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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Expulsion of Afghan refugees from Pakistan; humanitarian situation

The expulsion of Afghan nationals from Pakistan continues. 400,000 people have reportedly been deported from Pakistan to Afghanistan since October 2023. 90 % of these are said to have nowhere to return to. A survey reveals that 92 % have no access to clean water. Many additionally lack adequate food provisions.

On 27.11.23 the UN OCHA published a report alleging that the Taliban have obstructed humanitarian aid on repeated occasions. The mobility of aid organisations was restricted after the earthquakes in Herat province in October 2023, for example. Restrictions imposed on women also often lead to projects being abandoned. The report further states that the staff of humanitarian organisations have been subjected to violence. The Taliban arrested 25 people in October 2023 alone.¹

Persecution

On 01.12.23 an unknown person shot dead six people in a district of the city of Herat in which Hazaras make up the majority of the population. Two of those killed were Shiite clerics.

It was reported on 28.11.23 that the Taliban had arrested 45 students at the University of Badakhshan. They are accused of being members of the transnational Islamist movement Hizb ut-Tahrir and of having collaborated with Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP).

It was reported on 27.11. and 01.12.23 respectively that the Taliban had arrested a former soldier in Panjshir and two former police officers in Parwan.²

Government affairs

On 24.11.23 the Taliban dispatched their first ambassador to the People's Republic of China. At the same time, the Afghan embassy in India was closed. The embassy had been representing the toppled government up to this point in time. The two remaining consulate generals in India are reportedly linked to the Taliban.

On 03.12.23 the head of the central bank, who was appointed by the Taliban, announced that a completely Islamic banking system was to be introduced, under which banks will not be allowed to make any profits. Observers view the consequences of this step on the already severely weakened financial system with scepticism.³

Security situation: Attacks by the Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF)

By its own account, the AFF has killed four Taliban fighters in Kapisa province. The AFF has also claimed responsibility for an explosion in Kabul which reportedly killed two Taliban fighters on 27.11.23.⁴

Bangladesh

HRW report on government's actions against opposition

A report by human rights organisation HRW accuses the government of using violence against members of the opposition and critics of the government. According to the report, since the beginning of the protests by the largest opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), on 28.10.23 some 10,000 opposition activists have been arrested, at least 16 people – including two police officers – have been killed and more than 5,500 people have been injured. By reference to interviews with witnesses, police reports and video analysis, HRW reports on the use of excessive force by security forces, arbitrary mass arrests, enforced disappearances, torture and extra-judicial killings in connection with the planned elections on 07.01.24. The BNP states that half of its five million members are exposed to politically motivated persecution.

The BNP has announced that it will be continuing its protest and will not be participating in the elections in January.⁵

Bangladesh / Indonesia / Myanmar

Hundreds of Rohingya refugees land in Indonesia

Over 1,000 Rohingya refugees, including many women and children, have reached the Indonesian province of Aceh by boat since mid-November 2023. The UNHCR has appealed to neighbouring countries to broaden their efforts in the search for two more unseaworthy ships which are assumed to be carrying around 400 people.

For many years now, members of the Muslim minority have been fleeing Myanmar – a country with a majority Buddhist population in which they are refused citizenship and are exposed to brutality and attacks. Over one million Rohingya are living in refugee camps in Bangladesh. Most of them fled Myanmar in the face of brutal attacks by the Myanmar military in 2017. Increasing crime and violence perpetrated by armed groups in the refugee camps is prompting many people to risk the dangerous route over the sea in search of safety.⁶

Benin

MSF health projects recommenced

After a pause of 15 years, the aid organisation Doctors Without Borders (MSF) has returned to Benin with two projects. This was announced by the NGO on 21.11.23. One of the two projects concerns the north of Benin, while the other is based in the south-western department of Couffo. The project in the north includes care for people suffering from malaria, while the project in the south-west is focused on improving healthcare for mothers and children. MSF reports that concrete measures undertaken to date include providing existing health centres with modern medical equipment and more personnel.⁷

Burkina Faso

Sahel region: Civilians killed in attack

It has been reported in the media that suspected jihadists carried out an attack on a military base and a camp for internally displaced people in the town of Djibo in the north of Burkina Faso on 26.11.23. The town of Djibo, which is located in the Sahel region, has been under siege by jihadists for months. According to information from the UN, at least 40 civilians were killed and more than 42 injured in the attack. Dozens of attackers are said to have been killed in a counter-offensive.⁸

