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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Security situation

On 14.01.24, a suicide attack was carried out on the Taliban governor's office of Nimruz province, injuring three people. On the same day, the Afghanistan Freedom Front reported that it had fired rockets at the Taliban governor's office of Panjshir province, killing two Taliban insurgents. Most recently, on 02.01.24, a missile attack was carried out on the office of the Taliban governor in Badakhshan province (cf. BN of 08.01.24). Another attack was waged outside a shopping centre in the Hazara district of Dashti Barchi in Kabul on 11.01.24, killing six people and injuring 15 others. Most recently, on 07.01.24, the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) carried out an attack on a minibus carrying Hazara passengers (cf. BN of 08.01.24). Another explosive attack was carried out on a vehicle belonging to employees of a prison in Kabul on 09.01.24 for which the ISKP has claimed responsibility. Three people were killed and four were wounded in the attack. Also on 11.01.24, a blast occurred in the city of Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh province. Nothing is known about the perpetrators or the number of casualties.¹

Governance

On 11.01.24, it was reported that long queues comprising thousands of people from all over the country had formed outside the central passport issuing office in Kabul as the Taliban have suspended online passport applications, forcing people to apply in person.

Taliban leader emir Haibatullah Akhonzada has met with the leader of the allied Pakistani party Jamiat Ulema-e Islam Fazlur (JUI-F), Fazlur Rehman, to discuss tensions that have arisen between Pakistan and Afghanistan over the spike in terrorist attacks being carried out by the Pakistani Taliban (Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, TTP) and the repatriation of undocumented Afghan refugees from Pakistan (cf. BN of 08.01.24). On his return to Pakistan, Rehman said emir Akhonzada had called for the resumption of talks between Islamabad and the TTP via the Taliban's political office in Doha.²

Humanitarian situation

Northern Afghanistan (Badakhshan province) has been hit by yet another earthquake. There were no immediate reports of deaths or damage to buildings. According to reports issued on 11.01.24, the WFP has issued a warning that around one in three people across the country face uncertainty over their next meal as the country faces a daunting winter season.³

Cameroon

NGO employees kidnapped

According to media reports, on 10.01.24, three Cameroonian employees of the French NGO Première Urgence Internationale were kidnapped in Yémé, a village in northern Cameroon. Yémé is located in the Extrême-Nord

region, where the Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram is active and civilians have been repeatedly kidnapped.⁴

China / Taiwan

Parliamentary and presidential elections in Taiwan

On 13.01.24, the citizens of Taiwan elected Lai Ching-te, the candidate of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), with around 40% of the vote, to succeed President Tsai Ing-wen, who was not allowed to run again after serving two terms in office. Turnout was around 72%. Like the candidates of the Kuomintang (KMT), which advocates more dialogue with Beijing, and the Taiwan People's Party (TPP), Lai is in favour of maintaining the status quo. A spokesperson for the Chinese government which had previously tried to influence the election criticized the result, saying it does not represent mainstream public opinion on the island, describing a "reunification of China" as inevitable. The DPP lost its absolute majority in parliament (Legislative Yuan), which can pass laws independently of the President, in the parliamentary elections which were also held on 13.01.24, dropping from 62 to 51 seats. The KMT won 52 seats and the TPP eight.⁵

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Presidential elections: Constitutional Court confirms election result

According to media reports, the Congolese Constitutional Court rejected two legal challenges submitted on the election results on 09.01.24.

At the end of December 2023, nine opposition candidates had jointly signed a declaration, describing the election of 20.12.23 as fraudulent, rejecting the results and calling for a rerun. On 03.01.24, Théodore Ngoy who came last in the presidential election also submitted an application to the Constitutional Court for the election to be annulled. According to him, the election was marred by a number of irregularities.

