

Group 62 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

12 August 2019

Afghanistan

Negotiations about Afghanistan

High-ranking Taliban representatives met with US negotiators in Qatar for the eighth round of talks about a political solution for the Afghanistan conflict. The Afghan government is not involved in the talks. The press reported that an agreement laying down the rules for the withdrawal of US and NATO troops is to be negotiated by 01 September 2019. It is conditional on a guarantee by the Taliban that the country will not become a safe haven for terrorists again. This is to be followed by official peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, the report says.

Attacks in Kabul

Despite the ongoing negotiations with the US the Taliban called for violent action to be taken against the elections scheduled for September. The attacks continue, on 06 August 2019 a bomb attached to a van carrying staff of the interior ministries anti-drug unit exploded. Reportedly there were two casualties and seven others were wounded. At first no-one claimed responsibility for the attack.

On 07 August 2019 a car bomb blew up near a military academy in Kabul. At least 14 people were killed, and over 140 were wounded, most of them civilians. The Taliban claimed the attack stating that they wanted to hit an enemy recruitment centre.

Algeria

Release of man arrested for hoisting Berber flag

Nadir Fetissi had carried the banned Berber flag during a protest march and faced ten years in prison for endangering national unity on account of this. On 09 August 2019 he was acquitted by a court in Annaba in eastern Algeria. He had been arrested in early July. Others who had also been arrested in Annaba for carrying the Berber flag were released a few hours later. The court hearings for 18 people in Batna province are still pending. In other parts of the country protesters who had hoisted the Berber flag were given suspended sentences.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Political parties agree on formation of government

Ten months after the elections to the presidency the three leading parties have agreed on the new government to be formed. Representatives of Serbs, Muslim Bosnians and Croatians signed the agreement at a meeting that had been brokered by the head of the EU delegation in Bosnia. The main point of contention between the parties had been their different attitudes towards NATO. The Serbs oppose an accession, while Bosnians and Croatians advocate it. The wording in the government agreement is rather vague confirming merely the intention to strengthen relations to the western defence alliance.

Chad

Dozens die in ethnic clashes

On 09 August 2019 President Idriss Déby Itno told journalists in the capital N'Djamena of at least 37 deaths, one hospital mentioned 44 fatalities. The current conflict has been developing since 05 August 2019 in the eastern province of Ouaddai. Arab cattle herders and sedentary farmers are confronting each other. Déby deplored that owners of firearms would not hesitate to use them when the police interfered. Last month Déby had proposed to reinstate military courts to counter the violence. According to Déby over 40 people were killed in similar conflicts in Sila province since the beginning of the year.

China

Hong Kong: General strike, more demonstrations

On 05 August 2019 thousands stopped working to observe the general strike called for that day. Protests were held in seven city districts. Again, streets were occupied and rallies held in front of police stations and government buildings. Metro and commuter trains were blocked, about 200 flights were cancelled, because some of the airport staff had called in sick or went on strike. Police and protesters clashed violently. The police announced 148 arrests; which brings the total of arrests since the protests started to about 600. On 07 August 2019 up to 3,000 (depending on source) lawyers protested against the way government and police were treating participants of the protest movement.

From 9 to 11 August 2019 hundreds of demonstrators held a sit-down strike at Hong Kong airport to draw the travellers' attention to the situation in Hong Kong without interfering with air traffic. On 10 and 11 August 2019 thousands were out on the streets again, although some protests had been banned. The protesters set up barricades and engaged in confrontations with the police that used tear-gas.

Colombia

Violence by armed groups

According to a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report published on 08 August 2019 armed groups are fighting for control over territory abandoned by the rebel organisation Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) in the Departamento Norte de Santander (Catatumbo region) near the border to Venezuela. The report says that the government is not effectively controlling all of these areas. The rebel organizations Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) and Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL), that are still active, as well as regrouped former FARC fighters are committing acts of violence against the population. There are murders, disappearances, sexual violence, recruiting of children and expulsions, even land mines are used. The report goes on to say that the government stated that more than 40,000 people had been displaced from the region, mostly by fighting between the ELN and the EPL. The roughly 25,000 Venezuelan refugees living in the region are also threatened by this violence.

