

DETERIORO

SYRIA: Rising violence in the country endangers the continuity of the negotiations in Geneva and leads the opposition's delegation to suspend its participation in the formal process

The peace talks in Geneva promoted by the United Nations and the International Syria Support Group hit a new setback in April, amidst intensification that cast doubt on the cessation of hostilities agreement and threatened to derail negotiating efforts. The situation in the country led the opposition delegation to suspend its involvement in the formal process because it had seen no progress in the implementation of the ceasefire or in access to humanitarian aid. The special envoy of the UN and the Arab League for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, underscored that the announcement by the opposition High Negotiations Committee (HNC) did not mean that the process was breaking down and stressed that the opposition delegation would continue in Geneva, allowing for informal meetings. According to De Mistura at mid-month, regarding discussions about a possible transition, the opposition maintains the idea of implementing a transitional government, while Bashar Assad's regime has attempted to promote the idea of a unity government. In late April, the diplomat warned that the latest round of meetings had been severely affected by the deteriorating security situation in Syria and asked both the United States and Russia to get involved to keep the ceasefire alive. According to De Mistura, the meetings with the parties were held between 13 and 27 April and managed to identify some points in common, including the idea that a political transition would require the involvement of representatives of the opposition, the government and independents, that the country needs a new Constitution and that supervising its drafting would be one of the transitional authorities' key responsibilities. (The Guardian, 18/04/16; Al-Monitor, 18/04/16; UN News, 28/04/16)

THAILAND: Peace talks remain stalled after the government refused to sign the terms of reference of the negotiations

MARA Patani, the umbrella organisation that represents six insurgent groups and is negotiating the end of armed conflict with the government, is pessimistic regarding the future of the peace process after the government refused to sign the terms of reference of the negotiations during the third round of informal talks of the Joint Working Group-Peace Dialogue Process which took place in Kuala Lumpur at the end of April. This was the first meeting since August 2015 in which delegations from both sides were fully represented. The spokesperson for MARA Patani and member of the negotiating panel, Abu Hafez al-Hakim, stated he was unsure whether the intention of the government was to amend the terms of reference under discussion, draw up new terms or suspend the negotiation process. According to him, the aforementioned terms of reference had been drawn up and agreed by the respective officials during three meetings held between October and March. Abu Hafez al-Hakim also stated that the removal of the panel Secretary General, Nakrob Boonbuathong, who he considered to be one of the driving forces behind the peace process at the heart of the government, could be behind Bangkok's decision not to ratify the reference terms of the negotiations. Nakrob Boonbuathong was the only person from the government who had been present in the negotiations since the beginning of the peace process in 2013 and was the negotiating panel member who had been most heavily involved in the technical issues of the negotiations. According to various media sources, his removal could be due to him being considered too aligned with the stances of the insurgent groups. MARA Patani indicated that following the government's decision there was no point in negotiating the second item of the meeting, the creation of the so-called safety zones (zones where the insurgent forces would commit to reducing or abandoning violence as proof of how they effectively control the individuals or groups who are behind the violence). In relation to this latter item, a report from the International Crisis Group research centre indicated that one of the main problems in the current peace process is that MARA Patani

does not speak for the BRN, the main group responsible for the violence in the south of the country (which has caused the death of more than 6,500 people, with more than 11,000 being wounded since 2004). Prior to the removal of Nakrob Boonbuathong there was some degree of hope that peace talks would resume because at the beginning of March the government had agreed to grant immunity and freedom of movement to the main representatives of the armed groups operating in the south of the country. (Benar News, 20, 28 y 29/04/16; The Muslim World, World Bulletin, 30/04/16; Malay Mail Online, 28/04/16)

TURKEY (SOUTHEAST): The government demands that the PKK surrender or lay down its weapons, while the PKK rules out dialogue under current conditions and rejects the demand to disarm

The distance grew between the parties to the conflict in Turkey. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that military-police operations were the way to eradicate the PKK and that the destruction of the armed group and its sympathisers is the only solution to the conflict. Erdogan also stated that the PKK only has the option to either lay down its weapons or surrender, stressing that the group deceived the government in the last peace process, so it could no longer be trusted. Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu also blamed the PKK for the failure of the last peace process due to the construction of barricades and calls for war. Through its leader Cemil Bayik, the PKK blamed the government for the collapse of the peace process by ending the consensus that the PKK claimed had been reached through the Dolmabahçe Declaration in 2015. The PKK stated that under current circumstances, including the conditions of isolation of its supreme leader, Abdullah Öcalan, dialogue was not possible. The group denounced attempts to eliminate the Kurdish movement, urged joint mobilisation against Erdogan and said that the PKK would step up the war across the country. Bayik said that the solution could only be reached through negotiations, but that the PKK would only negotiate if the state changed its policy towards the Kurds, which he called “genocide”. Bayik also indicated that they had received letters and calls to put an end to the war and that they had responded to them. Meanwhile, the co-leader of the HDP, Selahattin Demirtas, stated in April that in recent months, his party had persuaded the PKK of the need to return to the negotiating table, with the government’s knowledge, but that Ankara fully rejected a return to the negotiations. Moreover, the Turkish opposition party CHP called for a solution as part of Parliament and urged the rest of the parties and specifically the HDP to form a commission to seek a solution to the conflict. In other news, the US ambassador in Turkey called on the PKK to lay down its weapons. (Hürriyet, Firat, Bianet, BBC, 1-30/04/16)