After hearing both applications on 08.01.24, the Constitutional Court rejected them on 09.01.24 and announced the final election results. The reason for the decision was the enormous gap between Félix Tshisekedi who garnered 73.47% of the vote and the runner up Moise Katumbi who took 18.08% of the votes. The alleged irregularities would not have changed the ranking of the candidates, the court said. The percentages of votes obtained announced by the Constitutional Court differed only slightly from the figures published by the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) on 31.12.23.

The two main opposition candidates Moise Katumbi and Martin Fayulu, who came third with 4.92% of the vote, have decided not to challenge the election result in court. One of the reasons for this was the lack of trust in the judicial system (cf. BN of 08.01.24). Tshisekedi is to be sworn in for a second term of office on 20.01.24.⁶

Ecuador

Security crisis: escalation of violence with kidnappings, hostage-takings and homicides

President Daniel Noboa declared a 60-day state of emergency on 08.01.24 after the imprisoned leader of the drug gang Los Choneros, Adolfo Macías, also known by the alias Fito, escaped from a prison in Guayaquil on 07.01.24, sparking a wave of prison riots including hostage-takings. As a result, violence has also escalated on the streets and numerous attacks - including hostage-taking and kidnappings - have been carried out on shopping centres, hospitals, a television station, universities and schools in a number of cities since 09.01.24. The security situation has been particularly volatile in and around the city of Guayaquil, which is considered to be an epicentre for drug trafficking. However, there have also been reports of security incidents in other cities, including bombings and kidnappings of police officers. Other detainees, including Fabricio Colón Pico, alias El Salvaje, a prominent member of the drug gang Los Lobos, reportedly escaped too, and the police say that at least ten people were killed. In order to bring the security crisis back under control, President Noboa signed a decree for a state of emergency on 09.01.24, saying the move had been prompted by the existence of an internal armed conflict. The military operation within the country was intended to restore control and, within the framework of international humanitarian law, to crack down on 22 drug gangs, including Los Choneros, Los Lagartos, Los Lobos and Los Tiguerones, which had

been designated terrorist organisations and parties to the conflict. Since then, more than 1,300 people have been arrested in numerous security operations and around 180 prison officers who had been kidnapped in various prisons were freed by 14.01.24.

According to experts, there has been an increased politicisation of violence since the 2023 elections, combined with the struggle for power and influence. They say numerous institutions have been infiltrated by organised crime, while drug gangs are also exercising control over many of the country's prisons. According to the authorities, drug gangs operating in the country have links to various Mexican cartels, among others. In 2023, the number of people who were victims of violent deaths rose to 8,000, therefore almost doubling year-on-year and actually quadrupling since 2018. This means the country that had long been considered to be comparatively calm and safe currently has one of the highest murder rates in the region. Clashes are taking place between members of the various criminal groups as well as between state security forces and drug gangs.⁷

Egypt

Four deaths in custody since the beginning of 2024

According to several reports issued by human rights organisations on 03.01.24, 07.01.24 and 13.01.24, at least four people have died in various detention facilities since the beginning of 2024 due to a lack of medical care. In all four cases, the people concerned, some of whom had been detained for politically motivated reasons according to the organisations, are said not to have received the appropriate medical treatment.⁸

El Salvador

Parliament adopts reforms to Code of Criminal Procedure and Terrorism Act

On 03.01.24, parliament dominated by the ruling party approved reforms to the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Special Law Against Acts of Terrorism. They are intended to give the Prosecutor General Rodolfo Delgado who is considered to have close ties to the government more powers to fight crime. However, in this context members of the opposition fear that the lack of control mechanisms could potentially lead to the abuse of power or politically-motivated persecution. Among other things, they consider the wide discretionary scope Delgado has and the conditions under which he can now designate individuals and groups as terrorists to be problematic. It means individuals or organisations on the list could potentially have their assets confiscated. There are no national mechanisms in place to remove them from the list.⁹

Iran

Reports on several prison sentences

According to media reports issued on 09.01.24, a former professional bodybuilder who had been previously convicted was sentenced to a further five years and eight months in prison. According to information circulating on social media, the man was charged with gathering and collusion as well as propaganda against the system. Having been previously sentenced to seven years in prison in 2019, the former athlete was released early from prison in February 2023 as part of an amnesty due to his deteriorating health. He was arrested again in September 2023 as he tried to leave the country for Turkey.

