

Group 62 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

6 May 2019

Afghanistan

New SIGAR Quarterly Report: NATO no longer provides district-level stability assessment

On 30 April 2019, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction SIGAR published its second quarterly report which gives an overview of reconstruction activities in Afghanistan. So far, the reports had always contained an assessment of the stability situation and information on the territorial control status for all 407 districts according to a NATO-developed set of criteria. Since these data are deemed to be 'of limited value', they will no longer be provided.

However, it can be inferred from the report that from November 2018 through January 2019, the number of enemy-initiated attacks rose by 19 percent compared to the previous period (August-October 2018). In the same period, the number of casualties in the Afghan defence and security forces were 31 percent higher. In the recent quarter, most attacks and assaults were launched in Farah, Helmand and Faryab province. The report also contains data provided by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project ACLED: In total, 7,399 security-related events were recorded in 2018, roughly the same as the 7,345 recorded in 2017. The three provinces with the most events were unchanged from 2017 to 2018, i.e. Nangarhar, Ghazni and Helmand. It is notable that during the winter months (1 December 2018 to 28 February 2019), a roughly 39 percent increase was recorded compared to the same period one year prior. The three provinces with the most security-related events in this reporting period were Helmand, Kandahar and Nangarhar.

The report also contains a summary of the findings on civilian casualties provided by two sources: the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan UNAMA (see also BN of 29 April 2019) and the NATO Mission Resolute Support RS. UNAMA documented 10,993 civilian casualties in 2018, while RS reported 9,214. Both sources stated that Kabul, Nangarhar and Helmand provinces experienced the most civilian casualties.

Increase of internally displaced people in Nangarhar province

According to UN information, clashes between Taliban insurgents and IS fighters in eastern Nangarhar province in April led to the displacement of more than 56,000 Menschen from the Zawa area of Khogyani district and Wadisar in Sherzad district. Most of the displaced people have moved to other districts of the province (mainly Surkhrod and Behsud). Humanitarian aid organisations are trying to take care of the refugees who had carried only the absolute necessities with them. In the affected areas, three medical facilities were closed; four schools had already closed down before the outbreak of fighting.

Grand council convention ends with call for peace

From 29 April to 3 May 2019, the Loya Jirga (Grand council convention) convened in Kabul. It ended with a 23-article resolution calling for peace with the Taliban and for internal dialogue. President Ghani offered a ceasefire during the month of Ramadan (6 May until 4 June 2019); however, he stressed that the truce would not be unilateral. Also, he promised to free 175 Taliban prisoners.

Attack on police headquarter

On 5 May 2019, a suicide attack by Taliban insurgents on a police headquarter in northern Baghlan province, left at least 13 security officers killed and scores of others wounded, among them civilians. Apparently, several Taliban members were also killed in the incident.

Algeria

Continuing mass protests against government

During the eleventh straight week of demonstration, people gathered on 3 May 2019 to protest against the political elites still in power. The military court of Blida has confirmed the arrest of Said Bouteflika, youngest brother of former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, alongside two former intelligence chiefs. New elections are scheduled to take place on 4 July 2019. Last Friday's protests were mainly peaceful.

Benin

Parliamentary election results / protests

In the parliamentary elections held on 28 April 2019, the two parties close to President Patrice Talon shared the 83 seats in parliament with the Union progressiste securing 47 and the Bloc républicain 36 seats. Opposition parties had been excluded from the election. Voter turnout was low at 23 percent.

On 1 and 2 May 2019, hundreds of opposition protesters violently demanded President Talon's resignation, setting up roadblocks and burning tyres in Cotonou. Security forces violently dispersed the crowds, using tear gas, water guns and live ammunition. On 2 May, a woman died after having been shot at the day before. Also on 1 May, one individual was shot dead during protests in the northern town of Kandi.

French tourists feared kidnapped

Two French tourists are feared kidnapped after they failed to return to their hotel after an excursion to Pendjari national park located in the northern part of the country bordering Burkina Faso. The authorities suspect that the couple may have been abducted by an Islamist group. On 4 May 2019, the body of their local guide was found. Observers suspect that terror groups linked to IS and al-Qaida operating in Benin may infiltrate the neighbouring countries Benin and Togo.

Burkina Faso

Attacks on church and school leave several dead

On 28 April 2019, unidentified gunmen on motorbikes attacked the Protestant Silgadij church in northern Sahel region (Soum province), as the worshippers were leaving the church around noon. The pastor of the church, two of his sons and three other worshippers were killed in the incident. This is the first attack on a church since Islamist groups started their activities in 2015.

