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Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Syria – July to December 2022

01 January 2023

04 July 2022

New UN estimates: More than 300,000 civilians killed since 2011

A position paper published on 28.06.22 by the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria, cited new casualty figures for the Syrian conflict, which has been ongoing for more than ten years. Accordingly, between 01.03.2011 and 31.03.2021, a total of 306,887 cases of civilians killed during the fighting were recorded. This corresponds to about 1.5% of the pre-war population.

Combatants and deaths that were not reported to the authorities are not included in this list. In 143,350 cases, precise information on the name, place and date of death could be provided.

Afrin: Nine killed by missiles fired from government areas

According to the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, nine militiamen were killed in Turkish-occupied Afrin on 29.06.22 when a Syrian army missile reportedly hit a transport vehicle. The victims belonged to the Failaq al-Sham group, an Islamist Syrian Arab militia that sides with the Turkish military.

Idlib: High-ranking member of Hurras al-Din killed by US drones

According to a US military statement, Abu Hamzah al-Yemeni, a senior Yemeni member of the al-Qaeda-affiliated Hurras al-Din, was targeted and killed in a drone strike on 27.06.22. According to the Syrian Civil Defence, also known as the White Helmets, the air strike occurred south of Idlib (city). There are no reports of wounded people involved. According to various sources, the man killed was alone on a motorbike at the time of the attack.

Tartus: Air strike wounds civilians

According to the Syrian Ministry of Defence, the Israeli military fired several missiles at targets in the village of al-Hamidiyah in the south of the governorate of Tartus on 02.07.22. According to the report, two civilians were also wounded by the air strikes.

11 July 2022

Idlib: Import of international relief supplies terminated

No extension of the mandate for international aid deliveries across the Turkish-Syrian border could be agreed in a vote of the UN Security Council on 08.07.22. The UN mission for a humanitarian aid corridor to northern Syria has been in place since 2014 and was restricted already in 2020 when the rights of use of three border crossings for UN aid were not extended (cf. BN of 13.01.20).

The current closure of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing for UN aid means that the last remaining corridor for aid across the Turkish-Syrian border is closed. Thirteen Security Council members voted in favour of extending the mandate, China abstained and Russia was the only member to vote against. As a state with veto power Russia

argued that international aid should go exclusively through the state sovereign in Damascus. About four million people currently live in and around Idlib in an area that is not under Damascus' control, an estimated 1.7 million of them in tents.

UN representatives describe the aid deliveries to northern Syria as the largest humanitarian aid operation in the world. In 2021, about 800 lorries crossed the border at Bab al-Hawa every month.

18 July 2022

Idlib: Import of international aid supplies extended after all

After the Russians vetoed the extension of the previous mandate for international aid deliveries across the Turkish-Syrian border on 08.07.22 (cf. BN of 10.07.22), the members of the UN Security Council finally managed to agree on a compromise proposal on 12.07.22 that also accommodates Russia's wishes and initially extends the aid for only six months. About four million people are currently dependent on aid deliveries to the rebel-controlled area in Idlib.

The majority of the other permanent members of the UN Security Council had originally rejected the Russian proposal because an extension by six months seemed too short and might expire in the wintertime, when the need for aid will be greatest. In addition, the short duration would complicate planning for international aid agencies, they said. The three permanent Western members of the Council, the USA, Great Britain, and France, therefore abstained in the vote on 12 July 2022.

US: Senior IS member killed in Aleppo

On 12.07.22, the US military announced that it had killed the leader of IS in Syria, Maher al-Agal, in a drone strike near Jindires, a town in the north-western part of Aleppo governorate near the Turkish border.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, al-Agal was a well-known commander in Raqqa, the then "capital" of the caliphate in Syria, until the city was captured by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in 2017. In 2020, he reportedly moved to Afrin, where he led a rebel group under the larger rebel alliance of the Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army.

