



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Security situation

On 07.01.2025, two religious scholars from the Taliban were attacked by armed men in Baghlan province (Baghlan-e-Markazi district). One survived with serious injuries, the other was killed. The Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) has claimed responsibility for the attack. The Taliban have confirmed the incident. On 06.01.25, an explosion took place at a Taliban police compound in the city of Kunduz, injuring several Taliban members.

No one has claimed responsibility for the attack. The National Resistance Front (NRF) said it attacked the convoy of the Taliban Minister of Energy and Water, Abud Latif Mansour, in Kabul on 31.12.24, killing his bodyguard and injuring two other members. On 28.12.24, an attack was carried out near the Taliban Ministry of Interior in which four people were injured.

On 24.12.24, the Pakistani army carried out airstrikes in the province of Paktia (Barmal district), killing at least 46 people, including civilians. The declared aim was to hit camps of the terrorist group Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) as part of a new counter-terrorism operation. The Taliban confirmed the attack and subsequently attacked Pakistani army border posts. In the crossfire of the skirmishes, 15 Taliban members were reportedly killed. On 02.02.25 and 10.01.25, the Pakistani army fired dozens of missiles at the border region of the eastern Afghan provinces of Kunar (Sirkanay District) and Khost.¹

Governance and persecution

According to media reports issued on 11.01.25, the Taliban arrested three former soldiers from Panjshir province. On 06.01.25, a former police commander was also arrested by the Taliban in Badakhshan province (Kuran wa Munjan district). The Taliban imposed a night curfew after 9 p.m. in Qadis District of Badghis province on 02.01.25. At a two-day meeting held between Emir Akhunzada and the head of the Ministry of Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (PVPV), Khalid Hanafi, in Kandahar, the Emir emphasised that the so-called mohtasibs (enforcers of the Ministry of Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice) were responsible for reforming the people and the younger generation within the meaning of the Islamic regime. On 07.01.25, PVPV enforcers arrested nine people in the city of Kabul (police districts 3 and 5) for "moral corruption" and gambling. In December 2024, the morality police arrested a total of 44 people across the country on charges ranging from "moral corruption" and gambling to "sorcery", illicit relationships and violations of Islamic law.

The Taliban have installed 350 surveillance cameras in the city of Pul-e-Khumri (Baghlan province) in order to increase security there, according to their own sources. They have also launched a campaign to confiscate "banned books" in the city of Sheberghan (Jawzjan province) as part of an effort to "safeguard Islamic values and prevent the spread of misleading content". Shirin Akhund, the Taliban governor in Kandahar province, has urged some local international NGOs to cease operations.

Neda Mohammad Nadim, Taliban Minister of Higher Education, stated that disobeying the orders of Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada is tantamount to "disobedience to God". According to media reports issued on 28.12.24, Hibatullah Akhundzada has issued a directive banning the construction of windows in residential buildings that

overlook neighbouring homes, particularly those housing women. If an existing building has windows violating this directive, the owner is required to block the view by erecting a wall or using appropriate coverings.²

Chad

Attack on the presidential palace

On the evening of 08.01.25, assailants attempted to gain entry to the presidential palace in the capital N'Djamena. The motive for the attack remains unclear. According to media reports citing government statements, 18 of the 24 assailants were killed and the remaining six were injured. Two guards were reportedly also killed and several others injured. The assailants, who were armed only with knives and machetes, were said to be residents of a poor neighbourhood in the south of N'Djamena and were under the influence of alcohol and drugs. Government spokesman and Foreign Minister Abderaman Koulamallah stated that there was probably no terrorist background. President Mahamat Idriss Déby, who was in the palace at the time of the attack, called on the judiciary to clarify the situation.

Max Kemkoye, spokesman for the Groupe de concentration des acteurs politiques (GCAP) (Political Actors' Consultation Group), an alliance of opposition parties, expressed doubts about the official account of the incident, also in view of the time it took for the attack by drunken people to be brought under control. According to witnesses, shots were heard for almost an hour. According to the report, Kemkoye saw the information on the origin of the attackers as an attempt to denigrate sections of the population who are considered to be supporters of the opposition figure Succès Masra.³

Ruling party wins parliamentary election

According to the official provisional results of the parliamentary elections held on 29.12.24, which were announced on 12.01.25, the Mouvement patriotique du Salut (MPS) (Patriotic Salvation Movement) party, the main political force supporting President Mahamat Idriss Déby, like his predecessor and father, won 122 to 124 out of 188 seats. Voter turnout was reportedly around 51.5 percent. Large sections of the opposition boycotted the election, including Succès Masra's Les Transformateurs (The Transformers) party. The boycott was justified with an expected manipulation of the election, as had already been criticised in the presidential election (cf. BN of 13.05.24). Regional and local elections were held at the same time as the parliamentary elections. The elections marked the conclusion of the return to a constitutional order after a transitional phase lasting several years.⁴