Democratic Republic of the Congo

The situation in the east

The fighting between armed groups and government forces in the eastern province of North Kivu (cf. BN of 30.10. and 13.11.23) continues. The UNHCR and UNICEF are warning that the situation for the population and in

particular those who have been displaced by the conflict is giving rise to an increasingly severe humanitarian crisis. Over 450,000 people have reportedly been displaced in the past six weeks. In all, some seven million people in the region are said to be affected by the consequences of the conflict. A matter of particular alarm is the inadequate access to those in need of humanitarian aid, which is attributed to blockades of key roads.

The aid organisation Doctors Without Borders has observed a marked increase in cases of bullet wounds in the past eight weeks. The majority of the people admitted to the region's hospitals with bullet wounds are reportedly civilians.

Meanwhile, the auxiliary troops of the East African Community (EAC) have begun their withdrawal from the east of the country. The EAC dispatched troops to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in November 2022 to help in the fight against the M23 rebel group. In November 2023, president Tshisekedi announced that there would be no extension of the auxiliary forces' mandate. According to reports in the media, the mandate is to be taken over by a support mission of the Southern African Development Community. No information is available as yet with regard to when this mission is to begin and how long it will last.

A number of presidential candidates have also begun their campaigns in the conflict-ridden east of the country for the general elections which are scheduled for 20.12.23 (cf. BN of 13.11.23). The EU announced on 29.11.23 that it would not be dispatching an election monitoring mission, however. According to a spokeswoman for the mission, this decision is attributable to technical difficulties over which the EU has no control.

The spokeswoman has stated that the required telecommunications equipment was not provided for the election monitors. Equally, no permission had been forthcoming for use of their own means of communication, including telephones and satellite internet packages. The spokeswoman referred to concerns about the monitors' safety. The Congolese government has expressed its regret at the withdrawal of the EU election monitoring mission and promised that it will endeavour to ensure transparent, inclusive and free elections, adding that it remains willing to welcome monitoring missions.⁹

Guinea-Bissau

Exchange of fire following conflict over government spending

It emerges from agency reports citing various media that an exchange of fire between different groups of government security forces took place in the capital, Bissau, on the night of 30.11.23. The incident ensued after the national guard had used force to free the finance minister, Souleiman Seidi, and treasury secretary António Monteiro from police custody. The national garde is said to be under the control of parliament. Seidi and Monteiro were reportedly taken to a national guard barracks. After negotiations failed, an exchange of fire with a battalion of the presidential guard ensued. Two of those involved in the gun battle were killed. The city district concerned was cordoned off. Guinea-Bissau's president, Umaro Sissoco Embaló, who was at COP28 in Dubai at the time, stated that he had nothing to do with the events. Guinea-Bissau's executive has been in a state of cohabitation since the new government took office (cf. BN of 14.08.23).

Seidi, who belongs to the Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC), and Monteiro are accused of having paid over six billion CFA francs (approx. EUR 9,150,000; fixed exchange rate) without authorisation to eleven companies with close links to the governing coalition. They were questioned in connection with corruption investigations on 30.11.23 and subsequently arrested. They had previously defended the payments before parliament as being lawful. The two were taken into custody again on 01.12.23. The commander of the national garde, Victor Tchongo, was also arrested, along with other national garde members. Patrols by the ECOWAS stabilisation mission (cf. BN of 16.05.22) were seen in Bissau, and by midday life on the streets had reportedly returned to normal.

In the aftermath of the incident, the different political camps rowed over their interpretations of the events. Embaló and his party, MADEM-G15, spoke of an attempted coup against Embaló, asserting that Tchongo had acted on orders. Without stating any names, Embaló said that everyone knew who was behind the incident and announced that there would be consequences. In contrast, representatives of the governing coalition expressed incomprehension over the arrest of the two politicians.¹⁰

Iran

Demonstrator receives prison sentence

According to reports in the media on 01.12.23, a man from the city of Piranshahr (West Azerbaijan province) who took part in the nationwide protests of 2022 has been sentenced to five years and six months in prison. Citing a Kurdish human rights network, the man is reported to have been charged with actions counter to national security and propaganda against the system. The man was reportedly shot and wounded by security forces at the protests in 2022, temporarily taken into custody and provisionally released on bail.¹¹