25 July 2022

Damascus: Syrian soldiers killed by Israeli air strike

On the night of 20.07.22, three Syrian soldiers were killed and seven others wounded by an air strike on military targets near the capital. According to Syrian state media, the missiles were fired by the Israeli military on the Golan Heights. Unspecified property damage was also recorded.

Idlib: Russian air strike kills seven people, including four children

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that on 22.07.22 a house in the village of Jisr al-Shoghour was hit by a Russian air strike. Seven civilians were killed, including four children, it said. According to media reports, a Russian war plane flew attacks on five different targets in the region.

01 August 2022

Suwayda: 17 people killed in fighting

According to local media, on 26.07. and 27.07.22, ten members of an armed group working with government security services, known as the Falhout group, and seven members of the local Rajjal al-Karama (Men of Dignity) died in fighting that broke out between the groups. According to reports, numerous armed groups supported by the Damascus government operate in Suwayda, mostly with impunity. The Falhout group is associated with kidnappings for ransom, as well as drug smuggling and arbitrary arrests.

The fighting was triggered by another kidnapping by the group.

15 August 2022

Protests in Turkish Occupied Territories and Idlib

According to several reports, protests, including some violent protests, against statements made by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu took place in Azaz, al-Bab, Afrin, Tal Abyad and Idlib on 12.08.22. On 11.08.22, he had spoken positively about a diplomatic rapprochement with the Assad government. The pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that a security force headquarters in Azaz were stormed and a Turkish flag was removed from the house of the local government and set on fire.

In principle, Çavuşoğlu's statements do not contradict Türkiye's previous position in the Syrian conflict, although it has sometimes been described as ambivalent. As recently as 12.08.22, the Turkish Foreign Ministry published a statement reaffirming support for the Syrian opposition.

Israeli attacks on military targets in Tartus and Damascus

According to the Syrian military, three Syrian soldiers were killed and three others wounded in an Israeli missile attack on 14.08.22. The pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that the attack was aimed at an air defence position near the village of Abu Afsah in Tartus, where Iranian-backed militias are regularly based. However, according to sources of an international news agency, the attack near Damascus was aimed at the Lebanese Hezbollah.

22 August 2022

Northeast Syria: Turkish army attacks leave dozens dead

The Turkish military attacked the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) controlled northeast of Syria several times.

On 16.08.22, the Turkish military launched an air strike in Ayn al-Arab (Kurdish Kobanî), killing at least eleven people and injuring eight others, according to local media and the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR). Reportedly, the victims included several members of the Syrian armed forces.

Also, on 16.08.22, the Turkish Ministry of Defence declared that 13 suspected members of Kurdish militias had been killed in an artillery attack after they assaulted the border post of Çiçekalan near the Turkish border town of Birecik. One Turkish soldier was killed.

On 18.08.22, a drone fired a missile at a volleyball court in Hasakah, killing at least four women and injuring several others. The US military condemned the attack without identifying a perpetrator. According to the statement, a group of teenage girls were allegedly meeting there to play sports under a UN education programme. SOHR blamed Türkiye for the attack and stated that a Kurdish Syrian commander was there at the same time.

Al-Bab: At least 15 dead after rocket attack by government troops

On 20.08.22, according to media reports, a rocket was fired at a busy market in the Turkish-occupied northern part of Syria. The Syrian Civil Defence (also known as the White Helmets) stated that 15 people were killed and at least 28 were injured.

While the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) issued a statement denying involvement in the attack, the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) blamed the attack on Syrian government forces and considered it retaliation for the Turkish air strike on 16.08.22.

According to SOHR, this was the deadliest attack in the region since a fragile ceasefire took effect in March 2020.

Syrian Minister: Syria ready for return of refugees from Lebanon

On 15.08.22, Hussein Makhoul, a cabinet member of the Syrian government, stated that Syrian refugees in Lebanon could return to Syria and count on support from the authorities. Makhoul made the statement during a meeting with Lebanese (Transitional) Minister for Displaced Persons Issam Charafeddine in Damascus. Charafeddine had told an international news agency already a month ago that Lebanon hoped to repatriate about 15,000 Syrians every month in the near future.

