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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Security situation

The Torkham border crossing between Afghanistan and Pakistan remained closed as of 17.03.2025. The closure has now been in place for 24 days; there is no solution in sight as talks between the Taliban and Pakistan have stalled. In an initial round of talks held on 09.03.25, both sides had agreed to a two-day ceasefire and to halt Taliban construction of new border posts. However, Taliban forces resumed building the structures the following day, fuelling tensions. The Taliban did not turn up for a planned second round of talks with tribal elders and business representatives last week. Pakistan is making the reopening of the border dependent on the Taliban halting the construction of military facilities in the disputed area.

According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), at least 455 civilians, including 359 children, were killed or injured in 234 accidents involving unexploded ordnance in Afghanistan in 2024.

Clashes erupted between Taliban fighters and unidentified gunmen at a Taliban base near the Kunduz-Khanabad motorway in the Khwaja Pesta region of Kunduz province. According to unconfirmed reports, several people were killed and injured.

According to media reports issued on 13.03.25, armed robbers stormed a money exchange market in Paktia province, killing two security guards and stealing an estimated USD 100,000 from three shops. On 17.03.25, an explosion occurred in the Khaikhana neighbourhood in the north of Kabul.¹

Algeria

Three Algerians and two Frenchmen sentenced for proselytising

On 11.03.25, the Tizi Ouzou Court of Appeal confirmed the first-instance judgement against several defendants who were sentenced to two years' imprisonment without probation and a fine of DZD 100,000 each (approx. EUR 687, as of 17.03.25) on the charges of "inciting a Muslim to change religion" and "attacking national security".

Two other defendants were acquitted of the charge of "inciting a Muslim to change religion" but were instead sentenced to a fine of DZD 20,000 for "illegally harbouring a foreigner without prior registration".

The media reports do not provide any information about the religion of the accused, but they are presumed to be Christians.²

New charges in the trial against Boualem Sansal

According to media reports, the French-Algerian writer Boualem Sansal, who was arrested at Algiers airport on 16.03.25, was brought before a judge on the morning of 13.03.25. The charges against Sansal, who is accused of offences such as undermining the integrity of state security under Article 87 of the penal code, have reportedly been extended to include espionage.

The reasons for Sansal's detention were not clearly explained by the authorities. Observers suspect that the reason for the judicial action was a recently published interview he gave to the French media outlet *Frontières*, which is associated with the right-wing political spectrum centred around Éric Zemmour and whose strategic committee Sansal belongs to. In it, he commented on the issue of borders and sovereignty claims in the territories of Algeria and Morocco and in the disputed territory of Western Sahara. Sansal, who is 80 years old and is seriously ill, went on hunger strike in mid-February after his lawyer was refused a visa to enter the country. Sansal had been pressurised by the Ministry of Justice to find a "non-Jewish" lawyer.

In the recently published report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, Algeria is criticised, among other things, for the fact that several activists and journalists have been imprisoned in recent years on the basis of vague anti-terrorism laws.³

Armenia / Azerbaijan

Armenia and Azerbaijan reach peace agreement

Armenia and Azerbaijan reached a peace agreement on 13.03.25 to end the conflict they have been embroiled in for decades. Both the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministries announced that the negotiation process on the text of the peace agreement had been finalised and that they were ready to negotiate the date and place of signing the agreement. However, doubts remain as to whether all outstanding issues have actually been resolved. Azerbaijan has at least one prerequisite attached to the agreement: Armenia would have to adopt a constitutional amendment and renounce all territorial claims against Azerbaijan, which the Armenian government has so far rejected. However, Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has repeatedly called for constitutional reform in recent months.

Armenia and Azerbaijan have waged war against each other several times during the past three decades over control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which belongs to Azerbaijan under international law but has been largely populated by Armenians. A lightning offensive carried out in mid-September 2023 saw Azerbaijan regain control of the whole of Nagorno-Karabakh. The military operation prompted almost all of the territory's 100,000 Armenians to flee to Armenia. Peace negotiations between the two countries have been ongoing ever since.⁴

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Escalation of the conflict between Republika Srpska and the central state

After the Federal Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina sentenced the President of the Republika Srpska (Serbian Republic (RS)) entity, Milorad Dodik, to one year in prison on 26.02.25 for defying the decisions of the High Representative (HR) (cf. BN of 03.03.25), the Bosnian Public Prosecutor's Office ordered the arrest of Dodik as well as of the Speaker of the RS Parliament, Nenad Stevandić, and the Head of Government, Radovan Visković, on 12.03.25. The two defendants had failed to answer two summonses for questioning. In addition, on 28.02.25, the Republika Srpska Parliament passed laws that deny the judiciary and police of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian central state jurisdiction over the entity. On 13.03.25, the National Assembly of the Republika Srpska also adopted a new draft constitution and a draft Law on the Protection of the Constitutional Order of Republika Srpska. Both drafts seek to assert greater autonomy for Republika Srpska, establishing separate institutions, including an army and judiciary, and containing provisions for self-determination and the right to form confederations with other countries. The draft constitution will go for 30 days of public discussion before being sent for a final vote in the assembly.

