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Group 62 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

26 August 2019

Afghanistan

Attacks in Jalalabad

On 19 August 2019, the 100th anniversary of the country's independence, at least ten bombs exploded in various districts of Jalalabad, the capital of the eastern province of Nangarhar. The bombs caused at least 66 deaths.

In addition thereto more fighting and attacks occurred last week, including in Logar, Zabul, Ghazni, Farah, Parwan, Kabul, Nangarhar, Wardak, Kandahar, Kunar and Balkh.

Taliban threaten telecommunications enterprise

The Taliban accused the Afghan telecommunications firm Salaam Telecom of cooperating with the secret services of Afghanistan and the US. They announced that they will attack the company's facilities, staff and vehicles and will destroy radio masts and optical fibres. Even the owners of the company's SIM cards will be targeted by the Taliban.

Algeria

Protesters storm the office of the National Commission for Dialogue and Mediation

On 17 August 2019 protesters stormed the office of the National Commission for Dialogue and Mediation. The independent commission had been established by interim president Bensalah to mediate the process which should ultimately lead to new democratic elections.

Protests in Algiers and other cities

For the 27th time since the protests started, protesters assembled in Algiers and other urban centres throughout Algeria on 23 August 2019. Again the protests were directed against „Le pouvoir“ (the ruling elite), Army Chief Ahmed Gaid Salah and generally against corruption and unemployment.

China

Hong Kong: Protests

According to official sources 49 people were wounded during protests that turned violent on 24 and 25 August 2019. The demonstrators erected barricades and threw bottles, stones and incendiary devices at the police. The police responded with water cannons and tear gas. Other policemen aimed at protesters with their guns without shooting. The police arrested 65 protesters which brings the total of arrests since the protests started to about 830.

On 23 August 2019 thousands of protesters formed human chains in the districts of Kowloon and Hong Kong Island. This protest remained peaceful.

On 21 August 2019 several hundred people staged a sit-in at an underground station in Yuen Long district. In this way they wanted to commemorate the attack of protesters by thugs at this place in which over 40 people were injured. The attackers are linked to the triads, Hong Kong's organized crime scene. Although 28 of the attackers were arrested at the time, no charges have been brought yet.

Hong Kong: Abuse of social media

According to reports that appeared on 19 August 2019, social media blocked and deleted user accounts on the internet that were allegedly used from China to systematically spread misinformation about the Hong Kong protests. 936 user accounts were affected on Twitter as well as a network of about 200,000 accounts that had not yet engaged in any significant activities. Facebook deleted five accounts, seven pages and three groups. On 23 August 2019 YouTube announced the blocking of a network of 210 channels.

Hong Kong: British consulate staff member arrested

The Chinese Foreign Ministry informed on 21 August 2019 that a staff member of the British consulate in Hong Kong had been arrested when entering Hong Kong from neighbouring Shenzhen already on 08 August 2019. He was accused of violating public security laws. After spending 15 days in administrative custody (a type of detention the police may impose without a court order), he was released on 24 August 2019. China stepped up the controls on the Hong Kong border. Travellers' smartphones are searched and the photos and news about the protests on the phones are checked.

Egypt

UN anti-torture conference delayed

On 20 August 2019 it was decided to indefinitely delay a anti-torture conference that the UN had planned to hold in Cairo. The decision came after massive protests of several NGOs in view of the situation of human rights in Egypt that indicates that the Egyptian regime will use such a conference either as legitimization and an excuse or it will compromise the UN's entire anti-torture approach.

Ethiopia

National programme to fight FGM and child marriages

On 21 August 2019 the Ethiopian government launched a national plan to eradicate child marriages and the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) within the next five years. The government wants to make available Birr 2.7bn (approx. € 33m). The initiative will include campaigns to raise awareness and more assistance. UNICEF reports that in Ethiopia every fifth girl below the age of 18 is married.

Ghana

Casualties during deployment of security forces

The Operation Vanguard special unit to combat illegal mining arrested several people in Ayanfuri (Upper Denkyira West Municipality in the Central Region) who were suspected of having illegally dug for gold on 22 August 2019. This triggered a violent confrontation between Ayanfuri's enraged citizens and the special unit on 23 August 2019. Two people were killed and two others seriously wounded.