According to other media reports, the father of a student being held in detention has been sentenced to five years in prison. They say the father had been held in temporary detention since December 2022, inter alia on charges of having a financial connection with an anti-government group abroad. The imprisoned son of the convicted man is a winner of international science Olympiads who, together with a fellow student, was sentenced to 16 years in prison in 2020 on charges that include propaganda against the system and endangering national security.

It was also reported that the father of a protester killed during rallies held in 2019 has been sentenced to 18 years in prison. The man gained notoriety after the death of his son because he repeatedly and publicly criticized the government's violent crackdown on protesters in 2019. He was arrested for the first time in April 2021 and sentenced to three years and six months in prison on several charges, two and a half years' exile from his home province and a two-year ban on leaving the country.¹⁰

Attack on military base in Sistan and Baluchestan province

According to media reports, an armed attack was carried out on a military base near Rask I (Sistan and Baluchestan province) on 10.01.24, killing at least one police officer. Jaish al-Adl (Army of Justice in Arabic), a Sunni Baluch separatist militant group has claimed responsibility for the attack. Members of the group had attacked a police station in the province back in December 2023 (cf. BN of 18.12.23). A large section of the population of the province of Sistan and Baluchistan, which borders Afghanistan and Pakistan, belongs to the country's Muslim Sunni minority.¹¹

Freedom of the press: two journalists released on bail

According to media reports issued on 14.01.24, two female journalists were released from Tehran's Evin prison on bail of 10 billion toman (around EUR 180,000; as of 15.01.24), having been detained for around 17 months. They have also been banned from leaving the country. The journalists attracted widespread media attention as both women had been sentenced to seven and six years in prison, respectively in October 2023 for their coverage of the death of Mahsa Amini (cf. BN of 23.10.23). The Iranian Journalists' Association has criticized the bail amounts.¹²

Iraq

Landmines

On 23.12.23, the agency responsible for landmines announced that around 2,100 square kilometres are still contaminated with explosive materials, almost 260 square kilometres of which are located in the Kurdistan Region. The use of mines in Iraq dates back to the First Gulf War in the 1980s. Since demining began in 2003, around 30,000 people have been killed or injured by mines.¹³

Conflict between Türkiye and the PKK

According to the Turkish Minister of Defence, Türkiye carried out airstrikes on a total of 14 Kurdish militant targets in the provinces of Dohuk and Erbil on 20.12.2013. It is not known how many militants of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) were killed or injured.

On 22.12.23 and 23.12.23, a total of 12 soldiers were killed in attacks carried out by PKK militants on Turkish soldiers stationed in the Kurdistan Region. Thirteen PKK supporters were "neutralized". The Turkish military typically uses the term "neutralized" to mean that the enemy has been killed, injured or has surrendered. Also on 23.12.23, the Turkish government announced that Sulaymaniyah International Airport would remain closed for flights to and from Turkey for a further six months. This measure was issued by the Turkish government in April 2023 citing the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's (PUK) alleged support for the PKK in Sulaymaniyah province where the PUK is headquartered.

On 27.12.23, a village in the Chamchamal district (Sulaymaniyah province) was attacked by two suspected Turkish drones. The village itself had previously been evacuated, but according to eyewitness reports, several PKK supporters were injured in the attack. On 28.12.23 and 01.01.24, another village in the same district was also attacked by drones, causing an unknown extent of material damage.

According to the Turkish Ministry of Defence, it carried out several airstrikes in the mountains of the provinces of Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah on 06.01.24, claiming that PKK bunkers, camps and caves were destroyed and "numerous" PKK supporters were killed or injured.