The draft law, adopted in urgent procedure, stipulates criminal prosecution for 21 offences, including attacks on Republika Srpska's constitutional order, threats to its territorial integrity, sabotage, espionage, and failure to comply with decisions issued by entity authorities. It also criminalises "obstructing the fight against the enemy", "serving in an enemy army", and "aiding the enemy". In view of the escalating political situation, the EU has deployed additional EUFOR peacekeeping troops to Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁵

Burkina Faso

Massacre of dozens of civilians

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), suspected members of the paramilitary group *Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie* (Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDP)) killed dozens of civilians in several villages in the Solenzo department of the western province of Banwa on 10.03.25 and 11.03.25. There are reportedly more than 10 videos featuring suspected armed paramilitaries and dozens of people killed and injured, mainly nomadic herders of the Fulani ethnic group. The Fulani have reportedly been accused of collaborating with an Islamist group. Islamist groups are said to have exploited the Fulani's frustrations over corruption and seizure of natural resources to recruit them to their cause. HRW's news release states that the Fulani have long been stigmatised in the Sahel region and are regularly accused of working with jihadist groups. On 10.03.25, a raid was reportedly launched in the region against the Al-Qaeda group *Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin* (JNIM), which led to deadly attacks on civilians in the villages of Bèna, Ban and Darsalam where the Fulani make up the majority of the population. Among other things, the residents were reportedly tied up and interrogated by VDP members searching for jihadist members. In its news release published on 14.03.25, HRW urged the military government to prosecute those implicated in the massacre. Prime Minister Rimtalba Jean Emmanuel Ouedraogo reportedly described the reports of the massacre as "manipulative actions aimed at calling into question the actions of the fighting forces".⁶

Chad

Consequences of the floods in 2024

According to a media report published on 07.03.25, the consequences of the major floods from last year's rainy season (cf. BN of 19.08.24) are still being clearly felt. According to UN OCHA and national surveys, around 1.9 million residents from 342,471 households across the country were affected by the worst flooding to date, most of them in the provinces of Lac, Mandoul and Moyen-Chari. Reports state that with 119 of 125 departments (spread over 23 provinces) affected, hardly any part of the country was spared. Over 570 people are said to have lost their lives. 217,779 houses and 432,203 hectares of farmland were reportedly destroyed across the country and over 72,170 head of cattle were killed.

The agricultural losses have reportedly put an additional strain on the already tense food security situation. Over 4.5 million or around a quarter of the population are reported to be affected by food insecurity. It is estimated that this will reach a critical level (IPC phase 3 or higher) for around 3.7 million people in 2025 during the particularly difficult June-September period. In 2024, 36.7 percent of children suffered from chronic malnutrition. The Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) for 2025 aims to mobilise USD 1.45 billion for humanitarian aid to reach 5.5 million vulnerable people, including in the areas of housing, health and education. The HNRP 2024, totalling around USD 1.13 billion, was reportedly 55 percent funded.⁷

Cuba

Release of hundreds of detainees finalised

On 10.03.25, the Vice President of the Supreme People's Court (Tribunal Supremo Popular, TSP), Maricela Sosa Ravelo, declared that the process involving the early release of 553 prisoners had been officially completed in two phases: 378 prisoners were released in January and 175 in February 2025. Among those released are the prominent opposition figures José Daniel Ferrer and Félix Navarro. However, well-known dissidents such as the artists Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara and Maykel Osorbo remain in custody.

Those released are obliged to appear in court regularly, to comply with the sanctions imposed and to fulfil civil obligations. Failure to comply with these conditions may result in them having to serve the outstanding sentence in prison.

The early, conditional releases are said to have begun as part of a Vatican-brokered agreement with the US under former President Joe Biden. However, once Donald Trump took office and Cuba was reinstated on the terrorist list, the process then appeared to stall following the initial prison releases in January 2025 (cf. BN of 27.01.25).⁸

Guinea

Additional parties suspended

On 14.03.25, the transitional government presented a further report on the investigation of the political parties (cf. BN of 11.11.24 and 13.01.25). According to a media report, two of the most important political formations, the former ruling party of ousted President Alpha Condé, Rassemblement du peuple de Guinée (Rally of the People of Guinea Rainbow (RPG-Arc-en-ciel)), and Sidya Touré's Union des forces républicaines (Union of Republican Forces (UFR)), were suspended for three months.

A total of 28 parties have reportedly been affected by the measure this time. According to the Ministry of Territorial Administration, these parties failed to meet their obligations to provide bank accounts or hold a congress over the past three months. The largest opposition party, Cellou Dalein Diallo's Union des forces démocratiques de Guinée (Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG)), managed to avoid suspension on the condition that it hold a congress within the next 45 days. A congress planned for 19.04.25 - 20.04.25 was stopped by a court on 28.02.25 following complaints filed due to internal disputes. The disputes arose following the expulsion of the current government spokesman Ousmane Gaoual Diallo after he took over functions within the transitional government. The same court had declared his expulsion from the UFDG null and void on 27.07.24.⁹

Iran

Activist sentenced to two years in prison

According to a report published by a human rights organisation based in the US on 11.03.25, a man imprisoned in Tehran has been sentenced to two years in prison for engaging in political activities. The conviction was based on charges of assembly and collusion against national security.

The man is said to have been arrested in February 2025 during a gathering in front of Tehran University (cf. BN of 17.02.25) and was taken to the local Evin prison. It is reported that the man has a history of previous arrests and convictions related to his political activism.¹⁰

Religious minorities: reprisals against Christian converts

According to reports issued by a Persian-language news portal that represents the interests of Christian converts in Iran, a Christian convert arrested in February 2025 was released from temporary detention in the city of Babol (Mazandaran province) on bail equivalent to around EUR 37,000 and was subsequently charged.

