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Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

17 September 2018

Afghanistan

Armed confrontations

In many provinces the fighting in the form of air and drone strikes and raids by the security forces continued last week as well, so did the ambushes and attacks of the insurgents, sometimes killing and injuring also civilians. The most affected provinces were: Helmand, Kandahar, Zabul (south), Sar-i-Pul, Samangan, Faryab, Jawzjan, Balkh (north), Kunduz, Baghlan (north-east), Kabul, Logar, Maidan Wardak (centre), Nangarhar (east), Paktia, Paktika, Ghazni (south-east), Herat und Farah (west).

Assaults and attacks

On 11 September 2018 a judge of Ghazni province was assassinated by the Taliban in the Company area of Kabul. A police trainer was shot in the 12th police district. Three shells hit the 12th and the 16th district resp. without causing any damage. In the Behsud district of Nangarhar province (east) a child died and five people were wounded in a series of bombings. A suicide bomber targeted a protest against the local police commander of Shinwar district on the road between Jalalabad and Torkham in Nangarhar. The bomb caused at least 68 deaths and wounded 165. So far no-one claimed responsibility for the bombing. The Taliban announced that they had not been involved.

A policeman died and three civilians were injured in an attack with a magnetic bomb in Lashkargah (capital of Helmand, south) on 13 September 2018. In Kabul's Shah Shaheed district a candidate for the elections to the lower house of parliament was injured by gunfire.

On 14 September 2018 five tax officers were injured when a land mine exploded in Khogyani district of Nangarhar province (south-east).

On 15 September 2018 masked men shot the administrative head of Shamluazi district in the southern province of Zabul and his son. In another magnetic bomb attack on a policeman in Lashkargah (Helmand) one person died and one was injured.

On 16 September 2018 the Taliban blew up an important connecting bridge in Markaz-i-Baghlan district in Baghlan province (north-east).

Violence against women

The government of the central province of Parwan announced that since the beginning of the solar year (March) 27 killings of women had been registered. The figure includes the victims of fighting as well as of domestic violence and so-called murders of honour. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) reported that 277 killings of women had been registered in 2017 throughout the country.

Burkina Faso

Double attack

In the night to 15 September 2018 Kompienga province suffered a double attack claiming at least nine civilian lives. Also in Kompienga, three members of the same family were shot, probably by jihadists on motorcycles. In the village of Diabiga an Islamic cleric's house was attacked and he was killed along with five others.

Bhutan

Elections in Bhutan: Governing party loses first election round

A change of government is imminent in the Kingdom of Bhutan: Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay's People's Democratic Party (PDP) lost out in the first round of the parliamentary elections on 15 September 2018. The run-off election will be held on 18 October 2018 between the Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT) party of Pema Gyamtsho, which had been in government already from 2008 to 2013, and the Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (DNT) party and its chairman Lotay Tshering. According to official sources the voter turnout in the first round was 66 %.

Eritrea/Djibouti

Rapprochement between Djibouti and Eritrea

Eritrea and Djibouti intend to peacefully end their ten-year-old border conflict and want to re-establish trade relations. In April 2008 Eritrean troops attempted to occupy almost unpopulated areas at Djibouti's northern border. Observers assumed that Eritrea wanted to secure the strategically important place on the Red Sea. Eritrean troops had already failed in doing so during two prior attempts in 1996 and 1999. Since then the relations between both states had been practically frozen. Djibouti had appealed for mediation in the conflict with Eritrea both to the African Union and the United Nations.

Most recently, since June 2010, units from Qatar had been stationed in the disputed region with the consent of both countries. However, in mid-2017 they had to leave again when Qatar and Saudi Arabia fell out with each other. The background are improved relations between Saudi Arabia and Eritrea as well as Djibouti, which sided with Saudi Arabia in the conflict.

