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Group 22 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

7 November 2016

Afghanistan

Situation in Kunduz

At least 32 civilians are reported to have been killed and 19 injured in a NATO air raid in Kunduz province on 03.11.16. In addition, some 15 Taliban fighters were reportedly killed, including the Taliban's chief of operations for Kunduz, Mullah Taki.

Fighting continues between Afghan and international troops in Kunduz.

Violent clashes between returnees and local residents

Violent clashes over entitlements to land occurred in the north-eastern province of Takhar (in the Dasht Kala district) between local residents and returnees from Pakistan. 14 people were injured.

Further armed clashes

Hostilities, raids and attacks, some involving fatalities or injuries among the civilian population, also occurred in other provinces. According to press reports, the following provinces were affected in recent weeks: Kunar, Nangarhar, Helmand, Uruzgan, Badghis, Parwan, Jowzjan, Zabul, Paktika, Kabul, Baghlan, Logar, Sar-i-Pul (here the Taliban are reported to have taken over several villages which had been abandoned by the local police), Faryab, Farah and Ghazni.

Targeted attacks

Two American soldiers died in a suicide attack in Parwan province (Central Afghanistan) on 26.10.16. IS fighters reportedly shot dead some 30 civilians in Ghor (West Afghanistan). 17 people, including police officers, were injured in two attacks in Paktika (South-East Afghanistan). A cleric was murdered by IS fighters in Jowzjan (North Afghanistan). A hospital in the province of Madian Wardak (Central Afghanistan) was hit by Taliban mortar shells, killing a child and injuring eight other people.

Two civilians were injured and one killed in a bomb attack in Kandahar on 30.10.16.

Four civilians died in a suicide attack in Jalalabad (Nangarhar) on 31.10.16. Seven civilians were injured.

On 01.11.16 seven civilians were killed when a roadside bomb exploded in Parwan (Central Afghanistan).

A police officer was injured in a bomb attack in Kapisa (Central Afghanistan) on 03.11.16.

A reporter from Aryana Television was killed in a bomb attack in Helmand (South Afghanistan) on 04.11.16.

A local journalist was injured.

On 05.11.16 the governor of the district of Batikot in the eastern province of Laghman was injured in a bomb attack. His driver was killed. The deputy police chief of the province of Kapisa (Central Afghanistan) survived a bomb attack in Kabul. IS supporters abducted seven farmers in the province of Ghor (West Afghanistan). Taliban shot dead two passengers on a coach in Faryab (North Afghanistan).

An Australian woman was abducted in Kabul on 06.11.16.

Pakistan

Attack on police college

On 25.10.16 IS supporters attacked a police college in Quetta (Baluchistan), killing at least 60 people. More than 120 people were injured.

Iraq

Fighting south of Mosul

Government troops continued to advance on the IS-occupied city of Mosul. Fighting occurred in a suburb to the south-east of Mosul.

Bomb attacks

According to official figures, at least 21 people were killed and many injured in two bomb attacks on 06.11.16. In Tikrit and Samarra, the IS carried out attacks with ambulances packed with explosives.

On 04.11.16 a bomb attack took place on a refugee convoy some 100 kilometres south-east of the city of Mosul, killing 26 civilians who were fleeing from the IS.

Turkey

HDP politicians detained

In the night of 03.11.16 security forces arrested eleven members of the pro-Kurdish HDP in the course of an anti-terrorism operation, including the two party chairpersons, Selahattin Demirtas and Figen Yüksekdağ. According to media reports, they were arrested because they had failed to respond to summonses from the state prosecutor's office. Access to social networks and messenger services is also reported to have been restricted in Turkey since the arrests. On 05.11.16 nine further HDP officials were detained, including provincial and district chairpersons in Adana. With 59 seats, the HDP is the third-largest party in parliament and the largest political representative body for the Kurds. The immunity of numerous HDP MPs was lifted last May. President Erdogan describes the HDP as the voice of the banned Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK). The week before, the government had ordered the closure of 15 primarily pro-Kurdish media, including the Diha Kurdish news agency and several regional newspapers in south-eastern Turkey. These are accused of disseminating propaganda for the PKK. In protest at the arrest of its chairpersons and numerous other MPs, HDP representatives announced on 06.11.16 that they had resolved to undertake an extensive boycott of parliament and that they would be withdrawing from all legislative processes for the time being.

Explosion in Diyarbakir

Only a few hours after the arrest of the HDP politicians, a vehicle packed with explosives was blown up near to the police headquarters in Diyarbakir, in south-eastern Turkey. According to media reports, at least eight people were killed and more than 100 were injured. The Turkish government initially blamed the attack on the PKK. On 05.11.16 both the IS and the Kurdish extremist group TAK (Kurdistan Freedom Falcons) claimed responsibility.

