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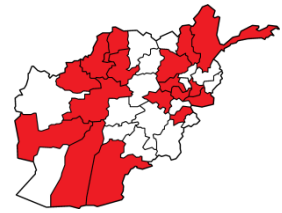
Briefing Notes

10 September 2018

Afghanistan

Armed confrontations

In many provinces the fighting in the form of air and drone strikes as well as raids by the security forces continued last week as well, just as the ambushes and attacks of the insurgents that sometimes also claimed civilian victims. The most affected provinces were: Kabul, Parwan, Maidan Wardak (centre), Ghor, Farah (Westen), Paktia (south-east), Badghis (west), Baghlan, Takhar, Badakhshan (north-east), Kandahar, Helmand (south), Laghman, Nangarhar (east), Faryab, Jawzjan and Sar-i-Pul (north).



Assaults and attacks

A candidate from Parwan province standing for the Lower House elections was killed by a bomb in Kabul on 03 September 2018; three other people were wounded.

On 04 September 2018 Taliban abducted four passengers from a bus in the Maiwand district of Kandahar province (south).

On 05 September 2018 at least 26 people were killed and at least 90 wounded in a double attack on a Kabul wrestling club. At first a suicide bomber blew himself up in the sports hall and once the security forces and journalists had arrived on the scene, a car set up with explosives was detonated. This attack engineered by IS occurred in the mainly Shia district of Dasht-i-Barchi.

Unknown gunmen shot an officer of the Afghan intelligence agency in Parwan (centre). In Badghis (west) the head of police of Maqur district was killed in a bomb attack. In Kabul the security forces succeeded in arresting eleven members of the Haqqani network. The Haqqani network is closely allied with the Taliban and responsible for numerous attacks in Kabul.

On 07 September 2018 four people died when their car hit a booby trap in Maidan Wardak province.

09 September 2018 a suicide bomber attacked a manifestation commemorating the day the Afghan national hero Ahmad Shah Massoud died, killing at least seven and leaving 24 wounded. The attack happened in the 4th police district (Taimani) of Kabul and IS claimed to be responsible.

Death sentence for Afghan soldier for treason

The court martial in Mazar-e-Sharif sentenced a soldier to death on 08 September 2018. He was charged with having handed over a checkpoint and ten of his comrades to the Taliban in Sar-i-Pul province in 2016. The soldier denies having committed the offence, the judgement is not yet final.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Constitutional court excludes opposition candidate Bemba from presidential elections

On 03 September 2018 the constitutional court confirmed the election committee CENI's decision of 24 August 2018 to bar Jean-Pierre Bemba, the chairman of the MLC opposition, from standing for the presidential elections in December 2018, because he had been convicted for bribery of witnesses by the International Criminal Court which the court found to be one form of corruption which is a reason for exclusion from the election under election law. Bemba was considered to be one of the most promising opposition candidates for the presidential elections.

Egypt

Death sentences for 75 Muslim Brothers

On 08 September 2018 a Cairo court confirmed the death sentences for followers of former President Mursi. The defendants had participated in protests on Rabaa Al-Adawiya Square in the summer of 2013 where more than 900 people, including eight security forces, are said to have died. A total of 739 people was indicted in this mass trial. In addition to the death sentences the court handed down prison sentences, 47 of them for life. There were no acquittals. Amnesty International called the criminal proceedings a "grotesque parody of justice". Only in July this year a law was passed granting immunity to Egyptian law enforcement officers to protect them against prosecution for offences in the times of turmoil between 2013 and 2016.

India

Homosexuality decriminalised

On 06 September 2018 the Supreme Court of India ruled that discrimination because of sexual orientation constitutes a violation of fundamental rights. Part of the 146-year-old section 377 of the Indian Criminal Code that still dates back to colonial times and provides for a prison sentence of up to ten years for homosexual acts, will now be deleted. The Supreme Court's decision is final and is a historical milestone in this strictly conservative society.

