategy it develops should complement not duplicate those in existence by taking into account the division of labour between the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the AU and the UN, as well as Somalia’s bilateral partners. It should also clearly identify and build upon the AU’s comparative advantages, which include AMISOM’s access to wide areas of the country off-limits to the UN and other partners, as well as its potential to be a more neutral arbiter within the region.

7. South Sudan
2019 offers hope, however fragile, for a reduction in fighting in South Sudan, following five years of brutal civil conflict in which some 400,000 people have died and nearly four million have been displaced internally and externally. In September 2018, President Salva Kiir and his main rival Riek Machar, the former vice president-turned rebel leader, signed a power-sharing agreement. Violence has subsided and, for now, that is reason enough to support this fragile accord. The deal, brokered by Presidents Omar al-Bashir of Sudan and Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, the regional leaders with the most at stake in South Sudan, is not a final settlement to the war. But it opens the door to a new round of fraught negotiations that could lead to a unity government and, eventually, elections.

There are abundant reasons for scepticism. This new pact builds on a previous deal, concluded in August 2015, which collapsed less than twelve months after it was signed, triggering a surge in fighting. By calling for elections in 2022, the agreement perpetuates the Kiir-Machar rivalry and risks yet another violent showdown. Worryingly, security arrangements for the capital, Juba, have yet to be finalised, as have plans for a unified national army. In addition, donors, tired of financing failed deals, are waiting for concrete action by Kiir and Machar before committing funds. The U.S., the long-time driver of Western diplomacy in South Sudan, has stepped back.

This caution and broader cynicism are understandable, given the parties’ track record and the fact that they squandered billions of dollars in past donor support. But momentum is being lost, and if this deal fails the country could plunge back into bloody warfare.

Although the AU took a back seat in South Sudan from the outset, essentially supporting mediation efforts of the regional bloc IGAD, it has an important role to play going forward. The High-Level Ad Hoc Committee on South Sudan – composed of Algeria, Chad, Nigeria, Rwanda and South Africa, and known as the CS – forms part of the body tasked with finalising the formation of regional states, the number and boundaries of which are disputed. Building consensus on this politically sensitive and highly technical issue will require consistent engagement from the CS heads of state, who would be well advised to draw on support from the AU Border Program and partners with relevant expertise.

The new accord is supposed to be guaranteed by a region that itself is in flux – alliances are shifting following the rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea – and that does not agree on what form a lasting political settlement should take or how to reach one. By stepping up their engagement on South Sudan, the CS and PSC could help keep regional leaders focused on ensuring that the deal does not disintegrate and encourage them to begin building consensus for a wider settlement that shares power more equitably across South Sudan’s groups and regions.

8. Sudan

Anti-government demonstrations have engulfed towns and cities across Sudan since mid-December 2018, when the government ended a bread subsidy. Security forces have killed dozens in a crackdown that could intensify further. President Omar al-Bashir, in power since 1989, has survived past challenges to his authority by resorting to brutal repression. But the scale and composition of the protests, coupled with discontent in the ruling party’s top echelons, suggest that Bashir has less room for manoeuvre this time around. Beyond the immediate humanitarian costs, significant bloodshed would undermine Sudan’s incipient rapprochement with the West, scuttling future aid or sanctions relief, thereby deepening the country’s economic woes.

The AU’s first priority should be to minimise violence against demonstrators. African leaders with influence in Khartoum should publicly warn against the use of deadly force and call on the government to keep the security forces in check. Behind the scenes, they should encourage Bashir to step aside and provide incentives, such as guaranteeing asylum in a friendly African country, for him to do so. If necessary to facilitate a managed exit, they should work with the UN Security Council to request a one-year deferment of the International Criminal Court’s investigation of him for atrocity crimes during the counterinsurgency campaign in Darfur.

Adam Nossiter, “Algeria Protests Grow Against President Bouteflika, Ailing and Out of Sight,” The New York Times, March 1, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/01/world/africa/algeria-protests-bouteflika.html, reported, “Thousands poured into Algeria’s streets on Friday for a second week of unusual demonstrations against the country’s aging and ailing president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, whose decision to run for a fifth term has aroused unexpected popular opposition.”
Analysts and local journalists said the size of the antigovernment crowds all over the country was the largest in over 30 years, and spoke of a possible shift in the balance of power in a place ruled for years by a gerontocracy left over from the country’s war of independence against France nearly 60 years ago. They said this Friday’s crowds were even bigger than those of last week.

Adam Nossiter, "Algeria Army Chief Opens Path to End of Bouteflika’s Rule," The New York Times, March 26, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/26/world/africa/algeria-army-president-bouteflika.html, reported, "After weeks of large street protests, Algeria’s army chief of staff called Tuesday for a declaration that the incapacitated 82-year-old president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, be deemed unfit to rule, appearing to pave the way for an end to his 20 years in power.

The army chief of staff, Gen. Ahmed Gaid Salah, one of the top power brokers in the regime, who had until recently been loyal to the president, threw his weight behind what he called the ‘legitimate demands’ of the demonstrators in a speech broadcast continuously on Algerian television.

The statement from the powerful army leader, in a speech in the central town of Ouargla, seemed to signal an end to the president’s rule, and the thousands who have taken to the streets of the capital Algiers and other cities nearly daily for weeks greeted the news with joy. Mr. Bouteflika, paralyzed and in a wheelchair, has not spoken to his country in years.

If the [constitutional] council heeds his appeal — he is also vice minister of defense — two-thirds of the national assembly would have to go along. The head of the National Council, or senate, would then take over for a maximum of 90 days, during which elections would be held. Then would come the question of whether the difficult shift away from rule by the present entrenched elite might occur.

Adam Nossiter, "Huge Crowds of Algerians Protest Army’s Latest Compromise Offer," The New York Times, March 29, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/29/world/africa/algeria-antigovernment-protests.html, reported, "Tens of thousands of protesters in Algeria turned out Friday to demonstrate against the government’s latest attempt to pull the country out of its political impasse, clearly signaling popular rejection of a compromise offer by the Army this week.

The demonstration, the sixth in a row, appeared to reinforce the deadlock: protesters have dismissed the proposal from the country’s most powerful figure, Gen. Ahmed Gaid Salah, the army chief of staff, to sideline the ailing president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, install as interim president the head of the Senate, and hold elections.

What happens next is unclear, but some opposition figures said it was now up to the government to make what one called a more serious offer. The crowds in the streets, increasingly pressing in their demands, want the wholesale removal of what they call “the System” — everyone associated with Mr. Bouteflika’s 20-year reign. So far the government has given no sign of conceding.”


What’s new? On 2 April, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Algeria’s aging and ailing president, resigned under pressure from the military. The move was the result of five weeks of street protests at the prospect of Bouteflika running for an unprecedented fifth term in elections originally scheduled for mid-April.

Why does it matter? The end of Bouteflika’s twenty-year rule augurs a period of uncertainty. The regime so far remains in place and has stepped up repression to persuade protesters to accept a regime-led transition and go home. But protesters distrust the interim leadership’s promises and are clamouring for more fundamental change.
What should be done? The regime and protesters should commit to non-violence and launch a dialogue that aims to establish a roadmap for a transition whose outcome ought to be broadly acceptable to protesters, regime leaders and society at large, lest police repression escalate and street protests devolve into chaos and violence.

Overview

It took five weeks of street protests to end the reign of Abdelaziz Bouteflika, thwarting his fifth term as president. But now, three weeks later, a stalemate looms as protesters and security forces disagree on the pace and content of a political transition. Key regime figures rejected by the street remain in power, prompting demonstrators to call for a clean break with the past: the departure of all Bouteflika-era figures and the drafting of a new constitution. In response, the authorities have banned all demonstrations, apart from those held on Fridays, and are showing a new assertiveness. Yet the protests are only growing. The Algerian leadership will therefore need to give clear signals that real change is underway: by sacking governors, dissolving parliament and postponing presidential elections. Above all, it should embark immediately on a dialogue with civil society leaders accepted by the protesters to reach agreement on the outlines of a political transition that would serve to restore confidence and prevent an uncontrolled cycle of violence. Change in Algeria should come from within, not from outside: any external interference now risks undermining the legitimacy of the transition taking place.


What is happening?

In a letter to the nation on 10 February, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, 82 years old, said he would run for a fifth term in the upcoming April election despite his declining health, which has prevented him from speaking publicly, let alone campaigning – he has suffered several strokes since 2013. Many Algerians interpreted the president’s words as granting himself another five-year term, given the country’s poor record of fair elections. This has generated protests of unprecedented magnitude across the country, but their outcome remains uncertain.

These protests, which are mainly rejecting Bouteflika’s attempt to hold onto power, have far exceeded the scale of the marches against his earlier (successful) bid in 2014 to win a fourth term. On 1 March, between 700,000 and 800,000 people assembled in Algiers, and another 2 million in the rest of the country, from Annaba in the east to Tiemcen in the west, and even in regions which until recently had seen very little mobilisation.

Despite the scale of these protests, Bouteflika’s campaign director Abdelghani Zaalane submitted the president’s candidacy to the Constitutional Council on 3 March, even as Bouteflika himself lay bedridden in a Geneva hospital (Zaalane is the son-in-law of Algeria’s army chief of staff, Gaid Salah). That same day, a public TV announcer read out a letter from Bouteflika in which he said that if he is re-elected, he would establish an “inclusive and independent national conference” to “debate, design and adopt” constitutional, administrative, political and economic reforms; set up an “independent mechanism” to organise early presidential elections; and stage a referendum for a new constitution to mark a new republic and a new “system”, ensuring a “generational transition”.

In his letter, the president also claimed to have “heard the heartfelt cry of the protesters”. But this backfired. The Algerian street interpreted these words as yet another insult and provocation. While the statement responded partly to the demonstrators’ and political opposition’s demands (an inclusive national conference, an independent commission to organise elections, and a new constitution), many Algerians believe that the president, in power since 1999, is no longer able to lead or set the required pace for reform. The protests are continuing: a new round is expected on Friday, 8 March, coincidentally also International Women’s Day, which usually marked by rallies.
In the meantime, on 4 March, several opposition parties, including the Islamists and Talae al-Horiat (the Vanguard of Freedoms) of Ali Benflis, a former prime minister (2000-2003) and a presidential candidate in 2004 and 2014, met in Algiers, where they called for the application of Article 102 of the constitution. This clause vacates the presidency if the head of state becomes incapacitated. They also called for postponing the elections.

What triggered the protest movement?

Bouteflika’s announcement that he would run for a fifth term prompted a sense of national humiliation. Many protesters believe that the president is squandering Algeria’s potential and that his exploitation by interest groups around him borders on the absurd, given his poor health. Some also say that Algeria has lost too much time and that, had Bouteflika stepped aside in 2014, reforms could have elevated the country to a major economic power by now.

While Bouteflika’s decision to run for a fifth term triggered the protest movement, the public outcry also expresses something deeper: a desire to reclaim the street, as public demonstrations have been banned in the capital since 2001. Slogans recall the Tunisian uprising of December 2010-January 2011: “Game Over”, “The people want the fall of the regime”, “Thieves, you took the country”, “Algeria, free and democratic”. But unlike the Tunisian movement, the protests are driven less by the indignities of economic marginalisation.

The movement also has a sociocultural dimension. The urban middle classes as well as the working classes ask for every Algerian “to finally be able to live a normal life and to overcome the trauma of the Black Decade” (1992-2002), and for no one to have “to die at sea while crossing the Mediterranean to Europe looking for the El Dorado and the pleasures of a consumer society”. Protesters believe that the means to fulfil these aspirations already exist, but that the “Bouteflika clan” – the president and his family, campaign director, prime minister and a cluster of crony businessmen – is obstructing them because of their inability to agree on a successor to the aging president.

So far, the protests have displayed some degree of national unity. No one is making demands specific to their regions, and a wide range of social groups march together peacefully against a common adversary. Most striking has been the presence of whole families – women, children and the elderly – in contrast with past protests.

Finally, the protesters are championing a break from the past while also asserting their support for the national army, which they say derives “from the people”. But their support appears to extend to other security forces. Some protest slogans say: ‘Brothers, brothers, the police are our brothers’.

Around the world, people see a spontaneous movement. Where do things stand on the ground?

In Algiers, few demonstrators claim that the current protest movement is spontaneous. Many say that they are well aware of the presence of behind-the-scenes actors from different sectors of Algerian society, who, while not responsible for starting the movement, are certainly keeping it fired up.

Many of these actors are indeed participating in the protests or supporting them discreetly. This is the case with army generals who were retired early in recent years; security commanders and officers frustrated by the dismantling of the Department of Intelligence and Security in 2015; and international businessmen who have been prevented from maximising their economic potential by the inner circles of power. It is true also of senior officials, workers unions, youth associations, human rights activists, students, journalists, lawyers and opposition parties that have become part of the “system”.

Most of them consider it necessary to ‘re-institutionalise’ the country by neutralising ‘extra-constitutional’ forces (the Bouteflika clan) that allegedly are undermining the state’s resilience in the face of social, economic and regional challenges. These challenges could become even more acute in the coming years, particularly if foreign exchange reserves fall significantly, inflation rises and security deteriorates in countries neighbouring Algeria.

Finally, these actors seem to agree on the need to reduce the informal, opaque and fragmented nature of power in order to ‘save the country’. Their objective, beyond showcasing a democratic discourse, is to restore the tacit regional equilibrium within the centres of power, inherited from the independence war (1954-1962), and to reduce the arbitrariness of the official decision-making process.

What could happen next?

The protest movement has emerged in a specific regional and international context. Algerians are torn between the memory of their failed 1988-1991 democratic spring, fear of a return to the violence of
the Black Decade, aspirations for freedom and a conviction that the protests do not represent a break from the “system” but serve to maintain it (notably, the role of the army). They want to avoid the Egyptian scenario (polarisation between Islamists and anti-Islamists, followed by a return to authoritarianism) or the Syrian one (civil war), and they realise that the virtues of liberal democracy are being questioned internationally, even in neighbouring Tunisia. It is therefore difficult to say what will happen, especially because everything depends on whether the momentum for protests strengthens or weakens across different parts of society.

But given the diversity of actors who want change, it is likely that protests will only grow as long as Bouteflika maintains his candidacy. Whether they will remain peaceful or turn violent will, to a large extent, depend on the response of the security forces. If they remain as professional as during recent demonstrations and refrain from charging the crowds except when these converge on public buildings, violence is likely to remain limited.

Article 102 of the constitution could be applied. In this case, the presidency would be declared vacant due to Bouteflika’s ill health. The president of the Council of the Nation (the upper house of the Algeria Parliament) would assume the office of head of state for a period of up to 90 days, during which a presidential election would be organised.

Opposition parties, which defer to the protest movement lest they be accused of hijacking it, may struggle to make their voice heard in an open political discussion about possible solutions. If mass mobilisations intensify, new political and civil society forces will emerge and make new demands, such as the election of a National Constituent Assembly.

Meanwhile, the army may decide to pilot a possible transition process. Retired General Ali Ghediri, also a presidential candidate, could represent a consensus figure embodying both continuity and a break from the past.

Algerians have painfully learned the lessons of history. Yet they seem, once again, doomed to experiment with unprecedented forms of political liberalisation, as they did in 1988, with unknown consequences. The polarisation between Islamists and anti-Islamists is no longer relevant. Islamist parties that participate in the elections and are represented in the parliament and the regional and communal people’s congresses could benefit from this protest movement and negotiate better political representation, but in the current context, their role, like that of Salafi quietists, appears very marginal. The risk of violence between the pro- and anti-fifth mandate, or even between supporters of a ‘re-institutionalisation’ and defenders of the status quo, however, is real. Any break with the past must therefore take place gradually and in compliance with the constitutional order. It will not be an easy task.”


By nightfall, they had come within 23 miles of the city and a powerful rival militia was racing to stop them, raising the possibility of renewed civil war.

The advance, by Gen. Khalifa Hifter, appeared to mark a new and possibly decisive stage in the power struggle that has torn Libya apart since the Arab Spring uprising of 2011.”

However, a change in alliances among Libyan militias quickly considerably slowed the advance of Hifter’s forces, setting up what could be a long battle (David D. Kirkpatrick, “Ambush Slows Libyan Militia’s Drive to Take Capital,” The New York Times, April 5, 2019).

Some fighters with extremist ties or who have been targeted by United Nations sanctions have said this week that they were joining the Libyan government’s fight against an attack by a militia leader.”

ICG, “Averting a Full-blown War in Libya,” Alert / Middle East & North Africa 10 April 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/averting-full-blown-war-libya?utm_source=Sign_Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=0bf3bfc43 EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_01_28_08_41_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-0bf3bfc43-359871089, commented, “Fighting between forces loyal to Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar and allies of the UN-backed government in Tripoli threatens a bloodbath and a regional proxy war. Libya’s international partners should urgently take steps to avoid a major battle and get both sides back to the negotiating table under a new format.

A dangerous military confrontation is underway in Libya between east-based forces loyal to Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar and armed groups allied to the UN-backed government in Tripoli. So far, international diplomatic responses have been too timid to prevent an all-out fight for the capital. If unleashed, a full-fledged offensive could become a proxy war between regional powers and cause innumerable casualties as well as immense devastation while prolonging Libya’s post-2011 troubled state. Statements from UN member states, including Haftar’s backers, urging parties to exercise restraint or calling on them to freeze their positions or even withdraw and resume UN-led political talks, are unlikely to be effective unless backed by a credible threat of sanctions and unless regional actors refrain from fuelling the war. The UN should also encourage the parties to return to the negotiating table by offering a new three-track negotiating format that addresses the warring sides’ core political, military and financial concerns. If outside actors are serious in their calls to stop a full-blown war, now is the time to act.

The escalation started on 3 April when Libyan National Army (LNA) forces under Haftar’s command launched a major military offensive, named “Flood of Dignity”, deploying thousands of men and heavy artillery from their rear base in eastern Libya into the west of the country with the stated aim of capturing the capital. The offensive came despite repeated warnings by Libya’s international partners to desist and in the midst of a visit by UN Secretary-General António Guterres to support a UN-sponsored national conference scheduled for mid-April.

LNA forces began to advance on Tripoli in the apparent belief that their international supporters, which include the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt, Saudi Arabia, France and Russia, would tolerate or support their offensive; in particular, Libyans noted that the LNA began its offensive shortly after Haftar returned from a visit to Riyadh. LNA forces also appeared confident that their advance would not face significant resistance from their Tripoli-based adversaries and enjoyed the support of local residents. They first took the town of Gharian, 100 km south of Tripoli, and then some smaller towns west of the capital. Currently, fighting is ongoing in and around the non-operational Tripoli International Airport, which they captured on 6 April, as well as in neighbourhoods on the capital’s southern outskirts. On 8 April, Tripoli’s only functioning airport at Mitiga was struck from the air, apparently by the LNA, forcing its evacuation.

Over the previous month, Haftar built up his forces in central Libya and reportedly sent weapons to western LNA outposts, but few appeared to believe he would make any moves to defy the U.S., in particular, Washington had cautioned him verbally not to move into western Libya, where the UN-backed government and Misratan forces, U.S. allies in the fight against ISIS in 2015-2016, are based. U.S. admonishments were part of a coordinated international effort from late February to persuade Haftar to accept a UN-backed political deal with Fayez Serraj, the head of the Tripoli-based government, to unify the country’s divided institutions, including the military, and place Haftar at the helm of the armed forces. Although some diplomats and officials in the Tripoli government believed a deal was imminent, Haftar never agreed to it, arguing that the presence of militias in Tripoli would prevent its implementation. He is certain that ordinary Libyans, frustrated by the militias’ power in the capital and the lack of security there, support him.

The UN-backed government in Tripoli has responded to the LNA offensive by mobilising its allied forces; the decision by leaders in the city of Misrata, which has the most sizable and well-equipped military forces in western Libya, to join the fight suggests that the Tripoli government and its supporters are not about to surrender. A wide range of armed groups based in western Libya are joining the Tripoli-led counteroffensive, which they see as a way to defend the civilian state against the threat of...
authoritarianism and to uphold the country’s revolutionary legacy against the return of the Gaddafi-era regime, some of whose leaders have openly supported Haftar. So far, casualties remain limited, but a further deployment of forces and heavy weaponry, an increased use of air power and direct or indirect external military intervention could precipitate a humanitarian disaster.

Despite the LNA’s military might and external support, its victory in Tripoli is not a foregone conclusion. The LNA could succeed in taking Tripoli without much of a fight if hostile forces turn sides or flee, as they have done in the centre and south. For now, however, this is an uncertain prospect as the two military coalitions appear equally matched. A more probable outcome is for the current escalation to turn into a protracted battle and possibly a prolonged siege of Tripoli, with a mounting civilian toll. And it could spread to other parts of the country, as Misratan forces have explicitly stated they intend to cut off LNA supply lines in central Libya, and have intimated that they may even go on a more far-reaching counter-attack.

What happens in the fight for Tripoli is now largely dependent on how outside actors respond. A number of external powers, including the U.S., UK, France, Italy, the UAE, Egypt and Russia, have condemned the escalation, calling on all parties to exercise restraint and either freeze military operations or withdraw to their prior locations. But none of these statements included the threat of sanctions and none made explicit mention of the need to support the UN-backed Government of National Accord in Tripoli. To many Libyans this suggests that foreign governments are tacitly backing Haftar in his ambition to seize the capital and power.

While some of the LNA’s backers, such as the UAE and Egypt, appear to have attempted to rein in Haftar over the past three months, they may leap to his aid if he suffers military setbacks now that his forces stand at the gates of the capital. (Even as Egyptian diplomats were counselling restraint, heavy artillery and surface-to-air rockets were reportedly finding their way across the Egyptian border into Libya.) Should that happen, other foreign powers may jump into the fray on behalf of the Tripoli government, including Qatar and Turkey. Meanwhile, Russia blocked a UK-initiated UN Security Council statement condemning Haftar’s military offensive, insisting it call on all sides to exercise restraint.

To prevent a bloodbath in Tripoli and a dangerous escalation involving regional powers, Libya’s international partners should take urgent steps to avoid the current escalation from turning into a major destructive battle for the capital:

Members of the UN Security Council should call for an immediate cessation of hostilities, and impose sanctions on political leaders and military commanders seeking to escalate further instead of standing down;

Regional powers should refrain from militarily backing the offensive, and reaffirm their support for UN-led negotiations;

The U.S. should call on Arab capitals to refrain from fuelling the war, and redouble efforts to persuade both sides to accept a previously proposed compromise agreement that would see military command in the hands of a national security council.

In order to encourage both sides to accept a ceasefire and resume negotiations, the UN should consider proposing a new negotiating format to replace the defunct Haftar-Serraj deal brokered but never finalised in late February. New negotiations would need three components reflecting the three-tiered nature of the Libyan crisis:

A political track, which should no longer be limited to a deal between Haftar and Serraj but include a wider range of political representatives from rival factions to ensure broader national buy-in;

A military track, convening senior commanders from both sides, along the lines of the Egypt-led military dialogue that took place until mid-2018 to agree on new security arrangements for the capital;

A financial track, bringing together representatives from Libya’s divided Central Bank in order to bridge the rift in the financial institutions that first emerged from the 2014 political government split and only has grown since. The ensuing banking crisis and financial crunch it provoked for the east-based government, which faces increasing difficulty in processing payments, may well have triggered the LNA’s move on Tripoli at this particular moment.

Libya’s transition has been marred by numerous setbacks, infighting and external interference over the past eight years. These have enabled violent non-state actors such as ISIS to gain a foothold. Those who support the LNA’s military offensive in Tripoli today in order to defeat parties they label terrorists are
betting on a military solution, which they believe will stabilise the country. But such an outcome is far from guaranteed, and all should be aware that protracted deadly fighting would have tumultuous repercussions for Libya, its neighbours and Europe, too. The threat of terrorism could become a self-fulfilling prophecy as new jihadist and other radical groups emerge from the chaos and join the fighting.”


What's new? Madkhalis, followers of an ultra-conservative Sunni Muslim doctrine originating in Saudi Arabia, have gained great influence across Libya, including in key armed groups and religious institutions. Although they helped fight ISIS and provide security, their rise is divisive and could complicate efforts to resolve the Libyan conflict.

Why does it matter? From civil society advocates to Sufis to religious minorities, many are alarmed by the Madkhalis' clout, intolerant actions and anti-democratic agenda. Their ideology also sets them against political Islamists like the Muslim Brotherhood, echoing wider regional divides. Their presence in powerful armed groups makes them central actors in Libya's conflict.

What should be done? Actors working toward a political solution to the Libyan conflict should ensure that, in rebuilding the security apparatus, they prevent security forces' politicisation through any kind of ideological influence. And Madkhalis should commit to respecting the freedom of religious minorities and civil society groups and the neutrality of religious institutions.

Executive Summary
Madkhalis ("Madkhalis" for short), followers of an ultra-conservative Sunni Muslim doctrine, are growing in influence across Libya since the fall of the Qadhafi regime in 2011. Present in major armed groups in both east and west, they wield considerable military clout and, as a result, political leverage over both post-2014 rival governments. Their rise within the security sector follows a common pattern among other Libyan warring factions, both Islamist and non-Islamist, which have sought to expand their influence by penetrating the security apparatus and converting its members to their worldview. Now, their anti-democratic agenda and rejection of Libya's religious and cultural diversity has triggered growing apprehension from many Libyans. Libyan political actors negotiating a solution to the conflict should seek to build a professional security apparatus shielded from ideological influence of any kind. For their part, Madkhalis should publicly commit to respecting religious freedom.

Madkhalis form an important contingent in the eastern military forces currently attacking the seat of government in Tripoli but their rise and the tensions this is causing in Libya is by no means the conflict’s principal fault line. Many others play a significant part: the two governments’ rival claims to legitimacy, failed attempts to unite the country’s divided military, rifts among international stakeholders, a deadlocked UN-backed political process and local actors’ strong economic incentives in prolonging the crisis. In other words, the Madkhalis are just one factor. But they have been overlooked, at least in part due to their opacity and the ambiguity of their political objectives. Yet their growing role adds another layer to an already multi-dimensional conflict.

As elsewhere in the Arab world, the Madkhalis current – named after Sheikh Rabee al-Madkhal, a Saudi theologian whose followers adhere to an ultra-conservative but politically quietist ideology – has grown rapidly in Libya in recent years. Tolerated by Muammar al-Qadhafi prior to the 2011 uprising because of its political subservience and only a minor actor immediately after the regime’s fall, it has gained a wide following since the current conflict began in 2014 and has entrenched itself in key institutions. In Tripoli, Madkhalis are well-represented in major armed groups that have worked with the internationally-recognised Government of National Accord to bring security to the capital. They control or wield significant influence over some of its key facilities and institutions, for which they provide protection. In the east, they are an important component of the Libyan National Army (LNA), playing a key role in the battle to retake Benghazi under the command of Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, and currently moving westward with the LNA to wrest control of Tripoli from the UN-led government of Faiez Serraj and allied armed groups.
Madkhalis have also taken control of important religious institutions, using them to spread their sometimes divisive beliefs. Although not directly engaged in electoral politics because of their rejection of democracy, they nevertheless constitute an important lobby for a greater role for religion in public life, including a maximalist application of Sharia, which they want reflected in any future constitution. So far, they have not rejected the state court system (which Islamist factions in Libya, including ISIS and al-Qaeda aligned groups, have in the past). Likewise, although some of their members have called for greater gender segregation, so far the movement has not attempted a blanket enforcement of such demands. Yet the group’s secretive behaviour and its readiness to embrace tactical cooperation especially with paramilitary forces in both eastern and western Libya raises questions about its long-term goals.

The Madkhalis currently enjoys – or enjoyed – a certain popularity among some Libyans, who approve of their perceived integrity and, in some places, for helping restore order. Their particular brand of ideology – fiercely opposed to both non-violent political Islamists and violent jihadist groups – has made them allies in the fight against the Islamic State, but also deepened one of the divides in the Libyan conflict between supporters and opponents of groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood. In fact, their ideological opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood aligns them on one side of a wider regional divide that has prolonged the conflict. Unlike some of the revolutionary groups that emerged in 2011, they have not sought to punish or marginalise former Qaddafi loyalists. Their ideology allows them to transcend tribal, ethnic and regional divides, and they are perhaps unique in having built a presence across the country, allying with local forces on different sides of the conflict.

For their critics, however, the Madkhalis are extremists who are implementing an agenda to transform society. They see the group’s verbal, at times physical, attacks on a range of targets – secularists, Islamists, members of religious minorities such as the Ibadis, followers of mystic traditions such as Sufism, women and youth activists – and use of state religious institutions to spread its ultra-conservative dogma as a strategy to impose new cultural and societal norms. Combined with Madkhalis’ growing military clout and influence over the main political hubs and security forces, and a lack of clarity as to their ultimate ambitions, their rapid rise since 2011 is becoming a widespread source of anxiety.

Adding to this, Madkhalis have openly backed Haftar, a deeply divisive figure who has called for elections but whose opponents accuse of wanting to establish a military dictatorship, raising the prospect that Madkhalis currently aligned with the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord, which Haftar opposes, might switch camps. Suspicion that Madkhalis’ religious edicts are prompted by Saudi Arabia’s own political and security prerogatives has raised the fear that the current is serving a foreign agenda. Riyadh’s apparent backing for the Haftar-led offensive on Tripoli in early April have reinforced such fears.

Those seeking to bring Libyan parties to the negotiating table to reach a political solution to the conflict should take into account not only the Madkhalis’ unique position but also the potential for conflict that their rise creates. They have an important presence in what are likely to be the building blocks of any future integrated security forces, and they hold strong views on the constitutional and electoral processes that Libyan actors and the UN currently are preparing. **At a minimum, Libyan and external actors should:**

Ensure that security arrangements currently being devised – whether those the UN-backed effort in Tripoli that the Government of National Accord (GNA) is seeking to implement, or unilateral security decisions carried out by the LNA and the east-based government that supports it, or future efforts to revive what are currently deadlocked initiatives to unite Libya’s fragmented security forces – tackle the problem posed by the ideological influence of any armed group in the security apparatus. This should include provisions that individuals be integrated into security bodies according to their qualifications rather than ideological or other ties, and that the rival governments discourage religious activism in the security apparatus, be it by Madkhalis or others.

Assert the principle that official religious institutions be tolerant of religious freedom and diversity in their legal and administrative actions. The rival governments, as well as any unity government that eventually emerges, should repudiate any edict that would endanger Libya’s religious minorities and affirm that all religious currents and sects deserve protection and tolerance – rights that should be constitutionally guaranteed.

Press the GNA and its rival in eastern Libya to allow civil society organisations and actors to operate safely without harassment or threats, and not tolerate any possible future attempt to encroach on the judicial apparatus or pursue more militant gender segregation.
Encourage Saudi Arabia to restrain its religious authorities and individuals based in its territory from inciting or participating in violence in Libya.

The absence of a functioning state and the ongoing turf war among competing political groups and military factions admittedly makes such efforts difficult. Eight years of conflict have splintered the social fabric and undermined the trust in the state apparatus, opening space for groups with religious-based ideologies to gain ground. Some have openly engaged in violence or inserted themselves in security forces. The failure to contain these groups is one more factor that could undermine progress toward Libya’s stabilisation, and indeed could help reverse it, or even thrust the country into a new deadly war.10


What's new? Ethiopia is moving ahead with construction of Africa’s largest dam, despite Egypt’s worry that it will reduce the downstream flow of the Nile, the source of around 90 per cent of its freshwater supply. It is crucial that the parties resolve their dispute before the dam begins operating. Why does it matter? The Nile basin countries could be drawn into conflict because the stakes are so high: Ethiopia sees the hydroelectric dam as a defining national development project; Sudan covets the cheap electricity and expanded agricultural production that it promises; and Egypt perceives the possible loss of water as an existential threat.

What should be done? The three countries should adopt a two-step approach: first, they should build confidence by agreeing upon terms for filling the dam’s reservoir that do not harm downstream countries. Next, they should negotiate a new, transboundary framework for resource sharing to avert future conflicts.

Executive Summary

The three-way dispute among Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan over the sharing of the Nile waters remains deadlocked. An April 2018 leadership transition in Ethiopia eased tensions between Cairo and Addis Ababa. But the parties have made little headway in resolving the crisis triggered by Ethiopia’s 2011 decision to build the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), expected to be the largest hydropower plant in Africa. Egypt fears that the dam will drastically reduce water flow downstream and thus imperil its national security. Ethiopia and Sudan assert their right to exploit the Nile waters to further develop their economies. The three countries need to act now to avert a graver crisis when the dam comes online. They should accede to immediate steps to mitigate damage, particularly during the filling of the dam’s reservoir, when water flow to downstream countries could decline. Next, they and other riparian states should seek a long-term transboundary agreement on resource sharing that balances the needs of countries up and down the Nile basin and offers a framework for averting conflict over future projects.

The stakes in the dispute are high. Egypt relies on the Nile for about 90 per cent of its freshwater needs. Its government argues that tampering with the river’s flow would put millions of farmers out of work and threaten the country’s food supply. In Ethiopia, engineers estimate that the GERD will produce about 6,450 megawatts of electricity, a hydropower jackpot that would boost the country’s aspirations to attain middle-income status by 2025. Authorities have sold the dam as a defining national endeavour: millions of Ethiopians bought bonds to finance its construction, helping implant the initiative in the national psyche. Fervent public support for the dam has recently cooled, however, following allegations of financial mismanagement.

Between 2011 and 2017, Egyptian and Ethiopian leaders framed the GERD dispute in stark, hyper-nationalist terms and exchanged belligerent threats. Politicians in Cairo called for sabotaging the dam. Media outlets in both countries compared the two sides’ military strength in anticipation of hostilities. A recent rapprochement has quieted the row. Ethiopia’s new prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, visited Cairo in June 2018 and promised to ensure that Ethiopia’s development projects do not harm Egypt. In
turn, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi said his country recognises that the dispute has no military solution. But despite the warming relations, there has been little substantive progress toward a resolution. Political upheaval in all three countries complicates this task to varying degrees. In Sudan, President Omar al-Bashir, in power since 1989, is clinging precariously to his job amid the most sustained wave of protest the country has seen in decades. In Ethiopia, Abiy, while enormously popular with the public, is struggling to consolidate his hold on power. Egypt’s Sisi is relatively secure in his position, but his drive to extend his stay in office until at least 2034 has divided the military establishment, his key domestic constituency. These internal dynamics mean that the leaders dedicate less time to the Nile dam issue than they should. They could blunder into a crisis if they do not strike a bargain before the GERD begins operation.

Egyptian, Ethiopian and Sudanese authorities should consider a phased approach to agreeing on a way forward. Most urgent is the question of how quickly to fill the dam’s reservoir. At first, Ethiopia proposed filling it in three years, while Egypt suggested a process lasting up to fifteen. To achieve a breakthrough on this question, Ethiopia should fully cooperate with its downstream partners and support studies seeking to outline an optimal fill rate timeline. If necessary, the three countries should seek third-party support from a mutually agreed-upon partner to break the impasse. Ethiopia should also agree to stagger the fill rate so that it picks up pace in years with plentiful rains, which would minimise disruption of water flows.

To reduce mutual suspicion, leaders should take a number of confidence-building measures. Prime Minister Abiy should invite his Egyptian and Sudanese counterparts to tour the GERD construction site, thus highlighting Ethiopia’s willingness to address downstream countries’ concerns. Such a demonstration of Ethiopian good-will could afford the Egyptian authorities the space to make necessary adjustments, notably improving inefficient water management systems. For its part, Cairo should declare that it will not support armed Ethiopian opposition groups, to allay Addis Ababa’s fears.

Outside partners could help build confidence. The European Investment Bank, which the Ethiopians perceive as less pro-Egyptian than the World Bank, might offer Addis funding for the last phase of dam construction. Such funding could be conditional on Ethiopia cooperating on sticking points such as the fill rate. The EU should continue its talks with downstream countries on potential guarantees (including loans) and other instruments to support those countries in years in which drought or other shocks endanger food security. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), as well as Qatar and Turkey, could offer bilateral or trilateral investment in agriculture in Ethiopia and/or Sudan that afford Egypt a discounted and reliable supply of staples, notably wheat and rice. The U.S. and China, which enjoy close ties to some Nile basin governments, could also encourage parties to resolve their disputes before the GERD is completed.

Outside partners should encourage Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan to approach the dispute not as an existential conflict but as a chance to establish a resource-sharing partnership. Delays in the GERD’s completion and the improved mood following Prime Minister Abiy’s ascent make this moment propitious for a breakthrough on this question, Ethiopia should fully cooperate with its downstream partners and support studies seeking to outline an optimal fill rate timeline. If necessary, the three countries should seek third-party support from a mutually agreed-upon partner to break the impasse. Ethiopia should also agree to stagger the fill rate so that it picks up pace in years with plentiful rains, which would minimise disruption of water flows.

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Outside partners could help build confidence. The European Investment Bank, which the Ethiopians perceive as less pro-Egyptian than the World Bank, might offer Addis funding for the last phase of dam construction. Such funding could be conditional on Ethiopia cooperating on sticking points such as the fill rate. The EU should continue its talks with downstream countries on potential guarantees (including loans) and other instruments to support those countries in years in which drought or other shocks endanger food security. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), as well as Qatar and Turkey, could offer bilateral or trilateral investment in agriculture in Ethiopia and/or Sudan that afford Egypt a discounted and reliable supply of staples, notably wheat and rice. The U.S. and China, which enjoy close ties to some Nile basin governments, could also encourage parties to resolve their disputes before the GERD is completed.

Outside partners should encourage Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan to approach the dispute not as an existential conflict but as a chance to establish a resource-sharing partnership. Delays in the GERD’s completion and the improved mood following Prime Minister Abiy’s ascent make this moment propitious for negotiating a way forward. Waiting until the dam is operational – when its impact on downstream countries is clearer – would raise the risk of violent conflict.