UNHCR and various human rights organisations speak out against (involuntary) returns to Syria and warn of the dangers that those concerned may face in Syria. Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International (ai) have

documented human rights violations, some of them severe, that have befallen returnees from neighbouring countries.

29 August 2022

Several attacks involving the US and Iran

According to the US military, two major air strikes were flown against targets in Syria within 24 hours, allegedly targeting the Iranian Revolutionary Guards (IRGC).

After militias loyal to Iran had fired missiles at US bases near al-Tanf in eastern Syria and the Green Village in northeastern Syria on 15.08.22, injuring two soldiers, US Air Force fighter jets dropped guided bombs on nine bunkers in Deir ez-Zor, where militias serving the IRGC were said to have stored ammunition and other military equipment, on 23.08.22. The pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the bunkers were maintained by the Fatemiyoun Brigade, a pro-Iranian militia made up of Shia fighters from Afghanistan. According to the report, at least six Syrian and foreign fighters were killed in the attack.

The IRGC also allegedly fired missiles at the US bases Green Village and Conoco (near the oil field of the same name) in Deir ez-Zor governorate on 24.08.22, injuring a total of three US soldiers. In a counterattack by US combat helicopters, four people suspected of being involved in the attack were reportedly killed and three vehicles including equipment were destroyed.

These confrontations come at a critical time. According to diplomatic sources, the US and Iran, along with other countries involved, are close to reaching an agreement on the resumption of the so-called nuclear deal (JCPOA) with Iran.

05 September 2022

Israeli attack on Aleppo airport

Syrian state media reported that the Israeli military fired rockets at the international airport near Aleppo on 31.08.22. According to the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), Israel fired four missiles at a runway and adjacent warehouses. No personal injuries have been reported. According to SOHR, the attack was probably aimed at a weapons shipment from Iran for associated militia groups in Syria and/or Lebanon.

12 September 2022

Idlib: Dead in air strikes

The pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported on 08.09.22 that the Syrian government had launched air strikes on targets in the northwestern governorate of Idlib. Seven civilians were killed and at least twelve others were reportedly injured. SOHR counted a total of 14 air strikes, including on the village of Hafsarjah in northwestern Idlib (city).

Idlib: Four dead in mine explosion

On 05.09.22, according to the Syrian Civil Defence (aka as the White Helmets), four minor siblings were killed when they triggered an IED while entering an abandoned flat in the village of Binnish. SOHR reported that the flat was in a building that had been used by war refugee families for years. In addition, 176 people have already died from unexploded ordnances in the current year, more than half of them children.

Al-Hol: Blow against IS network

On 07.09.22, a US military spokesperson reported that units of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) had arrested dozens of IS fighters from the al-Hol detention centre and freed four women they had held captive. The report was preceded by a two-week SDF operation intended to dismantle a larger IS network inside the camp.

According to the report, the four women were in a tunnel at the time of their liberation, where they had been chained and tortured by IS supporters. The SDF are supported by the US-led international coalition fighting IS.

Aleppo: International airport temporarily out of operation

A second Israeli attack on the airport near Aleppo (cf. BN of 05.09.22) on 06.09.22 led to a temporary suspension of flight operations. The private airline Cham Wings then diverted all flights to Damascus. Shuttle buses were to take passengers from Aleppo to Damascus. On 09.09.22, operations in Aleppo were resumed.

SOHR reported that the Israeli attack destroyed several warehouses belonging to Iranian-backed militia groups at the airport site.

19 September 2022**Deir ez-Zor: IS kills six SDF soldiers**

The Islamic State group killed six members of the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces after their fighters had captured them near the village of Ruwaished in Deir ez-Zor governorate on 12.09.22. According to a news agency linked to IS, this was supposedly in retaliation for the military offensive in al-Hol camp (cf. BN of 12.09.22).

