

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

22 October 2018

Afghanistan

Armed clashes and attacks

Hostilities, air raids and drone attacks, raids by the security forces and attacks by insurgents occurred in numerous provinces last week, and in particular during the parliamentary elections on 20.10. and 21.10.2018, in some instances also involving fatalities or injuries among the civilian population. Incidents of relevance to the security situation were reported from the following provinces: Samangan, Balkh (North Afghanistan), Kunduz, Takhar, Baghlan (North-East Afghanistan), Helmand, Kandahar, Nimroz, Zabul (South Afghanistan), Farah (West Afghanistan), Kabul, Maidan Wardak, Parwan, Logar (Central Afghanistan), Nangarhar (East Afghanistan), Ghazni (South-East Afghanistan) and Bamyán (Central Highlands).

A man running for election to parliament was murdered in Lashkargah (capital of Helmand, South Afghanistan) on 17.10.18 - the tenth parliamentary candidate to be killed to date. He died in a Taliban bomb attack which claimed at least four other lives and injured seven people.

On 18.10.18 the police chief and the head of the secret service in Kandahar were shot dead in what appears to have been an attack by a bodyguard on a high-level security meeting at the seat of Kandahar's governor (South Afghanistan). The provincial governor suffered injuries. NATO's new supreme commander in Afghanistan escaped injury, a US brigadier incurred gunshot wounds. The Taliban have claimed responsibility for the attack. As a result of this incident, the parliamentary elections in Kandahar have been deferred for one week. Elections have also been postponed in other provinces and districts, such as Jowzjan and Samangan provinces and the city of Ghazni.

Parliamentary elections

Many attacks occurred during the parliamentary elections, with at least 170 people killed and injured throughout the country (reported figures vary considerably). The Taliban claim to have staged 507 attacks throughout the country, while government sources put the figure at 192. Numerous polling stations were unable to open on account of the security situation as well as technical and staffing problems. There were reports of "chaotic conditions" in various media. The voting period was thus extended to 21.10.18, and was fully postponed in some districts. The electoral commission is not expecting to have any preliminary results before mid-November. It intends to present the final results at the end of December.

Algeria

Ban on wearing full-face veils in the civil service

On 18.10.18 the authorities banned public-sector employees from wearing the Islamic niqab veil. The prime minister stated that this was necessary in order to recognise people's faces. The niqab is not in widespread use. The hijab, which covers the head and neck, but not the face, is more popular.

Armenia

Head of government wants new elections

Prime minister Nikol Pashinyan stepped down on 16.10.18 in order to force new parliamentary elections. The prime minister's alliance, which took over government of the country on 08.05.18 in the wake of a peaceful revolution (so-called Velvet Revolution), does not have a parliamentary majority. It is dominated by the party of former president Sargsyan. Parliament is required by the constitution to undertake two attempts to elect a successor within two weeks. If this fails, parliament is to be dissolved. In order to ensure that this happens, Pashinyan has obtained undertakings from all parliamentary parties to refrain from putting forward any candidates. Should any candidates be nominated, he intends to call hundreds of thousands of his supporters out onto the streets again.

The new elections are planned for 09.12. or 10.12.18.

Bhutan

New prime minister

Lotay Tshering has become the Himalayan kingdom's new prime minister. His party, Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (DNT), won the third parliamentary election since the country's transformation into a constitutional monarchy in 2008. In the run-off on 18.10.18, the DNT defeated the Druk Phuensum Tshogpa party (DPT) which governed the country from 2008 to 2013, taking 30 of the 47 seats in the National Assembly. The outgoing prime minister's PDP party dropped out of the contest in the first round of elections back in September.

The DNT was founded in 2013, making it the youngest of Bhutan's four registered parties. In his election campaign, Lotay Tshering raised the issues of youth unemployment and the gap between rich and poor in the Buddhist kingdom. The country's head of state is the king, who continues to dictate the direction of politics.

Comoros

Army regains control of rebel stronghold

According to government information, the Comorian military regained control of the old quarter of Mut-samudu on the island of Anjouan on 20.10.18, following several days of resistance by rebels. Opponents of president Azali Assoumani had been fighting soldiers in the streets and alleys of the old town since 15.10.18. At least three people died in the fighting. At a press conference on 21.10.18, interior minister Mohamed Abdou stated that Anjouan's governor, Abdou Salami Abdou, had been placed under house arrest because he had incited the rebellion and had provided the insurgents with weapons and money. The political situation has been tense since the constitutional referendum of 30.07.18. The referendum empowers president Assoumani, who originates from the largest island, Grande Comore, to hold office not only for one term of five years, but for two successive terms. It had been an established rule since 2001 that the presidency was to pass to a different representative of the three large Comoros islands of Grande Comore, Anjouan and Mohéli every five years. According to this rule, the next president would have had to come from Anjouan. To compound the situation, Assoumani announced his intention to call an early election in 2019, which would allow him to govern until 2029, should he be victorious.