Dionne Searcey and Emmanuel Akinwotu, “11th-Hour Delay of Nigeria’s Presidential Election Disappoints Millions,” The New York Times, February 16, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/16/world/africa/nigeria-election-delayed.html, reported, “The weather, Sabotage of buildings storing election materials. A raft of court challenges. Those were some of the reasons Nigeria’s elections commissioner cited for his middle-of-the-night decision — announced at 2:30 a.m. on Saturday — to delay the nation’s presidential vote hours before polls were to open.”

ICG, Nnamdi Obasi, Senior Adviser, Nigeria, "Winning Back Trust in Nigeria’s Rescheduled Elections," Q&A / Africa, 19 February 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/winning-back-trust-nigerias-rescheduled-elections?utm_source=Sign-Up-to+Crisis+Group%27s+Updates&utm_campaign=73872b818a-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_01_18_03_54_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab6c11ea-73872b818a-359871089, commented, "Only hours before polls were to open, Nigeria’s electoral commission postponed elections scheduled for 16 February by one week. In this Q&A, Crisis Group’s Nigeria expert Nnamdi Obasi says the commission and other authorities must act now to win back trust and reduce risks of violence.

What happened?
Nigeria’s 84 million voters were set to vote in presidential and federal legislative elections on 16 February. But at 2:40 am that day, just over five hours before polling stations were to open, the nation’s election management agency, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), postponed the balloting. INEC’s chairman, Mahmood Yakubu, announced a one-week delay to 23 February. He also said gubernatorial and state legislative votes would be rescheduled from 2 to 9 March.

Was there any forewarning of the delay?
The postponement came as a surprise. INEC had repeatedly told both Nigerians and international observers that it was fully prepared to bring off the elections according to schedule. Voters had gone to bed assured. Some had already gathered around their candidates’ residences, all set to troop to polling stations at dawn. International observers had deployed teams across the country’s 36 states and rented all the meeting rooms at the federal capital Abuja’s five-star Transcorp Hilton Hotel, for use as situation rooms throughout the voting. INEC itself had set up its National Collation Centre at the International Conference Centre in Abuja, where it was to receive results from the states later in the day.

Why were the elections postponed?
Yakubu said the postponement followed a review of logistical and operational plans, which showed that proceeding with the polls as scheduled was no longer “feasible”, even though as recently as 11 February, he had insisted that it was. The chairman claimed the commission had been unable to deliver election materials to all distribution centres and polling units across the country ahead of the vote.

He said that bad weather caused the delays, referring to the harmattan season, a period of dry, dusty wind that blows from Sahara over West Africa from November to about mid-February, often accompanied by a haze that reduces visibility. The weather conditions, he said, had prevented aircrafts carrying election materials from landing and forced the commission to rely on slow-moving long-haul trucks for ground delivery. Yakubu added that early February fires in three of INEC’s offices, in Abia (2 February), Plateau (9 February) and Anambra states, also hindered its preparations.

The scale of the distribution problem remains unclear, as INEC offered no figures. On the eve of the elections, however, there were media and other reports that polling materials, including ballot papers and result sheets, had not been delivered in parts of all of several states, including Ekiti, Oyo, Taraba, Edo, Niger, Ogun and Rivers states.

Yakubu’s explanations for the non-delivery are not entirely satisfactory. There were no weather-related impediments in southern states – Ekiti, Oyo and others – where materials went undelivered; other states lacking materials, like Kogi, are close to Abuja, and therefore required no airborne deliveries. More significantly, on 17 February, the Nigerian Airspace Management Agency tacitly disputed INEC’s claims of flight constraints by saying it had made sure two days earlier that all the country’s airports would be operational around the clock, precisely to facilitate the nationwide delivery of INEC’s materials.

What has been the reaction?
The postponement has stirred a firestorm of condemnation among voters, aimed at INEC. Many voters had travelled long distances to their registration and voting areas (as required by Nigeria’s election
law) or had shut down their businesses for the weekend. Two main grievances feed the anger: the electoral commission had four years to prepare for the polls, yet failed to deliver, and it announced its decision only hours before voting was set to start.

Political parties have been similarly critical. The national chairman of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), Adams Oshiomhole, called the postponement a national embarrassment; the party’s presidential candidate, the incumbent Muhammadu Buhari, said he was “deeply disappointed”. The APC’s chief rival, the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), denounced the delay as “dangerous to our democracy” and demanded that the INEC chairman resign.

The two main parties have blamed each other for the postponement, claiming it to be politically motivated rather than dictated by circumstance. The APC alleged that the PDP, fearful of impending defeat, orchestrated the delay to buy more time to rally support. The PDP rejoined that the APC was behind INEC’s “shoddy arrangements”, and that it was seeking to regain ground it had lost in the last weeks of campaigning. Neither party has provided hard evidence to buttress its charges.

Civil society organisations are also aggrieved. The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, a network of over 70 organisations supporting credible, transparent elections in the country, expressed “disappointment”, especially “against the background of assurances given by INEC on its preparedness” for the polls. The Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre demanded that the federal parliament launch an urgent investigation.

Not all reactions have been critical, however. Some media commentators take INEC at its word that it had to reschedule because free, fair and credible elections were in jeopardy. INEC, they say, was simply acting in accordance with its statutory powers. Others argue that a delayed but successful election is preferable to a timely but botched one.

Does the postponement increase the risk of violence around the elections?
It does. On 17 February, the National Association of Nigerian Students said it was calling a nationwide action to protest what it called a “show of shame and disgrace to a country”. Thus far, neither this demonstration nor other street protests has occurred. But the postponement has heightened political tensions and sown conspiracy theories around the country, increasing the likelihood of disputes and violent incidents, both during and after the polls. Moreover, the delay has spread distrust of INEC’s motives, which could lead to greater hostility toward its personnel during the elections.

What are the other costs of the postponement?
The rescheduling comes at great economic and psychological cost to all concerned, including the electoral commission, security agencies, political parties, local and international observation groups and, of course, Nigeria’s 84 million voters. INEC and political parties have spent large sums, the former making election preparations and the latter recruiting and mobilising agents to keep watch at polling stations. Security agencies committed considerable resources deploying personnel across the country to guard against election violence. Normal life was disrupted by a police order prohibiting vehicle movement from 6am to 6pm on 16 February. That order shut down commercial transportation, as well as delivery of goods to small-scale enterprises such as markets and shops. Even after police lifted the order on election day, most businesses remained closed, as disillusioned voters stayed home lamenting the situation.

The cost to the nation’s economy is similarly huge. At noon on 15 February, Nigeria closed its international borders, and many firms dismissed workers early to let them prepare for the polls the next day. On 16 February, air and sea ports were closed. Ken Ukaoha, president of the National Association of Nigerian Traders, said the country’s trading sector lost more than 140 billion nairas (about $387 million). The Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry said the interruption of economic activity cost the nation no less than $1.5 billion, an estimate some analysts consider conservative. The postponement could slow down the economy until all the elections, from presidential to gubernatorial, are eventually concluded.

Beyond economic costs, the reputational damage to the country is substantial. The delay comes at a time when Nigeria is in the international spotlight. Following similar postponements in 2011, when voting was pushed back for a few hours due to logistical flaws, and in 2015, when polls were delayed for six weeks ostensibly to allow the military clear Boko Haram insurgents from parts of Borno state, INEC’s decision creates further doubts about Nigeria’s ability to manage its own electoral processes predictably. What are the implications for the rescheduled elections?
If, as INEC claims, it postponed the vote strictly for logistical and operational reasons, then rescheduling may afford the commission time to rectify flaws and deliver more credible elections. For now, however, the delay raises several concerns.

An immediate concern is the security of ballots distributed to many states and local government areas before the postponement. These sensitive materials are vulnerable to theft or compromise.

Secondly, the conspiracy theories generated by the postponement could undermine faith in the outcome when polls are held. In particular, the two major parties’ allegations, each accusing the other of colluding with INEC to put off voting, could erode trust in the electoral commission and increase the likelihood of post-election disputes.

Thirdly, the postponement could have double-edged effects on voter turnout on the rescheduled dates. On one hand, the public anguish at the delay could spur greater turnout among opposition voters determined to remove Buhari and the APC from power. On the other hand, and more plausibly, it could depress turnout, either because voters have simply lost interest or because they have lost the wherewithal. Nigeria’s electoral law allows citizens to vote only where they registered: many must travel long distances to cast their ballots, and they may lack the means or the will to repeat the journey on the country’s hazardous roads.

The postponement could also impair election monitoring on the rescheduled dates. Having depleted their resources deploying teams across the country for the 16 February voting, numerous organisations – particularly Nigerian ones – may be reluctant or unable to do it all over again. Deficits in deployment could constrain field operations and diminish prospects for free, fair and credible elections.

The delay may also affect the electoral fortunes of political parties, creating an even greater disparity between the two major parties and numerous smaller ones. The APC and PDP, which control federal and state governments, have the money to mobilise a second time, but smaller parties do not and will be hard pressed to raise fresh funds. The postponement has thus tilted the playing field to the major parties’ advantage.

What should be done now?

Several key steps can ensure the success of the rescheduled polls on 23 February. INEC should provide a more detailed explanation for its decision to delay the elections, in order to dispel the widespread suspicion that political interests manipulated it into doing so. It should take all feasible steps to ensure that all electoral materials distributed before the election was postponed are urgently retrieved and secured. In some states, resident electoral commissioners report that they are already gathering the materials for safekeeping in local branches of the Central Bank of Nigeria. The commission should immediately engage reputable audit firms to verify that all materials stored at Central Bank offices are intact. It should also engage with the security agencies to guard the retrieved materials until the rescheduled dates.

The INEC has less than a week to regain the Nigerian public’s trust and the international community’s confidence in its ability to conduct free, fair and credible elections. It should update the public daily on the progress of its preparations. Most importantly, the commission needs to adhere to the new election dates. Barring unforeseen developments, if it postpones the polls again or cannot conduct them smoothly on the new dates, it risks further damaging its own reputation, with potentially serious consequences for Nigeria’s democracy and stability.

Other actors must also act responsibly. President Buhari should avoid any action that could further damage public confidence in INEC. Sacking the INEC chair – as some opposition parties allege that Buhari wants to do – would be unhelpful, since it could lead to further delays or upheavals. Security agencies, particularly at state and local levels, should ensure that retrieved election materials are secure and reassure the public, for instance through the use of audit firms. Political parties – particularly the APC and PDP – should allow INEC to execute its mandate impartially and refrain from generating or echoing conspiracy theories for which they have no proof and which only undermine confidence in the electoral process. Political parties and civil society organisations, including the mass media, should step up messages to counter voter apathy and encourage turnout on the rescheduled dates.

Nigeria’s international partners should also stay engaged. They should maintain close watch on the evolving situation and flag any indications of manipulation or intimidation of the electoral agency. Most importantly, international observers who were already in the country for the 16 February date, should be
especially vigilant about the activities of the electoral agency and security forces, not only in those states where delivery of materials was delayed but also in others where already delivered materials could be tampered with."

Declan Walsh and Joseph Goldstein, "Sudan’s President Omar Hassan al-Bashir Is Ousted, but Not His Regime," The New York Times, April 11, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/11/world/africa/sudan-omar-hassan-al-bashir.html, reported, "As Sudan’s military announced at lunchtime on Thursday that it had finally unseated President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, a brief burst of joy exploded outside the military headquarters in Khartoum where huge throngs of protesters had massed."

"But the euphoria quickly soured when the protesters realized who had replaced Mr. al-Bashir.
The somber man reading the speech on television was Lt. Gen. Awad Mohamed Ahmed Ibn Auf, the defense minister and a confidant of Mr. al-Bashir. General Ibn Auf, like Mr. al-Bashir, had been accused of perpetrating war crimes in Sudan’s western region of Darfur.
The protesters fell silent as he laid out his terms: the release of political prisoners, but also a two-year transition steered by a military council, the suspension of Sudan’s Constitution, the dissolution of government and curfews starting at 10 p.m. that night. Loud groans and lamentations rippled through the crowd, followed by a current of anger."

The hundreds of thousands of protesters calling for a quick establishment of civilian government in Sudan won major victories two days in a row as first the defense minister, a close ally of the ousted President, and then the day the intelligence chief each resigned in turn as "temporary" head of government installed by the military. As of April 13, the next steps were not yet clear (Joseph Goldstein and Declan Walsh, "Sudan’s Feared Intelligence Chief Resigns in Another Victory for Protesters," The New York Times, April 13, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/13/world/africa/sudan-intelligence-chief-resigns.html).

ICG, "Charting a Way Forward in Sudan’s Unfinished Transition," Statement / Africa 12 April 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/sudan/charting-way-forward-sudans-unfinished-transition?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=2dc5310101-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_04_12_08_55&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-2dc5310101-359871089, commented, "Omar al-Bashir is out as president of Sudan, but protesters suspect that the military-led transition is a game of musical chairs. A new curfew raises the spectre of bloodshed. International actors should press vigorously for civilian leadership of a process that must promise further-reaching change."

Late at night on 10 April, after defying the most sustained protest movement in Sudan's modern history for months, Omar al-Bashir finally lost his hold on power. In an early afternoon announcement on state television the next day, Lieutenant General Ahmed Ibn Auf, Sudan's defence minister and vice president, confirmed the rumours that had been swirling in Khartoum; the security forces had ousted the president and, he said, placed him in detention. Bashir, who took power in 1989 and was one of Africa's longest-ruling strongmen, would rule no longer.

Reaction to this news has been mixed. Initially rapturous at the fall of an authoritarian figure whose tenure was stained by major human rights abuses, economic decline and entrenched corruption, protesters soon expressed disappointment at the terms of the handover the defence minister laid out. Ibn Auf announced that a military council would take charge of the country for two years. He also dissolved the government, suspended the constitution and ordered a three-month state of emergency. Many protesters had demanded a civilian-led transitional authority; in their eyes, the regime seemed to be trying to preserve itself under the guise of a coup.

It is thus apparent that the transition remains incomplete. The protesters' ranks in Khartoum have continued to swell, with campaigners demanding more substantive change. Protester anger was captured in a new slogan declaring that "the revolution has just started". Where before they chanted the "regime must fall", thousands of protesters who marched on the streets in sweltering heat after the army announcement declared in a new chant that "the regime has not yet fallen".
The protest movement that began on 19 December has already notched an impressive achievement in compelling Bashir’s ouster. The peaceful campaign has drawn participants from nearly every stratum of society. Women have been prominent throughout. The urban middle classes have joined with farmers and herders to stage near-daily protests not just in the capital but also in smaller cities and rural villages. Traders, students and a cross-section of professionals, notably doctors, have all backed the campaign. Ruling-party supporters, including in the regime’s traditional strongholds, joined opposition activists in the marches. At the four-day, 24-hour sit-in outside the military headquarters that tipped the scales against Bashir, Sudan’s tapestry of religious and ethnic diversity was on vivid display, with members of Sufi orders mingling with Christians and singing together late into the night. Thousands of protesters have paid a high price, including imprisonment, torture and death, for their participation.

A number of factors explain the protesters’ impressive staying power and the authorities’ eventual decision to respond – up to a point – to the calls for change. First, discontent is widespread over the country’s economic crisis, which entails runaway inflation, crippling shortages of essentials including fuel and a currency crunch. All but the wealthiest Sudanese have felt the pinch. The government’s ill-judged attempt to increase the price of staples such as bread sparked the initial street actions that soon became a popular uprising. Secondly, many young Sudanese view their elderly leaders as representing a self-dealing, kleptocratic order focused on its own survival and unresponsive to their needs and aspirations. Thirdly, the security forces have themselves fractured, with mid- and lower-ranking soldiers joining with the protesters, making clear that the regime’s base has spindly legs. Ibn Auf reportedly delayed the announcement of a transitional military council for hours because many younger military officers were demanding a full handover to civilian hands. Bashir’s senior security sector allies had to intervene. Reportedly, the intervention was eventually announced after Ibn Auf, intelligence chief Salah Abdallah Gosh and head of the Rapid Support Forces militia Mohamed “Hemeti” Hamdan Daglo stitched together a backroom agreement to push Bashir aside.

Protesters are right to be sceptical of the ruling elite’s intentions. Ibn Auf, who will head the transitional military council, hardly represents a break with the past. He is one of Bashir’s most trusted confidantes, having been in his circle since 1989. He is allegedly complicit in some of the worst abuses in Darfur, where the regime’s scorched-earth campaign against rebels beginning in 2003 left between 200,000 and 300,000 people dead and 2.7 million displaced. The U.S. State Department placed Ibn Auf, who was head of military intelligence at the time, on a sanctions list in 2007. Some in the protest movement accordingly perceive the announced change as a game of musical chairs. As one protester told reporters in Khartoum, in a refrain that has repeatedly been voiced among the crowds: “They just replaced one thief with another”. Nor is it lost on many Sudanese that Bashir’s camp has played actions list in 2007. Some in the protest movement accordingly perceive the announced change as a game of musical chairs. As one protester told reporters in Khartoum, in a refrain that has repeatedly been voiced among the crowds: “They just replaced one thief with another”. Nor is it lost on many Sudanese that Bashir’s camp has played

As Crisis Group has stressed since the protests broke out, many risks attend a political transition in a critical country in one of Africa’s more conflict-scarred neighbourhoods. To preserve his grip on power, Bashir kept the security forces fragmented. The danger of fighting among disparate armed groups in the event of a chaotic breakdown is high. Already, there are credible reports of clashes between elements of the army, who are more sympathetic to the protesters, and the loyalist National Intelligence Security Services. To smooth the transition, several steps will be required:

A first priority is to prevent further violence. Since December, security forces have repeatedly fired on protesters, killing dozens. In announcing Bashir’s ouster, Ibn Auf declared a 10pm to 4am curfew. In effect, he was ordering the thousands of protesters outside the military headquarters to go home. Sudanese authorities must not attempt to disperse the demonstrators by force. Such a move would be not only bloody but counterproductive. A lesson from the last four months is that repression – including Bashir’s 22 February order banning public gatherings and opening the door for mass roundups of protesters – has done little to change the course of the protest movement. Authorities should avoid violence and instead seek to reach an accommodation with protest leaders on the way forward.

More broadly, Sudan’s generals should rethink their outlined plan to rule by extra-constitutional fiat for two years. An African Union declaration adopted in 2000 expressly forbids military coups as unconstitutional changes of government. Unless the security forces quickly hand over power to a civilian-
led transitional authority, the AU should suspend Sudan’s membership and follow up with sanctions. The leadership of the country’s security organs should see a clear self-interest in avoiding such ostracism by giving the reins to civilians. If they do not, protests will continue, raising the spectre of an ugly confrontation that could plunge the country into the deeper turmoil they say they are intent on averting.

Demonstrators should form an umbrella group and put its leaders forward to negotiate with the military council. Up to this point, protesters have been understandably unwilling to reveal their leaders’ identities given the security forces’ brutal record; they arrested and reportedly tortured the Sudanese Professionals Association leaders who issued public statements in January. With the transition having picked up pace, they should now change tack.

Ensuing talks should lead to a transitional authority along the lines Crisis Group has advocated since 2012: civilian leadership that includes members of the opposition, the ruling party and civil society; a defined period of constitutional reforms; and, at the end, free and fair elections. Without such a transition, Sudan should not receive the assistance from international financial institutions that it desperately needs to emerge from its economic doldrums.

International actors, viewed by protest leaders as having been lamentably quiet as campaigners braved police bullets, torture and arrests, need to weigh in more vocally and forcefully to achieve these goals and do everything possible to ensure protest leaders that do identify themselves come to no harm. The U.S. and EU, which both maintain ties with elements of the administration in Khartoum, should clearly warn against a violent crackdown and signal that individual commanders will face sanctions should they allow it. They should make clear that economic and other forms of cooperation with Sudan depend on genuine transfer of power to a civilian leadership. In a statement hours before the coup was announced, the U.S., UK and Norwegian governments called for an “inclusive dialogue” and asked Sudanese authorities to respond to protesters’ demands in a serious and credible way. They and others, including the EU, should follow that public message with behind-the-scenes diplomacy with the generals now in charge in Khartoum.

Their message should be that greater repression will carry the price of continued isolation and will prevent Sudan from addressing the long-term economic and political crises underpinning the unrest. Sudan’s other partners, notably Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, likewise should encourage the military leadership to avoid a crackdown that would provoke further unrest and instability.

Sudan sits at a strategic corner of Africa, surrounded by neighbours facing internal difficulties of their own. Not least of these is South Sudan, for whose peace agreement Sudan remains an important guarantor. Other adjacent states – Egypt, Libya, Chad, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia and Eritrea – will also watch developments anxiously. Should Sudan descend into chaos, the turmoil could spill across borders. Sudan’s partners ought to move quickly to persuade military authorities in Khartoum to heed the Sudanese people’s call and allow for a credible, inclusive, broad-based transition to steer Sudan to greater stability after Bashir’s long, chequered and bloody tenure.”

Previously, ICG, “Bashir Moves Sudan to Dangerous New Ground,” Statement / Africa 26 February 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/sudan/bashir-moves-sudan-dangerous-new-ground?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=dd4257c29a-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_06_30_11_35_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-dd4257c29a-359871089, commented, “Faced with the most serious protests against his 30-year rule, President Omar al-Bashir’s declaration of a state of emergency will not save his bankrupt, unpopular regime. Instead, security forces must halt worsening violence, Bashir should step down and all sides should work on a broadly inclusive transitional government.

President Omar al-Bashir’s address to the nation on the evening of 22 February attempted to defuse the crisis that has engulfed his administration in the longest wave of protests in decades. Instead, the president’s words infuriated protesters and steered the confrontation, pitting the regime against a diffuse, still-peaceful protest movement into a new, more dangerous phase. Bashir spoke of the need for dialogue but in declaring a state of emergency, he placed more obstacles in the way of talks. He dissolved the government at the federal and provincial levels and, shortly after his speech, appointed security chiefs to head all 18 of the country’s regional states. He has in effect allowed the armed forces to run the country for a year.
Protesters greeted Bashir’s words with derision and anger. The president offered what seemed like a concession in declaring that parliament, which is dominated by the ruling party, would defer proposed amendments to the constitution designed to allow him to run in 2020. But this did not satisfy protesters calling for him and his circle to step down and for the formation of a transitional government.

The embattled president has played this card before. In 2013, following large protests by university students unhappy with the state of the economy, Bashir promised not to stand for election in 2015 only to Renege. Although intelligence chief Salah Gosh told the media before the president’s speech that Bashir would resign as head of the National Congress Party (NCP), which would have ruled him out as a candidate in 2020, Bashir made no such announcement. More importantly, by suspending the constitution and giving the security services the lead role in maintaining order, Bashir deliberately set the stage for a lopsided dialogue which the opposition has already rejected. This too is a card Bashir previously played in 2013 when he used massive repression against protesters and then called for talks with a weakened opposition a year later.

This is not Sudan’s first state of emergency. Previous rulers faced with mass protests have often turned to this blunt tool. Bashir himself has repeatedly declared an emergency in several provinces since 2011 in a bid to quell uprisings. In practice, this means deploying more troops – with fewer restraints on their behavior – and erecting multiple roadblocks in an effort to control the civilian population’s movements. Under the terms of the decree, security forces can raid premises without warrants and seize property. The order also grants authorities power to ban organisations without explanation.

Shortly after Friday’s announcement, armed security forces surrounded the offices of physicians who have been at the vanguard of protests, firing tear gas to force them out before detaining several of them, according to activists. Unarmed doctors have been among the most active professionals taking part in weekly protests calling for change. The regime also detained dozens of protest and opposition leaders Friday night and Saturday morning. Credible reports are emerging of isolated clashes between units of the National Intelligence and Security Services (seen as most loyal to Bashir) and army units siding with protesters in Port Sudan and other cities. Despite the increased danger, demonstrators poured into the streets in large numbers in several cities and towns around the country a day after Bashir’s speech, braving a police response that included use of live ammunition and tear gas. The risk of an escalation of violence is higher now than it has been at any time since protests broke out in the third week of December.

Sudanese police and its various armed forces already operate under notably permissive laws, enjoying immunity from prosecution. Human Rights Watch reports that security forces have killed at least 51 civilians since the latest round of protests began. With the regime’s back to the wall, these forces are likely to behave with even greater brutality.

Although a new wave of repression against civilians represents the most pronounced danger in the coming weeks and months, it is not the only one. Prolonged unrest has widened pre-existing fissures within Bashir’s regime. According to officials with close links to senior members of the ruling party, by dissolving the government Bashir sought to pre-empt a potential coup from within the NCP. Indeed, the regime appears more divided than in the past. The most prominent divide reportedly pits the senior military establishment (whose loyalty Bashir attempted to further cultivate by appointing 16 out of 18 state governors from their ranks) on one side and an Islamist wing whose leaders are said to advocate a more positive response to demonstrators’ demands on the other. If the split deepens, it could raise the specter of a dangerous confrontation between these well-organised and well-armed camps.

**Bread and More**

Protests began in mid-December in Atbara, a mid-size town 350km from the capital Khartoum and the historic home of Sudan’s once-powerful trade union movement. The immediate trigger for the public outpouring of dissent was a cut to a government subsidy that tripled the price of bread.

Protests are about much more than the price of staples, however. Anger has focused on the failures of what they see as an insular, security-focused regime whose ruinous policies and wanton corruption have created a sclerotic economy with few avenues for socioeconomic advancement. The scale of the current economic crisis, amid rampant inflation and biting foreign currency shortages, is illustrated in long queues of depositors trying to withdraw their funds from banks and reports of account holders
having to bribe cashiers to cash their cheques. Scrambles around vans delivering money to banks add to the sense of an economy in freefall. Many families survive on remittances from relatives working abroad. More than in previous rounds of protests, Bashir’s opponents have proved unexpectedly resilient. Protesters come from mixed political and economic backgrounds. Professionals, particularly doctors and engineers, have teamed up with opposition parties, many younger ruling party members and the Girifna, a coalition of youthful anti-regime university students formed in 2009. That some of the most intense protests have occurred in Bashir’s strongholds, in the wealthier centre of the country, is a potent new development. The regime has veered between repression and promises of reform including supposedly fair elections in 2020, but all this has not been enough to stop the protests.

What Should Be Done

Bashir has a reputation as a survivor but this latest challenge to his rule is especially acute because he has no tool to fix the economic crisis – and no external partner willing to invest the billions that could stabilise the economy. Indeed, the president has reached out to Doha, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, as well as Cairo and Moscow, but extracted little more than verbal promises of support. Despite having given Bashir substantial funds in the past and wishing that Sudan not collapse into chaos, Gulf partners prefer not to pump substantial money into Khartoum, believing the economic crisis is structural and requires a substantial change in state policies before a recovery can begin. Qatari defence minister Khalid bin Mohammad Al Attiyah arrived in Khartoum shortly before Bashir’s speech but authorities did not issue a statement on the content of his discussions with officials.

U.S. senior envoy, Cyril Sartor, Special Assistant to the U.S. President and Senior Director for Africa at the National Security Council, travelled to Khartoum in the third week of February to confer with top Bashir administration officials. According to the U.S. embassy there, among subjects discussed were ‘U.S.-Sudan relations, including concerns about the frequent use of force by the Sudanese government’s security forces to quell recent demonstrations’.

As Crisis Group stated in January, for external actors, the first priority should be to minimise bloodshed on the street. Western partners should warn Bashir and his circle that they will not extend badly needed financial assistance, debt forgiveness, further sanctions relief or normalise relations if the regime keeps its bloody crackdown against protesters, who have been remarkably peaceful since the uprising began. They should signal to officials close to Bashir that they will be held individually accountable for abuses against civilians. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Turkey, all of whom have ties with Khartoum, should likewise counsel Bashir that the course he has taken will do little to resolve Sudan’s deep crisis.

These partners should encourage all sides, especially the government, to abandon a zero-sum approach that could lead to a prolonged stalemate. They should instead consider a broad-based transitional government for a limited period to implement reforms that would set the stage for credible elections. Such a government must exclude Bashir. Because of the dominance of the ruling NCP and the dysfunction of mainstream opposition parties, most protest leaders have good reason to think holding credible elections in 2020 is not possible and are asking for a multi-year transitional government that can hold freer elections in two or three years.

Faced with dwindling options, Bashir has chosen the path of confrontation. By declaring a state of emergency, he has concentrated power even more in his hands and set the stage for a bloody crackdown on protests. Bashir appears to be falling back to the script used in 2013 when paramilitary troops killed hundreds to quell large anti-regime protests. Outside powers can take some steps to help prevent this disastrous scenario:

The U.S. and the EU should make clear that they will not normalise relations with Khartoum if the government gives its forces carte blanche to kill and detain protesters. These partners should maintain incentives for Bashir to step down, including the potential deferral of his case at the International Criminal Court under Article 16, but specify that such an offer is conditional on listening to protesters’ demands and enabling a peaceful transition. African leaders who enjoy influence in Khartoum could also encourage Bashir to step aside by offering asylum in a friendly African country. At the same time, international actors should be aware that Bashir’s exit alone will not satisfy the demands of protesters who want the fall of the “regime and its head”, as they chant on the streets, and that forming a broad-based transitional government would be the only acceptable option if Bashir steps down.
Qatar, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, all of whom have good access to key
decision makers in Khartoum, should counsel the regime to avoid further bloodshed and to set the stage
for credible dialogue with the opposition and the various leaders of the protest movement so all sides can
agree on a way to end the stalemate. They should urge Bashir to suspend the state of emergency to pave
way for such talks. They should also emphasise to Bashir and his inner circle that speed is of the essence.
The longer the crisis persists, the more likely a dangerous descent into chaos.

Western powers and Khartoum’s allies, including African leaders who maintain contacts with
various elements of the government, should reach out through backchannels and lean on them to
persuade Bashir to lift the state of emergency and refrain from further violence against protesters. Sudan
desperately needs substantial financial assistance to stabilise its economy. Bashir has opted to privilege his
own survival over the needs of the nation – a move that should deeply concern elites around him. A state
of emergency will further limit economic activity, lock out desperately needed foreign investment and send
the economy deeper into the doldrums.

As far back as 2012, Crisis Group advocated formation of a transitional government for a fixed
period including the ruling party, the opposition and civil society to implement defined reforms as one
model for a managed transition to end three decades of Bashir’s rule. This remains a credible option that
would require concessions by all sides. The opposition would need to accept that the NCP must form part
of such an arrangement. The NCP in turn would need to accept that it cannot dominate such a coalition.

The sustained wave of protests, gradually mounting since December, has highlighted the
frustrations of a wide cross-section of Sudanese with Bashir’s regime. The scale of the economic crisis
leaves Bashir with few tools to respond. He seems ready to deploy violent repression to ensure regime
survival. All those with access to him should make it clear that this is a losing bet. Further violence will only
compound the crisis and could lead to chaos – with a high cost both for him and for Sudan.²

shabab.html, reported: “The American military has escalated a battle against the Shabab, an extremist
group affiliated with Al Qaeda, in Somalia even as President Trump seeks to scale back operations against
similar Islamist insurgencies elsewhere in the world, from Syria and Afghanistan to West Africa.

A surge in American airstrikes over the last four months of 2018 pushed the annual death toll of
suspected Shabab fighters in Somalia to the third record high in three years. Last year, the strikes killed
326 people in 47 disclosed attacks,” Defense Department data show.³

ICG, “A Critical Six Months for South Sudan,”
Sudan’s rival parties have temporarily salvaged prospects for peace, agreeing a six-month deadline
extension to allow for the formation of a unity government. But the country’s external partners must
sustain pressure on both sides to preserve a ceasefire and maintain consensus on a path forward.

On 3 May at a summit in Addis Ababa, South Sudan’s rival parties agreed to a six-month extension
of the deadline to form a unity government. A consensual delay had become the best available option to
salvage South Sudan’s peace deal, which has produced the first sustained ceasefire in the five-year conflict
pitting forces loyal to President Salva Kiir against an alliance led by former Vice President Riek Machar.
But the next six months should not be wasted as the last eight were. The two sides need to make difficult
decisions and South Sudan’s foreign partners should both encourage and pressure them to do so in order
to prevent a return to war.

For the first extended period since the civil war broke out in December 2013, the news out of
South Sudan is not uniformly bleak: after the parties reached a peace deal in September 2018, a
nationwide ceasefire between the signatories has been holding, even though fighting continues between
the government and smaller groups clustered in South Sudan’s Equatoria region who remain outside the
peace deal. This is a noteworthy achievement after years of empty commitments by the parties to silence
their guns. Thousands of lives have been saved. But the gain is tenuous. The agreement, brokered by the
regional body IGAD (the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, long chaired by Ethiopia), gave the
parties eight months to complete two main tasks: unifying a national army and resolving internal boundaries. Little, if any, progress has been made on either.

This lack of movement is hardly surprising, as the status quo is convenient for both sides. The government has little incentive to execute a power-sharing arrangement that, by definition, will dilute its authority. Benefitting from its military strength, it has invested few resources to help finance implementation of the accord; this extension, or even one after that, is no hardship. Riek Machar, who in theory would have every reason to return to Juba to take up the post of vice president as provided by the accord, has also been content to procrastinate; he was the one insisting on a six-month delay. He appears to view the period prior to implementation – and notably the so-called cantonment process, under which both sides’ armed groups are to be assembled as a prelude to forming a new, unified army – as an opportunity to regroup and bankroll his fighting force, which has largely demobilised after years of attrition and a lack of external support. He will also want to wait for developments in neighbouring Sudan to settle down, given the role Khartoum has played as his historic patron. Meanwhile, regional and international interest in South Sudan has drifted and waned. With neither internal momentum nor external pressure, paralysis was virtually preordained.

The peace deal’s security provisions in particular have remained a dead letter. Kiir’s army ignored provisions to demilitarize cities. There was no advance toward cantonment: Machar did not send his soldiers to camps, claiming a lack of funds, which only confirmed to wary donors that this exercise is about subsidising armed forces that someday could revert to war.

Under the circumstances, the 3 May agreement is welcome news. By extending the deadline it avoided a riskier alternative: unilateral formation of a new government by Kiir without the main opposition party’s participation. When the government opted for that approach in 2016 and replaced Machar with a senior defector from his own party, two years of widening conflict ensued. There was another positive outcome: government representatives pledged $100 million to the implementation process, which – should Kiir carry out this commitment – will help assuage external donors increasingly impatient with Juba’s unwillingness to spend any of its own money.

But for the next six months not to mimic the inaction of the past eight, several steps will be crucial:

Breaking the impasse over implementation, especially regarding security provisions. As Crisis Group has previously underscored, the priority is to ensure the peace process does not stall and preserve its principal achievement, the ceasefire. So far, Machar has insisted that his return, and thus the formation of a unity government, can only happen after completion of the cantonment process. But this fraught, complicated endeavour will be time-consuming; South Sudan is entering its annual rainy season, which will last for most of the next six months, making the task even more challenging. In short, a unity government preconditional on a broader reform of the army and the integration of Machar’s disparate armed groups – many of which are likely to resist such a move – might never be formed. Likewise, Machar’s public insistence that he can only return if accompanied by a large force that includes thousands of his own fighters is a recipe for conflict: both of South Sudan’s two major eruptions of violence, in 2013 and 2016, were sparked by fighting between Kiir’s and Machar’s bodyguards.

One possible solution, previously mooted by Crisis Group, would be for a third-party force to provide protection for Machar to enable his safe and dignified return. Machar would need to request it – which could help convince outsiders that he is serious about returning – and implementation would be a heavy lift for exhausted donors and a distracted region. But it could be the most practical way of getting the deal moving and affording time and space for the peace deal to progress without holding it hostage to wider security reform process.

Improving relations between the two sides. Suspicion between the two sides runs deep, and each one doubts the other’s commitment to the deal. That is unlikely to change, but some steps could be taken to mitigate the damage. To begin with, irrespective of how unpleasant for them, Kiir and Machar should agree to regular face-to-face meetings. Kiir also should quickly outlay the financial commitments he has pledged as a sign of good faith.

Ensure better coordination among outside actors. Several factors have combined to weaken the role of external mediators. Most significantly, the long overdue ouster from power of Sudan’s president, Omar al-Bashir, has brought a diplomatic vacuum of sorts; along with Bashir went the other main broker of
the peace deal, his security strongman Salah Gosh. This has both visibly rattled Machar and left the process leaderless; for as long as uncertainty reigns in Khartoum, Sudan will not be in a position to mediate between Kiir and Machar.

There are no other obvious candidates to help guide the process. The likeliest alternative, Ethiopia, stepped up last week in Addis Ababa. But Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s willingness to devote the necessary energy to the task is questionable: he promptly handed the file to Sudan after he took office, preferring to focus on other critical priorities, including his own domestic transition and the peace deal with Eritrea. Ugandan President Museveni helped Bashir broker the accord, but he is closer to Kiir and enjoys little influence over Machar.

For lack of a better alternative, the burden likely will fall on the collection of regional countries represented in IGAD as well as Western donors, led by the Troika (the U.S., UK, and Norway) and the EU. Although these countries did not engage at a senior level, they performed relatively well in the run-up to Addis Ababa, articulating the clear message to the parties that the most important goal was for them to maintain consensus on a path forward. Their message now should be equally straightforward: the priority is protecting the ceasefire, which will require the parties to seek consensus and strike common ground. There is a lesson to be learned from past attempts to force through contentious solutions: in 2016, heavy outside pressure led to Machar’s return to Juba, with over a thousand well-armed fighters. The government immediately deadlocked over key decisions on how to implement the remainder of the accord, clashes between the two sides’ respective bodyguards led to days of bloody fighting in the capital, and Machar was forced to flee hundreds of miles on foot.

The Horn of Africa is undergoing seismic shifts, with a historic albeit risky transition in Ethiopia, a long-sought agreement between Addis Ababa and Asmara, the fall of Bashir, and South Sudan’s peace deal. Instability in any of these areas affects them all. The decision to extend the deadline for government formation in Juba is hardly a breakthrough. It represents a palliative at best, and a temporary one at that. It addresses neither the problem of the many localised rebel groups that Machar will struggle to accommodate, nor the ongoing power struggle between him and Kiir. But it is an achievement nonetheless.