Health system: Cholera outbreak

On 12.09.22, Syrian authorities announced that hospitals in the capital Damascus had been put on heightened alert after more than 20 cholera cases and at least five cholera deaths were recorded in the governorates of Aleppo, Latakia and Deir ez-Zor. The areas under SDF control in the northeast also recorded three deaths and further cases of cholera. According to initial UN investigations, the cause of the outbreak is most likely polluted water from the Euphrates River. This water is used for drinking, but also for irrigating fields, which in turn leads to the contamination of the food grown there. Syria's infrastructure has been severely damaged by the conflict, therefore large parts of the Syrian population have no secure access to clean drinking water.

Damascus: Israeli air strike on airport kills five soldiers

A new Israeli air strike on targets near Damascus airport killed five Syrian government soldiers and two members of Iranian-backed groups on 16.09.22, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. According to official sources, most of the missiles were intercepted by the air defence system. An air strike on targets at the airport had already damaged infrastructure in June 2022, causing a two-week closure, which also affected humanitarian aid.

al-Hol: Offensive ended after more than three weeks

On 17.09.22, the Internal Security Forces announced the end of a large-scale campaign in cooperation with SDF forces and the US-led coalition against IS sleeper cells in al-Hol camp. During the 24-day offensive, the soldiers arrested dozens of extremists, confiscated weapons and liberated two Yazidi and four non-Yazidi women who were being held in the camp.

Two members of the security forces were killed by extremists' resistance during the campaign.

26 September 2022**Crop losses due to climate change and conflict-related resource and infrastructure failures**

According to media reports, drought and lack of rain in 2022 reduced Syria's already vulnerable harvest. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), only a quarter of the pre-conflict harvest will be harvested this year, with an estimated 1 million tonnes of wheat. The causes for this decline originated already in the past years. The conflict has affected the infrastructure of many farms, whether through destruction or due to the poor economic situation or lack of modernisation, such as the establishment of irrigation systems. Furthermore, agricultural land also suffers from the poor security situation as well as from remnants of war. Due to the global increase in prices for wheat and other crops, the crop failures and the necessary purchases from abroad represent a further burden for Syria's already economically weak population. According to UN figures of February 2022, about 97% of the population was already living below the poverty line at that time and more than half of the population was food insecure.

Northwest: HTS violently stops 'Peace Caravan'

On 12.09.22, more than 400 people who were collectively trying to pass the Bab al-Hawa border crossing from northwestern Syria into Türkiye were forcibly stopped by the forces of the Islamist Hai'at Tahrir ash-Sham (HTS),

which is in control there. The people had set out together as part of the 'Peace Caravan' movement launched on social media, with the aim of reaching European countries. According to media reports, journalists were prevented from reporting. Other sources say that they were even violently attacked. The people participating in the caravan were also beaten and dispersed.

10 October 2022

USA: Three high-ranking members of IS killed

Spokespersons of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the USA have reported that a special detachment of the US armed forces killed three high-ranking members of IS on 06.10.22. The attacks took place at two different locations. In the first operation, US combat helicopters flew over parts of Hasakahs which are nominally under government control and dropped special forces in the village of Muluk Saray, where they killed Rakkan Wahid al-Shammari. This is the first known counter-terrorism operation to be carried out by the US in territory under Syrian government control in many years.

Hours later, two other high-ranking members of IS were killed by a drone attack in the rebel-controlled north. Abu Ala, the deputy leader of IS, was one of those killed.

There were reportedly no civilian casualties in either of the operations.

Cholera outbreak

On 05.10.22 the Syrian authorities recorded a total of 594 cases of infection with the *Vibrio cholerae* bacterium and 39 related deaths (cf. BN of 19.09.22). 605 suspected cases, several dozen confirmed cases and at least one death have been recorded in the rebel-controlled north-west of the country.

The first case of cholera in Lebanon since 1993 was also recorded on 06.10.22. According to the Lebanese health minister, the affected person is a refugee from Syria.

17 October 2022

Attack on military bus in Damascus / raid in Dar'a

Syria's state news agency has reported that at least 18 members of the military died in a Damascus suburb on 13.10.22 when a transport bus was destroyed by a bomb explosion. 27 people were allegedly injured.