Illegal manual mining (called Galamsey) in gold-rich Ghana is causing environmental problems. Since 2017 the authorities have been taking more decisive action against these practices.

Iraq

Security situation

Attacks are continuing in Iraq. In an attack on an army patrol north-east of Baqubah (Diyala province) on 20 August 2019 an officer and three soldiers were killed. On 22 August 2019 insurgents attacked bases of the Iraqi police in the sub-district of Qara-Tappeh in Diyala province. Iraqi security forces killed six of the attackers in a firefight, four of them were wearing explosive vests. Also in Diyala province, Jalawla sub-district, an Iraqi soldier was wounded by a sniper. A motorcycle bomb attack on a market place in the city of al-Musayib in Babil province (about 60km south of Baghdad) wounded almost 40 people. Another report

said that there were four deaths and 30 injured people. Also on 23 August 2019 a mortar attack of IS fighters in Diyala province killed an Iraqi security officer and injured another two.

Policemen rehired

On 21 August 2019 the Interior Ministry announced its decision to re-employ 25,938 policemen who had been dismissed during the conflict with IS. Minister Yaseen al-Yasiri said that 13,252 policemen in Ninive, 7,636 more in Anbar, 3,462 in Salah ad-Din, 1,072 in Diyala and 516 in Kirkuk are affected by the decision.

Demonstrations in Muthanna province

On 18 August 2019 dozens of people demonstrated in Suweir sub-district in Muthanna province for better basic supplies. They claimed that 50,000 people have been suffering of insufficient basic supplies for 15 years in this region.

Executions

The Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights announced that over 100 prison inmates have already been executed this year.

Iran

AI campaign for three women's rights activists in detention

On 19 August 2019 AI started an urgent action (UA) for the release of the three detained women's rights activists Monireh Arabshahi, Yasaman Aryani and Mojgan Keshavarz. The first two had each been sentenced to 16 years imprisonment in early August, Mojgan Keshavarz was given a term of 23 years and six months. The Iranian women had been arrested in May for handing flowers to women in conservative Islamist clothing on Tehran's metro asking them to treat women who do not want to wear a headscarf respectfully.

Qarchak prison called the "nickname for hell"

Almost 200 inmates of the women's block of the infamous Qarchak prison near Tehran wrote an open letter to the Director General of Iranian Prisons Heshmatollah Hayat al-Ghayb on Saturday, 17 August 2019, saying that they would reject the food provided by the authorities until their demands for better prison conditions had been heard. Qarchak women's prison on the motorway from Tehran to Varamin houses about 2,000 women and some children. The exact numbers vary with the times. No international human rights organisations or independent local observers are allowed to visit Iranian prisons. According to the news agency for Human Rights Activists (HANA) 200 to 300 prisoners are housed in each building in Qarchak and the rules for separating inmates by age and crimes are simply ignored.

Death sentences: Number of executions in Iran among the highest worldwide

The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, Javaid Rehman, reported on the progressive erosion of the situation of human rights which also included the execution of 253 adults and children. Although the number of executions is the lowest since 2007, it is still one of the highest worldwide, he said. Rehman voiced his concern that capital punishment may be imposed for more than 80 crimes in Iran ranging from adultery, homosexuality, possession of drugs, war against god, corruption on earth, heresy to insulting the Prophet Mohammed, none of which are considered serious crimes by the International Pact on Civil and Political Rights.

India/Pakistan

Kashmir: Situation remains tense

The situation in the Indian part of Kashmir remains tense after the abolition of the state's autonomy rights (s. BN of 19 August 2019). With the exception of a few relaxations the military kept all restrictions in force. Up to now more than 100 inhabitants were hurt by the use of pellets and tear gas. Indian opposition parties organized protests against the government's actions. As usual, fire was exchanged along the border to the Pakistani part of Kashmir, also claiming civilian lives.

