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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Security situation

According to media reports, violent clashes erupted between Taliban insurgents and unidentified armed men on the outskirts of Lashkargah, the capital of the southern province of Helmand, on 20.02.25. The Taliban have not commented on the incident and have not released any details about possible casualties. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

On 19.02.25, a bomb exploded near the Kifayat Exchange Market in the centre of the city of Mazar-e-Sharif in the northern province of Balkh, injuring at least three people. On the same day, according to media reports, gunfire erupted outside the Taliban-controlled Ministry of Interior in Kabul. The number of casualties is not known. Also on 19.02.25, the Taliban carried out an attack on a Pakistani army border post in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa along the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. According to Pakistani reports, one soldier was killed by the Taliban. The Pakistani army then launched a counterattack on a Taliban border post, with the Taliban reportedly suffering heavy casualties.

On 17.02.25, there was an explosion near the airport in the capital Kabul. Details about the cause of the explosion or possible casualties remain unclear. The Taliban have not commented on the incident.

Resistance groups carried out five attacks on Taliban checkpoints in Kunduz province between 17.02.25 and 20.02.25.

A Taliban intelligence officer was shot dead by unknown assailants in Takhar province on 18.02.25.¹

Governance and persecution

On 22.02.25, the Taliban conducted house searches in the Khair Khana neighbourhood in northern Kabul. The searches come at a time of reported internal divisions within the Taliban and a series of security incidents across the country.

On 18.02.25, Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada held an emergency meeting in the city of Kandahar with the Taliban governors of Kandahar, Zabul, Uruzgan and Helmand provinces. The focus was on security problems, including the prevention of possible ISIS attacks in the spring, the presence of unidentified armed groups in Bahramcha (an important smuggling centre near the Pakistani border), tensions within the Taliban, border problems with Pakistan and securing important border routes.

According to their own sources, the Taliban established almost 50 madrassas (Islamic religious schools) between September 2024 and February 2025, including in the provinces of Bamiyan, Balkh, Paktia, Paktika, Sar-e-Pul, Kapisa, Farah, Badakhshan, Baghlan, Khost und Ghazni, or at least laid the foundations for them.

According to media reports released on 17.02.25, the Taliban intelligence service have arrested the poet and cultural activist Alam Hashimi in Kabul and taken him to an unknown location.²

Colombia

ELN stages armed strike in Chocó

The guerrilla group National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)) called a 72-hour armed strike in the Chocó region from 18.02.25 to 21.02.25 and imposed curfews. As a result, shops were closed and public transport came to a standstill. Around 12,000 people were trapped in their communities and at least 3,500 were displaced from their homes. The ELN explained in a communiqué that the strike was a reaction to the alliances between the state, the military and mercenaries, working with right-wing paramilitary groups who they claim are attacking the rebels and community leaders. They say the government is also responsible for the poor humanitarian situation in Chocó and for the proliferation of paramilitaries such as the Clan del Golfo. According to the National Administrative Department of Statistics (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE)), the poverty rate in Chocó was 66.7 percent in 2023, with extreme poverty at 43.5 percent. In addition to the volatile economic situation, the region is particularly contested due to the presence of the ELN and the Clan del Golfo, which are competing for drug routes and illegal economies.

The government suspended peace negotiations with the ELN on 17.01.25 after a wave of violence in the Catatumbo region claimed more than 80 lives and displaced around 50,000 people (cf. BN of 17.01.25, 20.01.25 and 24.01.25).³

