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Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

3 September 2018

Egypt

Military operations in western Egypt and on the Sinai Peninsula

On 29 August 2018 the military announced the killing of 20 suspected insurgents in an air strike in western Egypt. The military also claimed that 13 suspected insurgents had died in northern Sinai and 18 were arrested.

Afghanistan

Armed confrontations

In many provinces the fighting in the form of air and drone strikes and raids by the security forces also continued last week, just as the ambushes and attacks of the insurgents in some of which also civilians were killed or injured. The most affected provinces were: Faryab, Balkh, Jawzjan (north), Nangarhar, Kunar (east), Badakhshan, Kunduz, Baghlan (north-east), Uruzgan, Helmand, Kandahar (south), Farah (west), Daikundi (central highlands), Ghazni, Paktia (south-east), Parwan and Kabul (centre).

Assaults and attacks

On 27 August 2018 unidentified gunmen shot dead two Afghan air force soldiers in Kabul.

Three civilians died in Kunar (east) when their vehicle hit a booby trap on 28 August 2018, 16 other civilians were injured.

On 29 August 2018 one person died in an explosion in Herat City (west), ten were injured.

The police commander of Farah airport (west) was shot dead by unknown assassins on 30 August 2018.

Unknown gunmen shot an imam in Mazar-e Sharif (Balkh province, north) on 01 September 2018.

On 03 September 2018 at least four people were injured when a magnetic bomb attached to a car exploded in Kabul's 10th police district.

Government crisis, resignations

Within a short time first the security advisor of President Ghani resigned and a few days later his deputy. Furthermore, the defence and the interior ministers and the head of the secret service agency offered their resignations, which President Ghani rejected. The reason given are different assessments of the security situation.

China

Xinjiang: Re-education camps

A media report dated 31 August 2018 says that about 30,000 people are held in five re-education camps in Onsu district (Chinese: Wensu) in Aksu (Akesu) prefecture. This represents over 16% of the roughly 180,000 members of ethnic minorities living there, mostly Uyghurs. The largest of these camps houses about 10,000 people, the report says. Onsu district has a population of about 230,000.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Opposition candidate Bemba excluded from presidential elections

On 27 August 2018 Jean-Pierre Bemba, chairman of the opposition party MLC, filed a complaint with the constitutional court because he was not admitted to stand for the presidential elections in December 2018. On 24 August 2018 the election committee CENI had ruled that he would not be admitted, because he had been convicted for bribery of witnesses by the International Criminal Court in March 2018 and sentenced to a fine and one year of imprisonment. CENI excluded five other candidates in addition to Bemba, among them three former prime ministers. The constitutional court must decide by 11 September 2018 (on the presidential elections see BN of 13 August 2018)

India

Abductions in Kashmir

Last week rebels abducted ten family members of policemen in the Indian part of Kashmir. The media reported that the kidnappings happened in retaliation to the security forces' raids leading to the arrest of family members of rebels.

Iraq

Protests in Basra

On 31 August 2018 protesters tried to storm the Basra provincial administration. Several people are said to have been hurt during the shuffle with the security forces. The High Commission for Human Rights in Iraq informed that nine people had been arrested and two of them released again later.

Since the beginning of July people have been protesting in Basra against the lack of basic supplies, widespread corruption and for better employment opportunities (see BN of 09 July 2018).

Drinking water crisis in Basra

The Health Ministry informed that over 1,000 people had been treated for water poisoning in the provincial hospitals of Basra. The Health Department director of Basra, Riad Abdul Amir, cites 17,500 cases in the last two weeks. Hospitals are warning of the risk of a cholera outbreak. The water crisis is due to the water supplies high content of salt and the poor quality of the drinking water.

Security situation

On 03 August 2018 the UN Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) informed that 82 civilians died and 113 were injured by violence in August 2018. Most affected were the provinces of Baghdad, Ninewa and Anbar.

