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Group 41 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

27 January 2014

Afghanistan

Security situation

On 21 January 2014 a group of mine clearance workers was kidnapped in Herat province (in the Pashtun Zarghun district) in western Afghanistan. Press releases spoke of 50 to 60 displaced persons. The Afghan government said that the police have taken up an operation in order to release the men.

On 23 January 2014 unknown gunmen shot down at least five teenage volleyball players as they practised in Laghman province in eastern Afghanistan (Alingar district). One week earlier, four footballers had been killed and three wounded in a Taliban missile strike in Kandahar province in southern Afghanistan.

On 27 January 2014 in the east of the capital of Kabul a suicide bomber blew himself up next to a bus of the armed forces. This attack killed at least two officers and two civilians, at least 22 people were wounded. An attack in Nangarhar province in eastern Afghanistan killed two civilians and wounded four when their car drove over a booby trap.

Journalist killed

On 23 January 2014 the burned and mutilated body of a journalist was found in Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand province in southern Afghanistan. Family members assume that the journalist who previously had been threatened was killed by government opponents. According to an Afghan journalists' association there have been approximately 60 cases of violence or intimidation against journalists this year so far.

Iraq

Refugees in Iraq

More than 140,000 people have reportedly fled clashes between security forces and anti-government fighters linked to al-Qaida in Anbar province in central Iraq. The UNHCR said that in the past few days 65,000 people have left their homes in Falludja und Ramadi where the clashes took place. The UNHCR also said that this is the largest displacement Iraq has witnessed since the sectarian violence between 2006 and 2008.

Pakistan

Security situation

In revenge for two attacks last week (see BN dated 20 January 2014) the Pakistani air force attacked Taliban hideouts on 21 January 2014 in the north-west of the country (North Waziristan). More than 40 Islamist militants have reportedly been killed. The authorities said that in the meantime approximately 1,500 families or 13,000 people have fled from their villages in North Waziristan in order to get away from the fighting.

On 21 January 2014 a bomb attack was carried out onto a bus with Shiite worshippers in south-west Pakistan (60 kilometres west of Quetta/ Baluchistan province). At least 22 people were killed in this attack, 20 were wounded and nine people are reported missing.

On 22 January 2014 at least seven policemen were killed in a bomb attack in north-west Pakistan. The policemen were there in order to protect a vaccination team. One day earlier three members of a polio vaccination team had been shot dead in Karachi.

On 23 January 2014 the explosion of a car bomb killed six people in Peshawar (north-west Pakistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province). The reasons for this attack are unknown. And a policeman was shot dead in Peshawar when he was guarding a Hindu temple.

On 26 January 2014 at least six children were killed when a bomb hidden in a toy exploded in Hangu district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Briton sentenced to death of blasphemy

A court in Rawalpindi convicted a British man of Pakistani origin on 23 January 2014 of blasphemy and sentenced him to death. The man who presumably suffers from a mental illness had claimed several times to be a prophet. Although the death sentence is being passed in Pakistan, it has however not been executed since 2008 with just one exception (in 2013 a soldier was convicted of murder by a military court).

Syria

Thousands of detainees tortured to death

On 21 January 2014 the BBC published an expert report on the torture of 11,000 prisoners in Syrian prisons who were tortured until they died. The photographs included in this report date back to the time when the uprising began in 2011 until August 2013.

First results of the peace talks

The delegation of Syrian President Mr Bashar al-Assad promised on the peace conference in Geneva on 26 January 2014 that women and children will be allowed to leave the besieged centre of Homs and they agreed to allow UN relief convoys to get to the people in the rebel-held city centre. UN mediator Mr Lakhdar Brahimi said that this is a first success. The strategically important town of Homs has long since been regarded as rebel stronghold, in 2013 however, the Syrian troops were able to conquer the villages in the vicinity and to advance to the city centre. The historic centre where thousands of civilians are staying has been under continuous fire for months. What is still in question is however, whether the rebels - who in part do not acknowledge the opposition in Geneva - will allow women and children to leave.

Kurds form new province government

Syrian Kurds formed their own Kurdish province government in the north of the country. The declaration of 22 January 2014 was made without the consent of the states negotiating in the peace talks. The government shall reportedly have its own president and 22 ministers, among them a minister of foreign affairs, justice, education and defence who are of Kurdish, Arab and Assyrian ethnic origin. Elections are to be held in four months. The largest Kurdish party, the Democratic Union Party (PYD) is not a member in the peace talks. Some representatives of the Kurds are members of the delegation of the Syrian National Coalition.

