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Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

23 March 2015

Afghanistan

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Security situation

Numerous security incidents occurred once again last week. Two women were killed when a roadside bomb detonated in Andar district in Ghazni province in south-eastern Afghanistan on 16 March 2015. One police officer and four civilians were killed in a suicide bombing of a police vehicle in Helmand province in southern Afghanistan. On 17 March 2015, a total of 20 police officers were wounded in two suicide bombings in Paktika province in south-western Afghanistan and in the western province of Farah. The chief of police of Kajran district was killed in a roadside bombing in the central Afghan province of Daikundi. Three women were killed when unidentified men attacked the house of a tribal elder in central Logar province. On 18 March 2015, a suicide bomber attacked the governor's headquarters and other government facilities in Lashkargah (capital of Helmand in southern Afghanistan), killing seven civilians and wounding 46 persons. On 19 March 2015, the police chief of Uruzgan province in the south was killed in a suicide attack in the capital of Kabul. On 22 March 2015, the Taliban killed five villagers in Andkhoy in the northern province of Faryab, including the village leader.

Further attacks were carried out against security forces and military operations claiming some civilian casualties were carried out in Helmand, Nimroz, Zabul (southern Afghanistan), Ghazni, Khost (south-eastern Afghanistan), Nangarhar, Kunar (eastern), Farah, Herat (western Afghanistan), Kunduz (north-east), Jawzjan (northern Afghanistan).

ISIS gaining ground

According to findings of the United Nations, ISIS is also gaining a foothold in Afghanistan. The Taliban continue to be the main enemy but reports suggest ISIS is also gaining momentum (cf. BN of 16 March 2015, 9 March 2015, 2 March 2015). ISIS includes foreign fighters and members of the Taliban who have joined ISIS.

UN extends UNAMA

The Security Council voted today to extend the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for another 12 months until 17 February 2016.

Woman lynched in Kabul

On 19 March 2015, a woman suspected of being mentally retarded who reportedly burned a Koran was beaten to death by an angry mob and set alight. Security officers did not intervene.

Pakistan

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Death penalty

Since the moratorium on the death penalty was lifted in December 2014 (cf. most recently BN of 16 March 2015), 48 persons have been executed.

Renewed attacks on polio vaccination team

On 17 March 2015, a polio vaccination worker and a police officer were shot dead in north-western Pakistan.

Military operation in the Federally-Administered Tribal Areas

Following the bombings of two Churches on 15 March 2015 (cf. BN of 16 March 2015), the Pakistani army claims it killed around 80 militants belonging to Tehrik-e-Taliban und Lashkar-e-Islam in fighting, involving both ground troops in the Khyber region and fighter jets.

Turkey

Assistance for Syrian refugees

The German Minister for Development Aid pledged Turkey will receive around EUR 11.5 million in aid during a visit made to Kilis, the border region between Turkey and Syria on 20 March 2015. The funds will be used mainly to enhance the infrastructure in Turkish communities in the border region (schools, water supply, waste disposal). According to UNHCR sources, there are 1.7 million registered Syrian refugees living in Turkey, the majority of whom are living outside refugee camps.

Öcalan calls for an end to the Kurdish conflict

In a message broadcast to mark the Kurdish New Year's celebrations "Nevruz" on 21 March 2015 in Diyarbakir, the leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, urged his party to organise a congress "to bring an end to the 30-year of struggle against the Turkish Republic". Mr. Öcalan said the congress should make the strategic and historical decision about ending the armed struggle based on mutually agreed principles, adding that this would hail a new era in relations between Kurds and Turkey. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said he hoped that Öcalan's message would become a "milestone for peace and solidarity".

Syria

Suicide bombings at New Year's celebrations in Hasakah

Two ISIS motorcycle bombers detonated their explosives during New Year's celebrations in Hasakah on 21 March 2015, killing at least 45 persons and wounding around 70. In the border area between Syria and Iraq, it is mainly Kurds fighting against ISIS to gain control over the towns Tall Tamer and Ras Al-Ain.

