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Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

27 August 2018

Afghanistan

Armed confrontations

Occasional incidents occurred during the week of the Islamic Festivities of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha). Anti-government forces fired shells and mortars on five Kabul districts (police districts 1, 2, 9, 10 and 16) on 21 August 2018. Shells hit near NATO premises, the US embassy and the presidential palace. The detonations could be heard during an address of President Ashraf Ghani on the occasion of Eid al-Adha. At least six people were injured. After several hours of fighting four attackers were killed by the security forces, five surrendered. IS claimed responsibility for the attack.

Assaults and attacks

On 23 August 2018 unknown gunmen shot two policemen dead who were guarding the state university in the north-eastern province of Badakhshan.

On 25 August 2018 at least seven people died in a suicide bombing in front of the office of the independent election committee in Jalalabad, capital of the eastern province of Nangarhar.

Taliban release prisoners

Most of the 200 passengers of a coach the Taliban had abducted on 20 August 2018 in the north-eastern province of Kunduz (see BN of 20 August 2018) were released on the next day. The Taliban kept at least 20 soldiers and policemen as prisoners. In the northern province of Faryab the Taliban set free at least 40 members of the security forces they had kept prisoner. In Kandahar province in the south 31 construction workers were released who had been kidnapped two months ago.

Taliban reject ceasefire

According to press reports the Taliban rejected President Ghani's offer of a ceasefire (see BN of 20 August 2018).

IS leader and several IS fighters killed in air strikes

Afghan authorities informed that on 25 August 2018 IS leader Saad Arhabi fell victim to an air strike together with ten of his followers in Chogiani district in Nangarhar province in the east.

In another air strike on 25 August 2018 more than a dozen IS fighters died in Kunar province in the east.

Whereas IS has been most active in Nangarhar and Kunar provinces up to now, it has extended its attacks also to urban centres in recent months. For months US and Afghan forces have targetted IS bases with intensive air raids.

National security advisor resigns

The president's national security advisor, Hanif Atmar, resigned on 25 August 2018. The former interior minister in the government of former president Hamid Karzai had been considered the second most powerful man in Afghanistan for a long time and since the 2014 presidential elections a strong ally of President Ghani.

Taliban leader killed in Kapisa province

On 26 August 2018 security forces succeeded in killing a Taliban leader and his two body-guards in Kapisa province (north-east of Kabul).

Situation in Ghazni city stabilized

The UN informed that the situation in Ghazni city, the capital of the south-eastern province of the same name, has stabilized following the attacks of 10 August 2018 (see BN of 13 August 2018).

Armenia

Thousands protesting for new head of government

Several thousand Armenians took to the streets on 17 August 2018 in the capital Yerevan to manifest their support for the new head of government and former opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan. He marched through the city's streets with his followers and addressed them on the central Place of the Republic stressing in particular his resolve to fight the rampant corruption which had already been quite successful. After weeks of protests parliament had elected Pashinyan as the new prime minister in May 2018. However, his actions against corruption had upset the long-time ally Russia. In recent weeks Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned Yerevan against taking any action against former heads of government and officials for this reason. Previously former Armenian President Robert Kotsharyan had been arrested and charged with rigging the 2008 presidential elections in favour of his pro-Russian successor. On 20 August 2018 Kosharyan was released from pre-trial custody and announced his political comeback. Experts assume that the former president wants to organize resistance against Pashinyan's new government.

Egypt

Former diplomat arrested

On 24 August 2018 Egypt's attorney general ordered the arrests of former ambassador Masoum Marzouk and other members of the opposition. Marzouk had advocated a referendum about President al-Sisi's regime in public and seems to have planned the organisation of a protest. The former ambassador and two other persons had been taken into custody already on 23 August 2018.

Fighting on the Sinai Peninsula

State media reported that security forces killed four suspected terrorists attempting an attack on a police checkpoint near the city of al-Arish in the north of the peninsula on 25 August 2018. Four law enforcement officers died in the same incident. Afterwards the police seized several heavy weapons and explosives, the report stated. On 26 IS claimed the attack.