At least seven deaths and twelve injured persons were the result of an attack on a control post near Al-Qaim on 29 August 2018 for which IS claimed responsibility.

On 30 August 2018 security forces in Kirkuk province informed that two policemen were killed and three wounded in the suicide bombing of a control post.

On 02 August 2018 an unknown gunman opened fire on the faithful praying in a mosque in Salah Ad-Din province. Reportedly three people were wounded.

Parliament convenes

On 03 September 2018 the parliament elected on 12 May 2018 (see BN of 14 May 2018) will convene for the first time. At the same time the constitutional time-limit for constituting a new parliament runs out. Reportedly Muktada al-Sadr and Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi formed a coalition together with other lists which now represents the largest group in parliament. This coalition has not been officially confirmed yet. The government has merely been an acting government since the election.

Iran

Many people holding dual citizenship arrested as spies

Secret Service Minister Alavi informed on 28 August 2018 that the security forces had arrested dozens of alleged spies, many of them holding dual citizenship. Those arrested reportedly worked for the government

in different positions. The minister again called upon the public to notify people holding dual citizenship in important positions. Under Iranian law they are not allowed to hold public office.

Long prison sentences for participation in protest

The reformist newspaper Shargh reported on 27 August 2018 that 21-year-old student Parisa Rafei had been sentenced to seven years in prison for participating in a student protest. The report said that she had been convicted of assembly with the intention of acting against national security and propaganda against the system. Rafei's lawyer said that she had demonstrated against the opening hours of a dormitory at the beginning of December 2017.

In several Iranian cities the country's economic problems had given rise to a larger protest movement in December 2017. The reformist paper Etemad stated that 45 students had been arrested during these protests; at least two of them have already been sentenced to eight years in prison.

Yemen

UNHCR: Violation of humanitarian international law

On 28 August 2018 the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) published a report saying that all parties to the conflict had violated international law and might be guilty of war crimes. According to the report the Saudi-led coalition had caused most of the civilian victims by bombing markets, funerals, marriages, prisons, civilian vessels and medical services. On 01 September 2018 Saudi Arabia cited mistakes related to the air strike in Saada governorate on 09 August 2018 that killed 40 children (see BN of 13 August 2018). The report blamed the Houthi rebels for indiscriminate use of devastating weapons to attack cities. It also said that the UN possesses evidence for arbitrary arrests and torture by all parties to the conflict.

Kenya

Attack leaves five dead

On 29 August 2018 five soldiers died after driving into a booby trap near the border to Somalia on the road between Kinga and Sankuri in Lamu county; ten others were wounded. The method of the attack was the one al-Shabaab frequently uses it in the border region.

Kosovo

Visa-free travel feasible

A majority in the European Parliament's Home Affairs Committee voted for visa-free travel for the citizens of Kosovo on 30 August 2018. The vote followed a recommendation by the EU Commission that considers that all 95 requirements have been met by now; such as compliance with the European minimum standards for fundamental rights and the rule of law. Before the decision becomes effective the European Parliament and the Council of EU Home Affairs Ministers must consent.

Libya

Fighting in Tripoli

Armed groups are fighting for the control of the capital. Last week at least 39 people were killed and dozens wounded. On 31 August 2018 the city's only airport had to cease operations. About 400 inmates escaped after a prison break on 2 September 2018, some of them followers of former dictator Muammar al-Gaddafi.

US air raid

The US military informed that an IS fighter who allegedly participated in IS' occupation of the city of Sirte, was killed in an air raid near the city of Bani Walid (north west) on 28 August 2018. Since the liberation of the former terrorist stronghold many IS fighters took refuge in the smaller villages in the surroundings.

Mali

Senior jihadist killed

A senior leader of Islamic State in the Greater Sahara was killed in an anti-terror operation of the French army. On 27 August 2018 the Paris Defence Ministry identified him as Mohamed Ag Almouner. He was considered to be one of the main decision-makers of the extremist grouping of EIGS (État Islamique dans le Grand Sahara) that pledged loyalty to IS. The Ministry said that also two of the terrorist leader's bodyguards and two civilians died in the operation in the Ménaka region (north).