Vehicle seized following breaches of compulsory requirement to wear hijab

According to reports in foreign media, a number of cars have been impounded in the Iranian capital, Tehran, as punishment for breaching Muslim clothing regulations. Women who had breached the compulsory requirement to wear the hijab were reportedly informed by text message about the imminent confiscation of their vehicles. This course of action and similar measures were announced in the aftermath of the 2022 protests and are being enforced to varying degrees. Many women, especially in cities, are continuing to ignore the requirement to wear the head covering, whatever steps may be undertaken against them (cf. BN of 17.04., 26.06. and 24.07.23). A contentious draft bill of the so-called law to protect chastity and the hijab which stipulated more severe punishment for breaches of the Islamic rules on clothing was rejected as it stands by the Council of Guardians at the end of October 2022 (cf. BN of 30.10.23).¹²

Iraq

IS attacks in Diyala und Makhmour

At least ten civilians died and at least twelve were injured in a bomb explosion followed by an attack with firearms in Muqdadiya (Diyala province) on 30.11.23. The bomb exploded at the roadside as a minibus passed by. A number of unknown persons subsequently fired at the rescue forces who rushed to the scene and other persons who were present. Iraqi security services are blaming the attack on so-called IS and assume that the minibus was specifically targeted. A local politician was on board the bus.

On 01.12.23 an Iraqi army base near Makhmour was attacked by suspected IS fighters and one soldier was killed. In response to the attacks, the Iraqi army carried out an air strike against the IS in Kirkuk on 03.12.23. According to the Iraqi military, several IS fighters were killed in the strike.

While IS has been territorially defeated in Iraq since 2017, isolated attacks still occur; the so-called disputed territories (i.e. territories to which both Baghdad and Erbil lay claim, such as Makhmour, Kirkuk and parts of Diyala) are a focus of sustained IS activities.¹³

Suspected US air strike against militias

On 03.12.23 five fighters of the “Imam Ali Battalions” (Arabic: Kata’ib Imam Ali) were killed in what is presumed to have been an air strike by the US military. The militia was reportedly in the process of firing missiles at American targets in the country.

Since October 2023, the US military has been the target of attacks by Iraqi militias on several dozen occasions. The militias say the attacks are reprisals for the USA’s support for Israel (cf. BN of 20.11. and 27.11.23).¹⁴

Lebanon

Effects of the war between Israel and Hamas

The repercussions of the war between Hamas and Israel continue to overshadow the entire domestic political agenda in Lebanon. The end of the ceasefire has rekindled fears of the war spreading to Lebanon. France has pushed for Resolution 1701 to be applied – which provides for the withdrawal of armed groups from the Israeli border – stating that a broadening of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) would be conceivable in order to enforce the resolution, should it fail to be implemented.

The war is also giving rise to increased migratory pressure. The Lebanese army has prevented the departure of a boat containing 110 Syrian refugees. Following the resurgence of fighting, the tourism sector, which is an extremely

important factor in the Lebanese economy, fears that the Christmas season will to all intents and purposes be cancelled. The Christmas season is vitally important in this country, which has a Christian heritage and a substantial number of biblical sites. In addition, the various rescue services complain that they lack the personnel and material resources to address the consequences of the fighting in the south of Lebanon.¹⁵

The situation in the south of Lebanon and the north of Israel

The end of the ceasefire also led to a resumption of fighting between Hezbollah and the Israeli army. Israel was attacked repeatedly from Lebanon and responded with return shelling. On the Lebanese side, three Hezbollah fighters and the mother of one of the fighters were killed in the hostilities last week.¹⁶

Niger

Anti-migration law repealed

According to reports in the media, on 25.11.23 the military junta repealed the anti-migration law which was agreed between the EU and Niger's government in 2015. The law prohibited the trafficking of migrants through Niger. Such trafficking is now exempt from punishment with immediate effect. The law formed part of the European strategy to curb migration via the Mediterranean.¹⁷

