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Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

4 March 2019

Afghanistan

Suicide bombings and attacks

Combat operations and attacks have been reported in the following provinces: Nangarhar, Laghman (eastern Afghanistan), Jawzjan, Faryab, Sar-e Pul, Balkh (northern Afghanistan), Ghazni (south-eastern Afghanistan), Logar (central Afghanistan), Uruzgan, Helmand, Zabul, Kandahar (southern Afghanistan), Herat, Farah (western Afghanistan), Baghlan, Kunduz and Badakhshan (north-eastern Afghanistan).

Number of civilian casualties falls in February

The Afghan NGO Civilian Protection Advocacy Group (CPAG) announced on 3 March 2019 that the number of civilian casualties dropped significantly in February. According to CPAG, 106 civilians were killed and 59 were injured in 17 provinces in February. There were no casualties in the other 17 provinces.

Forty homes destroyed in Sar-e Pul

According to local residents and politicians, the Taliban have burned down 40 homes of Afghan Local Police (ALP) members in the Sancharak district of the northern province of Sar-e Pul.

Attack on military base in Helmand

In the early hours of 1 March 2019, Taliban attacked the headquarters of the 215th Corps of the Afghan Army in the southern province of Helmand. Besides Afghan troops, US troops and US military advisors are also stationed there. It is a large military base responsible for the provinces of Helmand and Nimruz.

Road blocks

In Afghanistan there are regular reports of connecting roads being blocked by the Taliban or other insurgents or on which insurgent groups have set up checkpoints. Last week it was reported that the Ghazni-Paktia Highway remained closed despite a military operation against the Taliban.

Algeria

Journalists arrested

On 28 February 2019, around one hundred Algerian media representatives took part in a rally in the capital Algiers against alleged censorship of coverage of protests objecting to a fifth term for ailing President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. State and government-loyal media have failed to cover the protests. Several journalists were arrested.

Since President Abdelaziz Bouteflika declared his intention to stand for re-election, protests have taken place nationwide. The protestors are demanding that he withdraw his candidacy. Most of the demonstrations were peaceful. However, the police once again used tear gas and water cannons to break up the crowds in front of the seat of the Algerian Constitutional Court (cf. Briefing Notes of 25 February 2019). On 1 March 2019, about 200 demonstrators and policemen are said to have been wounded nationwide. Bouteflika himself announced on 3 March 2019 that he would stand in the elections but would not rule for the entire term of office. He said elections will be brought forward and vowed not to run in those elections. Furthermore, a

national conference is planned to discuss political, economic and social reforms. The opposition is calling for further protests and has announced that it will boycott the election.

Azerbaijan

Opposition activist freed after two years in prison

The Azerbaijani anti-corruption blogger Mehman Huseynov was released from prison on 2 March 2019 after fully serving a two-year prison sentence. Huseynov who had published a critical article about corruption in Azerbaijan was sentenced to two years in prison on charges of slander on 3 March 2017. His case sparked international outrage. The activist maintains his innocence and says his conviction was politically motivated. In December 2018, the activist was charged with attacking a prison guard. If convicted, he could have been sentenced to up to seven more years in prison. However, the Azerbaijani authorities dropped the charges after Huseynov went on hunger strike and wrote a letter to President Ilham Aliyev..

Iraq

Security situation

On 26 February 2019, a roadside bomb exploded in the al-Nuaimiya region south of Fallujah, some 50 km west of Baghdad in Anbar province, killing at least three persons and injuring three others. The bomb was aimed at a bus carrying construction workers.

On 27 February 2019, a policeman was killed in an armed attack carried out against a checkpoint in al-Houd in the Qayyara area, south of Mosul.

On 28 February 2019, at least two persons were killed and another 28 were injured in two bomb attacks in Mosul. The first explosion, a roadside bomb in the area of Hadhra, about 80 kilometres southwest of Mosul, targeted a vehicle belonging to the Shiite-dominated militia Hashd al-Shaabi, also known as Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF). The second explosion, also a car bomb, detonated near the university in Mosul. So far, no group has claimed responsibility for the attacks.

On 1 March 2019, Iraqi security forces southeast of the city of Rutba, some 280 kilometres west of Ramadi in Anbar province, discovered the bodies of five civilians who had previously been abducted by ISIS fighters on 1 March 2019.

On 2 March 2019, a policeman was killed in a bomb explosion in Hawija District, southwest of Kirkuk.

On 3 March 2019, a Peshmerga fighter was killed by unknown gunmen in an armed attack outside his home in Erbil. Also on 3 March 2019, three ISIS fighters were killed attempting to invade the Iraqi province of Anbar from Syria.