Democratic Republic of the Congo

UN Security Council condemns Rwanda's support for M23

On 21.02.25, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution S/RES/2773(2025) concerning the recent events in the east of the country (cf. BN of 27.01.25, 03.02.25 and 17.02.25). According to reports, the resolution strongly condemns the offensive by the rebel group Mouvement 23 Mars (23 March Movement (M23)) that is backed by the Rwanda Defence Force. The Resolution says M23 must immediately withdraw from the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, must immediately cease hostilities and fully reverse the establishment of illegitimate parallel administrations in that country's territory. However, the resolution also calls on the Democratic Republic of the Congo to cease supporting the Hutu militia Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) (cf. BN of 02.01.23 and 17.04.23) and calls for the implementation of commitments to neutralise that group. Rwanda and M23 justify their actions in eastern Congo with the endeavour to protect Kinyarwanda speakers and the Tutsi ethnic group (cf. BN of 20.06.22, 25.07.22 and 21.11.22). The head of the UN blue helmet mission MONUSCO, Bintou Keita, had stated before the vote on the resolution that the occupation of North Kivu by M23 severely restricted the mission's ability to protect civilians and carry out life-saving operations in North Kivu.

According to media reports, there was also a mass breakout from Munzenze prison during the capture of Goma. Around 4,000 prisoners are said to have escaped. Hundreds of female prisoners were reportedly raped and burned to death after the women's wing of the prison was set on fire.

President Félix Tshisekedi announced the formation of a government of national unity in response to the situation in the east of the country at a meeting of his "Union sacrée" (Sacred Union) coalition of parties on 22.02.25 (cf. BN of 22.01.24). He continued to rule out direct negotiations with M23.⁴

Eastern Congo: M23 advance along the border with Burundi

Following the largely uncontested capture of South Kivu's capital Bukavu (cf. BN of 17.02.25), M23 is continuing to advance further south. According to media reports, the rebel group reached the town of Kamanyola on 18.02.25. The Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) have reportedly withdrawn again. Burundian troops, which had been deployed in support of the FARDC, are also said to be retreating in order to concentrate on defending their own border. Burundi's army spokesperson has denied this claim, however. Clashes have already been reported in the strategically important town of Uvira on the northern shores of Lake Tanganyika. This town is only around 30 km away from Burundi's economic capital Bujumbura. Fearing an imminent assault, many civilians have fled Uvira. In the past two weeks, 42,000 people have already fled to Burundi, the UNHCR announced on 21.02.25.

M23 is also said to be continuing to advance in North Kivu. In Masisi, several days of clashes have been reported with the self-defence militia Wazalendo. M23 fighters are also located near Lubero (around 250 km north of Goma). FARDC soldiers have reportedly fled.⁵

Opposition politician released from prison

According to a media report issued on 21.02.25, Jean-Marc Kabund, Felix Tshisekedi's ally until 2022, has been released from prison. According to a spokesperson for the presidential office, he received a presidential pardon. Kabund was arrested on 09.08.22 and sentenced to seven years in prison on 13.09.23 for, among other things, insulting the president. Kabund's party Alliance pour le Changement (Alliance for Change (A.CH)) described the prosecution as politically motivated (cf. BN of 15.08.22, 05.09.22, 24.10.22 and 18.09.23).⁶

Ethiopia

Security situation in Amhara

At least 19 civilians, including children, are reported to have been killed by the Ethiopian National Defence Force in recent drone attacks carried out between 15.02.25 and 21.02.25. The attacks, which were directed against the armed Fano militia, took place in the regional state of Amhara, in the Goncha Enese district (East Gojjam, Angesh Kebele) and in Ambassel (Wollo). Fierce clashes have been recurring between government troops and the regional militia since 2021, and fighting has intensified since October 2024 as part of a large-scale military offensive launched by Ethiopian and regional forces against the Fano (cf. BN of 07.10.24).⁷

India

Jammu and Kashmir: tensions between the population and Indian security forces

The suicide of a Muslim man from Kathua district in the Indian-administered Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir sparked tension between the population and the Indian security forces in the region. On 05.02.25, after being released from police custody, the man recorded a video message in which he announced that he would take his own life so that no one else in the region would be subjected to "torture" by the police, who he said suspected him of being "associated with militants", the term used by the authorities for rebels fighting against Indian control of the region, which is also claimed by Pakistan. On 07.02.25, the Indian authorities stated that the man had only been interrogated for having "suspicious contacts in Pakistan and other countries" and denied that he had been tortured or physically abused while in custody.