After signing a peace agreement with the government in 2016 most FARC fighters were demobilized and withdrew from the areas they used to control. Other armed groups, including criminal gangs, try to exploit the resulting power vacuum for their own purposes.

Egypt

Attack on National Cancer Institute of Cairo University

A car bomb exploded in front of the cancer research centre of Cairo University in the night to 5 August 2019 and killed 22 people. The Egyptian authorities named Hasm group, which is close to the Muslim Brotherhood, as the organisation responsible for the attack. Hasm group denies any involvement. When two hideouts of Hasm group were stormed during the investigations 17 people died in the exchange of fire.

India/Pakistan

Curfew in the Kashmir region temporarily relaxed

dpa reported on 09 August 2019 that the Indian government has temporarily relaxed the curfew imposed on the Jammu and Kashmir region after the government's disputed revocation of the autonomy regulations applying to the region (see BN of 05 August 2019). The report said that the people of the city of Srinagar and surroundings had been allowed to leave their houses to attend regular Friday prayers in the neighbourhood mosques. Tens of thousands of soldiers are currently controlling the region, also to prevent any protests against the government's actions. The Indian foreign ministry said that no protests had taken place. Internet and telephone connections had been cut on 04 August 2019 and are said to have been re-established, at least partially. Several super markets, pharmacies and other shops have reopened.

Iraq

Security situation

On 04 August 2019 the owner of a Baghdad beauty salon was killed and an employee injured when an explosive device in her letter box detonated.

Several civilians and security forces were killed by IEDs and mines in the provinces of Anbar, Baghdad, Basra, and Diyala.

On 05 August 2019 the third phase of the anti-IS military offensive „Will of Victory“ (see BN of 29 July 2019) was launched in Diyala and Ninive provinces. On 06 August 2019 the Popular Mobilisation Unit announced the successful completion of the third phase.

Prison break in Baghdad

Fifteen suspected drug dealers escaped from police custody (al-Russafa police station) in Baghdad on 10 August 2019. A surveillance camera video shows the suspects leaving the police station without encountering any visible resistance from the security forces. Some of the station's staff can be seen in civilian clothing and without arms. By now eight of the suspects have been apprehended again. The media reported that some of those responsible for security had been dismissed.

Protests in the Ninive plains

On 06 August 2019 Prime Minister Abd al-Mahdi transferred responsibility for public security to the local Shabak units (Brigade 30) of the Popular Mobilisation Unit, the local police and the military. The earlier decision of the government of central Iraq to withdraw Brigade 30 from all check points in the Ninive plains had triggered protests from the rural population. On 01 July 2019 the central Iraqi government had issued a decree to fully integrate the Popular Mobilisation Unit into the Iraqi security forces (see BN of 15 July 2019).

Fifth anniversary of the attack on Sinjar

03 August 2019 marks the fifth anniversary of the IS attack on Yezidis in Sinjar. Up to now 73 Yezidi mass graves have been discovered in Sinjar district; 17 of them have been opened. The fate of 2,908 Yezidis, mainly women and children, is still unknown.

Iran

Significant increase in financial aid for the Palestinian Hamas

Two weeks after a Hamas delegation met with Ayatollah Khamenei and government representatives in Tehran, Israeli media report that Iran's financial assistance for the Islamist group will be significantly increased. The media refer to undisclosed Israeli government sources saying that after the meeting Iran boosted its about USD 100m in annual financial aid for Hamas to USD 360m. Many Iranians are strictly against Iran's spending for militant groups and regional interventions.

Renewed Iranian attacks on Kurdish militias

Bases of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) in the Iranian-Iraqi border area were the main targets of the attacks of the Iranian armed forces. The PDKI has been outlawed in Iran since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, because it fights for the right of self-determination of the roughly ten million Kurds in Iran.