Iran

Three political prisoners executed

The Iranian news agency Fars reported that three political prisoners (Ramin Hossein Panahi, Loghman and Zanyar Moradi) were executed on 08 September 2018. The report says that Zanyar and Loghman Moradi were the victims of human rights violations during their detention and did not have access to independent counsel. The number of executions has increased since Hassan Rohani assumed the presidency. Amnesty International says that at least 507 death sentences were executed in 2017.

Human rights activist Reza Khandan arrested

On 04 September 2018 officials of the Intelligence Service Ministry arrested Reza Khandan, the husband of human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh who has been jailed since June 2018. This information was provided to the editors of Deutsche Welle (DW) by someone close to the family. Every day Reza Khandan protested against his wife's detention on social media and reported about her poor state of health in prison.

Iraq

Protests in Basra

Official statements put the death toll of the Basra protests at 12 as a minimum (see BN of 03 September 2018). At least another 120 people, including security forces, were wounded. On 06 September 2018 protesters set fire to the provincial government's building and several political offices and on 07 September 2018 also to the consulate of Iran. The Iranian government informed that no-one was injured by the fire, but there had been damage to property. The Iraqi government assured Tehran of its regret. After one week of protests Basra had calmed down by 09 September 2018 and the curfew that had been temporarily imposed was lifted.

The first protests in Basra had flared up in July 2018 (see BN of 09 July 2018). The protesters demand an end to corruption, more jobs, and improved basic services.

Demands for al-Abadi's resignation

The Iraqi parliament met for an extraordinary session to discuss the events in Basra and the protesters' demands. According to media reports no results were reached. The parliament elected in May 2018 met for its first session on 03 September 2018. The media reported that the resignation of acting Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi had been demanded. There is disagreement about the election of the speaker of parliament and the new prime minister.

IS fighters blow up oil pipeline in Kirkuk province

The head of the Kurdish security forces, Idris Rafaat, informed that on 09 September 2018 IS fighters blew up an oil pipeline in Kirkuk province near the village of Qaradara, located between Kirkuk and Dubiz. He said that Iraqi police is not in the position to guarantee security in the region and therefore the IS fighters hiding in the Hamrin mountains south of Kirkuk take advantage of the security vacuum to stage sporadic attacks.

Iran attacks Kurdish separatists in Iraq

Iran's revolutionary guards (IRGC) attacked offices of Kurdish separatists in the city of Koya (also: Koy Sanjaq) in Erbil province in the Kurdish region of Iraq with short-range missiles on 08 September 2018. The Iranian revolutionary guards alleged that the building was a training centre for terrorists where sabotage against Iran had been plotted. The Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) said that also an adjacent refugee camp was shelled with cruise missiles. Kurdish media reported that at least 14 people were killed, including five members of the party's executive board, and over 40 were wounded. Every now and then Iranian-Kurdish opposition fighters and Iranian revolutionary guards clash violently at the Iraqi-Iranian border. The Iraqi foreign ministry denounced shooting at targets on Iraqi territory.

Number of internally displaced persons falls below two million

The United Nations Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) informed on 04 September 2018 that the number of internally displaced persons had fallen below two million (1,931,868) for the first time since November 2014. It said that people are continuously moving back, however, more slowly than in 2017. The provinces to which the highest numbers returned are Ninewa (1.49 million), Anbar (1.27 million) and Salah ad-Din (almost 553,000). Most of the remaining internally displaced persons are concentrating in the provinces of Ninewa (602,000), Dohuk (349,000) and Erbil (217,000).

Israel/Palestinian Autonomous Areas

Two die in Gaza protests

The weekly protests at the border to Israel continue and again two minors (16 and 17 years old) lost their lives attacking the Israeli border fence and thereby attracting fire. The Israeli army said that it is investigating the exact circumstances. Four other attackers could be arrested by Israeli law enforcement officers on 08 September 2018 when trying to overcome the fence with knives and axes.