Egypt

Military: Success against Islamists

On 16.10.18 the military published a review of its military operation to pacify the Sinai peninsula. According to the review, 450 Islamists have been killed and 30 soldiers have died since February. The Egyptian armed forces have been carrying out an operation against Islamist insurgents on the peninsula since February 2018.

State of emergency extended

On 21.10.18 parliament voted to extend the nationwide state of emergency by a further three months. The state of emergency was imposed in April 2017, following the deaths of more than 45 people in attacks on several churches, and has since been extended by subsequent three-month terms on a regular basis.

India

Kashmir: Renewed protests/explosion claims lives

On 17.10.18 two rebels and one civilian were killed in an operation by security forces in Srinagar, the capital of the northernmost federal state of Jammu and Kashmir. According to official information, a police officer was also killed. The purported rebels were allegedly members of Lashkar-e-Taiba. The incident triggered mass protests. The government closed all educational establishments in Srinagar and shut down the mobile internet. Several hundred paramilitary police were also deployed to maintain public order.

On 21.10.18 at least six civilians were killed and dozens injured in an explosion in the Kulgam district of the Indian part of Kashmir. The incident was preceded by an operation by the security forces in which three suspected rebels were killed. According to a police spokesperson, the security forces came under a bombardment of stone-throwing by the local population. The spokesperson further claimed that civilians ignored warnings and were approaching the operational area when a grenade exploded. According to eye witness reports, the police used live ammunition and tear gas to stop the demonstrators.

Iran

Baha'i members arrested

Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported on 16.10.18 that more than 20 members of the Baha'i religious community were arrested in August and September. It remains unknown what charges have been brought against them. More than 300,000 Baha'i live in Iran. According to a report by the international Baha'i community, discrimination on an economical and cultural level against the religious community has increased during Hassan Rohani's presidency.

Threats of punishment for allowing female spectators in football stadium

The chief public prosecutor, Mohammad Jafar Montazeri, sharply criticised the Iranian football federation on 17.10.18 for allowing women to watch men play a football match. He said that those responsible and female spectators should adhere to the regulations, otherwise they would face severe punishment.

Iraq

Security situation

At least 23 people have been killed in the latest incidents of relevance to the security situation. On 21.10.18 at least four Iraqi police officers died in two bomb explosions perpetrated by IS fighters in the Al Shoura and Makhmour regions.

Also on 21.10.18, a Turkmen family was killed by unknown armed men in the district of Hawija, some 55 kilometres south-west of Kirkuk.

Unknown attackers also killed a family in Jalawla, in the province of Diyala.

The Iraqi armed forces continued their military operations against IS. On 20.10.18 security forces killed four extremists in their hideout in Hit, three extremists in Kirkuk and two extremists in Diyala province.

Executions

The ministry of justice announced on 17.10.18 that six prisoners sentenced on terrorism charges had been executed.

Israel/Palestinian territories

130 injured in Gaza protests/an end to the escalation in violence?

According to information from the Gaza Strip health ministry, 130 Palestinians were injured by gunfire from Israeli security forces during the weekly Friday protests at the border with Israel on 19.10.18. The Israeli authorities reported that some 10,000 demonstrators took part in the violent protests this time. This would be a comparatively low figure, as the protests have drawn up to 30,000 participants in the past. On 18.10.18 a rocket from the Gaza Strip destroyed an Israeli home in Be'er Sheva while Egyptian negotiators were supposed to be working towards easing the tense political situation. Israel carried out air raids on targets in the Gaza Strip. In an uncharacteristic statement, Hamas condemned the firing of the rocket from its territory.

Libya

High-ranking militia officer killed

A high-ranking officer of the Revolutionary Brigades of Tripoli, one of the four major militias which dominate Tripoli, was shot dead on 16.10.18. The circumstances remain unclear. No other militia has claimed responsibility as yet. There is speculation about possible personal motives. On the same day, two members of the Rada militia (also known internationally as Special Deterrence Forces, SDF) were killed at a checkpoint. It is unclear whether there is any link between the two killings. Fears that these incidents could lead to a new escalation have proved unfounded so far.

Mass grave in Sirte

The discovery of a further 35 bodies was reported on 21.10.18. The total number of victims found since the mass grave was discovered to the west of Sirte now totals 110. Where no personal belongings were buried with the dead, DNA tests will be carried out.

Maldives

Election defeat confirmed

The Supreme Court of the Maldives has confirmed that head of state Abdulla Yameen was defeated in the presidential election. The five judges unanimously found that Yameen had failed to prove that the election had been manipulated. Opposition candidate Ibrahim Mohamed Solih surprisingly won the election in September, polling 58.4 % of the vote. All rivals of the authoritarian Yameen who would have had good prospects in the election were either in prison at the time of the election or had had to flee the country. Solih, previously a relatively unknown figure, ran for office as the candidate of ex-head of state Mohamed Nasheed's Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) and was supported by all the opposition parties.

Mali

11 killed in attack

Eleven civilians were reportedly killed in an attack in the village of Telly (Mopti region) on 15.10.18. According to a local official, the perpetrators were unknown armed assailants. No further details have been established as yet.