For now, the focus should be on using this reprieve wisely in order to preserve the ceasefire and, step by step, help South Sudan move toward a more comprehensive and longer-lasting peace.

The peace deal in South Sudan was signed in September 2018, not December 2018, as originally said in this statement. Correction made on 8 May 2019.


What’s new? South Sudan’s new peace deal is nearing its first critical test: the formation of a unity government in May 2019. But steps toward key interim benchmarks – unifying a national army and drawing internal boundaries – are lagging far behind schedule.

Why does it matter? South Sudan’s five-year civil war has brutalised the fledgling nation’s population, killing hundreds of thousands and uprooting millions from their homes. The new peace deal’s collapse could spark another wave of violence and displacement.

What should be done? The main warring parties should hammer out new political deals on security and internal boundaries before forming a new government. If they push back the May deadline, they should do so by consensus. They should also urgently request a third-party force to protect opposition leaders in Juba.

Executive Summary

Five years into South Sudan’s civil war, the main belligerents have once again agreed to stop fighting and form a unity government. But the set of agreements, finalised on 12 September 2018, two years after the last accord collapsed, does not end the country’s deep crisis. It neither resolves the power struggle between President Salva Kiir and erstwhile rebel leader Riek Machar nor outlines a final political
settlement for the country. Rather, it establishes a wobbly Kiir-Machar truce and grafts it onto the previous failed peace terms, without delivering much benefit to other groups that have been shut out of power. The new deal has lessened fighting, a welcome outcome, but it could break down over any number of outstanding disputes. Diplomats should handle the truce with care, nurturing momentum toward peace while pressing urgently for a more lasting settlement.

The accord, brokered by Sudan’s Omar al-Bashir and Uganda’s Yoweri Museveni, is not a finished product and requires revision, a reality that mediators are not yet ready to admit. Additional political deals are necessary on two crucial matters — unifying a national army and resolving bitter disagreements over local boundaries and administration inside South Sudan. Absent such deals, the Kiir-Machar truce may fail its first major test in May 2019, when the two South Sudanese leaders are scheduled to form a unity government.

Most worrying at present, Kiir and Machar are still negotiating shared security control of the capital Juba, the scenario which led to the bloody setback in 2016. This prospect is a powerful argument for delaying the unity government’s formation past May, to grant mediators time to organise a small, limited-mandate third-party protection force for opposition leaders, the least objectionable of bad options for Juba’s security arrangements. The parties should come to consensus on whether to move back the May deadline. They should also remain open to supplemental negotiations with those opposition leaders commanding large forces who have rejected the peace deal.

The accord’s flaws should be a call to international action; instead, diplomatic apathy prevails. Western diplomats, whose countries have paid billions to feed and care for South Sudan’s beleaguered civilian population, have failed to keep up with the rapid pace of events. The U.S. in particular appears to have abdicated its leading role in South Sudan diplomacy; outside of other Horn of Africa states, no country has stepped up to assume the mantle. The absence of diplomatic leadership is baffling. A more proactive posture is urgently needed.

To shore up the truce, and avert a return to large-scale violence, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the regional bloc overseeing the deal, as well as the African Union (AU), the UN and donors, especially the U.S. and allies, should step up and sustain their diplomacy. In particular, they should:

- Urge Kiir and Machar to strike new political deals on security and boundaries so that these provisions do not derail the rest of the accord. Push the parties as well to reach agreement on whether to postpone formation of the unity government now slated for May. Far more important than which route to take – delay or no delay – is maintaining consensus between the two main parties. Propose – and strongly push both sides to accept – a third-party protection force for opposition leaders to prevent Juba’s remilitarisation by competing armed parties. Opposition fighters should not deploy to the capital in significant numbers, not even as part of a “unified” national force.

- Begin a new mediation track for Thomas Cirillo, a former deputy army chief who now leads rebels in the Equatoria region opposed to the peace deal, which should be open to amendment. The government should halt its ill-advised military offensive against Cirillo’s forces, and both sides should recommit to the December 2017 cessation of hostilities.

- Fill the diplomatic vacuum created by Washington’s retrenchment by empowering a lead envoy with donor backing to conduct shuttle diplomacy between the regional capitals. The simplest path forward would be to appoint a U.S. envoy to reassure leadership of the Troika countries (the U.S., the UK and Norway) in close coordination with the EU and other donors. This envoy should focus on sustaining regional pressure on the parties and fostering a longer-term strategy for addressing South Sudan’s systemic political instability.

- Regional leaders, under IGAD’s auspices, should speedily appoint a new head of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC), the body tasked with overseeing the parties’ implementation of the agreement. They should pick a figure who commands the key belligerents’ respect and who, when necessary, can marshal regional governments to intervene to broker deals and constrain saboteurs. Donors should condition financial support for JMEC activities upon the appointment of a full chair.”
ICG, Abdullahi Abdille, Researcher, Horn of Africa,”The Hidden Cost of Al-Shabaab’s Campaign in North-eastern Kenya,” Commentary / Africa 4 April 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/kenya/hidden-cost-al-shabaabs-campaign-north-eastern-kenya?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=f8f00a9551-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_04_03_39&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-f8f00a9551-359871089, commented, "Four years after attacking a university, Al-Shabaab has sustained its campaign, forcing many teachers, nurses and officials to flee north-eastern Kenya, one of the country’s most neglected regions. Authorities must do more to tackle insecurity, reopen schools and counter the risk of increased militant recruitment.

On 2 April 2015, four gunmen belonging to Al-Shabaab, the Somalia-based affiliate of al-Qaeda, began shooting on the campus of Garissa University College, the only major institution of higher learning in north-eastern Kenya. By the time Kenyan special forces ended the 15-hour siege, the militants had killed 148 students, most of them Christians, and injured more than 79. This particularly deadly assault four years ago attracted considerable media attention – and rightly so. Yet what is arguably Al-Shabaab’s most insidious attack on peace and security in Kenya continues to this day, beneath the media’s radar, in less spectacular forms.

Since 2015, Al-Shabaab has conducted over one hundred small-scale assaults in the north east, killing dozens of soldiers and police, mostly with roadside bombs. This campaign has been devastating for civilians as well, particularly for non-Muslim professionals posted to the north east from elsewhere in Kenya. A series of Al-Shabaab assaults targeting these professionals, who constitute a significant proportion of the workforce, has driven hundreds of teachers, nurses, public administrators and construction workers to flee the region. The departure of so many trained professionals from an impoverished part of Kenya has deepened its socio-economic woes, reversing gains of the last two decades.

Primary and secondary education is worst affected. In February 2018, following Al-Shabaab’s murder of two teachers, authorities reportedly closed 250 schools in the region. Some have since reopened, but close to one hundred across the three north-eastern counties on the Somalia border are operating with a headmaster and no other teaching staff. Under pressure from worried teachers, the state has transferred about 2,000 of them out of the area.

As Crisis Group noted in a September 2018 report, Kenya has made some progress in rolling back Al-Shabaab’s infiltration from Somalia, primarily through greater community engagement and better intelligence gathering, and despite the occasional major attack in cities such as the 15 January assault on an upscale hotel complex in Nairobi. Yet in Kenya, as in Tanzania, Al-Shabaab continues to exploit a sense of political and economic exclusion among the Muslim minority in order to win new recruits. Allowing thousands of students in the north to go without a proper education deprives them of the skills and opportunities that schooling can bring and risks further stunting the region’s development. Moreover, it could deepen the sense of abandonment by the state that many feel, thus hindering Kenya’s efforts to curb Islamist militancy and potentially even fuelling Al-Shabaab’s recruitment.

Kenya should make a priority of boosting educational capacity in the north east. National authorities, working closely with northern elected officials, should fast-track a plan to invest in training teachers from the north east, given that Al-Shabaab is more interested in attacking the mainly Christian professionals from outside the region than in persecuting locals. But the state must also improve security to make all teachers and other professionals safer and to encourage those who have left to return to their jobs. It should recruit more police reservists from the north east and build police stations in the countryside, where schools and other facilities are most vulnerable to attack.

A Troubled Past

For decades, colonial and post-colonial authorities in Kenya have poured money and resources into wealthier areas of the country near the capital, at the expense of rural peripheries. By most accounts, the three north-eastern counties – Garissa, Wajir and Mandera, which are dominated by Muslim ethnic Somalis – are the biggest victims of this unequal development. Garissa, Wajir and Mandera are among the seven poorest of Kenya’s 47 counties, with poverty levels of 66 per cent, 63 per cent and 78 per cent, respectively, compared to 36 per cent across the country. In each of these three counties, more than three fifths of the inhabitants live on less than $1.90 per day. The average primary school enrollment rate
in these counties is 37 per cent, compared to 77 per cent nationally. The region lags behind the rest of
the country in infrastructure and health services as well.

The north east also has a history of political violence. Immediately after Kenyan independence in
1963, the government of Somalia backed irredentist claims upon the Somali-inhabited territory of northern
Kenya, resulting in an armed insurgency opposing rule from Nairobi. The ensuing war was widely known as
the Shifta War. The government repealed the state of emergency in the region only in November 1991.
During this period, the state’s human rights abuses were rampant, including multiple instances of
massacres perpetrated by the army and police, according to rights groups. The worst of these cases was
the 1984 Wagalla massacre in Wajir, when soldiers killed as many as one thousand people in a punitive
disarmament operation following clan clashes. Other slaughters attributed to security forces occurred in
Garissa (the Bulla Karatasi/Garissa Gubai massacre) in 1980 and in Mandera (the Malka Mari massacre) in
1981. The state also subjected the region to a form of collective punishment through systematic neglect,
as Crisis Group noted in a 2012 report.

Modest Progress
A subtle change began with the advent of multi-party democracy and economic liberalisation in
the early 1990s. Over the next two decades, the north east saw some modest socio-economic and
political development. Ethnic Somalis have acquired some political representation, including an increasing
number of appointments to crucial government posts. Their clout in business has also grown significantly.
Similarly, income and health indicators have risen, though the majority of the poor fail to benefit from
these improvements. Under President Mwai Kibaki (2003-2013), the government introduced universal free
primary education and affirmative action in higher education, boosting the number of students from the
north east admitted to public universities.

In this period, the north east also became a much more secure place. Between 2001-2011, local
administrators, including chiefs, worked with the security forces to corral the highway bandits who were
once prevalent. In 2010, Interpol named Garissa town, the biggest town in the north, as the ‘safest city in
East and Central Africa’.

Al-Shabaab's Retaliatory Attacks
All this progress began to falter in October 2011 when Kenya deployed troops in southern Somalia
with the goal of dislodging Al-Shabaab from its bases there. Almost immediately, Al-Shabaab launched a
series of retaliatory terror attacks in north-eastern Kenya, along the Indian Ocean coast and in Nairobi to
pressure Kenya to withdraw. In the north, the al-Qaeda affiliate mainly targeted security installations and
churches, as well as bars and restaurants popular with professionals – teachers, civil servants and others –
from Nairobi and inland counties.

Many of the victims were Christians, for reasons that have historical roots. Christian missionaries
who established the first Western-style schools during Kenya’s colonial period built most of them near the
agricultural settlements in Kenya’s central highlands. The people they converted were thus also the
country’s first Western-educated cohort. Even today, Christians make up a disproportionate share of the
country’s professional and managerial classes. (Christians also make up about 84 per cent of the
population overall, and Muslims about 11 per cent.) Moreover, since independence, the Kenyan
government has spent little to improve access to education in regions such as the majority-Muslim north
east, meaning that natives of these areas lack opportunities to become qualified for white-collar
government and teaching jobs. Accordingly, in the north east, as in other rural parts of Kenya, most of
the white-collar government workers and teachers come from elsewhere.

Initially, Al-Shabaab’s attacks in the north east were small in scale, with casualties ranging between
one and six. These raids continued, but since 2013 Al-Shabaab also began to stage large-scale attacks,
resulting in many deaths. These operations appeared designed to stoke tensions between Christians and
Muslims, polarising the country along religious lines, with the hope of triggering wider fighting.

Teachers have borne the brunt of attacks partly due to their large numbers, and the fact they are spread
throughout the vast region, including in remote villages close to the Somalia border. Al-Shabaab contends
that secular education imparts “corrupt foreign ideas to Muslim children”.

On 22 November 2014, gunmen shot 28 passengers on a bus travelling from Mandera, in north-
eastern Kenya, to Nairobi. Seventeen of those killed were Christian teachers heading home for December

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Economic sectors hurt the most by Al-Shabaab activity include construction, transportation and communications. Due to insecurity, engineers have abandoned construction sites in areas like Mandera. Even feasibility studies for new roads in the region have stalled, especially in the troubled hotspots. Al-Shabaab’s constant destruction of communication masts along the border has forced residents to travel long distances to make telephone calls. These attacks have also locked many locals out of the vibrant mobile phone money transfer system that has become a vital avenue of commercial activity in Kenya. Lack of communication lines has also limited the capacity of security forces to respond quickly to attacks.

Hundreds of health centres have been closed due to lack of staff. Community health workers are partly filling the void, but they cannot be permanent substitutes for better trained professionals. After the November 2014 bus incident, and when schools reopened early the next January, over 1,000 teachers refused to return, fearing for their lives. They demonstrated outside the Nairobi headquarters of the Teachers Service Commission, the institution mandated with managing teachers countrywide, to demand transfers to safer counties. In the end, the Commission gave in and transferred 900 of them.

Another attack, targeting Qarsa Primary School in Wajir on 16 February 2018, killed two teachers and one of their spouses. Though it was a much smaller attack than the bus assault, the impact was almost similar. Large numbers of teachers again agitated for transfer. The Commission transferred over 1,120 more teachers, 900 from Wajir county alone, leading to the additional closure of hundreds of schools.

As teachers desert the region, the poor, who cannot afford expensive private schools, are hardest hit. Hundreds of schools now operate well below capacity. “It is catastrophic for a region that has always lagged behind in all important human development indicators. We are going to the lowest of the low”, said education professor Mohamed Elmi in Wajir in July. A regional education manager concurred: “Since Al-Shabaab attacks began targeting teachers, academic performance has dropped”.

No Easy Solutions

In dealing with this difficult situation, the most discussed options focus on employing more locals to offer needed services. For the time being, this option will not by itself suffice as there are not enough skilled professionals from the north east to fill the available slots. Nonetheless, building up local cadres of professionals could help begin to address the problem in the medium term. The three county governments, together with national government institutions, need to invest promptly and heavily in supporting institutions that can train these cadres, such as teachers colleges, medical schools and technical and vocational colleges that offer an education to technicians and artisans. (Many construction workers abandoned their posts following the wave of attacks in 2014.)

The education ministry should raise its targets for educating students in the north and build more schools, enlarging the pipeline for students who can qualify for admission to institutions of higher learning, including teacher training colleges. Secondary school facilities in the north east are more dispersed than in other parts of the country, meaning that many students do not enjoy access to a high school education. Given the limited opportunities for students in the north, the government should actively consider an affirmative action program that allocates a higher number of places in medical schools, teachers colleges and technical training institutions to students from the north. Officials have begun deliberations along these lines but should speed up their work. The government should restart previous affirmative action programs that raised the number of north-eastern students admitted to public universities, by marginally lowering the entry grades required.

National authorities should also support local elected officials who work to fill the teacher gap, including by offering them financial support to hire qualified teachers at the local level when they can be identified. While the devolution of power and resources introduced under Kenya’s new constitution has brought governance closer to the grassroots, and has meant that each of the three north-eastern counties receives millions of dollars in devolved funds each year, county budgets are nonetheless already stretched...
by the challenge of providing services in the impoverished region. These counties would be hard pressed to channel funds to recruit teachers absent help from the national treasury in Nairobi.

The most important solutions, however, are tackling insecurity and stopping the exodus of professionals. It is a challenge to secure this huge, sparsely populated and poorly policed region, which shares a porous border with Somalia 638km long. Police stations are few and far between, and they too have come under attack by militants from across the border.

State authorities have made some efforts to enhance security. Over recent months, the government has recruited hundreds of police reservists and placed them along the border, where they guard the most vulnerable schools and other vital installations. The Teachers Service Commission also has redeployed the remaining few non-local teachers to safer areas. More can be done, however. The education ministry, the teachers’ employer, needs to better coordinate with officials in charge of security at the county and sub-county levels, in order to offer teachers updated risk assessments. Senior officials in charge of security in the region should recruit more reservists, and post officers to as many settlements as possible, while seeking to ensure that they can still mass a force large enough to repel Al-Shabaab attacks.

The status quo is unsustainable. Leaving the region’s economy to drift further downward and its youngsters without proper schooling would create tremendous human costs that its residents should not have to bear. Moreover, while the appeal of militancy defies generic description and varies from individual to individual, denying educational opportunities to youth in an already poor and under-served periphery cannot help in the battle against Al-Shabaab. As it works to restore security and the services that have been lost in the north east, the Kenyan government should pay particular attention to reversing Al-Shabaab’s campaign to hollow out educational institutions. Failure to do so could come at a huge cost to the rest of Kenya down the road.”

The U.N. Panel on Human Rights in South Sudan reported in February, that even during agreements to cease fighting, violent conflict has continued over control of oil, and foreign oil companies may be complicit in war crimes (Nick Cumming-Bruce, “Oil Industry May Be Tied to ‘Astonishing Brutality’ in South Sudan,” The New York Times, February 21, 2019).


What’s new?

On 23 March 2019 – just as the UN Security Council was beginning an official visit to Mali – 100 armed men attacked the village of Ogossagou-Peul, about a dozen kilometres from the town of Bankass (population 30,000), in the country’s centre. The inhabitants of this village are nearly all members of the Fulani community, which comprises many herders but also sedentary farmers. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) initially reported that at least 134 civilians were killed, including women and children. The situation remains confused and the death toll could rise. Other villages with a Fulani majority near Ogossagou have been threatened and some have reportedly been attacked.

This massacre took place in the context of a worrying upsurge in intercommunal violence in central Mali in recent months. On 1 January 2019, a similar attack targeted Kouloungo, another village in the Bankass district, leaving at least 37 Fulanis dead, including women and children. The violence is affecting mainly Fulani civilians in the region. Other ethnic groups, especially the Dogon and Bambara, have also been hit by violent attacks. These have so far happened on a lesser scale but they have been fuelling a cycle of
reprisals. Two weeks before the Ogossagou attack, suspected armed Fulanis targeted at least two Dogon villages in the region.

Intercommunal violence is no longer confined to the Mopti region and now threatens the stability of Mali as well as neighbouring Burkina Faso.

Who is responsible for the attacks and what are their motives?

The identity of those responsible for the attacks has not yet been established, but the finger is being pointed at the Dozos (the alternative spelling Donsos is sometimes used) armed groups present in several districts of the Mopti and Ségou regions. In Bankass, one of the Mopti region's eight districts, they mainly recruit from the Dogon community, who are predominantly sedentary farmers. In late 2016, many Dozos joined together to form Dan an Amassagou (“Hunters who Trust in God” in the Dogon language), an organisation that has both a political and a military wing.

Originally, Dozos were hunting associations responsible for managing the bush around their villages. Current groups of Dozos have, to a large extent, become paramilitary groups equipped with weapons of war. They have established bases in towns and villages in full view of the Malian authorities. They say they need to organise to protect their communities given that the Malian security forces are unable to hold back the growth of jihadist groups.

The Dozos often accuse their Fulani neighbours of supporting the jihadists, especially the Katibat Macina, which has strong roots in other districts of the Mopti region. But tensions between local communities go back a long way and stem in part from rivalries between herders and farmers and struggles for local power and especially access to land. The availability of weapons of war and the pretext of fighting jihadist groups have opened the floodgates to a level of ethnic-based violence that is without precedent in the region. One of the main issues at stake is the control over agricultural land and pastures.

The commanders of Dan an Amassagou reportedly decided, at a meeting on 13 March, to force out the Fulani communities from the area between Bandiagara and Bankass (located less than 30km away from each other). This meeting allegedly followed attacks on two Dogon villages in the Bandiagara region, in the course of which the assailants burned granaries and executed at least one person close to the Dozos. It is difficult to verify this information, but Dan an Amassagou announced on 20 March that it would conduct security patrols in the area.

Why haven’t the Malian and international forces present in Mopti intervened?

The Dozos have an ambiguous relationship with the Malian security forces. In 2016, when the Dozos were organising to defend their communities, some of the area’s political and military authorities tolerated and even encouraged their development in the hope that they would help to fight jihadist groups in the rural areas of central Mali where the state is weak. These groups’ activities then overwhelmed the political and military authorities. The Dozos quickly took advantage of the balance of power to settle scores and consolidate their influence on local affairs. The army has made a few attempts to disarm Dozo groups, especially in July 2018, but these measures have provoked a lot of resistance and anger among Dozos, who are supported by some sectors of the population. Malian security forces, already under pressure due to jihadist groups’ activity in the country’s centre, now fear confrontation with Dozo groups, who have so far supplied intelligence to the army and officially share the same enemy. In reality, the Dozos have attacked unarmed civilians more often than jihadist groups, except for a few direct clashes with the latter, such as recently in the Djenné region of the Niger Delta in central Mali.

International forces are also active in the country’s centre, but MINUSMA has concentrated its resources on Mopti and its mobility is compromised by security rules and a lack of resources. Meanwhile, the French military Operation Barkhane has an anti-terrorist mandate and focuses on combatting jihadists rather than protecting civilians. Some communities in Mopti find this hierarchy of priorities incomprehensible, saying that in their experience, the Dozos terrorise the civilian population more than the jihadists do. While the latter have targeted civilians, they have never, in this region, carried out massacres on the scale of the killings in Ogossagou and Koulogon. Many Fulani intellectuals interviewed by Crisis Group in recent months said their community does not enjoy the same level of protection as others because many political and security actors, including among international partners, believe they have close links with the jihadists. The more these communities feel stigmatised, the more they might be tempted into turning to jihadist groups for support.
Was this an isolated event? Does the current violence reflect attempts to organise ethnic cleansing?

The Ogossagou massacre was anything but an isolated event. Fulani civilians have now been targeted for several years in central Mali and more recently in Burkina Faso. In 2016, a Crisis Group report raised concerns about the violence suffered by the Fulani communities in central Mali. In May 2012, a land dispute led to the massacre of at least sixteen Fulani pastoralists by Dogon farmers in Sari, Koro district, near Bankass. This episode, which remains unpunished, was instrumental in encouraging Fulani nomads to arm themselves in the following months; some of them joined jihadist groups. Several reports, including by Human Rights Watch, have accused Malian security forces of arbitrary arrests and alleged extrajudicial killings of Fulanis suspected of complicity with the jihadists.

In recent months, the incidence of massacres has increased rapidly. Violence is now taking place on a different scale and the nature of these attacks is no longer in doubt. The aim is not just to kill young men in order to steal their herds or stop them from joining jihadist groups. By killing women and young children and by burning down homes and granaries, the attackers are trying to terrorise the civilian population and force a particular community, the Fulanis, to leave the area. This violence qualifies as ethnic cleansing, an unprecedented crime in this region of Mali.

There is a danger of recurring violence and this may further encourage the various communities to align themselves with the side that claims to be their protector. Fulani communities do not naturally align with the jihadists of Katibat Macina, however. In his first announcements as jihadist chief, Katibat Macina’s leader Amadou Koufa, who was also one of the founders of the jihadist coalition Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM), expressed extreme reluctance to defend the Fulani cause. Such a position could indeed prejudice his insurrectional objectives and interests much broader than those of any single ethnic group. As from December 2018, however, under pressure from his own combatants, whose families were victims of violence, and no doubt also following a strategic discussion among the GSIM command, Koufa presented himself as the standard-bearer for Fulani communities in the Sahel under the banner of jihad. Events like those at Ogossagou can only incite young Fulanis, disoriented and furious at the violence suffered by their families, to rally to this call.

Finally, the violence against Fulani civilians has spread beyond central Mali. In July 2018, a Crisis Group report described how nomadic Fulani communities along the Mali-Niger border had become the collateral victims of the war between French forces in Operation Barkhane and the region’s jihadist groups. More recently, collective violence has hit Fulani communities in Burkina Faso: on 23 March, the day of the Koulongo massacre in Mali, Koglweogo self-defence groups, which have similarities with the Dozos in Mali, killed about 100 Fulani civilians in Yirgou, 200km to the north of Ouagadougou. A recent report by the Burkina Human and Peoples’ Rights Movement (MBDHP) documented the arbitrary killings of several dozen Fulanis by Burkinafaso security forces in the Kain region, close to Bankass in Mali, in February 2019. In central Sahel, there are fears that the jihadists are no longer the only group guilty of terrorising the civilian population.

How to stop the violence spreading?

The government seems to have realised the significance of the massacre. On the day after the event, it convened an extraordinary council to announce a reorganisation of the army’s high command and the dissolution of Dan an Amassagou. It is crucial and urgent to enforce this measure on the ground. The government must disarm the groups implicated in the recent massacres. Their impunity in recent years has been instrumental in the rising tide of violence. In the coming months, the judiciary must also play its role. It must send a strong signal by identifying, arresting and punishing the main perpetrators of these atrocities. After months of equivocation that has allowed these groups to consolidate their position, the Malian security forces might, however, find it difficult to reassert their control over the area. According to unverified reports, Dan an Amassagou’s military commander, Youssouf Toloba, has refused to dissolve his group.

The international community can support the Malian government’s efforts to restore order in Bankass, Koro and Bandiagara districts, which are the most affected by the recent violence. In the first instance, this is the responsibility of the MINUSMA, which has a mandate to protect the civilian population and provide advice and support to the government. Provided that the Malian authorities agree, it could, in
the weeks to come, establish a base in Bankass with a strong police presence and a military contingent that includes a rapid reaction force (as in Mopti).

Intercommunal mediation initiatives will also be necessary in the near future, but they must not hinder either the judiciary’s work or the dissolution of the armed groups implicated in the massacres. Mediation with the Dozos has already been tried a few months ago. In September 2018, Dan an Amassagou’s military commander signed a unilateral ceasefire agreement before suddenly breaking it two months later. If such mediation is to resume, all relevant communities must be represented, contrary to what happened in 2018. Reconciliation between communities will remain a dead letter unless the authorities get more involved in resolving land conflicts, one of the main triggers for recent violence. In particular, the state should recover its capacity to regulate land conflicts in a peaceful way that is acceptable to all. This is a crucial issue and undoubtedly more important than reactivating the development projects that sometimes exacerbate pre-existing land conflicts.

Beyond central Mali, all actors involved in the struggle against jihadist groups, including Sahelian countries and international forces, must learn lessons from the recent intercommunal violence and avoid involving ethnic-based non-state groups in their counter-insurgency strategies. At best, this only leads to Pyrrhic victories. It may weaken or contain jihadist groups but undermines the state’s legitimacy and fuels dangerous intercommunal resentments. Sahelian countries and especially their international partners must also accept that the jihadists are not the only and not even necessarily the main threat to the security of the population.

Finally, a specific effort should be made to reach out to the Fulani communities affected by the violence in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. The sub-region’s governments should publicly condemn all attempts to stigmatise and attack these communities because of their alleged association with the jihadist cause, including when national security forces are responsible. Meanwhile, Western forces involved in the Sahel should urgently review their concept of a “pan-Fulani jihad”. Fulani communities, nomadic or otherwise, are not natural supporters of the jihadist cause. They only become so when policies stigmatise them or generate unacceptable levels of violence against them. Helping to protect these communities is the best way to avoid them turning to the most radical groups for support.

An initial peace agreement to end fighting that began in 2013 was achieved, in February, between the Central African Republic and 14 armed groups (“Central African Republic has Peace Deal,” The New York Times, February 3, 2019).


Inter-group fighting in the Congo, much of it amongst indigenous groups, has remained serious, directly causing a great many deaths, injuries and dislocations of people, while making it impossible to control a most serious and expanding Ebola epidemic, that could spread to other nations. U.N. investigators reported, in March 2019, that in one instance, villagers of the Batenda ethnic group attacked a Banunu community, killing at least 535 - and perhaps as many as 900 - people. As of January, some 19,000 people were believed to have fled the violence, about 16,000 crossing into the Republic of Congo (Nick Cummings Bruce, "Congo Report by U.N, Team Cites Carnage," The New York Times, March 13, 2019).

Adam Nossiter, "Can France Ever Leave Africa? Airstrikes in Chad Raise an Old Question," The New York Times, February 14, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/14/world/africa/france-airstrikes-chad.html, reported, "French airstrikes this month in support of Chad’s longtime autocratic ruler, Idriss Déby, have raised a familiar question: Has France really left behind decades of deep involvement in African politics? France’s foreign minister this week defended the strikes against Chadian rebels before a handful of puzzled members of Parliament who wondered why the country was again propping up an ironhanded
African dictator — albeit one whose relatively efficient military is considered vital in the fight against terrorists.

French officials have brushed aside these qualms, insisting that it was Mr. Déby himself who invited the French. The strikes took place between Feb. 3 and 6, destroying 20 rebel pickup trucks and stopping a rebel advance, the French military said in a statement.

French analysts have been sharply critical of the intervention in Chad.

ICG, "Rebel Incursion Exposes Chad’s Weaknesses,” Q&A / Africa 13 February 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/chad/au-tchad-lincursion-des-rebelles-devoie-le-fragilites-du-pouvoir?utm_source=Sign-Up-to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=3b56b3411d-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_01_18_03_54_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-3b56b3411d-359871089, commented, An early February incursion by the Union of Resistance Forces (UFR) into Chad from Libya was halted by French air strikes, conducted in coordination with the Chadian army. This most severe security threat for several years highlights the weakness of the country and President Idriss Déby’s rule.

What happened?

On 3-6 February 2019, at the request of N'Djamena, planes from the French Operation Barkhane proceeded with a series of strikes against a group of Chadian rebels in the north east of the country. According to rebels’ spokesperson Youssouf Hamid Ishagh, the Union of Resistance Forces (Union des forces de la résistance – UFR), a coalition based in Libya, intended to reach the capital N'Djamena in order to overthrow President Idriss Déby and “set up a transitional government unite of all of the country’s forces”. The plan was aborted following the French intervention. Composed mainly of Zaghawa fighters from Déby’s own ethnic community, this rebel movement is directed by Timan Erdimi, the president’s nephew, who lives in Qatar. He first tried to overthrow his uncle in 2008, and again in 2009 after forming the UFR.

According to a statement released by the Chadian army on 9 February 2019, “more than 250 terrorists, including four leaders” were captured, and over forty of their vehicles destroyed. These figures were refuted by Ishagh, who described them as fanciful.

The Chadian political opposition has criticised the French military intervention, the first in Chad since 2008, which it views as new proof of France’s unconditional support for Idriss Déby, while expressing its opposition to any takeover of power by force. These incursions took place as other Chadian armed groups are increasingly active at the country’s borders, and as the president is under pressure from an economic crisis and several years of social unrest.

Paris defended its intervention, conducted “in response to a request from Chadian authorities”, and justified it by the need to preserve stability in both Chad and the sub-region. The French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves le Drian declared in front of parliament on 12 February that “France intervened militarily to prevent a coup d’État”. French authorities added that Chad is a strategic ally whose army is deployed in operations against terrorism in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin.

What is the link with Chad’s domestic context?

By asking France’s military forces to intervene on his territory for the first time since 2008, President Déby showed that he took the risk very seriously. This is due to a domestic situation marked by growing social upheaval, but also to burgeoning dissent within his own ethnic community, which the rebels hope to exploit.

The capture of state resources has long generated tension among the Zaghawa and even within the presidential family. When Déby came to power in 1990, Zaghawa military and political leaders, including the president’s nephews, Timan Erdimi and his brother Tom Erdimi, helped organise a strong autocratic system around a new political party, the Patriotic Salvation Movement (Mouvement patriotique du Salut – MPS). Timan and Tom both served as chief of staff to the president before taking up strategic positions—respectively of Chad’s cotton parastatal company, at that time a public entity, and head of national oil projects. But in the early 2000s, Déby’s plan to revise the constitution in order to stand for re-election in 2006 led to a break with the Erdimi brothers, who saw themselves as his “natural” successors. This resulted in large-scale defections of Presidential Guard officers and senior administration officials, and
the creation of rebel groups in Sudan. Later, the presidential family made unsuccessful attempts to reconcile Idriss Déby and Timan Erdimi.

Other events provoked clashes among the Zaghawa. In 2009, his rapprochement with Sudan caused tension between the president and some of his clan who supported the rebellion in Darfur. Finally, in recent years, the growing influence of Déby’s wife, Hinda, an ethnic Arab from the Ouaddai region in the east of the country, and the appointment of her relatives to positions of responsibility, has generated new disputes among Idriss Déby’s family members.

The UFR’s recent incursion sought to take advantage of these tensions in order to encourage defections within the army, promote an internal uprising and provoke a reversal of alliances among the president’s entourage.

On 6 February 2019, Timan’s brother Tom Erdimi, living in exile in the U.S., addressed an audio message in Arabic to the Chadian military, calling them to join the UFR and overthrow Déby. “We call on you to join us. We are not far... We do not want to kill you; we do not wish to die either. The blood of Chadians has flowed too much already”, he said. A few days later, he echoed a complaint from soldiers' families when he added in a further audio message: “[the government] sends Chadian soldiers to die abroad without honour and without money for their families”.

Aside from strong support from part of the Zaghawa, at one time the Erdimi brothers also had good relations with politicians and intellectuals from the rest of the country, including the south. Many Zaghawa fear that their influence and interests will be threatened and that they could be the target of violence once President Déby is replaced or dies. The Erdimi brothers promise, should they come to power, to safeguard their interests while also undertaking to open a transitional period involving non-Zaghawa. But most Chadians are opposed to yet another violent coup d’Etat, and the UFR’s attempts to attract a broader consortium of discontented citizens to their movement did not prove successful.

The incursion started out in Libya, and the UFR has support in the Darfur region of Sudan. How is the situation in these two countries related to recent events in Chad?

This crisis has come about in a particular geopolitical context. In Libya, Marshal Khalifa Haftar is trying to change the strategic picture by leading a major offensive on southern cities, putting pressure on Chadian rebel groups in the area. In Sudan, President Omar al-Bashir, who forged an alliance with Déby in 2009, appears weakened by months of popular uprisings.

Like other Chadian rebel groups, including the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (Front pour l’alternance et la concorde au Tchad – FACT), the Military Command Council for the Salvation of the Republic (Conseil de commandement militaire pour le salut de la République – CCMSR) and the Union of Forces for Democracy and Development (Union des forces pour la démocratie et le développement – UFDD), the UFR shifted to southern Libya following its expulsion from Darfur in western Sudan by Khartoum in 2010. These groups do not agree on what strategies to adopt, they are divided along ethnic lines and by personal ambitions, and have even competed against each other. Their fighters engage in various forms of trafficking and sometimes work as mercenaries for Libyan militias.

The UFR’s incursion into Chad was likely precipitated by the offensive launched in mid-January by the Libyan National Army (LNA) of Khalifa Haftar, seeking to extend his hold over southern Libya. While the UFR spokesperson insists that the incursion of fighters into northern Chad was planned for a long time and has no connection with the LNA’s operation, other members of the group recognise that the pressure exerted by Haftar’s forces pushed them to promptly cross the border.

The LNA’s operation is officially aimed at combating terrorists, criminal gangs and foreign armed groups operating in the region. Although alliances in the Libyan civil war fluctuate constantly, the UFR was at one time close to the Misrata militia and the Benghazi defence brigades, Haftar’s rivals. Close to Paris, and an ally of N'Djamena in the region, Haftar often targeted the positions of Chadian rebels in southern Libya. It is possible that among other objectives, his advance aims to weaken them further.

In the 2000s, armed insurrections against Déby from Darfur, then in the grip of a civil war, twice reached N’Djamena and came close to overthrowing him. Since the signing of a peace agreement between N'Djamena and Khartoum at the end of 2009, al-Bashir ended his support to Chadian rebel groups, including Timan Erdimi’s UFR. Nevertheless, the UFR maintains close ties with Darfuri groups, including the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), and some of its fighters continue to move back and forth between Libya and Sudan. If al-Bashir’s power was to be threatened, so would be the agreement between the two
countries, which ultimately relies on the good will of the two presidents. That said, although the situation remains unstable following months of demonstrations, al-Bashir still appears to have the support of his security forces.

What are the prospects and what risks can be identified?

As in 2008, France's military intervention came in support of the Chadian authorities and President Déby. While most Chadians reject any attempt to grab power by force and condemn the incursions of rebel groups into their territory, many also criticise the support given by France and the international community in general to the country's current leadership. It is true that international actors have thus far failed to exert enough pressure on Chadian authorities to push them to engage in a truly inclusive political dialogue. Although Chad's security situation seems to have stabilised, Déby's call for help from France shows that the Chadian army, often portrayed as strong, also has its weaknesses. According to several officers interviewed by Crisis Group, the army, present in several theatres of operation (in Mali, in the countries of the Lake Chad region and on several home fronts including Tibesti, at the border with Libya), is overworked and some soldiers are demoralised. The situation is made worse by cuts in soldiers' allowances implemented in recent years (up to December 2018) to cope with the financial crisis following a fall in oil prices. In this context, groups like the UFR will undoubtedly continue to encourage desertions. More generally, recent events call into question the strength of Déby's rule, which largely relies on the army, and underline the fragility of a country led by the region's 'strongman'.

Suffering a large number of rapes of women under 15 years of age, the President of Sierra Leone declared sexual violence a national emergency, in February 2019, stating that sex with minors would be punished by life imprisonment. The country was still suffering the after effects of a civil war and a major Ebola epidemic (Palko Karsz and Dinne Searcey, “Sierra Leone Declares Crisis over Rapes of Young Girls,” The New York Times, February 9, 2019).