Kosovo/Serbia

No agreement in the Kosovo conflict

The eagerly awaited EU-mediated round of negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia on 07 September 2018 in Brussels has failed. Serbia and Kosovo wanted to overcome their conflict of many years by swapping territories (see BN of 27 August 2018). Serbian President Vučić left the session early and now rigorously rejects the exchange of territories that had previously been discussed. The EU made the accession of the two countries conditional on the solution of the Serb-Kosovo conflict. High hopes had rested on these talks, but the debate now created more tensions. A trip by Vučić to a Serb enclave in Kosovo on 09 September 2018 caused riots.

Libya

Fighting in Tripoli

Fighters of the Seventh Brigade from Tarhouna launched an operation to conquer the city on 26 August 2018 and gained much territory in Tripoli's south, however, their advance slowed down considerably on 02 and 03 September 2018. They focused their attack on the Abu Slim brigade which seems to have coordinated with competing as well as allied militias, such as the Nawasia brigade and the Rada militias (also: Special Deterrence Forces) and therefore a joint line of defence was be put up. A preliminary ceasefire negotiated by UNISMIL, the UN Mission in Libya, became effective on 04 September 2018. As a result, the area became quieter, however, the supply situation was aggravated. There are current reports about power cuts lasting up to 24 hours and long interruptions of the water supply.

Mauritania

Criminal prosecution of rape victims

In its report about the treatment of rape victims in Mauritania published on 05 September 2018 (“They Told Me to Keep Quiet’: Obstacles to Justice and Remedy for Sexual Assault Survivors in Mauritania”) Human Rights Watch (HRW) documents the institutional, legal and social obstacles for women and girls that report sexual abuse to the police and want the rapists to be held accountable. HRW quotes several cases of women who reported being raped to the police who were then charged for having extramarital intercourse (Zina). This attitude of the Mauritanian prosecution discourages women and girls from denouncing rapes. The report also says that the pressure of the family and social stigmatisation deter rape victims from turning to the police.

Moldova

Seven followers of Gülen extradited to Turkey

There have been reports that on 06 September 2018 seven Turkish teachers of Gülen schools have been arrested and six of them were expelled by Moldova's security agency (SIS) in cooperation with the Turkish secret service.

Rallying for reunification with Romania

On 02 September 2018 thousands took to the streets to call for reunification with Romania. From 1919 to 1940 both countries formed part of Greater Romania (România Mare). Moldova was part of the Soviet Union until its independence in 1991 and its official language is Romanian. Recent surveys showed that about one quarter of the entire population supports reunification with Romania. In addition to the majority of Romanian-speaking Moldovans, there is a significant Russian-speaking minority mostly concentrating in the renegade region of Transnistria and a Turkic-speaking minority in the autonomous region of Gagausia. These minorities advocate closer ties with Russia.

Myanmar

ICC: Proceedings against Myanmar feasible

On 06 September 2018 the International Criminal Court in The Hague ruled that it holds jurisdiction to prosecute crimes related to Myanmar's expulsion of members of the Rohingya ethnicity to Bangladesh (see BN of 03 September 2018). In contrast to Bangladesh Myanmar has not ratified the agreement to recognize the court.

Talks between the government and the alliance of rebels

On 05 September 2018 members of the government's Union Peace Commission met with representatives of the three rebel groups Arakan Army (AA), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) for the very first short talks in Kunming in China's Yunnan province. Another meeting is scheduled for October 2018. Together with the Kachin Independence Organization/Army (KIO/A) these three groups form the military 'Northern Alliance'; all four of them did not sign the 2015 nationwide peace agreement with the government to end the long-lasting military confrontations.

Nigeria

Boko Haram / ISWA: Attack on military base

Fighters of the Boko Haram splinter group Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA) attacked the city of Gudumbali in Borno state (administrative seat of the Guzamala Local Government Area) on 07 September 2018. They occupied and looted the local military base and abandoned Gudumbali again on 08 September 2018. Local militias reported that eight civilians lost their lives in the attack which the army denied. In June 2018 the government had declared the Guzamala region as safe and called upon the about 2,000 refugees from the area to return home from the refugee camps. Returnees reported being told that their state support would be cut, if they refused to return.