The woman was reportedly arrested on 06.02.25 by security forces who raided a gathering of Christian converts. According to unconfirmed reports from a Christian-based human rights organisation, the woman has been charged with gathering, collusion and propaganda against the regime.

According to media reports issued on 10.03.25, two Christian converts were also sentenced to prison terms of 10 and 15 years, respectively, and were slapped with additional penalties such as bans on leaving the country and fines. The two men were reportedly arrested in Tehran in November 2024 for allegedly founding a house church. They had been released on bail following their arrest. A Christian human rights organisation reported on 10.03.25 that, in addition to the two men, a 37-year-old woman had also been sentenced to 15 years in prison on charges relating to her Christian faith. None of the information can be independently confirmed.¹¹

Iraq

IDP camps in the Kurdistan Region

On 15.03.25, the Ministry of Migration and Internally Displaced Persons announced that a number of measures to improve the organisation of supplies for internally displaced persons in the Kurdistan Region could not be implemented for the time being due to a lack of funds.

The main plan was to merge some of the remaining camps where a small number of IDPs remain, in favour of larger facilities with correspondingly simplified supplies. In general, the funds that the Ministry has available for supplies for internally displaced persons have become increasingly scarce, partly due to the decline in international donations.

According to a statement issued by the Ministry on 12.03.25, twenty-three thousand families remain in camps in the Kurdistan Region, but voluntary returns have slowed down significantly. The Ministry sees two main reasons for this: firstly, it is assumed that there will be a renewed seasonal increase in the number of returnees during the Iraqi summer holidays. Secondly, a lack of funds will lead to a pause in the return grant of around USD 3,000 per family.¹²

Lebanon

Fragile ceasefire with Israel

In the course of negotiations between Israel and Lebanon, four Hezbollah captives were handed over to Lebanon on 12.03.25. A detained Lebanese soldier was handed over on 14.03.25.

A total of four people were killed in various airstrikes carried out between 12.03.25 and 17.03.25. According to Israeli reports, they included a senior Hezbollah leader and several fighters who were moving south of the Litani River in violation of the ceasefire agreement. Further Israeli airstrikes targeted Hezbollah infrastructure and arms depots.¹³

Syrian soldiers killed; Qusayr under siege

On 16.03.25, there was a border incident in the Harmel-Homs border region between Syria and Lebanon. Details are unclear, especially as the demarcation of the border in the region is disputed. All that is currently known is that three Syrian soldiers were killed in the region by armed Lebanese militia associated with Hezbollah. The bodies were handed over to Syria. In retaliation, the Syrian armed forces opened fire on the Lebanese village of Qusayr.

Hezbollah itself has denied any involvement in the incident in a public statement it issued. Although the Lebanese families involved are known to belong to Hezbollah, they are also heavily involved in smuggling in the region. These activities have repeatedly led to clashes with Syrian security forces in the past.¹⁴

Morocco

Blogger sentenced to two years in prison

The blogger Redouane Kastit, who is known for his opposition to the normalisation of relations with Israel, was sentenced to two years in prison without parole in the court of first instance on 10.03.25. He was charged for his posts on social networks and found guilty of "insulting a public body", among other things. Kastit was arrested in Tangier on 05.02.25 and has been in custody ever since.¹⁵

Nigeria

Priest abducted and murdered

A Catholic priest kidnapped by unidentified individuals in the northern Nigerian state of Kaduna on 04.03.25 was found dead the following day. According to media reports, the act of violence took place around 200 kilometres from the state capital in the Kaura Local Government Area. His body showed signs of violence. The motive for the offence has not yet been determined. Kaduna State is one of the states experiencing relatively frequent attacks by armed groups against schools, travellers and smaller towns, among others. According to the bishop responsible, a pastoral worker has been killed by unknown assailants in the region every year since 2021.

According to media reports issued on 10.03.25, state security forces in cooperation with a local vigilante group managed to free two Catholic priests kidnapped on 22.02.25 in the northeastern Nigerian state of Adamawa. A suspected kidnapper was arrested and an assault rifle confiscated.

In the southern Nigerian state of Edo, on 13.03.25, police forces managed to free a Catholic priest who had been kidnapped together with a seminarian in the early hours of 03.03.25. According to media reports, the seminarian did not survive his captivity. In Nigeria, acts of violence against Christian clergy, including and especially kidnappings for ransom (cf. BN of 18.07.22, 01.08.22 and 29.08.22, 02.01.23 and 01.07.24), have been fairly regular occurrences in the past.¹⁶

North Macedonia

EU rapporteurs and analysts see judicial independence under threat

Independent political analysts and the EU rapporteur for North Macedonia have expressed concern about increasing interference in the independence of the country's judicial system by Prime Minister Hristijan Mickoski's ruling coalition, according to recent media reports. They criticise the parliamentary motions tabled by the ruling party Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO DPMNE) in February 2025 to dismiss the Attorney General and six acting judges in the 15-member Judicial Council. However, according to media reports, the motions adopted by the parliamentary majority on 11.03.25 would have no legal effect, as, under the Judicial Council Act, the decision to resign cannot be made without the consent of the judges themselves. The judges in question, whom the government accuses of a lack of political neutrality in office or allegedly having political links with the current opposition parties, have so far refused to resign. According to media reports, the Prime Minister further exacerbated the smouldering dispute on 14.03.25 by announcing that he would support organised street protests against the refusal of the judges in question to resign. The opposition Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) and analysts accuse the government of undermining the independence of the judiciary by forcing a change of judges, thereby jeopardising the separation of powers and the rule of law in North Macedonia. The urgency of judicial reform, particularly in the area of the appointment and removal of judges and public prosecutors, has long been highlighted by EU legal experts.¹⁷