Ethiopia

Former militant opposition group returns from exile

Tens of thousands celebrated the return of former Oromo rebels from exile to the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa on 15 September 2018. After its reconciliation with the government the leadership of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) announced its intention to continue its fight for reforms peacefully. For over 20 years OLF had been acting underground and regularly committed attacks and was therefore banned as a terrorist group. Although the Oromo constitute the largest ethnic group in the multi-ethnic state of Ethiopia they felt discriminated against by the former leadership.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's reformist policy made the return of the former rebels possible, he himself is an Oromo. Next to Oromo leader Dawud Ibsa and other functionaries, about 1,500 fighters returned from neighbouring Eritrea. Although there was a massive turn-out of security forces during the celebrations, some clashes were reported.

Ethiopia/Eritrea

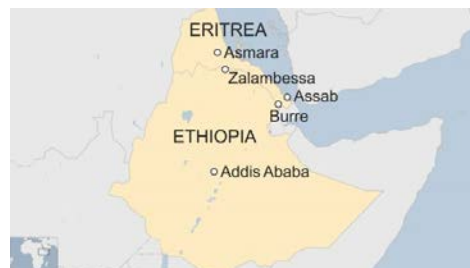
Ethiopia and Eritrea sign friendship agreement

At a meeting in the Saudi Arabian city of Jeddah Ethiopia and Eritrea entered into a formal peace agreement on 16 September 2018. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called the signing of the agreement a "historic event" and spoke of a "wind of hope" at the Horn of Africa. No details of the agreement have been published yet.

The peace process was initiated after the new Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took office in Ethiopia in April of this year. In July Eritrea's President Isaias Afwerki visited Ethiopia. Both sides confirmed their commitment to peace. Ethiopia and Eritrea opened embassies in the respective other country, re-established direct flights

and telephone connections. However, no official peace agreement had been made yet (see BN of 02 July and 16 July 2018).

The two border crossings in Zalembessa and Burre were opened on 11 September 2018. Abiy and Afwerki performed the official opening in Zalembessa, celebrating orthodox new year together with soldiers of both armies. This shall enable the movement of people and goods, however, Eritreans still need a visa to leave the country. Both countries had fought a border war from 1998 to 2000.



FYR Macedonia

Protests for name change

On 16 September 2018 thousands demonstrated in Skopje to vote for changing the country's name. During her visit on 08 September 2018 German Chancellor endorsed a pro vote as well. On 30 September 2018 a referendum will be held on changing the official name of the FYR Macedonia to "Republic of Northern Macedonia". If the name is adopted, the road would be clear for the country's accession to NATO and the EU.

It is quite open whether the majority of Macedonians will vote for the name change as the country is deeply divided on the issue. The national conservative opposition party VMRO rejects the agreement warning of a loss of national identity.

Under the name of „Former Republic of Yugoslavia Macedonia" Macedonia has been a member of the United Nations since 1993. However, Greece blocked its accession to the EU and Nato; fearing that the name entailed claims to the northern Greek province of the same name. Both countries agreed on a compromise on 17 June 2018.

India

At least eight rebels killed in Kashmir

On 13 September 2018 at least eight rebels were killed during shoot-outs in the northernmost state of Jammu and in Kashmir. Three rebels were killed in Kupwara district near the line of Control (LoC). According to the police they attempted to enter India from the Pakistani side to stage attacks. Security forces also shot two suspected insurgents near the city of Sopore and three more in Reasi district.

Iran

Baha'i given jail sentences and banished to exile

The Persian language news portal Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) reported that in Shiraz five members of the Baha'i religious community were sentenced to one year in prison and one year of exile. They were accused of "propaganda against the Islamic state". The German Baha'i community repeatedly criticized the sentencing of Baha'i for purely religious motives and without a fair trial, just as happened again this time. The more than 300,000 Baha'i living in Iran form the largest religious minority in the country. They are persecuted by the state because of their faith. For years Baha'i have not only been excluded from university studies, but also from government jobs. A report of the international Baha'i community states that the religious group's discrimination in the economic and cultural fields has worsened since Hassan Rouhani took office as president. It says that the government had forced more than 400 Baha'i, who had managed shops or enterprises, to close down their operations.