Five more Turkish soldiers were killed in clashes that erupted between the PKK and the Turkish military on 12.01.24 and twelve PKK supporters were "neutralized".¹⁴

Attacks on facilities of the anti-ISIS coalition

Between 21.12.23 and 11.01.24, a total of eight attacks were carried out on bases of the US-led anti-ISIS coalition. At least three US soldiers were injured. One attack took place in al-Anbar using rocket fire, the remaining eight were carried out in Erbil using drones. The Islamic Resistance, a coalition of pro-Iranian militias in Iraq, has claimed responsibility for most of the attacks. Another attack on a Peshmerga base was later declared an accident by a spokesperson for the Badr organisation, a Shia militia, adding that the attack had actually been targeting coalition troops. At least two militia officials were killed in retaliatory strikes carried out by the US military and a total of 24 people were injured. Civilians are also said to have been among the casualties.

The Iraqi government condemned both the attacks carried out by the militias on coalition troops and the retaliatory strikes by the US. On 05.01.24, it announced its intention to end the presence of coalition troops. On 11.01.24, the Iraqi government launched an online survey asking citizens for their views about the continued deployment of the US-led anti-ISIS coalition in the country. On 14.01.24, it was announced that around 100 members of parliament had signed a petition to withdraw coalition troops. The coalition had been established in September 2014 in response to the rise of so-called ISIS. Although ISIS is considered to have been territorially defeated in Iraq since 2017, smaller attacks against the military, civilians and infrastructure continue to occur regularly.¹⁵

Lebanon

Situation in southern Lebanon and northern Israel

Regular exchanges of fire continue unabated between Hezbollah and the Israeli army. Due to the large number of incidents taking place, developments will be summarized.

On the Lebanese side, more than 190 people have now been killed in Lebanon, including around 20 civilians and more than 150 Hezbollah militants, one Lebanese soldier and fighters of various other militant groups. So far, 19 Israelis have been killed, seven of whom were civilians.

According to aid organisations, around 76,000 people inside Lebanon and according to AP, 115,000 people in Israel remain internally displaced by the escalation along the border.¹⁶

Libya

Further oil and gas production facilities face closure

According to media reports issued on 11.01.24, protestors have threatened to shut down two oil and gas production facilities west of the Libyan capital if their demands are not met. In addition to the creation of further employment opportunities in the region and stricter environmental controls, the protestors are demanding the removal of the chairman of the National Oil Corporation (NOC), Farhat Bengdara. The latter is said to have committed serious violations in his capacity as chairman. Oil production had to be suspended at one of Libya's largest oil fields in the south of the country at the beginning of the month due to protests (cf. BN of 08.01.24).¹⁷

GNU announces arrest of leading ISIS member

According to an announcement made by the Government of National Unity (GNU) on 04.01.24, units of the Special Deterrence Force (SDF, also known as the Rada militia) are said to have arrested a leading member of ISIS, Hashim Abu Sidra, in Libya. According to local authorities, all leading ISIS members in Libya are either dead, in prison or on trial.¹⁸

Mozambique

Attacks in Cabo Delgado

Islamist insurgents carried out a number of attacks on the civilian population at the beginning of 2024. At least four civilians including a local employee of the organisation Doctors Without Borders were killed in the attacks which took place in the districts of Moçímboa da Praia, Macomia and Muidumbe. In addition, numerous shelters were reportedly destroyed and looted.¹⁹

