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Directorate 22 - Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

27 April 2015

Afghanistan

Security situation

The Taliban have started their annual spring offensive and have intensified their attacks on Afghan security forces and foreigners.

Last week the news spread that a German development aid worker employed by Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) was kidnapped by the Taliban in Kunduz (north-eastern Afghanistan) in mid-April. The Taliban have been stepping up their activities in this province for some time now. The province's deputy governor stated last week that large areas in four out of six provincial districts were controlled by the rebels. He said there was a risk that the Taliban might get Kunduz under their control.

The following events illustrate the current situation. On 21 April 2015, two persons were killed and 21 injured in a police armoury explosion in Kandahar (southern Afghanistan). In Kunduz, a bomb blast killed five civilians and injured five others. In Samangan (northern Afghanistan), several people died in fights between the rebels and the security forces. On 22 April 2015, several persons, among them a high-ranking judicial officer, were killed by an attack in Nangarhar (eastern Afghanistan). In Badghis (western Afghanistan) several people lost their lives in a shootout between militants and a former Jihad commander. In Nimroz (southern Afghanistan) five people died in a street bomb explosion. On 23 April 2015, the Taliban shot a high-ranking social security officer in Farah (western Afghanistan). On 23 April 2015, fights and attacks took place in Ghazni (south-eastern Afghanistan), Helmand (southern Afghanistan) and Badghis (western Afghanistan). On 24 April 2015, civilians were killed in a bomb explosion in Kandahar (southern Afghanistan). Several people lost their lives in violent fights for land estates in Zabul (southern Afghanistan). In Kunduz (north-eastern Afghanistan) and Kunar (eastern Afghanistan) heavily armoured Taliban attacked several control posts. This led to serious fights with the security forces. In Maidan Wardak (central Afghanistan) a deputy chief police officer was attacked. In Paktia (south-eastern Afghanistan) two civilians died in an attack on the director of the office for tribal affairs. On 25 April 2015, military operations took place in Ghazni and Paktika (south-eastern Afghanistan), Laghman (eastern Afghanistan), Farah (western Afghanistan), Zabul (southern Afghanistan) and Maidan Wardak (central Afghanistan). The family of a member of parliament was attacked in Laghman. On 26 April 2016, the chief police officer of Uruzgan (southern Afghanistan) was murdered. In Nuristan (eastern Afghanistan), a bank clerk and two policemen were killed in attacks. Serious fights with the Taliban took place in Kunduz (north-eastern Afghanistan) and Khost (south-eastern Afghanistan). On the morning of 27 April 2015, two bombs exploded in front of the provincial council office in Khost, and at least six civilians were killed in an attack in Zabul (southern Afghanistan).

Pakistan

Women rights activist shot dead

On 25 April 2015, a women rights activist was shot dead on the street in Karachi. Shortly before, she and her organisation The Second Floor had hosted a discussion about the human rights situation in the province of Balochistan. Balochistan has been the scene of attacks and fights with separatists for years.

Iraq

Several attacks

The authorities have reported that on 23 April 2015 a suicide bomber killed eight pilgrims and injured more than 17 in front of the Golden Mosque in Samarra, one of the most important Shia holy sites.

Car bomb explosions in and near Baghdad killed at least 20 people and injured numerous others on 26 April 2015. The most serious bombing took place on the Chilani square in Baghdad's city centre.

Mass execution denied

On 26 April 2015 a spokesman of the military command in Baghdad denied reports that IS had conducted a mass execution of more than 180 army officers and soldiers after having taken a military base on Lake Tharthar, north of Ramadi. The spokesman said that 13 soldiers had been killed by an IS suicide attack in front of the military base gates and that General Hassan Abbas Tufan, the commander of the First Army Division, was one of the casualties. No independent confirmation of this statement has been made.

Yemen

Air strikes on Sanaa/Aden still under fire

Eyewitnesses claim that at least five Saudi-led air strikes on Houthi rebel bases in Sanaa, the capital of Yemen, took place on 26 April 2015. Reportedly, 26 people were killed. These were the first serious attacks on Sanaa after the military alliance had announced that it would scale down its attacks on the Houthis.