Morocco

Mass petition after gang rape

In a local TV station interview a 17-year-old recounted her ordeal when she was held for more than one month by a group of young men who tortured, forcefully tattooed and raped her. She was released after her father struck a deal with the perpetrators, at least twelve suspects were arrested. Tens of thousands directed a petition to the king to provide the victim with medical and psychological support. In 2017 the Moroccan courts heard 1,600 rape cases, which was twice as much as in 2016.

Myanmar

UN report on Rohingya

In its report published on 27 August 2018 the UN Human Rights Commission for the first time accused the government of genocide of the Muslim Rohingya minority. Since 2017 about 700,000 people, most of them Rohingya, are said to have fled to Bangladesh where the world's largest refugee camp was set up in Cox's Bazar.

Myanmar denied the allegations.

Journalists sentenced for researching Rohingya deaths

On 03 September 2018 the two of Reuters journalists, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oi, who had been arrested in December 2017, were sentenced to seven years in prison for breaching a law on state secrets. They had researched the murder of ten men and boys of the Rohingya minority committed by the military. Allegedly they procured illegal access to secret state documents. The journalists denied these accusations. At least eleven journalists have reportedly been arrested in Myanmar since 2017.

Nigeria

ISWA attack on government troops

According to unofficial military sources suspected fighters of the Boko Haram splinter group Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA) overran a military base near the border to the republic of Niger in the village of Zari (Borno State, Mobbar Local Government Area) on 30 August 2018. Reportedly the terrorists killed at least two officers and 46 soldiers and looted the entire military base. Military spokesman Chukwu had said on 02 September 2018 that no soldiers were killed in this attack.

Pakistan

Protests against Prophet Mohammed cartoon contest

In response to the Mohammed cartoon contest initiated by the Dutch politician Geert Wilders for November 2018 several days of protests were held since 28 August 2018. 10,000 followers of the Islamist party Tehreek-e Labbaik (TLP) started a march on the capital Islamabad from Lahore in eastern Pakistan to bring it to a halt. They demanded the expulsion of the Dutch ambassador and to break off diplomatic relations with the Netherlands. On 30 August 2018 Wilders cancelled the contest because of these protests and a probable

death threat against him. Thereupon Pakistani clerics declared 31 August 2018 to be a day of celebration with special sermons.

Temporary closure of the consulate in Jalalabad/Afghanistan

Last week Pakistan temporarily closed down its consulate in Jalalabad (capital of the Nangarhar province in eastern Afghanistan) citing continued security problems and political interference by the provincial governor. In November 2017 a Pakistani diplomat was shot in the region and in June 2018 two Pakistani diplomats were abducted.

US cancels USD 300m in aid

The US military cancelled government aid of the Coalition Support Funds amounting to USD 300m. The official reason is that Pakistan had failed to take effective action against armed groups.

Russian Federation

Kremlin critic Navalny sentenced again

After the most prominent Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny had been arrested on 25 August 2018, a Moscow court sentenced him to 30 days of arrest on 30 August 2018 ruling that he had repeatedly violated the law by organising nationwide protests. Navalny urged his followers via Twitter to continue to work for the rally against the raising of the pension age scheduled for 09 September 2018 and not to be intimidated by the state. Also the elections for the mayor of Moscow and the governors of many regions are scheduled for On 09 September 2018.

Protests against pension reform

On 02 September 2018 thousands took to the streets nationwide, such as in Moscow and in Vladivostok, to protest against the raising of the pension age. In their view the softening of the reform proposed by President Putin is insufficient. In Moscow about 6,000 people attended a rally organized by the Communist Party and about 1,500 one organized by the 'Just Russia' party. These manifestations had been allowed by the authorities, whereas those of opposition groups are usually denied because of the restrictions of the right of assembly.