Ethiopia

Hundreds arrested during riots

The security forces arrested more than 800 people during unrest in the border region between Oromia and Somali. The charges against them include murder, burning down coffee plantations and setting up barricades. Violent clashes over grazing rights have been ongoing for decades and caused ethnic tensions.

Solving the conflict is also important for economic reasons. Chinese investors have discovered considerable oil and gas reserves in the Somali region. In order to exploit them the government needs political stability and effective control over the area. Ethiopia is among the fastest growing national economies in Africa, but exports are lagging behind expectations due to a lack of foreign exchange.

Vatican concerned about the murder of clerics

The Vatican's press service Fides reported that at least six priests of the Ethiopian-Orthodox church have been killed in the Somali region (east) and fire was set to eight churches. The majority of Somali's population are Muslims. Observers think that the controversies about land (see above) are more significant than religious differences.

Israel/Palestinian Autonomous Areas

Israel accuses relief organisation

On 23 August 2018 Israel's liaison office for Gaza addressed a statement to the aid organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) after Israeli security forces had killed an assistant employed by them during clashes at the border. Allegedly the employee advanced against the security forces with a rifle and hand grenades. MSF confirmed the death without commenting on the circumstances.

Investigation

The Israeli army initiated investigations into the death of two Palestinian teenagers who had been killed by Israeli soldiers during protests at the border to the Gaza Strip.

Kosovo

German Federal Army pulls out

The Federal Republic of Germany continues to cut down its KFOR contingent. By the end of 2018 the German army's base in Prizren will be cleared, leaving only a few dozen German soldiers behind.

Since 1999 the German army has been deployed as part of the NATO KFOR mission, initially the mandate covered 8,500 soldiers. Most recently the German parliament extended the KFOR mandate on 14 June 2018. The mandate allows for the deployment of up to 800 soldiers. Of the original 50,000 KFOR soldiers from about 40 countries about 4,500 men remain to secure the peace.

Kosovo/Serbia

Negotiations about exchange of territories according to ethnic criteria

For the first time the presidents of Serbia and Kosovo clearly signalled that they are seriously considering a peace agreement and a related realignment of the borders. Diplomats said that they agreed on an exchange of territories determined by ethnic criteria. Meaning that the mainly Serb populated northern part of Kosovo would become part of Serbia and the dominantly Albanian populated Presevo valley in southern Serbia part of Kosovo. In return Kosovo would be indirectly recognized by Serbia.

The next round of negotiations will take place in Brussels on 07 September 2018. Both countries are intent on EU membership and the solution of the territorial dispute is prerequisite for such membership. Up to now any changes of the borders had been a taboo. So far the US and France have indicated that they are open to a potential exchange of territory. The German government and EU Foreign Affairs Representative Mogherini are against it, because they fear that this might lead to further changes in borderlines on the Balkans.

Libya

Terror attack

When armed men opened fire on a checkpoint on the coastal road near the city of Zliten in the west at least four people died on 23 August 2018. One of the attackers died in the fighting with the security forces and at least two succeeded in fleeing. A few days later IS claimed the attack.

45 suspected Gaddafi loyals sentenced to death

On 15 August 2018 a court sentenced 45 people to death by a firing squad. 54 defendants received five-year prison sentences. The convicted defendants were charged with involvement in street fighting between anti-regime and pro-Gaddafi protesters in 2011 in which 146 protesters were killed.

Moldova

Large-scale anti-government rally

Several thousand people protested against the government in the capital Chişinău on 25 August 2018. The rally had been organized by the pro-European Party of Action and Solidarity, the Dignity and Truth Platform Party and the Liberal Democratic Party in Moldova; it was directed against the voiding of the elections in June (see BN of 02 and 15 July 2018) and the political interference of the governing Democratic Party (PDM) under the leadership of the oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc with the judiciary, parliament and the media.