Nigeria

Zamfara State: 150 people abducted from villages

Armed men killed one person and abducted at least 150 in attacks on four small villages in Maru Local Government Area (LGA) in the north-western state of Zamfara on 24.11.23. According to reports in the media citing eye witnesses' accounts, the attackers entered the villages on motorbikes. The incident is said to be linked to the killing of four men belonging to the attackers' group by Nigerian security forces. Prior to the attack on the four villages, it became known that the group's leader, Lawali Damana, had demanded compensation to the amount of approx. NGN 100 million (EUR 116,000 as per 04.12.23). Other media suspect a link between the abductions and the failure of people living in the region to pay levies demanded by armed groups. Abductions from villages and educational establishments for the purpose of extorting ransom money have been relatively common in north-western Nigeria in recent times. Maru LGA is affected by banditry with a degree of regularity (cf. BN of 07.08. and 27.11.23). Air strikes by the Nigerian military against criminal groups are no rarity in the region (cf. BN of 02.01., 24.07. and 16.10.23).¹⁸

Kaduna State: Eight people abducted

It emerges from media reports citing eye witnesses that armed men abducted at least eight people in Chikun LGA on 28.11.23. Investigations are already in progress, according to information from a police spokesperson which was publicised on 30.11.23. The purpose of such abductions is generally to extort ransom money. Schools, travellers and smaller villages have recently been targeted relatively frequently by kidnappers in north-west Nigeria. Chikun LGA has also witnessed kidnappings in the past. The military has successfully freed kidnap victims from the hands of bandits on numerous occasions (cf. BN of 19.09. and 06.12.22, 13.03. and 15.05.23).¹⁹

North: Military strikes against suspected terrorists

According to information released by the Nigerian Defence Headquarters (DHQ) on 01.12.23, in the space of one week at the end of November 2023 the military killed a total of 180 actors described as terrorists in the north of the country, arrested 204 such actors and freed 234 kidnap victims. By its own account, the military also seized a diverse array of weapons together with ammunition and other items of equipment in its various operations. It is not rare for such announcements of successful operations to be propagated by DHQ (cf. BN of 06.02., 20.03., 03.04., 18.09. and 16.10.23).

Media reports that around 50 people belonging to the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) group had been killed when a landmine exploded in Borno State on 26.11.23 were a particular focus of attention. The death toll was reportedly so high because both the truck which passed over the mine and the truck directly behind it were full of

people. There is conjecture that the mine may have been laid by ISWAP members some time ago and that it was intended to target the Nigerian army, which carries out regular patrols in the area.²⁰

Pakistan

“Honour killing” in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

An 18 year-old woman was shot dead in the district of Kolai-Palas/Kohistan on 24.11.23. It is believed that her father was the perpetrator. The motive for the murder was provided by photographs of the victim with a woman and two men which had appeared in social media. It remains unclear whether the killing took place on the basis of a resolution by a traditional tribal council (jirga), which passes judgement according to sharia law and without reference to national legislation.

Women and girls continue to be killed in Pakistan every year, in most cases by relatives claiming that the family’s honour is at stake. Despite strict laws and growing outrage among the enlightened Pakistani public, such “honour killings” continue to take place above all in the regions of the country where conservative traditions are upheld.²¹

Attacks and hostilities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

According to information from the military, an Afghan national carried out a suicide attack on a convoy on 26.11.23, killing two civilians and injuring three civilians and three soldiers.

Unknown actors carried out an attack targeting security forces at a market in Bannu on 26.11.23, killing one civilian and injuring 21 people, including a dozen Pakistani soldiers.

On 23.11.23 unknown attackers killed an employee of the forestry authority in North Waziristan.

On 22.11.23 two soldiers were killed in a landmine explosion and one police officer was killed in an attack on a checkpoint. Three civilians were killed and four injured in a bomb explosion in South Waziristan on 22.11.23. No-one has claimed responsibility for these attacks. Prior to these attacks, two soldiers were killed in an armed attack in South Waziristan. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan has claimed responsibility

for this attack. Eight allegedly armed fighters were killed in a subsequent military operation in South Waziristan on 27.11.23.

Three allegedly armed fighters and one soldier died in a military operation in North Waziristan on 21.11.23. Prior to this, four fighters, including a high-ranking target of the military, died in an operation on 18.11.23 (cf. BN of 20.11.23).