Gender equality: The labour market situation of men and women

A recent study says that of the 24 million Iranians in employment about 20 million are men and only about 4.5 million women. Due to this situation President Hassan Rohani had announced in a government decree issued already two years ago, that he intends to strive for a 30% quota of women in executive positions in public agencies and authorities by the end of his second term in 2021. In March 2019 the World Bank published an international ranking on gender equality which lists Iran in position 184. Only Sudan, Saudi Arabia and the UAE rank even lower. An Iranian study made under the control of the labour ministry says that three million people are currently registered as unemployed in Iran. The share of female university graduates is 28.1%, but that of male graduates only 12.9%, the study finds.

Israel/Palestinian Autonomous Areas

West Bank: Police search after murder of an Israeli

On 08 August 2019 the body of an 18-year-old Israeli was found near the settlements of Migdal Oz and Efrat on the West Bank. He was returning from Jerusalem to his Yeshiva (Jewish university) when he was stabbed to death near a bus stop.

Israeli security forces launched a large-scale search. Then on 10 August 2019 the Israeli military announced that several Palestinian suspects had been arrested. The media report that these are two brothers from Hebron.

Gaza Strip: Attack on border leaves four dead

On 10 August 2019 four Palestinians were killed in a shoot-out with the Israeli military when they attempted to overcome the border fence of Gaza with the use of force. Reportedly they wore military uniforms and were armed with rifles and grenades.

A Hamas spokesman said that this was an act by individuals, but Israel blames the radical-Islamist leadership for the attacks launched from its territory.

Kosovo

Parliament dissolved, new elections in autumn

After the resignation of Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj (see BN of 22 and 29 July 2019) parliament resolved to dissolve on 22 August 2019. Thereafter new elections must take place within 30 to 45 days.

The currently governing coalition consists of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) of President Hashim Thaçi, Haradinaj's Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) and the Social Democratic Initiative (NISMA) of Fatmir Limaj. The opposition includes the Democratic League (LDK) and the nationalist movement Vetevendosje (self-determination). According to the polls both parties would stand a chance of winning the next election.

Haradinaj had resigned after being summoned by the Kosovo Special Court in The Hague. Haradinaj had held the office of prime minister already from 2004 to 2005. He returned to this office after the 2017 parliamentary elections. During the Kosovo war in 1998/99 he was the co-founder and commander of the underground army UCK. The UN International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia had acquitted Haradinaj for lack of evidence already in two earlier trials in 2008 and 2012.

Libya

Murzuq

At least 42 people died in an air strike on a local assembly in Murzuq on 04 August 2019, another 60 were wounded, most of them seriously. It is said that the troops of Khalifa Haftar are responsible. Murzuq currently is in a power vacuum, because most of Haftar's troops have pulled out to bolster the offensive on Tripoli.

Ceasefire for Eid al-Adha

From 11 August 2019 to 15 September 2019 one of the most important festivities of Islam, Eid al-Adha, will be celebrated. The troops of the Government of National Accord (GNA) and the Libyan National Army (LNA) agreed on a UN-brokered ceasefire in Tripoli until 13 August 2019. This ceasefire has already been violated several times, including by a missile attack on Mitiga airport in the morning of 12 August 2019; overall it seems to be largely observed, though.

UN staff killed by car bomb

On 10 August 2019 a car bombing in Banghazi claimed the lives of two staff members of UNISMIL as well as others.

Morocco

Teacher arrested for inciting to violence

On 05 August 2019 Moroccan criminal police arrested a 26-year-old teacher who had called for violent actions against some young Belgian women in a Facebook group that includes 500,000 teachers. The women helped with the construction of schools and roads in the country's south for a non-profit Belgian organization. He said that the young women showed disrespect of the traditions of the region and the customs of the land by wearing shorts and T-shirts. Meanwhile the three young women left the country early. After the Belgian embassy advised the charity not to send any more volunteers to Morocco it has cancelled any further visits.

