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Group 22 - Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

9 January 2017

Afghanistan

Armed conflicts

Armed conflicts, cleansing campaigns and raids by security forces as well as attacks and bombings by rebels continue in which civilians are also being killed or wounded. According to press reports, the following provinces were affected last week: Baghlan (north-eastern Afghanistan), Jawzjan, Faryab (northern Afghanistan), Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan (southern Afghanistan), Nangarhar, Laghman (eastern Afghanistan), Kapisa, Logar (central Afghanistan), Ghazni (south-eastern Afghanistan), Herat und Farah (western Afghanistan) and Kunduz (north-eastern Afghanistan).

Taliban expanding the areas they control

According to information provided by the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), only around 57 percent of the 407 districts had been brought under the control or influence of the government by mid-November 2016. A year ago this figure was 15 percent higher. SIGAR is quoting US military sources which say out of 407 districts, only 233 are under the control of the government (83 districts) or are under the influence of the government (150 districts). By contrast, 41 districts in 15 provinces are under the control of insurgents (9 districts) or are under their influence (32 districts). 133 additional districts are deemed to be under threat. The provinces with the largest number of districts controlled or influenced by the Taliban are in southern Afghanistan, namely Uruzgan, Helmand, Kandahar and Zabul. Out of a population of approx. 32.1 million, around 20.4 million persons are living in areas subject to government control or influence, approx. 2.5 million are living in areas influenced by the insurgents and another 9.2 million are living in disputed territories.

UNAMA report on civilian casualties

On 6 February 2017, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) published its report on the number of civilian casualties in 2016. The report says 11,418 civilians were killed or maimed, compared to 11,043 in 2015. The highest number of civilian casualties (2,989) were reported in southern Afghanistan. The central region recorded the second highest number of civilian casualties (2,348) followed by 1,595 civilian casualties in eastern Afghanistan, 1,362 civilian casualties in northern Afghanistan, 1,270 civilian casualties in north-eastern Afghanistan, 903 civilian casualties in south-eastern Afghanistan, 836 civilian casualties in western Afghanistan and 115 civilian casualties in the central highland. UNAMA recorded 3,512 child casualties (923 deaths and 2,589 injured), a 24 percent increase from 2015.

Suicide bombings and attacks

On 30 January 2017, over 30 Afghan and foreign troops were killed in a roadside bombing in Zabul (Arghandab District, southern Afghanistan).

On 1 February 2017, news leaked that residents of Rodat district in Nangarhar province (eastern Afghanistan) were involved in an armed resistance against ISIS. One civilian was killed in a missile attack in Lashkargah (capital of Helmand province, southern Afghanistan), three civilians were wounded. In Khost City (capital of Khost province, eastern Afghanistan), five police officers and three schoolchildren were killed in two suicide bombings. A road construction worker who had previously been abducted was killed in Nimruz (southern Afghanistan),.

On 2 February 2017, suspected insurgents abducted two doctors in Badghis (western Afghanistan).

On 5 February 2017, the governor of Kunar (eastern Afghanistan) survived an attack by the Taliban.

Iraq

UNHCR announced on 30 January 2017 that food rations to 1.4 million people had to be halved at the refugee camps in northern Iraq because the donor countries had cut back on their commitment and, similar to 2015, had delayed paying the organisation.

ISIS cut power lines to eastern Mosul in several places during the week so that the liberated areas are currently, by and large, without electricity.

There has been a noticeable rise in attacks and guerrilla attacks in Anbar province, where ISIS has already attacked several towns that had been liberated. On 5 February 2017, Eid al-Karbouli, spokesperson of the regional government, said that in the foreseeable future, the troops in Anbar would no longer be able to free the regions held by ISIS in Anbar province.

Medical supplies are gradually running out in Erbil owing to the refugee situation which has deteriorated greatly because of cuts at UNHCR and the fighting around Mosul. This week, a maternity hospital asked for international aid because it is at risk of running out of anaesthetics.

Turkey

ISIS suspects arrested

According to the news agencies Anadolu and Dogan, Turkish police arrested 400 suspected ISIS terrorists, the majority of whom are said to be foreigners, in a series of raids as part of a crackdown on terror across the country. They are accused of planning attacks. The raids took place more than a month after the attack on a night club in Istanbul which ISIS is being held responsible for. 150 suspects were reportedly arrested in the city of Sanliurfa, 47 were arrested near the city of Gaziantep and 60 suspects were arrested in Ankara.

Tunisia

Terrorist suspects arrested

Security forces arrested seven terrorist suspects between the age of 31 and 48 at a public swimming pool a few kilometres south of the city of Tunis. According to official sources, the men confessed that they had met there regularly in order to avoid surveillance measures.