China

Filmmaker convicted for documenting protests

On 06.01.25, a court in Shanghai sentenced filmmaker Chen Pinlin to three and a half years in prison on the grounds that he had picked quarrels and provoked trouble. Chen had been arrested on 05.01.24 for publishing a documentary film about the nationwide protests held against the Chinese government's zero Covid policy at the end of 2022. The largest protest movement since the Tiananmen demonstrations in 1989 was sparked by a memorial event held for at least 10 people who could not be rescued from a burning residential building in Ürümqi on 24.11.22 due to state lockdown measures (cf. BN of 28.11.22). By holding up blank white A4 sheets of paper as a symbol of state censorship and a means of circumventing it, as well as an expression of grief, the protesters gave the movement the name "White Paper Protests" or "A4 Revolution". Many of them are said to remain in prison to this day, some of them without trial. According to Reporters Without Borders, at least 124 journalists are being held in Chinese prisons, which ranks the Peoples' Republic 172nd out of 180 countries in its global press freedom ranking⁵.

Ghana

Mahama sworn in as President

On 07.01.25, John Dramani Mahama was sworn in as president in the capital Accra following his victory in the presidential elections on 07.12.24 (cf. BN of 09.12.24 and 16.12.24). Mahama, who ran as the presidential candidate

of the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC), is thus starting his second term in office. He previously held the office from 2012 to 2017.

Mahama takes over as head of state at a time when Ghana's economy is slowly beginning to recover from the worst crisis in decades. After the COVID-19 pandemic, a cost of living crisis and high inflation, an ongoing bailout by the International Monetary Fund and a sovereign debt default, the country's economy is reportedly beginning to grow again.

In his inauguration speech, Mahama pledged to overcome the public discontent. The Ghanaian people now also expect Mahama to immediately tackle and deliver on his election promise to boost the economy, eliminate corruption in the country and curb the high level of youth unemployment.⁶

Guinea

Opposition member sentenced for defamation

On 07.01.25, a court in Kaloum/Conakry sentenced the opposition figure Aliou Bah, leader of the party Mouvement démocratique libéral (MoDeL) (Liberal Democratic Movement) to two years in prison. Bah had been arrested on 26.12.24 for allegedly "insulting and defaming" interim president Mamadi Doumbouya. He is said to have criticised religious leaders for not breaking their silence against the rulers who resort to kidnappings and killings. An appeal has been lodged against the ruling. The Liberal Democratic Movement sees the verdict as a political instrumentalisation of the judiciary and has announced that it will organise various protests.⁷

Freedom of association: parties suspended; registration of NGOs resumed

On 09.01.25, the Ministry of Territorial Administration issued a communiqué calling on dozens of political parties to cease their activities. According to media reports, this affects the 54 parties that were suspended at the end of October 2024 as part of the investigation into all parties launched by the transitional authorities (cf. BN of 11.11.24). National and international partners and institutions are also not allowed to work with the parties concerned until the deadline set for the end of January 2025 to furnish proof of legal obligations expires. However, on 10.01.25, the transitional authorities announced that the registration of NGOs and associations, which had been suspended at the beginning of September 2024 on the grounds of "actions to disturb public order", would be resumed (cf. BN of 09.09.24).⁸

India

Security situation in Chhattisgarh

On 06.01.25, at least 8 security officers and their driver were killed in Bijapur district in the state of Chhattisgarh when a roadside bomb planted by Maoist rebels hit their vehicle. Earlier, four rebels and a soldier were killed in an operation carried out against the insurgents on 04.01.25. The Maoist rebels, also known as Naxalites after the district where their armed campaign began in 1967, were inspired by the Chinese revolutionary leader Mao Zedong. According to its own sources, the Indian government wants to crack down on the armed rebellion by the beginning of 2026 and has stepped up its efforts to end the long-standing armed conflict. According to official figures, a total of 287 suspected rebels were killed and around 1,000 were arrested in 2024; 837 are said to have surrendered.⁹

Iran

901 executions carried out in 2024

According to a statement released by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on 07.01.25, the number of people executed in Iran rose to 901 in 2024. This is the highest number recorded since 2015, when 972 people were executed; 853 people were executed in 2023.

Among those executed were 31 women, 19 of whom had been sentenced to death for murder because they had killed their partners due to domestic violence or after being forced into marriage.

Most of the executions, which included 12 women, were for drug-related offences, but dissidents and people connected to the 2022 protests held in the wake of the death of Jina Mahsa were also executed. According to the

human rights organisation Hengaw, 13 of those executed were sentenced to death for political or religious activities or for alleged participation in the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement. According to Hengaw, more than half of those executed last year were members of ethnic minorities, including 183 Kurdish citizens.

