



Crisis Group

CrisisWatch – Our Monthly Conflict Tracker

# CrisisWatch

## March Trends & April 2024 Alerts

Our monthly conflict tracker highlights **three conflict risks** in April.

- Israel killed thousands more Palestinians in **Gaza**, bringing the death toll since 7 October to over 32,700. The strip's north is facing the world's worst famine, relative to population size, of the past few decades. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu repeatedly reiterated the threat to invade Rafah, which could kill or again displace a huge proportion of the 1.5 million people seeking refuge there.
- **Lebanon** continued to face the spectre of all-out war as Israel and Hizbollah engaged in deadly cross-border hostilities. Tensions between Palestinians and Israel during the remainder of Ramadan in April, including at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade, could provoke further violent actions by Hizbollah or Palestinian armed groups.
- Tensions spiked between **Bosnia and Herzegovina's** High Representative Christian Schmidt and Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik over proposed changes to the national election law, with Dodik threatening to paralyse state-level decision-making.

CrisisWatch identified **nine deteriorated situations** in March. Notably:

- Violence escalated in **Haiti** after the country's two largest gang coalitions launched coordinated attacks across the capital Port-au-Prince to deter an international security mission from deploying. Gangs targeted critical sites, freed over 4,700 inmates and forced tens of thousands to flee.
- Electoral authorities in **Venezuela** blocked the opposition coalition from registering their banned candidate María Corina Machado or her replacement, in an apparent bid to strengthen President Maduro's hand in the lead-up to July elections.
- Political tensions rose in **Somalia**, where the government of Puntland state suspended its recognition of the Mogadishu-based federal government over a review of the constitution, one of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's priorities.
- **Pakistan** launched its first acknowledged airstrikes in **Afghanistan** since the Taliban's takeover in 2021 in response to a deadly militant attack on an army post in a border district. The Taliban retaliated with cross-border fire, underscoring the risk of armed conflict between the two sides.

### TRENDS IN MARCH



#### Deteriorated Situations

Afghanistan, Pakistan, South China Sea, Venezuela, Haiti, Somalia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Russia (Internal), Israel/Palestine



#### Improved Situations

Papua New Guinea, Somaliland, Senegal

### ALERTS FOR APRIL



#### Conflict Risk Alerts

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Israel/Palestine, Lebanon



#### Resolution Opportunities

None

- Strained relations between China and the Philippines soured further over maritime incidents in the **South China Sea**.
- Our tracker also assessed **three improved situations**.
- Following a constitutional crisis over a delay to the original February voting day, **Senegal** held peaceful presidential elections that saw the victory of opposition candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye.
- **Somaliland** passed an electoral law, removing a source of tension between the government and opposition ahead of November elections.
- In **Papua New Guinea**, after tribal clashes killed dozens of people in the restive Highlands Region in February, the two warring factions struck a temporary ceasefire.
- Aside from the scores of conflict situations we regularly assess, we tracked significant developments in **Cuba, Jordan, Moldova, South Africa, Gabon** and **Togo**.

## Conflict in Focus

### HAITI

MARCH / APRIL 2024

**What happened in March?** Haiti's two largest gang coalitions joined forces under a broad front known as Viv Ansanm, launching coordinated attacks to seize control of critical sites in the capital Port-au-Prince and deter a Kenya-led international security mission from deploying. As the crisis escalated, outside pressure pushed Haiti's various political groupings to agree on the formation of a transitional presidential council – comprising seven voting members and two non-voting civil society representatives – that can address the country's myriad crises.

**Why does it matter?** Haiti is no stranger to criminal mayhem, but the present inter-gang dynamic is something new. In this latest offensive, rival gangs have sought to set aside their differences and forge a united front in the face of what they perceive as a shared existential threat – the multinational security force. The transitional council offers a glimmer of hope for the besieged country, but the challenges ahead are immense.

**What to watch in the coming weeks and months?** With gang rivalries fierce and alliances ever-shifting, Viv Ansanm could collapse at any time. But if the coalitions are able to uphold their pact, the security situation could deteriorate further, with dire consequences for ordinary Haitians struggling amid an ever-worsening humanitarian crisis.

The new transitional government's challenge will be to rally what remains of state institutions, confront the gangs and steer the country towards elections. But political divisions could impede its decision-making ability, providing gangs with the space to launch more brutal assaults and consolidate control. They could also exploit the uncertainty and try to seize power by broadening

their alliance to include politicians such as Guy Philippe, the rebel leader and ex-convict who proposed heading a three-person presidential council, and who remains at a distance from the appointed seven-member council.

Resumption of talks to deploy the international security mission will likely be met with another surge of gang assaults fighting to deter its deployment; if the gangs continue to carry out coordinated attacks during this offensive, the Haitian police could crumble. When the mission arrives, which could take months, gangs may look to mount simultaneous offensives against mission personnel and the police.

**What should be done?** The transitional presidential council's first priority upon installation, which is expected in the coming days, will be to confront the turmoil engulfing Port-au-Prince. It should appoint an interim Prime Minister and quickly resume talks with foreign partners to accelerate deployment of the security mission. It should also discuss potential stopgap measures until this force is ready, given continued opposition from some corners in Kenya and the mission's funding shortfalls.

The council also needs to present a cohesive front. Caribbean leaders announced that it would make decisions by majority vote, which should enable it to move swiftly, but could exacerbate divisions between members if some feel frozen out. To prevent the council from breaking down, its members should strive to maintain unity and act decisively in the public interest.