Israel/Palestinian Autonomous Areas

Attack at water well

Three members of an Israeli family were hit by a improvised explosive device on 23 August 2019. They were visiting a water well between Ramallah and Modiin on the West Bank. One youngster was killed, her father and brother were taken to hospital with serious injuries. Already in 2015 Israeli citizens had been murdered at this well that is located near the Israeli settlement of Dolev and is used both by Israelis and Palestinians. After the assault friends and family of the victim called for stronger police presence. Recently new security provisions have made it increasingly more difficult for Palestinians to use public places on the West Bank, such as water wells, jointly with Israelis.

Kenya

First digital census

As of 24 August 2019 the sixth census since the year of independence will take place and this time it will be purely digital for the first time. The data will be collected via tablets. The questions in the main questionnaire concern population data like age, gender, civil status, handicaps, educational level and training. Kenya is the first African country that will also include intersexuals, after a third gender was officially recognized last December following a heated debate.

The question about ethnicity is considered very critical and caused a lot of discussion already in 2009: 2.4 million Kenyan Somalis were counted. A court confirmed the results after the government had rejected the data as being false. The census also significantly affects the size and number of constituencies in Kenya and might thus impact the composition of the parliament after the next elections.

Libya

Misrata

Targets in Misrata were attacked by several drones on 18 August 2019. In response thereto the Misrata municipal council resolved on 20 August 2019 not to support any negotiated solution of the conflict that would assign any role to Kahlifa Haftar in the Libya of the future.

Fighting around Tripoli

Most of the fighting was reported in the region of Sabea (approx. 50 km south of Tripoli) on 21 August 2019, it seems there were exchanges of fire also in Ain Zara, including several air strikes. On 15 August 2019 the UN announced that since the offensive was launched there had been at least 38 attacks on rescue workers or medical facilities. It seems that a major LNA attack on the strategically important town of Gharyan started on 25 August 2019 which was supported by air strikes, but has not yet led to any breakthrough.

Mali

Soldiers killed

Alleged jihadists killed five Malian soldiers on 21 August 2019. The Malian armed forces 'Forces Armées Maliennes' (FAMA) informed that the soldiers were travelling between the cities of Hombori and Boni when they were ambushed.

Morocco

Pardons on Youth Day

On 21 August 2019 King Mohammed VI pardoned 443 prisoners on the occasion of Youth Day. The pardons included the reduction of prison terms, release of detainees and the conversion of prison time to

finances. Already on 19 August 2019 the king had granted his royal pardon to 262 prisoners on the 66th anniversary of King and People's Revolution Day.

North Macedonia

Country shaken by corruption scandal

Since July Macedonian domestic policy has been dominated by a corruption scandal. Katica Janeva headed the Special Prosecution (or SJO) and was the symbol and heroine of the fight against corruption and organized crime, meanwhile she resigned and has been arrested. She is suspected of having offered impunity to an oligarch (owner of a TV station) against a payment of millions.

This incident discredits the process of reforms in the country that is very difficult to begin with. The Special Prosecutor who also took former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski to court, was the one institution that had credibility with 70% of the citizens. Furthermore Prime Minister Zaev's social democratic government, that has been in office since 2017, is under domestic pressure for the sluggish progress made by reforms of the rule of law. On top there is external pressure after EU accession negotiations were delayed in June because of reservations in view of the lack of action taken to end corruption and the halting judicial reforms. In October the EU heads of state and governments will decide whether accession talks will be initiated with North Macedonia (and Albania).

Russian Federation

Kremlin critic Navalny released from prison

Russian opposition politician Alexey Navalny has been released on 24 August 2019 after spending 30 days in prison. After his release Navalny said in Moscow that the many arrests during the protests of recent weeks merely showed the authorities extreme fear of opposition forces. However, the security forces sometimes brute force could not stop the protests, he said. The critic of the Kremlin had been sent to prison because he had called for an unauthorized demonstration for free and fair regional elections in Moscow. The Moscow protests had been triggered by the exclusion of 57 opposition candidates who were not allowed to participate in the local elections to the Moscow city assembly scheduled for 08 September 2019.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi women may travel abroad on their own with immediate effect

Since 20 August 2019 women may themselves submit applications to have a passport issued or renewed. To travel abroad they do not need the permission of a male guardian anymore. This applies to women aged over 21. The authorities are thus implementing a historic reform for the Wahhabi kingdom with its strictly conservative government. The legal changes proclaimed at the beginning of the month also provide that in future women may register the birth of a child, a marriage or a divorce. They may also become guardians for minor children. In recent years Saudi Arabia started to relax its very strict rules for women under Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman.