Boko Haram: Travellers kidnapped from bus

On 04 September 2018 fighters of the terror organization Boko Haram stopped a bus travelling from Maiduguri to the city of Gwoza close to the border of Cameroon in Borno state. They abducted between ten and twenty of the passengers and allegedly one soldier was killed in the incident.

Pakistan

Arif Alvi elected president

On 04 September 2018 Arif Alvi who stood for Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Movement for Justice (Tehreek-e Insaaf/PTI) was elected as the new president. He succeeds Mamnoon Hussain of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N).

No deportation to Afghanistan

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan told the UNHCR that Afghan refugees will not be forced to return. About two to three million Afghan refugees are staying in Pakistan.

Russian Federation

Arrests during protests against planned pension reform

On 09 September 2018 several hundred protesters were arrested during the nationwide rallies against the pension reform held in more than 80 cities of the Russian Federation. In St. Petersburg alone 350 people were arrested, it is said. Civil rights activists are putting the figure at a minimum of 800 arrests throughout the country. The human rights organisation OVD Info informed that already prior to the nationwide protests another 50 people had been arrested, including some close associates of Navalny. On the internet Kremlin critic Alexey Navalny had called for protests against the government's controversial pension reform on 09 September 2018. He was unable to attend personally, because he is currently serving a 30-day prison sentence for violations of the law on public demonstrations. In Moscow the anti-reform protests coincided with the mayoral elections. It is considered certain that the pro-Kremlin incumbent will be confirmed. On 09 September 2018 mayors, local assemblies and governors were also elected in many other Russian cities, communities and regions.

Rwanda

Governing party wins parliamentary elections

According to preliminary information from the state election committee of 04 September 2018 the governing party Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) won the parliamentary elections held from 02 to 04 September 2018 with 74% of the votes. Together with smaller allied parties it holds 40 of the 53 directly allocated seats. The opposition party Democratic Green Party is represented in parliament for the first time and holds two seats. 27 of the total of 80 mandates were attributed to representatives of women, children and handicapped people.

Somalia

Attacks

On 04 September 2018 al-Shabaab fighters fired at a motor rickshaw carrying Somali soldiers in Mogadishu's Karan district. They killed four soldiers and two civilians. On 04 September 2018 al-Shabaab assassinated two people, who they said were an army officer and his bodyguard, in the Wardhigley district of Mogadishu. Al-Shabaab also assumed responsibility for attacking an employee of the Finance Ministry who suffered serious injuries from a car bomb explosion.

Fighting

On 04 September 2018 Somali units repelled an al-Shabaab attack on a base in Qoryoley district (Lower Shabelle region) and killed two extremists. In Marka (Lower Shabelle region) Somali soldiers arrested 32 al-Shabaab members on 03 and 04 September 2018 in the course of a security operation in this region that had been launched at the end of August. Several extremists were killed by soldiers from Somalia and Jubaland during operations against al-Shabaab retreats in Lower Shabelle region. No further details are known.

Clan elders abducted

On 03 September 2018 al-Shabaab fighters abducted 62 clan elders in Galgadud region. The so-called al-Shabaab regional governor maintained that the abducted elders' sub-clan had refused to fully compensate for the killing of five members of another clan.

Syria

Attacks on Idlib

After Turkey's efforts to negotiate a ceasefire had failed on 07 September 2018, Russian and Syrian fighter jets continued their intense air raids on targets in the Syrian province of Idlib over the weekend as well. The presidents of Turkey, Russia and Iran had failed to come to an agreement on a joint strategy at a summit in Tehran. The media reported that internationally banned barrel bombs had been used in the attacks again, these are containers filled with explosives and shrapnel. The Syrian army denies having used them.