Libya

Misrata Military Council announced on 30 January 2017 that its militia would be joining the newly-established Libyan army which will be subordinate to the Government of National Accord brokered by the UN. By making this announcement, the Military Council has positioned itself further against the Libyan National Army led by General Khalifa Haftar who has been called a "renegade general". The General announced on 5 February 2017 that his Libyan National Army had 95 percent of the country under its control.

Central African Republic

Outbreak of violence in Ouham-Pendé province

According to UN sources, outbreak of violence on 2 February 2017 between two armed groups in the town of Bocaranga (Ouham-Pendé province) reportedly killed and injured civilians as well as displacing some 9,000 people. Shops, markets and international non-governmental organisation compounds were attacked and pillaged in the clashes. Other reports say the rebel organisation Retour, Réclamation et Réhabilitation (3R) that was established in 2016 attacked the city.

At least one soldier was killed in an attack against a patrol of UN peacekeepers around 25 kilometres south-west of Bocaranga on 2 February 2017. Two troops were killed in an attack against a convoy of tanker lorries they were escorting near the town of Obo in the south-east of the country on 31 January 2017.

Nigeria

Boko Haram: suicide attack in Maiduguri

During the morning of 31 January 2017, a suicide bomber blew himself up at the entrance to the Dalori Housing Estate mosque in Maiduguri (capital of Borno State). A member of the civilian Joint Task Force (JTF) was also killed.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Opposition leader Tshisekedi dies

On 1 February 2017, Etienne Tshisekedi, aged 84, the main opposition leader of the Democratic Republic of Congo for many years, died as the result of a pulmonary embolism at a hospital in Belgium, where he had travelled to from Kinshasa to undergo medical tests on 24 January 2017. Tshisekedi was due to become President of the "National Transition Council for Monitoring the Transitional Agreement". This body is part of the agreement concluded between the government and opposition on 31 December 2016 to pave the way for and monitor free elections to be held by the end of 2017 as well as the stepping down of ruling President Joseph Kabila. The death of Tshisekedi means the opposition is losing its most important figurehead. Tshisekedi had been prime minister three times during the presidency of Mobutu between 1991 and 1994. In 2011, he lost the controversial presidential election against the current Joseph Kabila. Tshisekedi remained Chairperson of the largest opposition party UDPS (Union for Democracy and Social Progress) and President of the largest opposition alliance Rassemblement.

Cameroon

Boko Haram: suicide attack in Mora

In the early hours of 31 January 2017, three suicide bombers thought to be insurgents belonging to the Boko Haram terrorist organisation blew themselves up in Double (Extreme North Region), killing not only themselves but one civilian and wounding seven persons.

Gambia

First press conference for new President

Gambia's new President Adama Barrow held his first press conference as president in the capital Banjul on 28 January 2017 calling for democratic reforms. His first official act was to remove the word "Islamic" in front of "Republic" from the country's name. He also promised to open the media houses that were closed down during the previous regime and to reorganise the security apparatus. He announced that he will be appointing his cabinet immediately. However, his first appointment of Fatoumata Jallow-Tambajang as Vice-President, the architect of his alliance, proved to be controversial. The 67-year-old is considered to be too old for the office under Gambia's Constitution.

Sudan

Churches to be demolished

The Sudanese government is reportedly set to demolish at least 25 Christian churches allegedly said to be "trespassing into residential areas". In 2014, Sudanese authorities issued an order banning the construction of all new Christian churches.

Missionary sentenced to 20 years in prison

A court in Khartoum sentenced a Czech missionary, development worker and documentary maker who worked for the US branch of the organisation "Voice of the Martyrs" to 20 years in prison (or to 23 years according to other sources) on charges of espionage. Two other Sudanese Christians were sentenced to 12 years in prison respectively, having been arrested in December 2015. They are said to have documented the

persecution of Christians and to have crossed the border between Sudan and South illegally. The interdenominational organisation which the Czech missionary belonged to says it aids Christians around the world who are the victims of persecution.

Somalia

Bomb blasts

Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the blast of an explosives device at a restaurant that is frequented by Somali police officers and troops in Burane near Mahadeay (Middle Shabelle Region) on 30 January 2017. Seven persons including three troops were wounded. A member of the Upper House of Parliament in Hodan district of Mogadishu and his escorts escaped an explosives attack on his convoy unharmed.

Fighting

In the wake of an attack carried out against Kenyan units on 27 January 2017, in which al-Shabaab claims to have killed more than 60 Kenyan troops, the Somali army announced on 28 January 2017 that it would be launching an offensive to drive the extremists out of Gedo region.