Myanmar

Security situation

After local resistance groups (People's Defence Forces, PDF) carried out an attack on a military camp, Myanmar Army (Tatmadaw) troops burned down hundreds of houses in a village in Monywa Township (Sagaing Region) on 02.12.23, killing 18 civilians. Tatmadaw soldiers also set fire to villages and shot dead three civilians during a raid carried out in Sagaing Township on 13.12.23. Tatmadaw troops killed eight civilians and injured 25 others during

the bombardment of the town of Laukkai (Shan State) in the Kokang Self-Administered Zone on 26.12.23. Tatmadaw airstrikes carried out in Kokang had already claimed the lives of 55 civilians and injured over 40 others between 27.10.23 and 23.12.23. Following clashes with the Arakan Army in Paletwa (Chin state), 151 Tatmadaw soldiers fled to the Indian state of Mizoram on 27.12.23. Like around 80 other Myanmar soldiers, some of whom had fled to India with their families in November 2023, they were repatriated to Myanmar. In airstrikes carried out by the Tatmadaw in Rakhine State, 15 civilians were killed and around 30 others were injured in Buthidaung Buthidaung, Minbya and Mrauk-U, between 28.11.23. and 28.12.23. A total of 13 civilians, including four children, were killed in artillery attacks carried out on the community of Kawlin (Sagaing) between 28.12.23 and 02.01.24. Numerous other people were injured. Kawlin has been under the control of the underground National Unity Government since the end of November 2023. Tatmadaw soldiers shot dead 19 civilians, including a child, in Wuntho (Sagaing) on 05.01.24. The bodies of 14 people who, according to supporters of the military junta, were PDF members had already been found at the same location on 27.12.23. However, according to media reports, they were actually civilians. Seventeen civilians, including nine children, were killed in Khampat (Sagaing), which is also controlled by resistance forces, in an airstrike carried out by the Tatmadaw on 07.01.24. Twenty other people were injured. Since 01.01.24, a total of 25 more people have been killed and around 70 injured in fighting and by landmines in the states of Rakhine and Shan and in the Bago region. On 04.01.24, the Three Brotherhood Alliance (a merger of Ta'ang National Liberation Army, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and Arakan Army) captured Laukkai, another important trading hub, after the Tatmadaw troops stationed there had surrendered. In total, the junta is said to have lost control of 16 cities in Northern Shan and 14 cities in Kachin, Kayah and Chin states and Sagaing region since the end of October 2023. On 11.01.24, representatives of the Tatmadaw and the Alliance agreed to a ceasefire brokered by China in northern Shan. Shortly afterwards, however, the fighting resumed.

According to UN estimates, one-third of Myanmar's population (18.6 million people, including six million children) are currently dependent on humanitarian aid. Around 2.6 million people were displaced at the end of December 2023 as a result of the civil war and the conflicts that preceded it.²⁰

Nicaragua

Release and de facto expulsion of two people arrested in connection with the Miss Universe pageant

In connection with Sheynnis Palacios' victory in the Miss Universe pageant in November 2023, not only were Karen Celebertti, the organiser of the Nicaraguan counterpart of the beauty pageant, and her daughter denied re-entry to Nicaragua, but her husband and son were also arrested on 28.11.2023. They were accused of financing terrorism and treason. Martín Argüello Leiva and Bernardo Argüello Celebertti were released from prison on 06.01.24 on condition that they leave Nicaragua within 48 hours. They subsequently boarded a plane for Mexico.²¹

Imprisoned clergymen deported to the Vatican

According to an announcement made by the Nicaraguan authorities on 14.01.24, nineteen imprisoned Nicaraguan priests, including Bishop Rolando Álvarez, who is critical of the government, were deported to the Vatican.²²

Nigeria

Military strike against suspected terrorists

According to their own information, troops from the Defence Headquarters (DHQ) have killed a total of around 85 violent individuals designated as terrorists and arrested more than 100 others in several operations that have been carried out across Nigeria since the beginning of 2024. On 05.01.24, units of the Nigerian Air Force, for example, killed around 15 violent actors designated as terrorists as part of Operation Hadin Kai on the edge of the Sambisa Forest in Borno State. According to the military, high-ranking members were among those killed. In addition, military personnel freed around 40 kidnapped persons from a region in southern Nigeria and secured a significant quantity of various weapons and ammunition as well as stolen crude oil. According to a media report, the DHQ also announced on 05.01.24 that around 115 members of the Islamist group Boko Haram and their families had

surrendered. In the past, the DHQ has repeatedly circulated similar success stories (cf. BN of 20.03.23, 03.04.23, 18.09.23, 16.10.23 and 04.12.23).²³