The United Nations will make another attempt to start negotiations on 10 September 2018. The UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura will first hold confidential talks with representatives of Russia, Iran and Turkey in Geneva. Already before, the EU countries represented in the UN Security Council had called upon Russia and Iran to respect the previously agreed ceasefire. Their statement said that a military escalation in the north-west of the war-torn country could have disastrous humanitarian consequences for the civilian population. The Syrian regime's planned offensive against the rebel stronghold in Idlib would threaten three million people, including one million children.

It seems that President Assad is not willing hold back his large-scale offensive against the last major area held by the rebels in Syria any longer. He says that the offensive's objective is the fight against terrorists. The UN assumes that there are about 10,000 members of Islamist militias in Idlib. In particular the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham militia, previously known as Al-Nusra Front, controls much of the territory in the region.

Turkey

Court sentences

On 07 September 2018 the former head of the pro-Kurdish HDP party, Selahattin Demirtas, was sentenced to four years and eight months imprisonment by a court of first instance. Demirtas was found guilty of terrorist propaganda because of a speech he had given during the celebrations of the Kurdish New Year in March 2013. At the same time former HDP MP Sirri Sürreya Önder was given a prison sentence of three years and six months.

Also, on 7 September 2018 the film director Ali Avci was sentenced to six years and three months in jail for membership in a terrorist group. He was charged with being a member of the organisation of Fethullah Gülen. The court reasoned that with his film "Awakening" about the attempted coup he had been carrying out "public perception management in line with the core goals of the terrorist organisation".

Venezuela

Quito declaration

On 04 September 2018 eleven Latin American countries adopted the Quito Declaration calling upon the Maduro government to accept humanitarian aid for Venezuela's population and encouraging national efforts to legalize the stay of Venezuelans in South American countries. They also sought assistance from other regions in the world to cope with the crisis. President Maduro stated that the figure of Venezuelans leaving the country was grossly exaggerated by the UN and other forces hostile to his country. There was no supply crisis, he said.

Statement of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, former Chilean president Michelle Bachelet, reported to the UN Human Rights Council on 10 September 2018 that she had received confirmed information for June 2018 about deaths due to malnourishment and diseases that are preventable according to the Venezuelan standard of medical care. Furthermore, more cases of arbitrary detentions, ill-treatment and the suppression of the freedoms of speech, the press and opinion had been reported, she said.

Yemen

Protests against high cost of living

The press reports that hundreds have been protesting against the high cost of living in the country in the government-controlled southern part of Yemen since 02 September 2018. Protests are reported from Aden city and the governorates of Hadramawt, Lahij and Abyan. Protesters set tires on fire and blocked the streets. Protests erupted in response to the drastic devaluation of the Yemeni currency against the US dollar during the conflict.

Peace talks at risk

UN-mediated peace talks between the government and the Houthi rebels were scheduled for 05 September 2018 in Geneva. However, they did not come about, because the Houthi delegation failed to appear. According to the press the rebels had made their appearance conditional on several demands. They did not want to travel to Geneva in a UN aircraft, but one from neighbouring Oman which would not be subject to searches. At a stop-over in Oman they wanted to leave several wounded persons to receive medical treatment there. They also demanded guarantees for a safe return. Saudi Arabia did approve the flight, but not transporting the wounded, because they assumed that these included rebel fighters. The UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffith, stressed that the Houthis had been willing to travel to Geneva and said that he would resume talks with the rebels in the next days in Sanaa. The two warring parties had last met for peace talks in Kuwait in 2016.

Houthi rebels continue to shell Saudi Arabia

According to the press the Houthi rebels fired a ballistic missile at a military installation in Nadshran region in Saudi Arabia on 05 September 2018. The rebels say that the missile hit the target, but official Saudi sources maintain that it was intercepted, while its fragments injured more than 20 people. Saudi Arabia informed that the Houthi rebels have so far fired 189 missiles at Saudi Arabia.

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