On 16.11.23 security forces killed eleven allegedly armed fighters in operations in Peshawar and Tank.²²

Bus comes under fire in Gilgit-Baltistan

On 02.12.23 unknown armed attackers fired at a bus carrying passengers in Gilgit-Baltistan. The bus was being accompanied by a military escort, due to recent tensions between Sunnis and Shiites in the region. Nine people were killed, including two soldiers. More than two dozen people were injured, including a Sunni cleric.²³

Palestinian territories / Israel

Current developments and humanitarian situation

According to reports in the media, hostilities resumed between Israel and Hamas on 01.12.23, following the end of the seven-day ceasefire. The Israeli military announced that it was continuing its attacks after missiles were fired at Israel from the Gaza Strip. Within hours of the ceasefire coming to an end, Israel attacked more than 200 targets with ground, air and naval units. Locations in Khan Younis and Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip were among the targets. On 04.12.23 the Israeli forces renewed their call for the mass evacuation of Khan Younis, following Israel’s announcement on 03.12.23 that it was expanding its ground offensive to cover the entire Gaza Strip.

According to information released by the Palestinian health authorities on 01.12.23 more than 100 Palestinians have been killed since the fighting resumed.

More than 100 hostages who were abducted in the Hamas attack on 07.10.23 were released during the temporary ceasefire. Israel released Palestinian prisoners in return. It was also possible for humanitarian aid to be transported to Gaza on a larger scale.

According to reports in the media, a worsening of the humanitarian situation in Gaza is now being predicted in the face of the renewed fighting.²⁴

Russian Federation

Supreme court declares LGBTIQ movement an extremist organisation

The supreme court has classified the international LGBTIQ movement as an extremist organisation and banned its activities. The decree was enacted on 30.11.23 at the instance of the justice ministry and entered into force immediately. The proceedings took place in camera. It is unclear what or whom the decree is intended to target. On 01.12.23 the police carried out raids on clubs and bars which are popular among queer people in Moscow. The visitors were detained and their ID cards were photographed before they were released.²⁵

Senegal

Police raid and arrests at headquarters of PASTEF's new, alternative presidential candidate

According to reports in the media, police stormed the headquarters of imprisoned politician Bassirou Diomaye Faye in the city of Pikine (Dakar region) on 28.11.23. Faye was nominated as the alternative presidential candidate of banned opposition party Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (PASTEF) on 19.11.23. Three PASTEF activists are said to have been temporarily detained and use of the office was prohibited, citing the ban on the party (cf. BN of 07.08.23). The location is reported to have been used to collect the necessary number of endorsing signatures which Faye requires in the so-called "parrainage" process in order to qualify him to run in the 2024 presidential election. Faye has been PASTEF's secretary-general to date and is regarded as the right-hand man of the party's imprisoned leader, Sonko. Faye has also been held in custody awaiting trial for over seven months (cf. BN of 20.11.23). He has been charged with a number of criminal offences for criticising politically motivated prosecution and the instrumentalisation of the judiciary against Sonko in an online post (cf. BN of 17.04.23). Faye's candidacy for the election is reportedly only a contingency plan which is to be implemented in the event that Sonko is not admitted to the presidential election. Sonko most recently failed in an action before the Constitutional Council – Senegal's supreme court – aimed at securing his reinstatement on the electoral rolls (cf. BN of 20.11.23).²⁶

Sierra Leone

Suspected coup attempt: Deaths and arrests, over 2,000 prisoners allegedly freed; situation of the APC

According to reports by agencies and in the media, a number of armed actors attacked the main barracks and the appurtenant arsenal in the vicinity of the presidential residence, as well as several prisons and military and police bases in the capital, Freetown, in the early hours of 26.11.23. There are no reports of any outbreaks of violence in any other parts of the country, nor of any attempt by the armed actors to take control of any key centres of power, such as the presidential residence or state media. A BBC correspondent has provided an eye witness account of armed actors on the streets proclaiming a "'clean-up' of the country". President Julius Maada Bio and other representatives of the government and the security forces have stated that the situation is under control. The government initially communicated that the security forces had managed to repel "renegade" military officers, before speaking for the first time of an "attempted coup d'état" on 28.11.23.

According to information from the government, 21 people were killed in the attacks, including three attackers. The opposition put the death toll at 200, most of whom were civilians. On 28.12.23 the government announced that 13 military officers and one civilian had been arrested. According to information from the government, more than 2,200 prisoners were freed in the attacks on the prisons, which included a high-security prison. According to information from security circles, the armed attackers also seized weapons.