Katsina State: deadly attack on village

Armed actors killed around 10 people, including the village head of Kukar Babangida, in Jibia Local Government Area (LGA) in Katsina State on 11.01.24. According to media reports, the violent actors stole food and money, among other things, and set fire to several vehicles. Several people were reportedly injured. According to a media report, an unspecified number of women and children were also abducted. Attacks on communities and kidnappings by armed groups have occurred in Katsina State in the past (cf. BN of 11.09.23 and 13.11.23).²⁴

Expenditure on prisoners and prison conditions

According to media reports issued on 04.01.24 that are based on official information provided by the spokesperson of the Nigerian Correctional Service, the cost of feeding a prison inmate in Nigeria totals NGN 750 (approximately EUR 0.72, as of 15.01.24) per day. This information counters reports that the actual amount is only NGN 200 (approximately EUR 0.19, as of 15.01.24). The Nigerian Correctional Service spokesperson seized the opportunity, while making this clarification, to provide further details regarding the feeding of prisoners. He said that there is a ration committee in every custodial centre, which supervises the preparation and distribution of food rations to inmates. On 22.12.23, when commenting on the number of persons imprisoned in Nigeria (cf. BN of 08.01.24), the same spokesperson had provided information to the effect that improvements had been made in the areas of rehabilitation and reintegration, among others, in 2023. He added that many prisoners were also taking advantage of education and training opportunities. In addition, he said the working conditions of prison staff had improved in 2023.²⁵

Pakistan

Supreme Court paves the way for Nawaz Sharif to run in the election

Pakistan's Supreme Court has lifted the lifetime ban on politicians with convictions contesting elections, paving the way for former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to run in the parliamentary elections, which are expected to take place on 08.02.24. Following the decision handed down on 08.01.24, the ban on convicted politicians standing for election will now apply for five years.²⁶

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: attacks on security forces

On 09.01.24, five policemen were killed when their vehicle was caught in a roadside booby trap. The policemen were on their way to provide security to polio vaccination teams. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has claimed responsibility for the attack.

On 10.01.24, a dozen armed fighters attacked a police checkpoint in the Kohat region. Three police officers and a civilian who was caught between the fronts were killed in the exchange of fire. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, and the perpetrators managed to escape.

On 10.01.24, two policemen were killed by TTP fighters in Bannu.²⁷

Senegal

A number of PASTEF activists arrested and charged

According to media reports, nine activists from the youth organisation of the banned Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (PASTEF) (Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics and Fraternity) party have been arrested, charged and remanded in custody. They are accused of taking part in an unauthorised demonstration as well as "acts and manoeuvres that endanger public safety", lawyers said. The defendants had reportedly campaigned on the streets of Médina, a neighbourhood in the capital Dakar. Although the police had reportedly asked the defendants to disperse, they had continued to go from house to house to inform residents that they could collect their voting cards.²⁸

Journalist receives death threats for his reaction to the president's statement

According to the Coordination des Associations de Presse (Coordination of Press Associations) (CAP), Babacar Fall, a journalist and editor-in-chief of the private radio station RFM, has been subjected to death threats and other verbal attacks. The background to this is the comments Fall made about President Macky Sall's criticism of daily press reviews on Senegalese radio stations. CAP has called for state protection measures for Fall, for investigations to be carried out and for those responsible to be held accountable.²⁹

Sierra Leone

Alleged coup d'état: further indictments issued

As reported by the British news site BBC News, citing the Sierra Leonean Ministry of Defence, 27 military personnel of unspecified rank are facing charges of mutiny, murder, aiding the enemy and other offences. The indictments are related to the deadly outbreaks of violence on 26.11.23, which centred on the capital, Freetown, and were classified by the government as an attempted coup d'état (cf. BN of 04.12.23). In this context, former President Ernest Bai Koroma, who has been placed under house arrest, and 12 other people were recently charged with various high treason offences (cf. BN of 08.01.24).³⁰