On 03 July 2018 the EU Parliament had adopted resolution (2018/2783 [RSP]) to express its serious concern about the "further deterioration of democratic standards" in Moldova. The situation is exacerbated by economic problems, the exodus of young people leading to the concentration of an ageing population and in many cases extreme poverty.

Morocco

Pardons for the Feast of Sacrifice

King Mohammed VI pardoned 889 prisoners on the occasion of the Eid al-Adha festivities. It is said that among them are eleven of the 53 sentenced Hirak activists, who were serving prison sentences of less than three years. Also 160 to 188 (depending on the source) protesters of the Al Hoceima demonstrations will be released.

General military service reintroduced

On 20 August 2018 the military service that had been abolished in 2006 was reintroduced. The law provides for 12 months of service for those aged between 19 and 25.

Climbing of the border fence to Ceuta

On 22 August 2018 115 migrants climbed the border fence to the Spanish enclave Ceuta with the use of force. Allegedly they were taken back to Morocco after they said that they did not want to apply for asylum in Spain.

Nigeria

Over 100 female members of pro-Biafra group IPOB arrested

On 17 August 2018 female members of the outlawed pro-Biafra group IPOB protested in Owerri city (capital of the south-eastern state of Imo) for the release of their leader Nnamdi Kanu who is probably held by the Nigerian authorities and for a referendum on the independence of the Biafra area. The police used tear gas to disperse the demonstration. On 20 August 2018 112 of the 114 women arrested at the protest were brought before an Owerri magistrate's court. They were charged with membership in the banned IPOB organisation which can carry a prison sentence of up to 20 years under the terrorism law. Another charge was conspiracy to commit crimes. As the court was not competent for some of these offences the trial was deferred until 03 September 2018 to allow further consultations with the Imo attorney general.

Pakistan

Demonstrations in Kashmir/Shooting at the ceasefire line

Protesters in Srinagar (north-east, capital of the state of Jammu and Kashmir) hurled stones at the security forces in protest against the Indian government after evening prayers at the beginning of the Islamic Festivities of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha). The security forces responded with tear gas and several people were wounded. Similar protests broke out in other cities in this Indian state.

Already on 06 August 2018 there had been a shoot-out at the highly militarized Line of Control (LoC) separating the part of Kashmir under Pakistani administration (Azad Jammu and Kashmir) from the Indian part. The Indian military reported that a group of insurgents tried to cross the ceasefire line and enter the

Indian Gurez Valley with the use of force. Four Indian soldiers and two of the rebels were killed in the process.

Resumption of talks with India planned

The new government of Pakistan intends to resume talks with India. It said that such talks were necessary to re-establish peace in the region and stimulate Pakistan's economy. In the nineties the 'Composite Dialogue' had been introduced between the two nuclear powers, but was suspended after a 2008 terrorist attack in Mumbai, committed by a group that probably acted from Pakistan.

Russian Federation

Kremlin critic Navalny arrested again

Prominent Putin critic Alexei Navalny was arrested in front of his house in Moscow on 25 August 2018. A few hours earlier he had published a blog post calling for protests against the government's controversial pension plans on 09 September 2018. The protests should be held in about 100 cities including Moscow. Reports say that Navalny was taken to a local police station and later to a hospital allegedly because of a broken finger. It is said that a court hearing has been scheduled for 27 August 2018.

Navalny has repeatedly been imprisoned for his political activities. He was last released in mid-June after spending 30 days in prison, a sentence handed down for protesting against President Putin's renewed swearing in.

The planned raising of the pension age is widely unpopular in the Russian population. According to an initiative of Prime Minister Medvedev women shall not reach retirement age until they are 63, instead of 55, and men at age 65 instead of 60. Although President Putin is formally not responsible for the plan as he is the head of state, his approval ratings have dropped dramatically.