Moroccan navy rescues 424 from the sea

Between 03 and 05 August 2019 the Moroccan navy rescued 424 people and took them back to Moroccan ports.

Pardons for the Feast of the Sacrifice

On 11 August 2019 King Mohammed VI pardoned 350 prisoners on the occasion of the Eid al-Adha festivities. The prison sentences of 315 convicts were reduced, 35 were released and for 18 the prison sentence was commuted to a fine.

Moldova

EU resumes financial assistance

On 24 July 2019 the new Prime Minister Maia Sandu signed three financial assistance agreements worth USD 45 million with the EU in Brussels. The money is for economic development, establishing the rule of law, and for implementing an Association Agreement.

The EU had frozen its assistance in recent years due to a lack of progress with reforms, but after the new government took office both the EU and the International Monetary Fund see many opportunities.

The new government, consisting of the pro-European ACUM Group and the pro-Russian Socialist Party, was formed in mid-June and declared its resolve to end corruption (see BN of 01 July 2019).

Mozambique

Peace agreement signed

On 06 August 2019 President Filipe Nyusi and Renamo rebel leader Ossufo Momade signed a peace agreement during a solemn ceremony. The core of the agreement is the integration of some members of the Renamo militia into the army and the police. Others shall receive financial assistance to ease their transition into civilian life. This marks a return to the peace accord of 1992 between the former socialist Frelimo government and the Renamo rebels who used to be supported by the South African Apartheid regime. In 2013 Renamo had unilaterally renounced the agreement and had gone underground again. The 2016 ceasefire was followed by many years of negotiations.

Nigeria

Security forces take action against protests of RevolutionNow

On 05 August 2019 small-scale protests against the Buhari government were held in several Nigerian cities. Omoyele Sowore (human rights activist, founder of the Nigerian online news portal Sahara Reporters and presidential candidate for the African Action Congress (AAC) in the February 2019 elections) and the AAC had called for such protests with the hashtag #RevolutionNow. The police urged the population not to participate in these protests. In Lagos police barricaded the entrance to the national stadium where the protesters wanted to meet. Police also used tear gas against them and arrested about 12. Police sealed off Eagle Square and the access to the city in Abuja, whereupon some activists marched to the headquarters of the National Human Rights Commission and denounced human rights violations of the Buhari government. Inibehe Effiong (lawyer and advisor to Sowore) informed that a total of 56 people were arrested during the protests nationwide.

Court authorizes secret service to arrest Omoyele Sowore

On 08 August 2019 the Abuja Federal High Court applied anti-terrorism legislation and authorized the Department of State Services (DSS) to detain Omoyele Sowore who had been arrested on 03 August 2019 (see BN of 05 August 2019) for 45 days. In this way the DSS will be enabled to complete the investigations into Sowore's call for revolution of 27 July 2019 and for a protest rally against the Buhari government scheduled for 05 August 2019. If the task cannot be completed by then the DSS may apply for an extension of the detention period for another 45 days.

Ibrahim El-Zakzaky and his wife temporarily released from detention for medical treatment

On 05 August 2019 the secret service DSS released the leader and founder of the banned Shiite sect Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN), Ibrahim El-Zakzaky who has been held without a trial since December 2015, and his wife from prison. The DSS thus complied with an order of the Kaduna High Court of 05 August 2019 issued to permit El-Zakzaky and his wife to receive urgently required medical treatment in India. The court ordered the release on the condition that El-Zakzaky and his wife will be guarded during their trip to and stay in India and return to Nigeria to continue the trial immediately after completion of the treatment. The ban of the largest Shiite association in Nigeria had been preceded by many protest marches demanding the release of El-Zakzaky and his wife. The marches caused several violent clashes with the security forces resulting in a number of casualties.