Lebanon

Bomb attack of the Jabhat al-Nusra in Beirut

On 21 January 2014 a bomb attack in southern Beirut in the Hezbollah controlled urban district of Haret Hreik killed at least four people and wounded 45. The Lebanese branch of the Jabhat al-Nusra (also called al-Nusra Front) has taken responsibility for the attack and said that this is a revenge for assumed massacres of the Hezbollah in Syria and in Lebanese border towns. The Hezbollah allegedly support the Syrian president Mr Bashar al-Assad.

Tunisia

New constitution adopted

Three years after the revolution Tunisia has now made a decisive step forward when the national assembly adopted the new constitution.

After two years of arguments the Tunisian transition assembly adopted the new constitution on 26 January 2014 with more than the required majority of three thirds of the votes. According to Tunisian media reports 200 parliamentarians voted in favour of the new constitution, twelve abstained and four voted against it. The new constitution is regarded as path-breaking in the Arab world as it foresees among others freedom of conscience and equality between men and women. Prior to this, the non-party Prime Minister Mr Mehdi Jomaa had presented his transition cabinet of independent experts which includes 21 ministers and seven state ministers.

Egypt

Policemen killed

On 23 January 2014 at least five policemen were killed in an attack onto a control post in Beni Suef province approx. 100 km south of Cairo. Gunmen on motor bikes had opened fire onto the control post. The attackers and possible backers have not been unidentified.

Bomb series in Cairo

A series of bomb attacks on 24 January 2014 in Cairo killed at least six people, approximately 100 were wounded. The explosion of a car bomb by a suicide bomber in front of the Cairo police security directorate alone killed four people and wounded 73. Shortly afterwards, a bomb exploded near an underground station. A third explosive device exploded in front of a police station on a street leading the pyramids of Giza. On 25 January 2014 the Islamist group of Ansar Beit al-Makdis has taken responsibility for the attacks; the group is mainly known to be active on the Sinai Peninsula and linked to al-Qaida.

On 25 January 2014 unidentified offenders threw a firebomb onto a police station.

Heavy clashes on the anniversary of the revolution

Clashes on the anniversary day of the revolution on 25 January 2014 in Cairo killed at least 49 people. The police took action against the supporters of the former president Morsi with teargas and scatter shots. Approximately 250 people were wounded in Cairo and at other places. The Ministry of the Interior said that 1,079 people had been arrested who were mainly supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. The security forces also took violent action against a march of protesters of a secular movement in Cairo who criticise the government. One of the protesters lost his life.

Attack on the Sinai

On 26 January 2014 an attack onto a bus of the military forces killed four soldiers, 13 soldiers were wounded.

South Sudan

Ceasefire deal signed

Representatives of the government and the rebels signed a ceasefire agreement on 23 January 2014 in Addis Ababa which provided the ending of all fighting within 24 hours. An additional round of talks is planned for the negotiation of the retreat of Ugandan troops which had entered into the fighting on the side of the government, something which the rebels request. Shortly after the agreement had come into force, government and rebels accused each other of violating the ceasefire.

The Kenyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs said on 22 January 2014 that the member states of the IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development; east African union of states including Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda) wish to send up to 5,500 soldiers to South Sudan in order to monitor the ceasefire deal.

Somalia

Ethiopian troops integrated in AMISOM

4,395 Ethiopian soldiers were officially integrated in the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) on 22 January 2014. In future, they shall be responsible for the security in the regions of Gedo, Bay and Bakool in the south-west. This number of new soldiers increases the size of AMISOM to approx. 22,000 men. The headquarters are planned to be located in Baidoa. Ethiopian units have operated in Somalia since 2011. The al-Shabaab has announced a series of attacks against AMISOM.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Military offensive against ADF-NALU rebels

On 16 January 2014 the Congolese armed forces started a military offensive (operation “Sukola”) near the district capital of Beni (North-Kivu province in eastern Congo) with the logistic help of the UN MONUSCO peacekeeping mission against the Muslim rebel group ADF-NALU (Allied Democratic Forces – National Army for the Liberation of Uganda) who are of Ugandan origin. In this offensive the armed forces have reportedly been successful in capturing the built-up areas of Mamundiona, Kambi ya Mabi, Kalemi and Mwalika, approximately 40 km north of Beni which are supposedly important strongholds of the rebels. The ADF-NALU has been made responsible for a number of attacks in the vicinity of Beni in the past few months where dozens of civilians have been killed or kidnapped. Due to the increased recruiting of Congolese in the two years or so, its size is now estimated to approximately 1,400 men.