On 26 April 2019, Islamist insurgents attacked the school of Maïtaougou village (Centre-Est region, Koulpélogo province, Comin-Yanga community), killing five teachers and a local council. Due to the deteriorating security situation, a total of 954 schools have already been closed.

Cameroon

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

In its report of 2 May 2019 (Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: How to Get to Talks?), the International Crisis Group says that the crisis which broke out in 2017 in the two English-speaking regions Northwest and Southwest has led to the death of at least 1,850 people, among them 650 civilians, 235 soldiers and police officers and nearly 1,000 separatists. A total of 530,000 people have been displaced within the country, a further 35,000 have fled to neighbouring Nigeria. More than 170 villages have been destroyed.

China

Xinjiang: Surveillance software

In a report published on 2 May 2019, Human Rights Watch describes the systematic surveillance of the population by the authorities via a smartphone app. This app, designed for police use, connects the police officers to a platform called Integrated Joint Operations Platform IJOP, which aggregates data about people.

Thus, IJOP monitors everybody in Xinjiang, tracking down the movement of people by monitoring the location data of their phones and cars (in Xinjiang, GPS tracking is mandatory in all vehicles) and recording the use of ID cards, the report says. The system also monitors the use of electricity of households and the quantity of petrol used (unusually high amounts might be an indication for illegal activities). By evaluating typical patterns of behaviour, 36 categories of suspects have been established to whom the authorities are paying special attention, among them individuals who no longer use smartphones (which can be tapped or located easily), do not socialise with neighbours, do not attend party meetings or who collect money for mosques. Via the app, officers receive in real time predictive warnings of people behaving suspiciously; subsequently, they get orders for investigations whose results, in turn, are forwarded to IJOP via the app, the report continues. Indirectly, this system also serves to monitor the police officers themselves. With the data collected, individuals are automatically categorized according to their dangerousness, and their freedom of movement in the public sphere is restricted to different degrees. For example, at the numerous police checkpoints in areas with a high percentage of Uyghur population, individuals may not be allowed to enter public places or shopping malls, the HRW report says.

Columbia

No decision after vote on special jurisdiction in senate

After the Colombian congress had voted on 8 April 2019 in favour of maintaining the special tribunal for peace (Jurisdicción Especial de la Paz – JEP/ see BN of 15 April 2019), the result of the vote held on 30 April brought no majority for either side. The procedure itself is controversial since several senators did not take part in the vote and, more importantly, it is legally unclear which senators are at all eligible to vote. Hence, the decision was taken to seek a constitutional court ruling.

DR Congo

Ebola deaths pass 1,000

The most recent Ebola epidemic, which broke out last August, is still beyond control. On 3 May 2019, the death toll passed 1,000. WHO executive director Michael Ryan said that rebel violence in the affected provinces of Ituri and North Kivu was harming efforts by medical doctors and assistants to identify suspected Ebola patients and treat them. Also, political groups and armed militias were spreading false rumours about the work of the helpers in order to use the crisis for their own purposes. Since January 2019, there have been 199 attacks on Ebola workers or operations, 42 of them directly against health facilities, with 85 health workers wounded or killed, eroding the progress made so far in combatting the disease. he said.

Ethiopia

Dozens killed in ethnic clashes

Media report that dozens of people (some sources say at least 200) have been killed in ethnic clashes in the northwestern part of the country. During the last weekend of April, fighting between ethnic Gumuz and Shinasha in the regional state of Benishangul Gumuz apparently left at least 21 people dead. In the following days, protest rallies were held in neighbouring regional Amhara state, mainly by ethnic Amhara who see themselves as victims of assaults and displacement by ethnic Oromo, who are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia. During the protests, scores of people were killed in revenge actions. Security forces were blamed for having intervened too late. Apparently, Ethiopian military units have restored order.

Meanwhile, UNHCR has suspended missions in Gambella region due to the tense situation. Also this region has been the scene of repeated killings of civilians, among them refugees and humanitarian aid workers.



Iran

Arrests on International Workers' Day

In Tehran, security forces violently dispersed a peaceful protest rally in front of the Iranian parliament in commemoration of the Workers' Day. At least 30 individuals were arrested, among them members of the bus drivers' trade union and of the writers' association. The Tehran governor stated that the rally was authorised and therefore police was obliged to forcefully disperse it. In the last 12 months, at least 186 workers' activists have been detained, alongside 526 members of other trade associations. At present, 43 workers of the Haft-e Tapeh sugar cane company are being held in detention (for more than 10 years, the workers of Iran's largest sugar company have been protesting, first against the closure of the plant, then against the company's privatisation, and since 2014 against the impacts of privatisation), alongside with 60 workers of the steel industrial group in Ahwaz, 261 truck drivers and dozens of teachers.