A day after the man's suicide, a lorry driver from Sopore district in north Kashmir was also killed by the army. According to military sources, the man had driven through a security checkpoint on the Srinagar-Baramulla motorway and failed to stop despite repeated warnings. The vehicle was then chased for more than 20 kilometres, and the driver was finally shot dead.

Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Omar Abdullah – who was elected in the region's first general elections to be held in a decade in October 2024 – called the latest incidents "highly regrettable" and said he had discussed the matter with the central government in New Delhi and "insisted that both incidents be investigated in a timely and transparent manner". In Kashmir, however, the powers the regional chief minister has over the police have been drastically limited since the autonomous status of Jammu and Kashmir was revoked in 2019, as they are directly controlled by the Indian federal government. The spokesperson for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party in Kashmir said his party wants to form a high-level committee to investigate the deaths of the two civilians.

On 03.02.25, more than 500 Kashmiris were also arrested for the killing of a retired army officer. He was allegedly shot dead by rebels, and his wife and niece were injured in the attack in Kulgam in southern Kashmir. Following the killing, authorities arrested young men from several districts in south Kashmir, most of whom had previously been accused of participating in anti-government protests or armed insurgency. Photos of vehicles and people being searched by the armed forces at various checkpoints went viral on social media.⁸

Iran

Jaish al-Adl claims responsibility for attacks on administrative facilities in Sistan and Baluchestan

According to media reports issued on 22.02.25, the armed group Jaish al-Adl (Army of Justice), which is considered to be separatist, claimed responsibility for the attack on a building belonging to the local housing foundation in the city of Chabahar (Sistan and Baluchestan Province). On 22.02.25, the building was partially destroyed when a sound bomb exploded. No casualties were reported. In a statement, Jaish al-Adl cited the role the facility played in the displacement of the Baloch population as the reason for the attack.

According to media reports, the Director General of the Housing Foundation in the city of Zahedan (provincial capital of Sistan and Baluchestan) was the target of a gun attack in connection with the blast.

Jaish al-Adl also claimed responsibility for this attack and justified it by saying that it wanted to hold government bodies accountable for the demolition of houses and the confiscation of land belonging to the Baloch people.

Jaish al-Adl is classified as a terrorist organisation by the Iranian government. Among other things, the group carried out several attacks on security forces in the province of Sistan and Baluchestan in 2024 (cf. BN of 16.09.24, 28.10.24 and 11.11.24).⁹

Death penalty: at least 975 death sentences carried out in 2024

According to a joint report published by two European-based human rights organisations on 20.02.25, at least 975 death sentences were carried out in Iran in 2024. This represents an increase of 17 percent compared to the previous year (2023: 834 executions). Only 95 executions were officially announced by the Iranian authorities.

At least 503 people were executed for drug-related charges and around 419 for murder charges. At least 31 people were executed for security-related charges. Twenty-two death sentences were carried out for rape charges.

The people executed included at least 31 convicted women, 80 convicted Afghan nationals and one juvenile offender. A total of four death sentences are said to have been carried out in public spaces.

According to media reports, at least 649 people sentenced to death for murder charges were forgiven by the families of the murder victims during the reporting period. From the point of view of human rights organisations, this can at least be seen as a positive sign of a reduction in the death sentences. Overall, however, the report points to an increase in state-ordered executions.¹⁰

Iraq

Census

On 24.02.25, the politically controversial results of the first nationwide census to be conducted since 1987 were published. However, data such as the ethnic distribution in various disputed areas was not made public initially. According to the census, Iraq has a population of around 46 million, of which 50.22 percent are male and 49.78 percent are female. Over 70 percent of the population live in cities, and in Kurdistan the proportion of urbanisation is even higher at almost 85 percent. Only 3.66 percent of the population is 65 and older, while children under five years old account for 11.16 percent of the population.¹¹

Kenya

EACC – study on corruption in state institutions

According to recent press reports, the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) presented its latest study (National Ethics and Corruption Survey of 2023) on bribery in state institutions on 11.02.25. The report ranks the County Health Department, the National Transport and Safety Authority (NTSA), the County Commissioner's Office, the Public Service Commission, and the County Public Service Boards as the top five most corrupt institutions, each recording 100 percent corruption prevalence.