ICG, "Managing Ethiopia’s Unsettled Transition,” Report 269 / Africa 21 February 2019, commented, "Ethiopia's charismatic new prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, has generated great excitement with initiatives breaking with the past. But he faces challenges as formidable as his promises are bold: he urgently needs to halt communal strife, smooth the road to elections and boost the ailing economy. What's new? Ethiopia's new premier, Abiy Ahmed Ali, has made peace with Eritrea, extended a conciliatory hand to opponents, and promised moves to free and fair elections, expanded political space and economic reform. But amid the exhilarating changes, insecurity proliferates, the number of internally displaced people mounts and the economy struggles. Why does it matter? Abiy's bold moves have won plaudits from Ethiopians who have been protesting for change since 2014 and from donors who are eager to see democratic reform. But he now must make changes to his governance style in order to defuse ethnic and communal tensions and garner support for critical reforms. What should be done? In seeking to restore security and calm ethnic tensions, Abiy should govern more inclusively, working collaboratively with state institutions on reforms and involving civil society in reconciliation efforts. He should also begin preparing for the 2020 elections (ensuring broad political support for any violence-related delays) and focus on economic modernisation. Executive Summary

After four years of street protests, the ruling Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) elected Abiy Ahmed Ali prime minister on 2 April 2018. For many Ethiopians Abiy is a breath of fresh air. He admits the ruling coalition’s shortcomings, pledges reform, preaches unity and has made peace with Ethiopia’s old foe, Eritrea. Yet if Abiy has raised enormous expectations, he also faces daunting challenges. Insecurity has intensified and proliferated across the country, with communal violence tearing at the multi-ethnic fabric of Ethiopian society. Regional leaders demand more power. The economy is on life support, with foreign debt in excess of $24 billion, many young people without jobs and an old guard resistant to reform. There are no easy fixes for these challenges, but Abiy can give himself the best odds by focusing on three priorities – working to stop communal conflict, preparing for 2020 elections and reforming the dangerously weak economy.

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The crisis that led to Abiy's assumption of power was years in the making. Protests broke out in 2014 over discrimination against the Oromo – the country's largest ethnic group – and spread to other groups, especially the Amhara, its second largest. Discontent with tough socio-economic conditions, as well as with the ruling party's 27 years in power and its domination by a small, mostly Tigrayan, elite, was already widespread. The EPRDF, weakened by factional quarrels after the August 2012 death of strongman Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, struggled to contain the unrest. Meles's successor, Hailemariam Desalegn, veered from cabinet reshuffles and political prisoner releases to crackdowns including new arrests of opposition leaders and demonstrators. In October 2016, a state of emergency brought temporary calm, but the protesters' demands for political reform and socio-economic improvements still largely went unmet.

On 15 February 2018, Hailemariam resigned. By then the EPRDF elite – and especially its Tigrayan component – had lost its grip. With power dispersed among the security sector's upper echelons, who were divided over whether to reform or protect the status quo, the EPRDF proved unable to steer the battle for succession. The Oromo People's Democratic Organization, one member of the EPRDF coalition, stepped most assertively into the breach. Backed – in a break from tradition – by the Amhara National Democratic Movement, another EPRDF party, it propelled the Oromo nominee, Abiy Ahmed Ali, into the premiership. At age 42, Abiy is considerably younger than the old guard and, with the sympathy of many protesters, he appears well suited to the task of assuaging the grievances of the country's neglected groups.

Changes during Abiy's first months in office have been fast-paced. Abroad, he has signed a peace deal with Ethiopia's long-time enemy Eritrea, while strengthening ties with other neighbours and with influential Gulf states, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, with whom relations were previously fraught. At home, he has sent long-serving politicians and security officials into overdue retirement and detained others. He has assembled a media-savvy team to disseminate an inclusive message, condemning the EPRDF's past abuses and promising free and fair elections and a more legitimate and inclusive political system. In order to reduce the country's crushing debt, he has vowed to open up the state-dominated economy – a major shift from the developmental state model espoused by Meles. Hopes in Ethiopia are high.

So far, Abiy has set in motion important reforms, but enormous obstacles remain. Many Ethiopians are impatient for change. Communal violence has spread with an intensity unprecedented in the past quarter-century. Ethnic militias are proliferating. Unrest in the capital in September 2018 left at least 58 dead and led Abiy to cancel a trip to the UN General Assembly's opening week. Within the ruling party, no consensus exists on how to tackle the country's many challenges. Factions both inside and outside the EPRDF disagree over how much power should be devolved to federal regions and, as Abiy avoids taking a position, regional leaders jostle for greater autonomy, often under pressure from ethnic hardliners. Abiy himself contends with growing nationalist sentiment among his own Oromo constituents, many of whom expect him to serve their interests above those of others. For now, generous Gulf donations are keeping the economy afloat, but sky-high national debt means that Abiy at some point will have to embark upon belt-tightening.

At the top of the new prime minister's priority list must be the restoration of security through calming ethnic tension and violence. To encourage a positive national tone, Abiy should develop a governance style that matches his inclusive rhetoric. Working with ministries and the civil service to develop the reforms that they will implement can help dispel the impression shared by some that he is governing from a closed circle of co-ethnic and co-religionist advisers. It also can reenergise a bureaucracy that has been adrift. To improve prospects for a planned national reconciliation process, the prime minister should invite civil society – particularly the Inter-Religious Council, a multi-faith group that promotes dialogue among various segments of society – to play a bigger role. Elders, too, should take a more prominent part. The latter two groups may enjoy greater credibility in stimulating frank dialogue at the grassroots level over issues driving violence, including border disputes and perceptions of injustice – historical and more recent – since they are not direct players in forthcoming electoral campaigns.

There are other priorities, too. With the 2020 elections fast approaching (and local elections due in mid-2019), the administration has precious little time to prepare, and the same is true of a raft of political parties that have never before had the opportunity to participate in a credible election. Donors
should work collaboratively with authorities and the incipient local civil society movement to help surmount formidable logistical challenges, including ensuring a transparent voter registration process that does not exclude those who have been displaced by violence from their homes. Abiy should reach out to the opposition to agree on a dispute resolution framework ahead of the vote. This step might minimise the temptation of those unhappy with the outcome to resort to violence.

Lastly, the prime minister will need to institute comprehensive economic reforms: creating opportunities for greater domestic and foreign investment; streamlining regulation; breaking up inefficient state monopolies; carrying out banking reform to free up lending to the private sector; increasing manufacturing and agricultural productivity and revitalising the long-neglected small and medium-sized enterprise segment of the economy. All these measures will be critical to begin producing jobs for the burgeoning population.

For their part, Ethiopia’s international partners should, through a coordination mechanism, support his reform efforts with quiet counsel and the substantial financial aid needed to breathe new life into an economy whose pre-existing weaknesses have been compounded by five years of unrest and capital flight. They should disburse these funds as soon as possible to help the new administration address festering grievances over mass youth unemployment, which some leaders exploit to drive violence. All the while, they should keep in mind the dangers of an overly rapid transition and advise Abiy to adopt policies that favour long-term stability.

What happens in Ethiopia matters well beyond its borders. It is Africa’s second most populous country and one of its largest. It is also one of its more geopolitically significant – the only major country on the continent to have escaped colonialism and the seat of the African Union. Abiy’s drive to introduce more legitimate and inclusive governance in this prominent nation bucks a trend toward authoritarianism in the region and is closely watched across the continent and further afield. The stakes are high. If the experiment succeeds, the result could offer a powerful example to others. Failure – and especially a further turn into large-scale ethnic violence – would have major negative implications for an already unsettled region. The hope is that Abiy can create a more open and prosperous society, with benefits for Ethiopia and the region. This will require that the government bring under control the forces the transition has unleashed."

ICG, "Cameroon’s Anglophone Crisis: How to Get to Talks?" Report 272 / Africa 2 May 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/272-crise-anglophone-au-cameroun-comment-arriver-aux-pourparlers?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=835afc0b98-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_05_02_08_21&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-835afc0b98-359871089, commented, "After twenty months of clashes, the government and the separatists are both refusing to give ground. Both sides must explore compromise solutions aimed at a level of regional autonomy somewhere between the secession the separatists yearn for and the fake decentralisation proposed by Yaoundé.

What's new? The conflict in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon is deadlocked. Twenty months of clashes have killed 1,850, displaced 530,000 and led tens of thousands to seek refuge abroad, but the government and the separatists are sticking to their irreconcilable positions. The separatists continue to dream that

Why does it matter? In the last 20 months, the conflict has left 1,850 dead, 530,000 internally displaced and tens of thousands of refugees. The intransigence of the belligerents threatens to generate further violence and prolong the conflict, which neither can win in the short term.

What should be done? Camerooners and international actors should encourage the two sides to make concessions by threatening to sanction those who stand in the way of dialogue and rewarding the less intransigent. Ending the conflict will eventually require changes in the legal framework for decentralisation to grant greater autonomy to communes and regions.

Executive Summary
Cameroon’s Anglophone crisis is deadlocked. Twenty months of clashes have killed 1,850, displaced 530,000 and led tens of thousands to seek refuge abroad, but the government and the separatists are sticking to their irreconcilable positions. The separatists continue to dream that
independence is just around the corner. In Yaoundé, the government still wrongly believes it can win a quick military victory. Meanwhile, moderates and federalists, who enjoy majority support, are unable to organise. To break the deadlock, Cameroonian and international actors should put pressure on the government and the separatists. Both sides must explore compromise solutions aimed at a level of regional autonomy somewhere between the secession desired by the separatists and the fake decentralisation proposed by Yaoundé.

The socio-political crisis that began in October 2016 in the Anglophone Northwest and Southwest regions mutated into armed conflict at the end of 2017. Seven armed militias are currently in positions of strength in most rural areas. The security forces reacted slowly, but since mid-2016 have inflicted casualties on the separatists. They have not been able, however, to regain full control over rural areas nor prevent repeated separatist attacks in the towns.

**There is currently no dialogue between Yaoundé and the separatists.** The latter are calling for talks to hammer out the practical details of independence in the presence of an international mediator. The government refuses to discuss the form of the state or reform of institutions. It proposes instead a decentralisation model that grants neither adequate funding nor sufficient powers to local authorities (communes and regions) and intends to organise the country’s first regional elections later this year. Far from resolving the conflict, this half-baked proposal risks provoking further violence.

**Local initiatives to promote dialogue are emerging.** In July 2018, Anglophone religious leaders (Catholic, Protestant and Muslim) announced a plan to hold an Anglophone General Conference as a first step toward an inclusive national dialogue. A majority of Anglophones are in favour of this initiative. Initially reluctant, some separatists now seem to be more open to the idea on condition that it prepares the way for a referendum on self-determination that would give the choice between federalism and independence. Faced with opposition from the government, the conference organisers have already had to postpone it twice; from August to November 2018 and then to March 2019. It still has not taken place.

Although some separatists will refuse to give ground, others might accept a dialogue with the Cameroonian authorities, in the presence of an international mediator, to discuss federalism or genuine decentralisation that would grant autonomy and adequate funding to the regions and that would guarantee respect for the specific features of the Anglophone judicial and education systems. Similarly, although the Cameroonian government seems to rule out federalism, it might consent to regionalism or genuine decentralisation, which would involve changes to the legislative framework.

To clear the path to talks, the belligerents must each make concessions in order to establish a minimum degree of trust and reverse the spiral of violence. The government should support an Anglophone General Conference in order for Anglophones to appoint representatives to a national dialogue while at the same time providing non-separatist Anglophones with the opportunity to express their point of view. Cameroon’s president should adopt a conciliatory stance and recognise the existence of the Anglophone problem and the legitimacy of the Anglophones’ demands; order investigations into abuses by the security forces; make provision for reparations to victims and the reconstruction of affected areas; and release the hundreds of Anglophone activists currently in detention, including important members of the separatist movement. The separatists should renounce their strategy of Monday ‘ghost towns’ (general strikes) and their school boycott and expel combatants guilty of abuses against civilians.

A combination of internal and international pressures could lead both the government and the separatists to make such concessions. International actors could reward the parties who agree to moderate their positions and sanction those who remain intransigent. The Europeans and Americans, in particular, should consider targeted sanctions against government leaders and senior army officers who continue to obstruct dialogue (travel bans, asset freeze) and separatists who encourage or organise violence (judicial proceedings). The International Criminal Court prosecutor should open preliminary examinations into abuses committed by both sides, to underline that the pursuit of violence will have judicial consequences. International actors are divided, however, on what position to adopt and what measures to take and should first reach a common position, at least among Western countries.

Internally, Cameroonian Francophones and Anglophones who advocate compromise should mobilise to put pressure on the separatists and the government. In particular, federalists should work together to strengthen their position in the talks. They should continue to dialogue with the separatists and encourage them to moderate their positions, and increase the pressure on the authorities to open up to the less...
intransigent separatists. Finally, they should conduct an international campaign to promote peaceful solutions.

Once trust has been established, preliminary talks between government, federalist and separatist representatives will be necessary. These should take place outside the country. During this process, international actors, especially the U.S., Switzerland, the Vatican, the UN, the EU (especially France, Germany and the UK) and the African Union (AU) should continue to encourage the government to dialogue and offer funding and support for the talks.

In the event of a dialogue taking place, they could also help to fund compensation payments to victims of abuses, the reconstruction of Anglophone regions, the return of refugees and internally displaced persons and the disarmament and demobilisation of former combatants. Given the level of acrimony between the parties, the presence of an international mediator will be necessary during the preparatory discussions and then during the national dialogue. Several countries and international institutions and organisations have offered to mediate since the start of the conflict. The UN, the AU, the Catholic Church and Switzerland seem best placed to play this role, because the parties to the conflict perceive them as relatively neutral.

Substantive talks between the three parties should take place in Cameroon, which would require the government to guarantee safe passage for separatist representatives. During these talks, the government should indicate its readiness to amend the Constitution in order to grant greater autonomy to the regions and develop the legal framework for decentralisation. This could include direct elections for the regional councils and these councils’ presidents; the establishment of regional structures with substantial financial and administrative power; and an increase in the powers and resources allocated to communes. The government could also reform institutions and governance in order to take account of the specific features of the educational and judicial systems in the Anglophone regions.

More broadly, the conflict highlights the shortcomings of Cameroon’s centralised governance model and raises two crucial issues that the government must address: the need to improve the way the state handles minority rights, colonial heritages and cultural specificities; and the need for a fairer and more equitable redistribution of the country’s wealth. A lasting solution to the conflict requires dialogue and consensus, which are indispensable to undertake the institutional and governance reforms that Cameroon needs.”

Latin American Developments

In Guatemala, as President Jimmy Morales, accused of corruption, has moved to weaken investigations into official wrong doing, he has turned to the army for support. That led, as of March, to a bill in the legislature to grant amnesty for war crimes in the country’s civil war. Were the bill to pass as proposed, some 30 former military and police personnel could be released from jail and ongoing investigations stopped (Elizabeth Malkin, “Jailed for War Crimes, Guatemalan Military Officials May Now Receive Amnesty,” The New York Times, February 12, 2019).

ICG, "What We Heard in Caracas," Commentary / Latin America & Caribbean, 8 February 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/venezuela/what-we-heard-caracas?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Updates&utm_campaign=1127572ba1-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_02_08_01_CS&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-1127572ba1-393871089, commented: "President Trump’s tough talk and actions opened the door for change in Venezuela. Now the U.S. must avoid hardline inflexibility that could close it, ending the chance of achieving internal peace through an interim power arrangement between the country’s dueling presidents.

It’s hard for the two sides in Venezuela’s political conflict to agree on virtually anything, what with dueling presidents, competing institutions, and diametrically opposed visions. But in a brief visit to Caracas this week, we found broad consensus on one point: it all depends on Donald Trump.

The Venezuelan crisis is not new. President Nicolás Maduro and those immediately around him bear primary responsibility: They’ve badly mismanaged the country, trampled its democratic institutions, stage-managed elections, benefited from massive corruption, and brutally repressed protesters. The
consequences are plain to see, if almost impossible to fathom. Although Venezuela is home to the world’s largest oil reserves, its economy is in free fall.

The country faces widespread poverty, malnutrition, and diseases that not long ago had been eradicated. At least 3 million of its citizens—probably far more—have fled, to Colombia and elsewhere. The two sides engaged in various rounds of negotiations, but the political situation reached an impasse. The government stripped the opposition-dominated National Assembly of any power; the bulk of the opposition boycotted the presidential elections and refused to recognize the newly reelected president.

Enter the Trump administration. Working with leading opposition members and building on growing popular unrest, it worked out a straightforward strategy: Recognize Juan Guaidó, chairman of the National Assembly, as the legitimate president; grant him international support as well as access to foreign oil revenues and assets; impose crippling sanctions on Venezuela’s oil sector; and convince Venezuela’s military and other key regime constituencies that they have everything to lose by backing Maduro, and much to gain by lining up behind Guaidó, who, after presiding over an interim government, and bolstered by U.S. economic largesse, would organize new elections. The bet is that the members of Venezuela’s military and political elite will turn against Maduro once he no longer can provide them with the financial benefits they’ve become accustomed to.

Unlike most of President Trump’s gambits, this one was not the product of an errant tweet. Judging by the speed with which an impressive number of other governments followed the U.S. lead, the decision was well coordinated and planned. Now all it needs to do is succeed.

Viewed from Caracas, however, the future looks a tad more uncertain. Guaidó backers we met celebrate what they see as a perfect storm. The opposition appears more united than ever and enjoys unprecedented international and regional backing. Venezuela is suffering through an economic crisis of almost mythic proportions that the vast majority of Venezuelans blame on Maduro. The opposition leader is enjoying sky-high popularity. And there is no evident way out for an embattled president whose situation—economically, politically, diplomatically—they assume will only deteriorate with time.

Dig a little deeper, however, and even pro-Guaidó politicians admit they have little confidence that this will end peacefully or according to plan. They can’t imagine that Maduro, with so much to lose, will back down. They don’t trust that the military elite, which benefits so much from its control over licit and illicit businesses and which so far they have failed to reassure about its future, will defect. They wonder aloud about a possible U.S. military intervention, believing it could precipitate Maduro’s departure but also a future of violence and chaos in a country awash in weapons and replete with semiautonomous domestic and foreign armed groups. Right now, in short, they are riding high. But, they concede, that hardly means they are riding smoothly toward a denouement.

Those in Maduro’s camp, although unsettled by the depth of popular anger and breadth of international consensus and worried about what the United States might do, add to that list other reasons not to panic. They feel that what they need to do is stand fast, resist, and wait for that perfect storm to pass. They believe that if Maduro is still in power in two or three months, the opposition will lose its momentum and sense of inevitability; cracks will reemerge from within opposition ranks; and, as Venezuela’s economy craters and refugee flows soar, the world’s focus will shift from how to change the regime to how to stem the disaster. They argue that whatever divisions once existed within the broad camp comprising followers of former President Hugo Chávez—and, some acknowledge, those divisions and questioning of Maduro’s stewardship had indeed been growing—have been pushed aside as all close ranks in the face of what they describe as the attempted imposition of a new leader by the outside, a leader they associate with Latin America’s resurgent right, and imposed by the detested gringos, no less.

They also suspect that Guaidó’s political luster will fade. Not only will his presidency be shown to be devoid of actual power, but the political cost of the sanctions will shift from their shoulders to his. Although the public may be enamored with the opposition leader today, it will become disenchanted with him tomorrow, and wonder how he could possibly back American economic punitive measures that will have immeasurably worsened their lot.

Listen carefully to what more pragmatic voices on both sides say privately, and some intriguing ideas begin to surface. From some in the pro-Guaidó camp comes recognition that what Maduro and his allies currently have been offered is a choice between standing firm and surrendering, that they will likely choose the former, and that therefore if a peaceful solution is to be found, some compromise solution is
needed, albeit one in which the government makes major concessions. Maybe an interim power arrangement that includes Maduro and Guaidó or neither of them, so long as the powers of the National Assembly are restored, the electoral commission is reconstituted, political prisoners are released, and early presidential elections under international supervision take place.

From some in the pro-Maduro camp comes acknowledgment of the deficiencies of the current leadership and a willingness to consider early elections, so long as U.S. threats and sanctions are removed and an interim Guaidó presidency is not forced on them. From some in both camps comes agreement that no one can voice these sorts of views publicly lest they be roundly condemned and discredited by their respective harder-line allies. This is a situation that cries for outside mediation.

Reenter the Trump administration. As we spoke to one of the more pragmatic opposition parliamentarians, he offered this curious thought: ‘Trump’s unyielding support is a gift that can do us harm.’ What he meant was that the U.S. president had played a crucial role in altering the country’s political dynamics. As we visited the National Assembly, commotion stirred. We looked up to see Guaidó walking freely amid a throng of journalists and colleagues. That he could do so without fear of arrest or worse, his colleagues remarked, was a direct consequence of U.S. protection and of the implicit threat that, should something happen to him, something would happen to the government.

But what the parliamentarian also meant was that if Washington’s hard-line stance had pried open the door to a genuine transition, its inflexible posture risked slamming it shut. It would be difficult for an opposition member to stray too far from what Trump says, and if Trump says no negotiations and no compromise, then that was the baseline against which opposition members would be judged. He worried that, emboldened by U.S. support, the opposition would overplay its hand and miss an opportunity for a negotiated outcome. He and his colleagues needed the United States and its Latin American allies to complement their pressure with some additional margin of maneuver, some political cover, to enable them to safely prod and probe what might be possible and enter into discussions with a third-party mediator.

Absent such leeway, he feared an ugly scenario: Maduro doesn’t budge, the military refuses to act, violent escalation ensues—whether sparked by a U.S. intervention or something else—and Venezuela plunges into chaos. It’s easy for an American to tell a Venezuelan to keep his or her nerve, to be resolute and unyielding. It’s the Venezuelan who will suffer the consequences.

There is, of course, no guarantee, indeed possibly not even good odds, that a compromise could be found even if the United States were to moderate its stance and acquiesce in third-party efforts to reach a deal. The regime has mastered the art of negotiating for the sake of negotiating, of wasting time for the sake of survival. Even between the two sides’ more pragmatic elements, the gaps remain wide, and it’s hard to know whether their compromise proposals are genuine or simply meant to mollify overly insistent outsiders. But it’s worth testing, and the best test would come if a small group of countries, some trusted by the opposition and others by the regime, took up the task.

For now, in Caracas, such ideas seem somewhat detached from reality. For now, Venezuelans wonder what the military will do: stick with Maduro or split from him. For now, all eyes—the opposition’s as well as the government’s—are on Trump. An opposition deputy who clearly was full of gratitude for what the U.S. president had done put it this way: ‘It’s all in Trump’s hands. Whether he doubles down on pressure. Whether he gives us the space we need to negotiate. Whether, if he fails to dislodge Maduro after a few months, he loses interest or orders a military intervention. Yes, it’s all in Trump’s hands. God help us.’


The aid deliveries, promised by the opposition leader, Juan Guaidó, have been viewed as a major test of his credibility in the month since he declared himself president and promised to call for new elections and end Venezuela’s economic free-fall.”
ICG, Phil Gunson, Senior Analyst, Andes, “High Noon over Humanitarian Aid at Venezuela’s Border,” Q&A / Latin America & Caribbean 22 February 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/venezuela/high-noon-over-humanitarian-aid-venezuelas-border, commented, “Venezuela’s constitutional crisis continues to unfold, with the opposition amassing food and medicine on the borders with the stated intent of turning the military against President Nicolás Maduro, who is refusing the aid. In this Q&A, our Senior Analyst for Venezuela Phil Gunson explains the standoff.

Venezuela’s opposition leader Juan Guaidó, recognised as the country’s interim president by dozens of countries including the U.S., has promised that on 23 February a “humanitarian avalanche”, comprising hundreds of thousands of volunteers and heavy transport vehicles, will begin importing and distributing food and medical aid that is accumulating at various points outside the country. An aid concert, featuring a number of high-profile Latin music stars, is planned for 22 February in the Colombian border town of Cúcuta, while the government has announced its own rival festival across the frontier. Pointing to the vigorous U.S. government campaign to force him out of power, President Nicolás Maduro has called the aid distribution plan a show devised by Washington to provide an excuse for a military intervention. He has vowed to stop it.

What is the conflict about?

President Maduro was sworn in for a second six-year term on 10 January, but the opposition, which says his 20 May 2018 election was a sham, regards him as a “usurper”. Along with the U.S., Canada, almost all member states of the EU and most of Latin America, it argues that the country’s constitution requires Guaidó, elected president of the opposition-controlled National Assembly just five days earlier, to assume the interim presidency pending fresh presidential elections. Under the article they invoke, these should be held within 30 days, though supporters of Guaidó argue that this timetable is neither feasible nor desirable, and that fair elections cannot be held so soon even though the constitution demands it.

In addition to the confrontation over the presidency, Venezuela is facing an increasingly severe social crisis brought on by a collapsing economy and exacerbated by financial and trade sanctions imposed by the U.S. In the past two years, as Latin America and the Caribbean in particular have begun to feel the impact of mass emigration of Venezuelans, the crisis has taken on a regional dimension. And since the Trump administration assumed a leadership role in the coalition of countries pushing for Maduro’s removal, it is inextricably entwined with global geopolitics. In a speech in Miami on 18 February dedicated to Venezuela, President Donald Trump depicted the struggle as a key part of a regional, even global effort to roll back socialism, evoking the Cold War. Omitting any reference to other countries in the coalition, he said the Venezuelan opposition would win “because the United States, a truly great nation, is behind you”.

Do Venezuelans need the aid?

Aid organisations in Venezuela say the country is suffering a “complex humanitarian emergency” due to severe shortages of food and medicine and the government’s refusal to adopt adequate measures to combat hunger and disease. The gross domestic product has fallen by around half since Maduro took office in 2013, according to some estimates, and annual inflation in 2018 was over one million per cent. The government does not publish statistics, but according to a regular survey by three local universities, more than nine out of ten Venezuelans earn too little to buy sufficient food. Most essential medicines are unobtainable and the health system has effectively broken down. For example, in a survey of 40 public hospitals released this month, 75 per cent had no morphine and over half had no insulin. Doctors calculated that over 1,500 patients had died in these hospitals alone in recent months for lack of medicines or equipment. Almost 80 died as a result of power cuts. Diseases such as malaria, measles and diphtheria – once nearly eradicated in Venezuela – are spreading out of control, and patients with chronic conditions such as heart disease, cancer and HIV/AIDS are mostly unable to obtain treatment.

Even large-scale humanitarian aid, however, will not solve the crisis, which requires economic recovery and the reconstruction of health infrastructure and the country’s food and agriculture sector. Experts acknowledge that a few hundred tonnes of aid, were it to be allowed in, would still be just a drop in the bucket.

Will the government let the aid in?

No, at least it says it will not. The government admits that it has encountered economic difficulties, which it attributes to a decline in the price of oil, virtually the country’s only source of foreign exchange, and to U.S. sanctions, which intensified at the end of January when Washington moved to
withhold the proceeds of oil purchases from the state oil corporation PDVSA. U.S. government figures show that oil sales to the country from Venezuela at the start of February were less than a quarter of what they were in the last week of January. Belatedly, the Maduro government has started to acknowledge the scale of public misery in Venezuela, announcing that its ally Russia is sending 300 tonnes of emergency aid (a claim about which President Putin said he knew nothing), and on 15 January signing an agreement with UNICEF and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization to assist with child nutrition.

At the same time, Maduro’s government says talk of a humanitarian crisis and plans for the February 23rd provision of humanitarian aid are merely pretexts for a U.S. military intervention, potentially supported by other South American countries such as Colombia. In reality, it seems to fear that the aid the opposition wants to bring in will result in a challenge to Maduro’s authority over the armed forces. The opposition has been explicit in this regard, voicing its hope – and expectation – that military officers will turn against the sitting president to pave the way for a political transition, starting by refusing to obey orders to block the aid’s entry. Any attempt to thwart the aid delivery, some opposition sources say, would qualify as a crime against humanity, regardless of whether violence was used.

For the Maduro government, the provision of aid also has acute political significance, which is another reason why it will resist the opposition’s efforts. Aid for the needy is a critical political symbol and source of power in Venezuela, where Maduro’s government claims to be carrying out a revolution that benefits the poor while its detractors insist that it uses welfare handouts to reinforce its hold over deprived barrios. The government distributes cheap but basic food rations to an estimated 7.3 million Venezuelan households via a program known as CLAP.

As tensions have risen, both sides have resorted to sabre-rattling. On 15 February, Maduro announced a ‘special plan for permanent deployment’ (of the armed forces), “to defend our border against Colombian provocations”. Sources in Caracas downplay the threat, however, indicating that the government’s priority is to avoid a military flare-up at the border while controlling opposition protests through tough policing measures. The U.S., meanwhile, has refused to rule out military action, repeating that ‘all options are on the table’, while insisting that Maduro should leave office immediately. At a meeting in Miami on 20 February, the commander of the Colombian Armed Forces, General Luis Navarro, and the head of U.S. Southern Command, General Craig Faller, jointly called on their Venezuelan counterparts to ‘do the right thing’ and let the aid through.

Does the government’s argument stand up?

Under international law, governments must give consent to the distribution of food and medical supplies when a population’s survival is threatened, but only if the aid is of an exclusively humanitarian and impartial nature. This aid operation, however, is primarily political, in that it is intended to undermine Maduro and bring about a change of government. ‘Aid that sits on the border while US officials taunt the regime is there for political showmanship, not humanitarian aims’, tweeted Jeremy Konyndyk, the former U.S. foreign disaster assistance chief. In private, some of those behind the ‘humanitarian avalanche’ admit that the relief of suffering is a secondary consideration.

This matter is of great concern to humanitarian organisations that have been working inside Venezuela over recent years to bring in and distribute food and medicines. They fear that the government may target their operations as a result. On 15 February, for example, police took the unusual step of raiding the offices of the private charity Manos Amigas por la Vida (Fundación Mavid), seizing medicines and other supplies intended for HIV/AIDS patients in an operation that some feared may be a sign of things to come. They also arrested some of the staff. The police later announced that the charity had been found to be providing its clients with expired medicines. That said, the humanitarian emergency the government denies is all too real. It is the single biggest factor forcing millions of Venezuelans to flee the country. According to the latest figures from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, at least 3.4 million people – more than a tenth of the population – now live abroad. Most have fled in the past two years.

What is likely to happen?

Juan Guaidó has declared that the aid cannot be stopped, but many observers doubt that much will get across the border on the declared date of 23 February. Most attention is focused on the border near Cúcuta. Hundreds of tonnes of U.S.-funded aid have already been stockpiled there, ready to be taken into Venezuela. But the Venezuelan government has deployed troops and police to stop it and has even
blocked a new, and so far unused, multi-lane cross-border bridge with shipping containers and part of a tanker truck. There are also doubts as to whether the opposition will be able to gather a large enough rally on its side of the border to force the authorities to accept the aid consignments. Border towns such as San Antonio de Táchira and Ureña are relatively small, and road access from the rest of the country to the border would be fairly easy for Venezuelan security forces to regulate.

Other potential crossing points include the far south east of the country on the Brazilian border, and the northern coast, the likely destination of aid stored on the Dutch Antillean island of Curacao or heading from Puerto Rico. In recent days, however, Maduro has ordered a temporary closure of both routes of entry, and indicated that he might do the same on the Colombian border. Despite Maduro’s military manoeuvres, as well as the Trump administration’s pointed refusal to rule out the eventual use of force, both sides seem keen to avoid a military conflict, at least for now. One possible outcome would see some of the aid gaining entry to Venezuela at the same time as Caracas claims that it has successfully resisted an attempt at foreign intervention. But if the aid ploy fails to prompt the Venezuelan armed forces to withdraw support from Maduro, the opposition hopes that the oil sanctions, which are already beginning to nip, will bite hard enough to persuade the president that his time is up.”


A failure at the Guri hydropower plant, which provides the bulk of Venezuela’s electricity, has left most of the country without power since Thursday afternoon. While power returned intermittently to parts of Caracas, the capital, by Friday afternoon, many states remained without electricity."

"Analysts and electricity-sector contractors said the blackout was the result of years of mismanagement and corruption, which have brought the grid, transmission towers and generation plants to the breaking point. Not one of more than a dozen diesel- and natural gas-powered backup plants built by the government in the last decade came online to compensate for the Guri outage."

Finally (though temporary), "Red Cross Granted Access to Deliver Aid in Venezuela," The New York Times, March 29, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/29/world/americas/red-cross-venezuela-aid.html, reported, "The Red Cross said Friday it had received permission from Venezuela’s government and opposition to roll out one of the organization’s biggest global relief campaigns, signaling a possible easing in the dire humanitarian emergency gripping the country."

ICG, Phil Gunson, Senior Analyst, Andes, "The Darkest Hours: Power Outages Raise the Temperature in Venezuela," Commentary / Latin America & Caribbean 15 March 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/venezuela/darkest-hours-power-outages-raise-temperature-venezuela?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=510b2ae7c5-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_02_08_01_S5_COPY_02&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-510b2ae7c5-359871089, commented, "The crippling blackouts across Venezuela are a grim portent of things to come as U.S. oil sanctions kick in and the country’s crisis deepens. All concerned to end Venezuelans’ suffering should vigorously pursue a negotiated transition leading to a power-sharing deal.

On Thursday March 7, at around five in the afternoon, the lights went out in Venezuela. Within a couple of hours, as the tropical night descended, around 90 per cent of the country was plunged into darkness by a massive failure of the electricity generation and transmission system, run by the state-owned Corpoelec. Venezuelans, especially those living outside the capital Caracas, have grown used to frequent lengthy blackouts. The electricity minister, an army general, promised that this one would be fixed in ‘three hours’. But it soon became clear that this was a national emergency, heralding a new and more critical phase of the country’s protracted crisis. In one part of Caracas, the lights came on after 22 hours, but
soon went off again. The second power cut lasted 32 hours. After 100 hours, many parts of the country were still not receiving power, and a week after the lights first went out, full service has yet to be restored.

Normal life came to a virtual halt as people struggled to obtain basic goods and services. Crumbling infrastructure immediately began to fail. Water supplies dried up as pumps stopped working. Half the country’s hospitals have no back-up generators: newborns could no longer be kept safe in incubators (many reportedly died), 95 per cent of dialysis machines ceased operating and patients with needs as diverse as oxygen and insulin faced life-threatening interruptions to their treatment. Long queues formed outside the few petrol stations still pumping and motorways filled with parked vehicles at the few spots where a mobile phone signal could be picked up. Desperate inhabitants of some Caracas barrios began collecting water from the Río Guaire, an open sewer that runs through the capital. In the north-western city of Maracaibo, public fury at the lack of power boiled over into mass looting, affecting an estimated 500 businesses.

Information was also effectivity blacked out. The government provided limited news, and few independent mass media have survived economic constraints and state bullying and censorship. Social media and online news sites made heroic efforts, but without electricity or data connections, most people had to rely on rumour and speculation.

In an already devastated and hyperinflationary economy, the U.S. dollar became the principal currency. A carton of eggs could cost $4; a tanker truck of water, if you could get one, $150. Local bolivar banknotes are almost worthless and extremely hard to obtain, but card payments were limited to those stores with a generator. The military established control over the few places in Caracas where a truck can take on clean water, and only those with the right connections were able to benefit. Photographs circulated online supposedly showing water deliveries to the houses of prominent officials.

**An International Conspiracy?**

The government immediately blamed ‘sabotage’, as it has with virtually every previous major blackout, of which there have been dozens. As the hours stretched into days without power, the claim became more specific. President Nicolás Maduro said a combination of cyber-warfare, an ‘electromagnetic attack’ and direct sabotage of an electricity substation, all carried out either by the U.S. or the domestic opposition, was responsible. Experts had a more mundane explanation: a brushfire beneath overgrown power lines reportedly overheated the transmission cables, causing the hydroelectric generators that supply over 80 per cent of the country’s energy to fail. Thermal power stations that could make up the shortfall operate at a fraction of their capacity due to years of neglect and mismanagement. Government supporters argue that the reliance of the national grid on a few hydroelectric sources dates back to the period before the late president Hugo Chávez took office.

The government has not argued that the blackout was a consequence of the severe sanctions that the U.S. imposed on Venezuela at the end of January. These measures, which block the Maduro government from profiting from the oil sales that previously constituted its principal source of revenue, were designed to force Maduro’s resignation so that Juan Guaidó, who Washington and dozens of its allies recognise as the legitimate interim president, could take power. Whether they will succeed in that endeavour is very unclear; what is clear is that when existing and likely future sanctions take full effect, living conditions in Venezuela will get far worse. Their stated purpose is to strangle the government financially, and they will undoubtedly worsen a meltdown that has already caused over three million to emigrate.

**A Deepening Leadership Crisis**

The inexorable worsening of Venezuela’s humanitarian crisis and the demise of its public services under a policy of intensifying U.S. sanctions, which has so far failed to achieve its primary goal of unseating the government, makes a political solution more imperative than ever. But so far neither the government nor the U.S.-backed opposition shows public willingness to negotiate a transition.

The government hopes the opposition, which made enormous gains under Guaidó’s leadership at the beginning of the year, is running out of steam. Maduro and his allies take heart from the fact that U.S. military intervention appears unlikely at this stage, due in part to the refusal of other countries in the hemisphere to contemplate it. And its claims of sabotage directed against the opposition are shaping a political narrative that portrays its enemies as bent on removing the government regardless of the cost to
the public. It is once again threatening to prosecute Guaidó, in defiance of threats by Washington and its allies of unspecified but severe consequences. The U.S. has closed its embassy, saying the continued presence of its diplomats was a “constraint” on its policy, and European and Latin American governments are considering similar moves. One reason is that they are concerned about the safety of their diplomats; now that the U.S. has withdrawn, they feel that they may be targeted for reprisals.

Meanwhile, the opposition continues to insist on its three-part plan for a new government: ending the “usurpation” of power by Maduro, forming a transitional government and eventually (perhaps after nine to twelve months) holding new polls under a reformed electoral system. The plan is stalled, however, on point one, as Maduro shows no sign of stepping down and Guaidó and his backers in the U.S. and Latin America likewise show no sign of changing their insistence that he do so.