It has been reported that Russian and Syrian forces jointly killed 20 suspected IS fighters in Jasim (Dar'a governorate) on 16.10.22. According to Russian media, the fighters were responsible for the attack three days previously.

North-west: Heavy fighting between HTS and SNA

On 14.10.22 fighters of the Islamic fundamentalist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which dominates the rebel-controlled parts of Idlib, seized control of the city of Afrin and smaller towns in Aleppo governorate from the more moderate Syrian National Army (SNA) - a rebel organisation which, in turn, controls the Turkish-occupied regions of northern Syria.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 19 fighters and eight civilians were killed in the fighting. Representatives of the civil administration in nearby Azaz called on residents to resist the HTS.

A ceasefire was eventually agreed under the auspices of Türkiye on 15.10.22. The HTS has reportedly withdrawn its fighters from Afrin and other parts of northern Aleppo. In return, the SNA has allegedly undertaken to reform the structures of the local civilian administration and to remove the military presence from the municipal centres - in particular, the dominant Shamia Front and Jaish al-Islam factions.

Observers note that the HTS is endeavouring to play a more active role in the civilian administration of the rebel-controlled territories, in order to soften its militant image.

Two rebel leaders have warned that the presence of HTS could open the door for Russian bombing. On 16.10.22 Russian combat aircraft shelled Kafr Jana, a village which has been the scene of heavy fighting between HTS and SNA units.

24 October 2022

HRW: Türkiye has allegedly deported hundreds of refugees to Syria

In a statement on 24.10.22, Human Rights Watch (HRW) accused Türkiye of having arbitrarily arrested and imprisoned hundreds of Syrian boys and men and subsequently deporting them to Syria. According to HRW, the victims were forced to complete forms confirming the apparent voluntary nature of their departure from the country, before being taken to the areas of northern Syria under military occupation.

Russia scaling down military presence in Syria

A report citing western diplomats and a high-ranking member of the Israeli defence ministry which was published in the New York Times on 19.10.22 claims that the Russian military recently relocated personnel and equipment from Syria to the Ukrainian front. According to varying estimates, at least 1,200 to 1,600 soldiers, a number of commanders and, in particular, the S-300 air defence system are believed to have been withdrawn. The air defence system was deployed to Syria in 2018, since when it has presented an obstacle above all to Israeli air operations against Iranian targets in Syria. The withdrawn soldiers have reportedly already been replaced by Russian military police units, however.

Palmyra: Mass grave discovered

On 21.10.22 the state news agency, SANA, reported the discovery of a mass grave in the ancient oasis town of Palmyra. The twelve bodies buried in the grave are believed to be victims of IS, which controlled the UNESCO Cultural World Heritage Site in 2015 and 2016.

31 October 2022

UN special envoy: Conflict remains “very active”

In a statement before the UN Security Council on 26.10.22, the UN special envoy for Syria bemoaned continuing violence, an outbreak of cholera and the worst economic crisis since the beginning of the conflict in Syria. He reported that more than 24,000 suspected cases of cholera and at least 80 deaths in connection with cholera had been documented to date. In addition, he noted that the Syrian pound had again incurred a substantial drop in value, driving up the price of food and fuel to new record levels.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), food shortages are rampant, with people in Syria now only able to afford 15 % of what they spent on food three years ago.

Organised return from Lebanon

Lebanese authorities report that more than 2,400 people registered for an organised return to Syria on 24.10.22. Only 1,700 received the necessary permit from the Syrian side, however, and others decided against embarking on the return journey at short notice, as a result of which the final list only contained around 750 names.

According to Syrian state media, ambulances awaited the returnees from Lebanon on the other side of the border, with medicine and food packages.

Abbas Ibrahim, head of the Lebanese authority for general security, said at a press conference on 25.10.22 that more than two million Syrians were living in Lebanon. According to the UNHCR, at least 76,500 have returned to Syria from Lebanon voluntarily since 2016. The UN organisation is not involved in carrying out organised return processes.