ALERTA

INDIA – PAKISTAN: Discussions between both governments remain blocked

The meeting between the Foreign Secretaries of India and Pakistan was not able to unblock the diplomatic relations between the two countries. This was the first high-level meeting between the two countries since the attack on the Pathankot Indian military base, in Punjab State, which India attributed to insurgency groups based in Pakistan. Although the diplomatic meeting, held during a summit of Asian countries, had raised major expectations, it did not manage to reactivate the Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue process, established in December 2015 to replace the Composite Dialogue, the framework under which both countries hope to reach an agreement on issues such as the dispute over the Kashmir region. Both parties reiterated the usual accusations and the meeting ended without a joint statement or an agreed calendar to implement the Bilateral Dialogue. In fact, this meeting was held weeks after Pakistan’s High Commission pointed out that the Bilateral Dialogue was suspended after Pakistan arrested an Indian citizen accusing him of being a member of the Indian intelligence services. (The Hindu, 27/04/16)

YEMEN: UN-backed negotiations begin in Kuwait following implementation of the ceasefire among the parties

As announced in late March, a cessation of hostilities agreement between the warring parties in Yemen began to be implemented at midnight on 10 April in order to facilitate the revival of the negotiations between the parties. The negotiations have been suspended since last December. In the first few weeks of April, UN Special Envoy Ould Cheikh Ahmed hailed the work of the De-escalation and Coordination Committee, as well as the local committees involved in the same sphere, due to their work on improving the security situation in the country. Bringing together military representatives from both sides, the De-escalation and Coordination Committee participated in capacity-building activities led by experts from the EU. Nevertheless, various ceasefire violations continued to be reported in different parts of the country and the delegation of the Houthis and those close to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh warned that it would not attend the meeting in Kuwait for security reasons. The talks finally resumed on 24 April, with a three-day delay with regard to the original date. During the first few days, the UN special envoy underscored the positive atmosphere and the work on five main points, defined in UN Security Council Resolution 2216 and the agenda agreed on as part of the talks in Macolin, near Biel (Switzerland). These five points include the withdrawal of the militias and armed groups, the delivery of heavy weapons to the state, interim security agreements, the restoration of the institutions of the state, the reactivation of inclusive political talks and the creation of a special committee for detained and missing people. According to the UN, these aspects must be implemented at the same time, and not sequentially, so it urged the parties to develop mechanisms of implementation in each area. After the talks began, the UN Security Council released a presidential statement asking the parties to resume the political transition in the country. However, on 1 May the government delegation announced that it was suspending its participation in the talks due to reports of ceasefire violations in Amran governorate. (UN News, 11, 18, 21, 22, 24, 25/04/16 and 01/05/16; The New York Times, 18/04/16)

AVANCE

ARMENIA – AZERBAIJAN (NAGORNO-KARABAKH): A ceasefire agreement is facilitated by Russia following the most serious incidents of violence since the 1990s

The chiefs of staff of Azerbaijan and Armenia agreed to a ceasefire at a meeting in Moscow facilitated by Russia on 5 April, amidst a serious escalation of violence around Nagorno-Karabakh that killed scores of people and involved the use of tanks, helicopters and artillery. The incidents were described as the most serious since the end of the armed conflict in the mid-1990s. The ceasefire agreement was announced from the capitals of Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh and entered into force at midnight on 5 April. The agreement was reached in a context of numerous calls for containment and mobilised international diplomacy. Among the steps taken, Russian President Vladimir Putin held separate telephone conversations with the presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia, urging them to implement the ceasefire agreement. The OSCE Minsk Group (Russia, the United States and France), a mediator in the peace process, expressed serious concern in the first few days of the incidents and called on the parties to adopt stabilisation measures. They later welcomed the decision on the new ceasefire, urged the parties to honour it and announced an upcoming trip to the region. (OSCE, RT, Moscow Times, 1-30/04/16)