Prison sentences for former Ahmadinejad government officials

On 12 September 2018 Tehran prosecutor general Gholamhossein Esmaeili informed that the former head of the presidential office and advisor of former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Esfandiar Rahim

Mashaei, and his former media advisor Aliakbar Javanfekr were sentenced to over ten years in prison in total. Mashaei received a sentence of five years in prison for "activities against national security", of one year for "propaganda against the Islamic republic" and of six months for "contempt of court". Javanfekr was also charged with "activities against national security" and received a four-year jail sentence. Ahmadinejad and his former associates have been under scrutiny by the judiciary for two years. His allies are accused of "tyranny" and embezzlement. In mid-March the Iranian revolutionary court handed down a jail sentence of 15 years and a fine of Tuman 43bn (approx. € 4m) against Ahmadinejad's former vice-president Hamid Baghaei for abuse of office, corruption and embezzlement.

Iraq

Iraqi deputies elect speaker of parliament

After the parliamentary elections of May 2018 the members of the Iraqi parliament elected the Sunni Mohammed al-Halbusi (Mohammed al-Halbousi) as house speaker on 15 September 2018. He received 169 of the total of 329 votes. At age 37 Al-Halbusi is the youngest speaker of parliament in Iraqi history. Under the constitution a 90-day process that should lead to the formation of a new government starts now.

Security situation

Security-related incidents continue unabated, such as in Baghdad on 10 September 2018 where a bomb was exploded that injured four people. On 12 September 2018 there was another explosion in the city injuring two people. On 11 September 2018 security forces seized ten missile launchers and 21 explosive devices in Anbar province. On 12 September 2018 at least 12 people were killed and another 42 wounded in a suicide attack in the city of Tikrit (Salah ad-Din province). The assault happened near a popular restaurant. On 13 September 2018 the media reported that IS members kidnapped an ambulance driver in Kirkuk. On 15 September 2018 a policeman and a civilian were killed and another civilian wounded in an IS attack in Kirkuk province. On 16 September 2018 an Iraqi soldier was killed and another five were wounded by explosives in an attack on a patrol in Diyala's north-east.

Iraqi security forces started operations against IS fighters, arrested some of them and seized weapons and IEDs. IS fighters sporadically attack villages or civilians in towns or on major traffic routes. The provinces of Ninive (Ninewa), Anbar, Salahaddin (Salah ad-Din), Kirkuk and Diyala are especially affected.

Executions

AFP reported on 10 September 2018 that seven people convicted of terrorism and sentenced to death had been executed by hanging.

Israel/Palestinian Autonomous Areas

Three die in Gaza protests

Three people from Gaza, including an eleven-year-old boy, died in the continuing weekly protests at the Israeli border. The Palestinian side said that the boy had been hit in the head by a tear gas canister. The Israeli army says that he was hit by a stone thrown by his comrades. The Israeli army puts the number of participants in the protest at 13,000 Palestinians. During the confrontations stones, fire bombs, and grenades were hurled at the Israeli security forces. Reportedly nine Palestinians succeeded in entering the Israeli territory for a short while. Since the weekly protests started on 30 March 2018 a total of 180 Palestinians has died.

Knife attack on the West Bank

Prominent activist of the settler movement, Ari Fuld, was killed in a knife attack. A 17-year-old Palestinian stabbed Fuld in front of a department store on the West Bank on 16 September 2018. The attacker was then chased by passers-by and injured until the police came and took him into custody. Fuld held not only Israeli, but also US citizenship.

Kosovo

EU parliament recommends visa liberalization

On 13 September 2018 the European Parliament recommended the liberalization of the visa requirements for Kosovo. Before the decision becomes effective the consent of the Council of EU Home Affairs Ministers is needed. A liberalization can only be decided by a qualified majority. It is assumed that the decision could be made by the end of the year.