Iraq

Human rights violations in the fight against ISIS

According to the human rights organisation Human Rights Watch, militiamen, volunteer fighters and Iraqi security forces deliberately destroyed civilian buildings after they had driven ISIS out of the town of Amerli and its suburbs in early September 2015. The report documents that militiamen pillaged the property of Sunni civilians who had fled the fighting, burning their homes and businesses to the ground and completely destroying at least two villages.

UN accuses ISIS of genocide

In the opinion of UN experts, the bloody crimes committed by ISIS militiamen have reached the scale of genocide. They say ISIS militia are committing war crimes and crimes against humanity. The accusation of genocide levelled against ISIS, refers to the deliberate attempts to wipe out the Yazidi minority. ISIS fighters are also accused of committing crimes against Shia and members of other religious and ethnic groups. Iraqi government forces and affiliated militia groups also appear to have committed war crimes, the United Nations said. They are reportedly guilty of killing, torturing and abducting civilians.

Yemen

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Houthi rebels release members of the government from house detention/UN Security Council meets

Houthi rebels who have held the capital of Sanaa in their grip since September 2014 released the members of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi's cabinet who had been under house arrest for the past two months. Former Prime Minister Khaled Bahah confirmed his release in a note he posted on his Facebook page on 16 March 2015. The members of the government were reportedly allowed to move freely Bahah himself has announced his plans to leave Sanaa.

The UN Security Council urged the Houthi rebels to withdraw during a special session convened on 22 February 2015 and expressed concern that the country could slide into a similar situation as Syria, Iraq or Libya.

Military development/security situation

The Houthi rebels have captured the third-largest city of Taiz (in southern Yemen, located between Sanaa and Aden, it has a population of around 500,000).

Allies of Al-Qaeda reportedly captured in the city of Al Huta in Southern Yemen on 20 March 2015.

On 20 March 2015, a group allegedly allied with the terrorist group "Islamic State" carried out suicide attacks on two mosques in Sanaa which are frequented mainly by Houthi supporters. At least 142 persons were killed and over 350 were wounded.

Tunisia

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Attack on National Museum in Tunis

23 people, mostly foreign tourists were killed in a shooting attack on Bardo National Museum in Tunis on 18 March 2015; 40 persons were wounded. The shootings at the museum inside Tunisia's parliament compound was one of the worst militant attacks in four years. According to government sources, gunmen wearing army uniforms opened fire on tourists as they were getting off a bus on the square in front of the museum. They were then forced to enter the building and were taken hostage. A special security force unit ended the hostage-taking after 3 hours, two gunmen were shot dead at the scene. They were of Tunisian origin, had undergone training in Libya and some had recently returned from fighting for Islamist militant groups in Syria. Islamic State militants claimed responsibility for the attack on 19 March 2015. The Tunisian Minister of the Interior said in a press release issued on 21 March 2015 that investigations were still ongoing, that they were looking for a third suspect and that ten suspects had been arrested.

Eritrea/Ethiopia

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Ethiopian attacks on targets in Eritrea

According to a high-ranking Ethiopian officer, the Ethiopian air force bombarded two targets in Eritrea on 20 March 2015. They reportedly pounded a gold mine around 150 kilometres west of the capital Asmara as well as an army depot in Mai Edaga (which is located around 50 kilometres south of Asmara). The Canadian company operating the Bisha mine merely spoke of an "act of vandalism".

Mali

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Peace agreement

The coalition of the leading rebel groups in northern Mali has spoken out against the peace plan which has already been signed by the government. The government then announced on 18 March 2015 that it refuses to participate further in the peace talks. The rebel groups praised the Algiers Agreement as the basis for negotiations and pressed for further negotiations with international participation.

Sierra Leone

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Vice-President dismissed

On 18 March 2015, Vice-President Sam-Sumana was removed by President Ernest Bai Koroma after he had applied for asylum to the US Embassy in Freetown. He was expelled from the APC March 6 for allegedly forming a rival political movement and fomenting trouble in his home district of Kono. Sam-Sumana has denied the accusations and refused to be excluded from the party.

Renewed curfew

On 19 March 2015, a three-day curfew was once again imposed for the capital of Freetown and the north of the country. The curfew will last from 27 to 29 March 2015 to try to contain the Ebola epidemic..

