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Briefing Notes

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Afghanistan

Governance: floggings on the rise

According to media reports issued on 24.02.25, citing statements released by the Supreme Court, the Taliban had 18 people in Khost province flogged for engaging in same-sex relationships and "illicit affairs". In the eleven days up to 02.03.25 alone, more than 70 people were reportedly flogged in the provinces of Kabul, Khost, Nangarhar, Zabul, Faryab, Kapisa, Parwan, Herat, Ghazni and Bamiyan. According to a report submitted to the UN Human Rights Council, the Taliban carried out 311 public floggings between July and December 2024, an increase of 22 percent compared to the first half of 2024.¹

58th session of the UN Human Rights Council: human rights situation worsening in Afghanistan

According to the UN, the human rights situation in Afghanistan is continuing to deteriorate. Women, minorities and civil society in particular are being subjected to extreme repression under Taliban rule. According to Richard Bennett, the UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan, the Taliban's gender-specific oppression of women has become more systematic and institutionalised.²

Humanitarian situation

According to media reports, flash floods took place in Farah province (Pushtkoh, Gulistan, Farah Rod and Qala Ka districts) on 25.02.25, in which the Taliban claim 23 people were killed and 44 were injured. Further floods caused by severe rainfall on the same day occurred in the provinces of Kandahar (killing 11 people) and Helmand (killing six people).³

Bosnia and Herzegovina

President of Republika Srpska (Serbian Republic) sentenced to prison

On 26.02.25, the Federal Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina sentenced the President of the Republika Srpska (RS) entity, Milorad Dodik, to one year in prison for defying the rulings of the High Representative (HR). The criminal proceedings were instituted in October 2023, after Dodik signed a decree on the entry into force of the law on the non-publication of rulings handed down by the High Representative and on preventing the enforcement of state-level Constitutional Court rulings in the entity in the same year (cf. BN of 03.07.23). As the representative of the international community, the High Representative has far-reaching powers in monitoring the implementation of the Dayton Accords concluded in 1995, which ended the Bosnian war that began in 1992. The political leadership of the Republika Srpska does not recognise the incumbent High Representative, the German politician Christian Schmidt, as his appointment in 2021 was not confirmed by the UN Security Council. Along with the judgement, the court imposed a ban preventing Dodik from holding presidential office for six years. As a result of the conviction, he will not be permitted to hold public office even after serving his sentence. As this was a first-instance verdict,

both sides can appeal. The second-instance verdict is expected to be delivered by the end of this year. Until then, Dodik can continue to hold office for the time being. He himself publicly stated that he would oppose the ruling and described it as politically motivated by "racist and nationalist hatred" against Serbs. Serbia's President Aleksandar Vučić echoed his condemnation and reiterated his country's support for Dodik.⁴

Eritrea

Government calls for nationwide mobilisation

According to the organisation Human Rights Concern Eritrea, the Eritrean government has issued a directive to all regional administrations to register and mobilise citizens under the age of 60. The measure includes the completion of military exercises and also applies to demobilised persons, persons exempted from compulsory military service, married women and women with children. They are required to remain on standby or return to their respective military units. In addition, individuals under the age of 50 are prohibited from leaving the country, according to the report. Registration is said to have already begun. Even individuals undertaking business trips have reportedly also been prohibited from leaving the country. The nationwide mobilisation is said to have been triggered by the increasingly tense relationship with Ethiopia. The government has not yet issued an official statement.⁵

Iran

Temporary arrest of a singer at a concert in Tehran

According to media reports issued on 01.03.25, the well-known singer Hiva Seyfizadeh was temporarily arrested by security forces during a live performance in Tehran on 27.02.25 and released again after paying bail. Quoting information provided by concertgoers, it was reported that after the end of the first piece of music, masked security forces dressed in civilian clothes had stopped the concert. According to a director of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, the woman was arrested for singing solo without authorisation. In the meantime, the content of the artist's Instagram account was reportedly deleted and replaced with a notice saying the police had ordered the blocking of her account and issuing a warning.⁶

Five-year-old child killed by shots presumably fired by police officers

According to media reports issued on 27.02.25, a five-year-old boy was killed in the city of Iranshahr (Sistan and Baluchestan province) after shots were fired at his family's vehicle. The boy's mother, who was pregnant, was also said to have been injured. Baluchestan human rights channels reported, citing eyewitness reports, that local police had opened fire at the family's vehicle. No explanation has been provided regarding the reason for the shooting. The police commander of the province of Sistan and Baluchestan, however, stated that the shots had been fired by as yet unidentified individuals. He said a police inquiry would be launched into the incident.⁷