Somalia

Attacks

On 17 August 2018 the outgoing supreme commander of the Somali army survived the explosion of an al-Shabaab booby trap in Shalambood (Lower Shabelle region) unhurt. On 22 August 2018 an al-Shabaab suicide bomber attacked an AMISOM convoy with an explosives laden vehicle in Merka (Lower Shabelle region). Thereafter mortar shells were fired at the convoy killing at least one person and wounding several others. One person died and several were wounded by a booby trap attack of a convoy of the defence minister in Mogadishu's Daynile district on 23 August 2018. The minister escaped unharmed. On 24 August 2018 an AMISOM soldier from Djibuti was killed and two were wounded when al-Shabaab booby trapped a convoy in Jalalaqsi (Hiraan region).

Fighting

On 19 August 2018 government units drove al-Shabaab fighters out of several suburbs of Merka (Lower Shabelle region). Two al-Shabaab members were killed north-east of Kismayo (Lower Juba region) in an air strike of the US African Command (AFRICOM) on 22 August 2018.

Puntland reconquers village

On 17 August 2018 Puntland security forces reconquered the village of Af Urur from al-Shabaab who fled without putting up a fight. Al-Shabaab had taken control of Af Urur in July 2018 (see BN of 23 July 2018).

No peace Agreement between Puntland and Somaliland

On 19 August 2018 the Puntland government rejected claims that a peace agreement had been made with Somaliland for the village of Tukaraq (Sool region). Since the beginning of the year security forces of Puntland and Somaliland had repeatedly clashed there. Somaliland took control of Tukaraq in January 2018. For years Puntland and Somaliland have been arguing over the affiliation of the Sool and Sanaag regions as well as parts of Todgheer region. These areas are mainly inhabited by the Dulbahante and Warsangeli clans which belong to the clan family of Darod. The majority of Puntland's population belongs to Darod clans. Most of the Somaliland population, however, belongs to the clan family of Issaq.

Syria

Deteriorating humanitarian and security situation in Idlib

Following media reports the security situation for the civilian population in Idlib province has deteriorated. There are abundant kidnappings for ransom, killings and fighting between rival groups. The reports say that 270 people suspected of links to the Syrian government were arrested by rebel groups on 13 August 2018.

The United Nations World Health Organisation (WHO) voiced its concern about the security situation in the province and warned of the outbreak of diseases like polio because of a lack of vaccinations. The internally displaced persons had little access to health care, drinking water and sanitary facilities, it said.

Warning of chemical weapons

The US mission at the United Nations published a press release jointly with France and the United Kingdom on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the chemical attack on Ghouta (21 August 2013), reaffirming their positions against the use of chemical weapons.

On 22 August 2018 John Bolton, the US National Security Advisor, warned that the US government would intervene if the Syrian government used chemical weapons.

On 25 August 2018 the Russian defence ministry informed that rebel groups had staged a chemical weapon attack in Hama province. It said that the attack was to be blamed on the Syrian government so the US and others could use it as a pretext for air strikes against the government. The pro-opposition Syrian Human Rights Observatory contradicted the statement of the Russian defence ministry.

An independent United Nations investigation committee found that the Syrian government had used chemical weapons at least 28 times since 2013.

IS hostages from Sweida

After IS attacked the city of Sweida on 25 July 2018 (see BN of 30 July 2018) it is still holding at least 27 persons, including 16 children, the human rights group Human Rights Watch informed. Local media report continued clashes between the Syrian army and IS. The negotiations about the release of the hostages continue.

Tajikistan

Journalist released

Journalist Hairullo Mirsaidov was released from prison on 22 August 2018 after a court in Sughd province had commuted his 12 year prison sentence to a fine (80,000 Somoni, approx. 7,300 EUR) and community work. The decision is not yet final and unappealable. Police had arrested the journalist in December 2017 in Khujand for embezzlement, false testimony and inciting to hatred for religious and ethnic motives. Mirsaidov denies the charges saying that he had been arrested because of his critical reporting about corruption in government.

Turkey

"Saturday Mothers" gathering dissolved

According to reports in the media, police dispelled a protest of the so-called Saturday Mothers in Istanbul on 25 August 2018. For more than 20 years the mothers have been gathering in Istanbul demanding information about the whereabouts of their family members that disappeared decades ago. They meet regularly for this purpose and this time was the 700th meeting. The media said that police used tear gas and water cannons. At least 23 people have been arrested for questioning, among them a 82-year-old long-standing participant, the reports say. The reasoning offered by the authorities was that the protest could not be allowed to take place because of links to the banned PKK and that it had not been registered.