Kosovo is the only country of the Western Balkans that does not yet enjoy any visa liberalization. In 2009 the visa requirement was lifted for the Schengen Area for Montenegro, the FYR Macedonia and Serbia and in 2010 for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina. This resulted in a strong increase in asylum applications in Germany in the subsequent years.

Lebanon

Formation of government delayed

Prime Minister Saad Hariri was commissioned with the formation of a new cabinet on 24 May 2018. Ever since the parliamentary elections on 06 May 2018 controversies between the political parties have prevented any agreement.

The media report that national stability is at risk because of the political paralysis in view of the economic crisis. In recent weeks there were occasional protests against cuts in the electricity and water supplies including in Tripoli and Sidon.

Libya

Security agreement for Tripoli

On 12 September 2018 the internationally recognized Libyan government located in Tripoli, the Presidential Council (PC) announced a security agreement for Tripoli with several local militias as well as with the 7th Brigade from Tarhouna that had been involved in the fighting for Tripoli in recent weeks. Almost no details are known, it seems, though, that one of the key points is that major state institutions shall be protected by official security forces in future to the extent possible. All further developments are totally unclear at this time.

Legislative process for constitutional referendum

On 13 September 2018 yet another attempt to pass an act on the terms for the intended constitutional referendum in the House of Representatives (HoR) failed. At this time all significant groups in Libya consider the HoR to be the legitimate parliament to act in this capacity. The required quorum did not come about, also because only very few members from western Libya were present. Their absence might be due to the recent fighting in Tripoli, because it made domestic flights very difficult.

Morocco

Cooperation for border security strengthened

On 13 September 2018 a government spokesperson informed that Morocco had prevented 65,000 entries into the EU in 2017. The European Union recently agreed on new subsidies of about € 236m to enable the North African country to provide basic services and create new jobs.

Legislation against sexual violence

On 14 September 2018 parliament adopted a new law providing for harsher punishment for rape, domestic violence and sexual harassment which will enter into force on 19 September 2018. Female critics

complained that the wording of the act does not clearly define domestic violence and abuse during marriage is not specified as an offence. Nor does the law provide for any support of the victims, but still the law is a step in the right direction, they said.

Nigeria

Boko Haram: Another attack on a military base

Fighters of the Boko Haram terror organization attacked a military base of the 145th battalion in the city of Damasak in Borno state (administrative seat of the Mobbar Local Government Area) on 12 September 2018. Other than the recent terrorist attacks on military bases (see BN of 10 September 2018 and 03 September 2018) the attack was repelled. The Army Chief of Staff, Buratai, announced that 50 terrorists were killed during a five-hour fire-fight.

Pakistan

Military curtails freedom of the press

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) published a special report on 12 September 2018 concluding that the Pakistani military had "quietly but effectively" restricted critical reporting. The report says that access to certain areas was denied and violence against reporters had been instigated. Journalists were the victims of violent attacks and certain dailies had to close down, it says. Furthermore there had been intimidation which resulted in self-censorship. According to some journalists the conditions for the free press are currently similar to those during the military dictatorship.

Passports for children of Afghan and Bangladeshi refugees born in Pakistan

Prime Minister Imran Khan announced that the children of Afghan and Bangladeshi refugees born in Pakistan shall receive Pakistani citizenship. He said that this was a common practice in many countries of the world and would enhance these people's chances on the labour market. About 1.5m Afghan refugees are staying legally in Pakistan. According to UN reports at least 60% of the Afghan refugees living in Pakistan were either born there or minors when their parents immigrated.

Russian Federation

After poisoning suspicion - Pussy Riot member is treated in Berlin

A member of the dissident Russian political punk band Pussy Riot who might be the victim of a poison attack has been flown to Berlin for treatment. It was reported that Pyotr Verzilov landed in an ambulance plane at Berlin Schönefeld airport in the evening of 15 September 2018 and will receive specialist treatment. The 30-year-old had been taken to a Moscow hospital on 11 September 2018 after first losing his vision and then his capability to speak during a court hearing, his partner said. Two days later he had to be transferred to the intensive care unit of the renowned Moscow Sklifosovsky Institute. The Pussy Riot members assume that their colleague was intentionally poisoned to intimidate him or even to kill him.