Pakistan

Punjab: court cancels forced marriage and conversion of a Christian woman

In February 2025, a civil court in Bahawalpur in the province of Punjab made a rare decision to annul the forced marriage of an 18-year-old Christian woman. The marriage to her stepfather's brother was declared invalid, and the forced conversion to Islam was annulled, according to the Christian organisation ADF International. She was also issued new identity documents that restored her status as a Christian. According to a study conducted in 2014, around 1,000 women and girls mostly from the country's Hindu and Christian communities are abducted, forcibly married and coerced into converting to Islam in Pakistan every year.¹⁸

Balochistan: military ends train hostage situation

On 12.03.25, security forces stormed the train hijacked by Baloch separatist militants near the Mashkaf railway tunnel in Kachhi district and freed hundreds of hostages. On 11.03.25, Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) militants had blown up railway tracks and fired at the Jaffar Express carrying 440 passengers en route from Quetta to Peshawar. According to the Pakistani Ministry of the Interior, around 70 to 80 assailants then took control of the train. Insurgents wearing explosive waistcoats mingled with the passengers. The military reportedly sent hundreds of soldiers and also deployed the air force and special units. In the final phase of the operation, special forces first killed the suicide bombers and then the remaining militants. According to the military, 21 hostages and four soldiers were killed. The train driver and several other people were already dead. No information was provided on the exact number of people rescued in the final phase of the operation. A total of 346 passengers are said to have been brought to safety.

Prior to the military's statement, the authorities said that 190 hostages had been rescued. Previously, the BLA, which claimed responsibility for the attack, had declared on 11.03.25 that it had 214 people in its custody and on 12.03.25 that 50 passengers had been killed. On 14.03.25, the government announced that the perpetrators had communicated with contact persons in Afghanistan and that India was the mastermind behind the attack.

The BLA is the largest of several ethnic armed groups fighting against the government in Balochistan on the border with Afghanistan and Iran. In recent months, the BLA has stepped up its activities and increasingly professionalised its tactics.¹⁹

Security situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan

On 15.03.25, Pakistani security forces raided two hideouts of an armed group in the districts of Mohmand and Dera Ismail Khan in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to the military, at least two soldiers and nine militants were killed in gun battles.

On the same day, armed militants attacked security forces in the Kurram district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, according to police. No further details are known.

On 16.03.25, Baloch separatists attacked a paramilitary security convoy in the Noshki district, killing at least five people (three security force members and two civilians), according to the authorities. A suicide bomber is said to have blown himself up on a lorry. The BLA stated that more than 90 security force members had been killed in the attack.²⁰

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

Israeli electricity supply to Gaza suspended

In a statement issued on 09.03.2025, the Israeli Energy Minister announced that he had cut off the power supply to the Gaza Strip with immediate effect. He justified the move by saying that he wanted to exert pressure on Hamas to release the remaining hostages so that it would no longer be able to govern the coastal strip once the war was over.

According to media reports, the actual impact will be limited, as the power supply for most people in the area was already severely limited. According to a study conducted in 2023, more than 50 percent of the electricity supply in the Gaza Strip was provided by various, mostly private sources such as diesel generators or solar panels before the outbreak of the war. However, due to the halt in imports of humanitarian supplies, the availability of fuel for the generators is now also in jeopardy. The move by the Israeli Ministry of Energy has brought the operation of a sewage treatment plant and a desalination plant for the production of drinking water, previously powered by Israeli electricity, to a standstill.

A spokesperson for the Hamas politburo described the Israeli measure as a "waste of time" against the backdrop of ongoing negotiations to end the war.²¹

Fifty-nine Israeli hostages remain in captivity

Out of the total of 251 people abducted from Israel on 07.10.23 and taken to Gaza, media reports indicate that just over 130 have since returned alive under agreements that included the release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails.

The Israeli government assumes that 59 people are still being held captive in Gaza. Only 24 of them are believed to be still alive.

According to Israeli reports, seven people were executed by their captors when Israeli military personnel approached them. Four other hostages are said to have lost their lives as a result of Israeli airstrikes. Three hostages are said to have been accidentally killed by Israeli fire because they had been mistaken for armed Palestinians. In one case, a person is said to have died in crossfire. The circumstances of death are still unknown in 26 other cases. The Israeli military is also said to have retrieved around 40 bodies, some of them of people killed on 07.10.25 and then taken lifeless to Gaza. Eight bodies were handed over by Hamas in February 2025.

According to media reports, more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners have now been released as part of an agreement reached with Hamas to free Israeli hostages. The majority of them are said to have been held in administrative detention without charge or imprisoned by Israeli security authorities for minor offences. Large sections of Palestinian society also regard this group as hostages in the broader sense of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Among those released, however, are reportedly over 200 violent offenders who have been imprisoned for murder, involvement in attacks or other crimes, such as Ashraf Zughayer, who was released on 25.01.25. Zughayer is said to have orchestrated a suicide bombing in which six people were killed outside the main synagogue in Tel Aviv in September 2002. He confessed to the offence and is now 46 years old. After his release, he was greeted by a cheering crowd in East Jerusalem.²²

Russia

Extensive drone attack on Moscow and other regions

On the night of 11.03.25, ten regions in the federal district of central Russia, in particular the capital region of Moscow, were attacked by several hundred drones of the Ukrainian armed forces.