Somalia

Abduction of a helicopter crew

According to reports, six passengers were abducted by al-Shabaab members after a helicopter made an emergency landing in Galmudug on 10.01.24. Of the total crew of nine, who were travelling on behalf of the UN, one person died under as yet unexplained circumstances, while two people managed to escape. The crew was reportedly on a medical mission and was made up not of UN personnel but of mostly international medical staff. Further UN flights in the region have therefore been suspended until further notice.³¹

Attack on airport in Mogadishu

On 11.01.24, an attack was reportedly carried out on Aden Adde International Airport in Mogadishu, in which a Ugandan member of the UN Guard Unit was killed. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack.³²

Sudan

Ongoing fighting

On 11.01.24, airstrikes were reportedly flown on Nyala (South Darfur State), killing three civilians and injuring others. This is the third time since October 2023 that the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) have flown attacks on the provincial capital, which, for the time being, is controlled by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia. Also on 11.01.24, 33 civilians were reportedly killed in attacks on southern Khartoum. On 14.01.24, seven civilians were reportedly killed in Al-Qutaynah (White Nile State) during bombardments by the SAF.³³

Syria

Northwest: cross-border aid extended

On 11.01.24, the Syrian government in Damascus gave its approval for the extension of cross-border aid from Türkiye via the Bab al-Hawa border crossing into northwest Syria. According to Syria's mission to the UN, the aid deliveries had initially been approved until 13.07.24.

Since 2014, the UN Security Council had authorised cross-border aid without the involvement of the Syrian government. Last year, however, a renewed extension failed, so the Syrian government initially offered authorisation under certain conditions (cf. BN of 23.11.23 and 25.09.23).

On 13.02.24, authorisation for aid deliveries to pass through the two border crossings Bab al-Salama and al-Ra'i following the severe earthquakes in February 2023, will also expire (cf. BN of 20.02.23).³⁴

Northwest: use of incendiary weapons by government forces

According to media reports, the Syrian Civil Defence, also known as the White Helmets, reported that four civilians were allegedly wounded by the use of incendiary weapons in northwest Idlib city on 07.01.24. The attack is reported to have targeted a school that was being used as emergency accommodation for displaced Syrians. Incendiary weapons were allegedly used the day before, but did not result in any casualties. The use of incendiary weapons against the civilian population is prohibited under international law.

Human Rights Watch last reported in October 2023 on the use by government forces in northwest Syria of cluster munitions, which are prohibited under international law by a convention ratified by 112 countries. However, neither Syria nor Russia are among the signatory states.³⁵

Northeast: Turkish airstrikes

The Turkish military has once again carried out attacks on targets in Iraq and Syria which the military say are linked to the PKK. After nine Turkish military personnel were killed in northern Iraq on 12.01.23, the military reportedly killed nine people in Syria in the following 24 hours alone. Turkish statements said the armed fighters had been neutralised.

In addition, according to Turkish state media, another 24 targets were hit in Syria on 14.01.24, and numerous armed fighters were reportedly killed. State authorities did not initially provide an exact figure.³⁶

South: Jordanian airstrikes

According to media reports, the Jordanian military attacked targets in Syria from the air on 09.01.24 and on previous days that same week which it allegedly linked to the drug smuggling scene in southern Syria. According to unconfirmed reports, three people were allegedly killed in the attacks on targets in Shaab, 'Arman and Malah, including at least one known drug trafficker.³⁷

Activities of ISIS

On 12.01.24, a weekly online publication issued by ISIS published figures on the activities it had engaged in the previous week. According to these figures, ISIS members had carried out 34 operations in Syria alone, resulting in the death or wounding of 70 people. According to the figures, the primary targets were members of the Syrian military.³⁸