Nigeria

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Only three LGA still under Boko-Haram control

On 17 March 2015, Chief of Army Staff, Lt. General. Kenneth Minimah announced that out of the Local Government Areas (LGA) originally controlled by Boko Haram, only Abadam, Kalabaldi and Gwoza (Borno state) remain the grip of the terrorists.

Mass grave discovered in Damasak

On 19 March 2015, soldiers discovered the bodies of at least one hundred people under a bridge just outside the town of Damasak along the border with Niger, one of whom was the imam of the town. Several of the victims had been decapitated while other had been shot, probably by Boko Haram. The town had been captured by Boko Haram in late November 2014. Chad and Niger launched a large-scale air and ground offensive against Boko Haram in the area on 9 March 2015.

Gamboru recaptured by Boko Haram

After Chadian troops pulled out of the city of Gamboru (which is on the border with Cameroon) on 12 March 2015, Boko-Haram militants recaptured the defenceless city on 18 March 2015, killing eleven people. The Chadian army had freed Gamboru from the grip of Boko Haram in early February 2015.

Boko-Haram militants kill wives

Dozens of Nigerian women who were forced to marry Boko Haram fighters were reportedly slaughtered by their "husbands" before a battle with troops several days before Borno's second largest city Baga was recaptured by the Nigerian army on 16 March 2015. The command was issued by the local terrorist leader. The women were killed to prevent them from subsequently marrying soldiers or other so-called non-believers.

South Sudan:

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South Sudanese refugees in Sudan

According to UNHCR sources, thousands of south Sudanese nationals fled to Sudan after peace talks between the government of South Sudan and rebels led by former Vice-President Riek Machar failed (cf. BN of 9 March 2015). Since fighting erupted again on 8 March 2015, around 4,000 persons have fled Upper Nile state in South Sudan to White Nile state in Sudan since Another 900 persons have reportedly sought shelter in South Kordofan.

Somalia

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Al-Shabaab leader killed

According to a statement issued by the Pentagon on 18 March 2015, a U.S. drone strike in southern Somalia killed Adnan Garaar, an al Shabaab leader on 12 March 2015. He is believed to be the mastermind of an attack on Westgate shopping mall that killed more than 60 people in September 2013.

Violence between clans in the region of Hiiran

At least twelve persons were killed and dozens wounded in violent clashes between clan militia of the Hawadle (who belong to the family of the Hawiye clan) and the Suure (who belong to the family of the Dir clan) near Beledweyne in Central Somalia on 21 March 2015. The reasons for the clashes are unclear. Lengthy land disputes but also political disputes over representation of the two clans at future elections have been given as the reasons for the hostilities.

Corruption at government level

According to a report to be published by the auditor general, the majority of the 25 ministries were found to have engaged in malpractices in the financial sector, misappropriating public funds for private purposes. The auditor general said he had to suspend several members of his 61-strong team due to "bribe taking from ministries" they were investigating. The findings are likely to strain relations with donors helping to rebuild the east African country.

Democratic Republic of Congo

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Some activists arrested at pro-democracy meeting released

At least seven of the 28 persons (including pro-democracy activists, musicians, journalists and a U.S. diplomat) arrested at a press conference held by the Congolese youth movement Filimbi at the cultural centre Eloko Makasi in Kinshasa during the evening hours of 15 March 2015 remain in detention according to a lawyer speaking on behalf of the movement. The US diplomat and foreign journalists are to be released before 15 March 2015. The four foreign pro-democracy activists (three Senegalese and one Burkinese) who had been accused of masterminding the armed coup in the Democratic Republic of Congo were expelled on 16 March 2015. Seven Congolese musicians were released on 17 March 2015.

Around a dozen activists who had protested in front of the headquarters of the secret service in the east Congolese city of Goma on 17 March 2015 pressing for the release of persons detained in Kinshasa on 15 March 2015 were released during the night on the day they were detained.

The conference was intended to facilitate networking of initiatives in order to prevent President Joseph Kabila from standing for a third term in office.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

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EU Association Agreement enters into force – new reform strategy

Following reform promises made by Bosnia and Herzegovina, the EU's Foreign Affairs Council on 16 March 2015 activated the country's Stabilisation and Association Agreement, SAA which had been signed in 2008. However, the Foreign Affairs Council urged the country to maintain the positive momentum by developing an initial agenda for reforms before they can consider its application to join the EU.