Eyewitnesses also said that foreign battleships had fired on Shia military positions in Aden.

US government: Iran does not control the Houthi rebels

On 20 April 2015 a spokeswoman of the US National Security Council contradicted Saudi-Arabia's claim that Iran supported the Houthi rebels in order to expand its influence. The Huffington Post reported that US secret service officials had said for months that the conflict in Yemen was a simply civil war, not a proxy war between Iran and the Arab countries around the Persian Gulf.

Turkey

Attack on AKP office

On 23 April 2015, a person was killed in an armed attack on an office of the Turkish government party AKP in the city of Batman, 100 kilometres north of the border to Syria. The media reported that one of the attackers was injured and arrested by security forces and that the second had fled. The motive for the crime is still unknown.

Syria

Offensive by the rebels

After days of heavy fighting, fighters of the al-Nusra Front and allied Islamist rebel groups almost completely took over the strategically important city Jisr al-Shughur (province of Idlib) in the north-east of the country last week. The Jihadists had recently captured Idlib, the provincial capital, and forced the government troops to retreat to Jisr al-Shughur. By now, the government army only controls the small city of Ariha and the military base Mastumah in the province. The Syrian army intensified its air strikes on Jisr al-Shughur on 26 April 2015.

Egypt

Mursi sentenced to twenty years in prison

A criminal court in Cairo sentenced Mohammed Mursi, the former president who was overthrown in July 2013, and twelve co-defendants, all of them high-ranking officials of the Muslim Brotherhood, to twenty years in prison each. Two other Muslim Brotherhood officials were sentenced to ten years in prison each.

The court found the defendants guilty of bearing co-responsibility for the illegal arrest and torture of at least ten protesters in July 2012. A murder charge had been dropped. The sentences are not yet final and binding. This is the first decision in a trial against Mursi. He is also accused of espionage for enemy powers and treason.

Tunisia

Casualties in fights with Islamists

On 23 and 24 April 2015, the Tunisian army and Islamist insurgents fought in Kasserine, near the border to Algeria. According to the government, ten Islamists and three soldiers were killed in the fights. Since the IS attack on the Bardo museum in Tunis in March 2015, which cost 20 foreign tourists their lives, the army has stepped up the fight against armed Islamists. The mountainous area near the border to Algeria serves as a retreat for militant groups.

Burundi

Two killed in protests

On 25 April 2015, the governing Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie – Forces de Défense de la Démocratie (CNDD-FDD) nominated incumbent Pierre Nkurunziza as candidate for the presidential elections in June 2015. On 26 April 2015, security forces violently dissolved demonstrations against this decision. At least two protesters were killed.

A re-election would mean that Nkurunziza would start his third term in office. This, the protesters argue, would violate both the constitution and the peace agreement of 2000. Nkurunziza's supporters claim that his first term in office does not count, as he was appointed by parliament and not elected by the people. The international community has repeatedly asked Nkurunziza not to aim at a third term in office, as there are fears that such a step might re-trigger the civil war between Hutu and Tutsi.

Angola

Police raid against sect leads to deaths

On 16 April 2015, security forces raided a camp of the Seventh Day Light of the World Church sect in a village in the province of Huambo. According to official reports dated 22 April 2015, 22 people (13 sect members and nine policemen) were killed. The opposition party Unita said that about 200 people were dead. According to police reports, members of the sect used violence to prevent the arrest of sect leader José Julino Kalupeteka, but failed. The illegal sect, a split of the Seventh Day Adventist Church with more than 3,000 members, claims that the world will end on 31 December 2015.

Ethiopia

Mass protest against IS murders overshadowed by clashes

On 22 April 2015, tens of thousands protested against the IS killings of Christians in Libya which took place only a few days before. The demonstration was organised by the government in Addis Abeba, the Ethiopian capital. About two-thirds of Ethiopia's 95 million inhabitants are Christians. The authorities obviously wanted to channel people's anger about the murders. However, the demonstrations resulted in violent clashes. Participants threw stones at the police. At least 100 people were arrested. The protesters called for revenge, but also criticised the government for having failed in its fight against poverty, which had caused people to leave the country in the first place.