Meanwhile, the Access Center for Human Rights, a human rights organisation based in Lebanon, states that 141 cases of non-voluntary return to Syria from Lebanon have already been documented in the year to date. The Lebanese government rejects such accusations.

07 November 2022

Idlib: Heavy attack on camp for displaced people

According to reports in the media, a large tent camp to the north-west of the governorate capital of Idlib was targeted by artillery shelling and air raids on 06.11.22. UN representatives spoke of an escalation of the conflict. A

ceasefire between the warring parties has actually applied for the region since 2020, but has been regularly disregarded ever since its introduction.

The pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) claims that government troops fired around 30 rockets at rebel-controlled areas. According to SOHR, the rockets also reached the Maram camp and other camps for displaced people, killing nine people and injuring 77. SOHR reports that among the dead was a refugee who was only deported from Türkiye to Syria two months ago.

According to government media, the Syrian army shelled positions of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). Syrian and Russian combat aircraft were reportedly also involved in the attacks.

SOHR has reported that the rebels responded by attacking Saraqib, an area to the east of Idlib, and the Al-Ghab plain with artillery and rocket fire.

15 November 2022

HRW: Türkiye contributing to water shortages; cholera

In a statement released on 07.11.22, Human Rights Watch (HRW) accuses the Turkish authorities of failing to allow sufficient water to flow into the Euphrates. The statement further claims that the supply is also inadequate from the Allouk water station, which is located in the territories occupied by Türkiye and which represents an important source of water for hundreds of thousands of people in the region.

HRW states that the territories under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the north-east are already being disadvantaged in the distribution of relief supplies by the central government in Damascus.

The UN and the Syrian health ministry attribute the current outbreak of cholera in the country to people drinking dirty water from the Euphrates and using such water for agricultural purposes. Some 17,000 cases of cholera and at least 49 deaths have been recorded in the territories under government and SDF control. The number of documented cases of cholera in the territories under rebel control in and around Idlib stands at around 3,000.

UN Special Rapporteur calls for end to sanctions

On 10.11.22 Alena Douhan, UN Special Rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures, called on the USA, the EU and a number of involved Arab countries to lift the sanctions which have been imposed on Syria “unilaterally” (i.e. without a UN mandate). She said the measures had further worsened the destruction and the trauma suffered by Syrian civilians, adding that the sanctions were affecting all areas of life in Syria and posed an obstacle to the reconstruction of the country in particular.

Douhan’s statement came at the end of her twelve-day visit to Syria. According to information from the UN, 12 million people in Syria are currently affected by food shortages. 90 % of the population is living in poverty. Once an oil exporter, today Syria is dependent on imports from abroad. The Syrian pound trades on the black market at 5,000 to 1 US dollar. Prior to the outbreak of the conflict, the rate stood at 47 : 1.

Some human rights organisations operating in Syria nevertheless rejected the UN Special Rapporteur’s assessment, instead calling for additional sanctions. The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) complained that Douhan should have called on the Syrian government to first of all cease its human rights violations towards its own people. The SNHR alleges that tens of thousands of Syrians have been killed or have disappeared, without the Syrian government ordering a single investigation.

21 November 2022

Turkish military offensive

Turkish combat aircraft carried out numerous strikes on 89 targets in northern Iraq and northern Syria on 20.11.22. According to the Turkish defence ministry, the attacks targeted bunkers, tunnels, ammunition dumps and training facilities of Kurdish groups from Tal Rifaat in north-western Syria to the Qandil Mountains in the east of northern Iraq. The ministry states that the operation was carried out in retaliation for the attack in Istanbul’s city centre on 13.11.22 (cf. BN of 15.11.22). The military operation goes by the name of Claw Sword (Pençe-Kılıç Operasyonu).

Both the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the military wing of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) have denied accusations that they were responsible for the attack in Istanbul.