According to the Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA), which focuses on human rights, as of 09.01.25, a total of 54 political prisoners are currently facing the death penalty.¹⁰

Crackdown on ethnic minorities

According to media reports, at least 65 Kurdish citizens, including activists, environmentalists and former political prisoners, were arrested by agents of the Ministry of Intelligence (VAJA) in various cities, including Mahabad and Sanandaj, between December 2024 and early January 2025.

Reports indicate that many of the detentions were carried out by plainclothes agents without judicial warrants and involving physical violence. At the end of December 2024, for example, nine Kurdish citizens were allegedly arrested in Saqqez and Oshnavieh, whose current whereabouts remain unknown. Despite repeated attempts, families of the detainees have been unable to obtain any information about their loved ones' location, charges, or condition.

Furthermore, human rights organisations have reported that security forces arrested a total of 21 members of the Arab minority at the beginning of January 2025. Twelve people were arrested in Ahwas on 08.01.25. The arrests were reportedly made while house searches were being conducted without an arrest warrant and the detainees are said to have been taken to unknown locations. In addition, two Sunni Arab Iranians are said to have been arrested in Ahwas because of their religious activities.

In addition, according to press reports, at least 38 Baluch residents were arrested in raids in the city of Zahedan on 07.01.25. Details about the whereabouts of those arrested, the reasons behind their arrest and the charges brought against them remain unclear.¹¹

Iraq

Consequences of ISIS rule

According to an Iraqi news organisation, at least one woman was killed and three other members of her family were injured in the province of al-Anbar on 29.12.24 when a landmine left behind by ISIS exploded.

On 10.01.25, three children were reportedly killed when an unexploded hand grenade detonated in the province of Saladin.

On 09.01.25, the Iraqi government announced that 193 families, consisting of approximately 715 people, had returned to Iraq from the al-Hol refugee camp in northeast Syria. Most of the people in al-Hol are displaced persons who have links to ISIS.¹²

Lebanon

Israeli withdrawal; presidential elections

As part of the ceasefire agreement concluded between Hezbollah and Israel, Israeli forces have withdrawn from several villages and towns in southern Lebanon. The Lebanese army followed suit, as agreed. On 07.01.25, Lebanese forces entered the border town of Naqoura where the headquarters of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) is located.

Israeli forces continue to carry out attacks on targets attributed to Hezbollah. In accordance with the ceasefire agreement, Israel reserved the right to use armed force to prevent Hezbollah from rebuilding its capacities south of the Litani River.

On 09.01.25, the Lebanese parliament elected Joseph Aoun, the former commander-in-chief of the Lebanese armed forces, as the new president. The office of president has only been held on an interim basis since 2022. The election is generally seen as Hezbollah's weakened sway in the political arena.¹³

Nigeria

Northeast: dozens of Islamists killed by the military

According to media reports, 34 Islamists and six members of the army were killed in a clash that erupted between Nigerian armed forces and Islamists in Borno State on 04.01.25. According to other reports, the clash erupted on 05.01.25. The military were allegedly supported by vigilante groups during the clash. According to some media, the Islamists are Boko Haram members, while other sources claim that they belong to the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) group.¹⁴

Plateau state: deadly attack on civilians

According to media reports, unknown assailants killed 15 people in an attack carried out on a village in Riyom Local Government Area (LGA) of Plateau State on 22.12.24. The incident reportedly occurred shortly after a security meeting to safeguard a peaceful Christmas festive period was held. The attack casts doubt on the effectiveness of efforts to prevent further violence in the region. Plateau State has been the scene of several similar acts of violence in recent times. Attacks carried out on villages at Christmas time in 2023, in which many people were killed and injured, caused particular outrage (cf. BN of 08.01.24).¹⁵

Pakistan

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: TTP attack in South Waziristan

On 21.12.24, militants killed 16 security officers and injured eight others in a raid carried out at a security checkpoint in South Waziristan district, according to police sources.

The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which claimed responsibility for the attack, said that 35 Pakistani security officers had been killed. The figures could not be independently confirmed. Neither side said how many militants were killed during the attack.¹⁶

Security situation in 2024

Last year was the deadliest for Pakistani security forces in nearly a decade, according to the Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS). In its annual report, the Islamabad-based think tank reported 685 fatalities among security personnel, an almost 40 percent increase compared to 2023. The number of militant attacks carried out in Pakistan in 2024, meanwhile, rose by 70 percent compared to the year before, according to the Pak Institute of Peace Studies (PIPS). Most of the attacks were carried out by the TTP which is active in northwestern Pakistan, and by the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), a separatist militant group which has wreaked havoc in the southwestern province of Balochistan.