Nigeria

Offensive against Boko Haram in Sambisa forest

On 22 April 2015, the Nigerian army began a ground offensive against the Boko Haram terrorists in the Sambisa forest in the federal state of Borno, the last known major retreat of Boko Haram. Large-scale air strikes had taken place before. Niger, Cameroon and Chad plan to send troops to participate in the military action in the coming days. According to the military, high-ranking Boko Haram commander Mojahid was killed in fights on 21 April 2015 when the terrorists attacked soldiers near the city of Alagarno at the edge of the Sambisa forest.

Marte taken by Boko Haram

On 23 April 2015, more than 2,000 Boko Haram fighters attacked the city of Marte (near Lake Chad in the federal state of Borno). After intensive fights with the army, the terrorists captured the city on 24 April 2015 for the third time since 2012.

Sudan

Fights in Darfur

The conflict in the Darfur states in western Sudan began in 2003. On 26 April 2015, the Sudanese army and the rebel militia JEM (Justice and Equality Movement) and SLM-MM (Sudan Liberation Movement – Minni Minnawi) fought near the city of Tulus (South Darfur). The Sudanese army reported that the rebels suffered major losses and lost more than 100 vehicles. Spokespersons of the rebel organisations denied the army's success. JEM claimed to have gained control of the government army positions in Tulus and to have captured hundreds of government soldiers. According to SLM-MM, fighters of the two rebel groups also control the city of Buram, about 80 km from the capital Nyala.

Against the background of the military clashes, spokespersons of the Sudanese army and the governor of South Darfur accused neighbouring South Sudan of granting the rebels shelter and support.

Somalia

Attack in Garowe/Puntland hit UN workers

The attack in Garowe/Puntland on 20 April 2015 (see BN of 20 April 2015) killed employees of the United Nations Children's Fund. Three of the victims were Somalis, two Kenyans, one Ugandan and one Afghan. Seven UNICEF workers are said to have been injured. According to the chief of police of Garowe, the perpetrator, who also died in the bus, worked for the UN as well. Following the attack, Ali Mohamoud Rage, a spokesman for al-Shabaab, said that his organisation would continue to attack the UN organisations in Somalia.

Attack in Mogadishu

An explosives-laden car was blown up in front of a restaurant on 21 April 2015. At least ten people were killed and at least six injured. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Attack on police station

On 21 April 2015, about 40 armed attackers occupied the police station of Gosince, near the border to Kosovo. Four policemen were temporarily detained. The attackers wore insignia of the former Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK) and spoke Albanian. They called for an independent state, claiming that they did not recognise the Ohrid Agreement.

Background

About one-quarter of the population (2.1 million) are ethnic Albanians. The Ohrid Agreement of August 2001 improved the rights of the Albanian population and prevented a civil war.

While the tensions have largely dissolved, the country is still split along ethnic lines. The two ethnic groups distrust each other, and as a result, violent clashes or attacks on members of the other ethnic group are a

common feature of everyday life. Many observers believe that the increasingly authoritarian and nationalist policies of the conservative government are a threat to domestic peace.

EU concerned about political developments

The EU Council of Ministers expressed “grave concern” about the situation in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. On 21 April 2015, it said in Luxembourg that the situation was deteriorating, in particular in the area of rule of law, fundamental rights and freedom of media.

Migrant tragedy

On 23 April 2015, at least 14 migrants, probably from Afghanistan and Somalia, were hit by a train and killed. About 50 people had been on the rail track. The site of the accident is located on a well-known migrant route from Greece towards central and western Europe. Macedonia is one of the most important transit countries. Migrants often use rail tracks as guides. While travelling by land is generally regarded as more secure than travelling by sea, this was not the first accident of its kind. Local media have reported five similar accidents. In November and December 2014, six migrants are said to have died in accidents on rail tracks.

Serbia

Transsexual beauty queen elected

The first “Miss Trans Serbia 2015” contest has taken place in Belgrade. Gay rights associations supported the event as an important step towards the recognition of minority rights in the conservative country. Homosexuality or transsexuality is mostly still regarded as a disease in Serbia. The EU is exercising pressure on the government to improve protection of LGBTI communities (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Intersexual).