EACC further revealed that Nyamira, Baringo, Siaya, Bungoma, Turkana, West Pokot, Samburu, Nandi, Kakamega, and Kisumu recorded the highest number of corruption cases.¹²

Lebanon

Ceasefire with Israel

The extension deadline agreed for the complete withdrawal of the Israeli army from southern Lebanon passed on 18.02.25.

Israel continues to highlight Lebanon's inability to prevent Hezbollah from rearming and reserves the right to continue to occupy five locations within Lebanon for the time being. Airstrikes continue to be carried out regularly against Hezbollah weapons depots and areas where smuggling attempts are made by Hezbollah, some of which also target the Bekaa Valley and border crossings with Syria.

Beirut Airport has extended the suspension of inbound and outbound flights to Iran indefinitely after repeated accusations from the Israeli side that these flights were being used by Iran to support Hezbollah by smuggling large quantities of cash and other goods.¹³

Nigeria

Security situation in the northeast: numerous deaths due to Islamist violence

Violence perpetrated by Islamist groups in the northeastern state of Borno, as well as military actions against individuals attributed to Islamist groups, claimed a death toll that reached three-digit figures in the first seven weeks of 2025. The following examples are not an exhaustive list of violent incidents:

According to media reports, on 04.01.25, six members of the military and 34 people officially designated as terrorists by the authorities died in a clash that erupted between Islamists and security forces not far from the village of Sabon Gari in the Local Government Area (LGA) of Damboa. On 09.01.25, two people were killed in a bomb attack on a police station. On 12.01.25, suspected Islamists killed 40 civilians in an attack on the village of Dumba near Lake Chad. According to media reports, a military spokesperson announced on 16.01.25 that security forces had recently killed 76 militant Islamists. Numerous weapons were reportedly also seized, including machine guns, grenades, bazookas and explosive devices. According to media reports, at least 20 civilians were killed in an attack carried out by suspected Islamists on the village of Gadan Gari on 22.01.25, and at least 20 soldiers were killed in an attack on a remote army base on 24.01.25.

Fighting is also raging between members of the Islamist groups Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). For example, media reports indicate that deadly clashes erupted between the two groups in Abadam LGA on 14.02.25. The clashes are likely to spread to the neighbouring Kukawa LGA. The activities of these two groups are the cause of the precarious humanitarian situation that has existed for years in northeastern Nigeria and in parts of the neighbouring countries of Cameroon, Niger and Chad. Over 35,000 people have been killed and millions displaced. Security forces have not yet succeeded in putting an end to the regional threat situation. The acts of violence committed there by Islamists and the deadly reactions of the military continued to make headlines in 2024 (cf. BN of 19.08.24, 09.09.24 and 28.10.24).¹⁴

Pakistan

Arrests of Afghannationals on the rise

The Pakistani authorities have stepped up arrests of Afghan nationals in the capital Islamabad. The Pakistani Foreign Ministry justified the measures as an effort to create the conditions for the rapid return of Afghans to their home country. Most recently, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also set a deadline of 31.03.25 for Afghan nationals awaiting resettlement in third countries to leave the country. If their cases are not processed by the respective governments that have agreed to accept them, they also face deportation after the deadline expires. According to the IOM, more than 800,000 Afghan refugees have either returned home voluntarily or have been deported from Pakistan since 2023.¹⁵

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: military operations in Karak and Kurram

On 21.02.25, six suspected Islamist fighters were killed in a military operation in the district of Karak.

