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Group 62 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

3 June 2019

Afghanistan

Attacks in Kabul

On 30 May 2019, a suicide bomber blew himself up at the entrance of the Marshal Fahim National Defence University, killing at least 6 people and injuring another 16. The IS militant group has claimed responsibility for the attack. On 31 May, at least 7 civilians were killed or injured in an attack launched in the eastern parts of the capital (5th police district, near the Education University). A further attempted attack in the 12th police district (Bot Khak area) was successfully prevented.

Increasing importance of “Islamic State in the Khorasan Province” ISKP

US reports say that the number of IS fighters in Afghanistan has risen to around 5,000; this figure is five times as high as last year. Afghan government circles say that the IS militant group is benefitting from the rising number of fighters in Pakistan and Uzbekistan and also from fighters who have escaped from Syria. Additionally, IS is recruiting disappointed Taliban followers and young people without future prospects. At present, IS has terror cells in Kabul and fighters in the two eastern provinces of Nangarhar and Kunar.

Algeria

Presidential elections postponed

As the only two candidates who registered for the presidential elections scheduled to be held on 4 July 2019 did not meet the required preconditions, Algeria’s constitutional council has postponed the voting. Interim President Bensalah needs to set a new election date before the expiry of his term of office on 9 July 2019.

Cameroon

Anglophone crisis: At least 1,850 people killed since September 2017

In its report “Cameroon’s Anglophone Crisis: How to Get to Talks?” published on 2 May 2019, the International Crisis Group states that, to its knowledge, at least 1,850 people have been killed in the crisis in the two English-speaking regions Northwest and Southwest since September 2017; the victims include 650 civilians, 235 soldiers and policemen and almost 1000 suspected separatists. 530,000 people have been displaced within Cameroon and 35,000 have fled to neighbouring Nigeria. More than 170 villages have been destroyed.

More than 350 supporters of the Cameroon Renaissance Movement arrested

On 1 June 2019, security forces arrested at least 350 “Mouvement pour la Renaissance du Cameroun” MRC supporters who had participated in demonstrations banned by the authorities in the cities of Yaoundé, Douala, Bafoussam and Bagangte. The protesters demanded the release of their party leader and of over 100 MRC members/supporters who have been held in detention since January 2019.

DR Congo

23 ADF rebels killed

On 30 May 2019, an army spokesman stated that in the early hours of the morning, the Islamist rebel group Allied Democratic Forces ADF attacked military positions in the town of Ngite-Mavivi (eastern North Kivu province). In the clashes, 26 rebels were killed, the spokesman said. AFP news agency reported that on the same day, the army showed the bodies of 23 suspected ADF fighters in the town of Beni. Also on 30 May, the IS terror group claimed that fighters in its central African province killed dozens of soldiers in attacks on three military bases near Mavivi and that they were able to return to their initial positions without any losses. There has been no independent confirmation of this statement.

Egypt

HRW report on the Sinai conflict

On 28 May 2019, HRW published a report on the current situation of the Sinai conflict entitled “If You Are Afraid for Your Lives, Leave Sinai!” Apart from the documentation of abuses committed by IS militants, the report contains accusations against the Egyptian state for various crimes, among them enforced disappearances and arrests of children, forced evictions and torture. At least 3 people have been killed by the security forces while in detention, HRW says. Since 2013, the conflict has been escalating in North Sinai, where so far around 3,000 people have lost their lives.

Iran

Publishing paper shortage

In a letter to President Hassan Rouhani, several managers of pro-government newspapers have voiced concern about the looming end of print media due to the severe paper shortage. Since 12 May 2019, the daily ‘Hamshahri’ has had fewer pages. Already before, several newspapers had reduced their pages. On 6 May 2019, ‘Jahan-e-Sanat’ newspaper published the headline “We do not have any paper” on its front page. Iranian semi-official ISNA news agency says that some newspapers are considering to close down their business.

Artists protest

Around 2,000 musicians have signed an open letter to minister of culture Djannati and to the majlis (parliament) in protest against the government’s interference with artistic creation. It was high time that the government terminated its security policy measures against musicians and other artists, the letter said. The reason for this letter is a new law which was passed by parliament in February, stipulating that a 10 percent share of the profits of all concerts in large cities be paid to the state. Since the revolution of 1979, the Iranian government is holding a firm grip on cultural and artistic freedom, with the ministry for culture and Islamic guidance (Ershad) having the task to Islamise the cultural and artistic scene and to cut short any un-Islamic efforts. Making music is disputed among the Shiite scholars: While some of them consider serious music as unproblematic, others insist on allowing only religious music played with certain instruments.