Russian Federation / Chechnya

Kadyrov tells security forces to fire on Russian soldiers

On 23 April 2015 the Chechen TV station Grozny TV broadcast a video which shows Ramzan Kadyrov, the Head of the Chechen Republic, giving a speech to his special forces. Kadyrov said: “I would like to officially state: Open fire if someone from Moscow or Stavropol, it doesn’t matter, appears on your turf without your knowledge.” On 19 April 2015, Russian security forces from Stavropol killed a man who was on a Russian wanted list in Grozny. Kadyrov obviously felt provoked by this act. The Russian ministry of the interior said Kadyrov’s statements were unacceptable, but the spokesman of Russian president Putin did not want to respond in any detail.

Russian Federation

New opposition alliance established

On 18 April 2015, former Russian prime minister Mikhail Kasyanov (2000 – 2004) of the liberal Republican Party – People’s Freedom Party (RPR-Parnas) and well-known opponent activist Alexei Navalny of the Party of Progress announced at a conference in Moscow that their parties would form an electoral alliance in 2015 and 2016. During the past week, other parties and groups joined this opposition alliance, for example the Civic Initiative, Democratic Choice, the Alliance 5th December and the Libertarian Party. The alliance is also supported by the Open Russia organisation of Kremlin opponent Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who is living in exile in Switzerland. The well-known liberal democratic party Yabloko has not joined the alliance so far. The alliance aims to unite the weak and split Russian opposition and to win as many seats as possible in the upcoming elections to the regional parliaments and the national parliament.

Russian Federation / North Caucasus

Successor of rebel leader Umarov killed

On 20 April 2015, the National Anti-Terrorism Committee reported that Russian security forces had killed Aliaskhab Kebekov (also known as Ali Abu Mukhammad), the leader of the Islamist rebels in North Caucasus, and four other suspected Islamists in a raid in the republic of Daghestan on 19 April 2015. The Islamist fighters confirmed Kebekov's death. Kebekov (born in 1972) was the successor of long-term rebel leader Doku Umarov, whose death had been announced in January 2014.

Ukraine

Situation in the east of the country

Following new breaches of the ceasefire, the conflict parties complained that the violence was increasing. According to the Ukrainian army, one soldier was killed and two injured in the city of Shyrokyne, near Mariupol. The separatists accused the Ukrainian army of repeatedly shelling areas controlled by the rebels. Both sides called on each other to implement the peace plan agreed in February in Minsk.

Alexander Zakharchenko, the head of the Donetsk People's Republic, claimed that Ukrainian separatists aimed at gaining control over the area around Donetsk. He asked the Ukrainian government to enter into direct talks. Moreover, he stated that, contrary to the agreements, his troops had not removed all heavy weapons from the area because the separatists needed to be able to respond to shelling by Ukrainian soldiers. That was why the weapons were brought back to their former positions.

In the face of warnings by the Russian government, the US started on 21 April 2015 to train about 300 soldiers of the Ukrainian army in Yavoriv in western Ukraine, near the border to Poland. Governments in Washington and Moscow mutually accused each other of sending troops to Donbass, the area of the conflict. According to the Russian ministry of defence, US soldiers have been sent to Artemivsk, Severodonetsk and Mariupol, in contrast to what had been announced. The Americans claimed that the Russian army had positioned additional air defence systems in eastern Ukraine and brought some of them nearer to the front. Moreover, they said that Russia was sending additional troops towards the Ukrainian border.

China

Campaign against Christian churches in Zhejiang

In its annual report, which was released on 21 April 2015, the organisation China Aid states that state persecution of Christian communities has considerably increased. It documented 572 cases of persecution which affected a total of 17,884 persons – a 300 per cent increase since 2013. For example, the scale of a campaign which officially targeted illegal structures in the province of Zhejiang was considerably larger than assumed so far. According to unconfirmed local media reports, the authorities removed or demolished up to 1,000 crosses from illegal house churches and officially registered churches between end-2013 and end-2014. Up to 50 churches were reportedly demolished. More than 1,300 adherents who wanted to prevent these actions were arrested. The province of Zhejiang is regarded as one of centres of Christianity in China.