Support by foreign militias

After the flood disaster in the crisis region of Khuzestan, pro-government foreign militias were deployed there under supervision of the revolutionary guards Pasdaran-e Enghelab-e Eslami, with the official task to assist with the clean-up operations. In mid-March, the Tehran Revolutionary Court chairman Moussa Ghazanfarabadi had said during a visit of the Qom Seminary: "If we do not help the Islamic Revolution, Iraqi al-Hashd ash-Sha'bi, Afghan al-Fatemiyoun, Pakistani al-Zainebiyoun and Yemeni al-Houthis will." These militia groups are called 'defenders of Shiite shrines' in the Iranian media. Ghazanfarabadi's statement can be regarded as a warning which may refer to a possible internal and/or international crisis.

Warnings by morality police

Iran's interior minister Aboldreza Rahmani Fazli has welcomed the new policing measure to send text messages to Iranian women warning them of 'misconduct in public'. The messages referring to 'moral values' would lead to compliance with the Islamic rules, the minister stated. The text messages are sent to female car drivers who do not respect the strict dress codes requiring women to wear a headscarf in public. After three warnings, they are summoned to appear before the morality police. In the last weeks, dozens of women had to commit themselves in writing that they will adhere to the Islamic rules in future. A study carried out by Iran's parliamentary research centre showed that around 70 percent of Iranian women do not agree with the state dress code.

Execution of two adolescent boys

On 25 April 2019, the two 17-year old cousins Mehdi Sohrabifar and Amin Sedaghat were executed in Adelabad prison in Shiraz. According to Amnesty International, the teenagers were unaware that they had been sentenced to death until shortly before their executions. They had been convicted of rape and robbery in a secret trial without the assistance of a lawyer.

Iraq

Security situation

Despite security operations, militant attacks are continuing in the country. Press reports say that the number of attacks rose to 97 in April (March: 59). Apparently, IS activities are still focussed on northeastern Diyala province and its Khanaqin district, securing access to all rural areas of the province. There have been repeated reports on people escaping from the cities. IS fighters are reported to extort money and carry out abductions. There are also reports of security-related incidents in Ninive province, where IS combatants have launched attacks mainly in the western and southern parts. As in Diyala province, there are more and more reports of people fleeing from the cities due to IS operations, mainly in the western parts of the province. On 5 May, the Iraqi military and paramilitary tribal groups apparently started a major security operation in Anbar, Ninive and Salahaddin provinces in the northwestern part of the country, press sources report.

Reverse migration to Kurdistan Region of Iraq

On 23 April, press reports said that reverse migration is taking place as the displaced people who had gone to northern Ninive province are now leaving their homes and moving back to the autonomous Kurdistan

Region: The Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights IHCHR says that people are leaving Ninive due to lack of security, stability and lack of basic services.

Israel/ Palestinian Autonomous Area

Escalation of violence between Gaza and Israel

On 3 May 2019, two Palestinians were killed in clashes at the Gaza-Israel frontier during Friday's protests. Two Israeli soldiers were wounded by snipers; subsequently, two Palestinians were killed by an Israeli airstrike. In the two following days, approx. 600 rockets were fired from Gaza, forcing tens of thousands of Israelis to seek shelter. For the first time in years, the Israeli army has responded with targeted airstrikes against individual leading figures; also, more than 250 militant targets in Gaza were attacked with tanks and artillery. The fights were the heaviest military clashes since the last war in 2014, with Palestinian attacks killing four Israeli individuals and Israeli forces taking the lives of 22 Palestinians. In the morning of 6 May 2019, the Palestinian side agreed a new ceasefire with Israel. Apparently, most Palestinians killed in the Gaza escalation were from Islamic Jihad. While the group officially co-operates with the ruling Hamas party, it has become more and more rebellious against Hamas' authority over the area in recent years.

Kazakhstan

Several protesters arrested

On 1 May 2019, protesters gathered in Nur-Sultan, Almaty and numerous other Kazakh cities, calling for a boycott of the presidential elections scheduled for 9 June 2019, and demanding the release of all political prisoners. Media report the arrest of around 100 protesters in Almaty. The Kazakh interior ministry said that in both Almaty and Nur-Sultan, 80 protesters were arrested. On 19 March 2019, long-standing Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev had resigned from office and installed the chairman of the senate Jomart Tokayev as interim president. On 23 April 2016, Tokayev was nominated as presidential candidate.