Russian Federation

Tens of thousands rally for free elections again

Despite the police's massive efforts to intimidate the population tens of thousands again demonstrated peacefully against police violence and for free elections on Moscow's Sakharov Prospect on 10 August 2019. The organizers put the number of participants at 50,000 while the police say there were about 20,000. Many young people were among the protesters. Videos on social media showing the violent handling of protesters by police in earlier protests had caused an uproar. Among the slogans shouted at the rally was the call: "Free

political prisoners". This particularly refers to the prominent opposition politicians Alexey Navalny and Ilya Yashin, both of whom are currently detained.

In contrast to the protest on previous weekends this one had been authorized. No mass arrests took place. The civil rights portal OWD-Info said, that nevertheless about 180 people had been arrested in Moscow. At manifestations of solidarity for the Moscow protests at least 80 people had been taken into custody nationwide, the portal reports. On the two previous weekends more than 2,000 people had been arrested during unauthorized demonstrations. The drastic action taken by the security forces against the peaceful protesters met with international criticism.

Saudi Arabia

Gender equality: In future women will be allowed to travel without permission of a man

King Salman ibn Abd al-Aziz al-Saud issued a decree granting women aged above 21 the right to a passport and to travel, this is reported on the Saudi news website Okaz. Up to now women in Saudi Arabia required the consent of a male guardian for this. The guardians are mostly their fathers or a brother. Many of the recent improvements of the situation of women also have an economical aspect. Such as a law against sexual harassment that has been in force since last year. This permits more women to work with men with whom they are not related. The latest reforms even include a right to work for women.

Somalia

Death sentences executed

On 05 August 2019 a Somali court martial executed two al-Shabaab fighters in Mogadishu. The court found them guilty of committing several terrorist attacks in Mogadishu, including the one on the Sahafi hotel in November 2018 in which dozens of people lost their lives.

Attacks

It is said that on 07 August 2019 al-Shabaab attacked a police station in the city of Beledweyne, Hiraan region, and on 08 August 2019 another one in Bardhere, Gedo region.

Fighting

On 08 August 2019 several attacks were flown against al-Shabaab in the cities of Jamame and Sakow as well as the village of Salagle (Middle Juba region) probably with a US drone.

The Somali army and AMISOM took control of the city of Awdheegle (Lower Shabelle region) on 06 August 2019. The city had been occupied by al-Shabaab for several years.

Syria

Ceasefire terminated

On 05 August 2019 the Syrian government announced the termination of the unilaterally declared ceasefire and the resumption of its offensive in Idlib. It is reported that already on 09 August 2019 Syrian and Russian air force jets were firing at targets again, thus resuming the bombing that had stopped since the ceasefire was declared on 01 August 2019.

Russia's explanation for the end of the ceasefire is that the Jihadists controlling the last rebel territory in Idlib and some neighbouring provinces, had fired at places controlled by the regime and at the Russian military airport Hmeimin.

After President Assad's forces succeeded in conquering the strategically important city of Hobait on 11 August 2019 they came closer to Khan Sheikhoun, which has been under rebel control continuously since 2012. The pro-opposition Syrian Human Rights Observatory called this the most significant advance of the government forces since the offensive started on 30 April 2019.

UN staff estimate that at least 10,500 people were displaced in June and July.

Turkish military offensive averted

On 7 August 2019 the US and Turkey announced their agreement on the establishment of a security buffer zone in the north-east of Syria. The zone is to prevent Kurdish fighters from using the region as a retreat for attacks within Turkey and furthermore the area is treated as a future settlement area for Syrian refugees returning from Turkey. Both parties to the conflict accuse each other of intending to change the demography of the region in the long term in favour of a Kurdish respectively an Arab majority.

However, the agreement is rather vague. At first both parties want to set up an operational centre for the establishment of a so-called security zone. No details about the future zone's size or its control became known. Until recently Turkish diplomats insisted on a corridor that is at least 32km wide which would mean that a large part of Kurdish settled areas including the city of Qamishli would be included. The dominantly Kurdish SDF leadership proposed a corridor that is 3-5km wide. Another open question is who will control the future security zone.

The Syrian government in Damascus criticized the agreement as an attack on Syrian sovereignty and its territorial integrity.