Imprisoned teacher sentenced to three years in prison

According to a report issued by an Iranian-Kurdish human rights organisation based in Norway on 24.02.25, a retired teacher and activist who is currently imprisoned in Tehran has been sentenced to three years in prison. The charges against the 55-year-old included accusations of propaganda through collaboration with anti-regime groups and membership of opposition groups. The accused was arrested by security forces in August 2024 and spent around two months in solitary confinement in Tehran's Evin Prison. At the end of 2024, she was transferred to the prison's women's ward. It is reported that the woman had previously been arrested and sentenced for her civil activities.⁸

Reprisals against organisers of online dating events

According to media reports issued on 24.02.25, fifteen people have been summoned, arrested or cautioned by security authorities for allegedly organising blind date events on social media. They claim several online platforms known for such events, some of which have over one million followers, have been blocked by Iranian authorities due to what they describe as criminal content contrary to public decency. According to Iranian police forces, the crackdown follows numerous complaints from families about social, cultural, and moral damage.

The online content in question, which is mainly published on large international online platforms and is only accessible via technical circumvention services (VPNs) due to the official ban in the country, is attracting widespread interest, particularly among the young population.⁹

Iraq

Impact of the possible self-dissolution of the PKK

In Iraq, the announcement of a ceasefire and the possible self-dissolution of the PKK (cf. the section on Türkiye) has been largely welcomed across party lines. Various parties have expressed hope, particularly with regard to the role the PKK plays in the Shingal region. A complex agreement between the armed groups active on the ground has been in the pipeline for years, which would ultimately result in the Iraqi state taking over the security of the region. Groups affiliated with the PKK have repeatedly opposed its implementation because it would have forced them to give up positions of strategic importance for the PKK.¹⁰

Lebanon

Ceasefire with Israel

Israel continues to occupy five strategic hills within Lebanon. Further airstrikes on Hezbollah positions, weapons depots and fighters are taking place with low frequency, and there have also been renewed exchanges of fire. Lebanon and Israel continue to accuse each other of breaking the ceasefire, but the Lebanese army is still not in a position to exercise full control over the south. Following a statement released by the US Special Envoy for the Middle East region, Steve Witkoff, there is widespread opposition to Lebanon joining the Abraham Accords in the political debate within Lebanon, but there are also critical voices calling for the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and the UN resolutions on southern Lebanon. On 28.02.25, a man was allegedly arrested at Beirut airport carrying USD 2.5 million in cash. The money was allegedly intended for Hezbollah.¹¹

Attack on UN peacekeepers

Following the attack carried out on a UNIFIL convoy on 13.02.25, twenty-six people have been charged, 13 of whom have gone into hiding. Three UNIFIL members were wounded in the attack, a vehicle was set on fire and USD 29,000 was stolen. The charges range from forming a criminal organisation to attempted murder. If convicted, the suspects could face life imprisonment without the prospect of parole.¹²

Mali

Allegations against the army and mercenaries

The Front de libération de l'Azawad (Front for the Liberation of Azawad (FLA)), one of several Tuareg rebel groups in Mali, accuses the army and allied mercenaries of the Wagner group of "executing" a total of at least 24 civilians who were on their way from Algeria to the city of Gao on 17.02.25. This was indicated in media reports released on 22.02.25; the exact locations of the two incidents are not known. According to the FLA, women and children were amongst those killed. An army representative rejected the allegations, saying that rumours had been spread by "terrorist networks, their allies and sponsors". An investigation is nevertheless underway. According to an agency report, this involves a rare investigation conducted into human rights violations since the military seized power in 2020. However, analysts say it is unlikely the investigation will actually fault the troops or the mercenaries.

