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Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

1 August 2016

Afghanistan

Armed confrontations

The fighting, attacks and ambushes continue, in some cases killing and injuring also civilians. According to media reports the following provinces were particularly affected last week: Nangarhar, Ghazni, Maidan Wardak, Jawzjan, Takhar, Sar-i-Pul, Helmand, Farah and Logar.

It is said that due to the prevailing insecurity almost 1,000 families became internally displaced persons in the north-eastern provinces of Takhar and Kunduz. Taliban attacks in which at least 24 police were killed were reported from Helmand province (south) on 29 July 16.

The number of government controlled districts fell to about two thirds of the total of 407 districts by end of May. The US military reports that the government controls 268 districts, 36 are under the control or influence of the insurgents and 104 districts are at risk.

The UN reported that 5,166 civilians were killed or wounded in the first half of 2016, this is four percent more than in the same period 2015 and at the same time the highest figure in any six-months period since 2009.

Attacks

The commissioner for women affairs of Ghazni district (south-east) survived an assault on 26 July 2016.

On 28 July 2016 at least 16 civilians were wounded in the explosion of a bomb hidden in a rickshaw in Baghlan-i-Markazi district in Baghlan province (north-east). A policeman suffered injuries in a bomb explosion in Kabul. In Ghazni province three policemen, including one senior officer, died in an ambush.

Five civilians lost their lives when a roadside bomb exploded in Logar (centre) on 31 July 2016.

Taliban attack on Kabul hotel

In the night to 01.08.16 the Taliban attacked a hotel near Kabul airport that is mainly used by US forces contractors. The attackers first exploded a lorry loaded with explosives and then attacked with firearms. The government announced that three attackers and one policeman died, but none of the hotel's patrons were injured.

Iraq

IS commanders fleeing Mosul

According to intelligence of the Iraqi government many IS leaders fled Mosul ahead of the planned reconquest of the city. A large number of IS families and commanders allegedly started out for Syria or attempted to secretly reach the autonomous Kurdish region. Disputes among the extremists were increasing, the report said, mainly over money. In anticipation of the fighting tens of thousands fled the city of Shirkat that is located 100 kilometres from Mosul. In the event of an attack on Mosul the United Nations and the ICRC expect at least one million refugees.

Bombings cause casualties

At least 18 people were killed in a series of attacks by the extremists on 27 July 2016. A suicide bomber killed three policemen and three civilians at a police check point in Baghdad's Shia district of Shula, 15 people are said to be wounded. In the city of Yusufiyah, about 20 kilometres south of Baghdad, a bomb

exploded in a business area killing at least three people and probably wounding nine. Two people died and five were injured by a bomb explosion in a shopping street in Sadiya district. Allegedly three secret service officers of the interior ministry were shot by assassins driving by.

A mortar grenade hit the Al Salam refugee camp south of Baghdad killing and wounding several people.

Attack on oil field

The local head of police of Kirkuk province and three suicide bombers lost their lives in an IS attack on an oil field in Kirkuk. Reportedly three policemen were wounded.

Turkey

Responses to attempted coup

On 30 July 2015 President Erdogan announced a reform of the Turkish armed forces. More soldiers were dismissed, based on an emergency decree about 1,400 were given dishonourable discharges. The decree also ordered the closure of many military academies and secondary schools.

Fighting between the military and the PKK

Heavy fighting between soldiers and PKK fighters continue in south-eastern Turkey.

The Turkish army stated that it killed 35 PKK fighters who attempted to storm a military base in Hakkari province on 30 July 2016. The army also said that eight Turkish soldiers had previously been killed in a PKK attack.

Syria

Serious attack

In the northern Syrian town of Qamischli two attacks claimed at least 56 lives and wounded more than 160 people on 27 July 2016. The IS terrorist organization claimed responsibility for the attack stating that it had targeted Kurdish security forces. The Syrian Human Rights Observatory reported that a lorry loaded with explosives and a bomb on a motorcycle went off in front of the headquarters of local Kurdish police and near an administrative building. Qamischli is a stronghold of the Kurdish rebel group YPG.

Al-Nusra Front cuts ties with al-Qaeda

The media reported last week that Islamist Jabhat al- Nusra in Syria officially broke away from the al-Qaeda terrorist network, now calling itself Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (Front for the Conquest of Syria). They said that their purpose was to set up a new front and to potentially form new alliances with other Syrian rebel groups.