On 4 March 2019, Iraqi forces killed three ISIS fighters and arrested another five as they attempted to invade Iraq from Syria in the al-Jazirah area southwest of Mosul. The five men arrested were brought to the headquarters of Niniveh Operations.

Iran

Teachers' strike

Teachers refused to teach at many schools throughout the country on 3 March 2019. This is already the third teachers' strike to be held in the school year 2018/2019. The teachers are demanding higher spending on education as well as pay increases. They are also calling for greater access to education for all, rather than increasing fees and privatising education. The strike is to be continued on 4 and 5 March 2019. Since the first strike in September and October 2018, more than one hundred educators have been interrogated by the security authorities. Dozens of teachers have been sentenced to heavy prison sentences for their activities.

Israel

Criminal prosecution against Prime Minister announced

On 28 February 2019, Israel's Attorney General Achivai Mandelblit announced that he would bring charges against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The announcement had long been awaited following two years

of investigations against Netanyahu on suspicion of bribery, fraud and breach of trust. He rejects the accusations and presents the charge as a plot by his political opponents. Parliamentary elections will take place in Israel on 9 April 2019. However, before charges are formally filed, the accused will have the opportunity to convince the Attorney General of his innocence in a separate hearing. If he does not succeed, Netanyahu would be the first acting prime minister to be prosecuted.

Yemen

Hostilities in Hajjah

Fighting has been raging for about a month between pro-government fighters of the Al-Hajour tribe and Houthi rebels in the Kushar district in the north-western Hajjah Governorate. Several civilians and fighters have reportedly been killed and many people have been displaced. The coalition led by Saudi Arabia has supported the tribal fighters by dropping supplies and weapons by plane and by launching air strikes against the Houthi rebels in the region. Houthi rebels have held most of Hajjah province in their grip since September 2014.

Situation in Hodeidah

Negotiations between the Yemeni government and the Houthi rebels on the transfer of troops to Hodeidah, agreed in Stockholm in December 2018, are ongoing. The transfer has already been postponed several times. Control of the port following the withdrawal of the armed forces is one of the obstacles. The port of Hodeidah is crucial for the import of goods and humanitarian aid. Despite a ceasefire agreed in December 2018, clashes have erupted occasionally in the city, claiming the lives of civilians.

For the first time since September 2018, the World Food Programme (WFP) has regained access to the Red Sea Mills, one of the most important food storage centres in Yemen. Parts of the camp were destroyed in attacks.

Kazakhstan

Protestors and journalists arrested

Several protestors were arrested by Kazakh security forces during demonstrations in Astana and Almaty on 27 February 2019, according to media reports. Some demonstrators demanded the resignation of President Nursultan Nazarbayev. The protesters accused the Kazakh government of ignoring the needs and demands of ordinary people. For weeks, small protests have taken place throughout Kazakhstan over the poor living conditions. The protests were triggered by the death of five children in a fire at their family home. Both parents were working an overnight shift to feed the family.

In the south-western town of Schangaösen, two journalists were arrested and questioned by the police on 27 February 2019 when they wanted to report on a protest by the local population.

Kosovo/Serbia

U.S. pressing for agreement to be concluded, territory swaps up for discussion again

20 years after NATO intervened in Kosovo, the West is urging Serbia and Kosovo to resolve the ongoing conflict. The dialogue on future relations between the two countries is to be continued in March. The U.S. want an agreement to be ready by June.

Negotiations had come to a standstill in the autumn of 2018, after Kosovo had initiated the deployment of its own army and introduced customs duties on goods imported from Serbia. In the summer, the announcement of a possible exchange of territory had fuelled hopes of rapprochement and a solution. Neither the EU nor Kosovo were prepared at the time to make border corrections on the basis of ethnic criteria, according to which North Kosovo, which is mainly inhabited by Serbs, is to be replaced by the southern Serbian Presevo

region, which is mainly inhabited by Albanians. (cf. Briefing Notes of 27 August 2018 and 19 November 2018).

There is now growing pressure, particularly from the U.S., to conclude such an agreement in order to end the conflict. Meanwhile, the EU reportedly also supports the plan, even though it actually contradicts its principles. Germany is the only country to have spoken out against new borders so far. However, the issue of territory swaps continues to be hotly disputed in Serbia and Kosovo. In Kosovo, Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj and all opposition parties as well as the majority of the population are opposed to territory swaps. In Serbia the nationalist opposition and the Orthodox Church continue to regard Kosovo as part of Serbia.