An operation is also underway in the Kurram district, where fighters have targeted Shia worshippers and security forces escorting aid deliveries for hundreds of thousands of residents in the region in recent months. According to the authorities, 48 suspects allegedly involved in the attacks were arrested between 17.02.25 and 21.02.25. Kurram has been cut off from the rest of the country since November 2024 after the government blocked roads following clashes between heavily armed Shia and Sunni tribes.¹⁶

South Africa

Well-known homosexual imam murdered

According to recent press reports, Imam Muhsin Hendricks, who was the first Islamic cleric in the world to admit his homosexuality in 1996, was shot dead in a car in plain sight on 15.02.25. According to the police, the motive is unclear, and the two suspected gunmen are on the run. South Africa was the first African country to allow same-sex marriages after the end of apartheid. According to media reports, the constitution explicitly protects citizens from discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation. According to ILGA World, Hendricks worked as an activist with interfaith communities around the world and conducted independent research on Islam and sexual diversity for many years.¹⁷

Sudan

RSF announces parallel government

According to reports published on 23.02.25, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and their allied militias have signed a founding charter for the establishment of a parallel government in Nairobi, Kenya. According to the reports, the charter is intended to pave the way for a "government of peace and unity" in the areas under their control. The charter reportedly calls for a "secular and democratic state" envisioned by the RSF. It further states that a "new national army" is to be founded. It says that the civil war is to be ended and unhindered access to humanitarian aid is to be guaranteed. However, the establishment of a parallel government is viewed with scepticism by the United Nations.¹⁸

Syria

Ongoing fighting and airstrikes in East Aleppo and northeast Syria

Fighting between the militias of the so-called Syrian National Army (SNA) and the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in East Aleppo continues. The Turkish military is also continuing to bomb targets in the areas that are under SDF control. The focus of the fighting is on the Tishreen Dam and the Qaraqzak Bridge. According to various reports, there have only been a few casualties. Most of those killed are said to have been members of the respective armed parties.¹⁹

National Dialogue Conference announced

Although a member of the preparatory committee for the long-announced National Dialogue Conference confirmed two days before the invitations were sent out that the schedule had not yet been set and that it was unclear whether the dialogue conference would take place before or after the announced restructuring of the transitional government on 01.03.25, invitations were apparently sent out to numerous Syrians at short notice on 23.02.25, inviting them to come to Damascus the following day to take part in the conference.

Photos of the agenda, which indicates the conference would be held on 25.02.25, circulated on social media. As part of the conference, the future of Syria and pressing challenges are to be discussed with representatives of civil society. The agenda is also to include a so-called constitutional declaration, which is intended to provide a legal framework for government activities until a proper constitution can be drawn up and adopted.

In the run-up to the conference, the preparatory committee held dozens of meetings with a total of around 4,000 Syrians from various governorates. However, the group of participants at the conference initially remained unclear.²⁰

Israeli Prime Minister calls for demilitarisation of southern Syria

In a speech delivered to graduates of an Israeli military academy on 23.02.25, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared that Israel would not accept any military presence by the Syrian transitional government south of Damascus. In this context, he called for the demilitarisation of the three governorates of Quneitra, Dar'a and Suweida.

Most recently, the Israeli defence minister announced that the army would remain stationed on the summit of Mount Hermon and in the buffer zone along the Syrian-Israeli border for an indefinite period in order to protect Israeli communities and take action against possible threats.²¹

Türkiye

Nationwide arrests of opposition members

According to press reports published on 18.02.25 and 19.02.25, two hundred and eighty-two people in 51 provinces were arrested in large-scale raids conducted over a period of five days for suspected links to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). According to Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya, the detainees were specifically accused of spreading propaganda for the PKK, supporting it financially, recruiting members or taking part in violent street protests.

The arrests reportedly affected people from the left-wing political spectrum as well as journalists and politicians. It was reported that among those detained were activist and co-chair of the Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Party (DSİP) Senol Karakas, human rights lawyer Nurcan Kaya, LGBTIQ activist Yildiz Tar and also members of other left-wing, socialist and pro-Kurdish organisations and parties, such as the Socialist Refoundation Party (SYKP).