Morocco/Spain

Melilla: Border fortifications stormed

Spanish authorities confirmed on 21.10.18 that up to 200 people had entered Spanish territory after jointly storming the border fence. One man reportedly died of a heart attack in the course of the action. 19 people required medical treatment after injuring themselves on the fence. Six members of the security forces also

incurred minor injuries. The border between Morocco and the Spanish enclave is fortified by a barbed-wire double fence of over six metres in height. In 2018 to date, some 4,000 people have entered Spanish territory via Melilla and over 48,800 have reached Spanish territory by sea.

Nigeria

Fighting between Christian Adara and Muslim Hausa claims lives

According to police information, 55 people were killed on 18.10.18 in fighting between indigenous Christian Adara and Muslim Hausa migrants in the town of Kasuan Mangani (Kajuru local government area) in the norther federal state of Kaduna. The clash reportedly developed from an argument about a wheelbarrow at the town's market. Special police forces were deployed to restore order in the area around Kasuwan Magani and a curfew was imposed on the same day. The police arrested 22 people.

In response to rumours of unrest in the city of Kaduna, on the evening of 21.10.18 the government of Kaduna imposed a 24-hour curfew for the capital, Kaduna, and the surrounding area.

IPOB leader Kanu reappears

On 19.10.18 photographs of Nmandi Kanu, the leader of the Biafra separatist organisation IPOB, which is banned in Nigeria, appeared in social media, showing him praying at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. Kanu's whereabouts had been unknown since 14.09.17, when soldiers stormed his parents' estate in Umuahia, federal state of Abia. On 21.10.18 Kanu gave an interview to Radio Biafra in which he announced that he intended to return to Nigeria and continue the struggle for Biafran independence.

Pakistan

Executions

According to a report by the NGO Justice Project Pakistan, 496 people have been executed since the moratorium on the death penalty was lifted in 2014. 4,688 people who have been sentenced to death are being held on "death row".

Russian Federation/Ukraine

Russia/Ukraine conflict: Autonomy for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church

On 11.10.2018 the head of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople recognised the autonomy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The Russian Orthodox Church, which has controlled the orthodox churches in Ukraine to date, duly broke off contact with the Patriarchate of Constantinople. In the following days, the orthodox churches of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan followed the example of the Russian Orthodox Church and ended their relations with the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

The primate of the Russian Orthodox church, Kirill I, is regarded as a supporter of Russian policies. The Russian president stated through his spokesperson that Russia would protect the interests of orthodox believers in Ukraine, should religious conflicts go beyond legal confrontations.

Somalia

Air raid leaves 60 dead

The US military has reported that it killed 60 fighters in an air raid on Al Shabaab on 16.10.18. There were allegedly no civilian casualties in the raid near Harardhere (Mudug region). This was the largest air raid against the terrorist group since November 2017.

Syria

Abductions by IS

Although IS is on the retreat in most parts of Syria, according to the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights it abducted at least 130 families from a refugee camp in Deir es-Zor province (eastern Syria) on 13.10.18. The Islamists allegedly raided the camp, which was inhabited largely by women, and took the families to an area controlled by the IS to the east of the Euphrates river. On the night of 19.10.2018 IS reportedly released six of a total of 27 Druze who were abducted in the southern Syrian province of Suweida back in July 2018. The 21 remaining hostages are apparently also to be released in the coming days, the government having freed prisoners and paid ransom money in return.

Turkey

Suspensions

It has been reported in the media that the interior ministry suspended 259 local officials last week (103 village officials and 156 neighbourhood headmen). They are accused of being members of or having links with terrorist organisations.

Venezuela

Repatriation plan meets with little response

The “Vuelta a la Patria” plan launched by the Venezuelan government (“Return to the Fatherland” - an allusion to a very well-known work by the Venezuelan poet Juan Antonio Pérez Bonalde), which entails a sort of return grant for emigrant Venezuelans and is aimed at ending mass emigration, has so far (as per 13.10.18) been taken up by only around 8,000 Venezuelans. No decline in mass emigration is to be observed.

Vietnam

Blogger out of prison and straight into exile

Blogger Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh was prematurely released from prison on 17.10.18 and had to leave the country for exile in the USA on the same day. The blogger, who is also known under the pseudonym Me Nam (“Mother Mushroom”), was arrested in October 2016 and was sentenced to ten years’ imprisonment in June 2017 for anti-government propaganda.

Yemen

Famine

The UN warns that more than 12-13 million people are threatened by famine. This would be the worst famine for over 100 years.

Air raid claims lives

According to media reports, on 13.10.18 an air raid by the Saudi-led coalition hit a bus carrying civilians in the administrative district of Hodeida. At least a dozen people were killed and even more injured.

New prime minister

On 15.10.18 president Hadi dismissed prime minister Ahmed bin Dagher on account of the national economic crisis. His successor, Maeen Abdulmalek Saeed, was sworn into office on 18.10.18.

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