In this context, the Russian Ministry of Defence reported that it intercepted 343 drones, 91 of these in the greater Moscow area alone, and 195 in the Belgorod, Bryansk, Kursk and Voronezh regions further upstream, directly bordering Ukraine. The attack hit oil refineries and distribution stations in Moscow and Oryol as well as an airbase in Ryazan. According to the relevant authorities in Moscow, three civilians were killed by falling fragments from a downed drone and 18 others were injured; one casualty was also reported from Lipetsk. In several of the regions, falling drone debris also caused damage to residential buildings and led to power cuts in parts of Belgorod. In the European part of Russia, drone and other remote attacks are carried out regularly on military bases and defence and oil industry facilities, sometimes also causing material damage to civilian buildings and isolated civilian casualties. According to observers, the current attack was the largest of its kind on the capital region since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in February 2022.²³

Somalia

Offensive by Al-Shabaab

As part of the latest advances made by Al-Shabaab (cf. BN of 03.03.25), units of the Islamist organisation attacked the Qahira Hotel in the centre of Beledweyne town on 11.03.25 and besieged it throughout the night. The hotel was hosting a meeting of local elders and government officials discussing strategies to counter the latest Al-Shabaab offensive.

Local security forces, together with units from the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), managed to end the attack and the siege of the hotel on the morning of 12.03.25 following a prolonged firefight. According to official reports, all six attackers were killed. Seven civilians, including two well-known and respected elders, were also killed in the fighting.

After the fighting at the hotel ended, the Somali secret service (NISA) and international partners attacked Al-Shabaab targets in the Middle and Lower Shabelle regions. Several dozen of the organisation's fighters were killed in the process. In addition, several websites operated by Al-Shabaab or affiliated with the organisation or its ideology were taken offline on 12.03.25.²⁴

South Sudan

Rising tensions in South Sudan

Since mid-February 2025, the South Sudanese army (South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF)) and allied militias have been fighting in Upper Nile against the "White Army", an armed militia that is said to support Vice President Riek Machar. The SSPDF, on the other hand, reportedly supports President Salva Kiir. On 04.03.25, the "White Army" is said to have captured a military base in Nasir. On 07.03.25, a UN helicopter is reported to have come under fire while attempting to evacuate SSPDF soldiers from the area. An SSPDF general, 27 of his soldiers and a UN crew member were reportedly killed. Several of Machar's allies were reportedly arrested in Juba following the violent clashes in Upper Nile. Due to the political tensions between President Salva Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar, the outbreak of a civil war could be imminent, according to media reports on the latest events of 07.03.2025.²⁵

Syria

Hundreds of civilians killed after fighting and massacres in Syria's coastal region

Following several coordinated attacks on Syrian security forces on 06.03.25, the transitional government mobilised its officially affiliated security forces and armed groups. The ensuing fighting led to numerous extrajudicial executions and massacres of the civilian population, particularly in the coastal region (cf. BN of 10.03.25).

The fighting took place between armed groups loyal to Assad and official security forces as well as supporters of the transitional government. According to media reports, local armed groups, militias from the Turkish-backed SNA alliance from the north and foreign Islamist groups also fought alongside the official troops on the side of the transitional government.

Although these are nominally considered to be integrated into the new Syrian security apparatus, they are de facto still subject to the same organisational, personnel and command structures as before, as no, or no full, integration processes have taken place to date.

According to various reports, civilians also armed themselves and joined the armed parties. The initial fighting then turned into attacks on the civilian population. Acts of revenge carried out by the troops and supporters of the transitional government are said to have occurred along sectarian lines. The Alawite population, in particular, which is seen by large parts of the Syrian population, if not as supporters, then at least as beneficiaries of the toppled Assad government, was therefore affected by executions and mass killings.

According to its own sources, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) was able to verify the killing and execution of at least 1,034 civilians by 15.03.25. It reports that 439 were killed by supporters of the Assad government, while 595 killings are attributed to the security forces and their supporters. The organisation stated that it was still verifying events in this context, so these are preliminary results for the time being. Among the groups of the security forces, factions of the Syrian National Army (SNA), in particular, as well as foreign militias, are said to have been involved in the massacres. However, some of the official security forces that emerged from the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) fighters under the General Security Department also took part in the killings. In addition to the high number of civilian victims, hundreds of fighters are also said to have been killed.

Since the fall of the Assad government and the takeover of power by the HTS, Alawites have been increasingly exposed to acts of revenge in the form of attacks and threats. Meanwhile, high-ranking military and intelligence officers of the toppled Assad government have evaded the reconciliation processes set up by the transitional government and founded or joined armed groups. These include the Syrian Popular Resistance, the Syrian Islamic Resistance Front, the Military Council for the Liberation of Syria and remnants of the National Defence Forces (NDF) militia group. These groups were involved in the attacks on the troops of the transitional government on 06.03.25. Although the transitional government claimed to have regained control on 10.03.25, attacks by armed groups on security forces continued until at least 14.03.25. Several members of the armed forces were killed, but there were initially no reports of civilians being killed.

Interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa announced wide-ranging investigations and criminal consequences for those responsible for the killings of civilians, including allies. To this end, he set up a committee which is to report its findings to him within 30 days.²⁶

Agreement on integration into state apparatus between SDF and transitional government

On 10.03.25, interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) commander Mazloum Abdi signed an agreement to facilitate a ceasefire and pave the way for a political agreement between the two political entities.

The declaration of intent covers several points, including the central aim of integrating the military and civilian components of the SDF into the transitional government by the end of 2025, although details of this process have not yet been included. Despite the agreement, Turkish airstrikes and fighting between factions of the SNA and SDF continued in East Aleppo, raising questions about the transitional government's ability to control the SNA factions. A Turkish Ministry of Defence source told a news agency that the agreement would not affect Türkiye's actions against terrorist organisations in Syria. Türkiye considers the YPG, the strongest group within the SDF, to be a terrorist organisation and continues to demand its disarmament and dissolution.

On 10.03.25, Druze militias and the Syrian transitional government also signed an agreement which, among other things, provides for the recruitment of security forces from Suweida and the establishment of military units from Suweida under the umbrella of the Ministry of the Interior. However, an influential Druze leader, Sheikh al-Hijri, stated shortly afterwards that no agreement had been reached. It is not known to what extent this statement has an impact on the signed agreement.²⁷

Temporary constitutional declaration signed

On 13.03.25, interim President al-Sharaa signed a constitutional declaration that will be valid for a transitional period of five years and is to be replaced by a permanent constitution at the end of this period, accompanied by parliamentary and presidential elections.

This provisional constitution grants al-Sharaa far-reaching powers and influence over appointments to both the legislature and the judiciary, although it also provides for a separation of powers. Under this constitution, one-third of the members of the future parliament would be appointed by the interim president.

In addition, a committee would be formed, which in turn would appoint a further committee to appoint the usual two-thirds. Al-Sharaa would also appoint the judges of the Supreme Constitutional Court. A reading of a summary of the declaration listed Sharia as "the main source" of future legislation, whereas it had previously been considered only one of the main sources. Fundamental rights, including freedom of opinion and belief, are to be preserved for all Syrians during the five-year transitional period. The declaration states that restrictions on rights are only possible in cases of national security. It adds that the president has the power to declare a state of national emergency. It also states that the glorification of the Assad regime is exempt from freedom of expression. The declaration was drawn up by the Constitutional Committee on the basis of the results of the National Dialogue Conference.

Al-Sharaa also announced the establishment of a National Security Council, which includes the current ministers of defence, the interior and foreign affairs, and the head of the intelligence service. They have so far been considered loyal to al-Sharaa. In addition, two advisors are to be appointed who will also be members of the council.

However, the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), the political arm of the SDF, and the opposition Kurdish National Council (KNC) criticised the constitutional declaration in no uncertain terms. They said it would grant absolute power to the executive and make political plurality impossible.

Only a few days earlier, the transitional government and the SDF had succeeded in signing an agreement that paved the way for the integration of the Kurdish-dominated groups and administration in northeast Syria into the transitional government. There were protests by the local population in the northeast.²⁸

Türkiye

Femicides

According to media reports, five women were killed by their male partners, some of them former partners, between 10.03.25 and 12.03.25. In this context, the women's rights organisation We Will Stop Femicide Platform stated that 21 women across the country were killed by a male relative or acquaintance, including four by their husbands, in February 2025.

Women's rights organisations have repeatedly pointed out that by declaring 2025 the Year of the Family, the government wants to strengthen traditional domestic roles instead of tackling social challenges such as domestic violence.²⁹

Cybersecurity law passed by parliament

According to press reports, the Grand National Assembly passed a controversial cybersecurity law on 12.03.25. Opposition politicians and legal experts had warned that it could enable comprehensive surveillance, restrict freedom of expression and lead to possible abuse of power.

The 21-article law, which was adopted by 246 votes to 102, introduces new state surveillance mechanisms and expands the powers of the Cybersecurity Directorate, which was established in January 2025. Critics expressed concern in advance that the law grants the executive excessive powers that could potentially undermine privacy. The cybersecurity board that is to oversee the implementation of the law will be made up of government representatives, including the president, the vice president and the heads of key ministries and security agencies. Opposition members argue that this structure places cybersecurity policy under the direct control of the president and precludes independent oversight.

The law provides for prison sentences of up to five years for individuals who create or disseminate false information about cybersecurity-related data breaches in order to incite fear or target institutions or individuals.

In addition, cybersecurity service providers must comply with government-approved regulations and report security breaches to the authorities, with non-compliance resulting in heavy fines and potential criminal liability.

One of the most controversial provisions, Article 8, originally provided for the head of the cybersecurity board to be granted far-reaching powers to conduct searches, seize data and copy digital records. In response to objections, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) revised the bill and cancelled this clause completely. Another important change was made to Article 16, which originally criminalised the dissemination of false information about data leaks. After concerns were raised that this could be used to silence whistleblowers and journalists, the wording was adapted to specifically address data leaks related to cybersecurity. Despite these changes, there are still concerns about the potential impact of the law.