Unless the armed forces withdraw their support from the president, Maduro is likely to remain in power. The loyalty of the military high command to him has confounded the somewhat naïve opposition expectations of a swift rupture in the armed forces. Without a fundamental schism in chavismo, sanctions risk prolonging and intensifying the agony of the population and giving a fresh boost to a migration crisis that is straining the resources of neighbouring countries, above all Colombia, and could become destabilising.

In private, opposition politicians and their foreign allies are beginning to contemplate another path, as supposedly are some government officials. The opposition insists that their overarching objective is to hold free and fair elections, but the U.S. and its Venezuelan allies say this cannot be done with Maduro still in power. Sources close to the government, meanwhile, suggested that early elections under reformed authorities and with full international monitoring might be acceptable outcomes. But they stipulate that an agreement on this issue cannot appear to be the result of foreign pressure on Maduro, lest of all from the U.S. The government would also demand that a chavista candidate be allowed to participate in the polls, and should he or she win, that the victory be respected by all countries and parties. Finally, they demand that sanctions be lifted prior to the polls lest they significantly handicap their chances.

An initial agreement on a future election, hard as it now seems, could pave the way for a broader set of public negotiations on Venezuela’s future political and economic arrangements, thereby softening the probable animosity felt by the losing side in the polls. These talks would also serve to persuade senior military officers that the interests of the armed forces as a whole and their personal economic prospects will be adequately protected. The military as an institution is vital to the transition, not least because of the proliferation in the past two decades of heavily armed groups of all kinds, from criminal gangs to Colombian guerrillas and pro-government paramilitaries (so-called colectivos) that have begun to carve up the country into semi-autonomous fiefdoms.

A genuine transition would involve forming an interim administration in which opposition, pro-government leaders, the armed forces and business groups would all be represented. It would be charged with alleviating the humanitarian crisis and stabilising the economy as sanctions are progressively lifted, while preparing the country for free elections. The opposition-led National Assembly has begun to produce a legal framework for a transition, although it continues to insist that executive power would be held by Guaidó pending elections. In any event, much more needs to be done, particularly in spelling out the future role of the military, the methodology for forming an interim cabinet, and genuine guarantees for the outgoing leadership that chavismo will remain an integral part of Venezuela’s political landscape. Foreign governments and international bodies have a vital role to play in bringing the two sides to the table and acting as guarantors of any agreement.

How Outside Powers Can Foster a Peaceful Transition

Any power-sharing deal will be extremely hard for politicians on both sides to sell. Both have led their supporters to believe that a ‘winner-takes-all’ solution is available. Backtracking from that position threatens to cause serious internal disputes, potentially allowing hardliners on both sides to disrupt a transition. The foreign allies both of Maduro and Guaidó must help by making it clear that they will contemplate neither the status quo nor an external military intervention. Optimally, Washington, Moscow and Beijing would agree on how the crisis should be resolved – a difficult feat, given the current state of tensions between them and their divergent political and economic stakes in Venezuela. The European Union and its recently formed International Contact Group have a role to play in this process, as well as in devising a path toward internal negotiations.
ICG, Ivan Briscoe, Program Director, Latin America and Caribbean, "Will Pressure Bring Down Venezuela’s Government?" Commentary / Latin America & Caribbean 9 April 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/venezuela/will-pressurebring-down-venezuelas-government?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=6002f28a7d-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_04_09_09_06&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-6002f28a7d-359871089, commented, "In Venezuela, the lights go off nearly every day, and there is little for most families to put on the dinner table. Amid the growing misery, will the government’s social base abandon it for the opposition challenger? And will the government itself crack under pressure?"

Angela (not her real name) handles delivery of the state food rations known as CLAPs in her working-class neighbourhood in Caracas. She is a lifelong supporter of chavismo - the left-wing populist philosophy and command economy preached by the late president, Hugo Chávez – and loyal to his successor, the embattled Nicolás Maduro. But today, with numerous outside powers backing opposition figurehead Juan Guaidó’s claim to the presidency and Venezuela sinking ever deeper into poverty and despair, she admits that she and her friends are ‘weary’. At what point in the U.S.-driven effort to asphyxiate the Maduro government, I wonder, might she finally give up the cause? At what point might the sanctions and other pressure have the intended effect? Her eyes glaze over at the question. ‘I cannot live without my medicine’.

As I sit in her front room, a friend or family member passes by with a bag of beef bones. Ángela nods her approval. I am not sure whether she intends to boil them for her family to eat, or to feed them to the slender dog curled up at my side. It could be either, for meat is scarcely affordable for most Venezuelans and the local butchers are now charging prices in U.S. dollars – though Angela says she has never handled a dollar banknote in her life. But it would be rude to ask. We are in La Vega, a populous district in the capital’s west that ballooned decades ago on the fringes of a factory supplying the concrete that raised the towers and paved the highways of a once-prosperous metropolis. La Vega’s chavistas, and there are many, point to the historic achievements of their idol’s twenty years of rule. For once, they say, a Venezuelan government heeded the cries of the poor. Thanks to high oil prices, it handed out lines of credit for ordinary working people to build houses. It supplied them with secure jobs and decent health care. No longer were the masses shunted aside by the upper classes, who instead cowered at their political might.

At chavismo’s grassroots, in a place like La Vega, discontent with Maduro and fear of sanctions’ effects are never far beneath the surface. One community activist arrives at our meeting in a nearby housing project in mourning. A 34-year-old female friend has just died of tuberculosis, brought on by malnutrition and aggravated by a lack of antibiotics. The activist chokes back her grief and proceeds to revile the ethics of contemporary chavismo, so decrepit in comparison to the movement’s early days. Where once there was plenty, now there are bare cupboards and vanishing public transport. Where once there was the promise of popular democracy, now there are the raids and killings by police special forces squads (the FAES), the obsession with securing votes and social media propaganda. But she is clear as to who is her political enemy; ‘I don’t want to go back to the old oligarchy’.

A Brave Front

Guaidó’s challenge is posing similar questions to high-ranking chavista officials and military officers. How long can they continue to back the incumbent if the government cannot provide basic services or ensure that families like Ángela’s have enough to eat? How bad does it have to get before the government caves in?

In the government’s upper echelons, chavistas are counting small, tactical victories over the Venezuelan opposition’s campaign, backed by the U.S. and its Latin American and European allies, to
remove Maduro. They chalk up as successes that the military high command has maintained its cohesion; that in February the government thwarted the entry of opposition humanitarian aid; and that the country has withstood repeated nationwide power cuts with only limited, local breakdowns of order. Multiple sources close to government attest that a survivalist logic has seized the state. It ascribes each public service outage, without evidence, to imperialist intrigues; it hardens its anti-opposition stance with each new day. It has placed Guaidó, the would-be opposition president, under a travel ban, blocked him from running for office and stripped him of his parliamentary immunity from prosecution, while jailing his chief of staff.

Beneath the bluster, however, it is not hard to find senior chavistas who understand that the victories they enumerate are pyrrhic. The country's economic fundamentals are dire and worsening. U.S. imports of Venezuelan oil have collapsed to zero under the sanctions imposed in late January, while the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) reports oil production has fallen at least 13 per cent in February alone, though other estimates point to a far steeper drop. Sources close to the government say new banking sanctions imposed by the U.S. in March, days after the arrest of Guaidó's chief of staff, could compel the state to pay cash for millions of dollars in food imports used for the CLAPs – money the state would struggle to find. Certain Venezuelan diplomats reportedly have to travel to another Latin American country in order to get their wages.

'We are not prepared for a long regime of sanctions,' states one very prominent chavista's chief of staff. 'I think we overestimate our power to resist and underestimate the capacity of gringo sanctions to pressure us'.

A Worried Inner Circle

The circle closest to Maduro – estimated by Elliott Abrams, U.S. special representative for Venezuela, to number ten to twenty people – is not, as critics often suggest, unaware of the scale of the country's hastening disaster. By giving its consent to the Red Cross to begin distributing humanitarian aid in Venezuela, the government in effect acknowledged the reality of public destitution. Other global humanitarian bodies report direct approaches from the government to begin relief operations. Lack of running water as a result of the power outages is impossible for officials to ignore: it led last week to furious protests in chavista neighbourhoods blocks away from the presidential palace in Caracas, and people regularly fill buckets in the fetid Guaire river that courses through the city. But the government portrays this extreme deprivation as part of a war of attrition, with each new adversity giving a pretext for government leaders or powerful chavista factions to crack down on the opposition with yet more venom.

The inner circle is also conscious that refusing to yield to any opposition demand – with the exception of accepting humanitarian relief – and shunning the gestures that could help initiate serious negotiations could bring catastrophe. A senior chavista identifies three scenarios in which the government could find itself obliged to talk: mass public disorder, akin to the 1989 Caracazo riots that followed a hike in fuel prices, led to hundreds of deaths and helped pave the way for the rise of Chávez; rifts between the civilian and military wings of government; and foreign military intervention.

But several sources close to government note that, even in these extreme cases, civilian leaders may not back down from unbending resistance. The armed forces, led by Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino López, may well need to persuade them to do so. As one source familiar with government thinking said, 'when the military high command sees the cost of giving in to external pressure as lower than the cost of keeping internal peace and order, then they are likely to act'. Tensions with the military have reportedly flared in the wake of the March power cuts. For the time being, however, it seems unlikely that the armed forces would wish to stage a coup. There has been no successful putsch in Venezuela since 1958, and conditions for carrying one out now are inauspicious given the intelligence services' close watch over the barracks and the heavy consequences that suspected plotters pay.

A Sanguine Opposition

The opposition recognises that its campaign to unseat Maduro, establish a transitional government, and stage free and fair elections has run into difficulties. Many are nonetheless unperturbed, saying the chavistas' recalcitrance is simply what one would expect from corrupt, criminal officials desperate to keep power. Sources close to Guaidó insist that they are patient. They point to the fact that the interim president is now Venezuela's most popular politician, with over 60 per cent support. Some pragmatists in the opposition are displeased that the Trump administration's unshinting backing for Guaidó
A Yawning Gap

Alert to the spectre of social chaos, an escalating migrant exodus across the border with Colombia – which remains officially closed – the spread of non-state armed groups, and the dangers of U.S. or Russian military entanglement in Venezuela, figures from both government and opposition in private calls for restraint and compromise. International efforts to push for a negotiated solution or to create the conditions under which peace talks could take place, above all the EU-backed International Contact Group, are intensifying. Formulas for unblocking the stalemate between the two sides are proliferating, while secret channels for talks are burrowing underneath the lines. Leading chavistas now speak candidly of the conditions under which they would accept new elections and a possible period in opposition. "Well, at least we had 20 years in power", says one, stoically, "and the oligarchy had nearly 200". Leading opposition figures court heresy by accepting that Maduro could stay in office until these new elections are held, possibly by presiding over a government of technocrats.

But these initiatives may fail to yield more than soothing chatter unless they resolve the fundamental differences that the pressure campaign is, if anything, deepening rather than mitigating. Even for pragmatists in the opposition, no negotiation is possible without a clear show of good faith from the government, given the failures of previous rounds of talks. To them, good faith means a landmark concession: a commitment that the government will accept losing power, restoration of the National Assembly’s authority or sweeping reform of the discredited National Electoral Council as a first step toward early elections. A mass release of political prisoners, of the kind that President Daniel Ortega has promised in Nicaragua, would likewise help bring about a thaw.

In the government’s eyes, meanwhile, the economic suffocation that should in theory be encouraging them to consider negotiations instead prompts them to believe that the opposition and Washington desire not the restoration of democracy, but, in the words of one recent minister, the ‘political annihilation of chavismo’. Whereas the opposition demands a token of government sincerity to begin peace talks, the chavistas insist on guarantees of fair treatment at the end of the process. They wish to ensure that their movement will be respected as a political force, that they will not be prosecuted or exposed to a witch hunt, and that the new government will respect their social policies. They insist that they should be entitled to take part in new elections if these occur, and keep power if they are victorious. And they are adamant that no guarantee or pledge to respect their demands can be trusted so long as the U.S. maintains support for Guaidó’s “parallel government” and imposes sanctions that will not be lifted barring the chavistas’ total surrender.

Distrust and dogmatism make it extraordinarily hard for either side to give what the other wants in order to commence negotiations in earnest. Meanwhile, until talks begin, the campaign of economic pressure will persist and the most vulnerable Venezuelans will feel it most acutely. And the pressure will not necessarily yield the result the opposition hopes for.

Back in La Vega, the chavista community activist finishes with her withering assessment of the Maduro government. It has betrayed the people – of that she is sure. So I ask her how she would feel if Guaidó came to power. She flames with fresh certainty, but of a different nature. “Look at me”, she says. She is black. “I am not going back to being compared with the Guaire river, to the dirty waters of the Guaire. No way.”

One month after Juan Guaidó staked claim to the interim presidency and Washington imposed oil sanctions, the Venezuelan opposition hardliners’ strategy for removing President Nicolás Maduro has produced no immediate results. Though under extreme financial pressure, and notwithstanding the decision by dozens of countries to transfer recognition from Maduro to opposition leader Guaidó, the government has refused to hand over power. The hardliners’ approach, designed in tandem with the Trump administration, threatens to worsen Venezuela’s crisis rather than resolve it.

Close to 600 members of the security forces have deserted in the past week, with Venezuelan troops and police flowing daily across the bridges into Colombia. Yet the bulk of the military continues to back the Maduro government. An offer of amnesty for those soldiers willing to switch sides seems to have found few takers. This is no surprise. Many in the military regard amnesty as insulting, as the term suggests that they are criminals. The armed forces are also fragmented, due both to coup-proofing policies begun under President Hugo Chávez and to the government’s economic co-option of the top brass. The severe internal repression exercised by military intelligence, along with Cuba’s G2, further reduces the likelihood that a sizeable fraction such as a division or regional command will break ranks with the government.

The highly publicised 23 February attempt to introduce humanitarian aid into Venezuela succeeded in one respect: it demonstrated how far the Maduro government will go to resist what it described as a Trojan horse for military intervention. But the government believes that it emerged victorious, since the aid effort did not fracture the ruling coalition or bring much, if any, assistance into the country. The aid standoff also showcased the opposition’s lack of a credible Plan B. The effort’s apparent failure led some hardliners to call more vocally for outside military intervention, only to see major Latin American states and nations plus Canada convened in 2017 to resolve the Venezuelan crisis – in Bogotá. The threat of intervention has receded for the time being, and divisions in the international coalition backing Guaidó lie exposed.

Meanwhile, Venezuela will soon feel the devastating economic and social impact of oil sanctions. The numbers fleeing the country are set to rise dramatically, as the government struggles to make ends meet; the opposition’s popularity could also sharply decline as the public sees no improvement in its lot. Amid larger refugee flows, calls for action will likely intensify. The result could be two unattractive scenarios: a steady deterioration of the country’s misery, with no plan for ending it, or renewed interest in a perilous foreign military intervention that could sow chaos in Venezuela and beyond.

Working Toward a Non-Violent Solution

Both sides have raised the possibility of talks to resolve the crisis, but at present neither side is willing to soften preconditions that the other finds unacceptable. Maduro’s allies say they are prepared to negotiate institutional and political reform, as well as, potentially, early elections, but not an immediate handover of power; for the current opposition leadership, as well as for the U.S. and Lima Group states, Maduro’s exit from power is a required first step, to be followed by an interim government and elections under new rules to be drawn up during the transition phase. Both sides seem to believe that time is on their side: the government, insofar as it thinks that if it can hold on for two or three months, the worst will be over; the opposition, insofar as it holds the view that as pressure grows, Maduro’s camp and the military will crack. It is a recipe for a stalemate that harms all sides: a deepening economic plight that makes it increasingly difficult for Maduro to govern, coupled with a perpetuation of his hold on power that makes it impossible for the opposition to realise its aspirations.
A potential way out exists, but it will require both sides to make tough compromises brokered by a third-party mediator. A proposed transition could occur in stages. The government would need to take confidence-building measures, most importantly releasing political prisoners; dissolving the National Constituent Assembly elected in 2017 (which is stacked with Maduro allies), if necessary after a referendum on its final constitutional reform proposals; and restoring the opposition-controlled National Assembly’s powers. The second stage should then be free and fair elections, under a comprehensively reformed Electoral Council and with full-scale international monitoring. Such elections would need a minimum of nine months and more likely over a year to prepare.

During the interim, the Maduro government could transfer power to a transitional cabinet including representatives of both chavismo and the opposition. All sides would need to reassure the military high command as to their future; it would be essential to have them on board for any successful transition. The opposition’s amnesty offer depends for its effectiveness on trust that does not exist at present. The only guarantee that will likely appeal to the military is a share of power, meaning their participation in the transitional government, combined with a clear framework for their future role. Such guarantees can emerge only from substantive negotiations, not from personal decisions by senior officers taken in response to public offers such as amnesty or the lifting of individual sanctions. The primary tasks of the transitional regime would be economic stabilisation, humanitarian assistance, internal security and institutional reform, all of which are likely to require significant external assistance.

In other words, Venezuela will need a genuine transition period as opposed to the kind of abrupt ‘regime change’ that many in the military, the chavista movement and the government believe the current plan implies. An international monitoring and verification process, involving countries acceptable to both sides, could cement the guarantees and other commitments made in such negotiations. The centrality of the military to a transition suggests that the high command will need to make the first significant move in this direction, with the understanding that its core interests will be respected. The armed forces will also need to preserve what remains of its institutional cohesion to deal with significant internal security issues during and after a transition phase. Optimally, the opposition would hold the principal economic portfolios in the transitional government while chavismo would continue to control security and defence ministries, albeit with a mandate to reform, notably by ending the worst abuses by security forces. And, optimally, neither Maduro nor Guaidó would hold the presidency during this period, though agreement on this point ought not to be a precondition for negotiations to commence. The presence of Maduro in particular will be a sticking point for both the internal opposition and the U.S. administration. But unless he is ousted in a palace coup or by some other means prior to negotiations, he is unlikely to step aside; he almost certainly would not do so in favour of Guaidó, whose presidency the government and chavistas would perceive as a U.S.-backed coup d’état.

Recently, voices within the U.S. government have sounded a welcome note in this regard, albeit in private: they seem to accept that a negotiated transition is the most desirable way forward, recognise that bringing chavistas on board would be a pivotal step, and acknowledge both that the Venezuelan military will need to play a central part in urging the Maduro government toward such an outcome and that this will not happen through individual defections or offers of amnesty. But there are discordant notes, and these unfortunately come from the most senior levels: statements from National Security Adviser John Bolton to the effect that the U.S. administration is “not afraid to use the word Monroe doctrine” and that its goal is to put an end to the experiments of former President Hugo Chávez as well as of Maduro, are highly unlikely to assuage the fears of chavistas or others about Washington’s intent.

Addressing the Humanitarian Emergency

The humanitarian needs of ordinary people living in Venezuela as well as of the growing diaspora are urgent and require redress without preconditions. No party should politicise Venezuelans’ suffering, as the U.S. and opposition hardliners did on February 23; nor should anyone ignore the suffering on the grounds that no crisis exists, as the government continues to disingenuously proclaim. To meet the needs, the government must accept more humanitarian assistance; to date, humanitarian agencies operating in Venezuela have done their work discreetly and on a relatively small scale in light of the government’s public aversion to aid. For their part, and in particular given that they chose to impose oil sanctions, the U.S. and the opposition should agree to steps that will alleviate suffering even before a transitional
government is in place. Both Maduro and Guaidó allies also should find ways to lower tensions along the border with Colombia, where a miscalculation – or deliberate provocation – could lead to a wider conflict.

Aid continues to get into Venezuela by private transport, but to reach the most vulnerable people in sufficient volume it must be greatly expanded. One option would be to formally place the delivery and verification of aid in the hands of neutral parties such as the Red Cross and the UN. At the same time, the UN should consider establishing a cross-border aid operation protected by a small contingent at both ends, for example, of the Tienditas bridge close to the Colombian border town of Cúcuta. This operation would require the consent of both Colombian and Venezuelan authorities, as well as the informal acquiescence of the opposition and its international backers. The UN could set up such a mechanism through agreement among its branch offices and the governments in the two countries. These understandings would be essential to ensuring suitable security conditions for the passage of aid across the land border, and the UN could also use such channels to expedite aid deliveries via Venezuelan airports. These steps might allow both sides to save face, while addressing the humanitarian emergency on a larger scale than has hitherto been possible.

Once aid reaches Venezuela, distribution should fall under the control of a National Coordination Mechanism, comprising the main aid agencies operating in the country and government representatives. This mechanism would work alongside the UN in identifying populations with the greatest need, above all in southern Venezuela, and guaranteeing that aid reaches them (no independent assessment of humanitarian needs has yet been carried out in Venezuela). The mechanism could help ensure that all concerned use aid properly and transparently and that the government does not divert it for political purposes.

U.S. and Canadian Developments

Nicole Perlroth, "Chinese and Iranian Hackers Renew Their Attacks on U.S. Companies," The New York Times, February 18, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/18/politics/china-hacking-iran-usa.html, reported, "Businesses and government agencies in the United States have been targeted in aggressive attacks by Iranian and Chinese hackers who security experts believe have been energized by President Trump's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal last year and his trade conflicts with China. Recent Iranian attacks on American banks, businesses and government agencies have been more extensive than previously reported. Dozens of corporations and multiple United States agencies have been hit, according to seven people briefed on the episodes who were not authorized to discuss them publicly."

"The Iranian attacks coincide with a renewed Chinese offensive geared toward stealing trade and military secrets from American military contractors and technology companies."

Nicole Perlroth, David E. Sanger and Scott Shane, "How Chinese Spies Got the N.S.A.'s Hacking Tools, and Used Them for Attacks," The New York Times, May 6, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/06/us/politics/china-hacking-cyber.html, reported, "Chinese intelligence agents acquired National Security Agency hacking tools and repurposed them in 2016 to attack American allies and private companies in Europe and Asia, a leading cybersecurity firm has discovered. The episode is the latest evidence that the United States has lost control of key parts of its cybersecurity arsenal."

"The Chinese action shows how proliferating cyberconflict is creating a digital wild West with few rules or certainties, and how difficult it is for the United States to keep track of the malware it uses to break into foreign networks and attack adversaries' infrastructure."

With racism against all non-whites and non-Christians rising, in the United States, along with an increase in hate crimes, Richard Fausset, "3 Black Churches Have Burned in 10 Days in a Single Louisiana Parish," The New York Times, April 5, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/05/us/louisiana-black-church-fires.html, reported, "Three historically black churches have burned in less than two weeks in one south Louisiana parish, where officials said they had found "suspicious elements" in each case. The officials have not ruled out the possibility of arson, or the possibility that the fires are related."

entered the synagogue on Saturday yelling anti-Semitic slurs, and opened fire with an A.R. 15-style gun. He paused when the rabbi of the congregation tried to talk with him. But he fired again, shooting the rabbi in the hand.

His attack left a 60-year-old woman dead, the rabbi wounded and a 34-year-old man and a girl with shrapnel wounds."

"The shooting, at Chabad of Poway, about 25 miles north of San Diego, is the most recent in a series of deadly attacks at houses of worship, including the mass shooting at mosques in New Zealand last month and the church bombings in Sri Lanka this past week. It came exactly six months after one of the worst acts of violence against the American Jewish community in decades left 11 dead in a Pittsburgh synagogue."

School shootings have also been continuing, as well as other mass murders.

Central American refugees coming to the U.S. across its Mexican border (largely the result of U.S. policies) reached a higher level in March 2019, but this was well below the much higher levels of peak immigration of earlier decades. Because of the redeployment of border agents combined with other Trump Administration immigration related policies, the U.S. Immigration Service and its facilities were overwhelmed by the numbers, causing an artificial crisis. Current levels of migration to the U.S. are largely the result of climate change and continuing U.S. policies, that the Trump administration has suggested worsening, that keep corrupt undemocratic governments in power, promote economic inequality and violence, and do only a little to ameliorate the resulting threats to life and livelihood in a number of countries (Miriam Jordan and Simon Romero, "Spring Brings Surge of Migrants, Stretching Border Facilities Far Beyond Capacity," The New York Times, March 30, 2019; https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/30/us/border-migrants-el-paso-bridge-spring-surge.html; discussions on the Tom Hartmann radio program in late March and Early April, 2019; and Kirk Semple and Paulina Villegas, "Catastrophic Delays at U.S.-Mexico Border Follow Redeployment of Agents," The New York Times, April 5, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/05/world/americas/us-mexico-border-delays.html).

The Southern Poverty Law Center Reports that the number of hate groups in the United States, which declined from a high of 1018 in 2011 to 784 in 2014, has since risen steadily to a new high of 1020 in 2018 (Heidi Beirich, "Rage Against Change," Intelligence Report, Spring 2019).

DIALOGING

FUEL TO THE FIRE: HOW GEOENGINEERING THREATENS TO ENTRENCH FOSSIL FUELS AND ACCELERATE CLIMATE CHANGE

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As global temperature rise continues to alter our natural environment with devastating impacts for humanity and biodiversity, the need for urgent action is increasingly clear. But as the climate crisis intensifies, once far-fetched “solutions” are finding their way dangerously closer to the mainstream.

Grouped together under the name of “geoengineering,” a variety of earth-altering techniques promise to serve as a “Hail Mary” pass for the health of our planet. From pulling carbon dioxide out of the air, to altering how the sun’s rays reach the earth, these technologies attempt to minimize the effects of climate change after carbon dioxide has already been emitted, instead of stopping those emissions in the first place. Geoengineering offers the alluring (and false) promise that we can continue to rely on fossil fuels while somehow avoiding the catastrophic climate impacts of a fossil economy.
Unsurprisingly, fossil fuel companies have been among the most active backers of geoengineering because it allows them to keep pumping more oil, burning more coal, and reaping the profits.

For fossil fuel companies, that’s precisely the appeal of geoengineering: the promise and the myth that we can continue business as usual. In reality, these technologies further entrench the fossil fuel industry’s hold on our energy systems, while doing nothing to address the causes of the climate crisis.

For example, a process called direct air capture would suck carbon dioxide directly from the air by installing what amounts to huge air filters all around the planet. But it takes a lot of energy to do so (and not necessarily renewable energy). And where does the “recovered” carbon go afterward? Most likely into new diesel and jet fuels, or pumped into the ground to produce more oil, which would then be burned and re-emitted in a continuous loop of expanding carbon emissions.

In other words, fossil fuel companies have found yet another way to profit off of climate destruction.

What’s more, geoengineering technologies could create entirely new threats for human rights and the environment. For example, a technique called solar radiation modification would block the sun’s rays or reflect them back into space, before they have a chance to warm our atmosphere. Yet the technologies to do so also create profound risks that will threaten human health, food security, and the environment across large regions, like acid rain, ozone depletion, and massive changes to rainfall patterns.

The growing urgency of the climate crisis is forcing difficult choices and difficult conversations even among committed climate advocates. The window for avoiding catastrophic climate change is small and closing rapidly.

While advocates argue that geoengineering technologies could serve as an insurance policy in case we push ourselves past the point of no return, it could serve to ensure just that: Holding onto the promise of an unproven, possibly disastrous technology could weaken the political will to stop climate change. We cannot stand by and cross our fingers for technological fixes that could create new environmental challenges and make the transition to a low-carbon economy more difficult.

But most importantly, we don’t need to.

The world already has the tools we need to solve the climate crisis. We can promote renewable energy and energy efficiency, protect and restore natural forests and ocean ecosystems, and respect the rights of indigenous peoples to protect the lands they safeguard. All of these are workable, cost-effective solutions to the climate crisis that we can use right now. The problem is not one of technology, but one of political will.

We know how to solve the climate crisis. Geoengineering is not that solution.


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THE RE MAY BE SOME VIABLE FORMS OF CARBON CAPTURE

Stephen M. Sachs*

I agree with Carroll Muffet that many forms of proposed geoengineering, including examples of proposed carbon capture, are likely to be more destructive than helpful, for all the reasons that he cites. Moreover, in banking on them, there is the danger that we will delay doing what can, and must be done now, quickly, on the unsupported assumption that some new scientific or technical development will come along to solve the problem.

At the same time, it is important not to dismiss any and all such technologies out of hand. It may be that there are some that will be helpful in stemming the production of greenhouse gases, or otherwise combating global warming induced climate change, without worsening the problem they are trying to solve, or causing other serious problems, or taking huge risks, when we already have good means for solving the problem. Since what needs to be done is huge, and must be accomplished in a quite limited time, any conceivably promising approach ought to be investigated, if the costs of the research and development itself are not too high. And if we do not act swiftly and sufficiently enough with the proven methods we have, then we might need additional tools - but only if they are appropriate ones.

In whatever we do that relates to the environment - and almost everything we do does (and not only to global warming) - the lesson from our current experience is that everything is connected and problems need to be approached holistically, considering all the significant effects - positive and negative primary and secondary - short, medium and long term. This is a lesson that was learned long ago by Indigenous peoples after long careful study. We need to complete our relearning of it quickly.

We need to avoid the errors of narrow approaches - such as the powerful ones that on the one hand have made western science very successful - but on the other hand have caused serious unintended consequences, including our current environmental crisis: global warming induced climate change, pollution and other forms of degradation of the environment, and overuse of resources. This means taking into account all the likely significant impacts of decisions as possible. But since in most cases that is very complex so that the future cannot be accurately predicted (including that assumed stable conditions may change), it is necessary to regularly review the impacts of decisions, to make necessary adjustments.

Moreover, in the west, we have tended to underestimate the difference in different locations - in time, place and culture. Thus, there has been a tendency to apply good general principles or programs, without adequate consideration of the circumstance to which they are to be applied. This has, and continues to cause, all kinds of failures, including in dealing with the environment. The watchwords of what we need in our approaches is first to see how everything is connected, taking into account the full range of significant effects of such action. Second to continually monitor and review actions, carefully making changes as appropriate. Third, to carefully consider the conditions of any specific application, adopting that application to the needs of that place (including not applying a generally good action where it would be counterproductive to do so), and in each place adjusting for changing conditions on site, and in relation to shifting conditions elsewhere. Doing all of that requires extensive research and analysis. But it is absolutely necessary for everyone's welfare, and in some critical cases, for our survival.

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RENEWABLE ENERGY IS CHEAPER THAN FOSSIL FUELS. CALIFORNIA PROVES IT

Tom Solomon*

With New Mexico’s Energy Transition Act now leading the country’s shifts towards clean renewable energy, fossil fuel interests and their supporters seek to spread disinformation on the real benefits of renewables. They can’t stand that solar and wind energy is clean, non-polluting, abundant, and now, as the cheapest form of electricity (per Lazard), is out-competing fossil fuel energy on cost. Their latest effort is to point to high electricity costs in California and blame them on that state’s move towards renewable energy. But as we know, “correlation is not causation”. California’s high electricity prices are NOT due to a shift to renewables, but instead are due to their over-reaction to the Enron-caused energy crisis and the rolling blackouts of 2000-2001, caused by Enron’s criminal market manipulations. California’s response to those blackouts was to overbuild gas-fired power plants. And because energy demand has also dropped due to increasing energy efficiency, “Californians are paying billions for power they don’t need”. This was the finding of a Feb 5, 2017 LA Times report by that title (1).

Whereas many states require an energy capacity cushion of 10% over demand, California regulators responded by requiring a capacity cushion of +15%, and their gas-powered building boom had them on a path towards overbuilding by 21%! Of course their costs were high!

Fortunately, California regulators recently came to their senses and in Nov 2018 cancelled three gas-fired power plants proposed by PG&E, instead directing them to build utility scale battery storage, saying it was cheaper (2).

The fact is that renewable energy requires no fuel, therefore no fuel costs and no pollution. And solar and wind provide peak power at different times of the day and of the year and therefore complement each other. Studies show that significant utility battery storage is not required until renewables reach about 50% of grid power, which for NM is in 2030 (3). And with battery storage competitive already, and prices dropping 20% per year, per McKinsey (4), it will be available and inexpensive when we need it. Renewable energy wins on climate, on health and on cost. Now let’s build it as fast as we can.


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U.S. RECOGNITION OF ISRAEL’S GOLAN ANNEXATION A THREAT TO WORLD ORDER:
THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION’S DECISION MARKS A SERIOUS VIOLATION OF FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF INTERNATIONAL LAW.

Stephen Zunes*


President Trump has signed a proclamation to formally recognize Golan Heights as Israeli territory.

Following its conquest of the Golan region, Israeli forces drove out most of its residents in what has accurately been called ethnic cleansing. The Druze inhabitants of the five remaining villages suffered under years of Israeli military occupation and largely remain loyal to Syria. Protests immediately broke out following Trump’s announcement. When Israel tried to impose its laws on the region in 1981, the Syrian Druze engaged in a successful nonviolent resistance campaign, blocking Israeli efforts to force them to carry Israeli ID cards, conscript them into the Israeli military, and other efforts to incorporate them into Israel.

In response to Israel’s attempted annexation, the U.N. Security Council in 1981 unanimously adopted, with the support of the United States, resolution 497, which declared that “the Israeli decision to impose its laws, jurisdiction, and administration in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights is null and void and without international legal effect.”

But the United States blocked any effort to enforce this and related resolutions.

Subsequently, the Israeli government has been building settlements in the fertile highlands and growing Golan’s Jewish population to some 26,000 people, in violation of international law and U.N. Security Council resolutions, which prohibit occupying powers from settling civilians onto territories seized by military force.

Again, however, the United States has blocked enforcement of these resolutions and Israeli colonization has therefore continued unabated.

Due to the ongoing Syrian civil war and war crimes by the Assad regime, few are suggesting an immediate return of the Golan to Syria. However, a number of other options are available, including handing over the territory to United Nations administration, as took place following the Indonesian withdrawal from occupied East Timor in 1999.

The timing of the U.S. decision was widely seen as an effort to boost the chances of Israel’s rightwing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

International reaction to Trump’s decision has been overwhelmingly negative. The French foreign ministry noted how “The recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan, occupied territory, would be contrary to international law, in particular the obligation for states not to recognize an illegal situation.” The German government condemned the “unilateral steps” taken by Washington, D.C., observing that, “If national borders should be changed, it must be done through peaceful means between all those involved.”

Former deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs Tamara Cofman Wittes noted in a tweet that the decision “yanks the rug out from under U.S. policy opposing Russia’s annexation of Crimea, as well as U.S. views on other disputed territories.”

Along with the State Department’s decision to no longer refer to the West Bank as occupied territory, the Golan decision may also serve as precedent to recognize Israeli sovereignty over much of the Palestinian territory seized in the 1967 war. It will no doubt embolden other governments with expansionist agendas, such as Morocco, which has occupied much of Western Sahara since 1975.
“If Washington stops upholding the core international principle opposing the acquisition of territory by force,” warns Wittes, “we should expect more states to seize territory they covet from their neighbors.”

The timing of the U.S. decision was widely seen as an effort to boost the chances of Israel’s rightwing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, currently in a tough re-election fight in the face of an imminent indictment on corruption charges.

But the move also destroys any hope of the United States playing a role in negotiating an end to Syria’s civil war and strengthens the hand of Syria’s brutal dictator Bashar al-Assad, enabling him to play the nationalist card and reinforce his alliance with the Iranian regime and the radical Lebanese Hezbollah.

“It really puts the moderates in an impossible position,” observed Bassma Kodmani, a Syrian opposition leader and member of the negotiating team. “Assad will mobilize with the help of Iran and justify the presence of Iran, and the presence of militias, and the aggressive posture of Iran in the region.”

Despite Trump’s claim that Israeli control of the Golan Heights is vital for Israeli security, there is a growing awareness within Israel that it is far less important in an era when the principal threats to Israel’s security come in the form of suicide bombers and long-range missiles. Israeli army chief Lt. Gen Moshe Yaalon observed in 2004, that Israel could cede the Golan Heights in return for peace and more successfully defend Israel’s internationally recognized border.

Trump’s dangerous and rash decision to recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Syrian Golan was actually built on policy failures of previous administrations. Israel and Syria came close to a peace agreement in early 2000 when Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak agreed to withdraw from Syrian territory in return for the Syrian government agreeing to strict security guarantees, normalized relations, the demilitarization of the Golan, and the end of support for radical anti-Israel groups. A dispute regarding the exact demarcation of the border, constituting no more than a few hundred yards, prevented a final settlement.

With the death of Syrian president Hafez al-Assad later that year and the coming to power of the rightwing Likud Bloc in the subsequent Israeli election, talks were indefinitely suspended. Assad’s successor, Bashar al-Assad, called for the resumption of talks where they left off, but both Israel and the United States rejected the proposal. A 2003 resolution supported by an overwhelming bipartisan majority of Congress insisted that Syria enter new talks “unconditionally,” effectively rejecting the position of the more moderate Israeli government of former Prime Minister Barak and instead embraced the rejectionist position of the subsequent right-wing Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

In 2006, several prominent members of the Israeli cabinet—including Defense Minister Amir Peretz and Internal Security Minister Avid Dichter—called on their government to resume negotiations with Syria. Although Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni appointed a senior aide to prepare for possible talks, such initiatives did not get any support from Washington. According to the Jewish Daily Forward, it appeared that “Israel would be prepared to open a channel with Syria but does not want to upset the Bush administration.”

Indeed, when Israeli officials asked Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice about pursuing exploratory talks with Syria, her answer, according to the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, was, “don’t even think about it.” Similarly, the Israeli daily Yedioth Ahronoth reported that Israeli government officials “understood from President Bush that the United States would not take kindly to reopening a dialogue between Israel and Syria.”

U.S. pressure succeeded. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert reportedly expressed concern that it would be inappropriate to counter President Bush’s “clear position on this issue” and who is “Israel’s most important ally.” Similarly, Israeli Vice Premier Shimon Peres was quoted as saying, “The worse thing we could do is contradict the United States, which opposes negotiating with Syria.” Interior Minister Ronni
Baron told a television reporter, “When the question on the agenda is the political legacy of Israel’s greatest friend, President Bush, do we really need now to enter into negotiations with Syria?”