Kosovo/Serbia

Conference on Western Balkan countries led to no result

While Kosovo and Serbia agreed to resume the dialogue on normalisation of their relationship at the summit held on 29 April 2019 in Berlin (see BN of 29 April 2019), Serbia demands prior to the renewed dialogue that Kosovo lifts the punitive tariffs on Serbian imports. Kosovo, in turn, intends to lift the tariffs only after Serbia recognizes Kosovo's state sovereignty. Besides, no final conclusion was reached with regard to the controversial issue of a land swap. A further meeting will be held in Paris on 1 July 2019.

Kosovo's President Hashim Thaci said that the United States must have a leading role in the process of normalizing relations because the EU is too weak and not united.

Lebanon

Prominent Fatah member killed

On 26 April 2019, Mohammad Nazih Khalil (known as Abu al-Kul) was fatally shot. He was a member of the Palestinian security forces and of Fatah in the Palestinian refugee camp Ain al-Hilweh. Apparently, the incident led to unrest and shootings; several people were injured. The Palestinian security forces have temporarily reinforced their presence. Negotiations supported by the Lebanese authorities are intended to prevent an armed escalation between the groups living in the camp. According to Palestinian leading figures, the suspects will be brought to the Lebanese justice as soon as they are apprehended.

Protests and strikes in the public sector

In the discussion of the state budget for the year 2019, the new government is apparently planning to introduce austerity measures to combat the country's enormous fiscal deficit. For fear of cuts in salaries and pensions, protest rallies were held in Beirut and other parts of the country by retired military personnel,

teachers of public institutions and employees of public hospitals and of authorities. On 3 and 4 May 2019, the employees of the Central Bank of Lebanon BDL went on strike. Media report that the strike has been expanded into an open strike.

Libya

Fight for Tripoli

Fighting continues between the forces of the Libyan National Army LNA and those of the Government of National Accord GNA, including their respective militias. From 30 April through 6 May 2019, neither side was able to achieve a breakthrough. The LNA has not yet managed to capture the city centre. On 1 May 2019, the WHO stated that since the beginning of the military offensive on 4 April 2019, a total of 376 people have been killed and 1,822 others wounded.

Situation in southwestern Fezzan region

On 4 May 2019, the raid of a LNA military camp and a prison inside the camp left at least nine LNA members dead; also, an unknown number of prisoners were freed. While IS has claimed responsibility for the attack, LNA blames IS and 'Chadian' fighters for the incident.

Mali

18 dead in 2 attacks

On 1 and 2 May 2019, two ambushes by armed men left a total of 18 civilians dead. The first attack apparently killed 12 people near the city of Mondoro (Mopti region). The second attack took place when residents came to pick up the victims. So far no information has been provided regarding the perpetrators.

Nigeria

ISWA attack on military base near Magumeri

In the evening of 3 May 2019, suspected fighters of ISWA (Islamic State in West Africa), a terrorist group which had split off from Boko Haram in 2016, attacked a military base near Magumeri (administrative centre of the Local Government Area of the same name in Borno state). According to the military, a large number of terrorists were injured or killed in fights lasting several hours. On 4 May 2019, ISWA claimed responsibility for the attack through its news agency Amaq, maintaining to have killed 10 soldiers.

North Macedonia

Social Democrat wins presidential run-off

In the presidential runoff, the candidate of the governing Social Democrats Stevo Pendarovski gained a narrow majority of 52 percent. His rival Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova of the nationalist opposition party VMRO-DPMNE secured 44 percent. Pendarovski is a pro-European professor of political science.

As the first election after the disputed change of the country's name from "Macedonia" to "North Macedonia" was considered to be an indicator for the government's pro-western policy, Pendarovski's victory is seen as a victory for the government, which implemented the name change. Voter turn-out was low at 44.5 percent.

Russian Federation

Nationwide protests on 1 May

On 1 May 2019, protests and rallies took place in Moscow, St. Petersburg and many other Russian cities, with about 130 protesters being arrested by the security forces. Media sources give a number of 60 arrested individuals in St. Petersburg, among them many opposition activists who criticized Putin with banners and

slogans. On 2 May, a St. Petersburg court sentenced two opposition activists to 10 days in prison for having organized an unauthorised demonstration.