The FLA is a new alliance of Tuareg rebel groups that has replaced previous alliances and is pursuing the goal of independence for the region. In Tamasheq/Tuareg, Azawad refers to at least the north of Mali with the cities of Gao, Timbuktu, Kidal and Ménaka.¹³

Nicaragua

Returnees turned back at the border; reform of the migration law

At least 160 nationals have reportedly been turned back at the border or denied entry when attempting to return to Nicaragua since the reform of the migration law (Ley 761), and the associated adoption of the criminal code (Ley 641), in November 2024. Recently, this has increasingly affected individuals who lost their migration status under the new US administration due to the termination of various programmes, such as the Humanitarian Parole Programme. These include, inter alia, journalists, human rights defenders, relatives of political prisoners, as well as influencers and YouTubers. These types of practices were already documented between 2021 and March 2024, for which the legal reforms have now created a statutory basis. During this period, more than 150 cases of people being refused entry were documented, including clergymen, university lecturers, lawyers and minors in addition to the groups of people mentioned above. The 2024 law reform allows the Directorate General for Migration and Foreigners (DGME) to deny entry to people who, for example "undermine national sovereignty or pose a risk to society". Article 113 of Ley 761 regulates the specific grounds for the deportation of nationals that include "promoting and inciting acts of social destabilisation" and for "acts contrary to morality or public decency", "publication or dissemination of fake news that endangers social stability" or on the orders of the judicial authorities. The law also regulates the grounds for deportation and expulsion (Articles 171 and 174) as well as the loss of Nicaraguan citizenship (Article 64), for example, following a conviction for treason. Many sections of the law have relatively vague wording. There are also provisions for transport companies that carry Nicaraguan nationals who are subject to entry restrictions. According to media reports, airlines and bus companies send passenger lists to the Directorate General for Migration and Foreigners in advance, with the names of individuals intending to enter Nicaragua. These lists are then used to cross reference names with another list they receive periodically from the Interior Ministry flagging these individuals.

Individuals entering or departing the country illegally by circumventing official border controls can also be penalised with fines or two to six years' imprisonment under the 2024 reforms in accordance with Article 318 of the Nicaraguan Criminal Code.¹⁴

Nigeria

Kano State: arrests over planned protests

On 26.02.25, police forces arrested 17 suspects in the northern Nigerian state of Kano who were allegedly planning a violent protest rally. According to media reports, a police spokesperson confirmed this action on the same day. He said the police had acted proactively to prevent a possible breakdown of law and order and to ensure public safety. The police spokesperson warned all individuals and groups against engaging in any form of unlawful gathering, procession, or violence.¹⁵

Violent events in the southeast

A number of violent incidents attracted particular media attention in mid-February 2025 in Nigeria's southeastern states. For example, unidentified armed men reportedly kidnapped several people in Anambra State on 13.02.25, including a Catholic priest. On 16.02.25, the police announced that security operatives had killed five suspected members of the Eastern Security Network (ESN), an organisation associated with separatist efforts, during operations carried out in Imo State a few days earlier. On 17.02.25 and 19.02.25, a total of four people were killed in a boundary dispute between two communities in the state of Ebonyi. In the southeast of Nigeria, other armed groups are active alongside those in favour of the region's secession (cf. BN of 11.11.24).¹⁶

Pakistan

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: attack on religious school important to the Taliban

On 28.02.25, at least six people, including a high-ranking cleric, were killed in an explosion at the Jamia Haqqania (Darul Uloom Haqqania) seminary in Akkora Khattak in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ahead of the fasting month of Ramadan. Several people were injured. The seminary is known for training important Taliban leaders.

According to the local authorities, Hamidul Haq Haqqani, a Pakistani politician from the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam party and deputy head of the seminary, was among those killed in the explosion. The provincial police chief explained that, according to initial findings, the explosion was caused by a suicide bomber. He had managed to gain access to the seminary despite strict security precautions. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack. Hamidul Haq Haqqani was the son of Samiul Haq Haqqani, who is known as the "spiritual father of the Taliban". For many years, the latter had been the head of the seminary which his father, Abdul Haq, a well-known Islamic scholar of the Deobandi school and founding member of Jamiat-Ulema-e-Islam Pakistan, had founded in 1947. The Afghan Taliban condemned the attack, which was one of at least four attacks to be carried out across the country, two of them on mosques, which were unusual both in their number and their timing just ahead of the fasting month.¹⁷

Torkham border crossing between Afghanistan and Pakistan closed

Pakistan closed the Afghan-Pakistani border crossing at Torkham on 21.02.25 due to a dispute over the construction of a border post by Afghanistan. According to media reports issued on 02.03.25, the border crossing was not reopened. Bilateral trade and travel have been interrupted for the second week in a row.¹⁸

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

Gaza Strip: first phase of ceasefire ends; humanitarian imports to the Gaza Strip halted

The first phase of the ceasefire concluded between Israel and Hamas in January 2025 ended on 01.03.25 (cf. BN of 20.01.25). However, the negotiations on the conditions and circumstances of the second phase of the ceasefire have not yet been finalised, meaning that the next steps remain unclear for the time being.