The plans for the pension reform had been announced shortly after the start of the football World Championship in June 2018 and have meanwhile been approved in the first reading by the Duma. The retirement age shall be 63 years for women in the future, instead of 55 and for men 65 instead of 60. In view of an average life expectancy of 67 years for men and 78 for women many Russians are very upset by this move. Young Russians are afraid of negative repercussions on the labour market, because they must then compete with older workers.

Somalia

Attacks

An exploding car bomb that targeted a security officer, who remained unhurt, injured at least one person in Mogadishu on 27 August 2018. At least two Somali soldiers lost their lives on 27 August 2018 when a booby trap exploded in Mogadishu's Hodan district. The car bomb attack on an administrative building in Mogadishu on 02 September 2018 killed at least six people, three of them soldiers. Some of the approximately 15 injured persons were students of a nearby Koran school. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack.

Fighting

On 25 August 2018 al-Shabaab fighters attacked a Somali army base in Daynuunay near Baidoa (Bay region), occupied it for a short time and killed six government soldiers in the course. Somali army units, supported by AMISOM, took control of the village of Dhanaane (Lower Shabelle region) on 27 August 2018 after al-Shabaab had retreated. Jubaland and Somali government soldiers killed nine extremists in a security operation in Burdubo district (Gedo region) on 25 August 2018. On 28 August 2018 heavily armed al-Shabaab fighters attacked a Somali army supply convoy in Marka (Lower Shabelle region). There is no information on casualties.

US-AFRICOM informed that three al-Shabaab fighters were killed in an air strike about 40 km south-west of Mogadishu on 29 August 2018.

South Sudan

Peace agreement signed

After President Salva Kiir and Riek Machar, the leader of the largest rebel group (Sudan People's Movement/Army – In Opposition – SPLM/A-IO), have made an agreement on the distribution of powers at the beginning of August 2018 (see BN of 06 August 2018), Riek Machar signed a peace agreement mediated by the Sudanese government in Khartoum on 30 August 2018. Two days earlier he had still declined to sign. This agreement increases the chances for making peace in South Sudan. However, the parties to the conflict had negotiated several peace agreements in recent years, none of which was honoured.

Uganda

Opposition MP left country

In the night to 31 August 2018 police arrested the MP Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu at Entebbe airport when he wanted to leave for the US for medical treatment. He was taken to a hospital in Kampala. On 31 August 2018 the MP's followers and security forces clashed violently. On 01 September 2018 he was allowed to leave for the US. He is also known under the name of Bobi Wine and had been released from custody on bail on 27 August 2018 (see BN of 27 August 2018).

Ukraine/Russian Federation

Separatist leader killed/peace talks suspended/truce broken

On 31 August 2018 Alexander Zakharchenko, separatist leader of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic, became the victim of an assassination in the city of Donetsk. Media reported that 30,000 people gathered in mourning on 02 September 2018. The details of the assassination are still unknown. Russia blamed Ukraine which denied any responsibility. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov called the assassination a provocation and a pretext to boycott the peace talks. He said that Russia would only be prepared to resume negotiations after the situation had been analysed.

The truce agreed on 29 August 2018 is not observed. OSCE observers reported more than 70 violations since it became effective.

Western Balkans

Increasing number of visa applications

Under the so-called Western Balkans arrangement people from the Western Balkans can apply for a work visa with the local German embassies, if they have a binding job offer and the Federal Employment Agency consents. The German embassies issued a total of 19,294 visas in the first nine months of 2017 (4,702: Bosnia, 4,758: Kosovo, 3,675: Macedonia, 3,613: Serbia, 2,796: Albania).

Meanwhile the number of applications has risen dramatically. Although twice as many visas were processed in the first six months of 2018 (52,000) than in the same period in 2015, waiting times at the embassies are still very long because of the high number of applications, even, if the Federal Employment Agency's consent has been given. Between November 2015 and September 2017 128,000 declarations of consent and 38,000 visas were issued.