The failure of the United States to help bring peace between Syria and Israel when it was possible has now led us to the point where Trump and Netanyahu believe they can get away with this dangerous defiance of international legal norms and worsen an already difficult situation regarding Israel, Syria, and its neighbors. The decision could play a major role in destabilizing an already-tenuous world order.

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**LIBYA: WILL THE U.N. APPEAL FOR A HALT TO THE MARCH ON TRIPOLI BE HEARD?**

Rene Wadlow, * April 7, 2019

With the administrative-political situation in Libya badly stalemate and a meeting for negotiations to be held 14-16 April unlikely to make progress, on Thursday 4 April 2019, General Khalifa Haftar, one of the key players in the drama decided to start a "March on Tripoli" and to take overall power by force.

Most of the significant buildings in Libyan cities were built by Italians during the Fascist period when Libya was an Italian colony. Thus, General Hafter has patterned himself on Mussolini’s 1922 "March on Rome". In 1922, the diplomats of most States looked away when Mussolini marched or the diplomats took it as a domestic affair.

In 2019, the "March on Tripoli" has drawn more international attention and concern. The U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres met with Hafter a few hours before the March began. Guterres was in Libya to facilitate the 14-16 April meeting on which his Special Representative Ghassan Salomé has been working for some time in the hope of drawing a road map for long-delayed elections. On Friday 5 April, the U.N. Security Council held a closed-door emergency meeting. The Security Council called for a halt to the March on Tripoli and the deescalation of the growing armed conflict.

The Security Council recognized the real possibilities of broader armed conflict and its consequences on the civilian population. In the recent past the Libyan armed factions have violated the laws of war and have a sad record of abuses against civilians.

We will now have to see if Khalifa Hafter is more open to international appeals than was Benito Mussolini. My impression is that the goal of holding overall power is stronger than the respect of international law. However, even a successful "March on Tripoli" will not create the conditions for an administration of a culturally and geographically-diverse country. New and appropriate constitutional structures must be developed.

There cannot be a return to the earlier Italian colonial structures, nor to the forms of government at independence developed by King Idris al Sanussi which depended largely on his role as a religious leader using religious orders, nor the complicated pattern of "direct democracy" developed by Muammar al Qadhafi. The Association of World Citizens has proposed the possibility of con-federal structures.

The post 2011 Libyan society faces large and complex issues. Resolving the institutional, economic and political issues is urgent and cannot be settled by elections alone. There are three distinct regions which must have some degree of autonomy: Tripolitania and Cyrenaica both bordering the Mediterranean and Fezzan in the southern Sahara. Within each of the three regions there are differing and
often rival tribal societies which are in practice more kinship lines than organized tribes. (1) There are differing economic interests and there are differing ideologies ranging from "Arab Socialism" to the Islamist ideology of the Islamic State which has spread from its Syrian-Iraqi base.

The situation is critical, and the next few days may be crucial for the future of the country.

Note

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SACRIFICING GREATNESS FOR PERSONAL AMBITION: AN OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT ERDOGAN

Alon Ben-Meir,* February 15, 2019

Over the past year, I had the opportunity to speak to many Turkish scholars and former government officials, the majority of whom left your country because they feared for their lives and their loved ones.

The one question that kept on surfacing is why a leader like you—who has achieved the pinnacle of power by undertaking the most significant social, political, and judiciary reforms, pursued economic development, and came close to establishing a model of Islamic democracy—reversed gears and abandoned your most impressive achievements?

From every angle I examined your behavior, I could not escape the conclusion that your reforms were nothing more than a vehicle by which you could solidify power to allow you to promote your political Islamic agenda. As far back as December 1997, you publicly equated Islam to a military crusade, citing a poem that states in part: “The mosques are our barracks, the domes our helmets, the minarets our bayonets, and the believers our soldiers.”

Your unruly ambition to become the leader of the Sunni Muslim world is the driving force behind your ceaseless efforts to implant a Turkish-oriented religious dogma in many countries in Europe and the Middle East.

You have invested hundreds of millions of dollars, building mosques and religious educational institutions and appointing Turkish Imams to promote your brand of Islam. MP Alparslan Kaavaklioglu, a member of your AKP and head of the parliament’s Security and Intelligence Commission, echoed your skewed sentiment, stating last year that “Europe will be Muslim. We will be effective there, Allah willing. I am sure of that.”

In May 2018, you said that “Jerusalem is not just a city. [It] is a symbol, a test, a qiblah. If we can’t protect our first qiblah, we can’t be confident about the future of [our] last qiblah.” On a separate occasion, you told the crowd that the Muslim reconquest of Jerusalem would be “Soon, God willing.”

The EU countries have caught on to your alarming scheme; Chancellor Sebastian Kurz of Austria in June 2018 ordered the closing of seven mosques and scrutinized the right of dozens of Turkish imams to remain in the country, citing suspected violations of an Austrian law that bans “political Islam” or foreign financing of Muslim institutions.

You have shattered the dreams and aspirations of your fellow countrymen by denying them their inherent human rights, and dismantled every pillar of genuine democracy. You have sought and were
granted constitutional amendments providing you near-absolute power, which you grossly abuse to realize your pipedream of becoming the new Atatürk of Turkey’s modern era.

You have subordinated the judiciary and the rule of law to your whims, ensuring that courts pass judgments consistent with your own position on any alleged offenses, all in the name of social piety, national security, and solidarity.

You have orchestrated a military coup that was planned to fail, calling it “a gift from God” that permits you to chase your enemies with vengeance. You accuse your arch enemy Fetullah Gülen of being behind it, but have produced no credible evidence to support your charges.

You used the ‘coup’ to enact emergency laws, seizing ever more power. Tens of thousands of suspected Gülen followers were incarcerated, including teachers, judges, law enforcement officers, human rights defenders, doctors, lawyers, political activists, and students, leaving behind their despondent and despairing families.

You have imprisoned over 17,000 women with their children, wreaking havoc on a multitude of innocent civilians. You have hunted Turkish nationals whom you accuse of being affiliated with the Gülen movement and pressure many countries to expel such nationals.

Fearing public accountability, you have targeted the press and labeled it as the enemy of the people. You have closed scores of media outlets, and imprisoned and tortured more than 200 journalists.

In today’s Turkey, freedom of the press is a thing from the past, as just about all existing licensed media outlets must dance to your tune and strongly support your political agenda to stay in business. In the same vein, you are prohibiting the right to assembly while stifling the academic community and think tanks, who are the forces of social, political, and economic advancement.

Your Kurdishphobia seems to blind you. You have been fighting the PKK and accusing them of being terrorists, when in fact they represent the cause of their fellow Turkish Kurds. At least 40,000 have been killed on both sides over the past 50 years, and there is no end in sight as you vow to kill every last one standing, which is completely delusional.

The PKK are freedom fighters fighting on behalf of their Kurdish community, who simply want to maintain their cultural heritage, keep their language alive, enjoy their folk music and dance, and have their basic human rights respected.

Instead, you abruptly ended the peace negotiations in July 2017 and continue to persecute them indiscriminately, inflicting unbearable pain and suffering on your own fellow citizens yet demanding absolute loyalty.

You have and continue to sternly object to the establishment of Kurdish autonomous rule in Syria, fearing that your own Kurdish community would follow suit. Under the pretext of fighting ISIS, you invaded Syria in order to actually wage merciless war against the Syrian Kurdish militia—the YPG—whom you falsely accused of being a terrorist organization allied with the PKK. On the top of your agenda in Syria, however, is the eventual establishment of a permanent presence there.

You betrayed your alliance with the US-led coalition to fight ISIS by providing ISIS with logistical support, allowing volunteers to cross the border to join their ranks in Syria and Iraq, and trading oil for weapons, all while turning a blind eye to their reign of terror and unspeakable atrocities.

You pretend to be a Western ally, but you cozy up to Russia’s Putin—the West’s staunchest enemy. You remain determined to purchase Russia’s S-400 air defense system, in defiance of the US and
NATO. As a NATO member, you have violated every clause of the charter by committing horrifying human rights abuses at home and destroying every tenet of democracy.

You are creating alliances with Islamic states and organizations, and drawing to your orbit countries with predominantly Muslim populations, including the Balkan countries, by investing in their infrastructure and providing them with military equipment and training.

Your policy of “zero problems with neighbors” has failed; instead Turkey has problems with just about every neighboring state, including Syria, Iraq, Greece, Cyprus, and Armenia. Many world leaders know you are a conniving, power-thirsty dictator, but deal with you out of necessity only because of Turkey’s geostrategic importance as a bridge between East and West and a hub of oil and gas.

You have no shame about dispatching your thugs to foreign countries to do your bidding. Among many other egregious incidents, 15 members of your security detail physically attacked protestors outside the Turkish Embassy in Washington, DC in 2017. In 2016, your security team fought with Kurdish protestors in Ecuador. In 2015, your bodyguards scuffled repeatedly with Belgian police, and in 2011 they fought UN security personnel.

You are antisemitic to the core. Among many of your antisemitic statements, at a recent meeting of the Turkey Youth Foundation in Istanbul, you stated that “the Jews in Israel kick men, but also women and children, when they’re on the ground.” You also told the audience, “Don’t be like the Jews.”

More than 100 years have passed since the genocide of over one million Armenians by Ottoman soldiers in the wake of World War I. Even though history books have fully documented, and the international community recognizes, this horrifying event, you still haven’t mustered the courage to admit it.

In fact, you vehemently criticize any country and condemn any individual that attributes the genocide to the Ottomans. Although it was the Ottomans and not the present Republic of Turkey that committed these atrocities, you do not want to malign the Ottomans as you have made no secret of your ambition to revive the power and influence of the Ottoman Empire under your leadership.

The sad thing, Mr. Erdogan, is that we are living now in the 21st century; the days of conquest and undue influence over the fate of other countries are over. You had a historic opportunity to become a respected, benevolent leader, loved by your countrymen and admired by world leaders. But you have squandered it all because of your desire to become the new Sultan of a would-be empire that exists only in your wretched imagination.

You, like any other mortal, will be gone. Perhaps it is a good time for you to reflect and ask yourself, what am I leaving behind?

In your wake, Mr. Erdogan, you leave a shattered Turkish people, yearning to be free, free to think and believe, free to assemble, free to criticize, free to use their ingenuity and resourcefulness to create a free society.

But you have sacrificed the welfare for the Turkish people for blind personal ambition, for which you will be remembered.

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A NEW DESPOTISM IN THE ERA OF SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM

Sam Ben-Meir,* February 18, 2019

There is a fascinating chapter toward the end of Alexis de Toqueville’s Democracy in America titled “What Kind of Despotism Do Democratic Nations Have to Fear?” in which the author attempted something truly extraordinary – to describe a social condition which humankind had never before encountered. We find him trying to put his finger on something which does not yet exist, but which – in his extraordinary political imagination – he was able to foresee with startling clarity.

I maintain that we have good reason to fear that the business model of commercial surveillance – pioneered by Google and adopted by Facebook, among others – is serving to undermine the foundations of our democracy. Shoshana Zuboff explains in her new book, The Age of Surveillance Capital (Public Affairs, 2019), that the system works by treating human experience as “free raw material for translation into behavioral data. Although some of these data are applied to service improvements, the rest are declared as proprietary behavioral surplus, fed into advanced manufacturing processes known as ‘machine intelligence,’ and fabricated into prediction products that anticipate what you will do now, soon and later. Finally, these prediction products are traded in a new kind of marketplace that I call behavioral futures markets. Surveillance capitalists have grown immensely wealthy from these trading operations, for many companies are willing to lay bets on our future behavior.”

In effect, we are becoming the subject of a new insidious, subtle, and almost invisible form of subjugation that was foreseen with uncanny ability by Tocqueville in 1849. Over a hundred and seventy-five years ago, Tocqueville wrote: “The kind of oppression with which democratic peoples are threatened will resemble nothing that has proceeded it in the world.” He goes on to describe the elevation of “an immense tutelary power ... which alone takes charge of assuring their enjoyments and watching over their fate. It is absolute, detailed, regular, far-seeing, and mild. It would resemble paternal power, if, like that, it had for its object to prepare men for manhood; but on the contrary, it seeks only to keep them fixed in childhood; it likes citizens to enjoy themselves, provided that they think only of enjoying themselves. It willingly works for their happiness; but it wants to be the unique agent and sole arbiter of that.”

In Time magazine’s January seventeenth article “I Mentored Mark Zuckerberg, But I Can’t Stay Silent” author Roger McNamee observes, “One of the best ways to manipulate attention is to appeal to outrage and fear, emotions that increase engagement. Facebook’s algorithms give users what they want, so each person’s News Feed becomes a unique and personal reality, a filter bubble that creates the illusion that most people the user knows believe the same things.”

The notion of a bubble here is a useful one: central to the work of Jakob von Uexküll, an Estonian-born biologist and one of the fathers of biosemiotics, is the concept of the umwelt – or ‘surrounding-world’ – the ‘soap-bubble’ that each creature creates for itself and which constitutes their experiential world. The umwelt is composed of signs as bearers of meaning, and for each organism the umwelt is the whole of their reality. What distinguishes us as human beings is that our umwelt is not fixed, immobile, rigid, or static. One of the ways we can understand the effect of Facebook’s algorithms on its users is that the umwelt each user inhabits runs the danger of effectively shrinking: growing smaller and ever more calcified. In “How Facebook’s Algorithm Suppresses Content Diversity and How the Newsfeed Rules Your Clicks,” the author Zeynep Tufekci asserts that researchers were able to definitively conclude that, by a measurable amount, Facebook’s newsfeed algorithm reduces a user’s exposure to “…ideologically diverse, cross-cutting content...” By assuring that we are exposed only to that which we are likely to approve of and assent to, our umwelt – or social reality – is that much more diminished and homogenized.

Facebook’s business model has far-reaching implications, especially in terms of our ability to empathize with others – others who may not be like, or think like, ourselves. This had devastating results in Myanmar where Facebook became a tool for ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya. While it certainly
may not have been its intention, Facebook has become a “forum for tribalism” promoting a “simplistic
version of “community” while arguably “harming democracy, science and public health” – as Siva
Vaidhyanathan suggests in Antisocial Media: How Facebook Disconnects Us and Undermines Democracy
(Oxford University Press, 2018).

Much of my research has shown that there is a close relationship between empathy and our ability
to creatively reconstruct the umwelt of the other. While one cannot share his or her umwelt – each of us
remains in our own soap-bubble, as it were – we can participate in a common umwelt, which in many ways
is purportedly the stated goal of social media. It is ironic that Facebook, which claims to prize connectivity
above all, has in fact, contributed to producing the opposite result – where each of us fixed in a vapid and
hardened bubble of isolation.

In the face of an American government that is increasingly retreating from its responsibilities, we
must recognize that Facebook, Google, and Amazon are the new leviathans. In serving users only those
posts with which they will agree, Facebook is like Tocqueville’s ‘tutelary’s power’ which “everyday ...
renders the employment of free will less useful, and more rare; it confines the action of the will in a smaller
space, and little by little steals the very use of free will from each citizen.” These companies do not simply
want to automate information: as Zuboff observes, “the goal now is to automate us... to produce
ignorance by circumventing individual awareness and thus eliminate any possibility of self-determination.”

Facebook’s business model represents a new insidious form of subjugation that does not
trivialize, but as Vaidhyanathan observes, “it hinders, compromises, enervates, extinguishes, dazes, and
finally reduces each nation to nothing more than timid and industrious animals of which the
government is the shepherd.”

Facebook has contributed its share to the deterioration of epistemic norms and has helped to
usher in the era of so-called post-truth. The motivation behind this disdain for truth as such, has always
been the same – namely, it serves the bottom line. As McNamee puts it: “on Facebook, information and
disinformation look the same; the only difference is that disinformation generates more revenue, so it gets
better treatment.”

Over a two-year period preceding the 2016 election, one hundred and twenty-six million
Americans saw Russian-backed content. Facebook was at best reckless in the rampant and deliberate
spread of disinformation through fake Russian accounts; which is to say that by allowing the proliferation
of fake news, Facebook incontrovertibly helped Donald Trump to become the President of the United
States. Facebook has provided fertile ground for the spread of grossly irresponsible conspiracy theories
and “hopelessly inaccurate viral posts.”

Like many others, McNamee suggests that users should have control over their own data and
metadata – as if data ownership is the solution to the scourge of surveillance capitalism. The problem with
this kind of thinking is that it fails to ask the more elementary question of whether such data should exist
at all. As Zuboff observes “It’s like negotiating how many hours a day a seven-year-old should be allowed
to work, rather than contesting the fundamental legitimacy of child labor.” Surveillance capitalism
represents a new form of despotism, one that is harming our capacity for individual autonomy in order that
behavioral data can continue to be generated unimpeded, supplying markets and the advertisers that are
Google’s and Facebook’s real customers.

We are becoming the kind of solipsistic and atomistic society that Tocqueville foresaw, “an
enumerable crowd of like and equal men who revolve on themselves without repose … each of them,
withdrawn, and apart, is like a stranger to the destiny of all the others... As for dwelling with his fellow
citizens, he is beside them, but he does not see them; he touches them and does not feel them.” Alexis de
Tocqueville warned us that oppression may take forms which are gentle, quiet, calm, but nonetheless,
inimical to genuine freedom. To adequately respond to the problem will require more than demanding
greater privacy or data ownership – it will involve a radical questioning of our basic assumptions, and a new understanding of what democracy means and entails in the age of capitalistic surveillance.

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WHAT WE READERS ARE ABOUT?

Please share with us what you are doing relating to nonviolent change. If you send us a short report of your doings, learnings, ideas, concerns, reactions, queries,... we will print them here. Responses can be published in the next issue.

Steve Sachs: Increasingly the world has been moving further into a major time of change with positive potentials, but invoking, at times dangerous resistance, through fear and greed. Both the positive and the negative/dangerous in the increasing crises are more and more evident. In the United States, Trump, who is both symptom and cause, poses increasing dangers to democracy and quality of life at home, and major harmful disruption in the wider world. His, favorable to the aims of Russian President Putin, anti U.S. allies’ actions, increase the likelihood of major turmoil in Europe. He is already adding to the terrible level of conflict in the Middle East, which threatens to bring a war with Iran that would be disastrous to all involved, with negative ramifications for the rest of the world.

The fear of change, combined with failure for those in power to deal with deepening problems (both from the greed/fear of some and shortsightedness of themselves and others) has brought a number of oligarchs to power in the last few years. But for the most part their failure to understand how to deal with the major issues undermines them over time. It is significant that two long term dictators have fallen in Algeria and Sudan, where a struggle is in progress as to whether inclusive civilian government will come to power, or the old guard will remain, at least for a time. Erdogan is now increasingly in difficulty in Turkey, and some see that he is on his way out, sooner or later. In Hungary there have been major protests against the right wing government, that a year or so ago would not have been expected, while Russia has been increasingly experiencing anti-Putin demonstrations. And then there is the terrible situation in Venezuela, with the Turmoil in Nicaragua threatening to move in a similar direction.

Here in the U.S., the backlash to Trump and the so-called Republicans in many offices, has brought a Democratic House into office, as an even more crucial election than the last approaches. Meanwhile many critical struggles are in progress over power and issues in Washington and around the country.

Underlying all the other issues and events is the growing complex environmental crisis. As recent research reports make clear, what Indigenous people and other holistic thinkers have long known, the problem is not only global warming induced climate change, but also over use of resources, destruction of environments by development, over use of resources, pollution of many kinds,... all of which are linked to over population (though there are numerous places that need more people). It is hopeful that a huge and increasing number of young people see the problem and are pressing for action (and in other areas as well). But unless the world as a whole acts quickly and sufficiently, the already quite serious and increasing harm to the planet and its people will become a major disaster.

But rapid and sufficient extent of action needs to be smart action, or it will fail. Policy makers and people in their various roles need to act with the knowledge of the complexity of the issues that have to be met holistically, with variation for geographic, cultural, and developmental (changes in circumstance over time) particulars. General properly directed solutions will fail or cause new problems, unless they are applied differentially according to local circumstances of time and place. And the inevitable side effects, often unpredictable, need to be watched for and properly acted upon.

Proper environmental, and other essential, policy cannot take place, however, without the necessary political insight and will. That is what unites the environmental, other policy, and political crises.
CIVIL SOCIETY MATTERS TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Peter J. Jacques*

Life and death for whole communities hang in the balance of achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that include eliminating poverty, conserving forests, and addressing climate change, passed by the United Nations unanimously in 2015. Take for example, the Indigenous Amazigh people who live in the mountains around Marrakech. They are representative of people who need to be served first by sustainable development.

The High Atlas Amazigh people experience hard lives in small villages. Most work as day laborers and agriculturalists with barely enough income to support their families and heat their homes. Education is a major concern, but is hard to attain for a number of reasons. Sometimes families cannot afford the subsequent costs of backpacks and books, even when the school is open and free. The challenge is especially difficult for girls, because, as one person explained, “How can fathers let their girls study if it is dark when they must travel?” The effect of incomplete education is profound, and when we asked one 62-year-old man what he thought the greatest threats to the future were for his community, he did not have confidence in his own experiences, noting, “What can I say? I am not read [educated].”

Through a partnership of the University of Central Florida (Orlando), The Hollings Center for International Dialogue (Washington D.C. and Istanbul), and the High Atlas Foundation (Marrakech), we recently conducted field work in the High Atlas Mountains, speaking with the people there who poured their hearts out to us.

The most consistent message we heard from the people of the High Atlas was that the future hinges on water. One group told us that when things are good, it is because the rain is abundant and on time; things are very hard otherwise. They are worried that climate change will affect if the rains come, or that the rain will not “come in its time.” They have good reason to worry because climate change is expected to decrease precipitation significantly, reducing streams, lakes, and groundwater.

Drought is a constant worry. The World Bank estimates that 37 percent of the population works in agriculture, meanwhile production of cereal crops varies wildly due to annual variation of precipitation-- and 2018 was thankfully a bountiful year. Climate change will make the people of the High Atlas Mountains much more vulnerable while they are already living on the edge of survival. In one area, this change in precipitation timing and amount was already noticeable, resulting in a significant loss of fruit trees. In that same area, we were told that there is fear that there will be no water in twenty years, and that for these people who are deeply connected to the land, there will be “no alternatives.”

The High Atlas people are in an extremely vulnerable position. One group noted that they are so desperate for basic resources that they burn plastic trash to heat their water. Worse, they believe they have been left behind by society and that “the people of the mountains do not matter.” They feel that Moroccan society is deeply unfair—there is no help for the sick, little support for education, little defense against the cold, and that, for some, corruption is the greatest threat to a sustainable future.

Consequently, civil society has an important role in achieving the SDGs. The High Atlas Foundation has been working to help people in this region to organize themselves into collectives that decide both what the collective wants, and pathways to achieve those goals. Women have organized into co-ops that they own and they collect dividends from their products together. People in one coop lobbied the 2015 Conference of Parties climate meeting in Marrakech. Men’s associations have developed tree nurseries that

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not only produce income, but which protect whole watersheds – and therefore some water for the future. They are also participating in carbon sequestration markets. In this regard, the Marrakech Regional Department of Water and Forest provides them carob trees and the authorization to plant these trees on the mountains surrounding their villages.

However, perhaps the most important element of these collectives is that they give each person in them a voice. Leaders of these collectives have formal rights to approach the regional governments about their needs, and this voice would not be heard at all without the formal collective organization. These organizations cannot replace government services, but they do add capacity to the community.

Not only do these collectives lend people some influence over their current and their children’s lives, they love each other and they are not struggling alone. We witnessed profound solidarity. Repeatedly, the collectives told us “We love each other, we are one family,” “We are like one,” “We help each other,” and the conviction that “I will be with you.” The world is decidedly on an unsustainable path, so if we are going to meet SDGs, all the people like the people of the High Atlas Mountains must matter and their voice deserves to be heard.

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SYRIA: CONCERNS RAISED AND POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

Rene Wadlow,* March 15, 2019

March 15 is widely used as the date on which the conflict in Syria began. 15 March 2011 was the first “Day of Rage” held in a good number of localities to mark opposition to the repression of youth in the southern city of Daraa, where a month earlier young people had painted anti-government graphites on some of the walls, followed by massive arrests.

I think that it is important for us to look at why organizations that promote nonviolent action and conflict resolution in the US and Western Europe were not able to do more to aid those in Syria who tried to use nonviolence during the first months of 2011. By June 2011, the conflict had largely become one of armed groups against the government forces, but there were at least four months when there were nonviolent efforts before many started to think that a military “solution” was the only way forward. There were some parts of the country where nonviolent actions continued for a longer period.

There had been early on an effort on the part of some Syrians to develop support among nonviolent and conflict resolution groups. As one Syrian activist wrote concerning the ‘Left’ in the US and Europe but would also be true for nonviolent activists “I am afraid that it is too late for the leftists in the West to express any solidarity with the Syrians in their extremely hard struggle. What I always found astonishing in this regard is that mainstream Western leftists know almost nothing about Syria, its society, its regime, its people, its political economy, its contemporary history. Rarely have I found a useful piece of information or a genuinely creative idea in their analyses “(1)

In December 2011, there was the start of a short-lived Observer Mission of the League of Arab States. In a 9 February 2012 message to the Secretary General of the League of Arab States, Ambassador Nabil el-Araby, the Association of World Citizens (AWC) proposed a renewal of the Arab League Observer Mission with the inclusion of a greater number of non-governmental organization observers and a broadened mandate to go beyond fact-finding and thus to play an active conflict resolution role at the local level in the hope to halt the downward spiral of violence and killing. In response, members from two Arab human rights non-governmental organizations were added for the first time. However opposition to the conditions of the Arab League Observers from Saudi Arabia led to the end of the Observer Mission.

On many occasions since, the AWC has indicated to the United Nations, the Government of Syria and opposition
movement the potentially important role of non-governmental organizations, both Syrian and international, in facilitating armed conflict resolution measures.

In these years of war, the Association of World Citizens, along with others, has highlighted six concerns:

1) The wide-spread violation of humanitarian law (international law in time of war) and thus the need for a U.N.-led conference for the re-affirmation of humanitarian law.


3) The deliberate destruction of monuments and sites on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

4) The use of chemical weapons in violation of the 1925 Geneva Protocol signed by Syria at the time, as well as in violation of the more recent treaty banning chemical weapons.

5) The situation of the large number of persons displaced within the country as well as the large number of refugees and their conditions in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. In addition there is the dramatic fate of those trying to reach Europe.

6) The specific conditions of the Kurds and the possibility of the creation of a trans-frontier Kurdistan without dividing the current States of Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Iran.

These issues have been raised with diplomats and others participating in negotiations in Geneva as well as with the U.N. appointed mediators. In addition, there have been articles published and then distributed to NGOs and others of potential influence.

The Syrian situation has grown increasingly complex since 2011 with more death and destruction as well as more actors involved and with a larger number of refugees and displaced persons. Efforts have been made to create an atmosphere in which negotiations in good faith could be carried out. Good faith is, alas, in short supply. Efforts must continue. An anniversary is a reminder of the long road still ahead.


*Rene Wadlow, President, Association of World Citizens.

TRUMP’S CONTROVERSIAL DECISION ON IRAN’S REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS:

IRAN HAS NEAR-UNIVERSAL MALE CONSRIPTION, IN WHICH THE GUARDS OFTEN GET PRIORITY—NOW ALL OF THESE YOUNG MEN, SOME OF WHOM HAVE NO DESIRE TO EVEN BE IN THE ARMED FORCES, WILL BE LABELED AS “TERRORISTS.”

Stephen Zunes*

There is little question that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is bad news. Some of its units have engaged in severe repression of nonviolent dissidents, supported Assad’s brutal counter-insurgency operations in Syria, backed hardline Islamist militia in several foreign countries, and more.

But the Trump Administration’s unprecedented decision to label the IRGC as a terrorist organization—the first time the United States has given such a designation to any entity of an internationally recognized government—is dangerous and irresponsible.

Trump justifies the terrorist label on the grounds that the Revolutionary Guards have provided direct support for repressive regimes and backed armed extremist groups. Of course, the same could be said regarding some U.S. government entities. Indeed, in a retaliatory move, the Iranian government has now labeled the U.S. Central Command, which oversees U.S. military operations throughout the Middle East, as a terrorist organizations as well.

U.S. forces under the Central Command and Revolutionary Guard units have been operating within miles of each other in both Syria and Iraq, often working jointly in the fight against ISIS. Indeed, IRGC-led Iraqi Shia militia have been recognized as more effective than the U.S.-backed Iraqi Army in defeating these Salafist extremists, though both have also engaged in war crimes.

With the IRGC and their allies now in the same category as ISIS and Al-Qaeda, the risk of an armed confrontation in these unstable war zones increases, and thereby the threat of a war between the United States and Iran.

This may have been the goal of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Advisor John Bolton, who apparently convinced Trump to take the controversial decision and have long pushed for a military confrontation with Iran.

IRGC-backed militias in Lebanon and Iraq serve as the armed wing of political parties which have leading roles in their country’s respective coalition governments. Since these parties are now formally considered to be “affiliated with terrorists,” this could hamstring U.S. diplomatic efforts in those countries. Trump appears to want to force the State Department to adopt a simplistic “you are either for us or against us” policy to the very complex and sensitive political constellations in the Middle East.

With more than 125,000 members, the IRGC is one of the largest units of the Iranian armed forces. Iran has near-universal male conscription, in which the IRGC often gets priority over the other branches of the armed services for the best recruits. But now all of these young men, some of whom have no desire to even be in the armed forces, will now be labeled as “terrorists.”

With the IRGC now formally designated as a terrorist organization, the freedom of countless other asylum-seekers with similar affiliations are now in jeopardy.

Like the militaries of Egypt and a number of other autocratic countries, the IRGC controls large segments of the Iranian government, the business sector, and social system unrelated to any military or security functions. These institutions employ an estimated 11 million Iranians, meaning they, too, could be designated as members of a terrorist organization.

In an asylum case I was involved with a few years ago involving an Iranian dissident, the ICE lawyer noted that he had attended a technical college that was affiliated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. The
judge recognized that the school was one of many institutions the IRGC controlled and that his training was void of political content or military applications and thereby granted him asylum.

With the IRGC now formally designated as a terrorist organization, the freedom of countless other asylum-seekers with similar affiliations are now in jeopardy.

A related problem is that any business from Europe, the Middle East, or anywhere else that sells a printer, books, a stapler, or anything else to any of the thousands of entities controlled by the IRGC, could now be targeted by the U.S. government for providing material support for a terrorist entity.

Ironically, just a few years ago, the Trump organization invested millions of dollars into a failed attempt to build a Trump Tower in the Azerbaijani capital of Baku that, according to an investigation by the *The New Yorker*, appeared "to be a corrupt operation engineered by oligarchs tied to Iran's Revolutionary Guard."

Interestingly, the effort to label the IRGC as a terrorist organization was initially pressed by a bipartisan group in Congress more than a decade ago, including such prominent Democrats as Hillary Clinton, Chuck Schumer, Dianne Feinstein, Patty Murray, and Dick Durbin. But the Bush Administration recognized its dangers and blocked its adoption, as did the Obama Administration several years later in response to a subsequent effort.

Most Iranians see the Revolutionary Guard as repressive and corrupt, yet also as defenders of the nation, heroes of the Iran-Iraq war, and protectors of national sovereignty. As a result, Trump’s move will likely strengthen their influence, rather than weaken it.

Individuals and units within the IRGC responsible for war crimes and severe human rights abuses, illegal financial activities, and similar activity should certainly be subjected to sanctions. However, this overreaching designation of the entire Revolution Guard as a terrorist organization is misleading, illogical, and dangerous.

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**THE BALKANS: THE FEAST FEEDING RUSSIA’S AND TURKEY’S HUNGER**

Alon Ben-Meir and Arbana Xharra,* March 9, 2019

The political tension between Kosovo and Serbia is creating a perfect environment wherein Turkey and Russia can lure the two countries into their respective spheres of influence. High-ranking US and EU envoys are trying to resolve the long-standing dispute, urging Serbia and Kosovo to normalize relations when in fact it is becoming increasingly more tense. Serbia’s refusal to recognize Kosovo’s borders, preventing it from joining international organizations such as Interpol and UNESCO, and reneging on a 2011 freedom of movement agreement prompted Kosovo to take direct action against Serbia by imposing a 100% tariff on goods from Serbia.

False reports that the US threatened to withdraw its troops from Kosovo if the tax is not suspended were quickly propagated by Russia’s and Turkey’s propaganda machines in an effort to take full
advantage of the continuing discord between the two countries. Serbia and Kosovo are vulnerable to fake news online, generated by Russia and Turkey, and corrupt leaders in the Balkans continue to fall for it.

The political elites, who are easily manipulated by Russia and Turkey, also use their own disinformation in order to influence the public. Both Russia and Turkey may well accelerate their disinformation campaign as the 20th anniversary of NATO’s bombing of Yugoslavia approaches. Kosovars and Serbians are paying the price for the political squabbling that seems to benefit neither country, as they have become the feast feeding Russia’s and Turkey’s hunger to control the Balkans.

The discord between the two countries manifests itself through the lives of the citizens of both states. “When I travel through Serbia, I’m forced at the border to remove my car plates and pay a five-euro fee for just crossing through Serbia, and to pay for highway toll, they don’t accept euros from us, just Serbian dinars, while the Serbs entering Kosovo do not face these difficulties!” says Vilson Kacoli, from Kosovo. He, along with most Kosovars, strongly support their prime minister for his refusal to revoke the tax under any circumstances.

Meanwhile, Putin and Erdogan have been working hard to strengthen their own ties with the Balkans and are continuing to invest in major national projects strategically calculated to have the greatest economic and political impact throughout the region.

Trade between Turkey and the Western Balkans has dramatically increased, from $430 million in 2002 to $3 billion in 2016. Roughly one-third of this trade was with Serbia, while in Kosovo, Turkey is continuously investing in the most important sectors while privatizing Kosovo’s strategic assets. Turkish state development agency TIKA has renovated hundreds of historic monuments in Kosovo, financed local projects, and organized large events designed to reinforce bonds with Turkey.

“The total investments from Turkish businesses in Kosovo during 2007-2017 are 382.1 million euros,” Esin Muzbeg, the general secretary of the Kosovo Turkey Chamber of Commerce, told the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network. Additionally, Serbia’s Energy Agency gave final approval for the construction of a branch of the Turkish Stream pipeline, which will deliver Russian natural gas into Turkey and southern Europe.

Russia has geostrategic interests in the Western Balkans as well as in the Mediterranean countries. In the Balkan states, Russia’s interest rests on two considerations. First, the Western Balkans region has strategic importance as a transit routine for Russia’s gas; second, Moscow wants to preserve Slavic roots and the Orthodox religion in the region, along with bilateral cultural and traditional values, particularly as long the relationship between the EU and Russia is tense and not likely to improve any time soon.

According to Russian portal RT, the country’s sovereign wealth fund and partners are planning an increased investment in Serbia, likely adding $500 million to its current investments. Serbia has already attracted Russian investments in the Balkans which, according to various statistics, exceeds $4 billion. “The energy sector continues to be a priority of the Russian investments. Moscow is aiming to make the Balkan countries dependent on Russian gas, just as in Europe”, says Lavdim Hamidi, editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper Zeri in Kosovo, who recently investigated Russian and Turkish capital investments in the Balkans.

Moreover, the Western Balkan states offer low-cost opportunities for Russia to undertake a combination of political and economic measures to undermine the EU’s geostrategic interests. In 2016, for instance, Russia attempted to organize a coup in Montenegro aimed at the overthrow of then PM Milo Djukanovic in order to prevent his country from joining NATO. Last year, Putin tried to block the settlement of the conflict between Greece and Macedonia, knowing that the solution would result in the latter’s membership in NATO.
While Serbia is trying to balance their bilateral relations between Russia and the EU, other countries like Kosovo and Macedonia are more transparent in seeing Europeanization. Russia has every intent of sowing discord to keep the Balkan states from becoming EU members.

Artan Grubi, a parliamentarian in North Macedonia representing the Democratic Union for Integration (BDI, the largest Albanian political party), stated that North Macedonia triumphed in the geopolitical and geostrategic battle between Western and Eastern interests. “Finally, with the signing of the protocol for NATO membership, citizens of this country may feel confident that they belong to Euro-American values and that eastern influences failed.”

Ismet Kryeziu, executive director of the Kosovo Democratic Institute (KDI), says that the Balkan region – except Serbia, which is known as pro-Russia – despite the challenges in daily politics, is committed to walk alongside the policies and values of Western democracy led by the US and the EU states. “Kosovo policy makers will make geo-strategic mistakes to turn the Republic of Kosovo into a “black hole”, which will expand the Russian and Turkish influence”, says Kryeziu.

Neither Russia’s nor Turkey’s activities and intentions in the Balkans are hidden. Both countries are taking political steps to distance the Balkans from the West, be that for economic, strategic, or hegemonic reasons. They are relentless and brazen and will do everything in their power to entrench themselves into these countries, albeit it is only a question of time when Russia’s and Turkey’s interests clash in the Balkans.

Lulzim Peci, former Ambassador of Kosovo to Sweden and Executive Director of the Kosovo Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED), thinks that current strain of relations between the United States and Kosovo suits Russia more, as it serves its strategic interests, “especially in the absence of a clearly defined position of the key Western countries toward Kosovo-Serbia relations”, says Peci.

Given the EU’s strategic interests in, and the general orientation of the Balkan states toward the West, the EU should insist on democratic reforms and adherence to human rights, against which it would speed up its efforts to support the socio-economic conditions in these countries and accelerate the membership process.

This will provide the Balkan states the confidence that their prospective membership is real by virtue of the EU’s practical deeds and continuing political engagement, which will give the Balkan states diminishing incentives to accommodate either Turkey’s or Russia’s ambition to lure them into their orbit.