The US government proposed extending the first phase by seven weeks, which the Israeli government agreed to. Hamas rejected the proposal and adhered to the agreement, which provides for the transition to phase two. In the second phase, the war was to end permanently and all remaining Israeli troops were to be withdrawn from the Gaza Strip. In addition, further Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners were to be released as agreed in prisoner exchange deals. The new US-Israeli proposal would see the release of half of the remaining hostages, both alive and dead, as part of the extension of the ceasefire at the beginning of the seven-week period.

So far, 25 living and eight dead hostages have been handed over to Israel as part of the ceasefire agreement. In return, more than 1,500 Palestinian prisoners have been released. According to the Israeli government, 25 hostages and the mortal remains of 30 hostages who were killed are still in the Gaza Strip. Although the war has not yet been resumed by either side, both are preparing to continue fighting if further negotiations fail.

Just a few hours after the new proposal was published, the Israeli government announced on 02.02.25 that it was suspending all humanitarian aid (with the exception of water) to the Gaza Strip. The media reported that this was intended to step up pressure on Hamas to agree to the ceasefire extension. The suspension of humanitarian aid is likely once again to have a negative impact on the humanitarian and supply situation in the Gaza Strip after a significant improvement due to increased imports following the conclusion of the ceasefire agreement.

The winter conditions pose major challenges for the population. According to the health authorities, six newborns have died due to the freezing weather conditions in Khan Younis and Gaza City.¹⁹

West Bank: military operations continue in several localities

Israel continues to carry out military operations in several villages in the north of the West Bank. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), a total of 55 Palestinians, most of them armed, and three Israeli soldiers have been killed since the offensive was launched on 21.01.25. Attacks carried out by Israeli settlers have also led to the wounding of 10 Palestinians and caused material damage to Palestinian property.

The military operations are focusing on four refugee camps, which are considered to be centres of armed groups. Almost 40,000 people have fled their homes there. Large parts of the infrastructure, roads and buildings have already been damaged. It is not yet clear when it will be possible to return. On 24.02.25, the Israeli defence minister announced that Israeli troops would remain in the refugee camps for the coming year and would initially prevent the return of residents. The majority of the population in the camps only have a low income and are now facing considerable challenges in securing their livelihoods.²⁰

Russian Federation

Arrests at memorial events for deceased Navalny

According to the independent civil rights portal OVD-Info, at least 42 people were arrested in 18 cities across Russia on 16.02.25, half of them in the cities of Volgograd, Yaroslavl, Ufa and Novosibirsk, during commemorative events held to mark the first anniversary of Alexei Navalny's death. Those attending the gatherings had individually held peaceful vigils for the deceased opposition leader on the street or had visited well-known memorials for the victims of political repression, such as the Solovetsky Stone memorial, laying flowers or holding posters showing pictures of the deceased or inscriptions such as "Russia will be free" and "in eternal memory". While some of those arrested were released without charge a short time later, others were sentenced to penalties of between one and 14 days' administrative detention on charges of allegedly committing administrative offences, including, with reference to posters of Navalny shown, the "use of extremist symbols" (Article 20.3 of the Administrative Offences Act).²¹

Senegal

Casamance: peace agreement with MFDC rebels

Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko signed a peace agreement with members of the rebel group and independence movement Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance (Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance; MFDC) in Guinea-Bissau on 23.02.25 under the mediation of Guinea-Bissau President Umaro Sissoco Embaló. According to media reports, the agreement is part of several initiatives launched by the Senegalese government to end the separatist conflict in southern Senegal's Casamance region, which has been ongoing since 1982, and to accelerate the development of the region. It reportedly provides for the surrender of weapons, the demobilisation of the MFDC rebels and their reintegration into society. It reportedly also obliges the Senegalese government to organise the return of displaced persons. A de facto ceasefire has been in place since 2012. At his inauguration in April 2024, President Diomaye Faye declared the restoration of peace in Casamance to be one of his priorities. The last agreement of this kind was reportedly signed in 2022 under former President Macky Sall.²²