Mali

Military operation in the north

French forces killed at least 11 Islamist fighters in a military operation in Mali’s northern region and one French soldier was wounded. The operation was reportedly necessary in order to prevent the jihadists from regaining power and from a renewed settlement in the region, declared an army source. Different items of equipment were seized.

Central African Republic

Election of an interim president

The Mayor of the capital of Bangui, Ms Catherine Samba-Panza was elected as new interim president on 22 January 2014. She is expected to bring reconciliation to the country which has experienced heavy civil disturbances, to restore the government’s ability to govern the country and to enable hundreds of thousands of refugees to return. Though Ms Samba-Panza is Christian, the Muslim rebels appreciate her as a neutral institution. The first female head of state in Central Africa shall govern the country as long as democratic elections can be held.

EU votes for military operation

On 20 January 2014 the Foreign Ministers of the European Union voted in favour of a military mission in the Central African Republic. The number of about 500 soldiers shall support French and African forces which have already been operating there.

UN special representative appointed for the investigation of acts of violence

In the meantime the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva appointed Ms Marie-Thérèse Keita Bocoum from Ivory Coast as special representative in order to investigate the acts of violence. Prior to this, UN Secretary-General Mr Ban Ki-Moon had requested some action because the Central African Republic is “in a free fall” and “additional atrocities” must urgently be prevented there. The latest reports on heavy clashes were made on 23 January 2014 with at least 16 fatalities when hundreds of Christians in Bangui set fire on Muslim houses and raided numerous shops.

Russian Federation/North Caucasus

Attack in Dagestan – Seven extremists killed

In the evening of 17 January 2014 an anti-tank weapon was shot onto a restaurant in the city centre of Machatshkala – the capital of the Republic of Dagestan in North Caucasus. Only a few minutes later a car bomb exploded in front of the entrance. These attacks wounded in total 16 people.

One day later Russian security forces killed seven suspected extremists in a battle. The suspects had been traced in a suburb of Machatshkala and they have reportedly been responsible for the attacks onto the restaurant the previous day, the anti-terror authority NAK said.

The focus in North Caucasus is still the unstable situation in Dagestan. The authorities say that at least 16 terror groups were active in that region last year. The Russian Security Council says that approximately four fifths of all terroristic acts are committed in the region of Dagestan in North Caucasus.

Ukraine

Protests in Ukraine continue – protesters occupy Ministry of Justice

There were again heavy clashes in Kiev in the night of 25 January 2014 to 26 January 2014. Following these clashes, President Yanukovych had surprisingly offered the opposition to lead the government, something which they rejected, however. The opposition continues to request that President Yanukovych resigns and that immediate presidential and parliamentary elections shall take place. Last week there were fatalities among the protesters for the first time during the violent clashes.

Late in the evening of 26 January 2014 government opponents stormed the building of the Ministry of Justice which is only a few hundred metres away from the main camp of the protesters and they erected barriers. In the past few days protesters have always again occupied government buildings. Opposition leader Mr Vitali Klitschko requested that the protesters should leave the ministry. He also said that a political solution must be found in order to solve the struggle for power and to prevent any challenges. Justice Minister Ms Elena Lukash as well called the militant government opponents to free her ministry. She said that she hopes for a peaceful solution to the conflict. Should, however, the protesters not leave the building she will discuss the situation with the National Security Council. Then, it might be possible that they discuss plans to declare a state of emergency in Ukraine.

In the meantime the media report heavy unrest in all parts of the country and also in the political homeland of Mr Yanukovych which is the east of Ukraine. In the industrial city of Donjezk mainly young protesters attacked the central government building. 300,000 people were registered to attend a solidarity demonstration for the president in Kiev on 26 January 2014, however, only 300 people attended in fact. Riots are reported from Odessa, Saporishshje and Dnipropetrovsk. The riots have spread onto almost all important cities in Ukraine.

China

Riots in Xinjiang province kill twelve

On 27 January 2014 Chinese policemen shot six people dead in Xinjiang province. The exchange of fire has reportedly been triggered off during a terror attack, reported the state media. Six other people reportedly died when explosive agents exploded which the attackers themselves had carried with them. Five other suspects were arrested.

The border province in the west of the country - which is rich in raw materials - has in the past few years always again been the setting of acts of violence. The Chinese government often says that militant Islamists are responsible for such acts. In the period of time since April 2013 approximately 100 people have died during unrests.