Iraq

Explosions in Kirkuk

On 30 May 2019, a series of improvised explosive devices went off in the centre of Kirkuk, killing at least 3 people and wounding another 16. Just before the explosions hit, the security forces had been able to deactivate two more devices.

Threatening letter to parliamentary speaker al-Halbousi

Local media report that Iraqi parliamentary speaker al-Halbousi has received a threat letter due to his position as mediator in the US-Iranian crisis. There are indications that the letter was sent by members of the Hezbollah brigades.

Threats against journalist

On 26 May 2019, Nabil Jassim, a locally renowned journalist and head of the Iraqi news agency Baghdad Today, reported that he had received phone threats. Before, the news agency had published documents apparently giving evidence of political corruption. The national union of Iranian journalists has asked the interior ministry to initiate investigations. According to the Iraqi security authorities, the source of the phone threats is unknown.

Party leader released on bail

Shaswar Abdulwahid, leader of the opposition party New Generation, has been released on bail from prison (see BN of 27 May 2019). Apparently, five other party members are also to be released. A court verdict has not yet been handed down.

Iraq/Syria

At least 1,302 civilians killed by US-led coalition

On 31 May 2019, the US-led coalition against IS insurgents published a report on the civilian casualties in Iraq and Syria from April 2014 to April 2019. In this time period, a total of 34,502 airstrikes were carried out, killing at least 1,302 civilians. Independent observers say that the number of unreported cases has to be assessed much higher.

Israel/Palestinian territories

Knife attack in East Jerusalem

On 31 May 2019, a Palestinian stabbed and wounded two Israelis, one of them severely, in East Jerusalem. The 19 year-old perpetrator was shot dead by the police.

Unrest on Temple Mount

On 2 June 2019, Israeli police clashed with Palestinians protesting against Jewish guests visiting the common holy ground of both religions. The Palestinians barricaded themselves in the Al Aqsa Mosque and hurled chairs and stones at the security forces. 45 people were injured by rubber bullets and pepper spray; 7 people were detained by the Israeli police. That day, a Sunday, approx. 1,200 Jews visited the site in commemoration of its capture by the Israeli forces in 1967. For many Muslims, the visit of Jews on Temple Mount is a provocation, in particular during the holy month of Ramadan.

Kosovo

Violent operation and arrests in the northern part of the country

On 28 May 2019, clashes occurred between locals and police during an operation against smugglers in the country's northern part with its predominantly Serb population. In the incident, several individuals were injured and arrested, among Mikhail Krasnoshchekov, a Russian member of the UN mission. On 30 May he was released and taken to a Serbian military hospital in Belgrade. On 31 May the government in Pristina required that his diplomatic immunity be waived and declared that he was not welcome on Kosovan territory any more. The diplomat is suspected to have violated Kosovo's constitutional order and to have infringed universal values, peace and stability. According to the police, he and a local UNMIK staff member were arrested because they had used an UNMIK vehicle as part of a barricade erected together with locals. The barricade was organized to prevent the police from entering the city of Zubin Potok.

Libya

Fighting for Tripoli

Fights are still continuing around the airport, along the road to the airport, as well as in Ain Zara and its surrounding. On 27 May 2019, the WHO indicated that so far the fights for Tripoli have left at least 562 dead

and 2,855 injured; the actual figures are probably substantially higher. On 2 June 2019, the Government of National Accord (GNA) reported the downing of a reconnaissance drone over Tripoli. The lettering “Made in UAE” is visible on photos taken of the incident.

Explosions in Derna

In the night to 2 June, at least 2 attacks at the Awliya ad-Dam militia’s headquarters killed at least 15 people. So far, nobody has claimed responsibility for the attack; however, the militia is known for having kidnapped and/or detained the families of former members of Derna’s Shura Council. Before general Haftar’s troops conquered Derna, the city had been controlled by the Shura Council which includes also several Islamist militants. The council had put up resistance against the LNA for a long time.

Nepal

Explosions kill 4 people

On 26 May 2019, three bomb attacks took place in the city centre of the Nepalese capital Kathmandu and in the greater Kathmandu area. 4 people were killed in the incidents, 7 more were injured, 3 of them critically. The security forces suspect that a Maoist faction may be responsible for the blasts in Ghattekulo district, on the city outskirts in Ukedhara and in the Thankot area.