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TRUTHFUL REPORTING IN THE BALKANS IS LIFE-THREATENING

Alon Ben-Meir and Arbana Xharra,* February 6, 2019

Kosovo investigative journalist Parim Olluri knew the assailants who physically attacked him two years ago in front of his house, while the police and other security institutions remained silent. “I sent names to the Kosovo Police as well as to the Prosecutor’s Office, but none of them took any action”, says Olluri. Instead, the politicians, who were identified by the journalist to the police, sent messages to Olluri denying that they were involved in the attack.
“How did they find out whose names I mentioned? This proves that police work in tandem with politicians and they used my testimony to inform them”, says Olluri, adding that the security institutions in Kosovo do not investigate cases promptly and thoroughly, because they are under the control of the political echelon.

As a result, many journalists who are committed to candid reporting in Kosovo and other Balkan countries feel unsafe as it has become normal to be threatened and even physically attacked. The growing intimidation of independent media outlets in Balkan countries clearly points to the pervasive corruption and organized crime in this part of Europe.

Ironically, the Balkan countries who wish to join the EU seem to ignore that freedom of expression is one of the fundamental prerequisites to EU accession. They flout the fact that freedom of the press is one of the main pillars of a democracy, good governance, and political accountability. According to the EU charter, no country can join the EU without guaranteeing freedom of expression as a basic human right (Article 49 of the Lisbon Treaty).

International organizations devoted to the protection of journalists expressed their deep concern over the hostile environments under which Balkan journalists are working. Human Rights Watch’s (HRW) annual World Report documented the attacks and threats against journalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, and Macedonia. The HRW report was based on interviews with 86 journalists, most of whom write on sensitive issues such as war crimes and corruption.

Just a few days ago, thousands took to the streets in Serbia, demanding fair elections, free press, and the resignation of President Aleksandar Vucic. Serbian citizens have come to realize that their president is certainly exploiting his position for financial gains while tightening his grip on power and control over the media to prevent damaging reporting.

Sedad Numanovic, a journalist from Bosnia and Herzegovina, said that the environment for media in his country is becoming increasingly unsafe. “Physical assaults on journalists have become common and is affecting their everyday life. When a journalist is beaten no longer makes the news”, says Numanovic.

In 2018, the owner of The Bosnian Times, Nedžad Latić, and BN Television journalist Vladimir Kovačević were physically attacked, and the perpetrators of both attacks have not been arrested nor faced justice. “It is not hard to conclude that this year will be much worse for journalists than the past year. It is most disconcerting to do our job in such a threatening environment”, says Numanovic.

Even though it is a member of the European Union, Croatia too is not safe for journalists. Hrvoje Bajlo, the owner of Zadar News and correspondent for national website Index.hr, was attacked last year and suffered from severe physical injuries. This happened three weeks after Tomo Medved, Minister of Veterans’ Affairs, allegedly threatened another journalist, Vojislav Mazzocco.

The Committee to Protect Journalists called on Montenegrin authorities last year to guarantee the safety of Olivera Lakić, an investigative journalist with the local daily Vijesti, who was shot outside her apartment building in May 2018.

Lakić, who has reported extensively on crime and corruption in Montenegro, was the second journalist from Vijesti who was attacked last year. A bomb exploded near the house of Lakić’s Vijesti colleague Saed Sadikovic on April 1, 2018, CPJ reported at the time.

remain a serious problem despite the government’s recent efforts to quell such contraventions. That said, the intermingling of powerful business, politics, and ownership of certain media by corrupt powerful bosses inhibits the development of independent news outlets.
Albanian Union of Journalists chief Aleksander Cipa said that most of the threats journalists receive are coming from criminal groups that operate and have a monopoly over important sectors of the economy. “Journalists and editors in Albania exercise self-censorship due to the economic interests of business groups and media owners who have created partnerships.”

It’s not only corruption and organized crime that is inhibiting credible voices; criticizing a dogmatic ideology, especially when related to Islam, is very dangerous for reporters.

Journalists across the Balkans face similar pressure from the Turkish government, which targets anyone who dares to criticize Turkey’s President Erdogan in particular. On July 20, 2016, the Turkish embassy in Pristina sent a note to Kosovo’s foreign ministry, urging them to investigate and punish journalist Berat Buzhala after he posted public comments critical of Erdogan on social media.

The Turkish embassy’s note stated that “(The ministry should) ensure that necessary steps will be taken about this person in accordance with the law.” A screen shot of Buzhala’s Facebook comments against Erdogan was attached.

The embassy’s note—a copy of which was seen by Reuters—also quoted a 2016 Kosovo law prohibiting citizens from joining armed conflicts outside the country. It also stated that the law stipulates that people such as Buzhala making these comments “shall be sentenced to jail terms from six months to five years.”

Xhelal Neziri, a prominent journalist from Macedonia, says that over the last five years, two journalists ended up in jail. “Journalists face threats not only from corrupted politicians, but also from the political figures that use religion for a cover to serve their interests. If you criticize their religious-based ideology, a whole machinery will lynch you”, said Neziri.

Although the constitutions of most of the Balkan states guarantee freedom of the press, anyone who dares to criticize the abuse of religion are declared enemies of Islam and face the harshest rebuke and often an explicit call for ‘annihilation.’ The religious apparatus that supports the Turkish president is particularly active, along with those who are linked to centers of financial power in the Balkans, which spread the most fundamental doctrine of Islam.

While the Balkan countries claim to be democratic states, they seem to ignore the fact that freedom of the press is central to a functioning democracy. The Balkan states who aspire to join the EU should have no illusion that their aspirations can be realized unless they live up to the requirements of the European Union charter.

As such, the EU is in a position to exert significant influence on these countries. They must make it abundantly clear that continued intimidation, harassment, and persecution of journalists will foreclose any prospective EU membership.

The Balkan public needs to know that they can rely on the EU’s backing in their battle for human rights and freedom of the press, and their leaders will have to realize that their continued violation of these rights carries a heavy price tag.

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THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF ERDOGAN’S ERA

Alon Ben-Meir,* Apr 25, 2019

The result of the recent municipal elections in Turkey represents a major shift in public sentiment toward President Erdogan, which will have major political ramifications that will bring him down in disgrace. It is true that the economic crisis and the ineptitude he exhibited in dealing with it played an important role in the election and the AKP’s devastating losses in the largest cities, especially his hometown of Istanbul. There are, however, other major factors that have directly contributed to public disgust with his ruthless one-man rule. The local elections provided the first expression of the public outrage that has been building up for the past several years, during which he reversed the most significant socio-political and judicial achievements while systematically dismantling what’s left of Turkey’s democracy.

For Erdogan, a democratic form of government could not serve his ambition to become the absolute leader who can both shape Turkey’s destiny as an Islamic state and serve as the head of the Sunni Muslim world. As he once stated, “democracy is like a bus, once you reach your destination you get off.” Following the failed military coup, which he accused his staunch nemesis Fethullah Gülen of orchestrating, he dismissed some 125,800 public officials and subjected nearly 446,000 to harsh interrogation. In an unprecedented crackdown, 17,000 women with over 700 small children have been jailed and subjected to torture. He systematically persecuted the country’s Kurdish community while denying them their basic human rights. Moreover, he shut down nearly 130 television channels, radio stations, newspapers, magazines and publishing houses, and arrested 231 journalists. His purges have inflicted suffering on more than a million and a half people whose family members were targeted by Erdogan.

To be sure, Erdogan made Turkey a police state. Ordinary Turks are terrified of the unfolding abuse as he robbed not only their freedom but their dignity. It was under this environment that the recent elections were held, and the result, not surprisingly, reflected the public’s outrage.

The changing political winds have weakened Erdogan considerably, and as a result, the opposition parties became emboldened to challenge Erdogan. Other than voters’ fatigue with the AKP, the opposition parties, namely the CHP and the Kurdish HDP, joined forces and took full advantage of the public’s dissatisfaction with how Erdogan dealt with the economic crisis. Even though they received hardly any coverage in the media, they were still able to make huge inroads in the election.

Erdogan’s former political rival and current coalition partner, Devlet Bahceli, has become very influential with Erdogan and his government, as the coalition is critical for Erdogan to maintain his razor-thin majority in the parliament. This shift in the political dynamic is a sign that Erdogan’s firm hold on power is eroding, and there seems to be no prospect that Erdogan will regain the public trust that he wantonly betrayed.

Erdogan portrays himself as a devout Muslim. As far back as December 1997, he was imprisoned for his public statement equating Islam to a military crusade, citing a poem that states in part: “The mosques are our barracks, the domes our helmets, the minarets our bayonets, and the believers our soldiers.” He exploits his religious “credentials” to portray himself as a pious man, and uses religion as a political tool as he is determined to convert Turkey into a conservative Muslim state.
To that end, he pursued an aggressive Islamic agenda to instill in the public consciousness that their overall well-being is directly linked to their being devout Muslims. He undertook the building of hundreds of mosques and religious educational institutions, not only in Turkey but in the Balkan states, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and even some European countries.

Being that overall the Turks are far more Western-oriented, Erdogan’s increased attempts to insert Islam into society and politics is resented as it runs contrary to the public’s belief that being a Muslim can go hand-in-hand with Western culture. The public holds Erdogan responsible for and resents the fact that he forfeited the opportunity to make Turkey an EU member.

In addition, Erdogan is bent on reviving many elements of the Ottoman Empire using soft power to influence the policies and the direction of the many countries that were once dominated by the Ottomans. His former prime minister Davutoglu once told me that by 2023, the hundredth anniversary of the new Republic of Turkey, Turkey will exert as much influence on these states as the Ottoman Empire did in its heyday.

To instill images of the Ottoman era, he built for himself a 1,150-room presidential palace. Against the will of the people in Istanbul, he went ahead and converted a large section of Taksim Square into a huge mall that includes one of the largest mosques, designed architecturally to reflect the Ottoman period. The heavy investments that Erdogan made to promote his illusionary revival of the Ottoman era greatly disillusioned even some of his ardent followers, for whom bread-and-butter issues are far more critical, especially when the economy is limping and is unlikely to recover any time soon.

Furthermore, for Erdogan, the close alliance with the West has become an obstacle to realize his national aspiration, and he made a conscious decision to distance himself from his allies. Discarding Turkey’s critical alliance with the US, he incarcerated Rev. Brunson and used him unsuccessfully as a bargaining chip to force the US to release Fethullah Gulen. Erdogan was and still is determined to crush the Syrian Kurds (YPG), the US’ closest ally in the fight against ISIS, and to establish a permanent foothold in Syria to which the US sternly objects, which further strained the relationship with the US.

He defied fellow NATO members by purchasing a sophisticated air defense system from the West’s staunchest adversary, Russia, potentially compromising the US’ military technology. US Army General and NATO commander Curtis Scaparrotti told the Senate in March: “My best military advice would be that we don’t then follow through with the F-35—flying it or working with an ally that is working with Russian systems, particularly air defense systems, with one of our most advanced technological capabilities.”

Turkey under Erdogan never fully committed to the letter of NATO. Erdogan refused as a NATO member to meet its principle requirement, which is full adherence to democracy and human rights. Most Turks view Turkey’s growing distance from the West as a major setback for their country that will not be reversed as long as Erdogan remains in power.

Erdogan’s growing closeness to Putin is alarming for most Turks who believe that Putin is for Putin, and would do anything to undermine US’ interest in the Middle East, weaken the US-EU alliance, and destabilize NATO. Coopting Erdogan is a part of Putin’s sinister scheme. Working closely with Iran’s leader, along with Putin, in the search for a solution to the Syrian crisis and deliberately excluding the US from the process offers another glaring example of how far Erdogan will go to defy his Western allies.

Some say that the result of the local elections is indeed harmful to Erdogan politically but will not undermine him in the long run. I disagree. Given the public dismay and resentment of his brutal governing, the beginning of the end of Erdogan’s era has begun and his downfall is all but sealed; the only question is how soon.
THE ELECTION WILL OBLITERATE THE FACE OF ISRAEL AS WE KNOW IT

Alon Ben-Meir

Posted April 12, 2019, this article was originally published by Australian Outlook as "Netanyahu’s Election Win Will Change the Face of Israel".

The result of the Israeli election has demonstrated that the Israeli public’s movement to the right is now consolidated, and that its prospective reversal to the center and left-of-center is becoming increasingly unlikely. This outcome should give serious pause to every Jew and friend of Israel, as the consequences for Israel’s future will be extremely dire. It will allow the newly-expected right-wing government led by Netanyahu to take any measure of his choosing to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state. This will further undermine Israel’s democratic and Jewish foundation, and put the country on the fast track to self-destruction, obliterating the face of Israel as we know it.

To begin with, there has been a steady and continuing nearly unequivocal support of the United States for successive governments throughout Israel’s existence. The US’ enablement of Israel, specifically over the last few decades, has allowed centrist and right-wing governments to undertake policies, in particular the building of new and the expansion of existing settlements, that run contrary to any prospective Israeli-Palestinian peace based on a two-state solution. In this regard, Trump’s open-ended support of the Netanyahu government has severely and perilously undermined Israel’s future security and well-being, which ironically the Trump administration wants to shield.

Second, as the Palestinian extremists continue unfortunately to play into the hands of the Israeli right-of-center, it has made it easier for the leaders of the right to make a strong case against the Palestinians, and justify the enforcement of discriminatory policies and the occupation. The building of settlements and the imposition of a massive security apparatus that extends throughout the West Bank and Gaza further diminish the rise of an independent Palestinian state with a contiguous land mass.

Third, the Israelis have developed a siege mentality from their historical perspective, as well as from their experience with the Palestinians (especially following the Second Intifada in 2000). As a result, Israel has become increasingly self-reliant on national security matters and suspicious of the Palestinians and the international community on the whole. As such, Israel’s use of excessive military power to quell Palestinian resistance became routine, and applying harsh measures against the Palestinians in the occupied territories to keep them at bay became the norm.

The fourth reason is national security concerns. Israel undoubtedly is the superpower in the region, and there’s not a single country (including Iran) or combination of countries that can in fact, now or in the foreseeable future, overwhelm Israel militarily. Nevertheless, Israelis feel vulnerable and insecure, making national security a central theme in any future relations with the Palestinians, which of necessity constrained the extent of concessions the Israelis could make under any peace consideration.

Fifth is the growing, if not decisive, political strength of the settlers, who are now in a strategic position. The settlers, represented by various right-wing parties including Likud, have secure representation, both in the Knesset and the government. No Israeli government would dare to evacuate any significant number of settlers without provoking a major political crisis and even violent resistance that will tear the country apart.
Sixth, there is a nearly constant schism between secular Jews and the Orthodox community, which has further diluted the prospect of unity among the Israelis themselves. Moreover, since no single party has been able to acquire an absolute majority, elections always lead to a coalition government, which of necessity has to compromise on significant issues, perhaps other than security. As a result, the discord between the coalition partners to agree on a long-term solution to the conflict with the Palestinians was put on the back burner, which further complicated and made the conflict ever more intractable.

The consequences of this election and the certainty of forming a right-wing government led by Netanyahu are hard to exaggerate. To start with, if there had been any small prospect of a two-state solution, it has now practically vanished completely under his watch. This in and of itself will further galvanize Palestinian extremism, which undoubtedly would lead to more frequent violence that could fuel long-term bloodshed between the two sides.

Netanyahu and his partners will now have a freer hand to act as he has already been, to diminish the role of the judiciary; violate international conventions, specifically in regards to the occupied territories; implement far harsher methods to solidify the occupation; and certainly open the door for further annexation of significant parts of the West Bank, as Netanyahu promised to do if he were re-elected. There is no doubt that the coalition, regardless of political differences, will stick together to create new, irreversible facts on the ground that will bury the prospect of a two-state solution.

Additionally, the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights by Trump has rendered a major blow to the prospect of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace. Sadly, whereas most of the Arab countries were edging ever closer to Israel in recent years because of their common enemy Iran, the result of these elections will certainly deter further improvement of relations between Israel and Arab states, and Israel’s regional isolation will only escalate.

Moreover, Israel’s very democracy, which has for past few years been teetering on the edge, is now poised to fall. Last summer’s Basic Law formally declared Israel to be the nation-state of the Jewish people, which is outright discrimination against Israeli Arabs and other non-Jewish minorities. BDS and other punitive measures against Israel will become a common cause supported by an increasing number of countries around the world.

Furthermore, the discord between American Jews in particular and Israel will be far more intense, which will have major repercussions on Jewish unity as the ideological gap between the two sides will only deepen. Diaspora Jewry near-unanimously supports a two-state solution, which they view as the ultimate outcome that provides Israel with security and preserves its Jewish majority and democratic nature.

To be sure, Israel will become a de facto apartheid state as it continues to apply different laws to Israelis living within Israel and in the settlements, and a different set of occupation laws that govern the Palestinians, which limits their political freedom and narrows their basic civil rights.

Unlike any previous right-wing Israeli government, the formation of a new government under Netanyahu may well be the most decisive and consequential for Israel as we know it. This is nothing short of a turning point in Israel’s history, as its reactionary, zealous, messianic, and extreme right-wing leaders choose more territory over the future security and prosperity of Israel, forfeiting its democracy and shattering the centuries-old dream of the Jews to establish an independent, free, secure home and live in peace.

It is a choice that has put Israel on the fast track toward the abyss.

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RISK OF ISRAELI-IRANIAN WAR STILL LOOMS HIGH

Alon Ben-Meir,* May 2, 2019

This article is a short excerpt from my latest essay, Preventing an Israeli-Iran War, published in the May 2019 issue of American Diplomacy. The full-length essay is available at http://americandiplomacy.web.unc.edu/2019/05/preventing-an-israeli-iran-war/.

Accusing Iran of being a rogue country bent on acquiring nuclear weapons, supporting extremist groups and terrorism, persistently threatening Israel, and destabilizing the region in its relentless effort to become the dominant power may well all be justified. The question is, what would it take to stop Iran from its destabilizing activities and help make it a constructive member of the international community, and avoid military confrontation with either the US or Israel or both.

The answer is not regime change, as Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and top American officials advocate, but a diplomatic solution. The EU, led by France, Germany, and the United Kingdom – who continue to adhere to the JCPOA – should initiate a behind-the-scenes dialogue and pave the way for US involvement in a negotiating process with Iran to find a peaceful solution and prevent a disastrous military confrontation.

Should the Trump administration remain adamant on regime change, it is more than likely that one of the following scenarios will unfold, which could lead to a catastrophic development.

Bellicose narrative leads to violence: The threats and counterthreats between Iran and Israel could lead to miscalculation, resulting in an unintended outbreak of a catastrophic war that neither side wants nor can win. As it continues to escalate, such narratives also create a public perception both in Israel and Iran that military confrontation may well be inevitable. As a result, both countries would become entrapped by their bellicose narrative against one another, in which any incident perceived to threaten the national security of either side could trigger a devastating military confrontation.

Rhetoric like the statements by a senior Revolutionary Guard commander, declaring on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Iranian revolution that “if they [the United States] attack us, we will raze Tel Aviv and Haifa to the ground”, and Netanyahu’s response that if Iran attempts such an attack, it will fail and “…this would be the last anniversary of the revolution that they celebrate”, should be avoided.

Attacks in Syria spark further conflict: Israel’s continuing attacks on Iranian military installations in Syria, from which Iran has sustained heavy losses, could pressure Iran to retaliate as it will no longer allow itself to be humiliated now that these attacks are in the open. Iran’s tendency to overly exaggerate its military prowess, which it has come to believe in, and Israel’s psychologically rooted fear of existential threats, narrows the space of reasonable discourse.

The problem here is that Israel’s determination not to allow Iran to establish permanent military bases in Syria, and conversely Tehran’s resolve not to cut its losses and leave, shortens the time before an outright military confrontation could occur. These conditions are further aggravated by Trump’s support of Netanyahu’s military campaign against Iran in Syria, bringing Israel and Iran ever closer to the precipice of war.

Effecting regime change in Iran: Trump’s desire to effect regime change – by imposing sanctions to
dislocate the Iranian economy and instigate public unrest, while trying to isolate Iran internationally – could create chaotic conditions in the country, but it does not guarantee that regime change will in fact be realized. Unlike the US’ successful attempt in 1953 to topple the then-Mosaddeq government, in today’s Iran the clergy is far more entrenched in every aspect of life.

Although Iranians are suffering and ordinary people take a serious personal risk by demonstrating against the government and demanding change, this public pressure is not enough to unseat the government, as the Trump administration is hoping for. It does, however, push the government to search for new avenues to alleviate the worsening economic conditions.

The mullahs have shown an inordinate capacity to ruthlessly quell any public unrest, and it can count on the powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to safeguard the survival of the clergy, because in protecting the mullahs, the Guard protects its own elite position. This mutuality of interests and dependency explains why the clergy allocates a significant portion of Iran’s national budget to the Guard, regardless of the overall economic hardship from which the public suffers.

Waging a premeditated war against Iran: This is the worst option of all, as there is simply no way to predict the ultimate outcome. To suggest, as some Israelis do, that a surgical attack on Iran’s nuclear facilities carried out jointly by the US and Israel will not necessarily evolve into a regional war displays a clear lack of understanding of the Iranian psychological and political disposition. Regardless of cost, Iran will retaliate against US targets and allies in the region, which could plunge the Middle East into a devastating war from which no one will escape unscathed.

Given the fact that no war could obliterate Iran, and Israel’s low threshold for casualties, any Iranian attack on Israel in the course of a war that results in the death of thousands of Israelis while inflicting massive destruction may well force Israel to resort to the use of WMDs. This option becomes even more realistic should Israel conclude with certainty that Iran is posing an imminent existential threat. For this reason, no sane Israeli or American should even contemplate a premeditated war and must stop short of nothing to prevent an accidental one.

The February 2019 Warsaw conference revealed disunity and disagreement between the US and its allies in addressing the Iran problem. Although it was ostensibly convened to address the crises sweeping the Middle East, the focus quickly shifted to Iran, which was the intent of the US in the first place. The Trump administration wanted to rally the international community behind its confrontational policy toward Iran, to which the European countries objected, as was manifested by the low-level delegations they sent to the conference.

For Iran, this display of disunity provided it the opportunity to take full advantage of the Western alliance’s discord and trade with many other countries to compensate for American sanctions. However, the EU must make it clear to Tehran that it cannot count on the discord to last indefinitely. Conversely, Germany, France, and the UK ought to persuade the US that its confrontational approach will not work. Secretary of State Pompeo’s unabashed statement that “you can’t achieve stability in the Middle East without confronting Iran”, a position that Netanyahu echoed the day after, will only heighten the tension and draw them ever closer to a military confrontation.

The EU must initiate behind-the-scenes negotiations with Iran, if it hasn’t already, and along with the US, develop and agree upon a joint cohesive strategic plan to mitigate the conflict with Iran based on the carrot-and-stick approach. The new negotiations should be based on quid pro quo aiming to achieve a comprehensive deal in stages to enhance mutual credibility and build trust.

Every conflicting issue must be placed on the table and a solution to any such issue, for example, an agreement on freezing Iran’s research and development of ballistic missiles, is reciprocated by lifting a specific set of sanctions from which Iran can derive immediate benefit. To be sure, Western powers should
offer Iran a path for normalization of relations, removing sanctions, and assurances that the West will not seek regime change.

In return, Iran must stop meddling in the affairs of other states, supporting extremist groups such as Hezbollah, threatening Western allies, and waging proxy wars in Yemen and Syria while undermining their geostrategic interests. Moreover, Iran must provide a full account of its nuclear weapons history and present all information pertaining to its nuclear facilities and equipment, as was uncovered by the archives seized by Israel, along with the technology and materials that it has hidden from the international monitors.

This kind of cooperation and high level of transparency will serve the objective of reaching regional stability from which Iran can benefit greatly, instead of continuing its nefarious activities which invite condemnation, sanctions, and potentially war.

Pierre Vimont, senior fellow at Carnegie Europe, observes that “These different challenges all boil down to the issue of a regional security arrangement for the whole region. Highly ambitious indeed, but the response to the current mistrust between Iran and its neighbors can only come from a clear perspective of where this whole region should be heading to ensure a sustainable stability.”

There is nothing in the current crises with Iran that cannot be resolved through negotiations. But the continuing threats and counter-threats will gain increasing traction and make the risk of waging a war preferable to the consequences of allowing Iran to continue its destructive behavior.

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IT’S TIME TO END U.S. MILITARY AID TO THE PHILIPPINES: U.S. TAXPAYER FUNDS ARE BANKROLLING THE WORSENING HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS IN THE PHILIPPINES. MOVEMENTS ARE RISING TO SHUT THAT AID OFF.

Amee Chew*

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Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte’s bloody “War on Drugs” has now claimed over 27,000 lives — almost all poor and indigent people, including children, summarily executed by police or vigilantes.

Over 140,000 pre-trial detainees are being held in overcrowded Philippine prisons, many on trumped up drug charges; 75 percent of the total prison population still awaits their day in court, let alone conviction. On top of this, assassinations of human rights lawyers, journalists, labor and peasant organizers, indigenous leaders, clergy, teachers, and activists are spiraling out of control.

Duterte has systematically silenced voices of political dissent, jailing Senator Leila DeLima, an early drug war critic; ousting Supreme Court Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno, who opposed the imposition of martial law in Mindanao; and now arresting Maria Ressa, internationally renowned journalist and executive editor of the indy outlet Rappler.

Meanwhile, less known to U.S. audiences, Duterte has dropped bombs on Philippine soil over 368,391 times — and some 450,000 civilians have been displaced by militarization. After scuttling peace talks with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), Duterte has jailed internationally
protected peace consultants. And in January, consultant Randy Malayao was murdered in cold blood by armed hit men.

Ever since the Philippines attained formal independence in 1946, the U.S. has maintained a military presence on its former colony, guiding and supporting “counter-insurgency” operations to put down constant rebellions against an oligarchic government. Today, the Philippine armed forces overwhelmingly direct violence not against outside invaders, but at poor and marginalized people within its borders. U.S. military aid is only making internal conflict worse.

**U.S. taxpayer funds are bankrolling the worsening human rights crisis in the Philippines.**

Duterte’s repressive regime is the largest recipient of U.S. military aid in Asia.

In 2016, the U.S. helped inaugurate Duterte’s drug war by giving $32 million to the Philippine police (supposedly for “training and services” in “policing standards” and “rule of law,” besides equipment). In July 2018, the United States announced an additional $26.5 million in U.S. tax dollars to beef up support for Philippine police, in the name of “counter-terrorism.”

In FY2018, the Defense Department provided roughly $100 million in military aid, including equipment, weapons, and aerial surveillance systems, to the Philippine military and police, though Operation Pacific Eagle — a so-called “overseas contingency operation” that is exempt from congressional limits on spending. The amount demanded for this program will increase to $108.2 million for FY2019 — even as the Defense Department has admitted it lost track of transactions for 76 of 77 arms sales conducted under bilateral agreements with the Philippines.

In 2018, on top of the above, the U.S. sold the Philippine police and military over $63 million worth of arms. It also donated 2,253 machine guns, over 5 million rounds of ammunition, surveillance equipment, and other weapons. Military aid totaled at least $193.5 million last year, not counting arms sales, and donated equipment of unreported worth. At least $145.6 million is already pledged for 2019.

In January, Trump authorized $1.5 billion annually for the Asian Pacific region, including the Philippines, from 2019 to 2023. Although this authorization includes a stipulation that counter-narcotics funds will not go to the Philippines (“except for drug demand reduction,” a potential loophole), it’s too little, too late. The set-aside has no restrictions on weapons funding for the Philippine military. And separately, the State Department already plans to deliver $5.3 million this year to the Philippine police for anti-narcotics activities. Worse, rampant corruption together with a total lack of transparency means it’s hard to ensure where military aid could actually end up.

**U.S. military equipment forms the backbone of Duterte’s “military modernization” program.**

Although this aid is tiny compared to the U.S.’s own bloated military budget, this tremendous transfer of weapons and surveillance technology is significant in propping up the Philippine armed forces’ capacity.

Duterte has embarked on an ambitious program to “modernize” the Philippine military, massively increasing funding and pouring more money towards this than spent in the last 15 years. (Meanwhile, he’s doubled the salaries of military and police.) He could not do so without U.S. aid and arms.

For its part, the U.S. is particularly interested in expanding aerial “intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance” missions over Mindanao, the largest island in the Southern Philippines, rich in untapped mineral resources. Without U.S. aid, the Philippine military would lack the airplanes and technology to perform this surveillance.
What’s more, this year’s Operation Pacific Eagle budget sets aside an extra $3.5 million for U.S. military efforts to collect and analyze “local media in native languages” — underscoring that the U.S. is striving for an upper hand in directing Philippine military operations. And in winning an information war over public opinion.

In recent years, the U.S. has had up to 5,000 troops deployed in the Philippines at any one time. Officially, U.S. troops are limited to “joint exercises” and war games. But questions have been raised over possible U.S. personnel involvement in secretive missions, resulting in killings of civilians and human rights abuses.

In the case of the 2015 Mamasapano massacre, supposedly under the jurisdiction of Philippine police and military only, hearings later uncovered U.S. guidance and surveillance support, despite U.S. denials. Meanwhile, U.S. troops who themselves commit human rights abuses, murder, or sexual assault, are insulated from being held accountable by the U.S.-Philippines Visiting Forces Agreement.

What are the consequences of the bonanza of military aid for Duterte?

The bottom line is, the U.S. government is complicit in — and actively supporting — the deepening human rights crisis in the Philippines.

Police are linked to the killings carried out by unidentified vigilantes in the War on Drugs, and their corruption abounds. Besides tagging the unarmed people they have murdered as “fighting back,” police have planted evidence; sexually assaulted women and children, in exchange for release or dropping drug charges; and detained people without charges and tortured them to extract bribes, including through the use of secret holding cells.

In addition to the drug war, repression is unfolding on other fronts, as well. Twelve journalists were killed in the first two years under Duterte — the highest number of murdered journalists in the first two years in office of any Philippine president. At least 34 lawyers have been assassinated, including Benjamin Ramos of the National Union of People’s Lawyers, an attorney representing the Sagay 9 — peasants, including women and minors, massacred for trying to claim land they were legally awarded.

At least 48 environmental campaigners were murdered in 2017 alone, making the Philippines the second most dangerous country for environmentalists, after Brazil. By 2018, 14 massacres, killings mostly of farmers who were fighting for land reform, were perpetrated by police, military, or paramilitaries.

Labor leaders are being slaughtered using tactics similar to those in the drug war. Edilberto Miralles, president of R&E Taxi Transport union, was shot in broad daylight in front of the National Labor Relations Commission in 2016. Linus Cubol, chair of Kilusang Mayo Uno in Caraga, was murdered in November by vigilantes riding in tandem. Police brutally beat peacefully picketing NutriAsia workers on strike and their supporters, wounding scores; then they charged the picketers with assault, planted weapons, and attempted to suppress journalists’ coverage of the dispersal.

Under Duterte, over 134 human rights defenders have been killed. In just one case, in 2017, Elisa Badayos and Eleuterio Moises were murdered while serving on a fact-finding team investigating human rights violations due to militarization in Negros Oriental.

Since 2017, Duterte has imposed martial law on Mindanao. Increasing militarization is resulting in rampant abuses against indigenous and Moro people. Aerial “surveillance” missions already make up the bulk of U.S. aid to the Philippine military. Most likely in direct relation, bombings in Mindanao have escalated — particularly over indigenous lands, causing mass evacuations. Simultaneously, reminiscent of U.S.-sponsored tactics in Latin America resulting in indigenous genocide, the Philippine military, together
with paramilitary groups it arms and guides, are terrorizing indigenous communities. The military has recruited and even forced indigenous people to become paramilitaries as a means of divide-and-conquer.

Indigenous groups’ resistance is at the forefront of the struggle against climate change, both in the Philippines and globally. Now, their lands, such as those in Mindanao’s Pantaron Range, are some of the few remaining to be opened up to extractive logging and mining by multinational corporations. The militarization of indigenous lands, purportedly in the name of counterinsurgency, seeks to quell this organized community opposition to corporate land-grabbing and environmental degradation.

Education is a center of community resistance — and now repression as well.

The military and paramilitaries are targeting indigenous community schools — turning their grounds into military encampments, shooting teachers and students, bombing the schools — to force their closure. Indigenous children and their teachers are the victims of this campaign.

In September 2017, Obello Bayao, a student at Salugpongan's school in Dulyan, Talaingod, was killed by Alamara paramilitaries while walking home from farming. He was shot 24 times in the back. In the same community, another 15-year-old student was gunned down by Alamara in 2016, while a 14-year-old girl reported being gang raped by soldiers in 2015.

In May 2018, Beverly Geronimo, a teacher of indigenous children, was gunned down in Trento, Agusan del Sur while buying school supplies. In November 2018, four teachers, Tema Namatidong, Julius Torregosa, Ariel Barluado, and Giovanni Solomon, were abducted by the military in Lanao del Sur.

The list of atrocities continues. In June 2018, 72 schools were unable to hold classes because of military harassment. Over 2,000 indigenous students could not attend school because of nearby military encampments.

The schools under attack are part of a movement led by indigenous groups, together with NGOs and church partners, to provide relevant education for their youth, a service largely neglected by the government. Ninety percent of indigenous children lack access to formal education. In the 2000s, indigenous communities established schools in conjunction with their struggles for self-determination, in hopes that education would help protect them from land-grabbing. The military has sought to brand community schools as “training camps” for communist insurgents, recently launching Facebook campaigns towards this purpose.

U.S. military aid is intensifying the conflict in Mindanao, exacerbating its impact on civilians. U.S. investment in aerial surveillance will escalate an air war that has a brutal and indiscriminate effect on people as well as the environment. The integration of “intelligence” activity in counter-terrorism is dangerous. It will likely worsen repression against anyone organizing for indigenous, labor, and human rights — feeding a growing bloodbath as paramilitaries are employed to undermine these local struggles, while providing cover for government troops to escape accountability.

Today’s violence is inseparable from the U.S.’s imperial shadow. The drug war is a purge of humans deemed worthless in a society where social safety nets were never allowed to be developed, where the failure of neoliberal economic reforms now plays into the hands of despotism, and where U.S.-backed elites regularly employ state-paid goons to undermine democracy.

Placed in historical context, Mindanao, and those lands of indigenous communities under attack, were some of the last outposts resisting Spanish and U.S. rule. The islands — dubbed by Trump “a prime piece of real estate from a military standpoint” — have long served as a stepping stone towards U.S. aspirations of dominance in the Asia-Pacific. U.S. military aid continues a long process of “pacification” — and colonial conquest, now unfolding in neocolonial forms.
People's movements in the Philippines are calling for international solidarity, to end the U.S.-backed militarization of their communities.

They demand also peace with justice — a peace process that adopts structural reforms like those outlined in CASER, a program the NDFP sought to reach agreement on implementing via peace talks, that includes land reform, rescinding neoliberal economic policies, and respecting indigenous land and self-determination.

In 2016, Sandugo, a historic alliance of indigenous and Moro groups from across the Philippines, formed, urging for self-determination and a just peace. Three thousand delegates met in Manila, and protesters converged on the U.S. embassy, under a banner calling for an end to U.S. intervention and militarization. At the gates of the U.S. embassy, the Philippine police responded by beating people indiscriminately, and a police van ran over the crowd, injuring dozens.

Three years later, the call to end U.S. military aid and lift martial law continues.

In terms of the drug war, one of the first groups to come out in vocal opposition was Kadamay, a mass-based organization of urban poor people. Instead of killings, Kadamay has called for addressing poverty and the root causes of the drug problem — in short, for drug addiction to be treated as a health, not criminal, issue. More recently, an organization of family members of those killed in the drug war has formed, Rise Up For Life and Rights.

When the Philippine Senate tried to restrict funding for Duterte’s drug war in late 2017, the U.S. stepped in to provide funds that filled the shortfall.

To evade accountability, Duterte has shifted drug war operations from under the Philippine National Police (PNP) to the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency and back to the PNP’s general operation funds. Recently, he eliminated keeping a separate budget item for the drug war — obscuring how much money is being expended on it. The Philippine Congress has not been able to provide effective oversight.

The continuing drug war killings and rampant human rights abuses only underscore that there is no way to ensure U.S. military aid to the Duterte regime does not enable human rights violations. For its part, U.S. military spending is not only overblown, but also often untraceable, secretive, and unaccountable. From Central America to Palestine to the Philippines, U.S. military aid has a sordid legacy of fueling atrocities.

A growing movement is calling on Congress to cut military aid, arms gifts, and arm sales to the Philippines — as well as to end support for the Duterte regime.

Congress must exercise its powers to ensure the Leahy Law, which stipulates no funding shall be furnished to foreign security forces if the U.S. knows they have committed “a gross violation of human rights,” is upheld with regard to the Philippines. (For more information on this campaign, please visit: ichrus.org.)

In 2007, due to movement pressure, Congress held a hearing on rising extrajudicial killings in the Philippines under Gloria Macapagal Arroyo’s regime. Legislation was passed placing restrictions on military aid. The next year, killings decreased significantly.

Our time to act is now.

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How Sudan’s Pro-Democracy Uprising Challenges Prevailing Myths about Civil Resistance

Stephen Zunes*


A powerful pro-democracy civil insurrection in Sudan which has ousted a longstanding dictator and his successor is still in progress, but Sudanese are hopeful for a full democratic transition.

Demonstrations began in December of last year, initially focusing on the deteriorating economic situation, but soon escalated to demand that the authoritarian President Omar al-Bashir—who had ruled the country for nearly three decades—step down and that democracy be restored. By January, the protests had spread to the capital of Khartoum, gaining support from youth and women’s movements as well as a number of opposition parties. During the third week in February, the government declared a state of emergency, increasing their arrests of oppositionists and censorship of media coverage of the movement. Despite the growing repression, as well as a cabinet shakeup and other measures to appease the opposition, protests continued.

On April 6, the Association of Sudanese Professionals led a march of hundreds of thousands onto the Army headquarters in Khartoum and began a sit-in, demanding the resignation of al-Bashir and the return of democratic civilian governance. Despite scores of protesters being killed over the previous months, the movement was clearly growing. Less than a week later, on April 11, the military removed al-Bashir from office and subsequently placed him under arrest. General Awad Ibn Auf, who had served as al-Bashir’s Defense Minister and now headed the transitional military council in Sudan, declared himself interim president, announced the release of some political prisoners, declared a state of emergency (including a dusk to dawn curfew), and promised elections in two years.