The Taliban takeover of neighbouring Afghanistan in 2021 has boosted the fighting capabilities of armed groups in the region. Militant groups active in Pakistan have access to US military equipment and weapons left behind in Afghanistan after the US Armed Forces' withdrawal. The TTP and Afghan Taliban have close ideological and organisational ties. Pakistan has accused the Afghan Taliban of sheltering the militants operating in Pakistan.¹⁷

Military courts hand down another 60 judgements against civilians following mass protests in May 2023

On 26.12.24, a Pakistani military court sentenced 60 people to prison terms ranging between two and 10 years over the mass protests that were sparked in May 2023, the army's media wing said (cf. BN of 23.12.24).¹⁸

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

Gaza Strip: latest developments; humanitarian situation

According to a statement issued by the Hamas-led Ministry of Health on 08.01.25, at least 45,936 Palestinians have been killed and 109,274 others wounded in the Gaza Strip since the outbreak of the Gaza war in October 2023. The ministry does not officially distinguish between combatants and civilians. The figures cannot be independently verified. According to information provided by the Israeli military on 29.10.24, a total of 393 Israeli soldiers have been killed and 2,535 others wounded since the ground offensives were launched.

Following the rescue of two hostages, 98 Israelis are still missing in Gaza.

The fighting is currently concentrated in northern Gaza, which has been under intense siege since the beginning of October 2024. The three main hospitals in the area, the Indonesian Hospital, the Kamal Adwan Hospital and the Al-Awda Hospital, were stormed by Israeli forces on 24.12.24, 27.12.24 and 03.01.25, respectively. Israel points to the presence of some high-ranking Hamas members and weapons in all three facilities, which they claim has deprived them of their protection under the First Geneva Convention (Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field). In all cases, suspects were arrested and non-suspect patients and medical staff were evacuated.

According to reports, access to northern Gaza for humanitarian aid has been difficult to impossible since October 2024. It is therefore unclear how many civilians remain in the area. There is no reliable data available on the supply situation either, and there is great uncertainty regarding the distribution of existing supplies owing to difficulties arising both at the border crossings and during distribution in Gaza.¹⁹

Republic of Moldova

New defence strategy approved

The Moldovan parliament has adopted a 10-year defence strategy in preparation for future EU accession. Defence spending is to be increased to one percent of GDP by 2030, which the pro-Russian opposition has ridiculed as pointless in view of Moldova's small land mass and the small number of armed forces deployed against Moscow. The document cites risks of the Russian-Ukraine conflict spreading, particularly around the Black Sea port of Odesa close to Moldova's border.²⁰

Russia suspends natural gas supply at the turn of the year

On 01.01.25, the Russian energy company Gazprom also suspended natural gas supplies to the Republic of Moldova in light of the expiry of the Russian-Ukrainian transit contract at the turn of the year. According to media reports released on 28.12.24, the Moldovan government decided to restrict electricity exports during peak consumption times, to reduce electricity consumption in public facilities and street lighting and to change working hours in energy-intensive companies in preparation for the suspension of supplies. Energy consumption is to be reduced by at least a third. In future, 38 percent of energy requirements are to be covered by domestic production, 10 percent of which is to come from renewable energies. The rest will be imported from Romania. The Moldovan state energy company Energocom stated that it had successfully covered 100 percent of the country's electricity requirements, while conceding that there were bottlenecks in the Transnistria breakaway region. While the Kremlin is confronting the Republic of Moldova with debts totalling over USD 700 million, the Moldovan government puts its debt at USD 9 million. Moldovan Prime Minister Dorin Recean accused the Russian side of using "energy as a political weapon" in the debt dispute.²¹

Energy supply in Transnistria

The suspension of Russian natural gas supplies is having a particular impact on the supply to the Cuciurgan power station in Transnistria, which supplies a large part of the Republic of Moldova with electricity. According to the authorities, the power station, which supplies the 450,000 inhabitants of Transnistria in particular with electricity, has been switched to coal-fired operation. They say coal reserves could cover the region's consumption for 30-50 days. The Transnistrian capital Tiraspol has set up 30 meeting points where people can warm up and receive hot meals. According to the energy supplier Tiraspoltransgaz, 115,000 households only receive gas supplies for cooking. People are using wood and electric heaters to keep warm. The Moldovan government, which had convened a crisis team on 26.12.24, announced on 06.01.25 that it would supply 14 Transnistrian villages with natural gas, as they are technically connected to the Moldovan network. Transnistrian Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Obolonik stated that the lack of gas supplies had forced the closure of all industrial companies with the exception of food producers. The gas supply to several state institutions has also been halted. In the first few days of January, electricity was cut off on an hourly basis. On 08.01.25, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky assured Moldovan President Maia Sandu of his willingness to support the country with Ukrainian coal supplies.²²

Russian Federation

Prison sentence for donations to Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation

On 24.12.24, a Moscow district court found Ivan Tishchenko guilty of financing extremist activities under Article 282.3 of the Russian Criminal Code and sentenced him to four years' imprisonment. The cardiac surgeon regularly donated an undisclosed amount to the Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) established by Alexei Navalny. According to the defence, the standing order was set up before the FBK was classified as an extremist organisation in June 2021. According to the human rights organisation Memorial, at least 27 criminal proceedings have been instituted as of December 2024 for financial contributions (often small donations) made to the FBK. It reports that so far fines have been imposed in 11 cases and prison sentences in two cases (including this one). Two further donors have reportedly been sentenced to suspended sentences.²³

Sudan

US State Department: genocide accusation against RSF militia

According to a press release issued by the US State Department on 07.01.25, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia has committed genocide in Sudan. US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken stated that the RSF militia and allied militias had carried out attacks on civilians and that men, boys and babies had been murdered and girls and women had been raped. The RSF militia had targeted civilians on the basis of their ethnicity. Blinken accused the RSF leader Mohammad Hamdan Daglo, known as Hemedti, of having ordered mass rapes of civilians by his soldiers. He said the US was now imposing sanctions against Daglo and seven companies in the UAE that are said to be close to the RSF militia.²⁴

Syria

Ongoing fighting between SDF and SNA in East Aleppo

Turkish airstrikes and fighting between the Turkish-backed militia coalition, the so-called Syrian National Army (SNA), and the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continue unabated in northern Syria.

Following the capture of Manbij and Tall Rif'at by the SNA (cf. BN of 23.12.24), the Tishreen Dam is the main focus of Turkish attacks. On 08.01.25, over 1,000 protesters gathered to demonstrate against the ongoing shelling at the request of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES). According to media reports, targets in the vicinity were bombed during the protest march. The health authority in Ayn al-Arab (Kobani) reported that five civilians had been killed and 15 others wounded. Turkish authorities denied Turkish responsibility for this and accused the DAANES and SDF of abusing the civilian population as human shields. According to reports issued by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), 37 people were killed the following day. These reportedly included mainly SNA fighters, but also six members of the SDF. This brings the total death toll for the past month to 332. According to SDF reports, three civilians were also killed by Turkish airstrikes on 11.01.25.²⁵

Protests by the Alawite population; reports of deaths in riots and acts of retaliation

On 25.12.24, protests by the Alawite population broke out in several cities across the country after a video circulated online showing the destruction of an Alawite shrine in Aleppo. The authorities later stated that it was an older video. The newly appointed police chief of Homs reported peaceful protests in Homs city that had been abused by groups linked to the ousted Assad government. Individuals are said to have opened fire on protesters and security forces present, killing one person and injuring several others. Security forces imposed temporary curfews and set up checkpoints to bring the situation under control. The SOHR initially reported that the protests had been suppressed by HTS fighters.

Further protests broke out in Damascus after a video showing the burning of a Christmas tree was made public. The following day, the interim government's Ministry of Information announced that it was banning the distribution of videos with a "sectarian character aimed at spreading division".

Since Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) seized power, dozens of Syrians are said to have been killed in acts of revenge, particularly members of the Alawite population. Concerns about retaliatory attacks among Alawites remain high. No concrete figures on the number of victims are available.²⁶

Action against militias loyal to Assad

Armed groups of the transitional government are carrying out arrest campaigns in various places in order to drive forward the dissolution of militias loyal to Assad. On 30.12.24, for example, an arrest campaign took place in the town of Adra near Damascus, in the course of which several leaders of such militias are said to have been arrested. On 25.12.24, fighting broke out between HTS fighters and supporters of the ousted government in the coastal town of Tartous after a high-ranking official of the former government was to be arrested, according to media reports. In the process, 14 HTS fighters were allegedly killed and others wounded.

Following the protests in Homs city, which escalated into fighting (see above), on 02.01.25, the new Syrian security forces used tanks to carry out a further arrest campaign against former militia members and soldiers in Homs city who had refused to disarm and are suspected of involvement in war crimes. More than 100 people are said to have been arrested on the very first day of the campaign, which lasted several days.

The crackdown on members and officials of the former government also led to criticism. Human rights organisations accused the transitional government of arbitrary arrests and non-transparent action against suspected Assad supporters. The transitional authorities denied this and pointed out that they were taking action against armed Assad loyalists who were prepared to use violence, but not against mere sympathisers.

A few days later, on 12.01.25, reports were received that around 360 people who had been taken into custody in the course of the arrest campaigns had been released by the General Security Department. It had reportedly been confirmed that the persons concerned would not oppose disarmament and the transitional government and had not been guilty of any war crimes. It was not initially known how many of the detainees from Homs remained in custody.²⁷

Economic situation and easing of sanctions

The desolate economic situation continues to pose challenges when it comes to supplying the Syrian population. While aid organisations assume that around 90 percent of the population is still living below the poverty line and around 13.1 million people in Syria do not have enough food, the transitional government is endeavouring to obtain further aid and reconstruction assistance.