Attacks on Turkish military establishments

Turkey reported that Kurdish YPG fighters attacked a Turkish military station in Afrin on 09 August 2019. Two soldiers were wounded in the attack.

Three people die in an attack in Qamishli

Three children were killed by a car bomb in the dominantly Kurdish north-east of the country on 07 August 2019. The city's police spokesman suspects a terrorist background. It seems that no-one has yet claimed responsibility for the attack. The authorities have been warning against the growing danger of attacks with radical Islamist motives by underground IS followers for some time.

Turkey

German national arrested

Media reported that a German citizen was arrested when he entered Turkey at the end of July 2019. The Turkish judiciary accuses him of disseminating terrorist propaganda via his Facebook account. The German Foreign Office is informed of the incident, the report said. A magistrate ordered his pre-trial detention because of the risk of absconding since he did not have a residence in Turkey. The media reported that the man was born in Turkey in 1983 and held German nationality since 2011; he had been released from Turkish citizenship in 2012.

Tunisia

Almost 100 candidates registered for the presidential elections

By now 98 candidates have submitted their applications for the presidential elections on 15 September 2019. The candidates include the Head of Government Youssef Chahed, defence minister Abdelkarim Zbidi, media czar Nabil Karoui, former interim president Moncef Marzouki and the homosexual lawyer Mounir Baatour. On 31 August 2019 the Tunisian election committee will announce which candidates have been admitted.

Venezuela/Colombia

Naturalization of Venezuelan children in Colombia

On 05 June 2019 Colombia's president confirmed a resolution providing that children of Venezuelan citizens born after 19 August 2015 will receive Colombian citizenship. Before they could only get Colombian citizenship, if at least one parent had a permanent legal residence title in Colombia.

New US sanctions/Talks break down

On 06 August 2019 US-President Donald Trump signed an executive order imposing sweeping sanctions against the Venezuelan government. All assets located within the US will be frozen, all business with the

Venezuelan government is practically forbidden for US citizens and companies (even though exemptions may be applied for, e.g. for medical goods or investments in the US interest). There is strong criticism of the sanctions because they mainly hit the country's economy and will predictably intensify the crisis. Maduro's government responded by temporarily breaking off the talks with the opposition on 08 August 2019.

Yemen

Fighting and take-over of power in Aden

On 07 August 2019 fighting broke out in Aden between the Presidential Guards (a pro-government unit) and the Security Belt Forces (a military unit of the southern separatist movement Southern Transitional Council (STC), supported by the UAE). The renewed fighting came after an attack of the Houthi rebels on the Security Belt Forces in Aden on 01 August 2019 (see BN of 05 August 2019). The latter accused the Yemeni government of having participated in the attack. The fighting continued until a ceasefire was agreed in the evening of 10 August 2019. Reports say that at least 70 people were killed and hundreds were injured in the fighting. The separatists took control of the presidential palace and some military posts. The interior minister of the Yemeni government congratulated the UAE on their victory and was critical of Saudi Arabia, their allies in the fight against the Houthi rebels, for not doing enough to stop the Security Belt Forces.

The STC is supported by the UAE, but the government troops are supported by Saudi Arabia. Thus, the rift between Saudi Arabia and the UAE, who actually are both fighting against the Houthi rebels, becomes increasingly obvious in the Yemeni civil war.

Arrests and expulsions in Aden

The UN accused the Security Belt Forces of having launched reprisal attacks against hundreds of citizens from northern Yemen after the Houthi rebel attack of 01 August 2019 (see BN of 05 August 2019). The Houthi rebel movement comes from the country's north. There are reports that people were arbitrarily arrested and detained, forcibly displaced, physically attacked and harassed. In the districts of Al-Shiekh Othman and Mansoorah houses and shops were searched. The Security Belt Forces denied any involvement in the assaults that allegedly happened on 03 and 04 August 2019.

Attack in Hajjah

There was a report on 11 August 2019 that several people, including civilians, were killed or injured in an air strike of Saudi forces in Hajjah governorate.