UN report: inhumane prison conditions

During her visit to Senegal from 03.02.25 to 14.02.25, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture noted "dramatic and inhumane overcrowding in prisons" and inhumane prison conditions. In the UN report on her preliminary observations, she calls on the Senegalese authorities to take measures to ensure humane prison conditions. Outdated and overcrowded prisons, excessive length of pre-trial detention of up to six years without trial, a lack of alternatives to detention and a shortage of lawyers and judges are addressed in the report.²³

Somalia

Successful counteroffensive by Al-Shabaab

According to media reports, Al-Shabaab has been conducting a successful counteroffensive against the Somali National Army (SNA) and its allies for more than two weeks. After the SNA launched a large-scale offensive against Al-Shabaab three years ago with air support from the US and Türkiye, it is now coming under massive pressure itself. Since the start of the counteroffensive, Al-Shabaab has reportedly succeeded in capturing strategically important towns in central Somalia, particularly in Middle Shabelle. Most recently, the administrative capital of Hirshabelle state, Jowhar, was reportedly encircled by Al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab is said to have operated very nimbly and to have specifically exploited weak points by attacking the bases of the units that are said to have been sent to other regions for support. In the process, Al-Shabaab apparently captured large quantities of equipment, weapons and ammunition.²⁴

Syria

Ongoing fighting and airstrikes in East Aleppo and northeast Syria

Even after Öcalan's call (cf. the section on Türkiye) for the PKK to lay down its arms, fighting continued between the fighters of the Turkish-backed militias of the so-called Syrian National Army (SNA) and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in East Aleppo, especially in the Manbij district. Mazloum Abdi, commander of the SDF, stated that Öcalan's call did not concern the SDF. While Türkiye considers the People's Defence Units (YPG), the most influential faction within the SDF, to be synonymous with the PKK, the SDF leadership has for years emphasised its distance from the PKK.²⁵

Fighting between the transitional government and groups loyal to Assad

There are repeated attacks by militias loyal to Assad on relevant targets within Syria, including security forces of the transitional government, but also Israeli military personnel. For example, on 26.02.25, when, according to media reports, suspected supporters of the former Assad government attacked a local police station in Qardaha and demanded the withdrawal of the transitional government's internal security forces. This was followed by a security campaign carried out by the internal security forces in the town.²⁶

National Dialogue Conference

Just two days after the invitations were sent out (cf. BN of 24.02.25), hundreds of Syrians came together on 24.02.25 and 25.02.25 for the National Dialogue Conference in Damascus. In workshops, they developed proposals and objectives in the areas of transitional justice, the constitution, the establishment of state institutions and personal freedoms, as well as Syria's future economic model and the role of civil society. The specific content remained under wraps. The 18-point final declaration of the one-and-a-half-day conference spoke in favour of establishing a committee that was to be tasked with drafting a constitution and rejected the establishment of ethnic or religious quotas within public institutions. It also emphasised Syria's territorial integrity and condemned the presence of Israeli troops in the south of the country.

The hasty organisation and short duration of the conference, the lack of representation of minorities and women, the lack of transparency in the selection of participants and the open question of the extent to which the results of the conference would be binding for the transitional government led to widespread criticism. Those not invited included representatives of the SDF, which controls large parts of northeast Syria. Due to the last-minute organisation, some people who were abroad, in particular, were unable to attend.

A few days later, on 02.03.25, the transitional government announced the convening of a committee tasked with drafting a constitution. One of the seven members, all of whom have completed legal training, is a woman. The government reshuffle announced for 01.03.25 is still pending.²⁷

Fighting in Jaramana and threats of military intervention by Israel

On 28.02.25, fighting broke out between security forces of the HTS-led transitional government and Druze factions in the Damascus suburb of Jaramana. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), one member of the security forces was killed and nine other people were wounded. Influential Druze figures affirm that the Druze factions were an "undisciplined mob" that did not represent the Druze population of Jaramana. The reporting on the events and on the trigger for the fighting is ambiguous, and different narratives about the events are being presented. Syrian security forces were deployed to the town. Tensions on the ground were able to be contained through the mediation of influential Druze figures, including members of armed groups from the majority-Druze governorate of Suweida.

However, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced the following day that if the Druze population were harmed, Israel would intervene. He said that the Israeli military had been instructed to prepare for an intervention.

Netanyahu's announcement was rejected by Druze leaders and the Syrian transitional government. A week earlier, calls by the Israeli government for the demilitarisation of southern Syria had already caused a stir and led to protests within Syria (cf. BN of 24.02.25).²⁸

Türkiye

Abdullah Öcalan's call for the dissolution of the PKK

According to press reports, on 27.02.25, Abdullah Öcalan, the founder and leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), who has been imprisoned since 1999, issued a declaration, which was read out, calling for the laying down of arms and the dissolution of the organisation, which is classified as a terrorist organisation and banned in, among other places, the EU and Türkiye. The declaration was read out in both Kurdish and Turkish in an Istanbul hotel by a delegation of MPs from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM), which on 27.02.25 had visited Öcalan in prison for the third time since 28.12.24.

Specifically, Öcalan declared that all armed groups must lay down their weapons, and the PKK must dissolve itself. He also took historical responsibility for his call and thanked President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Erdoğan's coalition partner in the so-called People's Alliance, the leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), Devlet Bahçeli, for their support in achieving peace. In the declaration, Öcalan called on the PKK to voluntarily convene a congress and formally decide to lay down arms and dissolve the PKK. In his message, Öcalan also addressed the reasons for the PKK's armed struggle, including the state's refusal to recognise a Kurdish identity, and added that there was no longer any reason for an armed conflict. He stated that there was no alternative to democracy in the pursuit and realisation of a political system. He said that democratic consensus was the fundamental way. Öcalan did not say what steps, if any, the government should take to respond to Kurdish demands for more comprehensive political and cultural rights. He also did not mention any preconditions for the PKK to lay down its arms. A member of the delegation, who spoke the opening and closing words at the press conference on 27.02.25, stated that Öcalan had handed the delegation a note at the end of their meeting in prison. It stated, without Öcalan going into detail, that the renunciation of weapons and the dissolution of the PKK would undoubtedly require the recognition of democratic politics and its legal framework.

According to media reports, the reactions to Öcalan's call were largely positive. For example, in the Kurdish-majority city of Diyarbakır in the southeast of the country. Around 3,000 people had gathered in a square there to listen to an audio broadcast of Öcalan's appeal, and some people broke into spontaneous applause or tears. Politicians, such as the leader of the Republican People's Party (CHP) welcomed the call too, but also emphasised the need for a transparent and democratic process and dialogue.

On 28.02.25, President Erdoğan commented on Öcalan's call and described it as a historic opportunity to come closer to the goal of a Türkiye without terrorism. Erdoğan also stated that Türkiye would monitor the situation closely to ensure that the talks to end the insurgency were brought to a successful conclusion. He also warned of delays in the peace process and that the military would continue the fight against the PKK if promises were not honoured. He said that no member of the Turkish nation, whether Turkish or Kurdish, would forgive anyone who blocked this process through ambivalent speeches or actions, as had happened in the past. Likewise, on 28.02.25, the spokesperson for President Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) issued a statement. In it, he said that all groups associated with the PKK, including the People's Defence Units (YPG) and the Democratic Union Party (PYD), must be disbanded. He said that this included ending the presence of the PKK both in Türkiye and in its neighbouring regions, particularly in Iraq and Syria. He stated that there was no room for negotiations on the characteristics of the state and added that there would be no compromises in the peace process.

On 01.03.25, the PKK Executive Committee announced an immediate and unilateral ceasefire with Türkiye as its first response. This would pave the way for the realisation of Öcalan's call for peace and a democratic society. In addition, they said they agreed with the content of the call and would follow and implement it. Furthermore, they stated that none of their "forces" would take armed action unless they were attacked.²⁹

Arrest of CHP mayor

According to media reports, the mayor of Beykoz Municipality, Alaattin Köşeler, a member of the main opposition party CHP (Republican People's Party), and 20 other people were arrested on 27.02.25 in raids carried out by the Istanbul Financial Crimes Division. The Public Prosecutor's Office has issued arrest warrants and search and seizure warrants for the 20 other suspects, including five municipal employees and 15 people who do business with the municipality, on charges of forming a criminal organisation, membership of a criminal organisation and aiding and abetting its activities. Köşeler's arrest has been criticised and condemned by CHP officials and has been described as an attempt to defy the will of the electorate.