Most recently, on 10.01.25, at least three people were killed in a stampede in front of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. According to reports, numerous people had congregated at the mosque and the forecourt for Friday prayers, but also to receive food aid.

Following the recent five-year extension of US sanctions under the Caesar Act, which is one of several sanction packages, the US government eased some restrictions for the next six months on 06.01.25 to enable investors to work with Syrian authorities. The easing of sanctions is expected to have a particular impact in areas that contribute to supplying the population, such as humanitarian aid, but also electricity, energy, water and sanitary facilities.

In a further step towards opening up Syria, international commercial flights resumed at Damascus International Airport on 07.01.25.

The reunification of the Syrian economy after several years of de facto division poses challenges for the transitional government. Due to a desired equalisation of public salaries between the former areas of the HTS-led administration in Idlib and the areas formerly controlled by the Assad government, the transitional government temporarily cut salaries in Idlib by half of the total amount (these were previously around USD 100-170/month). At the same time, public salaries in the former Assad government areas were increased as part of emergency measures, as these were previously only around USD 17/month. Teachers in Idlib then announced they would go on strike in protest against the temporary cuts, claiming they are also under great financial pressure despite the relatively higher salaries.²⁸

Türkiye

Exploratory talks on potential peace talks with the PKK

After two MPs from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM) visited the imprisoned PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) leader Abdullah Öcalan in his prison cell on 28.12.24, press reports stated that on 07.01.25 a DEM delegation held exploratory talks with other political parties regarding possible peace talks with the PKK, which is classified as a terrorist organisation by Türkiye, the US and the EU.

In October 2024, Devlet Bahçeli, leader of the right-wing Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), which is in government with the Justice and Development Party (AKP), had suggested that Öcalan should call for an end to the PKK's decades-long struggle and its dissolution in return for the option of his release. At the time, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan described the proposal as a "window of historic opportunity".

The two DEM deputies Sirri Süreyya Önder and Pervin Buldan had discussed this development at the meeting with Öcalan, the first political visit to Öcalan in ten years, and according to press reports, Öcalan had conveyed the message that he was ready to take the necessary positive steps and make the necessary call. He reportedly also spoke of an era of peace, democracy and brotherhood for Türkiye and the region. The DEM stated that Öcalan was ready to support a Kurdish-Turkish peace process and that he had also indicated his willingness to end the PKK's armed struggle.

According to a media report issued on 07.01.25, following the meeting with Öcalan, DEM delegates held talks with other political parties to discuss a possible peace process. Sirri Süreyya Önder, Pervin Buldan and Ahmet Türk met with the chairs and representatives of the Republican People's Party (CHP), the Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA) and the New Welfare Party (YRP) on 07.01.24. The CHP Chair emphasised the need for a parliamentary commission involving all parties to guide potential peace talks. Talks had previously been held with the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), including with MHP Chair Bahçeli. In the context of possible peace talks, on 11.01.25, Önder and Buldan also paid a visit in prison to the former co-chair of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), Selahattin Demirtaş, who has been detained since 2016. They visited former co-chair Figen Yüksekdağ, who has also been detained since 2016, in prison on 12.01.25. After the meetings, the DEM delegates stated that Demirtaş and Yüksekdağ said they would support a peace process and want to contribute to its success. President Erdoğan declared his support for a possible peace process at AKP party congresses in Diyarbakır and Şanlıurfa on 11.01.25.

In parallel to the exploratory talks, security forces have arrested a total of 147 people in 41 provinces with suspected links to the PKK since the beginning of January 2025, according to a statement issued by Minister of the Interior Ali Yerlikaya on 11.01.25. In 2015, a peace process between the government at the time and the PKK failed.²⁹

NGO: 394 femicides in 2024

On 03.01.25, the women's rights organisation We Will Stop Femicide Platform published its annual report on femicide and women who died under suspicious circumstances in 2024. According to the report, at least 394 women were killed and 259 women died under suspicious circumstances. This is the highest number of annual femicides since We Will Stop Femicide Platform began recording femicides in 2010. Three hundred and fifteen women were reportedly killed by men and 248 women died under suspicious circumstances in 2023.

In 2024, a total of 280 women were killed by their husband, former husband, partner, father, brother, son or another male relative and 57 percent of murder victims were killed at home. According to the report, 19 girls were also murdered by their fathers, nine of them together with their mothers. The report stated that 111 women were killed because they wanted to make decisions about their own lives, for example, they had wanted a divorce or had refused to marry. Two women were reportedly killed out of hatred. According to the report, it has not been possible to clarify under what pretext 233 women were killed.

The deaths under suspicious circumstances, for instance, include cases of women who went missing and were eventually found dead. For example, a female student was found dead on the shore of Lake Van, having been missing for 18 days. According to the woman's father, the authorities assumed that the death was a suicide, but the report stated that the family denied this claim and called for an investigation.³⁰

Conviction of 58 journalists in 2024

According to media reports, a member of parliament from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM) presented a report on the state of media freedom for the year 2024 at the beginning of January 2025.

