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Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

2 November 2015

Afghanistan

Security situation

The situation remains unchanged. Attacks and combat operations are continuing.

Military clashes

Official sources say that on 27 October 2015 security forces regained control over Dasht-i-Archi district in northeastern Kunduz province. Many of the Taliban insurgents killed in the operation were from abroad, it was stated. On 28 October, Taliban seized Darqad district in northern Takhar province; more than 1,500 families have fled from the fighting. On the same day, a total of eleven Taliban insurgents and four policemen were killed in incidents in eastern Nangarhar and southeastern Paktia province. In northern Balkh province, three civilians were shot dead and another four were wounded by Afghan Local Police (ALP) officials. A bomb attack in Mazar-e Sharif, capital of Balkh province, claimed at least nine lives. On 29 October, security forces fended off an attack on Omna and Wazikhwa districts in southwestern Paktika province launched by hundreds of Taliban insurgents. Fights are continuing in the area. In Achin district (eastern Nangarhar province), locals rose up against IS fighters. On 31 October 2015, a rocket launched by IS fighters hit a mosque in Achin district, killing six people and wounding another four. On 30 October, Taliban insurgents blocked an important district road in southeastern Paktia province. The province is currently the scene of fierce fighting; insurgents have stormed several police posts. In western Ghor province, Taliban fighters have attacked ALP posts; fighting is continuing in the area. At present, there are also clashes in southern Helmand province.

Targeted attacks

On 27 October 2015, a bomb explosion in Maimana (capital of northern Faryab province) wounded at least six people. On 29 October, four customs officers were abducted in Islam Qala (Herat province, border crossing into Iran). On 30 October, a suicide bomber launched an attack on security forces in Nad Ali district (southern Helmand province), killing at least five and wounding another five. In northern Faryab province, the leader of an anti-Taliban militia was killed in a targeted attack.

Sexual assaults on women prisoners

According to a recent research conducted by the Afghan 'Rights and Justice Organisation', at least 35 female prisoners suffered sexual abuse by judges and attorneys in Herat, Farah, Ghor, Badghis and Nimroz provinces.

Iraq

Number of victims for October 2015

Iraq Body Count (IBC) says that a total of 1,150 civilians were killed in October.

UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) reports that the number of civilians killed was 559 and the number of injured was 1,067 (including the victims in Anbar province). A further 155 members of the Iraqi security forces (including Peshmerga and other militias) were killed and 202 others injured (excluding the victims of operations conducted in Anbar).

Baghdad was the worst affected province with 1,150 civilian casualties (298 killed, 852 injured). Diyala province suffered 92 killed and 141 injured, Ninive 86 killed, Salahaddin 28 killed and 40 injured, and Kirkuk 39 killed and 7 injured.

UNAMI points out that these figures have to be considered as the absolute minimum, since the numbers of victims cannot be verified in areas of conflict.

Rocket attack on Camp Liberty

On 29 October 2015, at least 20 people were killed and dozens wounded when a rocket attack hit Camp Liberty (Camp Hurriya), a facility near Baghdad international airport where Iranian members of the opposition People's Mujahedin are living in exile. More rockets were launched on other sites in the area. On 30 October 2015, German news agency dpa reported that those responsible for the attack were not yet identified.

Syria

Peace talks in Vienna

On 30 October 2015, international talks were held in Vienna to discuss Syria's future. Representatives from 17 countries sought to find a solution to end the war. Apart from the UN veto powers (US, Russia, China, France and UK), representatives from Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Egypt participated in the talks. For the first time, Iran was also represented. On the whole, the summit saw diplomatic rapprochements and progress, but no breakthrough. The final communique on the results stated that the participants will explore modalities for free elections and a nationwide ceasefire. Another meeting was planned to be held within two weeks.

US to deploy ground forces

The USA has disclosed plans to station its first ground troops in Syria. Washington announced that it would deploy a small special operations force to Kurdish-controlled territory in northern Syria as advisers to groups fighting the IS militants.

German IS rapper Denis Cuspert apparently killed

On 30 October 2015, US military officials said that German jihadist and former rapper Denis Cuspert has been killed, presumably in an US airstrike on IS positions in Syria. He had not been specifically targeted in the attack which had killed also other extremists, it was stated.

Dozens killed in air raids on hospitals

The international medical charity Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) said that since the end of September 2015, when the Russian air campaign started, the number of air strikes against hospitals has increased significantly. In the month of October alone, 12 hospitals were hit by air strikes in Idlib, Aleppo and Hama provinces. Six of these hospitals were supported by MSF, the organisation said. In total, six hospitals were forced to close, four ambulance cars were destroyed and at least 35 patients and medical staff were killed and another 72 wounded, MSF said.

Nepal

New president elected

On 28 October 2015, the Nepalese parliament elected the first female President of Nepal, Bidhya Devi Bhandari. Although the President's powers are almost entirely ceremonial, many women and members of the over 100 ethnic minorities place great hopes in 54-years old Bhandari, a close confidant of Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli who was elected some weeks ago. Bidhya Bhandari is the widow of a former leader of the Marxist-Leninist CPN-UML i.e. the party of Prime Minister Oli. In 2010, Bidhya Bhandari, served as minister of defence.

Bangladesh

Attacks on intellectuals

In Dhaka, the publisher of a secularist writer and blogger was stabbed to death by religious extremists on 31 October 2015. Furthermore, two atheist writers and a publisher were severely wounded. The terror group 'Al-Qaeda on the Indian Subcontinent' has claimed responsibility for the attacks and threatened to target more writers, poets, intellectuals, journalists and actors 'guilty of blasphemy'. So far, four atheist bloggers have been killed in Bangladesh this year.