The arrests on 27.02.25 follow a wave of investigations and arrests targeting CHP-governed municipalities in Istanbul, as a result of which two CHP mayors from the districts of Esenyurt and Beşiktaş were removed from office and arrested. Ten municipal employees, all of whom are members of the CHP, including two deputy mayors and eight members of various city councils, were also arrested on 13.02.25 on terrorism charges (cf. BN of 17.02.25).³⁰

Ukraine

American-Ukrainian relations; efforts to end the war

The already strained relations between the US and Ukraine were further damaged during President Volodymyr Zelensky's visit to Washington on 28.01.25 in what observers described as an unprecedented altercation. US President Donald Trump and Vice President J.D. Vance accused Zelensky of "ingratitude" and "gambling with world war three" in front of the cameras during their reception in the Oval Office. Zelensky had actually travelled there to sign the agreement on US access to Ukrainian natural resources that has recently been the subject of intensive negotiations (cf. BN of 17.02.25 and 24.02.25). This did not take place due to Zelensky's visit being cut short. According to reports, Trump subsequently declared that Zelensky was not ready for peace.

The question was raised in many places as to whether the US would now completely cease its previously significant support for Ukraine and what further increased pressure the US would now exert on Ukraine to make concessions. It was reported that the Speaker of the US House of Representatives had expressed the expectation that Zelensky would resign as President if he did not "come to his senses". National Security Advisor Mike Waltz was reported to have also said similar things. The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) reportedly warned on 01.03.25 that an end to American support for Ukraine could decisively change the balance of power in Russia's favour. Even before the meeting, it had been reported that Trump was not planning to involve his country in any peacekeeping forces on Ukrainian territory or provide security guarantees.

Against this backdrop, heads of government from around 18 countries and leading representatives of the EU and NATO met on 02.03.25 at the invitation of the United Kingdom. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer expressed his confidence that the US could be won over as a reliable partner for securing European security guarantees after all. He stated that discussions had centred in particular on British-French proposals for a ceasefire plan between Ukraine and Russia, which still had to be specified. He said that, initially, a ceasefire "in the air, on the seas and in the energy infrastructure", that is to say, excluding ground combat, was to apply for one month.

The split between the US and large parts of Europe on the Ukraine issue had already emerged in the UN bodies on 24.02.25, according to media and UN reports. In the UN Security Council, the draft resolution S/RES/2774 (2025) introduced by the US was adopted with 10 votes in favour, including Russia's, while the remaining five Security Council members Denmark, France, Greece, Slovenia and the United Kingdom abstained. The resolution reportedly called for a swift end to the conflict and a lasting peace between the two warring parties. It was reported that the European countries had criticised the failure to designate Russia as the aggressor and the lack of reference to state sovereignty and territorial integrity. A few hours earlier, two non-binding resolutions had been adopted in an emergency session of the UN General Assembly. A Ukrainian-European draft resolution (A/RES/ES-11/7) was supported by 93 countries, while 65 abstained and 18 voted against. The latter included the US, Russia and Hungary as an EU member state. The American draft resolution (A/RES/ES-11/8), which originally reflected the same position as the UN Security Council resolution, was amended by European supplementary proposals. In the end, 93 countries voted in favour, 73 abstained, including the US, and eight rejected it, including Russia.³¹

Civilian casualties

In Kostyantynivka (Donetsk Oblast), civilians have once again become victims of daily Russian attacks (cf. BN of 24.02.25). According to the regional governor Vadym Filashkin, a strike with three glide bombs killed at least five people on 26.02.25. Filashkin was reported to have repeatedly called on the remaining residents to leave the city. The following civilian casualties were also reported in the Donetsk region as a result of Russian attacks: on 24.02.25, one person killed in Sloviansk; on 25.02.25, one person killed and numerous injured in Kramatorsk and another person killed in Yampil; on 26.02.25, one person killed in Pokrovsk; on 28.02.25 and 01.03.25, a total of six people killed without location information and on 02.03.25, one person killed in Kramatorsk.