Libya

Rival rulers agree on elections

The United Nations Support Mission in Libya UNSMIL announced on 28 February 2019 that the internationally recognised Libyan Prime Minister Serraj al-Fayez and military commander Khalifa Haftar had agreed on the need for elections at a meeting held in Abu Dhabi. The two leaders had not met in person since November 2018. No election date has been announced.

Libya's south under Haftar's control

On 3 March 2019, a spokesperson for General Haftar's troops announced that the LNA had taken control of Libya's southern border with Algeria. The week before, the LNA had already conquered the cities of Ghat and Awaynat and the oil fields of el-Sharara and el-Feel. Haftar's troops now control almost all of Libya's land borders except the western ones.

Nicaragua

Dialogue between government and opposition

On 27 February 2019, talks between representatives of the government and the opposition began in the capital Managua. Dozens of detainees were released. Since April 2018, Nicaragua has been in the throes of a serious domestic political crisis. Protests against social security reform and repressive state counter-measures escalated until security forces and pro-government forces violently removed barricades and roadblocks by protesters in July 2018. Since then, the situation has calmed down, while government agencies continue to search for those who took part in the protests. A national dialogue mediated by the Nicaraguan Bishops' Conference, convened by President Daniel Ortega Saavedra in May 2018, has not been continued since July 2018. According to various sources, between 300 and more than 500 people have been killed and hundreds arrested since April 2018. Some 60,000 people have fled to neighbouring countries or have disappeared into the country.

Nigeria

Muhammadu Buhari re-elected as president

According to an official statement issued by the Nigerian election commission CENI of 27 February 2019, President Muhammadu Buhari was confirmed in office having garnered 56 percent (around 15.2 million) of the votes cast in the presidential election held on 23 February 2019. His main rival, former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar, received 41 percent (approx. 11.3 million) of the votes. Voter turnout was just under 36 percent. The defeated candidate Abubakar announced on 27 February 2019 that he would contest the election in court.

Pakistan/India

India launches first airstrike against Pakistan since 1971

The tense situation of the two nuclear powers India and Pakistan (cf. Briefing Notes of 25 February 2019) has intensified since the attack carried out by the Pakistani group Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) in the Indian part of Kashmir (cf. Briefing Notes of 18 February 2019) on 14 February 2019. For the first time since 1971, the Indian Air Force launched air strikes against Pakistani territory on 26 February 2019. According to Indian sources, they were aimed at a JeM training camp.

Pakistan responded on 27 February 2019 with a counterstrike which it says resulted in the shooting down of two Indian fighter jets. According to Indian sources, the Pakistani Air Force flew an attack on Indian territory targeting military installations. India had fended it off and shot down a Pakistani fighter jet, but had lost an interceptor itself in the process. An Indian pilot arrested after the shooting on Pakistani territory, of whom photos taken after the arrest began circulating in the media, was released again on 1 March 2019 following pressure from India and was handed over to the Indian authorities at the Wagah border crossing in the Pakistani province of Punjab.

Fighting continues in the border region

The air strikes were followed by machine gun and artillery fire from India on 28 February 2019. Several hundred families were evacuated from the border villages on the Pakistani side of Kashmir. On the same day, the Indian government banned the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) organisation, which reportedly maintains close ties with separatist fighters.

On 2 and 3 March 2019, fire fighting in the border region continued. According to agency reports, two civilians and two soldiers were killed and two other people were injured in the Pakistani part of Kashmir; at least seven civilians were killed and ten were injured in the Indian part.

Senegal

Macky Sall confirmed as President in first round of the election

Head of state Macky Sall has already been confirmed in office in the first round of the presidential election. According to the preliminary results, Sall received 58.27 percent of the votes in the election held on 24 February 2019, as the National Vote Counting Commission announced in Dakar on 28 February 2019. The former head of government Idrissa Seck received 20.5 percent of the votes. The opposition criticized the election result, but does not intend to appeal. According to the National Vote Counting Commission, turnout was 66.24 percent. System-critical MEP Ousmane Sonko took third place with 15.67 percent of the vote, followed by Issa Sall (4.07 percent) and former minister Madické Niang (1.48 percent). The preliminary official final result still has to be confirmed by the Constitutional Council.

Macky Sall, who has been in office since 2012, promised in the run-up to the election to continue his policy which combines modernising the infrastructure with strengthening the social network for the poorer population. Projects such as the construction of a new airport and the expansion of electricity grids are praised by international donors such as the local elite. His critics, however, accuse him of being responsible for the sharp rise in national debt, as many infrastructure projects were financed with foreign funds.