Somalia

Security situation

A suicide bombing with a car bomb and the explosion of a belt of another suicide bomber in front of an AMISOM and UN base near Mogadishu airport claimed at least twelve victims among AMISOM soldiers and UN staff and injured 17 on 26 July 2016. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack and that one of the two assassins had been a former member of Somalia's parliament.

At least ten people, including four attackers, five civilians and a soldier died in an attack on the criminal police headquarters in Mogadishu; 15 people were wounded. The terrorists had exploded two car bombs in front of the building and then stormed it. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for this attack as well.

South Sudan

Security situation

President Kiir had set an ultimatum for Vice-President Riek Machar to return to the capital of Juba by 30 July 2016 and to cooperate in re-establishing peace which the latter did not comply with, therefore President Kiir again deposed his rival and appointed the mining minister Taban Deng Gai as his new deputy.

Meanwhile heavy fighting is reported from the surroundings of Juba between Machar's SPLM-IO (Sudan People's Liberation Movement – in Opposition) and government troops. Reportedly this was triggered by Kiir's orders to Paul Malong Awan, General Chief of Staff of the SPLA (Sudan People's Liberation Army, South Sudan's government army) to fly air raids in areas in which Machar was assumed to hide in order to kill him. The order allegedly also included instructions to move troops to the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo, because Machar would intend to flee to this neighbouring country. A presidential military advisor meanwhile announced that this order was a fake.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Large-scale opposition protest

On 31 July 2016 several ten thousands followed the opposition's call for a major protest in Kinshasa. The protesters called upon President Joseph Kabila, who has been in power since 2001, to allow the presidential elections to go ahead as scheduled in November 2016 instead of extending his mandate artificially. The protest, which was also attended by 83-year-old Etienne Tshisekedi, chairman of the largest opposition party UDPS, remained peaceful.

Tshisekedi had only returned to the DRC on 27 July 2016 after staying in Belgium for medical reasons for two years. Up to 100,000 of his followers had assembled at the capital's airport to welcome him.

According to the constitution, Kabila whose second term of office ends on 19 December 2016, cannot stand as presidential candidate again. Official announcements alleged that the election date originally set for 27 November 2016 cannot be maintained for logistical and financial reasons. On 11 May 2016 the Supreme Court had ruled that Kabila may stay in office for the duration of the delay.

Republic of Congo

Opposition leader Paulin Makaya sentenced to two years imprisonment

On 25 July 2016 the chairman of the opposition party UPC (United Party for Congo) was sentenced to two years in prison and a fine of about euros 3,600 on four counts including incitement to disturb public order and fomenting insurrection by a Brazzaville court. He had been arrested on 23 November 2015 for attending a protest on 20 October 2015 that called for boycotting a referendum scheduled for 25 October 2015. The approval of the referendum allowed the President of many years, Denis Sassou Nguesso, to stand for office once again.

Mali

State of emergency extended by eight months

The country's parliament approved the extension of the state of emergency for another eight months in an extraordinary session on 30 July 2016. Mali's radio station reported that the state of emergency will now last until 29 March 2017. The state of emergency provides the security forces with more extensive powers and allows authorities to restrict the freedom of assembly even more. The state of emergency had been imposed only one and a half weeks ago in response to an attack on a barracks in which 17 soldiers were killed and dozens wounded.

Chad/Senegal

Former Chad President to pay damages

A special tribunal in Senegal sentenced former president and military head of Chad, Habré, to the payment of about euros 80m in damages. Already in May Habré had been given a life prison term for crimes against humanity, rape and sexual slavery committed during his dictatorship. Almost 5,000 survivors and relatives of victims as joint plaintiffs had demanded a total of about euros 257m in damages. The court approved damage payments for each individual case of up to euros 30,000. It is unclear whether Habré himself will be in the position to pay.

Burundi

UN Security Council approves police mission

On 29 July 2016 the UN Security Council resolved to send up to 228 policemen to Burundi. They are to be deployed throughout the country to observe the security situation and monitor the observation of human rights for one year. The government does not want to admit more than 50 officers. Up to about 1,000 people protested against the mission in the capital Bujumbura on 30 July 2016.