Ukraine

International conference on the "peace formula"

On 14.01.24, a meeting was held in Davos, Switzerland, on the so-called peace formula proposed by President Volodymyr Zelensky. Participants included national security advisors from 80 countries. In contrast to a peace conference held in August 2023, China was not represented (cf. BN of 07.08.23). According to media reports, Defence Minister Rustem Umerov proposed an international working group on the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine, one of the points of the peace formula. He added that it would be impossible to talk about restoring the full sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine without a complete withdrawal.

Andriy Yermak, Head of the Presidential Office, then expressed his view on the idea of freezing the war with the Russian Federation. He ruled out any such scenario, saying that the current government would not accept it. In this context, the report also refers to a survey conducted in December 2023, according to which around three quarters of the Ukrainian population are against giving up the occupied territories.³⁹

Civilian war casualties and humanitarian situation

Renewed large-scale Russian attacks claimed the lives of a total of four people on 08.01.24, two in the Khmelnytskyi region and one each in Kryvyi Rih (Dnipropetrovsk Oblast) and south of Kharkiv. According to Ukrainian reports, thirteen people, including Turkish journalists, were also injured when two missiles hit a hotel in Kharkiv on 10.01.24. On the same day, Russian airstrikes on the Kharkiv region partially destroyed a school, killing one person. Russian shelling on the eponymous capital of the Kherson region killed two people on 12.01.24. Six people were injured by Russian artillery fire on a harbour facility in Kherson on 13.01.24. Four firefighters were wounded in a drone attack

carried out on a fire station in the same region on 14.01.24. Russian rocket fire on the town of Shostka (Sumy Oblast) led to a temporary loss of heating supply and one casualty on 14.01.24.

According to the Russian Federation-backed mayor of Horlivka in the occupied part of the Donetsk region, two people died as a result of a Ukrainian drone attack on 12.01.24. He said six people had been injured.

On 10.01.24, it was reported that the severe cold snap had led to power cuts in a total of more than 1,000 towns and villages spread across nine regions. The background to this was the weakened energy supply system due to targeted Russian attacks. On 12.01.24, almost 230 settlements remained without electricity, with the Dnipropetrovsk region being the worst affected.⁴⁰

According to the Reuters news agency, Ukraine is concentrating more on defence elsewhere than before. For some time now, the focus has been on the construction of fortifications in the form of barricades and trenches, for example in the Chernihiv region. According to media reports, the Russian Ministry of Defence announced on 13.01.24 that it had destroyed all intended targets in a group strike carried out on Ukrainian arms production facilities. The targets were reportedly facilities used for the production of gunpowder, grenades and drones.

According to Ukrainian reports issued on 09.01.24, the country now lacks air defence missiles after the last large-scale attacks. For the second week in a row, Ukraine has reportedly had to defend itself against Russian cyberattacks on state payment systems.⁴¹

Yemen

Attacks by US and Great Britain on Houthis

On 11.01.24, US and UK forces carried out airstrikes on more than 60 targets in Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen. According to reports, targets in or near the capital Sanaa and the port of Hodeidah on the west coast were hit. Other locations were reportedly targeted in the cities of Taizz and Dhamar. According to the Houthis, five fighters were killed in the attacks and six others were injured. On 13.01.23, US and UK forces carried out further airstrikes against Houthi positions. According to the US, precision munitions were used for the attacks in order to avoid casualties. The attacks took place a few days after the US-led mission aimed at protecting shipping traffic in the Red Sea issued a final warning to the Houthis who had had carried out a total of 27 attacks on cargo ships in the Red Sea since November 2023, ostensibly to weaken Israel (cf. BN of 08.01.24).

On 14.01.24, a US fighter jet shot down an anti-ship cruise missile fired from the Houthi militant areas toward a US destroyer operating in the Red Sea.⁴²

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