Political disputes among the three main ethnic groups (Bosnians (Muslims), Serbs and Croats) had greatly impacted the reform processes in recent years. The former EU strategy of constitutional reform as the core of the reform process had failed. However, they say progress had been made through an initiative launched by the Foreigner Ministers of Germany and Great Britain (cf. BN of 17 November 2014). Both had urged the EU partners to lift the blockade. Reforms are now needed above all in administration and the labour market.

It will be a challenge to implement the envisaged reforms. It will be hard, if not impossible, to avoid a thorough constitutional reform. Vast parts of the country are ungovernable because politicians keep working against each other. The ethnic division has deepened and the political, economic and social crisis has worsened.

Ukraine

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Situation in the East

The ceasefire agreement has led to a decrease in the number of clashes, but fighting has not stopped completely. The conflicting parties keep accusing each other of breaking the ceasefire. Reports of new explosions and fighting close to the airport and railway station in Donetsk are rife. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe has reported on dozens of cases of heavy gunfire.

The Parliament in Kiev approved a bill on 17 March 2015 according to which regions in the East that are under the control of pro-Russian separatists may be accorded special status. However, one prerequisite is that regional elections be held under Ukrainian law. According special status to the regions controlled by pro-Russian separatists is part of the Agreement of Minsk concluded in February 2015.

Georgia

Large-scale anti-government rally

Tens of thousands of people took to the streets in capital of Tbilisi, on 21 March 2015 to take party in one of the largest anti-government rallies of recent years. They blame the government led by Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili for the economic crisis and the rising crime rate. The protesters were led by activists and leaders of the opposition party "United National Movement" which ruled until October 2012 and is now calling for the current government to resign.

The economy has been weakened by the Ukrainian crisis and by the devaluation of the Russian ruble. They say the Association Agreement concluded with the EU in 2014 cannot compensate for this. The currency lari has been devalued by almost 30 percent in the past twelve months.

Georgia/Russian Federation

Moscow intensifies cooperation with South Ossetia

Russia's President Vladimir and the President of South Ossetia which is not yet recognised internationally, Leonid Tibilov, signed an alliance and integration agreement for 25 years offering the possibility of extension at a meeting held in Moscow on 18 March 2015. It envisages, inter alia, establishing a common area for security and defence, the abolition of border formalities, integration of customs authorities as well as a simplified system for the acquisition of Russian nationality. President Putin has also pledged 1 billion rubles (about EUR 138 million) to support the economically weak area by 2017. Russia has already paid 43 billion rubles in the past six years. Observers are assuming that South Ossetia is keen to merge with the Russian partial republic of North Ossetia.

South Ossetia declared independence from Georgia in 1990 which lost all control over South Ossetia after a war August 2008.

Azerbaijan

Nagorno-Karabach conflict

On 19 March 2015, gunfire broke out along the border between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan which claimed the lives of troops on both sides. Nagorno-Karabakh reported that three of its troops had been killed and four wounded and that 12 Azerbaijani troops had been killed. Azerbaijan says it killed up to twenty troops of Nagorno-Karabakh. The number and intensity of hostilities has risen since August 2014.

India

Attack on a police station in Kashmir

Three security officers and one civilian were killed in an attack launched by a Pakistani militant group on a police station in Kathua in Indian-administered Kashmir, around 15 kilometres from the border with Pakistan on 20 March 2015. The two attackers were killed after a gun battle that lasted four hours. This was the first serious clash since November 2014 when an attack was launched on an army compound (cf. BN of 1 December 2014).

A number of groups have been fighting for Kashmir's independence or for its annexation with Pakistan, but none of them have so far claimed responsibility for the attack.

China

Violence in Xinjiang

According to a report broadcast by Radio Free Asia on 18 March 2015, Uyghurs stabbed a local leader of the security forces in the street on 8 March 2015 in Yarkand district (Chinese: Shache) in Kashgar prefecture as well as two members of his family and one other person. Security forces shot the seven perpetrators shortly after.

In another incident which occurred on 12 March 2015, Uyghurs stabbed several passersby in front of a casino in the city of Kashgar. Security forces shot dead four of the six attackers.