Critics point to the vague wording, which could criminalise legitimate reporting of cybersecurity incidents, while the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) is preparing to challenge the law in the Constitutional Court. The CHP deputy for Bursa, Orhan Sarıbal, criticised the law during a press conference in parliament, saying it targets press freedom and the right to privacy as well as other democratic rights. The Turkish Journalists' Association (TGC) also criticised the wide-ranging powers granted to the cybersecurity board and the vague wording of the law, arguing that its main purpose is to cover up the truth and silence journalists. Law professor Bahadır Erdem also criticised the new regulation and warned that it could lead to the imprisonment of people who criticise the government.³⁰

Ukraine

Efforts for a ceasefire

According to media reports, the American delegation under US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and the Ukrainian delegation, including the head of the Presidential Office, Andriy Yermak, Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha and Defence Minister Rustem Umerov, met for negotiations in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on 11.03.25. The US's aim was to establish what concessions Ukraine was prepared to make. It was reported that the Ukrainian side declared its willingness to agree to an immediate 30-day ceasefire. Sybiha reportedly also told the US that the European partners would have to take part in future peace negotiations. According to President Volodymyr Zelensky, the US proposal for a ceasefire not only refers to airstrikes with missiles, drones and bombs as well as attacks in the Black Sea but also covers the entire frontline. According to the joint declaration, the ceasefire could be extended by mutual agreement, which in turn would depend on agreement and implementation by the Russian Federation (RF). The declaration stated that it was of particular importance for Ukraine that the US made military aid and intelligence information available again with immediate effect. Security guarantees were reportedly not part of the negotiations. The American side reportedly also reiterated plans for a minerals agreement that could give the US a 50 percent share of the revenue from the sale of Ukrainian mineral resources. According to US President Donald Trump, the agreement would offer implicit security guarantees by linking the economic interests of the US with the security of Ukraine. Trump has reportedly also hinted at financial consequences if the Kremlin does not support such a ceasefire. According to Rubio, the US was seeking unconditional Russian consent. Kremlin advisor Yuri Ushakov had reportedly already expressed scepticism on 13.03.25, saying that such a ceasefire would merely give Ukraine time to recover from the pressure exerted by the Russian troops.

At a meeting of the defence ministers of the five leading European military powers, the UK, Germany, Italy, Poland and France, in Paris on 12.03.25, the formation of a "reassurance force" that would guarantee peace in Ukraine in the event of an agreement was discussed, according to media reports. According to the reports, 15 countries are prepared to form a contingent of up to 30,000 troops to permanently secure Ukraine's airports, seaports and infrastructure.

In this regard, with reference to a statement issued by the Russian Foreign Ministry, it is reported that sending European peacekeeping troops to Ukraine would mean entering into a "direct armed conflict" with the RF. According to reports, 25 Western heads of state and government, the so-called "coalition of the willing", met on 15.03.25 under the leadership of British Prime Minister Keir Starmer to discuss further support for Ukraine and putting more pressure on the RF in the run-up to possible peace negotiations.

According to reports, Russian President Vladimir Putin replied on 14.03.25 that he supported the US proposal in principle, but at the same time he demanded a number of clarifications and conditions that would obviously rule out a rapid end to hostilities. According to Putin, many important details still needed to be clarified. He said that an agreement should lead to lasting peace and address the underlying causes of the conflict. The representatives of the RF and the US would now have to discuss the proposal. According to media reports, President Zelensky called Putin's response "manipulative". He said the latter was trying to either delay practical implementation or make it impossible. Meanwhile, President Putin has reportedly called on the hard-pressed Ukrainian troops in the Russian region of Kursk to surrender. In addition, it is reported that President Trump has stripped US special envoy Keith Kellogg, whom Moscow considers to be pro-Ukrainian, of his responsibility for the RF. In future, he will reportedly only be responsible for Ukraine.³¹

War events

The commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian armed forces, Oleksandr Syrsky, has indicated a partial withdrawal of his troops in the Russian border region of Kursk, according to reports issued on 13.03.25. At the same time, the Ukrainian army is reportedly attempting to quickly establish defence lines near the border in order to prevent a further Russian advance on Ukrainian territory. The military administration of the Sumy region has reportedly also ordered the forced evacuation of several villages near the border. According to the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), the Russian army has recaptured around 70 percent of the Russian territory that was occupied by Ukraine in the summer of 2024. According to the Russian army command, 430 Ukrainian soldiers have been captured.

Amid media reports of the depletion of Ukrainian stocks of ATACMS missiles supplied by the US, the US intends to resume deliveries of long-range missiles shortly after they have been modernised to better counteract Russian jammers.

Following military setbacks, President Zelensky has replaced Chief of the General Staff Anatoliy Barhylevych with his deputy Andriy Hnatov, according to media reports published on 16.03.25. In future, Barhylevych is to oversee the reform processes in the armed forces as Inspector General in the Ministry of Defence.³²

Civilian casualties

According to the governor, six people were killed in Russian attacks in the Donetsk region on 11.03.25. A Russian missile attack on Kryvyi Rih (Dnipropetrovsk region) claimed one life, according to media reports published on 12.03.25. According to the governor, a Russian airstrike on the port of Odesa on 12.03.25 killed four Syrians on a ship that was being loaded with wheat for export. On 14.03.25, according to reports issued by the responsible regional governors, residential areas in Kryvyi Rih and Kherson were hit by Russian airstrikes. While 13 people were injured in Kryvyi Rih, one person was killed in Kherson. According to media reports published on 16.03.25, at least one person died in a Russian drone attack in the city of Izium (Kharkiv region). According to reports published on 17.03.25, one civilian was also reported killed in Myrnohrad (Donetsk region) and another in the Sumy region.³³

