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Group 62 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

1 April 2019

Afghanistan

Possible risks of a peace agreement

According to the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), the peace progress reached so far could be at risk in case a peace deal is struck with the Taliban and especially if the Islamists take part in government. One of the main points of concern is that a peace deal might be a threat to women's rights which are endangered in any case. The restrictions imposed on women during the Taliban rule from 1994 to 2001 are still vividly remembered. Also, reconstruction efforts might be undermined by the reintegration of fighters and the enduringly poor economic situation. Other points of concern include widespread corruption and illicit opium trade.

Rising number of attacks on health facilities

The WHO says that as of 28 March 2019, a total of 31 attacks were targeted on medical personnel and facilities in 12 provinces. 98 health facilities were damaged, 87 had to be closed down, and only 27 were reopened.

Taliban take control of district in Badakhshan province

After several days of intense fighting, Taliban militants have captured the Arghanj Khaw district in the country's northeastern province of Badakhshan. Members of the provincial government are afraid that the Taliban are now in a position to attack Badakhshan's capital Faizabad.

Algeria

Protests / new transitional government formed

For the sixth weekend in a row, people took to the street in protest against the current government. After the country's power elites, who so far had been in support of President Bouteflika, turned against him and demanded his resignation, the President announced an interim government on 31 March 2019. The interim cabinet consists of six former and 21 new ministers. On 11 March, Noureddine Bedoui had been appointed as the country's new Prime Minister. Army chief and vice defence minister Ahmed Gaid Salah remained in office. On 26 March, Salah called on both the constitutional court and the parliament to declare President Bouteflika unfit to rule for medical reasons pursuant to Article 102 of the Algerian constitution. Also, Bedoui's predecessor Ahmed Ouyahia, head of the National Rally for Democracy RND movement, recently called for President Bouteflika's resignation in order to pave the way for a transitory process.

Burkina Faso

Killings of civilians by security forces and armed Islamists

A report released on 22 March 2019 by Human Rights Watch titled 'We Found Their Bodies Later that Day': Atrocities by Armed Islamists and Security Forces in Burkina Faso's Sahel Region, says that between mid-2018 and February 2019, a total of 42 civilians were killed by Islamist groups, most of them for being suspected of cooperating with the government and supporting the formation of self-defence groups. The

atrocities occurred in 32 villages in the Sahel region. Another 166 men were shot dead by security forces for having supported or given shelter to armed jihadists. The government has pledged to investigate the allegations. In view of the rising number of terror attacks, a state of emergency was declared in January 2019 in more than 14 of a total of 45 provinces in the northern and eastern parts of the country.

Cameroon

Crisis in Anglophone Cameroon

A report by Human Rights Watch released on 28 March 2019 (Cameroon: New Attacks on Civilians By Troops, Separatists) says that since October 2018, at least 170 civilians have been killed in more than 220 incidents, and hundreds of homes have been torched in English-speaking western Cameroon. At least 31 members of the security forces were killed in operations between October 2018 and February 2019, the organisation reports. Two civilians were beaten to death by armed separatists. In twelve incidents, more than 200 pupils under 18 were kidnapped for ransom and released after the money was paid.

Egypt

30 men sentenced for church attack plot

Apparently, the defendants had planned a suicide bombing on a church in the city of Alexandria and received training by the Islamic State terror group both in Egypt and abroad. The sentence was announced by the competent court on 30 March 2019. The defendants were convicted to prison terms of 10, 15 and 25 years. Ten of them were sentenced in absentia.

Prominent human rights activist released from jail

On 29 March 2019, prominent Egyptian activist and blogger Alaa Abd El-Fattah was released from prison after serving a five-year sentence. He had been convicted for participation in illegal and presumably violent protests against trials of civilians before military tribunals in 2014. Until his detention, he had contributed to independent news portals like Mada Masr and the newspaper Al-Shorouk. In 2014, he was nominated for the European Parliament's Sakharov human rights prize. Under the terms of probation imposed on him, Alaa Abd El-Fattah is now required to spend the night at a police station from 6pm to 6am for the next five years.

India

Incidents in Jammu and Kashmir

Eight members of the paramilitary special forces active in Jammu and Kashmir have lost their lives in operations in Baramulla, Bandipore and Shopian districts. In a similar operation, one civilian was killed. In the capital of Srinagar and also in Pulwama district, protests were triggered by the death of a school principal in police custody after he was detained for suspected connections to the recently banned Islamist organisation Jamaat-e-Islami (JI).

Incidents ahead of parliamentary elections

In the run-up to the parliamentary elections beginning in April, the parties have now announced their candidate lists. In several cases, supporters of applicants who did not make it to the list violently expressed their dissatisfaction with the party. Reports of attacks at party offices and on supporters of competing candidates came from Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Tripura and West Bengal.