Two soldiers were killed and six were wounded when al-Shabaab militants attacked Puntland security forces at a checkpoint in Boosaaso (Bari Region) on 1 February 2017. The security forces of the Interim Galmudug Administration killed an al-Shabaab leader called "Arab" near the coastal town of Harardhere (Mudug Region) on 3 February 2017. He had been regarded as the head of finance in the central regions of Somalia. On 29 January 2017, Somali special forces had assassinated Abdullahi Qanas, a senior military commander of al-Shabaab for Gedo region. Several troops were killed in an attack launched by al-Shabaab against a military convey of the Interim South West Administration (ISWA) near Baidoa (Bay Region) on 1 February 2017.

Bodies of abducted men found

On 1 February 2017, residents found the beheaded bodies of three civilians near Qandala (Bari Region, Puntland). They had been abducted last week, while travelling on a coach, by militia that has ties with ISIS. According to Amaq News Agency, a media outlet of ISIS, the dead men were murdered by ISIS. A small number of extremists who had joined ISIS operate from a remote mountainous region in Puntland. In December 2016, they gained temporary control over the town of Qandala.

Famine

The U.N.'s humanitarian coordinator for Somalia, Peter de Clercq, said in a statement that Somalia risks slipping back into famine unless massive assistance is provided urgently.

Zimbabwe

Pastor Evan Mawarire arrested upon return

On 1 February 2017, police arrested pastor Evan Mawarire, Zimbabwe's currently best-known civil rights activist at Harare airport after he had returned from the US after spending voluntary six months in exile. He was charged with attempting to overthrow the government of President Robert Mugabe and with insulting the national flag. In May 2016, he published a video on social networks wearing Zimbabwe's national flag over his shoulder while criticising the poor condition of the state, particularly the serious economic crisis that has plagued the country for many years. A protest movement developed under the slogan #ThisFlag within the space of a few weeks, organising the largest anti-government rally the country has witnessed in the past decade.

Western Balkans

Weak democracies

According to the latest report published by Freedom House, the six countries in the Western Balkans achieved a score of between 76 (Serbia) and Kosovo (52) out of a possible score of 100 max. for the status of their democratic standards. Serbia is the only country it classifies as just about free whereas Albania, Bosnia,

Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro were called just partly free, criticising the lack of political rights and civil liberties. Freedom House says that democratic standards are being threatened by a deterioration in the rule of law, growing nationalism and ongoing corruption.

According to the latest Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International, out of 176 countries (with Somalia coming in last at 176), the six countries in the Western Balkans are in the lower median range between position 64 (Montenegro) and 95 (Kosovo). Bribery is rife at all levels, in the healthcare and education system, public administration and the judiciary. Although there are some positive trends in relation to the rule of law and the fight against corruption, the deficits continue to be the main points of criticism levelled against the governments of all countries in the Western Balkans.

Virulent conflict potential above all in Kosovo and Bosnia

State and ethnic conflicts are simmering away in the shadow of major crises in south-east Europe that observers think could easily spill over into armed conflicts at any time. The crises in Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina above all have once again become virulent. Bosnia and Kosovo are the two states in the region whose national boundaries are disputed.

Tensions have risen recently between Kosovo and Serbia (cf. BN of 23 January 2017). The President of Kosovo is accusing Serbia of fuelling new tensions in the region. Northern Kosovo was separated similar to the way the Russians split off eastern Ukraine from the Ukrainian mainland. The Bosnian-Serbian President Milorad Dodik has repeatedly threatened to declare Serbian independence (Republika Srpska) and wants to redraw the boundaries on the Western Balkans. However, Macedonia is also considered to be a political powder keg. The election of the new US President has put wind in the sails of the nationalists in the Balkans.

Myanmar

Crimes against humanity

In a report published on 3 February 2017, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said the suspected attacks that have been carried out by security forces on Rohingya in Rakhine State since 9 October 2016 (murder, torture, rape, disappearings) most probably amount to crimes against humanity. The attacks were apparently widespread and systematic. The report is based on eyewitness accounts of Rohingya who fled to Bangladesh.

Well-known lawyer shot dead

On 29 January 2017, Ko Ni, a well-known Muslim lawyer and legal advisor to State Councillor and Foreign Minister Aung San Suu Kyi, was shot in front of the airport in Rangoon. Before he was arrested, the gunman shot a taxi driver who was following him. Ko Ni was one of the few Muslims who was forging a career in politics in Myanmar. He lobbied against discrimination against Muslims.