According to media reports, a total of 52 people were arrested on 18.02.25 alone as part of an investigation targeting the Peoples' Democratic Congress (HDK), an umbrella organisation of left-wing and pro-Kurdish groups and parties. Those detained include Semiha Şahin and Mehmet Saltoğlu, members of the Central Executive Committee of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM), Sema Barbaros, the Labour Party (EMEP) Istanbul Province Chair, and the politically active singer Pınar Aydınlar.

The public prosecutor's office accuses the HDK of being a legal front organisation acting as an alternative, extra-parliamentary assembly to the Turkish National Assembly. It further accuses the HDK of following the instructions of the PKK and the Union of Kurdistan Communities (KCK), which is also banned. The authorities referred to a 2019 ruling by the Supreme Court of Appeal, which described the Democratic Society Congress (DTK), a pro-Kurdish organisation with close ties to the HDK, as a terrorist organisation. The authorities further stated that HDK members had also played a role in protests, such as the protests held in Kobane in 2014 and the unrest in southeast Turkey in 2015 following the collapse of peace talks between Ankara and the PKK.

The DEM, the largest pro-Kurdish party, as well as EMEP and other parties condemned the arrests and criticised them as an arbitrary and democracy-threatening approach on the part of the government.²²

Arrests of suspected supporters of the Gülen movement

According to media reports published on 17.02.25 and 18.02.25, seventeen doctors were arrested during raids conducted in 10 provinces. Fourteen of them are said to have worked at public hospitals and three at private hospitals.

The arrests were part of an investigation conducted by the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office targeting doctors who were suspected of having links to a Gülen-affiliated dormitory that allegedly offered preparatory courses for the medical specialty examination (TUS). The detainees are also accused of depositing money in Bank Asya, a bank linked to the Gülen movement, and of using the ByLock communication application and payphones, through which they are alleged to have been in contact with other suspected members of the Gülen movement.

According to a press report published on 15.02.25, a total of 103 people in 39 provinces were arrested back at the beginning of February 2025 for suspected links to the Gülen movement. Those arrested are accused of having participated in Gülen movement activities at universities and in the military and of having been involved in the restructuring of the organisation. In addition, the detainees are accused of staying in so-called "secret" houses

where alleged supporters of the Gülen movement are said to have hidden in order to avoid arrest. They are also said to have been in contact with other alleged members of the movement via payphones and to have used ByLock, which, according to the authorities, has reportedly served as an encrypted communication tool for alleged supporters of the Gülen movement.²³

Ukraine

Civilian casualties

According to the governor of the Donetsk region, two people died in the city of Bilytske on 16.02.25. One person was killed in the embattled city of Pokrovsk on 17.02.25. In Kostyantynivka, also located in Donetsk and close to the frontline, one person was killed by a Russian attack on 18.02.25, and two people were killed by Russian glide bombs on 19.02.25. Thirty-four houses were damaged in the attacks. A large proportion of the population had already left the city. One person died in the neighbouring village of Predtechyne. Also in Kostyantynivka, five people died on 20.02.25 as a result of Russian attacks; two other people were killed in the villages of Mykolaivka and Vesele, according to the governor. Also on 22.02.25, one person died in Kostyantynivka in another glide bomb attack.

Civilians were also killed in Russian attacks carried out in other regions. On 15.02.25, one person was killed in the Nikopol district (Dnipropetrovsk Oblast), it was reported on 17.02.25. According to the local military administration, one person died in Orikhiv (Zaporizhzhia region) on 17.02.25. Two people died in the Kherson region and two in Kupiansk (Kharkiv Oblast) on 19.02.25, according to the respective regional governor. On 20.02.25, two people died in the Kherson region, two people died in the Nikopol district (Dnipropetrovsk) and one person died in Huliaipole (Zaporizhzhia Oblast), again according to the respective regional governor.

According to local authorities, one person was killed in a drone attack outside Kyiv on 22.02.25. In Kryvyi Rih (Dnipropetrovsk Oblast), one person was also killed by a drone attack on the night of 23.02.25, according to the authorities. They said it was the most massive Russian drone attack to date. The end result as reported on 24.02.25 was a total of 267 drones counted across the country and a total of four people killed. It was also reported on 24.02.25 that, according to the regional governor, one person had died in Russian attacks carried out in the Kherson region.²⁴

War events

Today marks the third anniversary of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in the war that has been ongoing since 2014.

