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Group 22 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

20 February 2017

Summarised edition owing to reprioritisation of tasks

Afghanistan

Fighting continues

Five members of a militia and five Taliban insurgents were killed in fighting that erupted between the Taliban and security forces around a village in north-western Afghanistan, according to a statement issued by a spokesperson of the provincial police on 15 February 2017. Taliban insurgents reportedly attacked two security checkpoints in the village of Gorsad in Fariab, which is now under the control of the Taliban. Security forces have been trying to recapture the village. In the neighbouring province of Jowzjan, the Taliban abducted 52 farmers in order to obtain a ransom, according to government sources. The spokesperson of the governor said the insurgents in the area were attempting to use kidnappings in order to improve their finances.

Attack on security checkpoint in Nangarhar

At least 17 Afghan troops and several ISIS fighters were killed in an attack carried out by ISIS at an army checkpoint in the district of Dih Bala in the early hours of 17 February 2017, according to the head of the Council of Nangarhar, Ahmad Ali Hazrat.

Iraq

Bombings in Baghdad

ISIS claimed responsibility for a bombing at a car market in the district of al-Bajaa on 16 February 2017 that is inhabited mainly by Shia Muslims, killing four persons. On 15 February 2017, a bombing carried out in the Shia district of Sadr City killed at least 10 persons. Since it has been losing ground, ISIS has come under massive pressure and is endeavouring to incite tension between Shia and Sunni Muslims.

Fight for Mosul

The fight for Mosul is obviously entering the crucial phase. On 19 February 2017, Prime Minister Haider Jawad Kadhimi al-Abadi announced the launch of a military offensive on western Mosul where the old part of the city, the old market and most of the government buildings are located. Experts expect this will be a protracted operation. According to Iraqi sources, the Iraqi army together with its allies managed to seize several villages during the first few hours of the offensive. Before the offensive was launched, the air force had dropped leaflets, warning people that fighting was about to begin. According to a statement issued by the coalition supported by the US on 18 February 2017, an ISIS militia command centre had been destroyed at a medical facility in western Mosul on 18 February 2017. In January 2017, eastern Mosul was recaptured from ISIS. The UN warns of mass displacements.

Turkey

Hundreds arrested

In anti-terror raids carried out in 37 Turkish provinces on 13 and 14 February 2017, security forces seized a large number of arms, including automatic guns and ammunition and arrested 834 persons who are suspected

of having links with the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), including several leading PKK members, according to media reports. The pro-Kurdish HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party) announced that hundreds of its members had been arrested. The police said the PKK leaders instructing its fighters to organise armed rebellions beginning on 15 February 2017, the anniversary of the day on which the leader of the PKK Abdullah Öcalan was arrested, as the reason for the crackdown

Journalist of the newspaper “Die Welt” arrested

According to media reports, the Turkey correspondent of the newspaper “Die Welt” Deniz Yücel was taken into police custody on 14 February 2017. Yücel has dual citizenship and holds a German and Turkish passport. His lawyers say investigations are being carried out against him for being a member of a terrorist organisation, for spreading terrorist propaganda and for misuse of data. According to the newspaper, Yücel was investigating the hacking of the Turkish Energy Minister's e-mail account. The Federal Foreign Office and Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel have urged Turkey to observe the rule of law in the proceedings.

Car bomb

On 17 February 2017, a car bomb detonated at a complex of buildings inhabited by judges and public prosecutors in Viransehir (south-eastern Turkey), according to media reports, killing a three-year-old child and wounding 17 persons. Nobody has claimed responsibility for the attack so far. The Turkish government is blaming the PKK for the attack and has arrested 26 suspects.

Syria

Attacks on Al Bab

According to reports by the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, at least 24 civilians, eleven of them children, were killed last week in attacks carried out by the Turkish army on the North Syrian city of Al Bab. According to media reports, the Turkish army, which has been advancing on an ISIS stronghold with rebels for the past few weeks, claims 15 terrorists were killed. Turkey's Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım announced that the Turkish army and the rebels it supports had gained control over the vast part of the city. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has denied these reports.

Central African Republic

Rebels kill dozens of people

According to a report recently published by Human Rights Watch, militants of the Union pour la Paix en Centrafrique (UPC) killed 32 persons in the city of Bakala (Ouaka prefecture) on 12 December 2016. At least 29 persons have been killed in clashes close to Bakala since late-November 2016. Between 9,000 and 10,000 persons have reportedly fled the violence. Tension between the UPC and the Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC), another rebel group belonging to Séléka, escalated in November 2016 after the FPRC joined forces with former opponents, the Anti-Balaka, to oppose the UPC. Fighting broke out in Mourouba near Bakala on 27 November 2016 when the UPC attacked suspected Anti-Balaka militants.

Ghana

Several persons killed in conflict over traditional office

Around ten persons were killed in violent clashes that erupted over a traditional office in the city of Bimbilla (capital of the Nanumba North district, Northern Region) on 9 February 2017. The clashes were triggered by the appointment of a sub-chief by the supreme ruling traditional leader of the ethnic group of the Nanumba which a rival group disagreed with. Gunfire broke out and several buildings were burnt to the ground. 170 additional troops and police officers were deployed to the city. An uneasy peace has settled over the area since 10 February 2017. Twenty one persons have been taken into temporary custody.

Since around 2002/2003, a conflict has been brewing over the lawful successor of the Nanumba leader. A nighttime curfew has been in place since the traditional leader of the Nanumba was murdered in Bimbilla in June 2014.

At present, there are 352 officially registered conflicts over traditional offices in Ghana. The Ministry for Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs has its own infrastructure of traditional chiefs (Regional House of Chiefs, National House of Chiefs including tribunals) who are supposed to resolve these conflicts. The government intervenes if and when – as frequently occurs – violence calls for the deployment of security forces.

Gambia

New President sworn in

Gambia is celebrating the swearing in of its new President, ending 22 years' of a dictatorship. Adamo Barrow took the presidential oath in Banjul for the second time amidst high security precautions on 18 February 2017. He had been initially sworn in in Senegal in January 2017.

Pakistan

Attack on Sufi shrine

A suicide bomber detonated a bomb among crowds gathered for the busiest day of the week at the shrine to Sufi saint Lal Shahbaz Qalandar in Sehwan, a town in the southern Sindh province on 16 February 2017, killing at least 88 persons and wounding up to 250 persons. The shrine is one of the most important shrines in Pakistan. ISIS claimed responsibility for the bombing which has been one of the deadliest in the history of Pakistan. In the wake of the suicide attack, security forces carried out nationwide raids against suspected perpetrators on 17 February 2017. More than 100 extremists have allegedly been killed and dozens have reportedly been arrested in operations carried out in Sindh province and in north-western Pakistan.

The Sufism movement has a long tradition in Pakistan and has been a thorn in the side particularly of Sunni-Islamist groups. Attacks have been carried out repeatedly against Sufi shrines (most recently in November 2016 when an attack was carried out at a temple in Belochistan, killing at least 52 persons (cf. BN of 14 November 2016)).

Islamists continue to carry out attacks in Pakistan. On 15 February 2017, four suicide bombers blew themselves up in the north-west, killing themselves and six other people. On 13 February 2017, thirteen persons were killed and dozens were wounded in a suicide bombing in Lahore.

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