A spokesperson of the Kurdish Syrian health authorities has claimed that a children’s hospital which was under construction near to the city of Kobanî (Ain al-Arab) was also hit in one of the Turkish air raids. The Syrian

Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) has documented one civilian death, 14 deaths among SDF fighters and twelve among members of the Syrian Arab Army. The state news agency, SANA, reports “several” soldiers having been killed.

For its part, the SDF supreme command stated that the Turkish attack will not go unanswered. Shortly afterwards, seven Turkish police officers and one soldier were injured in a rocket attack on the Turkish-Syrian border crossing point at Oncupinar-Azaz.

Violent crime in Al-Hawl

The SDF has reported that the dead bodies of two decapitated Egyptian girls were recovered from a sewer under the Al-Hawl camp for suspected dependants of IS members on 15.11.22. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), the girls, who were aged eleven and 13, had been reported missing several days previously. Both the SOHR and the local SDF authorities blamed the crime on IS. So-called sleeper cells apparently pursue people, especially females, who fail to submit to the extremist ideology of IS.

This represents the first murder to be documented in Al-Hawl since the security forces carried out extensive raids in the camp in the middle of September, in the course of which a number of people were arrested and arms and ammunition were seized.

28 November 2022

Damascus: Iranian colonel assassinated

The pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) has reported that an explosive device planted at the roadside blew up in Sayyidah Zaynab, a suburban town to the south of Damascus which is an important place of pilgrimage for Shiite believers, on 23.11.22.

Davoud Jafari, an expert for combat drones and air defence of the paramilitary Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), and his Syrian bodyguard were reportedly killed in the explosion. The IRGC confirmed the incident on its website, blaming Israel for the attack.

According to an international news agency, the incident occurred near to Damascus international airport, which is situated slightly further to the south-east.

Turkish military offensive

The Turkish military offensive which had begun in the previous week (cf. BN of 21.11.22) continued last week. According to reports in the media, five civilians, including one child, were killed in a rocket attack on the city of Azaz in north-western Syria.

There have also been reports in the media of Turkish drone strikes on 23.11.22 which were focused in particular on petroleum plants under the control of the Kurd-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Plants were hit in the city of Qamishli, in the north of Hasakah governorate, and in the area of Rmelan in the north-east of the governorate. The SDF has reported that eleven of its members, 15 civilians and 25 government soldiers were killed in the air strikes.

Türkiye’s president Erdoğan has announced that the military offensive is to be bolstered by a ground operation, adding that this would take place at an “appropriate” time for Türkiye. In response, SDF commander Mazloun Abdi announced on 26.11.22 that all SDF-led counter-IS operations would be stopped in order to prepare the troops for the expected ground offensive.

Suweida: At least four smugglers killed at Jordanian border

It was reported in the media on 27.11.22 that a number of people involved in smuggling had been killed in a large-scale anti-smuggling operation on the Jordanian-Syrian border. Smugglers from Suweida governorate were reportedly stopped at the border by Jordanian military. Dozens of people were apparently involved. Local residents report that exchanges of fire continued throughout two nights. The Jordanian military has stated that a large quantity of the drug Captagon was later seized on the Jordanian side, as well as ammunition and equipment. Shortly afterwards, local residents on the Syrian side of the border region found several bodies in the areas in which the clashes had taken place. A number of people are still missing.

06 December 2022

Suweida: Protesters set fire to government office

Syrian state media have confirmed that “outlaws” stormed the governor’s office in Suweida, capital of the governorate of the same name, on 04.12.22 and burned numerous official documents and files. Opposition media have reported on protests prior to this incident which were countered with live ammunition from security forces. The protests centred on the poor state of the economy, inadequate food supplies and the ongoing energy crisis. According to information from the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), one protester and one police officer were killed in clashes between protesters and security forces and seven people were injured. The governorate, which has a majority Druze population, was for a long time less seriously affected by the conflict in Syria than other parts of the country. Recent years have witnessed an increase in protests in Suweida, however, in the face of a severe worsening of living conditions.