Arrests at Cumhuriyet

On 31.10.16 Murat Sabuncu, editor-in-chief of the Cumhuriyet daily newspaper, which is critical of the government, was arrested along with four other journalists. According to media reports, the state prosecutor's office has ordered the arrest of 14 members of the newspaper's staff in all, including CEO Akin Atalay. In addition, former editor-in-chief Can Dündar, who is currently in Germany, has reportedly been placed on the wanted list. According to the Turkish state prosecutor's office, the newspaper is being accused of having supported both the PKK and the Gülen movement through publications.

Further dismissals

On 30.10.16 the dismissal of more than 10,000 more civil servants was ordered by decree under the state of emergency. According to the Anadolu news agency, this latest purge focused above all on civil servants belonging to the education and justice ministry, including teachers and lecturers, as well as medics and members of the military. Since the attempted coup, over 100,000 people have been dismissed and more than 35,000 arrested.

Lebanon

Aoun elected president

The 81- or 83-year old Christian politician Michel Aoun was voted in as the new Lebanese president on 31.10.16. Following 45 failed attempts to stage the presidential election, Aoun, who is considered an ally of Hezbollah, achieved the necessary majority in the second round (83 yes votes, with 36 abstentions and eight invalid votes). The parties in Lebanon had been unable to agree on a new candidate since 2014 (the Lebanese president has to be a Christian). Lebanon has been in political paralysis for some years now, with parliament divided into two camps: one block headed by Hariri, which is supported by the USA and Saudi Arabia, and one Hezbollah-led block, which is supported by Syria and Iran. Hariri gave up his resistance to Aoun in mid-October.

Hariri charged with forming a government

It was reported on 03.11.16 that the new president, Michel Aoun, had appointed Saad Hariri as the new prime minister and charged him with forming a government. Prior to this, 112 of the 127 MPs had voted in favour of Hariri in parliament (the Shiite Hezbollah, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party and the Lebanese Baath party voted against him). Hariri was prime minister from 2009 until 2011, when his government was toppled by Hezbollah.

Syria

Kurds launch offensive against the city of Al-Raqqah

On 06.11.16 the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) announced that they were advancing on the de facto IS capital of Al Raqqah from various sides with 30,000 fighters. The USA and Great Britain are planning to support them with air raids.

Air raids claim lives

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported on 27.10.16 that at least 35 people had been killed, including 22 children and six teachers, in air raids close to a school in northern Syria.

Fighting in Aleppo

Rebel troops broadened their offensive in Aleppo on 03.11.16 in order to break through the siege around the eastern part of the city which they control. At least twelve people were killed and more than 120 injured. The rebels had turned down the offer extended by the Russian armed forces, whereby they were to leave the city via corridors by 7 p.m. on 04.11.16. Russia refrained from flying air raids up to this deadline. The Russian president had ordered a humanitarian ceasefire for 04.11.16 from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. local time. Air raids on rebel areas then resumed.

Yemen

A country on the brink: war, power struggles and starvation

According to UN emergency relief coordinator Stephen O'Brien, the country is close to collapse, with 80% of the population - some 21.2 million people - dependent on humanitarian aid and over 2 million Yemenites suffering from malnutrition. O'Brien believes that the country is only one step away from mass starvation. The Oxfam relief organisation (Oxford Committee for Famine Relief) reports that 300,000 malnourished people, including many children, are in a critical condition and in need of immediate help. Oxfam has also

identified more than 50 cases of the fatal infectious disease cholera. Oxfam considers this to be one of the greatest challenges facing the country, making the humanitarian situation worse every day. It notes that many hospitals have been destroyed in the war.

Iran

Justice minister makes a case for less executions

Justice minister Mostafa Pourmohammadi has spoken in favour of reducing the number of executions, stating that, while death sentences could not be ruled out completely, they had not always proven effective in recent years. He said that it is currently being examined what punishments might be applied in which cases as more suitable alternatives to death sentences. In the summer a judicial investigation committee found that despite many executions the amount and variety of drugs smuggled into Iran was, if anything, on the rise. In view of this finding, Pourmohammadi believes that a review should be considered, according to the ILNA news agency (Iranian Labour News Agency). The judicial authorities throughout the country are also reported to agree to such a review. Iran has one of the highest execution rates worldwide. According to Amnesty International, 977 death sentences were carried out in 2015. More than 700 people are reported to have been executed since the beginning of 2016. The majority had been convicted of drug-related crime or the sexual abuse of children.

