

Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

10 December 2012

Afghanistan

Nato consultations on Afghanistan

The Foreign Ministers of the NATO countries discussed at a two-day meeting on 4 and 5 December 2012 the strategy the Alliance would be adopting after the ISAF troops withdraw at the end of 2014. The strength of the troops remains unclear as does how the successor mission will be financed. International partners have pledged US\$ 4.1 billion. Whereas the donor countries are insisting on having a considerable co-determination right on how the funds are spent, Afghanistan is determined to have the final decision on the matter.

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen praised the progress made by the Afghan police force and Army within the framework of the consultations. He said Afghan forces are meanwhile responsible for 75 percent of the population. Four out of five military operations are being managed by Afghan troops. Ninety percent of the training of security forces is being delivered by Afghan forces. However, he said there had been delays in establishing the security force. As more than 60 NATO soldiers have been killed by members of the security forces or persons wearing false uniforms this year, he said the security precautions taken in relation to the recruitment of cadets are manifold and time-consuming. The aim of having 352 officers by October 2012 will probably not be met until the spring of 2013.

Despite all the progress made, at least 384 NATO soldiers have been killed so far this year. Around 300 Afghan security officers are killed each month.

Assassinations

An Afghan women's affairs official was shot dead by unidentified gunmen in Laghman province in eastern Afghanistan on 10 December 2012, just months after her predecessor had been blown up by a bomb on 1 July 2012, while a police chief was killed in a roadside bombing in Nimruz province in western Afghanistan. Nobody has claimed responsibility for either attack.

On 6 December 2012, the head of the Afghan secret service Asadullah Khalid was seriously wounded in a suicide bombing.

Corruption

According to the Corruptions Perception Index published by Transparency International on 5 December 2012, which measures perceived levels of corruption by civil servants and politicians in 176 countries, Afghanistan is at the bottom of the indices along with North Korea and Somalia achieving just 8 out of a possible 100 points.

Pakistan

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province: suicide attack in Bannu

On 10 December 2012, two bombers blew themselves up outside the police station in Kaki, 15 kilometres southwest of Bannu in the Bannu District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Six persons including three police officers and the two suicide bombers were killed, six people were wounded. The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Belochistan province: policeman shot by unidentified gunmen

A policeman was shot in Pishin in the Pishin district of Belochistan province close to the Afghan border on 7 December 2012. The police are not ruling out a sectarian background since the policeman killed was a Shia Muslim. Three people died of gunshot wounds the same day in Makran in Panjgur.

Syria

Fighting continues

Fighting continues unabated. According to the opposition, Syrian government troops closed off access to the capital Damascus following attacks on military bases on 8 December 2012. At least 80 people are said to have been killed throughout the country on 7 December 2012.

Rebels agree to set up joint leadership

According to reports on 7 December 2012, the rebels agreed to set up joint leadership at a meeting held in Turkey which security representatives of the United States, Great Britain, France and the Gulf nations attended. Many of the 30 members of the new leadership unit are said to have links with Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists. High-ranking officers who defected from Assad's Army are being excluded from the leadership.

NATO and USA warn against the use of chemical weapons/Al-Nusra-Front seize chemical factory

On 4 December 2012, NATO Secretary General Rasmussen warned that there would be an "immediate response by the international community", if the Syrian regime were to use chemical weapons in the civil war. US President Barak Obama had warned of a relevant escalation on 3 December 2012. According to US intelligence sources, engineers have already begun mixing the two chemical components of the highly toxic nerve agent sarin that are normally stored separately. It has also been noted that arms have been transferred to other parts of the country. According to experts, the Syrian Armed Forces have hundreds, if not thousands, of tonnes of mustard gas, sarin and VX. Syria signed the Geneva Protocol of 1925 which bans the use of chemical and biological weapons.