According to this report, a total of 58 journalists were sentenced to around 135 years in prison in 2024, 112 journalists were detained and 26 were arrested. The report states that journalists were also fined a total of TRY 261,820 (around EUR 7,209 as at 13.01.25) and that 872 journalists were prosecuted. It adds that five journalists lost their lives, however the circumstances of their deaths are not specified. The report says that 240 cases of threats and attacks against, or obstruction of, journalists were also documented.

The report accuses President Erdoğan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) of intensifying its efforts to suppress independent journalism and dissenting opinions. Türkiye ranks 158th out of 180 countries in the 2024 Press Freedom Index published by the NGO Reporters Without Borders.³¹

Ukraine

Civilian casualties

According to the media, Ukrainian authorities reported multiple civilian casualties resulting from Russian attacks at the turn of the year: 14 casualties in the Zaporizhzhia region (04.01.25, 08.01.25), five casualties in the Donetsk region (26.12.24, 09.01.25 and 10.01.25), four casualties in the Kherson region (25.12.24, 06.01.25, 09.01.25), three casualties in the city and region of Kyiv (01.01.25 to 03.01.25), two casualties in the Dnipropetrovsk region (24.12.24, 05.01.25) and one casualty each in the Sumy (26.12.24), Chernihiv (03.01.25) and Kharkiv (04.01.25) regions. In addition, the media reported announcements from Russian occupation authorities that civilians had been killed in the Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine as a result of Ukrainian attacks: five casualties in the Donetsk region (04.01.25, 10.01.25), four casualties in the Kherson region (30.12.24, 09.01.25, 12.01.25) and three casualties in the Zaporizhzhia region (04.01.25, 09.01.25). According to UN figures, over 12,300 civilians have been killed since 24.02.22.³²

War events, military ombudsman, prisoners of war and recruitment/desertion

The Russian Ministry of Defence reported on 06.01.25 that Russian troops had captured the strategically important small town of Kurakhove in eastern Ukraine. This was also confirmed by the pro-government Ukrainian military channel Deep State. Only a fraction of the original 18,000 inhabitants remained there. Ukraine is now giving top priority to the defence of the heavily contested city of Pokrovsk. Russian troops are trying to bypass the city in the south and cut off the supply routes. According to an AFP analysis of data from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), Russian forces advanced a total of 4,000 km² in 2024, seven times more than in 2023.

According to an analysis conducted by the British Ministry of Defence, the Russian side has made tactical changes to missile and drone attacks on Ukrainian territory. According to the analysis, since August 2024, the Russian armed forces had allowed more time to elapse between attacks in order to build up stocks and had relied "on less frequent, larger waves of attacks rather than more frequent, smaller attacks". Moscow was also increasingly using drones with little or no explosive charges to overwhelm Ukrainian air defences and deceive Ukrainian radar systems.

On 29.12.24, President Volodymyr Zelensky announced a presidential decree to establish an ombudsman's office to protect the rights of soldiers and their families. He said this was at the request of the Ukrainian troops, who have hitherto had no direct point of contact and have had to go through the usually lengthy official channels.

According to media reports, another prisoner exchange between the two warring parties took place on 30.12.24 following mediation by the UAE. While Moscow reported that 150 prisoners of war had been exchanged, President Zelensky announced that 189 prisoners had been returned to Ukraine, including two civilians. According to the UN Human Rights Office, there are also credible reports that at least 62 Ukrainian prisoners of war have been executed by Russian forces.

According to media reports issued on 02.01.25, there have been numerous cases of desertion during the formation of new Ukrainian troops. The 155th Mechanised Brigade, which was trained in France, was reportedly affected. Independent Ukrainian military experts report that 1,700 soldiers deserted even before they were deployed to the front, with 50 having left training in France. It was reported that among the 5,800 soldiers deployed near Pokrovsk, there were high casualties due to a lack of drone support. The fact that new units were being created instead of replenishing existing troops was also criticised. The Russian advance in eastern Ukraine was therefore attributed not only to Russian superiority, but also to "leadership failures, tactical errors and a lack of coordination" in the Ukrainian armed forces. The Ukrainian military leadership had reportedly already admitted to "problems". The State

Bureau of Investigation had launched an investigation into the desertion incidents and the "abuse of power" by a military official.