At least two analysts have told Al Jazeera that the attackers numbered around 50 – including military officers and former rebel commanders. According to information from government and security circles, serving military officers and former members of the army and the police were involved in the outbreaks of violence – allegedly including parts of the military apparatus and security guards of Ernest Bai Koroma, former president and the former leader

of the main opposition party, the All People's Congress (APC). It has further been reported that a number of government representatives suspect the APC – which, similarly to Koroma, has condemned the events and also allegedly came under fire on 26.11.23 – of having masterminded the incidents.

Citing civil servants, Le Monde and the French news agency Agence France-Presse stated on 29.11.23 that there was currently no evidence that Koroma was involved in the breakouts of violence. Referring to information from the inspector general of the police, the dpa news agency has reported that further investigations are intended to establish the extent of the conspiracy and to identify other individuals involved. The police have launched a large-scale manhunt, publishing a wanted list on 28.11.23 specifying 34 individuals who are wanted in connection with the failed coup attempt and offering rewards for their capture. The people on the wanted list reportedly comprise serving or former members of the army and police as well as civilians. According to online portal The Sierra Leone Telegraph, almost all the wanted individuals have links to the APC or at least to the regions which are considered to be APC strongholds. The APC has issued repeated statements since 01.12.23 claiming that the government is carrying out a wave of arrests against its members, including high-ranking party officials, and among its supporters – above all in the north of Sierra Leone. Unconfirmed reports allege that a number of APC members and supporters have been killed by the security forces. The APC has spoken of a witch-hunt and an attempt by the government to silence the party.

The situation in Freetown is described as calm on the surface but tense. Security measures have been stepped up and checkpoints have been set up in and around the capital. A curfew which was initially imposed throughout the day was changed into a night-time curfew (9 p.m. until 6 a.m.) on 27.11.23 and is to apply until further notice. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) condemned the incidents and announced that “regional elements” would be dispatched to Sierra Leone if necessary, without going into any further detail.

Rumours of a possible coup against Bio's government have reportedly been circulating for months. As recently as August 2023 a number of people, including high-ranking members of the military, were arrested on suspicion of preparing a violent uprising.

A number of members of the military and the police are under investigation for subversion in connection with the alleged planning of activities to undermine peace and the stability of the state and to provoke violence (cf. BN of 07.08. and 14.08.23).

The political situation has long been considered tense. The opposition does not recognise the election result from the end of June 2023, in which president Bio secured his re-election, and international election monitors have criticised inconsistencies and inadequate transparency (cf. BN of 03.07.23). Initial signs of an easing of the political crisis had only recently emerged. Bio's governing party and the APC signed an agreement providing, among other things, for the release of all political prisoners, the dismissal of all politically motivated court proceedings and an end to APC's months-long boycott of parliamentary and council work (cf. BN of 23.10.23).²⁷

Somalia

Flooding

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud stated in an address on 29.11.23 that more than a million people had been displaced by the flooding in recent weeks. More than 100 people have been killed and over 1.5 million people are affected by the flooding. The torrential rainfall has destroyed key infrastructure, such as roads and bridges, and flooded residential areas as well as more than 1.5 million hectares of farmland. The Somali government has declared a state of emergency and is warning of the danger of diseases spreading.²⁸

UN Security Council lifts arms embargo

On 01.12.23 the UN Security Council voted unanimously to lift the final restrictions on the delivery of arms to the Somali government. The Council stated that this would enable the Somali armed forces to be re-equipped and modernised in its fight against Al-Shabaab. The arms embargo was imposed on Somalia in 1992, following the overthrow of Mohamed Siad Barre and the beginning of the civil war, and had since been extensively relaxed. At the same time a second resolution was adopted, imposing a complete arms embargo on Al-Shabaab.²⁹

Sudan

UN ends political mission

The United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission Sudan (UNITAMS) officially ended on 03.12.23, after the UN Security Council voted in favour of ending the political mission on 01.12.23 in response to a request from Sudan's military government. A transition period of three months was agreed to wind down the mission. The vote followed months of tension between the military government and the UN mission. Volker Perthes, the UN's special envoy, stepped down in September 2023 after being declared a persona non grata. UNITAMS was established in June 2020 to support Sudan in its political transition to democracy. A UN team which provides humanitarian aid and carries out development work is to remain in the country. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appealed once again to the warring parties to agree to a ceasefire as a matter of urgency, while also alluding to the devastating effects of the conflict on the civilian population.³⁰