The protesters, rejecting continued military rule and such a long delay in democratic elections, defied the curfew and demanded an immediate transition to civilian rule and early elections. Less than 30 hours later, Ibn Auf resigned and was succeeded by Lieutenant-General Abdel Fattah Abdelrahman Burhan, who—unlike Ibn Auf—was neither implicated in war crimes nor was as closely associated with al-Bashir’s repressive rule. The curfew was lifted, additional political prisoners were freed, and some of the more notorious military, police, and intelligence leaders, as well as leading prosecutors, were dismissed. A half-hearted attempt by the army on April 15 to disperse the ongoing sit-in failed. Talks between pro-democracy leaders and the interim government are continuing, with a number of important concessions regarding banning members of al-Bashir’s party and the inclusion of pro-democracy leaders in the interim government, though many of the details as of this writing are still being negotiated and demands for a civilian-led transitional government remain.

A Brief History of Civil Resistance in Sudan

This is not the first time that the people of Sudan have risen up in a largely nonviolent pro-democracy insurrection against a dictatorial regime. In 1964, when the country was ruled by military dictator Ibrahim Abboud, large protests coalesced into a crippling general strike that forced him from power. A series of unstable civilian coalitions governed the country until a military coup in 1969, led by Jafaar Nimeiry, but his repressive rule was ended during the spring of 1985, following two weeks of largely nonviolent demonstrations and a general strike led to his ouster by the military. Protests continued until the military agreed to hand power over to an interim civilian government and allow for democratic elections.
Divisions within Sudan’s broad-based coalition government made it vulnerable to pressures from the military leaders and right-wing Islamists who, led by al-Bashir, seized power in 1989. In subsequent years, the regime decimated Sudanese civil society, including the country’s once-vibrant trade union movement, and imposed an ultra-conservative Islamist system backed by a brutal police state. Despite the severity of the repression, a series of aborted uprisings and mass protests swept the country, most significantly in 1998, 2011, 2012, and 2016. A pro-democracy coalition known as Girifna (Arabic for “We are fed up”) persisted despite many of their leaders being arrested or killed.

**Striking Takeaways about Sudan’s Current Uprising**

The Sudan uprising challenges a number of prevailing myths many people have in the West regarding unarmed civil insurrections.

**Myth #1: Nonviolent tactics can’t work against highly repressive regimes**
Sudan has generally been ranked among the most bloody, violent, totalitarian regimes in the world. Al-Bashir has been indicted by the International Criminal Court on multiple counts of genocide, crimes against humanity, and other war crimes, and other top military leaders have been implicated as well. Pro-democracy activists have been repeatedly gunned down in the streets of Khartoum and other cities, yet the protests continued. In addition, unlike the 2011 uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt in which the largely nonviolent movements also included rioting, arson, and violent confrontations with security forces protesters in the Sudanese capital have made a conscious choice to remain nonviolent.

**Myth #2: Civil resistance can’t work in impoverished countries with high illiteracy, little Internet access, and poor infrastructure**
Sudan is one of the poorest countries in the world, exacerbated by ongoing armed conflicts, rampant corruption, drought, and—despite being the largest country in Africa—a lack of adequate transport and other basic infrastructure. Both literacy and Internet access are among the lowest in the Arab world, with barely half the adult population being able to read and write. The country ranks near the bottom of the Human Development Index. Despite this, hundreds of thousands of people have been mobilized across the country.

**Myth #3: Successful nonviolent struggle is unrealistic in countries with serious ethnic divisions or ongoing violent conflicts**
Sudan has suffered from violent internal conflict and civil war for most of the period since its independence in 1956. War waged by separatists in the south led to that region’s independence in 2011, but fighting continues on both sides of the new border. The war in the Darfur region in the west, which has included acts of genocide against the Fur population, continues. The Arab-led military government has discriminated against other minorities as well, including the Beja, Nuba, and Fallata. Yet all major ethnic groups have been participating in the uprising. In addition to the protests in the capital of Khartoum, massive demonstrations have taken place in such northeastern cities as Atbara (where the uprising began) and Port Sudan, to the southeastern city of El-Gedarif, to the western city of Al-Fashir, the capital of Darfur.

This underscores that both the desire for political freedom and the strategy of nonviolent civil resistance to obtain it are not restricted to a nation’s level of development, political stability, structure of governance, or its particular ethnic, religious, and cultural traditions. The Sudanese demonstrators’ willingness to maintain a strict nonviolent discipline, far greater than in many pro-democracy struggles in more “developed” countries, is also an important reminder that the appreciation of the strategic importance of nonviolent action is far from being primarily a Western construct.
Unlike many in the pro-democracy struggle in Egypt earlier this decade who naively trusted the military to be an ally, the Sudanese are remaining steadfast in demanding civilian leadership and a minimal political role for the country’s armed forces. Refusing to be placated by significant concessions that the transitional government is offering, and demanding they also step down is a high-risk/high-reward strategy. The leadership of the Sudanese army has shown its willingness to order large-scale massacres in the past. However, pro-democracy forces are hoping that—even if such orders are given—ordinary soldiers and an emerging younger generation of more moderate middle-level officers would refuse to carry them out.

With thousands of Sudanese still on the streets as of this writing, the pro-democracy movement appears to believe they have the winning hand.

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COUNTERING EXTREMISM THROUGH HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Yossef Ben-Meir, Mouhssine Tadlaoui-Cherki and Kati Roumani*


Vulnerability is a common denominator shared by many people in Morocco, including students and recent, jobless graduates and youthful, former prison detainees.

These two groups actually have more in common than might appear at first sight. A significant proportion of young Moroccans who manage to make it through high school to university grow up, together with their peers who may drop out at an early age, in some of the country’s toughest locations, where systemic poverty and deep social inequality throw life into a constant state of disruption.

With or without the benefit of formal educational opportunities, young people who are economically disenfranchised and struggling to balance several political, social, ethnic and religious narratives can be more easily attracted towards sympathy for radical ideologies and violent action.

Moreover, this vulnerability works against existing peace and security initiatives by decreasing the effectiveness of human development efforts, driving the most vulnerable still further towards extremist tendencies and active networks.

All this is set in the context of the high general unemployment rate in Morocco of around 9%, which is dramatically higher among the young, including recent graduates, for whom the level has exceeded 30% in recent years.

Two particular schemes currently in place for students and recent graduates may be extended in the future to former non-violent detainees, offering vital stability as well as aiming to counter violent extremism.

Both initiatives are the brainchild of the High Atlas Foundation or HAF, a Moroccan-United States
non-profit organisation founded in 2000, which aims to be a catalyst for grassroots development in vulnerable communities throughout Morocco by facilitating participatory development programmes, based on proven techniques.

Change agents in Mohammedia and Fes

Despite improvements in Morocco’s higher education system, getting regional universities to apply academic knowledge in an effective, even innovative fashion within the workplace remains a challenge. Essentially, the issue is the lack of relevance of many university training programmes to the realities of job market needs and of regional and local growth strategies.

Student Mohammed Idrissi Guartomi’s comment is typical of what many think: “I am about to get my law degree, but it seems that my dream to become a lawyer will never come true.”

To counter this, in 2008 HAF, in partnership with Hassan II University’s faculty of law, economics, and social sciences in Mohammedia, created the Center for Community Consensus-Building and Sustainable Development.

The centre offers students as well as young members of local civil society organisations, or CSOs, a range of training and capacity-building programmes, grounded in participatory methodology and experiential learning techniques.

From this safe vantage point, participants express their ideas and opinions, master applied skills and develop practical innovations of their own. What they gain is a sense of empowerment, as well as the tools necessary to bring about real socio-economic change in their own lives and communities.

Since its opening, the centre has become a hub for capacity building, planning and dialogue, where more than 100 locally elected officials, 150 CSO members and 450 university students have met to network, exchange advice and guidance and build capacity in the areas of participatory analysis, strategic planning, project design and management and advocacy.

Before his eventual graduation, Mohammed Idrissi Guartomi was among a group of 15 law students who advocated successfully for faculty managers to set up a law clinic where students have the chance to practise their vocation.

Meanwhile, a HAF team designed and secured the necessary funding for a year-long legal aid programme that took place in the 2014-15 academic year. A total of 55 law students benefited from this programme to gain additional theoretical and technical skills through role-play and working on case studies. At the same time, students provided a free legal aid service to selected local CSOs, activists and communities.

All of this has had a profoundly positive impact in three ways. Law student Ayoub Al Horr noted: “Wearing a lawyer’s suit and standing in front of my colleagues to present and advocate on behalf of a community association helped me realise not only the complicated aspects of the profession but also the career path I want to pursue.”

Undergraduates are empowered not only to become shapers of their own learning and future professional focus but also to play a critical role in building public support for change and engaging others in that process.

They have succeeded, too, in changing the culture so that the faculty is now examining innovative ways of offering improved training opportunities for its students, while delivering services in a way that ensures citizen’s full access to the civil justice system.
This particular programme has brought tremendous improvement to the organisational management of 18 selected CSOs. Each benefited from five hours per week of dedicated voluntary service during which students helped them review their bylaws, facilitate board meetings and actively participated in efforts to design and develop community development initiatives.

Fatma Al Achkar, president of Al Bochra women’s association in the commune of Ain Harrouda, commented: “Access for [our] association to legal aid services made the difference between poverty and self-sufficiency for an association serving a poor community. This programme has not only helped us improve how our association performs, but it has helped improve our lives.”

Building on this success, HAF was invited to train and coach undergraduates as change agents at Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University in Fes, one of many universities in Morocco known for violent clashes, both internally between student political groups and between these groups and police.

All participants were identified as vulnerable to adopting radical ideologies and accompanying violent action, yet expressed a desire and motivation to change, lead and improve their own lives.

During the course of the 2015-16 academic year, 70 students from the faculty of literature and human sciences have been benefitting from a training curriculum based on experiential learning in authentic community settings. As in Mohammedia, they are able to build their project management skills while supporting rural communities in identifying, implementing and evaluating key local human development initiatives.

Once again, the tangible benefits for all are clear and from the students’ point of view this further helps to boost their sense of achievement and self-esteem. Moreover, it was demonstrated that environmental factors conducive to political violence among students were significantly reduced.

Oummat Salaam: beyond borders

To extend this success to another part of Morocco’s youthful population, HAF is looking for funding for a project aimed at benefiting non-violent former prisoners. As before, the overarching goal of the programme would be to develop resilient communities whose members gain the agency to mobilise economic, political and social interconnections.

In addition, at the same time as enhancing volunteer participants’ professional and personal capacities, their prospects for genuine integration into mainstream society would improve.

Explicit in the terms of this project is the aim of reducing the environmental conditions that support radicalisation and the desire to become a foreign fighter in a terrorist organisation.

The project’s implications could be far-reaching too in the sense that, while it would commence in Morocco, with the recording of measurable success it could extend its reach throughout the Middle East and North Africa or MENA region.

In theory, a first initiative would last for 30 months, offering participants a full 24 months in the field, framed by six months during which HAF would open and close the project. A suggested 40 individuals would be assessed as before for their suitability as change agents – 10 recent college graduates together with 30 released detainees from three Moroccan provinces.

Convicted of non-violent offences, this latter group would be drawn from those with a broad range of educational experience, ranging from illiteracy and non-completion of high school through to university attendance.
While young men would be expected to make up the majority of participants, as statistically Moroccan women prisoners are less active in radicalism and violence due to cultural factors, the question of gender interaction during the scheme would be addressed with great sensitivity.

Nearly 80% of prison detainees who underwent similar, comprehensive programmes in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Yemen were fully rehabilitated into society and went on to become role models. Other studies have shown that programmes supporting opportunities for livelihoods, such as vocational training and job placement assistance, can mitigate the economic conditions that are conducive to radicalisation and recruitment.

**Broad participation and cultural sensitivity**

The level of success is greatly dependent on the degree of genuine grassroots involvement. Broad participation in community development marginalises religious and secular political extremists by strengthening indigenous democratic processes (which are themselves more likely to succeed) that generate economic prosperity.

Community empowerment occurs through a gradual, non-violent and widely accepted process because of the many collective and individual benefits the community experiences as a result of engaging in inclusive, direct dialogue in planning development projects of which the communities themselves are beneficiaries. As people achieve their own interests, they feel less alienation; their zone of tolerance also expands because the underlying conditions that fuel extremism are directly addressed.

As a result, beneficiaries are less likely to channel hatred towards outside actors. The more people come to reap the fruits of the local development approach, the more they will be emboldened to fight extremism existing within their own countries.

Yet project success is dependent too on the sensitivity accorded to a specific context, in this case to Moroccan Muslim culture in general and its youth in particular.

For most, the period of adolescence and just beyond is critical in achieving independence and autonomy and in defining self-identity. For many young people, in Morocco and worldwide, the very notion of self-identity is in crisis, particularly in the wake of fast-paced societal transition.

Earlier blueprints, however limiting, were clearly defined. Now they have been displaced on the one hand by attempts to forge something modern, coherent and meaningful but which largely fail young people; and on the other, by distorted, radically over-simplified interpretations of tradition, which seek to indoctrinate youth.

The dominant recurring theme in interviews conducted by HAF with university students who had crossed the threshold and begun a process of indoctrination was that all of them were searching for their purpose in life.

Islamic scholar Homayra Ziad writes: “It is telling that much of the recruitment discourse of terrorist organisations like ISIS centres on questions of justice. This discourse provides youth who are nominally Muslim with an identity that is unambiguous and based on zealotry, absolute certainty and absolute truth. It provides them with a community and with a cause. It gives marginalised youth the idea that they are fighting for justice in an unjust world order.”

The project proposes to serve youth by promoting to them an alternative, truly productive cause to which they may direct their energies. In practical terms, it translates into benefits for them, as participants in bringing about social justice for communities brought about through grassroots human
Youth actors and a distinguished concept

The chosen name of Oummata Salaam or Peace Nation reflects the rooting of the programme firmly in the Moroccan and MENA context, thus bestowing a sense of ownership by and control for the intended beneficiaries. It also signifies the wish to reclaim terminology that has been co-opted more recently by some radical groups.

HAF takes its cue from Islamic scholars who regard the term ‘Oummata’ in a universal way. Classically, it suggests human acceptance and connectivity framed within the context of a global, borderless society. The Oummata envisaged by this programme has in it a place for everyone; moreover, this highly progressive ideal resonates with that of participatory democracy, which is central to the HAF ethos.

In essence, the process of re-appropriating a linguistic concept parallels beautifully that of channelling dynamic, youthful energy for productive means. Rather than dropping into an abyss, both are uplifted, liberated in the true sense of the word and their true potential brought to the fore.

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of peoples across borders. This agreement will also address the overarching causes of migration, such as poor access to sustainable livelihoods, the socio-economic and environmental implications of migration upon both origin and host countries, as well as working to enhance the value and impact of migrants for sustainable development. Nevertheless, this cannot be achieved without acknowledging the growing storm confronting mankind: climate change.

Climate change, development and migration are part of an inextricably linked nexus. The Environmental Justice Foundation predicts that up to 10% of the world’s population could be at risk of forced displacement due to climatic hazards by 2050. At the GFMD conference, the EuroMedA Foundation, who hosted a side event entitled “A Euro-African Approach to Migration” highlighted that key issues set to face Africa will be desertification, drought and food insecurity, risks that are only going to worsen. Climate change can also compound existing, or create new political and economic issues in at-risk countries and further drive migratory patterns, with the distinct possibility of turning plans for “Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration” on its head.

A Two-Pronged Policy Needed to Stem the Flow of Migrants
Poverty Alleviation, Economic and Social Development

In acknowledgement of this looming problem, the following describes a strategy of participatory development, which addresses economic security and climate resilience for those most vulnerable, and hence reducing the likelihood of necessary migration in future. Morocco has the distinction of simultaneously being a last-stop transit country for migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, as well as being a nation of emigrants to Europe, North America and the Middle East. Under current projections, the country is set to be on the frontline of climate change, riddled by food insecurity, droughts, desertification, catastrophic flash-floods in erosion prone mountainous areas, all of which will only be exacerbated by the continuing trends of warming temperatures.

It is overwhelmingly the case that in Morocco as elsewhere, during community-based discussions regarding socio-economic development projects located in regions with high levels of emigration, that local participants would strongly prefer to stay in their home communities, if only there were basic opportunities there. Indeed, many migrants prefer not to be migrants, but instead seek the sustainable development of their origin communities. Involving local community members in the decision-making processes reveals key contextual insights into the priority initiatives that will enhance the wellbeing of their communities: these are highly viable and implementable because the projects respond to their self-defined needs, and are therefore most likely to be sustainable.

For example, in order to create opportunities and economic activity in marginalised rural communities experiencing notable emigration, a $100,000 investment can establish a women’s cooperative of approximately 50 members, for agriculture, food-processing or the production of artisanal crafts. This can generate an average of a 50% increase to household incomes, which in turn benefits a further 300-350 people, through better access to schooling, healthcare and sanitation infrastructure. Clean drinking water systems to serve one municipality costs in the region of $350,000 and dramatically improves not only resilience to droughts and girls’ participation in education, but also decreases incidences of water-borne diseases and infant mortality.

Furthermore, in Morocco, like so much of Africa, almost all the endemic species of fruit and nut trees can grow organically, if only investments in certifications, nurseries and co-operative building were available. These tree plantations can be used for multiple purposes, including seeding riverbanks to fight erosion, improving local biodiversity, to diversify traditional income sources and for carbon sequestration initiatives that can be vital for long-term sustainability. In this sense, human development and economic projects and investments at the grassroots level can be leveraged to form commitments from the
community to implement other initiatives that are beneficial for both protecting their local environments but also for global climate mitigation.

In order for potential migrants to be able remain in their communities, the agricultural value chain from nursery to market and the supporting infrastructure need to be put in place. The root of rural poverty, which ultimately propels migration, is in the insufferable bottlenecks at each step of the value-chain, slow-moving decision-making and ultimately a warming climate. Considering however the enormous opportunities that are discussed at global conferences, if applied at a community-scale, especially for example, with regards to added value from organic certification and carbon credit offsets, the ongoing impoverishment in rural places need not continue. So long as it does however, and if building climate resilience and adaptation is not incorporated with the migration-development paradigm, then the “ordered, safe and regular migration” hailed by the Global Forum and the UN’s HLPF will never be realised.

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A CALL FOR LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE FOR INTERFAITH INITIATIVES: FROM MOROCCO TO JERUSALEM

Sarah Turkenicz*


Comparison of the Museum of Tolerance in Jerusalem and the Akrich fruit tree nursery in Morocco and the use of museum for peace initiatives, and turns to the Akrich nursery for sustainable change and the elimination of spatial inequality.

Design plays a fundamental role in cultivating and forming collective memory through the shaping of physical public spaces. Landscape architecture is a field that grapples with social inequality and spatial complexity - two characteristics that Jerusalem embodies. In comparing the Museum of Tolerance in Jerusalem with the Akrich tree nursery in Morocco, I hope to shed light on how design can be better approached when dealing with interfaith relations.

The Museum of Tolerance (MOT) is located at the heart of modern Jerusalem on Hillel Street, a vibrant area that is at the intersection of the expansive Independence Park and the urban city center. The building is planned to host a variety of different activities: exhibition spaces, an education center, a theater, and includes numerous restaurants, cafes and shops. As a student walking by this site on my daily commute to school, I began to question. Who is this building for? Tolerance for whom and in what capacity? And more pressingly - Why here?

My apartment overlooked the ancient Muslim burial site that dates to the 7th century, known as Mamilla (Ma’man Allah in Arabic). It is on this site that the Simon Wiesenthal Center embarked on their architectural project for tolerance. According to Chief Excavator Gideon Suleimani, 400 graves containing human remains buried according to Muslim traditions were exhumed or exposed during excavations on the Museum site, many dating to the 12th century. Another 2000 graves remain under the museum’s site, the lowest layer dating back to the 11th century. Along with its historical roots, prominent Muslim warriors and scholars are buried there.
With museums often encapsulating history in countries that are post-conflict, how would this design play out in the milieu of Israel, where conflict is ongoing and ever-evolving, and narratives are complex and contradictory? MOT is surrounded by numerous acres of green space and Muslim heritage, but yet this was covered over at the expense of the building. The project went through while, ironically, it had the effect of silencing the very people the building seeks to pursue tolerance with. Rather than a museum that addresses the voices of a select few, landscape architecture could be the medium to work towards the erasure of this inequality as it ensures the cultivation and preservation of shared space.

This idea was explored through traveling to Morocco and meeting with Yossef Ben-Meir, the head of the High Atlas Foundation and the House of Life initiative. Here I saw just how important the revival of the cemetery and green space around the MOT building could be for the future of Jerusalem. The House of Life’s main initiative is to establish Muslim-Jewish collaboration by using agriculture as a bridge for Moroccan human development needs and cultural history. The site I visited was the Akrich Nursery, one of the Foundation’s inter-religious nursery projects. It is 30 kilometres west of Marrakech and the burial home of the revered Rabbi Raphael Cohen. The 700-year-old cemetery became a site of transformation when local villagers, public officials and the Jewish community decided to make effective use of the vacant spaces for fruit tree guilds. With the previous generations in Akrich relying solely on subsistence farming, this was an opportunity for eliminating food access barriers to approximately 2,000 farming families and 150 schools through the cultivation of 150,000 fig, almond and pomegranate trees since 2012.

The Akrich cemetery addresses a crucial question. With the coming end of a 2500-year-old era of Jews living in Morocco, how does one maintain a connection to this history without a physical presence? The caretaker of the cemetery, an Amazighi-born Moroccan, whose father and grandfather also maintained the cemetery, embodies this preservation, as he explained with great depth and pride the story of Rabbi Raphael Cohen. When viewed in this way, Jewish History becomes inextricable from Moroccan history. The revival and cultivation of indigenous produce goes hand in hand with the revival and cultivation of Jewish history.

Furthermore, an initiative in Akrich requires actual participation of the people. It ensures that Jews and Muslims work together daily. Through active participation, Moroccan citizens gain a sense that the future is theirs to make. As a result, indigenous produce is being reclaimed, while the revival of the cemetery has resulted in an influx of Jewish tourism along with a deep understanding and preservation of Moroccan culture and heritage.

While no two sites are the same, an initiative like this is crucial in Israel, where 8.3 percent of the total population face nutritional insecurity and 50 percent of the population of Israeli Arabs are unable to meet the minimal nutritional needs. The cemetery and surrounding green space should be at the forefront of the story, as it allows for a larger platform of participation, historical preservation and economic growth. As transitional justice mechanisms are always coming up against the frictions between global devices and local realities, it is the duty of all who intervene to grapple and question a justice that means different things to different people. As justice varies and changes due to the unique circumstances of a given time and place, so too should the methodologies. To supplement the Museum of Tolerance, landscape architecture solutions may better deal with the constant motion and messiness of an ongoing conflict and encourage citizens to take ownership and express locality through participation and cultivation of green space.

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MEDIA NOTES

Living Together in Peace and Harmony: The Journal of Living Together is published by the International Center for Ethno-Religious Mediation and available online from: https://www.icermediation.org/projects-
The video, *A Message From the Future with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez*, was produced by *The Intercept*'s Naomi Klein, narrated by Ocasio-Cortez, is a short film presented as a look back to the present day from a future in which the Green New Deal passed Congress and reshaped America and the planet for the better. It is available at: https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/04/17/we-can-be-whatever-we-have-courage-see-new-video-aoc-visions-greennewdeal-future?cd-origin=rss&utm_term=%27We%20Can%20Be%20Whatever%20We%20Have%20the%20Courage%20to%20See%27%3A%20New%20Video%20From%20AOC%20Envisions%20a%20Green%20New%20Deal%20Future&utm_campaign=New%20Video%20From%20AOC%20Envisions%20a%20Green%20New%20Deal%20Future%20%7C%20News%20%2526%20Views&utm_medium=Daily%20Newsletter&utm_source=Daily%20Newsletter&cm_mmc=Act-On%20Software,-email,-New%20Video%20From%20AOC%20Envisions%20a%20Green%20New%20Deal%20Future%20%7C%20News%20%2526%20Views,-%27We%20Can%20Be%20Whatever%20We%20Have%20the%20Courage%20to%20See%27%3A%20New%20Video%20From%20AOC%20Envisions%20a%20Green%20New%20Deal%20Future/.

USEFUL WEB SITES

**UN NGO Climate Change Caucus**, with numerous task forces, is at: http://climatecaucus.net.


350.org focusses on stopping and mitigating global warming induced climate change: http://act.350.org/.

The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) is concerned with the proper use of science in decision making, and of using science to prevent public harm in many areas, especially concerning the environment: www.ucsusa.org.

The Indigenous Environmental Network works on environmental issues from an Indigenous point of view: http://www.ienearth.org.

The League of Conservation Voters (LCV) is concerned with environmental issues: https://www.lcv.org.

Food & Water Action Fund (https://www.foodandwateractionfund.org) and Food and Water Watch (https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org) work to protect food and water.

Ocean River Institute is a non-profit that provides opportunities to make a difference and go the distance for savvy stewardship of a greener and bluer planet Earth: https://www.oceanriver.org.

Waterkeeper Alliance is a global movement for swimmable, drinkable, fishable water: https://waterkeeper.org.

WildEarth Guardians works to protect and restore wildlife, wild places and wild rivers in the American West: wildearthguardians.org.

Earth Policy Institute, dedicated to building a sustainable future as well as providing a plan of how to get from here to there: www.earthpolicy.org.

Wiser Earth lists more than 10,700 environmental and environmental justice organizations at: http://www.wiserearth.org/organization/

Earthwatch, the world’s largest environmental volunteer organization, founded in 1971, works globally to help the people of the planet volunteer realize a sustainable environment: http://www.earthwatch.org/.


The Environmental Defense Fund works on environmental issues and policy, primarily in the U.S.: http://edf.org.


SaveOurEnvironment.org, a coalition of environmental organizations acting politically in the U.S.: http://qa3.org/campaign/0908_endangered_species/xuninw84p7m8mxxm.


Care 2 is concerned about a variety of issues, including the environment: http://www.care2.com/.

Rainmakers Oceania studies possibilities for restoring the natural environment and humanity’s rightful place in it, at: http://rainmakers-oceania.com/0annexanchorc/about-rainmakers.html.

Green Ships, in fall 2008, was is asking Congress to act to speed the development of new energy efficient ships that can take thousands of trucks off Atlantic and Pacific Coast highways, moving freight up and down the costs with far less carbon emissions and more cheaply: http://www.greenships.org.


Planting Peace is, “A Resource Center for news and activities that seek to build a powerful coalition to bring about cooperation and synergy between the peace movement, the climate crisis movement, and the organic community.” Their web site includes extensive links to organizations, articles, videos and books that make the connections, at: http://organicconsumers.org/plantingpeace/index.cfm, Planting Peace is sponsored by the Organic Consumers Association: http://organicconsumers.org/.

The Global Climate Change Campaign: http://www.globalclimatecampaign.org/.

Georgetown University’s Conflict Resolution Program and the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) have created an online database of multimedia resources related to conflict management, as well as best practices for designing and using them at: Peace Media http://peacemedia.usip.org. For information, contact: Dr. Craig Zelizer, Associate Director, Master of Arts in Conflict Resolution, Department of Government, Georgetown University, 3240 Prospect Street, Washington, DC 20007, (202)687-0512, cz52@georgetown.edu, http://conflictresolution.georgetown.edu, http://internationalpeaceandconflict.org.

Learn Stuff has a long list of groups that deal with international conflicts and crises at: http://www.learnstuff.com/learn-about-international-crisis-groups/.

Global Beat, has been an excellent source of information and further sources for Nonviolent Change, at: http://www.nyu.edu/globalbeat. Global Beat also has an E-mail list serve.

The International Crisis Group (ICG) carries regular reports and sets of recommendations about difficult developing situations around the globe, and has been an extremely helpful source of information and ideas for this journal: http://www.crisisgroup.org/. ICG also has a regular E-mail report circulation service that can be subscribed to on its web site. The International Crisis Group (ICG) has launched a frequently updated website on “the nexus of issues surrounding Cyprus, Turkey and the European Union,” at: http://www.crisisgroup.org/.

The International Relations Center (IRC): http://www.irc-online.org/.

"Models of Unity", at: http://www.modelsofunity.net/, is a new web site that seeks to explore where people have come together across racial, ethnic, and religious divides to work for the betterment of their communities.

Tikkun, the Network of Spiritual Progressives is at: http://www.tikkun.org

IMRA – Middle East News and Analysis: http://www.imra.org.il/.

Transcend Africa, provides reports from across Africa at: www.transcendafrica.net.

Americas Program: www.cipamericas.org, which includes a blog.


Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA http://wozazimbabwe.org/.

The Pulitzer Center, whose mission is to promote in-depth coverage of international affairs, focusing on topics that have been under-reported, mis-reported - or not reported at all: http://www.pulitzercenter.org/.

Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR): www.acr.net.

Peace Voice, a source for thoughtful articles on the world today by Peace Professionals including members of academia and the non-profit sector, Home page is: http://www.peacevoice.info.. To view abstracts of
unpublished current offerings, which are available at no charge, go to www.Abstracts.PeaceVoice.info. To view pieces that have been published and are also available for reprint at no charge: http://www.peacevoice.info.


The Nuclear Age Peace Foundation is at: www.wagingpeace.org, providing educational information on nuclear weapons abolition and other issues relating to global security

The Open society Institute and the Soros Foundation: http://www.soros.org/

Conciliation Resources (CR) has re-launched its website http://www.c-r.org.


Noviolenciaactiva.com is a collection of posts that cover the importance of nonviolent action, events, and news in Spanish. Nonviolent Action, in English, presents a diversity of points of view about nonviolent action and nonviolence at: http://org2.democracyinaction.org/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=ffv4N6s%2B8od%2FvQP7%2F2hEeP%kCip65Z. Additional resources in Spanish are on-line at the website: TrainingforChange.org. Mostly training materials, plus some articles on nonviolent strategy.

Center for Global Justice is at: https://www.globaljusticecenter.org.


Peace and Collaborative Development Network "is a free professional networking site to foster dialogue and sharing of resources in international development, conflict resolution, gender mainstreaming, human rights, social entrepreneurship and related fields. Feel free to explore the site content and features", at: http://www.internationalpeaceandconflict.org/.
World Security Institute and the Center for Defense Information: www.worldsecurityinstitute.org. The World Security Institute (WSI) offers audio podcast programming in its list of interactive communication features at the iTunes Music Store. WSI's podcasts will include audio recordings of press conferences, panel discussions, and interviews with WSI experts hosted by WSI or in collaboration with other media outlets. Download iTunes at www.apple.com/itunes. Find WSI podcasts by searching for “World Security Institute” under the podcast section of the iTunes Music Store, or by clicking this link: http://phobos.apple.com/WebObjects/MZStore.woa/wa/viewPodcast?id=215717216, The WSI Brussels Security Blog aims to continue and expand the efforts of the World Security Institute, Brussels, to inform, stimulate, and shape the debate around the security and defense dilemmas facing Europe and the world, with a view to formulating effective and lasting solutions, posting regular commentary related to: Afghanistan, the Balkans, Darfur, ESDP, Iran, Iraq, Missile Defense, NATO, OSCE, Peace Support Operations, and Terrorism, at: http://wsibrusselsblog.org/.

The Universal Human Rights Index Website is a database for finding information and documents produced by the various components of the UN human rights system. It can easily do searches, by keywords and other methods on inquiry, at: http://www.universalhumanrightsindex.org/.

The Peace and Justice Studies Association (PISA): http://www.peacejusticestudies.org/.


The International Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) Program a American University web site. including bi-monthly newsletters, is at: newsletter at www.aupeace.org.


Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue (formerly the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century), is at: http://www.ikedacenter.org/publications.htm.

The Network of Spiritual Progressives: http://www.spiritualprogressives.org/.


The Stanley Foundation, “brings fresh voices and original ideas to debates on global and regional problems. The foundation seeks a secure peace with freedom and justice, built on world citizenship and effective global governance,” is at: www.stanleyfoundation.org.

Global Peace Hut: http://www.globalpeacehut.org/

Awakening the Dreamer, Changing the Dream runs on line discussions of “the most critical issue and greatest opportunity of our time and what you can do about it,” at: http://www.awakeningthedreamer.org/.
The **America’s Program** is at: [http://www.americaspolicy.org/](http://www.americaspolicy.org/), with detailed news of Mexico at: [www.americasmexico.blogspot.com](http://www.americasmexico.blogspot.com).

The **Peace and Collaborative Development Network** is at: [http://internationalpeaceandconflict.org](http://internationalpeaceandconflict.org).


The **TRANSCEND Network for Peace Development Environment** is at: [https://www.transcend.org](https://www.transcend.org).

The **International Journal of Conflict and Violence** focuses on one specific topic in each semi-annual online issue while also including articles on other, unrelated subjects. In the Fall 2007 issue the focus will be on terrorism. The Journal is at: [http://www.ijcv.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=27](http://www.ijcv.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=27).

The **Culture of Peace Online Journal** is at: [http://www.copoj.ca/](http://www.copoj.ca/).

The **Journal of Stellar Peacemaking** is at: Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.

The **Peacework Magazine**. “Global Thought and Local Action for Nonviolent Social Change” (also in print), published by the American Friends Service Committee - New England, 2161 Mass. Ave., Cambridge, MA 02140 (617)661.6130, pwork@afsc.org, is at: [www.peaceworkmagazine.org](http://www.peaceworkmagazine.org).


The **Jewish Voice for Peace** and **Jewish Peace News** are at: [www.jewishpeacenews.net](http://www.jewishpeacenews.net).


The **Canadian Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies** is at: [http://www.peaceresearch.ca](http://www.peaceresearch.ca).


The **Journal of Globalization for The Common Good**, dedicated to global cooperation and dialogue, is at: [www.commongoodjournal.com](http://www.commongoodjournal.com).


The Journal of Law and Conflict Resolution (JLCR) is a multidisciplinary peer-reviewed journal published monthly by Academic Journals: http://www.academicjournals.org/JLCR.


Peace Action is at: www.Peace-Action.org


The National Conference on Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD)'s Learning Exchange, as of August 2007 included over 2200 resources, is at: www.thataway.org/exchange/.

The Africa Peace and Conflict Network (APCN) offers open-access publications, including full research papers, Briefings, and a photo journal, at: www.africaworkinggroup.org/publications.

The Global Development Briefing, the largest circulation publication designed specifically for international development professionals, is at: www.DevelopmentEx.com.


UN Millennium Development Goals, indicators of levels of success on ending poverty: http://www.mdgmonitor.org/.

Peace and Collaborative Development Networking at: http://internationalpeaceandconflict.ning.com/, is a free professional networking site to encourage interaction between individuals and organizations worldwide involved in development, peace, conflict resolution and related fields.

The Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration (PARCC) at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University blog, entitled “Conflict and Collaboration” is at: http://conflictandcollaboration.wordpress.com/about/.


Ideologies of War and Terrorism Web Site is at: http://www.ideologiesofwar.com/.

The Global Nonviolent Action Database, as of March 26, 2013, was offering over 560 cases in its expanding database, in both formats: 2-3 page narratives that tell the story of the campaign, and searchable fields that enable the viewer to research many questions, from how other movements have used the occupation method (or nearly two hundred others!), to which countries have done what kinds of campaigns as researched so far, to finding dozens of examples of struggles for environmental justice and overthrowing dictators. It includes a map that enables one to search by clicking on a graphic “pin” located on any of six continents. Just click on Browse cases by geographic location: http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu.

H-Net-Peace carries announcements, etc., relating to peace at: http://www.h-net.org/-peace/.
The Journal of Peacebuilding and Development (JPD) is at: www.journalpeace.dev.org, or email: jpd@american.edu.

Confitti is the journal of Centro Psicopedagogico per la Pace e la gestione dei conflitti (in Italian) available from the center at: http://www.cppp.it/il_numero_12012.html.

The Nuclear Age Peace Foundation publishes an E-mail newsletter, The Sunflower, carrying its purpose, positions, programs and relevant developments, which can be accessed via: www.wagingpeace.org/sunflower-newsletter-february-2015.

The M. K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence is at University of Rochester, Interfaith Chapel, Box 270501, Rochester, NY 14627 (585)276-3787, togoodman@admin.rochester.edu, gandhiinstitute.org

The Peace Education Center, IEPE, and Global Campaign for Peace Education invite have a global online initiative “the Peace Education Online Communities.” at: www.c-i-p-e.org/forum. The Peace Education Online Community is an interactive website that enables members of the global community to communicate and interact with each other through a number of tools including: online discussions, collaborative working spaces, an updatable calendar of events, member profiles, reports of institutes, the sharing of files and papers including sample curricula and best practices from local communities, and much, much more. This web-based initiative was developed to support the members and participants of the International Institute on Peace Education, Community-based Institutes on Peace Education, and the Global Campaign for Peace Education, and other concerned educators. For more information contact: peace-ed@tc.edu. The Global Campaign for Peace Education Newsletter is usually published as a list serve monthly, with subscription and back issues at: www.tc.edu/PeaceEd/newsletter.

The Global Campaign for Peace Education (GCPE) e-newsletter provides a monthly bulletin of GCPE news, events, action alerts and reports of peace education activities and developments from around the world. Back issues of the newsletter are archived online at www.tc.edu/PeaceEd/newsletter. To subscribe via E-mail go to: http://c-i-p-e.org/elist/?p=subscribe&id=2.


The online Encyclopedia of Peace Education is at: http://www.tc.edu/centers/epe/.

The Plowshares site has on it a section for Syllabi from Courses Related to Peace Studies (from various sources) at: http://www.plowsharesproject.org/php/resources/index.php.


The Organization Development Institute is a nonprofit educational association organized in 1968 to promote a better understanding of and to disseminate information about organization development, at: http://www.odinstitute.org/.