Somalia

Attacks

Al-Shabaab fighters assassinated a member of parliament in the Karan district of Mogadishu on 23 February 2019. On 25 February 2019, nine street cleaners were shot dead on the outskirts of Afgoye (Lower Shabelle region). This incident is being attributed to Al-Shabaab, as is the murder of two civilians on 27 February 2019 in an internet cafe in the Bondhere district of Mogadishu.

On 28 February 2019, Al-Shabaab fighters stormed a hotel and business complex on a busy street in Mogadishu. It was not until the following day that the security forces regained control of the complex. The attack, for which Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility, officially claimed at least 20 lives; more than 60 people were injured.

Hostilities

On 23 February 2019, the United States Africa Command (U.S. AFRICOM) carried out air strikes on Al-Shabaab bases in Qunyow Barrow (Middle Juba region) near the town of Awdheegle (Lower Shabelle region) and in Janaale (Lower Shabelle region). Two extremists were reportedly killed in these attacks. 35 extremists were killed in further air strikes carried out by AFRICOM on Al-Shabaab positions and training camps on 24 February 2019 near Beledweyne (Hiraan region), 20 extremists were killed on 25 February 2019 near Shebeeley (Hiraan region) and 26 extremists were killed in the Hiraan region on 28 February 2019. Al-Shabaab fighters raided an AMISOM base near the town of Qoryoley (Lower Shabelle region) on 27 February 2019. At least three Somali troops were killed in the fighting that subsequently broke out.

Syria

UN against imminent return of refugees

According to a report published on 27 February 2019 by the UN Human Rights Council on human rights violations in the period between July 2018 and January 2019, the situation in Syria is currently not safe for refugees to return to the country stricken by civil war.

According to the report, civilians throughout the country are suffering from a lack of rule of law. People have been arbitrarily arrested or abducted in areas conquered by the government as well as in areas controlled by rebels. In addition, fighting continues in several parts of Syria, according to the report. In November 2018, for example, the government attacked the rebel area around the town of Idlib, even though a demilitarised zone had been established there. Civilians have also been killed in fighting against ISIS in eastern Syria. A safe and long-term resettlement of the people in their home areas is currently not possible, the report says

Mass grave discovered

A mass grave containing dozens of bodies was discovered near the contested site of Baghus, the last remaining enclave of ISIS. According to an SDF commander, the victims, most of whom had been beheaded, are probably Yazidi. The fighters of the Kurdish-Arab alliance continued their decisive offensive against ISIS in Baghus.

Turkey

Passports of ex-terror suspects reactivated

According to media reports, the Turkish government last week re-activated more than 57,000 passports that had been declared invalid following investigations into the coup attempt in 2016. Passport holders can now travel again, the Ministry of Interior said. It was also said that in total the cancellation of 212,541 ID cards has been cancelled since 2016. During the two-year state of emergency following the coup attempt, the government had invalidated the passports of tens of thousands of terrorist suspects in order to prevent them from leaving Turkey. The government also intends to continue invalidating the passports of terrorist suspects and their spouses.

Charges against Osman Kavala

Last week, the Istanbul public prosecutor's office brought charges against the publisher and entrepreneur Osman Kavala. He has been detained in custody since October 2017 without charges. He is suspected of having participated in the attempted military coup of July 2016 and of having financed the anti-government Gezi protests of 2013. Together with Kavala, 15 other people are to be charged, including Can Dündar, the former editor-in-chief of the anti-government daily Cumhuriyet, who lives in exile in Germany. According to his lawyer, there are five further proceedings against him.

Venezuela

Guaidó calls for mass protests

On 3 March 2019, in a live video address on social media, Venezuela's self-proclaimed interim president Juan Guaidó called on his supporters to participate in mass protests in the capital Caracas and in other cities throughout the country at 11.00 am local time (16.00 CET) on 4 March 2019. He also announced his intention to return to Venezuela on 4 March 2019. Despite an exit ban being imposed on him by the authorities, Guaidó had left for Colombia on 23 February 2019 to escort trucks carrying humanitarian aid across the border to Venezuela, but this failed. He also met U.S. Vice President Mike Pence in Colombia and held political talks in several South American countries. President Maduro threatened to have Guaidó arrested if he returned. Guaidó is under investigation because he appointed himself interim president on 23 January 2019. Because of the proceedings an exit ban had been imposed. On 2 March 2019, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini warned

that if Guaidó was arrested, tensions would escalate significantly. The U.S. National Security Advisor, John Bolton, also warned the Venezuelan government against arresting Guaidós. They said the threat would be met with a strong response from the U.S. and the international community.

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