Ghana

Prison sentence for death threats against judges

On 27 July 2016 the Supreme Court sentenced a radio show host and two of his guests (followers of the governing party National Democratic Congress - NDC) to four months in prison each and a fine of about euros 2,300. The owner of the broadcasting station Montie FM and the owner of the transmission frequency were fined as well. In a talk show broadcast on 29 June 2016 Supreme Court judges were threatened with death, if they were to decide against the national election commission in proceedings related to false entries in the electoral register.

Presidential and parliamentary elections will be held on 07 December 2016. How to ensure that the national electoral register is correct is a hotly discussed political issue and has been before the courts since 2014. John Dramani Mahama (NDC) won the 2012 presidential elections only by a small margin.

Rwanda

Genocide suspect arrested in Frankfurt/Main

Already on 20 July 2016 a 65-year-old Rwandan, holding the nationality of New Zealand, was arrested at Frankfurt international airport. Rwanda had issued a search and arrest request for him for suspicions of involvement in the 1994 genocide.

Central African Republic

UN Security Council extends MINUSCA mandate

On 26 July 2016 the UN Security Council resolved to extend the UN MINUSCA peace mission (Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic) until 15 November 2017.

FYR Macedonia

Agreement on new elections

The deeply divided political parties in this country that has been shaken by several crises, have agreed to hold new elections and to take certain measures to guarantee impartial media reporting as a prerequisite for fair and free elections. Further the (manipulated) electoral register is to be corrected. Finally, a special prosecutor shall be authorized to investigate without any restrictions, including against senior politicians. On 28 July 2016 four amendments to laws were adopted to permit early parliamentary elections to be held on 11 December 2016.

After having been postponed several times this election shall finally end the stalemate in internal politics. It seems that the power battle between the government and the opposition has abated somewhat at the moment. Also the protests by the civil society have lost momentum.

Albania

Judicial reform adopted

On 21 July 2016 the parliament unanimously adopted a reform of the judiciary which shall make it more independent and effective. The close interrelationships between judiciary, politics and organized crime shall be broken up. There are plans for installing a special prosecutor and a special tribunal to fight corruption. Also an investigation committee shall be established to take action against corrupt judges and prosecutors. The EU and the US have a say in the selection of the committee's membership. Among other things, the reform provides new rules for the election of judges to the constitutional court and the roles of the minister of justice and the attorney general. The reform is considered a prerequisite for negotiations on the Albania's accession to the EU. Since 24 June 2014 Albania has had the status of an accession candidate.

South-eastern Europe

Turkey demands action against Gülen schools

Several countries in south-eastern Europe (including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, FYR Macedonia) received letters from the local Turkish missions requesting them to take action against local Gülen schools or to close them down. The association of the Turkish minority in the Macedonian capital Skopje demanded to clean the country of all traitors.

This request caused mostly insecurity and indignation in these countries. As far as is known, by now only the city administration of Novi Pazar in the Serbian region of Sandžak responded to this request. It assured Turkey of its support stating that it would deny any support to this terrorist organization. Novi Pazar is the centre of Sandžak region that is mainly populated by Bosniaks (Slavic Muslims).

Fetullah Gülen, a Turkish cleric living in exile in the US, initiated a global network of private schools funded by tuition fees and donations. In the Balkan countries these schools are very much welcomed as an alternative to the mostly outdated public schools.

Armenia

Insurgents surrender

The 20 armed government opponents that had occupied a police barracks in Yerevan since 17 July 2016 surrendered to the police on 31 July 2016. The opposition members announced that they intended to continue their fight against the presidency of Serzh Sargsyan. The insurgents can count on much support from the population. There was another protest supporting the kidnappers and their demands on 30 July 2016 that was attended by more than 5,000 people.

The followers of the jailed opposition leader Sefilian had stormed the building and taken hostages to enforce his release and the resignation of President Sargsyan. During the occupation the government opponents shot two policemen, injured several people and held several hostages for some time (see BN of 25 July 2016)

The European Union expressed its concern in the light of the already tense situation because of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the failed coup attempt in neighbouring Turkey.

Russian Federation

Militant leader Kazimagomedov killed in Dagestan

The Russian Federation's anti-terrorism committee announced on 29 July 2016 that the leader of the South Dagestan militants, Kamaldin Kazimagomedov, had been shot in a gunfight with security forces in Suleiman-Stalsky district.