Demonstrations at the tomb of King Cyrus the Great

Last week, thousands of demonstrators converged on the ancient Persian royal capital of Pasargadae (province of Fars) in Iran and marched around the tomb of King Cyrus the Great (559 - 530 BC). The protesters reportedly chanted freedom slogans and criticised the Islamic system. Cyrus the Great is recognised as the founder of the ancient Persian empire, and played a major role in the nationalistic cult of the last shah, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, who was toppled by the Shiite revolution in 1979. The demonstration was thus described by some observers as being monarchist in character. According to International Business Times (US online publication), the authorities had foreseen the protests in connection with Cyrus the Great's birthday and had attempted in vain to prevent them by cordoning off certain areas.

Iran launches "national internet"

Iran has launched a national internet to replace the system which has been in use to date - a heavily filtered internet. Critics fear that this is rather an attempt to further restrict Iranians' online communications. The authorities already block social networks such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. Many Iranians use proxy sites and virtual private networks (VPN), to access the blocked content.

Libya

Several hundred people die in the Mediterranean

Two boats carrying a total of up to 270 people capsized on 02.11.16. 31 migrants were rescued. No bodies were recovered. Most of those who died are believed to have originated from sub-Saharan Africa. Rescued survivors report that the traffickers had shot at the migrants to force them onto the unseaworthy boats. According to IOM, 4220 people have already died so far in 2016 in failed attempts to cross the Mediterranean and reach Europe.

Bomb attack in Bengasi

At least four people are reported to have been killed and 23 injured in a bomb attack in the centre of the city of Bengasi in eastern Libya on 29.10.16. According to the Libyan Alwasat news site, the bomb exploded in a busy part of the city with many cafés. The political activist and TV presenter Mohammed Bougages, a supporter of the powerful general Khalifa Haftar, is reported to be among the dead.

Background

Political chaos has prevailed in Libya since the fall of Muammar al-Gaddafi in 2011. The UN-backed Government of National Unity only controls part of the country. Khalifa Haftar is fighting Islamists in Bengasi.

Nigeria

Double suicide attack in Maiduguri

A double suicide attack took place in Maiduguri, capital of the north-eastern federal state of Borno, at around 7 a.m. on 29.10.16. In the first attack, a female suicide attacker ran into a group of people at the entrance to the Bakassi camp for internally displaced persons and blew herself up. Some ten minutes later, a second female suicide attacker blew herself up around a mile from the first attack, outside a fuel depot of the national oil company NNPC. According to police information, eight people died in the two attacks. The attacks, which are being attributed to the Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram, were the first bomb attacks in the city for several months.

DR Congo

Opposition demonstration prevented by security forces

In the early hours of 05.11.16 the police fired tear gas at around 60 people in Kinshasa who had assembled close to the estate of opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi. An officially banned opposition demonstration was originally planned to have taken place at 10 o'clock on this day to protest against a feared unconstitutional extension of president Kabila's term in office. The demonstration was cancelled to avoid violence, however. Demonstrations have been banned in Kinshasa since 22.09.16, following the killing of some 50 people by the security forces in opposition demonstrations on 19. and 20.09.16.

Kenya

Attack claims lives

On the night of 24.10.16, members of Al-Shabaab killed twelve people in an attack on a guest house in the town of Mandera, in the north-east of Kenya on the border with Ethiopia and Somalia. They gained entry to the building with an explosive device and shot those present dead. The militia has claimed responsibility for the attack, On 06.10.16 they attacked an apartment building in Mandera (cf. BN of 10.10.16).

Central African Republic

French Sangaris mission ended

On 31.10.16 French defence minister Jean-Yves Le Drian officially announced the end of the Sangaris military mission, which began in December 2013. Up to 2,500 French soldiers were stationed in the country at certain times. 350 soldiers are to remain in the country to support the UN's MINUSCA peace mission, which comprises some 12,800 security personnel.

Various incidents claim lives

MINUSCA reported on 31.10.16 that Séléka fighters had killed at least 37 people in an attack on a camp for internally displaced persons in Kaga-Bandoro on 12.10.16 (cf. BN of 17.10.16). MINUSCA troops killed twelve of the attackers. More than 10,000 people, or at least 20,000 according to other sources, fled to a UN base near Kaga-Bandoro.

According to MINUSCA, 15 people died in fighting between Séléka and Anti-Balaka militia near the town of Bambari on 27.10.16. Six security personnel and four civilians were killed in an ambush on the road between Bambari and Grimari on 28.10.16.

On 24.10.16 four people were killed and several injured when MINUSCA troops took action against several hundred demonstrators who were staging a violent protest in the capital, Bangui, against the presence of the UN peace mission in the country.