The Syrian regime and activists from Aleppo warned against the use of chemical weapons by suspected supporters of the Al Nusra Front which has close ties with Al-Qaeda. It is said to have seized a chemical factory near Aleppo approx. 3 weeks ago where chlorine gas is manufactured.

UN and EU withdraw/search for a political solution goes on

Owing to the "extremely difficult" security situation, the United Nations has announced "that it will be suspending its missions locally for the time being and will be pulling out non-essential employees". There were around 1,000 international and local UN employees in Syria. The EU, which has a diplomatic office in Damascus announced that it will be limiting its activities to a minimum. A few days ago, UN troops had been gunned down on the street between Damascus and the international airport (cf. BN of 3 December 2012).

At a meeting convened at short notice in Geneva on 9 December 2012, the US, Russia and the UN rated the civil war situation to be "serious and getting worse" although a political solution remains possible.

NATO decides to move Patriot missiles to the Turkish-Syrian border

NATO took the decision on 4 December 2012 to transfer Patriot air defence missiles to the Syrian border. According to a decision taken on 6 December 2012, the Federal Government will deploy two Patriot batteries and up to 400 troops for a period of one year. The decision is to be ratified by the Bundesrat this week. Turkey had asked NATO to do so after Turkish territory had been hit several times from Syria. The Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned that the deployment of missiles could further destabilise the situation.

Lebanon

Clashes between supporters of Syrian civil war

Clashes broke out in Tripoli on 4 and 5 December 2012 once again between supporters of the civil war factions in neighbouring Syria. One man was killed and three were wounded. According to reports, 14 Lebanese and Palestinians who had joined the Syrian rebels had been killed in a Syrian village close to the border, causing tension to rise between Sunnis and Alawites. Many observers fear the Syrian civil war could spread.

Palestinian Autonomous Territories

Palestinians call for UN resolution against Israeli settlement policy

According to Palestinian leaders, they are pressing for a binding resolution to be adopted by the UN Security Council that condemns the Israeli settlement policy. They say the most recent announcement by the Israeli government that 3,000 new settler homes are to be built on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem is totally unacceptable. Observers consider Israel's announcement to be a response to the United Nations General Assembly vote to recognize Palestine as a non-member observer state 29 November 2012.

Hamas celebrates 25 years: Hamas leader pays first visit to the Gaza Strip

Hamas leader Khalid Meshal used his first visit to the Gaza Strip to make an aggressive declaration of war on Israel. At a mass rally to mark the 25th anniversary of the founding of the radical-Islamist Hamas, Meshal promised the crowds that he ruled out any territorial concessions over Palestinian territory. "Palestine is our land and nation from the (Mediterranean) sea to the (Jordan) river, from north to south, and we cannot cede an inch or any part of it," he said. Mr Meshal who has been living in exile for decades – a present he commutes between Qatar and Egypt – who took the helm of Hamas in 2004, also said his organisation would never recognize Israel. His visit to the Gaza Strip is seen as a sign of Hamas' new strength whose found Charter calls for the destruction of Israel. Hamas is considered to be a terrorist organisation in the West and by Israel.

Iran

Open letter of protest against book censorship

All authors need to obtain authorization from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Leadership (Ershad) before publishing books. More than 100 Iranian writers, poets, and translators have called for an end to book censorship in an open letter that was published on the Internet. The needed authorization is increasingly difficult to obtain, according to writers and publishers, who say censorship has intensified in the Islamic republic in recent years. Leader of the Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and Minister of Culture Mohammad Hosseini have said they do not see censorship as repression but as the need to observe Islamic morals and customs.

MEK puts out secret propaganda report: Iran and Hezbollah are supporting Assad

According to a secret propaganda report by the Iranian opposition in exile Mujahedin-e Khalq-e Iran (MEK) Iran has allegedly been supporting President Bashar al-Assad to a hitherto unknown extent in the fight against rebels. Syria and Iran have allegedly created common general staff in the fight against the rebels. In the report issued by MEK, it also says that Iran is helping to train Syrian Armed Forces and that Iranian engineers are servicing their aircraft. Twelve Iranian combat pilots, drones and several hundred troops have allegedly been deployed at the front. Furthermore, the report claims the Lebanese Hezbollah is heavily involved in the Syrian conflict. Hezbollah militants have been deployed in the besieged city of Homs and in the Zeynabieh region where they are protecting the border in order to prevent the rebels from importing arms.