Since 1995 the Saturday Mothers demand to be given account for the fates of their family members who had been arrested in the eighties and nineties during operations against the PKK and have disappeared since then. The women and their supporters demonstrate regularly and peacefully. Between 1999 and 2009 they had to interrupt their gatherings, because the police dissolved them most of the time. On 25 August 2018 the police intervened again for the first time in many years.

Uganda

Prominent opposition member charged with treason

On 23 August 2018 a military court dropped charges against Robert Kyagulanyi for illegal possession of arms. But the independent opposition deputy was not released, because a civilian court indicted him for treason. He alleged having suffered serious abuse in custody.

According to different reports Kyagulanyi was arrested either on 13 or 14 August 2018 after a campaign event for the local bye-elections to be held on 15 August 2018 in the north-western city of Arua. He was campaigning for an opposition candidate while President Yoweri Museveni supported a government candidate in the same town. Violent confrontations with the security forces resulted when the followers of both sides clashed. Other reports say that the riots were triggered by an attack on the presidential convoy, for which Kyagulanyi is blamed together with others. During the unrest Kyagulanyi's driver was shot in his car probably by the security forces. Human Rights Watch reported that a total of six opposition deputies, at least two journalists and 28 others were taken into custody, at least temporarily. Since then more protests against the arrests flared up, sometimes turning violent, such as in the capital Kampala on 20 August 2018 to which the security forces responded harshly including by using firearms.

36-year-old Kyagulanyi is a well-known musician under the alias of Bobi Wine, he has stood out as a strong critic of President Museveni and has many followers, especially among the young people.

Ukraine

New ceasefire agreed

On 22 August 2018 the parties to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine agreed a new ceasefire to start on 29 August 2018 to mark the start of the new school year in the Belarusian capital Minsk. The last ceasefire had been agreed in early June for the harvesting period. On 23 August 2018 five government soldiers were killed in fighting against pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine, seven people were injured near Luhansk. According to UN figures more than 10,000 people have died in the conflict in Ukraine since 2014.

Vietnam

Prison sentences for PNGV members

A court in Ho-Chi-Minh city sentenced twelve members of the organisation Provisional National Government of Vietnam (PNGV) that is headquartered in the US, to prison sentences between five and 14 years for attempting a coup. They were accused of distributing flyers and calling for protests. In January 2018 Vietnam had classified the PNGV as a terrorist organisation.

Yemen

Civilians die in air strikes

Civilians are repeatedly killed in air strikes by the Saudi-led coalition. In Hodeida Gouvernement several children and women died on 23 August 2018, the Houthi rebel controlled health ministry reported. Dozens of children were killed by a coalition air raid in Saada Gouvernement on 09 August 2018 (see BN of 13 August 2018). United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock denounced the attacks and called for an investigation. On 24 August 2018 the human rights organisation Human Rights Watch published a report saying that the coalition had not only failed to appropriately investigate war crimes, but even tried to hide them.

Zimbabwe

Election victory of Emmerson Mnangagwa confirmed

On 24 August 2018 the constitutional court rejected the opposition's action for rigging of the presidential elections and confirmed that the election results were lawful. The court did not find any indications of elec-

tion rigging and said that the action had also been filed too late. Opposition leader Nelson Chamisa (MDC), who lost the election, refused to accept the court's decision. He said that he had a legitimate claim to governing and will resort to peaceful protests.

On 26 August 2018 Mnangagwa was sworn in as president. He is the first elected successor of the long-term head of state Robert Mugabe, whom the army had forced to resign in November 2017 after 37 years in power. Mnangagwa had governed as interim president since Mugabe's resignation. Mnangagwa announced the formation of a commission to investigate the outbreaks of violence after the election (see BN of 06 August 2018).

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