Nigeria

President Buhari sworn in for second term as in office

On 29 May 2019, Nigeria’s President Muhammadu Buhari was sworn in for a second term in office in Abuja. He had won the presidential elections in February gaining 56 percent of all votes.

Nigeria/Niger

20,000 people from northwest Nigeria have taken refuge in the Republic of Niger

UNHCR stated on 28 May 2019 that since April, violence in northwest Nigeria has forced approx. 20,000 people to flee to the neighbouring Republic of Niger. This development has been caused by multiple reasons, including clashes between farmers and herders of different ethnic groups, violence incited by militias and kidnappings for ransom in the Nigerian states of Sokoto and Zamfara.

Pakistan

Situation of the Ahmadi community

A documentation of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat AMJ reveals that members of the Ahmadi community are increasingly subjected to hostilities of the mostly Muslim population in Pakistan. For radical preachers, the ideological differences between Ahmadis and the mostly Sunni Muslims (who consider Muhammad the last prophet and any other view like that taken by the Ahmadi community a blasphemy) are an occasion to express their hate and prejudice against Ahmadis. This narrative is also used for political ends; for example, political opponents are accused of having sympathy with Ahmadis. Various newspapers accuse them of conspiring against Islam. For the year 2018, AMJ has documented a total of 2,389 negative news items and 300 longer articles containing derogatory comments about Ahmadis. The shorter news messages, printed like advertising slogans, defame their beliefs in concise sentences. In everyday life, discrimination and hostility are widespread, including the spheres of school and work. Objections to the accusations are regarded as blasphemy and may lead to exclusion from university, to dismissal from work and even to violent attacks.

Fatal gunfire and arrests during protests

On 26 May 2019, a demonstration of the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement PTM near the Afghan border turned deadly when an exchange of fire occurred between activists and soldiers at a check post at Boya (North Waziristan tribal area). Both parties blamed each other for having started the gunfight. According to PTM,

the demonstration had been peaceful. At least 3 activists were killed and several people injured. The protest, led by the two members of the National Assembly Mohsin Dawar und Ali Wazir, was a reaction to an alleged prior violent operation of the army in the region. Ali Wazir and several activists were arrested. A curfew was imposed in both North and South Waziristan; telephone and internet services were switched off. Ali Wazir has to appear before an anti-terrorism court to face charges of terrorism. Already before the incident, the Pakistani authorities had announced tougher action against the movement.

Among the arrested is the journalist Gohar Wazir who had reported on the protests for Khyber News TV. The Committee to Protect Journalists CPJ has urged the Pakistani government to release him.

In Pakistan, a large part of ethnic Pashtuns are living in the northwest bordering Afghanistan. They feel threatened by both the government and by the security forces. PTM accuses the military of having resorted to arbitrary killings and forced disappearances in their anti-terror-operations against Islamists. Most Taliban and their leaders are ethnic Pashtuns.

Somalia

Fighting

On 25 May 2019, al-Shabaab militants attacked an AMISOM military base in Qoqani town (Lower Jubba region).

On 28 May, the Somali National Army SNA apparently killed 4 al-Shabaab fighters in Adale district.

On 29 May, suspected al-Shabaab fighters detonated 3 bombs along 3 different highway sections near Mogadishu. Several people were killed in the attacks targeting vehicles of the SNS and of the African Union Mission in Somalia AMISOM.

Al-Shabaab claims to have also attacked the US trained special unit Somali Alpha Group in the Weydow area of Mogadishu on the same day.

On 30 May al-Shabaab apparently attacked an AMISOM convoy in Heliwa district, Mogadishu. On the same day, the terrorist group was said to have also attacked an AMISOM military base in Afmadow town, Lower Jubba region.

On 30 May, a gunfight between government soldiers reportedly killed a soldier and injured 3 other individuals in Mogadishu's Dharkaynlay district.

Attacks

On 27 May, suspected al-Shabaab fighters apparently assassinated a clan elder in Mogadishu's Yaqshid district.

Sudan

Deadly clashes in Khartoum

Opposition sources say that in the morning of 3 June 2019, the military violently responded to the mass sit-in on the square outside the military headquarters in Khartoum, trying to break up the blockade. There were reports of explosions and shots. The Central Committee of Sudan Doctors CCSD says that the operation of the security forces left at least two individuals dead and several more injured. Currently, negotiations are suspended between military and opposition on the formation of a transitional government.