Egypt

Constitutional Declaration withdrawn

On 8 December 2012, President Morsi announced that the special powers bestowed upon him on the basis of the Constitutional Declaration on 22 November 2012 had been annulled. He said the referendum would be taking place on 15 December 2012 as scheduled.

By withdrawing his special powers, the President has met a key demand of the opposition. However, he continues to pursue his goal of paving the way for a Constitution that is dominated by Islam. The opposition say Morsi's concessions are insufficient.

Demonstrations continue

Since the President issued the Constitutional Declaration, there have been many rallies by opponents and supporters of the President. At least seven people have died and more than 700 have been wounded so far in violent clashes. Egypt's National Salvation Front opposition coalition has called for another nationwide demonstration on 11 December 2012. The President's supporters are also planning a rally the same day.

President Morsi calls upon the Army for assistance

President Morsi is planning on enlisting the help of the Army to deal with future mass protests by the opposition. The Army will provide for security and protect government buildings. Army leaders have called for a dialogue. They have warned against a national disaster which they could not tolerate.

Judiciary divided

Even though independent judges had said they would not monitor the future referendum on the Constitution, the Supreme Judicial Council announced on 3 December 2012 that it would delegate judges to oversee the referendum on the draft constitution. As these referendums in Egypt have to be monitored by judges, there is a risk that the referendum could be declared invalid if it was not monitored by judges.

Libya

Mass jail breakout

On 4 December 2012, 197 prisoners escaped from a jail in the southern Libyan desert town of Sabha, a town 800 km to the south of Tripoli, with the help of prison guards. They are said to include some Gaddafi supporters. Crime is on the rise in Sebha fuelled by illegal migration and trafficking in drugs. Hostilities have broken out between Black African and Arab tribes, some of whom are armed, in Sebha as well as in other desert towns such as Kufra.

Mass grave discovered in Tripoli

A mass grave was discovered at Sidi Hamid cemetery in the Gergarish district of Tripoli on 4 December 2012 in the search for missing persons. So far 103 bodies have been found. It is reported that some of the bodies have been identified as being from Zawia, the town located to the west of Tripoli. Local Committees are in the process of looking for these kind of mass graves of persons killed during the 2011 revolution throughout Libya. Mass graves have been discovered in numerous Libyan towns and cities, including Benghazi, Zliten, Ajdabiya and Sirte.

Prime Minister Ali Zidan attacked by militia

On 4 December 2012, Ali Zidan and a delegation visited the coastal town of Beida in Eastern Libya to hold a meeting with Beida Local Council. He was reportedly attacked by local militia. Zidan himself has denied this vis-à-vis journalists. He said reports about an attack against his delegation have been exaggerated. He said the meeting had taken place in a building formerly used by Saif al-Islam, one of Gaddafi's sons. Locals had objected to the choice of venue. He said the meeting had been interrupted by demonstrators but had gone ahead despite the protest.

Integrity Commission bans further persons from working in major positions

On 3 December 2012, the parliamentary Integrity Commission published another list of persons who are considered unworthy of holding positions in state institutions. This time, it is mainly candidates for foreign service who are affected. They have been accused of being associated with the former regime. Some of the persons affected have taken successful legal action against the ban.

Mali

Talks with rebels

At the first direct talks between the Mali Government and the two Tuareg rebel groups occupying the North of the country, the Tuareg have pledged to respect the “territorial integrity” of the country and reject terrorism. Representatives of the Islamist group Ansar al Dine and representatives of the MLNA, National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad, took part in the negotiations held in the capital of Burkina Faso. The two Tuareg groups and the Malian government have agreed on a ceasefire so as not to jeopardize further talks. On 8 December 2012, several hundred people took to the streets of the Malian capital Bamako to demonstrate against these negotiations because there is currently no basis for negotiations.