Four of the Pussy Riot activists, including Verzilov and his partner Veronika Nikulshina, ran onto the soccer field wearing police uniforms during the finals of the Football World Championship in Moscow in July 2018. For which they had to spend 15 days in jail. The activist group itself says that this was to protest against the excessive powers of the Russian police and against police violence. Pussy Riot has repeatedly drawn attention with spectacular activities against arbitrariness of justice and corruption in Russia.

Rwanda

Amnesty

On 14 September 2018 the government confirmed President Kagame's amnesty of 2,140 prisoners, including Victoire Ingabire of the FDU-Inkingi opposition party. She had been sentenced to eight years in prison for belittling the 1994 genocide and for the formation of an armed group to fight against the government in 2012. In appeal proceedings the sentence had been increased to a total of 15 years in 2013. The musician Kitzito Mihigo was among the pardoned convicts as well. He had been given a ten-year prison sentence in 2015 for attempted conspiracy to assassinate the president among other things. As yet no reasons for the presidential pardon were given.

Somalia

Attacks

Al-Shabaab targeted a government building in Mogadishu's Hodan district with a car bomb killing six and wounding 16 people on 10 September 2018. Presumably al-Shabaab fighters assassinated five charcoal traders in Lower Juba region on 10 September 2018. (In 2012 the Somali government had outlawed charcoal trade for environmental reasons and to cut the funding for al-Shabaab. The UN estimates that al-Shabaab is earning at least USD 10m annually from the illicit charcoal trade.)

Fighting

During raids in the villages of Bagdaad and Basra (Lower Shabelle region) Somali special units liberated seven people held prisoners by the extremists with the support of US units on 09 September 2018. This was part of joint operation of the Somali army and AMISOM to drive al-Shabaab from the road between Afgooye and Balaad in Lower and Middle Shabelle. On 11 September 2018 Somali special units advanced against an al-Shabaab base in the town of Mubarak (Lower Shabelle region). To support them the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) flew an air strike killing two extremists and a Somali soldier. On 11 September 2018 Somali soldiers arrested eleven al-Shabaab fighters in Bardhere (Gedo region). On 11 September 2018 the Somali police killed the commander of al-Shabaab's intelligence agency Amniyat responsible for the eastern part of Mogadishu in the city's Heliwa district. On 15 and 16 September 2018 there were reports that the Ethiopian air force killed 70 al-Shabaab fighters in an air strike on Somalia. Official Ethiopian statements said that al-Shabaab had been planning an attack on Ethiopian AMISOM troops. No further details were given.

Controversies between the federal states and the government

After the end of the Council of Interstate Cooperation (CIC) conference in Kismayo the presidents of the federal states of Galmudug, Hirshabelle, Jubbaland, Puntland and South West published a statement on 08 September 2018 announcing the freezing of their states' relations with the federal government. They maintain that the federal government had failed to establish security throughout the country and to comply with its constitutional duties towards the federal states. Leading politicians in Galmudug, Hirshabelle and Puntland voiced criticism of their presidents' action. On 12 September 2018 the Upper House of Parliament sent envoys to each of the five federal states to mediate.

South Sudan

Final peace agreement signed

On 12 September 2018 President Salva Kiir and rebel leader Riek Machar signed a final peace agreement. It provides that Machar will be re-appointed as first vice-president (see BN of 06 August and 03 September 2018). However, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) reported renewed fighting already on 15 September 2018.

Syria

Efforts to negotiate ceasefire for Idlib

Turkey's foreign minister Cavusoglu said on 14 September 2018 that his country continued its efforts to bring about a ceasefire in the last Syrian rebel stronghold in Idlib and that Turkey would also be prepared to cooperate to fight the terrorists there. President Erdogan met again with his Russian colleague Putin on 17 September 2018 to discuss the situation in Syria. One week ago, his attempt to avert the imminent offensive against Idlib in a summit meeting with Putin and Iran's president Rouhani had failed.