Somalia

Elections in Jubbaland

Ahmed Madobe was confirmed as regional president of Jubbaland on 22 August 2019. The election was controversial: The Somali Federal Government (SFG) announced that it would not recognize the election results and is supporting the opposition candidate Abdirashif Mohamad Hidig. The reason for this is that the federal government in Mogadishu wants to strengthen its control over the federal states.

Fighting

Several armed confrontations between al-Shabaab and AMISOM and/or Somali government troops took place last week which claimed a large number of victims on both sides, including civilians: in the area of

Mubarak and Janale (Lower Shabelle region) on 16 August 2019; in the area of Daynuna near the city of Baidoa (Bay region) on 17 August 2019; in Barire (Lower Shabelle region) on 18 August 2019 and on 20 August 2019 in the area of Jowhar (Middle Shabelle region) as well as in Qoryoley (Lower Shabelle region). On 20 August 2019 US AFRICOM flew an air strike against al-Shabaab near Qunyo Barrow (Middle Juba region).

Attacks

On 17 August 2019 alleged al-Shabaab fighters detonated a bomb targeting government officials in Daynile Town in Banadiir region. There are reports that three civilians were injured.

In two separate bombings by al-Shabaab in Mogadishu two government officials were killed and several civilians wounded on 25 August 2019.

Civilians released from al-Shabaab captivity

On 20 August 2019 a Somali National Army (SNA) spokesman announced the liberation of 20 civilians kept prisoners by al-Shabaab in Yontow village, north of Kismayo.

Sudan

"Sovereign Council" formed

A "Sovereign Council" was formed in Sudan to govern during a roughly three-year transition phase leading to democracy (see BN of 19 August 2019). The names of the body's eleven members were announced on 20 August 2019. The Sovereign Council includes five military and six civilian members. It is led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan who headed the military council governing up to now. After 21 months a civilian shall assume the leadership and finally elections shall be held in 2022. Abdalla Hamdok was sworn in as the new prime minister. As top priorities this economic expert named lasting peace, fighting the economic crisis and pursuing a 'balanced foreign policy'.

Trial against ousted potentate Bashir starts

The trial against Omar al-Bashir started on 19 August 2019. The charges against the former president include corruption, violations of foreign exchange laws and enrichment. Allegedly the 75-year-old admitted receiving millions of dollars from Saudi Arabia during his time in office. When searching al-Bashir's residence investigators found the equivalent of seven million euros in cash.

Syria

North-West: Government troops gaining territory very fast

Late in the evening of 19 August 2019 the Syrian army entered Khan Sheikhoun forcing the Islamist militia previously in control out of the city. On 21 August 2019 the entire city was under the regime's full control. According to the Syrian Human Rights Observatory Khan Sheikhoun had about one million inhabitants recently, almost 700,000 had fled there from other parts of Syria.

During the offensive against Khan Sheikhoun also a Turkish military convoy was targeted from the air on 19 August 2019. Reportedly three civilians were killed and twelve more injured. In recent weeks the rebels reinforced their ranks with fighters from the areas under Turkish occupation on the Syrian side of the Turkish border.

Khan Sheikhoun is located on the strategically important highway M5 between Damascus and Aleppo that has been interrupted by the rebels since 2012.

From Khan Sheikhoun the regime's troops advanced further, cutting off the villages in southern Hama from the remainder of the still rebel-held areas. On 23 August 2019 the Syrian army then announced the conquest of Kfar Zeita, Latamneh, Latmeen, Lahaya and Morek. Therefore Hama province is considered to be fully under the control of the regime.

One of the twelve Turkish military outposts is in Morek and currently surrounded by the Syrian army.

On 20 August 2019 the Russian Foreign Minister confirmed that there also Russian ground troops are fighting in Idlib.

On 22 August 2019 the Syrian armed forces opened a corridor in Soran to enable people to leave the embattled zone to resettle in areas under the control of the regime.