Against the backdrop of high numbers of Ukrainian men fit for military service fleeing the war and associated illegal border crossings, the Ukrainian police have launched a large-scale operation against people-smuggling gangs, according to media reports published on 10.01.25. In a first phase, the police and secret service have reportedly carried out 600 searches of homes and workplaces across the country in order to dismantle people-smuggling networks.³³

Energy infrastructure

According to information published by the Ukrainian government on 25.12.24, massive Russian airstrikes on the energy infrastructure took place across the country over the Christmas holidays, causing severe damage in some cases, leading to power and heating outages in some cities that lasted for hours. According to the largest private energy company, DTEK, it was the 13th massive attack to be carried out on the country's energy sector in 2024. According to Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko, the transmission system operator had taken the necessary measures to limit consumption and minimise the negative consequences. According to the National Institute for Strategic Studies in Kyiv, the authorities were trying with some success to minimise power and heating outages. Although there were major problems, it said the worst predictions of 20 hours a day without electricity had not materialised. Outages often lasted less than four hours.

Based on information provided by DTEK on 28.12.24, Ukraine has received its first shipment of liquefied natural gas from the US. This is intended to strengthen the energy security of Ukraine and Europe in view of the expiry of the gas transit agreement with the Russian Federation. Gas transit was completely discontinued on 01.01.25.³⁴

Judicial sentences, financial aid and the labour market situation

According to information provided by the Russian court on 29.12.24, a man was sentenced to 20 years in prison on charges of carrying out acts of sabotage on railway installations in Russian-occupied Crimea on behalf of the Security Service of Ukraine, the SBU. Based on information provided by the SBU on 02.01.25, a Ukrainian from the Chernivtsi region was sentenced to 15 years in prison on charges of attempted treason and justification of the Russian attack for attempting to pass on coordinates of critical infrastructure to the Russian armed forces.

The Biden administration has provided Ukraine with further aid in the run-up to the handover to US President-elect Donald Trump, including USD 3.4 billion in budget support to finance government services such as salaries for civil servants, teachers and healthcare staff. Ukraine is also receiving USD 15 billion from the US for social and humanitarian purposes as part of a G7 aid package. Based on information provided by the Ukrainian Ministry of Finance on 30.12.24, Ukraine received around EUR 40 billion in foreign financial aid for the entire year 2024 to support the budget – 30 percent as a grant and 70 percent in the form of loans on favourable terms. According to information provided by the Ukrainian government on 08.01.25, 11 million applications for winter aid payments – UAH 1,000 or around EUR 22 – have been submitted to date. A payment of UAH 1,000/month to teaching staff has also been announced, and this amount will be doubled from September 2025. In January 2025, the approximately four million internally displaced persons are also to receive rent subsidies.

According to the Ukrainian Ministry of Economy, the country has a shortage of up to five million workers due to people fleeing, military service and Russian occupation. Following the collapse of the labour market after 24.02.22, the Work UA platform, for instance, which brings employers and jobseekers together, is once again offering around 110,000 vacancies. According to the platform, the labour market has recovered quantitatively but has also changed geographically and structurally. It adds that while the situation in the frontline regions remains difficult, there is now more work than before the full Russian invasion due to company relocations in western Ukraine.³⁵

Venezuela

Maduro sworn in for third term in office

On 10.01.25, Nicolás Maduro was sworn in as president for a third term despite international protests. The pro-government Supreme Electoral Council (CNE) declared Maduro the winner after the election held on 28.07.24, having garnered 52 percent of the vote. However, it did not provide itemised figures for the count. The opposition's unity candidate, Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia, claimed to have won the election with 67 percent of the vote and is

recognised as the winner by the US, Canada and several Latin American countries (cf. BN of 29.07.24, 05.08.24, 26.08.24 and 07.10.24). Gonzalez left Venezuela in September 2024 after an arrest warrant was issued against him. Contrary to his announcement that he would return to the country on the day of the swearing-in ceremony and take over the presidency, he did not enter the country. He called on the military not to recognise Maduro. Opposition leader María Corina Machado, who was briefly detained during a rally on 09.01.25, stated that Gonzalez should be sworn in later "if the conditions are right".

Meanwhile, the US has increased the reward for information leading to Maduro's arrest to USD 25 million. The US, the EU and the UK have also adopted new sanctions.³⁶

Yemen

Security situation

On 26.12.24, the Israeli military announced that it had carried out airstrikes on several Houthi targets, including Sanaa International Airport and power stations and harbours in Hodeidah. According to the Houthi-controlled TV channel al-Masirah, 11 people were injured and three others were killed in these attacks. On 01.01.25, the US military announced that it had also carried out attacks on Houthi targets in Sanaa and other locations.

Meanwhile, on 06.01.25, Hans Grundberg, UN Special Envoy for Yemen, arrived for his first visit to Yemen since May 2023. According to his office, he wants to advance the peace process in the country and press for the release of UN staff currently being held by the Houthis.

On 10.01.25, the Israeli military announced that it had once again carried out airstrikes, including on a power plant near Sanaa. According to local media, at least one person was killed and several others were injured.

Also on 10.01.25, a security company announced that the oil tanker Sounion had been salvaged. It had been attacked by the Houthis in the Red Sea on 21.08.24, threatening to cause an oil spill.³⁷

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