Iraq

Security situation

On 23 March 2019, IS militants killed a civilian searching for mushrooms and wounded another individual in Anbar province. In cooperation with the Iraqi security forces, the international coalition is continuing airstrikes against IS fighters in Anbar province.

On 25 March 2019, IS militants attacked an oil field in Salah ad-Din province. With the support of PMU units, the attack was repelled; apparently, several IS fighters were killed in the operation, others escaped. On 1 April 2019, four IS members were detained in Kirkuk. Apparently, the four individuals had found shelter among families expelled from Ninewa province. Security incidents and military operations against IS insurgents have mainly been reported from Anbar, Ninewa, Kirkuk, Salah ad-Din and Diyala provinces and occasionally also from Baghdad.

PKK headquarters in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) shelled by Turkish jets

On 30 March 2019, the Turkish defence ministry confirmed that Turkish warplanes have shelled PKK sites in the Qandil Mountains as well as in the regions of Harkuk and Avasin-Basyan in the KRI. Kurdish media report that the affected villages are demanding intervention from the regional government of Kurdistan. Although the latest incidents have not claimed any lives, there is widespread fear and also a lot of material damage, the reports say. Local inhabitants demand protection from both the PKK and Turkish airstrikes.

Visa waiver agreements between Iraq and Iran

As from 1 April 2019, Iran waives all visa fees for Iraqi citizens (including the Kurdistan Region of Iraq). Iranian visas will be given to Iraqis in the form of a sticker rather than a stamp on the passport. Before, the Iraqi federal government had decided to waive visa fees for Iranian nationals.

Israel/Palestinian Autonomous Areas

Mass protests claim four lives

On 30 March 2019, a huge rally at the Gaza border marked the first commemoration of weekly demonstrations (usually taking place on a Friday) demanding the opening of the border and the right to return to Israel territory. The protests, this time attended by at least 30,000 people, were more peaceful than many had expected. Ahead of the demonstrations, the Israeli military had reinforced parts of the border fence and moved additional soldiers to the site. On the Palestinian side, Hamas officials organised personnel in orange vests to prevent protesters from approaching the border fence. Despite these efforts, 316 injured and four deaths were registered by the Gaza health ministry on that day.

Libya

Municipal elections were held on 30 March 2019 in the communities of Wadi Utba, Bent Baya, Zuwara, Batin Al-Jabal, Al-Qalaa, Al-Riyana, Nalut, Al-Hawamid and Ghadames. Preparations are underway for local elections in the whole country. In the areas controlled by Khalifa Haftar, however, municipal councils were replaced over the last years with military figures.

Nicaragua

Peace agreement reached

On 29 March 2019, government and opposition delegates signed an agreement on the release of all protesters detained during the internal political conflict which started in April 2018. Facilitated by the International Committee of the Red Cross, the release process is scheduled to apply retroactively from 20 March 2019 and be completed within 90 days. In a first step, the number of political detainees is to be agreed on. While the opposition lists 647 detainees, the official Truth, Justice and Peace Commission (CVJP) has registered only 261 prisoners.

Nigeria

Armed attacks at several villages claim more than 40 lives

On 30 March 2019, armed men attacked the villages of Kursasa, Kurya and Gidan Achali in the Shinkafi Local Government Area (northwestern Zamfara State). Villagers say that more than 40 people, mostly farmers, were killed in the event. Police says that only 10 persons were killed on a farm in Kursasa village.

Court issues arrest warrant against Nnamdi Kanu

On 28 March 2019, the Federal High Court in Abuja issued an arrest warrant against Nnamdi Kanu, leader of the banned separatist organisation IPOB (Indigenous People of Biafra). At the same time, the court revoked the release on bail for health reasons granted to Kanu in April 2017, because he had repeatedly failed to obey the courts citations. The IPOB leader is accused of high treason and had been imprisoned for more than 1½ years before being released on bail. Since 14 September 2017, when his parents' estate in Umuahia (Abia State) was stormed by soldiers, his whereabouts have been unknown. It was only on 19 October 2018 that photos appeared in social media showing him praying at the wailing wall in Jerusalem and later in the United Kingdom.

Pakistan

Attacks and assaults

Cross-border fire in the disputed border region of Kashmir has killed two Indian and at least 12 Pakistani soldiers.

An attack of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) fighters on a checkpoint in Balochistan Province claimed the lives of six members of the security forces.

'Honour killing' whistle-blower shot dead

On 6 March 2019, a popular activist against 'honour killings' was shot dead on a market place in Abbottabad city (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province).