MYANMAR: Aung San Suu Kyi meets armed groups that signed the ceasefire agreement

Aung San Suu Kyi, State Counsellor of the Myanmar Government, meets with representatives from the eight armed groups that signed the national ceasefire agreement (NCA), within the framework of the Joint Monitoring Committee, an agency made up of the

Government, armed groups, the army and civil society, to supervise the implementation of the ceasefire agreement. At this meeting, the first of its kind for the Myanmar leader with armed groups and the army after assuming her post on 1 April, Aung San Suu Kyi announced that in the following months, a conference in the style of the Panglong conference would be called. The Panglong Conference was convened by Myanmar's independence leader (Suu Kyi's father), bringing together the ethnic leaders after the country gained independence. (The Irrawaddy, 27/4/16)

SOMALIA: The National Consultative Forum reaches agreement on election calendar

The National Consultative Forum is held in Mogadishu on April 12 and 13. During the meeting, Government and regional political leaders reached an agreement on the specifics of the electoral process that will take place during 2016. The United Nations, the AU, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the EU, the United States, the United Kingdom, Ethiopia, Italy and Sweden welcomed the progress made and called on Parliament to include the agreed election calendar without delay. They also highlighted the celebration of the next meeting of the Forum in Garowe together with the Constitutional Conference in May. However, Somaliland did not participate in the meeting. Its Information Minister said that the country did not accept the outcome of the Forum and that Somaliland was not part of the agreement. UN Secretary-General special envoy Michael Keating stated that the process will involve 100 times more voters than in 2012 and that it will be more structured and transparent than the previous election. He added that the 2016 process will be a stepping stone towards a one-person, one-vote election in 2020. (Shabelle Media, 13/04/16)

SOUTH SUDAN: The transitional government is set up following Machar's arrival in the capital

On 26 April, Riek Machar, the first vice president of the government and leader of the armed opposition group SPLA-IO, returned to Juba to assume office. The Transitional Government of National Unity was formed two days later, as foreseen in the peace deal reached in August 2015. The SPLA-IO leader landed at Juba Airport after coming from Ethiopia in a UN plane. He was welcomed there by the head of the reception committee, Finance Minister David Deng Athorbei, as well as by Information Minister Michael Makuei, the SPLM-IO delegation in Juba, the chairman of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission of the Peace Agreement, Festus Mogae, different members of the diplomatic corps and the special representative of the UN Secretary-General. Machar arrived the day after top rebel military commander Simon Gatwech Dual set foot in the capital with his troops, joining the 1,370 SPLA-IO armed rebels already in Juba since the insurgents began to return at the end of March. Machar thanked the government for complying with the implementation of the peace deal and said that many challenges remain after the eight-month delay since it was signed. He also requested funding from countries that support the agreement in order to fully implement it. David Deng Athorbei stressed that Machar's return represents "the last nail in the coffin of the war in the country". President Salva Kiir, who received Machar in the presidential palace after his arrival, welcomed him and called him his brother, saying that his return marks the end of the war and the return of peace and stability to South Sudan. The Transitional Government of National Unity was formed two days later. It was formed by 30 ministers, of which 16 are members of the government, 10 belong to the SPLA-IO, two to the SPLA-FD and another two to other political groups. This was specified in the peace agreement: 53% for SPLM members, 33% for SPLA-IO forces, 7% for the SPLM-FD and 7% for members of other parties. Only six out of the 30 cabinet positions are held by women, making up 20% of the total. They will lead the ministries of roads and bridges; the environment and forestry; wildlife conservation and tourism; gender, child, and social welfare; culture, youth and sports; and land, housing and urban development. (BBC News, 26/04/2016; The NYT, 26/04/2016; The Guardian 26/04/2016; Sudan Tribune, 26, 30/04/2016; Radio Tamazuj, 26, 29/04/2016; News 24, 29/04/2016)

UKRAINE: Agreement reached to renew the ceasefire prior to Orthodox Easter

The Trilateral Contact Group (Ukraine, Russia, OSCE) announced the conclusion of an agreement with the armed groups of the Donbas for a new ceasefire coinciding with the celebration of Holy Week. According to the agreement, both parties pledge to notify all personnel on the ground of said instructions for full compliance with the ceasefire and to guarantee access and security to the OSCE monitoring mission. The truce takes effect on 30 April, according to the announcement of the special representative of the rotating chairperson-in-office of the OSCE in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group, Martin Sajdik. The agreement comes in a context of increasing ceasefire violations since mid-March. Meanwhile, Ukraine stated to the UN Security Council that the ceasefire should be strengthened before moving towards a political solution to the conflict. (OSCE, RFE/RL, 29/04/16)

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