Serbia/Kosovo

Agreement reached on joint control of border

Serbia and Kosovo reached agreement on 4 December 2012 brokered by the EU to jointly control four crossing points. Serbian and Kosovar officers will jointly control the crossing points under the supervision of EU officers. These “integrated border controls” will be implemented from 10 December 2012 onwards. Both countries view the agreement with scepticism. Serbia is emphasising the status-neutral character of the agreement, saying it neither relinquishes its claim to Kosovo nor does the agreement specify an intra-state border. By contrast, the Kosovar government views the agreement as confirmation that there is a border between Serbia and Kosovo. Serbs living in the North of Kosovo fear this is sending out the wrong signal. Following talks with the Serbian government, they have, however, decided to suspend the permanent protest which began on 5 December 2012 for the time being.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Goma under government control again – talks between the conflicting parties

In accordance with the agreements concluded between the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the Congolese government and M23 rebels of 24 November 2012, the M23 rebels pulled out of Goma (which is the capital of the eastern Congolese province of North Kivu) on 1 December 2012. The rebels who had seized Goma on 20 November 2012 withdrew to positions 20 km north of Goma. Deployment of the first 600 Congolese government troops began on 3 December 2012. The airport was reopened on 5 December 2012. Talks to settle the conflict in East Congo began between a delegation of M23 rebels under the leadership of Francois Rucogoza and a government delegation under the leadership of Foreign Minister Raymond Tshibanda in the Ugandan capital Kampala on 9 December 2012.

Nigeria

Attacks by Boko Haram

In the night of 2 December 2012, suspected members of the Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram killed 10 Christians in Chibok village in the predominantly Christian part of the town (which is around 70 km south of the capital Maiduguri in Borno north-eastern Nigerian State). The group is also being held responsible for attacks carried out on three churches on 2 December 2012 and on a police station in the city of Gamboru (along the border with Cameroon) in which two policemen were killed.

Ghana

Narrow election victory for President Mahama

According to the preliminary election result announced by the Election Committee on 9 December 2012, the incumbent President John Dramani Mahama from the NDC (National Democratic Congress) government

party won the presidential election of 7 December 2012 with around 51 percent of the votes. His strongest rival, Nana Akufo-Addo, who stood for the main opposition party NPP (New Patriotic Party) garnered 47.74 percent of the votes. Turnout was around 80 percent of the around 14 million voters. As documents were missing at many polling stations and the biometric systems using fingerprinting to identify voters were not working, the election was extended until 8 December 2012 in some locations. Election observers such as the Economic Community of West African States ECOWAS, the Commonwealth and the local observer group CODEO (Coalition of Domestic Election Observers) say the election was peaceful and transparent. The NPP, by contrast, spoke of vote rigging and announced that it would be contesting the result. Policemen used tear gas against several hundred supporters of Akufo Addos who had gathered in front of the Election Committee's office in Accra on 9 December 2012.

Togo

Decline in the number of female genital mutilations

The "abolition" of female genital mutilation was officially announced and celebrated at a national ceremony in Sokodé on 29 and 30 December 2012. The non-governmental organisation (I)NTACT which has its registered office in Germany has been implementing information campaigns at local level throughout Togo in cooperation with several Togolese organisations, speaking with local authorities and female genital mutilation practitioners who have been offered small loans to help them find new sources of income.

Surveys conducted in recent years document that there has been a continual decline in female genital mutilation which has been banned since 1998. The rate of female genital mutilation in girls under the age of 14 which is seen as a indicator of the current prevalence of the practise was 0.7 percent in 2008. The rate dropped to 0.4 percent in 2010 and according to a study conducted in 2012 is now even less than that.