



# CrisisWatch 2018

## April Trends & May Alerts

April saw the conflict in Yemen intensify, with both the Saudi-led coalition and Huthi forces increasing attacks – fuelling risks of further escalation in May. At the Gaza-Israel border, Israeli forces continued to push back Palestinian protesters with deadly force; with larger protests expected in May, casualties could rise. Eastern Libya’s strongman fell ill, prompting fears of further political and military splits. In Afghanistan, the Taliban stepped up attacks, while Kashmir saw deadly clashes and protests. Dozens were killed amid anti-government protests in Nicaragua. In Nigeria, rising violence – especially between herders and farmers – left nearly 500 dead. Burundi could see more

political violence around its 17 May constitutional referendum, and a flare-up in attacks by armed groups in the Central African Republic could provoke worse bloodshed in coming weeks. The United Arab Emirates’ withdrawal from Somalia led to clashes between army factions there. On a positive note, Ethiopia’s new prime minister took steps to mitigate ethnic tensions. In North East Asia, tensions escalated across the Taiwan Strait, while China-Japan relations continued to improve, and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and South Korean President Moon pledged to seek “complete denuclearisation” of the peninsula.

**Yemen’s** war saw an uptick in violence: the Saudi-led coalition intensified its airstrike campaign, killing at least 66 civilians, and in turn Huthi forces increased missile attacks on Saudi targets. The escalation – which could continue in May – risks derailing efforts to restart peace talks, further regionalising the conflict and aggravating the already dire humanitarian crisis. To curb this worrying trend, diplomatic efforts should be aimed at preventing a coalition attack on Huthi-held Hodeidah, a strategic port city on the Red Sea coast.

As we warned, violence increased at the **Gaza-Israel** border, where Israeli forces suppressed weekly Palestinian protests with deadly force, raising the total number of Palestinians killed since the protests began on 30 March to at least 42. May could be worse, as the largest protests are expected on 15 May when


Palestinians mourn the expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians from Israel during the 1948 war, a day after the U.S. plans to open its embassy in Jerusalem. In **Libya**, Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar’s two-week stay in a Paris hospital prompted fears that the search for a successor will fragment his military coalition in the east and see the political camps in the east or west use force to break the current stalemate.

In **Afghanistan**, the Taliban stepped up its efforts to capture district centres and move closer to the provincial capitals of Ghazni and Sar-e Pul as it announced the start of its spring offensive. Islamic State-Khorasan Province also continued to attack urban centres across the country, including an attack on a voter registration centre in Kabul on 22 April killing around 60 people, amid growing fears over security around elections later this year.

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## Trends for April

 **Deteriorated Situations**  
Afghanistan, Israel-Palestine, CAR, Kashmir, Libya, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Somalia, Taiwan Strait, Yemen

 **Improved Situations**  
China/Japan, Ethiopia, Korean peninsula

## Outlook for May

 **Conflict Risk Alerts**  
Burundi, CAR, Israel-Palestine, Yemen

 **Resolution Opportunities**  
None

Clashes between alleged separatist militants and security forces south of **Kashmir's** Srinagar on 1 April left thirteen alleged militants and three Indian soldiers dead. At least three civilians were killed later the same day as police fired on stone-throwing demonstrators protesting the killings.

In Bangui, capital of the **Central African Republic**, two attempts by the army and UN peacekeepers to arrest the leader of one of the city's armed groups failed and left 32 dead, including one peacekeeper. After armed men attacked a church on 1 May killing fifteen worshippers and a priest, many fear intercommunal violence could again flare in the city and trigger more fighting in the provinces. In **Nigeria**, Boko Haram kept up attacks, while herder-farmer violence and deadly banditry continued to spiral, leaving some 500 dead.

Political violence could rise around **Burundi's** 17 May referendum on constitutional changes, which if adopted would allow President Nkurunziza to run in presidential elections until 2034. The regime, including the ruling party's youth wing, the Imbonerakure, have been carrying out a campaign of intimidation against anyone who has opposed the referendum, or campaigned for a No vote.

A breakdown in relations between **Somalia's** federal government and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), partly driven by the UAE's deepening cooperation with Somaliland

and Puntland regions, over which the federal government claims sovereignty, led to the UAE ending its military training program. After the Emiratis pulled out, rival Somali army factions clashed at the training centre over weapons. Good news from neighbouring **Ethiopia**, however, as the new Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took steps to calm tensions between ethnic Somalis and Oromos and relax restrictions on civil liberties.

Dozens of people were reported killed in **Nicaragua** as mass anti-government protests clashed with security forces. Sparked by social security reforms, the protests vented a deeper fury with President Ortega's authoritarian rule.

In North East Asia, China held its first ever live-fire exercises in the **Taiwan Strait**, intended as a warning against Taiwanese who advocate independence. There were further signs of improving **China-Japan** relations ahead of a planned visit to Japan by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang for a trilateral summit in May. And the month saw an historic summit between the leaders of **North and South Korea** who pledged to seek "complete denuclearisation" of the peninsula. As we note in our commentary, this could lead to transformative shifts in inter-Korean relations, and sets the stage for upcoming multilateral dialogue, making the meeting between North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and U.S. President Trump more likely.