In rural regions, honour killings are often committed on the basis of decisions taken by traditional tribal councils (Jirgas). A Jirga can be convened after presumed honour crimes. Any meeting between a woman and a man belonging to different tribes can be regarded as an offence of common decency and be punished with death.

College Professor killed over alleged blasphemy

A student at a college in Bahawalpur (Punjab Province) has killed his professor over alleged blasphemy. The lecturer had planned to organize a joint course for male and female students and to encourage exchange between them. After the teacher was killed, demonstrations were organised by members of the teachers' association in the whole province.

Russian Federation

On 26 March 2019, more than 10,000 people took to the streets in Ingushetia's capital of Magas against an agreement allowing for a land swap between Ingushetia and the neighbouring Russian republic of Chechnya. The protesters demanded Ingushetia's President Yunus-bek Yevkurov to resign and called for a referendum on the agreement. Media report that on the following day, violent clashes erupted between security forces and protesters, leaving with several people injured.

Protests against the agreement had already erupted in September 2018, after Yevkurov and Ramsan Kadyrov, the President of the Russian republic of Chechnya, had concluded the agreement and both parliaments had approved it. At the time, Ingushetia's constitutional court and parts of the police had taken the protesters' side.

Somalia

Attacks

On 23 March 2019, al-Shabab fighters attacked a government building hosting two ministries in Mogadishu. Several people including a deputy minister were killed by two explosions and a subsequent gunfight between the terrorists and Somali security forces. Also in Mogadishu, an al-Shabab bomb attack at two checkpoints manned with security forces killed 4 soldiers and injured several civilians.

On 26 March 2019, a car blast killed at least one individual and injured two others in Mogadishu.

On 28 March 2019, al-Shabab fighters detonated an explosives-laden vehicle in front of a restaurant near the Wehliye Hotel on Maka al-Mukarama Road in Mogadishu's Howl-Wadag district. At least 15 people lost their lives in the attack.

Al-Shabab seizes town surroundings

Al-Shabab claims to have seized several areas near the town of Bal'ad in Middle Shabelle region (north of Mogadishu) after the Somali National Army (SNA) withdrew from there. Reports say that the SNA forces abandoned their positions after a dispute over wage payments.

Executions carried out by al-Shabab

On 27 March 2019, al-Shabab apparently executed five individuals for espionage in the area of Yaq Barawe (Bay region). On 31 March 2019, the extremists reportedly killed four more individuals for espionage in Kamsuma, Lower Jubba region.

UN extends UNSOM mandate

On 27 March 2019, the UN Security Council extended the mandate of its support mission for Somalia (UNSOM) until 31 March 2020.

Somalia/Kenya

Plans to close Dadaab refugee camp

According to an internal UN document, the Kenyan government plans to close down the Dadaab refugee camp by the end of August. The camp hosts approx. 230,000 people, mainly refugees from Somalia. However, this is not the first time that the government has announced plans to close the camp. Already in 2016, such plans had been announced, referring to security problems due to al-Shabab activities. Following the announcement, ten thousands of refugees returned to Somalia. However, in 2017 the Kenyan High Court ruled that the decision to close the camp was unconstitutional and in breach of Kenya's international legal obligations, amounting to the persecution of refugees.

Syria

Israeli air raids

Syrian state media report that on 27 March 2019, Israel launched an attack at targets near Aleppo, which was fended off by the Syrian air defence. Apparently, the raid targeted an industrial complex northeast of Aleppo. According to the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the Israeli airstrike hit some ammunition depots belonging to the Iranian troops and their allies, causing several huge explosions, and killing at least seven fighters associated with Iran. The Syrian Times reports that the missiles caused only material damage.

Turkey

Municipal elections

The state TV station TRT reports that in the nation-wide local elections held on 31 March 2019, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's AKP party has won most votes overall, but was defeated by the opposition in the capital Ankara. For 25 years, the city has been governed by the AKP and its predecessor party, but now the

candidate of the opposition party CHP Mansur Yavas secured around 51% of the votes cast. Also in the country's third largest city of Izmir, the centre-left opposition party is on the verge of victory; in Istanbul, a head-to-head race has not yet been decided, with vote counting still continuing. For President Erdogan, the municipal elections were an important test. While he had been able to consolidate power by winning the general elections of June 2018, the country is at present stuck in an economic crisis with a double-digit inflation rate and a rapid surge in food-prices. On Sunday night, the President appeared before thousands of cheering supporters declaring that the AKP had won the mayoral elections in 16 big cities, not mentioning however which cities. In the 2014 local elections, the AKP had secured 18 big cities. A dispute arose in a polling station in the eastern Anatolian city of Malatya; in the incident, two election observers of the small opposition Saadet Party were shot dead. A suspect individual was arrested.