Mali

Islamists declare unilateral ceasefire

The Islamist group Ansar Dine has declared a unilateral ceasefire. The president of the country's Supreme Islamic Council, Mahmud Dicko, confirmed on 31.10.16 that he had received an announcement to this effect from Ansar Dine's leader, Ijad Ag Chali. The Malian news portal malijet.com published a letter from Ag Chali in which he explained that he had agreed to an end to the attacks on request from Dicko. The Islamist leader did not comment on how long the truce was to continue and what he was demanding from the Malian authorities in return. According to AFP information, Ag Chali points out in his letter that the conciliatory move does not extend to the intention to enforce sharia law on Malian territory.

Somalia

Hostilities

According to press reports on 06.11.16, at least 24 people have been killed and 80 injured in fighting between rival militia in the city of Galkayo (Mudug region). Galkayo is divided into a northern part, which belongs to Puntland, and a southern part, which is the administrative seat of the partially autonomous region of Galmudug. On 02.11.16 unidentified ships shelled the Puntland port of Qandala (Bari region), which has been occupied by IS fighters since 26.10.16. Puntland troops moved out of Bossaso on 02.11.16 to recapture Qandala.

Attacks

On 01.11.16 al-Shabaab fighters attacked an AMISOM convoy with a booby trap near to the town of Mahadaay (Middle Shabelle region). Four Kenyan soldiers died on 02.11.16 when a booby trap which is thought to have been planted by Al-Shabaab exploded near to the town of el Wak (Gedo region). Two suspected Al-Shabaab members killed a local elder as he was leaving the mosque in the Mogadishu district of Wadajir on 02.11.16. The police arrested the attackers after an exchange of fire.

Security situation

On 01.11.16 the presidents of Puntland and Galmudug signed a ceasefire agreement in Abu Dhabi. Clashes had occurred between units from Puntland and Galmudug in recent weeks, following the deaths of 14 members of the Galmudug security forces in an air raid by the USA at the end of September. Galmudug blamed Puntland for incorrect intelligence which led to the bombing.

According to sources from military circles, Somali units withdrew from the town of Goofgaduud near the city of Badoa (Bay region) on 02.11.16 because of outstanding pay issues. Al-Shabaab then seized Goofgaduud. The withdrawal of parts of the Ethiopian units active in Somalia in the regions of Hiraan and Bakool has led to territorial gains for Al-Shabaab in recent weeks.

Burundi's defence minister announced on 03.11.16 that the Burundi AMISOM contingent might be withdrawn on account of outstanding pay issues.

South Sudan

Commander of UN soldiers dismissed following accusations of failure to act

The commander of the UN mission in South South Sudan (UNMISS), Kenyan lieutenant-general Johnson Mogoia Kimani Ondieki, was summarily dismissed by UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon on 02.11.16. This followed a report by an independent commission of inquiry which seriously criticised the behaviour of UN soldiers in South Sudan. The soldiers were accused of having failed in their duty to protect civilians and UN staff. The report found that command and control structures had not worked, the UN units had responded chaotically and ineffectively to fighting which broke out in July 2016 in the capital, Juba, between rebels

loyal to former vice-president Riek Machar and South Sudanese units, and had behaved in a risk-averse manner. According to the report, the soldiers even failed to intervene when they witnessed serious violence against civilians.

Ethiopia

Cabinet reshuffle after weeks of unrest

The government has carried out a cabinet reshuffle, following months of unrest. In a television address on 01.11.16, prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn stated that 21 of the total of 30 ministerial posts had been reallocated. He said the government hoped that this would ease the situation in the east African country. He added that the new cabinet is intended to represent disadvantaged sections of the population more effectively. At the same time, some 2,000 anti-government demonstrators who had been arrested two weeks previously on security grounds were released.

There have been mass protests since 2015, following the government's announcement of new building projects in the area surrounding the capital, Addis Abeba. Critics fear that the plans will disadvantage the rural population. In response to the increasing violence, at the beginning of October the government imposed a six-month state of emergency, during which the police can detain people without an arrest warrant (cf. BN of 24.10.16).

Eritrea

Opposition:

According to opposition sources, two members of the Eritrean air force have fled to Ethiopia in their aircraft. They allegedly landed in Mekele, the capital of the northern Tigray region which borders Eritrea, on 26.10.16. A spokesman for the opposition Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSADO) named the two pilots and stated that Ethiopian fighters had accompanied the jets when they entered the country's airspace.

Two members of the Eritrean air force defected to Saudi Arabia in 2012, requesting political asylum. Observers estimate that the Eritrean air force barely has any operational aircraft left.