Energy infrastructure and environmental damage

According to the energy provider DTEK, Russian airstrikes carried out on the night of 15.03.25 severely damaged power plants in the Dnipropetrovsk and Odesa regions and in some cases led to power outages. With reference to an unspecified research study, the blasting of the Kakhovka dam in 2023 triggered a "toxic time bomb", according to reports published on 14.03.25. According to the study, sediments containing 83,000 tonnes of heavy metals such as lead, cadmium and nickel were exposed.³⁴

ECtHR judgement on riots during the 2014 Maidan Revolution

Bloody riots and a catastrophic fire during the 2014 Maidan Revolution between pro-Russian and pro-European groups in Odesa claimed 48 lives. In its judgement, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has now found that the Ukrainian authorities violated the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). According to a press agency report published on 13.03.25, the fire brigade, police and other administrative bodies did not prevent or stop the violence or do what they could to save the people in the barricaded trade union building in Odesa that was burning at the time.³⁵

Venezuela

Releases

According to Attorney General Tarek William Saab, 110 people who had been imprisoned following the 2024 presidential elections were released again at the beginning of March 2025. According to media reports citing the NGO Committee for the Freedom of Political Prisoners (ClippVe), the released prisoners included a person with schizophrenia and a person suffering from severe depression. Their relatives had previously repeatedly complained about the withholding of medical care in detention and demanded their release on humanitarian grounds.³⁶

UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances in Venezuela

In a statement issued on 28.02.25, the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances said that it had received complaints from various sources (including NGOs, relatives and lawyers) about the practice of enforced disappearances from Venezuela, including in the context of the 2024 presidential elections and during and after Nicolas Maduro's inauguration in January 2025, and called on the Maduro government to put a stop to them, disclose the whereabouts of those affected and comply with international laws. It stated that there were also findings that habeas corpus applications had not been pursued or in some cases had not been accepted. In addition, the expert panel speaks of a systematic pattern of enforced disappearances, usually short-term, in which several actors (including the domestic and military intelligence services, the judiciary, the Attorney General's Office, the National Police and the Bolivarian National Guard) are involved. According to the committee's statement, these actors sometimes denied having detained a person after arrest or refused to disclose their specific whereabouts. The committee also sees the ongoing practice of enforced disappearances as a means of intimidating society, which is "fuelled by widespread impunity and selective justice".³⁷

Medical situation: treatment situation for chronic kidney disease

Recently, NGOs (ONTV and ATV), but also those affected themselves, have repeatedly criticised the shortage or non-availability of immunosuppressant drugs (for example, mofetil mycophenolate) dispensed as aid in the state pharmacies of the Venezuelan Social Security Institute (IVSS) (Farmacias de Alto Costo (high-cost pharmacies)) and warned of serious risks for transplant recipients, such as rejection reactions. At the end of February 2025, ONTV spoke of a "critical shortage in the last five months" in this context; it said states affected by the lack of deliveries included Aragua, Zulia, Barinas and Caracas. It mentioned that in addition to transplant patients, lupus patients, for example, had also been affected by a lack of or limited access to medication in the public healthcare system. According to people with specialist expertise, switching to private pharmacies with greater availability of medication was not an option for many of those affected for financial reasons.

In theory, the Venezuelan Social Security Institute (IVSS) also covers the treatment costs for dialysis services in the public healthcare system. However, there have been repeated reports in recent years that there are not enough dialysis stations in the country, as relevant units have repeatedly been closed due, among other things, to a lack of maintenance, for example. Recurring water and electricity outages and the lack of consumables (filters, solutions) and transport options to the relevant care facilities have also had a negative impact on the care of kidney patients. Government sources reported that a new dialysis unit was recently delivered to a hospital in Caracas on 07.03.25, and further units have been announced. However, there are no official figures on the extent to which this will contribute to improving the situation.

According to the President of the Venezuelan Medical Association, the serious health crisis in the country continues. The hospital survey (ENH) regularly published by the NGO Médicos por la Salud (Doctors for Health) also recently found that out-of-pocket costs (for example, for consumables during treatment) were once again high, particularly for childbirth.³⁸

Yemen

Over 50 killed in US military strikes on Houthi positions

US President Donald Trump announced on 15.03.25 that the US military had carried out large-scale air and naval strikes on Houthi militia positions. In addition to the capital Sanaa, the governorates of Saada, al-Bayda, Hajjah and Dhahar were also affected, according to Yemeni news reports.

According to a statement issued by a Houthi militia spokesperson on 16.03.25, at least 53 people were killed and 98 were injured in the strikes. Women and children were reportedly among the casualties. The US did not provide any information on the number of casualties.

According to the US government, the strikes were the beginning of an offensive that would continue until the Iranian-backed militia stop attacking civilian vessels passing through the Strait of Bab al-Mandab (literally: Gate of Tears).

According to media reports, members of the US government are assuming that the campaign could last several weeks. On the same day, the Houthi leadership vowed retaliation against the US. Iran has also condemned the attacks.

Since the attacks, which the Houthi militia began carrying out against civilian merchant vessels as a result of the Gaza war at the end of 2023, international shipping has diverted a considerable volume of traffic from Bab al-Mandab (and the Suez Canal) to the route around the Cape of Good Hope near South Africa.³⁹

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