Attack in Idlib

A car bomb exploded in the capital of the province with the same name on 24 August 2019. According to the Syrian Human Rights Observatory the incident happened in the district of al-Qusoor and killed two people. So far the city has mostly been spared from the fighting for the province's reconquest.

Confrontation with Israel

On 25 August 2019 at least three fighters for the regime were killed near the Syrian capital when they were hit by Israeli missiles. Israel called it a preventive blow, because these fighters had been involved in the preparation of a drone attack on Israeli territory. Allegedly they fought for the Al-Quds unit of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.

According to the pro-opposition Syrian Human Rights Observatory the victims were two fighters of the Lebanese Hezbollah and an Iranian.

The Syrian army reported the successful interception of several more shells from Israel. Reportedly two Israeli drones were downed in Lebanese airspace.

Turkey

Dismissal of several HDP mayors

Protests were held after the three mayors of the pro-Kurdish HDP party who had been elected in Diyarbakir, Mardin and Van, have been dismissed and replaced by substitutes appointed by Ankara. At least 30 people were arrested. The charges name alleged terrorist links of the mayors to the PKK.

Deadline for registration of Syrian refugees extended

The deadline for Syrian refugees to register that was running out on 18 August 2019 has been extended to 30 October 2019. Thereafter Syrian refugees run the risk of being sent to the region in which they first registered. University students or Syrians working in Istanbul are explicitly exempted.

Discussion about violence against women

On 18 August 2019 a woman was murdered in Kirikkale city: the ex-husband of a woman named Emine Bulut stabbed her to death in a cafe in the presence of her 10-year-old daughter. The crime was filmed and the video went viral on social media. NGOs reported that this year already about 200 women had suffered a similar fate, this generated considerable public pressure to intensify the prosecution of such cases.

Vietnam

Prison sentence

On 21 August 2019 a court in Quang Ngai province sentenced the democracy activist Huyn Dac Tuy to six years imprisonment. He had criticized the government and Vietnam's Communist Party on social media and had been arrested on 22 February 2019.

Yemen

Fighting in southern Yemen

Separatist forces supporting the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and forces allied with the Hadi government clashed occasionally: According to reports the Security Belt Forces took control of a large part of Abyan governorate (east of Aden) on 20 August 2019, including two military bases in Zinjibar, Abyan's regional capital. The reports said that the Saudi-led coalition flew air strikes to support the Yemeni government in Zinjibar. More fighting between both factions was reported on 21 August 2019 from Aden. On 22 and 23 August 2019 the Shabwani elite troops (loyal to STC) clashed with Yemeni government troops in Ataq (regional capital of Shabwa governorate). The STC claimed that the Saudi-led coalition again flew

air strikes to support the Yemeni government troops. There are reports that the government forces are controlling all of the city that had previously been split between both parties. On 25 August 2019 nine people were killed and 13 wounded in fighting 30 km south of Ataq.

Negotiations between the STC and the government

Saudi Arabia is trying to broker peace talks between the STC and the Hadi government, Yemeni government officials, however, refused to meet STC President Aydarus al-Zubaidi in Saudi Arabia. The Hadi government insists that it will only negotiate with the STC after it has returned control of the port of Aden to the Hadi government.

Humanitarian situation

On 21 August 2019 the UN announced that it will have to or already did end many relief programmes in Yemen due to a lack of funds. Currently about half of the approximately 24 million people in need receive humanitarian aid. The UN also cited the bureaucratic obstacles, in particular in northern Yemen in the areas controlled by the Houthi. At the same time the World Food Program (WFP) resumed food distribution in Sanaa after a two-months interruption and is supplying about 850,000 people. The WFP ceased relief supplies after accusing the Houthi rebels of using the food aid for their own purposes.

Fishermen killed

On 21 August 2019 the human rights organisation Human Rights Watch (HRW) accused the coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE of having killed 47 fishermen including children by bombing their boats in 2018. HRW demanded an investigation of the attacks by the UN. In addition, the coalition allegedly illegally arrested several fishermen and tortured them.

Fighting

There are reports that the Saudi-led coalition flew air raids against Houthi military bases in Sanaa and in several governorates on 19 August 2019.

It is said that the Houthi rebels attacked Jizan airport in south-western Saudi Arabia on 26 August 2019.