President signs ‘sovereign internet’ bill into law

On 1 May 2019, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a new internet law ensuring that Russian data flows will be steered away from foreign servers. Critics fear that the law will pave the way for increased censorship of the internet in Russia and that the country will be isolated from the global data net. The new law is due to enter into force in November 2019.

Senegal

Post of Prime Minister abolished

Senegalese lawmakers have approved the transformation of the country to a presidential democracy. On 4 May 2019, the members of the National Assembly voted in favour of the prime minister’s office to be abolished, NA president Moustapha Niassé said after a nine-hour debate. 124 lawmakers supported the constitutional reform initiated by President Macky Sall, 7 voted against it. The president’s party has a two-third majority in the National Assembly. Also, the assembly voted in favour of amendments aimed to prevent the dissolution of parliament by the president. Thus, parliament will no longer be able to initiate the procedure for a vote of no-confidence against government. In February 2019, President Sall was re-elected to a second term, on 2 April, he was sworn in. On 6 April, he announced his proposal of a constitutional amendment. Already in the 1960ies and 1980ies, the office of the prime minister had been abolished under the presidencies of Léopold Sédar Senghor and Abdou Diouf. Former Prime Minister Mahammed Boun Abdallah Dionne was appointed as Secretary General of the Republic.

Sri Lanka

Curfew

On 5 May 2019, a curfew was imposed after violent clashes between Muslims and Christians in Negombo. Media report that on the same day, over 600 foreigners were expelled, about 200 of them Islamic clerics.

Sudan

Ongoing protests

Demonstrators are continuing their mass sit-in in outside the military headquarters which began on 6 April 2019. On 2 May 2019, ten thousands of protestors gathered, calling for a rapid hand-over of power to a civilian government. The Opposition spoke of a ‘march of millions’, while media reported that hundreds of thousands attended the protests. Negotiations for the formation of a transitional government are continuing.

Syria

Last rebel stronghold under heavy fire

Reports say that on 1 May 2019, the Syrian army launched about 110 air attacks in Idlib province. Apparently the attacks, carried out with Russian support, have been the heaviest in more than six months. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported 7 civilian dead. Observers say that the offensive was intended to regain control over the strategic M4 and M5 highways connecting important Syrian economic centres. So far, the control over these roads has served as an important income source for the rebels.

Tunisia

German-Tunisian UN expert detained in Tunisia

On 26 March 2019, Moncef Kartas, member of an independent UN expert panel investigating violations of the UN arms embargo against Libya, took a plane to Tunis on behalf of the United Nations. In spite of his diplomatic immunity, he was arrested by a special unit of the Tunisian police. He has been held in custody since. Tunisian media say that he was due to participate in a meeting of the so-called Libya Quartet consisting in representatives of UN, EU, Arab League and African Union in the margins of the Arab League summit. The Tunisian internal affairs ministry has stated that he is suspected of 'spying for foreign parties'.

Turkey

Clashes with PKK fighters in the country's south-east

On 4 May 2019, PKK fighters launched an attack from northern Iraqi territory killing 3 Turkish soldiers.

Suspected followers of Fethullah Gulen arrested

As in the preceding weeks, numerous individuals have been arrested who are officially suspected of having been involved in the coup or having relations to the Gulen movement. Already on 26 April, a large number of people were arrested (see also BN of 29 April 2019). On 30 April, again 16 soldiers and 15 teachers were detained for alleged links to the Gulen movement.

Venezuela

Coup attempt and demonstrations

From outside a military base in southern Caracas, the soldiers of the Venezuelan army were called upon to take the side of interim president Guaido on 30 April 2019. Only few soldiers switched sides in the course of the day. Opposition leader Leopoldo López, who had been under house arrest since 2017, was liberated by soldiers and took refuge in the Spanish embassy. Despite President Maduro's announcement of severe prosecution, opposition leader Guaido was not arrested; rather, he called upon the protesters to begin strike actions on 1 May 2019. On the same day, pro-Maduro rallies took place. In Altamira, clashes between supporters of Guaido and Maduro left one female protester dead.

Yemen

Six civilians killed in bombing

On 2 May 2019, at least six civilians were killed and several others wounded when a roadside bomb went off. Security circles blame al-Qaeda for the attack which took place near the village of al-Katn in Hadramaut province. The region, characterized by weak government institutions, is a stronghold of the al-Qaeda terror network.

UN regains access to wheat stocks

UN staff has regained access to more than 50,000 tons of grain stored in Hodeidah. Due to the fighting, the aid workers had no access to the stores for months. Around 70 percent of the wheat is still usable and will be milled in the next weeks. The grain storage can feed more than three and a half million people for around one month.