Syria

Two members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps killed

According to a statement by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, two of its members were killed by Israeli air strikes on targets in Syria on 02.12.23. Syrian state media reported only material damage caused by Israeli air strikes on targets in the area around Damascus. For its part, the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that two Syrian nationals and two foreigners had been killed in attacks on targets in the Damascus suburb of Sayyidah Zaynab.³¹

Ukraine

Course of the war

With the onset of winter, president Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said that the war is entering a new phase. It has been reported that following talks with commanders of sections of the front in the east and south he also stated in his evening address that the construction of defence systems at the front and around Kiev must be accelerated. This comment is being interpreted as indicating a further consolidation of the fronts into trench warfare situation (or, inappropriately, a state of frozen conflict). Zelenskyy expressed his regret at the number of troops killed in action on the Ukrainian side and stated his dissatisfaction at the fact that certain types of weapons were not being delivered.

Heavy fighting is reported in the press in particular around Avdiivka and also Bakhmut, both of which are located in Donetsk oblast. The Russian side claims to have captured the town of Chromowe on the western fringe of Bakhmut. The Russian forces are reportedly also attempting to recapture positions which they have lost around the village of Robotyne (Zaporizhzhia oblast). A video which allegedly shows two surrendering Ukrainian soldiers being shot dead at close quarters by Russian forces has caused a stir.³²

Reform of conscription system announced

It has been reported in the media that Zelenskyy announced a reform to the provisions regulating conscription into the armed forces on 01.12.23. At present, these provisions prevent demobilisation in conjunction with martial law. Relatives of soldiers serving at the front have been staging local protests – most recently on 02.12.23 – at which they have repeatedly called for these provisions to be removed and for the burdens to be shared by others. The Ukrainian armed forces are currently said to comprise some 820,000 people (with no distinction as to those who are under arms or not). Meanwhile, the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, has ordered a further enlargement of the Russian army, to 1.32 million armed personnel.³³

Civilian casualties and humanitarian situation

The sustained shelling of the Kherson region continues to claim civilian lives. One death was reported on 03.12.23; on 30.11.23 three people died in the village of Sadove. A woman died of gunshot wounds in Kostiantynivka, a city close to the front in Donetsk oblast, on 03.12.23. On 02.12.23 one person was killed in connection with Russian shelling which destroyed two residential buildings in neighbouring Chasiv Yar. On 30.11.23 Russian artillery fire

targeting various localities in the Donetsk region killed at least three people in all, with further people reported to be under the rubble of destroyed buildings. On 28.11.23 Russian attacks which hit various localities, including Nikopol (Dnipropetrovsk oblast), killed a total of four people and injured at least five.

It is also reported on the basis of information from the Ukrainian side that no exchanges of prisoners between Ukraine and the Russian Federation have taken place for three months.

A comprehensive solution has still to be found in the dispute over what Polish truck drivers consider to be unfair competition from Ukrainian truck drivers, which has led to a blockade of the border (cf. BN of 20.11.23). Slovakian truck drivers have similarly begun a blockade at the border between Ukraine and Slovakia.³⁴

Yemen

Incidents in the Red Sea

On 29.11.23 a US Navy destroyer shot down a drone in Bab el-Mandab Strait which was fired from the direction of the Houthi-controlled territories in Yemen. A US military spokesman said that the drone which was headed for the destroyer was produced in Iran.

A series of missile and drone attacks took place in the Red Sea on 03.12.23. In all, three merchant ships were hit, two of which incurred minor damage while the third was more severely damaged. No casualties were reported. In parallel to the missile attacks, a US destroyer shot down a total of three drones which were approaching it. The Houthis have claimed responsibility for two of the attacks on the merchant ships, describing these as “Israeli”. The USA holds the Houthis responsible for all the stated attacks.

The Houthis have attacked a number of merchant ships with links to Israel in recent weeks (cf. BN of 27.11.23), citing the continuing war in Gaza as the reason for the attacks.³⁵

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Briefing Notes
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