According to an analysis of its own database by the American NGO Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED), Russian attacks targeting the civilian population have increasingly shifted from artillery and rocket fire to drone and airstrikes in the past three years of the war (2022, 2023, 2024). It says that while the estimated number of casualties from such attacks was highest in 2022, it had risen by 16 percent year on year to around 1,600 in 2024.

Russia claimed the capture of the settlement of Fyholivka in the east of the Kharkiv region on 17.02.25, the villages of Novosilka and Nadiivka in the Donetsk region on 21.02.25 and the village of Novolyubivka, one of a few under Ukrainian control in the Luhansk region, on 23.02.25. According to reports, Russia makes almost daily announcements about the capture of smaller settlements, which is rarely commented on by Ukraine and cannot immediately be independently verified.²⁵

Efforts to end the war; US-Ukrainian relations

With regard to a possible end to the Russian war of aggression, there has been a flurry of statements recently, centred on bilateral initiatives between the US and Russia as well as the impact on Ukrainian-US relations.

According to media reports, President Volodymyr Zelensky declared that, in view of bilateral meetings held between representatives of Russia and the US, including both foreign ministers in Saudi Arabia, he would not recognise any results of their negotiations that emerged to the exclusion of Ukraine. In his view, the US wanted to achieve a quick success in the form of a ceasefire. However, a ceasefire was not a victory. He said that for Ukraine, it was about its own fate for several generations. It was also reported that the majority of Ukrainian politicians rejected the idea of a ceasefire out of concern that it would give Russia time to arm itself.

It was reported that at the meeting in Riyadh which took place on 18.02.25, it was agreed that negotiators would be appointed for such talks. On 17.02.25, the US envoy to Ukraine, Keith Kellogg, said that the decision on a peace

agreement would not be imposed, but would be taken by Zelensky and the Ukrainian people. On the same day, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov expressed his country's position: Russia did not want to give up rare earths (cf. BN of 10.02.25) or the Russian-speaking population in the occupied territories.

In response to criticism from Ukraine for not having been invited, US President Donald Trump held the Ukrainian leadership at least partly responsible for both the Russian invasion and the continuation of the war. In response to these and other statements, Zelensky accused Trump of being trapped in a Russian disinformation bubble. Trump responded by calling Zelensky a "dictator without elections".

On 17.02.25, the British newspaper The Telegraph reported on the American draft agreement between the US and Ukraine on the exploitation of rare earths and raw materials, as well as on the use of ports and infrastructure. According to the agreement, the US would be entitled to 50 percent of Ukrainian revenues from these sectors and 50 percent of the financial value of licences to third parties. The author speaks of an "economic colonisation of Ukraine, in legal perpetuity". According to other media reports, the talks and the exchange of drafts for a raw materials agreement were continuing despite the bilateral tensions. Zelensky reportedly criticised the lack of American security guarantees, among other things.

Meanwhile, European efforts to play a role of their own in ending the war appear unsuccessful, according to media reports. In particular, there is disagreement regarding a possible peacekeeping mission in Ukraine.²⁶

Energy infrastructure

Following a massive drone strike against the energy infrastructure in the Odesa region on 18.02.25, the authorities reported that 160,000 residents there were left without heating and electricity.²⁷

Yemen

Explosive ordnance clearance

On 23.02.25, Saudi Arabia's Project Masam initiative gave an overview of the explosive ordnance clearance work it has been carrying out since 2018.

According to its own sources, a total of 482,637 mines have been cleared in Yemen so far, mainly in schools, villages and roads, to enable the population to return home. However, the figure on "mines" does not distinguish between different types of explosive ordnance: the figure also includes unexploded ordnance, unconventional explosive and incendiary devices and other potentially explosive devices such as anti-tank mines.²⁸

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