Local elections during civil war

The first local elections since 2012 took place in Syria on 16 September 2018. More than 40,000 candidates stood for election, competing for about 18,000 positions in the cities, municipalities and provinces. The lists of candidates are dominated by members of President Bashar al-Assad's Baath Party. According to media reports one of the intentions behind holding these elections now is to show the strength of the Assad regime and to demonstrate normality in a country in which a war is still raging and millions have fled their homes. Internal refugees may vote wherever they are currently staying, if the municipality is government-controlled. No ballot boxes were set up in other areas, such as Idlib province. However, voters were invited to move to the next 'free' municipality under government control. Some larger municipalities were split into several smaller units for these local elections, thus weakening former provincial centres. Especially those larger municipalities that had shown rebel-inclinations in the past, were broken up.

Turkey

German national sentenced

The media reported that the 46-year-old German citizen Ilhami Akter was sentenced to three years and one and a half months in prison in the Turkish city of Elazig on 14 September 2018. The court was convinced that he had been disseminating propaganda for terror organisations via social media, the reports say. The sentence was suspended for the time being and he was released, but may not leave Turkey. His defence counsel announced that he would appeal the sentence. Mr Akter had travelled to Turkey to take care of his sick mother who is living in Turkey. He was arrested in August, because he allegedly spoke critically of the Turkish government on Facebook.

Uzbekistan

Several bloggers arrested and one imam dismissed because of critical comments

A decree of the Uzbek government banning headscarves or hijabs for female students at school of August 2018 triggered criticism on Uzbek social media.

From 28 August to 04 September 2018 several people in different Uzbek cities were arrested because of their Facebook comments and posts. Allegedly they were critical of the hijab ban at schools and the Uzbek president's advisors. Four bloggers were released from custody and sentenced to administrative custody of up to fifteen days and some to fines.

On 09 September 2018 an imam in Tashkent was dismissed who had addressed President Mirziyoyev in a Facebook video pleading for more freedom of conscience and criticizing the hijab ban at school.

Former Uzbek President Islam Karimov closely monitored religious activities and often sanctioned the practice of religion outside of state-controlled mosques. However, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev who has been in office since September 2016, relaxed also the restrictions on the religious life of Muslims as part of the liberalization of the economy and political reforms.

Venezuela

Intervention possible

At a press conference at a border crossing between Venezuela and Columbia on 14 September 2018 Luis Almagro, Secretary General of the Organization of American States, did not exclude the option of military intervention to solve the Venezuelan crisis. On the next day his comments caused outrage with several South

American government. However, the outrage was not unanimous: Columbia did explicitly not support this criticism voiced by some Latin American States and Canada (Lima Group).

Vietnam

Activist given prison sentence

On 12 September 2018 a court in Dong Hoi (capital of Quang Binh province) sentenced activist Nguyen Trung Truc, a member of the opposition group Brotherhood for Democracy, to twelve years in jail for attempting a coup. He is one of the 40 members of the group arrested in 2017. Several have been given jail sentence meanwhile. The group advocated human rights and democracy in Vietnam.

On 14 September 2018 an appeals court in Thai Binh province confirmed the 13-year sentence for Nguyen Van Tuc, another group member, that had been handed down in April 2018.

Yemen

Fighting escalates after peace talks failed

After the peace talks between the government and the Houthi rebels scheduled for 06 September 2018 did not take place (see BN of 10 September 2018) the battle for the port city of Houdeida escalated. On 13 September 2018 UN Humanitarian Coordinator Lise Grande warned that the new offensive puts hundreds of thousands of human lives at risk. She said that 900,000 people are in urgent need of food aid and that 25% of all children in Houdeida governorate are malnourished. UN Special Envoy to Yemen, Martin Griffiths, visited the rebel-controlled city of Sanaa on 16 September 2018 trying to revive the peace talks.

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