Dar’a: IS leader killed in fighting

On 30.11.22 the jihadist militia confirmed the death of its leader, Abu al-Hasan al-Hashimi al-Qurashi. The supreme command of US forces in the region has affirmed this announcement, stating that Al-Qurashi was killed by Syrian rebels in the south of Syria back in mid-October. He was reportedly staying at a house in Jasim, a small town to the north of the governorate’s capital, Dar’a, when he was tracked down by a local anti-government militia. In the ensuing battle he is said to have ignited an explosive vest, thereby taking his own life.

This is the first time that an IS leader has been killed without the involvement of the US-led coalition to fight IS. It is also the first time that an IS leader has died in the south of the country, rather than in the Islamist-controlled north. On 02.12.22 the state news agency, SANA, reported that the Syrian army had also been involved in the operation.

Al-Qurashi was chosen as the terrorist militia’s new caliph as recently as March 2022 (cf. BN of 14.03.22). IS named his successor in an audio message of 01.12.12: He is said to go by the name of Abu al-Hussein al-Husseini al-Qurashi.

12 December 2022

Fuel shortages: Authorities to remain closed for two days in December

Syrian state media reported on 06.12.22 that the government authorities are to suspend their services on 11.12. and 18.12.22, on account of the acute shortage of fuel in the country. Many employees have recently no longer been able to reach their workplaces.

The ministry of domestic trade raised fuel prices by almost 100 % on 05.12.22, to SYP 5,400 (US\$ 0.93) for a litre of diesel and SYP 4,900 (US\$ 0.84) for a litre of petrol. The prices of subsidised fuel are to remain unaffected by these rises, however. The arrangement whereby the state covers the cost of 25 litres of fuel per vehicle every ten days also remains in force. It has recently been common for only 20 litres to be dispensed, however.

The government blames the current crisis on Western sanctions and supply bottlenecks involving delays of up to 50 days.

A pro-government newspaper has reported that Iran resolved in November to support Syria with three million barrels of oil a month in future. It had previously been supplying two million barrels a month.

Aleppo: Protest after fatal accident involving Turkish military

According to local reports, a woman and a child were run over by a Turkish military vehicle in Atarib, a town to the west of the governorate capital, Aleppo, on 05.12.22. Their instant deaths sparked spontaneous protests among the local population. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), local militias helped bring the Turkish soldiers who were involved in the accident to safety.

The population in the region has frequently complained about reckless driving by convoys of the Turkish occupying forces. The SOHR recently documented a similar incident in which a girl is reported to have been killed by a Turkish convoy near to the city of Ras al-Ayn at the beginning of November.

19 December 2022

Report by UN Secretary-General summarises current situation

In a report to the UN Security Council which an international news agency claims to have received in advance on 12.12.22, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warns of a worsening humanitarian situation in Syria.

The report comes in the context of a impending Security Council vote on an extension of the cross-border UN relief supplies from Türkiye into the rebel-controlled territories in Idlib (north-western Syria). The supply of UN aid deliveries via the Bab al-Hawa border crossing point between Syria and Türkiye was last extended by six months in July 2022. A vote on a renewed extension must be held on the UN Security Council by 10.01.23.

Guterres states that relief supplies to the rebel territories via Damascus, which Russia has pushed for on the UN Security Council, have increased this year. He adds that these supplies are still not on an adequate scale to replace the relief supplied via the Turkish-Syrian border, however. Out of a total population of 4.6 million in north-western
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Syria, around 4.1 million, 80 % of whom are women and children, are believed to be dependent on humanitarian aid.

Throughout the country as a whole, Guterres estimates that 15.3 million people will be in need of relief in 2023. This represents a rise over the corresponding figure of 14.6 million people in 2022. According to Guterres, around 22.1 million people are still living in Syria today. 7.5 million of these are believed to be living in territories outside of Syrian government control and a further 6.8 million are reliant on humanitarian aid.

The report notes that acute malnutrition among children aged between six months and five years increased by 48 % between 2021 and 2022.

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