Western Balkans

Voluntary return on the increase

More than 29,000 applications for voluntary return to the Western Balkan countries were approved under the REAG/GARP programme up to 30.09.16. Albanians make up the largest group, with 13,828 individuals, followed by Serbs (5,247), Kosovars (4,502), Macedonians (3,752) and Bosnians (1,286). The Western Balkans was also the main region of return in 2015, accounting for 30,000 departures from Germany. Here again, Albanians made up the largest group, with 11,268 individuals, followed by Kosovars with 8,122 individuals, then Serbs (6,122), Macedonians (2,895), Bosnians (1,765) and Montenegrins (645). The total flow of returnees additionally includes voluntary returns facilitated by the German federal states and (non-registered) unfacilitated returns.

Increase in deportations

The number of deportations has also risen. Over 13,000 people were deported up to the end of June 2016 (2015: approx. 20,000), approx. 75% of whom were returned to the Western Balkan countries.

Increase in labour migration

The German diplomatic missions in Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro had already issued 15,500 work visas in accordance with Section 26 (2) of the ordinance on the admission of foreigners for the purpose of taking up employment (BeschV) up to September 2016. It also remains possible for workers to enter Germany with the so-called Blue Card. In all, the Federal Employment

Agency recorded 27,508 approvals issued for labour migrants from the Western Balkans in the first nine months of 2016.

Decline in asylum figures

The number of initial asylum applications filed by asylum seekers from the six Western Balkan countries up to 30.09.16 stood at around 29,200 (2015: 120,882), representing 4.5 % of all filed applications (643,211).

Moldova

Second ballot required for the presidential office

Direct presidential elections took place for the first time in almost 20 years on 30.10.16. In the first round the pro-Russian socialists' candidate, Igor Dodon, fell just short of securing an absolute majority, at 48 %. The pro-Western liberal Maia Sandu took 38 % of the vote. The second ballot is to take place on 13.11.16. The election is seen as crucial in determining the country's future direction. Sandu from the centre-right opposition advocates further European integration. Dodon favours a strategic partnership with Russia. Moldova has been linked to the EU by an association agreement since July 2014.

With a population of 3.5 million, Moldova is one of the poorest countries in Europe. The political situation is unstable. Since it became independent in 1991, the former Soviet republic has been seeking a course between Russia and the EU. Various pro-Western alliances have ruled the country since 2009. Oligarchic power structures, corruption and legal uncertainty are nevertheless widespread.

Georgia

Ruling party wins run-offs

According to official information, the parliamentary election in Georgia has given the ruling Georgian Dream party a majority which empowers it to adopt amendments to the constitution. In the second ballot on 30.10.16 the Georgian Dream party won 48 of the 50 constituencies in which a run-off was staged for one seat in each instance. The other two seats went to independent candidates.

The pro-Western ruling Georgian Dream party had already secured a majority (48.7 %) of votes cast in the first round of voting on 08.10.16, with the largest opposition party, the United National Movement, coming in second with 27.1 % of the vote. In accordance with the official results, the ruling Georgian Dream party is now to be allocated 115 of the parliamentary seats, which total 150 in all. 27 seats go to the United National Movement, six to the pro-Russian Patriot Alliance and the remaining two seats to independent candidates. With its three-quarters majority, Georgian Dream is able not only to form the government but also to push through amendments to the constitution.

China

Hong Kong: Protests over intervention by the National People's Congress

Two opposition MPs elected to the Hong Kong parliament on 04.09.16 amended the text of their oath of office without due authority on 12.10.16 in protest at the central government wielding influence over Hong Kong, prompting the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China to intervene on 07.11.16. It excluded the two MPs from Hong Kong's parliament on the basis of Article 104 of Hong Kong's constitution, which requires an MP of Hong Kong to pledge allegiance both to Hong Kong and to the People's Republic of China. Thousands of people had already demonstrated in Hong Kong on 06.11.16 against the national parliament's actions, which are seen as meddling, particularly in view of the fact that Hong Kong's high court has yet to decide on the status of the two MPs.

Hong Kong's parliament had declared the two MPs' oaths invalid. MPs close to the central government prevented a second swearing-in ceremony on 19.10.16 by leaving the floor.

Philippines

Abu Sayyaf abducts German man

The Islamist group Abu Sayyaf has stated that it abducted a 70 year-old German man off the coast of the province of Tawi-Tawi in the south of the country on 05.11.16 and killed the woman who was with him. The Philippine military found the dead woman's body on the couple's yacht off the coast of the nearby province of Sulu on 06.11.16. Abu Sayyaf regularly abducts foreigners in order to extort ransom money.

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