Gülen supporters forcibly returned from abroad

On 27 March 2019, interior minister Soylu stated that following the attempted coup in 2016, the Turkish government made 504 extradition requests to 91 countries and that a total of 107 escaped terror suspects have been returned to Turkey meanwhile. In the eyes of the Turkish government, terror suspects is any individual with alleged connections to the Gülen movement. Human rights activists, however, criticise the circumstances of these alleged public enemies' returns, which are often unclear; in their view, these returns often resemble abductions. In summer 2018, for example, media had reported the attempted kidnapping of a Turkish school principal in Mongolia. These accusations were rejected by the Turkish authorities. Similar cases and deportations of alleged Gülen supporters were reported among others from Kosovo, Ukraine, Gabon, Pakistan, Malaysia and Azerbaijan.

Suicide of female Kurdish prisoner

Media report that last week, a female Kurdish prisoner committed suicide in protest against the solitary confinement of PKK founder Abdullah Ocalan. A representative of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Party of Peoples (HDP) stated that Ms Medya Cinar's suicide came after three suicides of prisoners since November 2018 in protest against the prison conditions of the former PKK leader. In the beginning of November, HDP MP Leyla Güven had started a hunger strike to protest against Ocalan's prison conditions; meanwhile many Kurdish prisoners have joined her strike.

Ukraine

Second round of voting required in presidential elections

None of the 39 candidates secured absolute majority in the presidential elections held on 31 March 2019. With more than half of the ballots counted, presidential candidate Volodymyr Zelenskiy took the lead in the first round with approx. 30 percent, followed by current leader Petro Poroshenko (16.3 percent) and former head of government Yulia Tymoshenko (14 percent). After the release of the official final results scheduled for 10 April, a runoff between Volodymyr Zelenskiy and Petro Poroshenko is expected to take place on 21 April. Both the actor and comedian Zelenskiy and the current President are explicit about Ukraine's pro-Western orientation. Already weeks before the elections, opinion polls showed Zelenskiy ahead of the President in both voting rounds. In the election night, Yulia Tymoshenko who surprisingly came third contested the results, claiming that the elections were falsified and that she had secured the second place. The election day itself passed rather smoothly; there were only sporadic allegations of vote-rigging. The election process was monitored by hundreds of OSCE observers. Ahead of the elections, the OSCE had voiced concerns with regard to the security situation for journalists. Numerous foreign correspondents had been denied entry to Ukraine, among them reporters from EU Member States.

Venezuela

Protests

On 30 March 2019, anti-Maduro protests were again staged in several cities of the country; in several instances, the rallies were violently dispersed.

New power cuts

Again, large parts of the population have been suffering from massive power cuts. From 25 to 30 March 2019, nearly all federal states were affected by widespread blackouts. While the government continued to blame cyber attacks or other sophisticated weapon technology for the power failure, opposition members and international observers see the main causes of the problem in poor maintenance, incompetent management and a lack of specialists.

President Maduro has announced that his country will ration electricity for a time period of 30 days.

Guaidó barred from public office

On 28 March 2019, Venezuela's auditor general Elvis Amoroso barred opposition leader Juan Guaidó from holding public office for 15 years.

Red Cross set to begin aid

On 29 March 2019, the Red Cross said that it can begin distributing crucial aid supplies to Venezuela within 15 days.

Yemen**Fighting in Hodeidah**

On 24 and 25 March 2019, clashes between Houthi rebels and government forces claimed the lives of at least eight individuals, among them civilians.

Attack at hospital

Eight people, five of them children, were killed in an airstrike hitting a hospital in Kitaf district, Saadah governorate. The blast also injured eight people.

10,000 families displaced

Media report that more than 10,000 families have been displaced after fights between Houthi rebels and government troops in Hajjah governorate. The fiercest clashes have occurred in Hajjah's Kusha district close to the border with Saudi-Arabia.

Cholera

Humanitarian aid organisations are deeply concerned by a huge rise in suspected cholera cases. More than 100,000 suspected cholera cases and over 200 deaths have been registered in the last three months. A third of all cases concern children under five.

Protests

On 26 March 2019, thousands of demonstrators gathered in the Houthi-controlled capital of Sanaa to support the rebels. There were also reports of protests in other cities, among them Hodeidah. This day marked the 4th anniversary of the Saudi-led war on Yemen which had started with airstrikes against the Houthi-rebels.

Fights between IS and al-Qaida

Between 24 and 28 March 2019, Islamic State in Yemen (IS-Y) and al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) clashed in the western part of al-Bayda governorate. AQAP claims to have seized Jabal al-Sawa and Aqaba al-Sulul areas from IS-Y.