Russian rocket launchers killed one person in the Kharkiv region on 25.02.25. According to the local governor, Russian shelling killed one person in the Kherson region on both 25.02.25 and 26.02.25. According to the military

administration, one person died in a Russian drone strike on a bus in Kherson on 02.03.25, and another of the passengers was critically injured. One person was killed in drone strikes on the Kyiv region on 25.02.25, and two were killed on 26.02.25. According to local reports, one person was killed by debris from Russian drones in Odesa on 28.01.25.³²

War events

According to media reports, the Ukrainian army claimed the recapture of the settlement of Kotlyne west of the long-contested city of Pokrovsk (Donetsk Oblast) on 26.02.25. The ISW had reportedly come to the conclusion that Russia had abandoned the capture of Pokrovsk (cf. BN of 17.02.25) and also assumed that the city would not be surrounded at present, also in view of Ukrainian resistance. It was reported that Russia had instead claimed the capture of several settlements in the Donetsk region. According to a Ukrainian analysis group, Russian troops occupied 192 km² in February 2025, the third consecutive month in which they occupied less additional territory than in the previous month.³³

Energy infrastructure

On the occasion of the third anniversary of the full-scale Russian invasion, Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko stated on 24.02.25 that Russia had carried out more than 30 mass strikes on Ukraine's energy infrastructure over the past three years. He said that despite this and despite the occupation of territories hosting power generation facilities producing a total of 18 gigawatts of generation, including in particular the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, the energy system continued to function. According to further media reports, the US State Department has cancelled a US Agency for International Development (USAID) initiative to restore the energy grid following Russian attacks. USAID had invested several hundred million USD in this so far, a local official said. He added that Ukraine's economy had so far proved resilient despite Russia's war, which was also aimed at destroying it, particularly thanks to USAID. Meanwhile, Italy has reportedly pledged USD 13.5 million for the Ukrainian Energy Support Fund, which will also be used to support the restoration of the energy infrastructure.³⁴

Venezuela

Deportations from the US to Venezuela, including alleged deserters

According to the US State Department, two flights carrying around 190 people deported to Venezuela had already landed on 10.02.25 (cf. BN of 17.02.25). The deportations took place following a trip by US special envoy Richard Grenell to Caracas in January 2025, during which six US citizens who had been imprisoned in Venezuela were also released.

According to US reports, several suspected members of the transnationally operating criminal gang Tren de Aragua were also among those returned. Venezuelan Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello contradicted this statement. However, he stated that 17 people had "unfinished business" with the justice system, mostly for unspecified offences dating back between seven and 15 years. According to Cabello, there were also two ex-military personnel of the National Bolivarian Armed Forces (Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana (FANB)) on the flight who had deserted. He said that investigations into this, including by the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (Dirección General de Contrainteligencia Militar (DGCIM)), had already begun. However, no further information has been provided on the identities of these individuals. In this context, a human rights defender warned of the lack of trial guarantees and the politicised legal system in Venezuela. At the same time, she stated that it should first be checked whether ex-military personnel were actually on the flight, whether they had deserted or whether this public announcement fulfilled another purpose, such as curbing desertion through intimidation.³⁵

Death in custody

On 24.02.25, another member of Vente Venezuela (Come Venezuela) died in custody. While opposition politician María Corina Machado and the relatives of the deceased accuse the state of failing to provide medical care, the authorities have not yet commented on the circumstances of Reinaldo Araujo's death. Araujo was arrested on 09.01.25 after visiting a doctor in connection with a protest. Since November 2024, he is already the fourth person allegedly detained for political reasons in the wake of the protests following the 2024 presidential elections to have died in custody (cf. BN of 25.11.24 and 23.12.24).³⁶

Arrests and convictions

Luis Somaza, a politician from the opposition party Voluntad Popular (Popular Will) and the former head of office during Juan Guaidó's interim presidency, was arrested in Caracas back on 12.02.25. According to Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello, he is accused of corruption in connection with the receipt of funds from USAID, among other things. Another Voluntad Popular party member was also arrested by the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service, SEBIN, in the state of Apure on 27.02.25. The opposition party described the arrest as arbitrary.

According to the online news website La Patilla (The Watermelon), one of its reporters was arrested on 20.02.25 by members of SEBIN. His whereabouts initially remained unknown, and there was no further information available. His relatives are said to have reported the disappearance to the Attorney General's Office.

On 24.02.25, Nelson Piñero, a member of the opposition Encuentro Ciudadano (Citizens' Encounter) party, who was arrested by SEBIN in the state of Carabobo in November 2024, was also sentenced to 15 years in prison for publications on social media, according to his party.³⁷

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Briefing Notes

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