Bureau of news channel Al Jazeera shut down

On 31 May 2019, Al Jazeera communicated that the Military Transitional Council had ordered to close the bureau of the Arab news channel. The correspondents of the Qatar-based channel lost their working permits and were banned from reporting in the country. Al Jazeera condemned this move, calling it an attack against media freedom.

Syria

Offensive in the northwest of the country

Since the begin of the military offensive against the rebels' last stronghold on 30 April 2019, the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has recorded almost 300 civilian fatalities and 400 killed fighters in the rebel controlled areas, almost 300 dead fighters on the government side and 22 civilians who died in rebel fire. Approx. 270,000 people were forced to flee from their homes. On 28 May 2019, a hospital in Kfar Nabul was shot at by government troops, increasing the number of attacks on healthcare facilities to 21. Also on 28 May, the UN warned that many of its humanitarian partners had been forced to discontinue their activities, with 21 vaccination centres and 49 other health facilities closed down. On 29 May, it was reported that shell fire and air strikes killed at least 14 people in Baraa, Serja and Habeet villages.

Assault in rebel area controlled by the Turkish military

On 2 June 2019, the explosion of a car bomb killed at least 13 people in the town of Azaz. The assault was conducted after a fast-breaking meal near a mosque. The border area, which before had been under the control of Kurdish troops, is now controlled by moderate Islamists backed by the Turkish military.

Assault in Raqqa

On 1 June 2019, a twin assault in Raqqa killed 10 people. The first explosive device was detonated along a road in the city centre, the second was ignited by a suicide bomber in a passenger car. Apparently, the victims were 5 fighters of the Syrian Democratic Forces and 5 civilians, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights says.

Exchange of fire with Israel

On 27 May 2019, a Syrian soldier was killed by an Israeli airstrike in Khan Arnabeh town, located close to the Golan Heights. Prime Minister Netanyahu explained that Israel attacked the Syrian air defence after a missile had been launched from there toward Israel. On 1 June 2019, the Israeli military reported that Syria had again fired two missiles toward the Golan Heights, apparently causing no damage. Israel responded with the bombardment of several military facilities in the south of Syria, killing 3 soldiers and injuring 7 more, Syrian state media said. In the evening of 1 June, the Israeli air force also bombarded the T4 airbase in central Syria. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, at least 10 people lost their lives in the incident, presumably Hezbollah fighters or Iranian forces.

Turkmenistan

Pardons on the occasion of Ramadan

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow has pardoned 764 inmates on the occasion of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. Already in March 2019, the Newroz festivity had prompted the president to pardon about 2,000 inmates. Political prisoners, however, are normally not included in the amnesties.

Venezuela

Talks in Oslo

The current negotiations in Oslo between government and opposition have not yet produced tangible results. However, both parties have declared their willingness to continue the negotiations.

Early parliamentary elections

On 25 May 2019, President Maduro announced to bring forward the elections for the National Assembly, originally scheduled for 6 December 2020. In the 2015 elections, which had been considered by electoral observers as fair and free and which had been recognised by both government and opposition, the opposition forces had gained a considerable majority in the National Assembly. Subsequently, the parliament was stripped of most of its rights, which were transferred to the constituent assembly. This body is established without elections and comprises only supporters of President Maduro. Hence, the parliament is the last constitutional body not controlled by President Maduro and forms the key basis for the opposition's work.

Referring to the constitution, the National Assembly had elected its speaker Guaido as interim president, arguing that President Maduro's term of office ended on 10 January. International opinion broadly agrees that the elections held in 2018 were neither free nor fair, particularly because promising rival candidates had been excluded already in the run-up to the elections.

Yemen

Fights

On 28 May 2019, the Saudi-led coalition conducted several airstrikes against Houthi rebels in Qatabah district (al-Dhali governorate) and also on a Houthi weapons depot at the Daylami Air force base in the capital of Sanaa.

On 29 May, further airstrikes targeted rebel positions in Sirwah district (Marib governorate).

On 28 May, the terror group Islamic State in Yemen IS-Y apparently attacked al-Qaida on the Arab Peninsula AQAP in al-Bayda governorate.

Exchange of prisoners

Last week, several prisoners of the Houthi rebels and of pro-government forces were released following an agreement on the exchange of prisoners. Among the released is Ahmed Omar Marqashi, a leader of the pro-secession Southern Movement. He had been detained in Sanaa for nearly ten years. The exchange of prisoners is occasionally agreed between the warring parties.