Turkey

Parliamentary elections

In the snap parliamentary elections held on 1 November 2015, the ruling Islamic-conservative AKP party has regained the absolute majority, allowing them to govern on their own, the state-run Anadolu news agency reported. According to the preliminary results, the AKP won nearly 50 percent of the votes (as opposed to 40.9 % in the June elections), thus securing 316 of the 550 seats in the national assembly. The centre-left secularist party CHP finished in second place with an unchanged 25 percent, followed by the nationalist MHP with around 12 percent (a decline of -4.3 %) and the pro-Kurdish HDP with 10.6 percent (-2.5 %). In the southeastern city of Diyarbakir, violence erupted between protesters and the police as AKP's victory was confirmed; police used tear gas and water cannons to disperse the crowds. Turkey's election board says official results will be released in 11-12 days' time after all possible complaints by political parties are reviewed.

After the AKP's election victory, Prime Minister Davutoglu called for constitutional changes to expand President Erdogan's powers. For this, however, the AKP will need to secure a two-thirds majority in parliament.

Police raid on media group

On 28 October 2015, Turkish police stormed the headquarters of the opposition media group Koza Ipek Holding, using tear gas and water cannons and shutting down two TV stations owned by the group (Kanaltürk and Bugün TV). At the beginning of the week, the prosecutor's office had ordered the media group to be placed under the management of a trustee panel. Already at the beginning of September, several media outlets of the group had been searched, including editorial offices located in Ankara. The media group is subject to investigations for links to the Hizmet movement led by Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen on suspicion of 'terror financing' and 'terror propaganda'.

Israel

Clashes with Israeli security forces

In the West Bank and in parts of Jerusalem, last week saw numerous clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces, with fatalities on the Palestinian side.

On 30 October 2015, an eight-month-old Palestinian baby died from inhaling tear gas fired by Israeli forces in the house of his family in the West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said. Israeli military officials argued that the tear gas was not used in the vicinity of the baby's family home, but dozens of meters away.

Iran

UN cites alarming rise in executions

The United Nations have expressed outrage at the spike in executions in Iran. UN Special Rapporteur Ahmed Shaheed reported to the UN General Assembly that executions in Iran have been rising at 'an exponential rate' since 2005 and the 'shocking 753 executions' carried out in 2014 might be topped with 1000 this year. There have been at least 694 reported hangings in the first seven months of 2015 alone. Iran executes more individuals per capita than any other country in the world, the UN rapporteur stated. The majority of executions were in violation of international law, and the rate of executions was 'alarming', Shaheed added.

69 percent of the executions during the first six months of 2015 were reportedly for drug-related offences. As of 15 July 2015, the Iranian authorities had officially recognized 246 executions.

Iran names first female ambassador

On 29 October 2015, Marzieh Afkham was appointed as the new ambassador to Malaysia, becoming the first female ambassador since the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

Yemen

Airstrike on MSF clinic

On 27 October 2015, Medecins Sans Frontieres said that one of its hospitals in Haydan district (northern Yemen) was attacked by the Saudi Arabian air force. Thus, more than 200,000 people living in the region were now without access to medical treatment, the organisation said. Saudi Arabia has rejected responsibility for the attack.

Azerbaijan

Ruling party expected to win parliamentary elections

It is expected that the winner of the parliamentary elections held in the authoritarian Caucasian state on 1 November 2015 will be the ruling New Azerbaijan party. After 91 percent of the votes were counted, the central election commission said that President Ilham Aliyev's party may well take at least 69 seats in the country's 125-seat parliament. The major opposition parties had boycotted the elections, calling them a sham vote. Opposition and human rights organisations accuse the government of having prevented opposition politicians from campaigning and having arrested some of them without giving any reason. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) had not even sent election observers to the former Soviet republic.

A total of 5.9 million electorate had been called to cast their ballots; voter turnout was at 55.7 percent, the election commission said. Over 700 candidates from roughly a dozen parties had competed for a seat. The leader of the opposition Musavat party, Isa Gambar, spoke of countless instances of electoral fraud, including multiple voting and restrictions on observers' work.

Ethiopia

IS militants arrested

On 28 October 2015, Ethiopian security forces reported the arrest of several suspected IS terrorists. This is the first time that Ethiopia has disclosed the presence of IS extremists in the country. A government spokesman said that the 20 detainees had planned terror attacks to destabilize the country. They were active in the southern and southwestern parts of Oromya region bordering Somalia.

Somalia

Attack on hotel in Mogadishu

On 1 November 2015, at least 17 people were killed and around 25 others injured in a terror attack on Sahafi hotel in Mogadishu. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack. First, a suicide bomber had used a car full of explosives to blast his way into the hotel compound. Then, al-Shabaab fighters dressed in Somali military uniforms stormed the hotel and opened fire. At the same time, a second explosive-packed vehicle blew up in the nearby parking lot.

Security situation

On 26 and 27 October 2015 fighting erupted between units of the Somali National Army SNA supported by the peace keeping mission AMISOM and al-Shabaab militants in the villages of Golweyn and Luq (Gedo region).

Both police and AMISOM announced to increase their tactical night operations against al-Shabaab in Mogadishu to lower the amount of arms trafficked into the city and to prevent al-Shabaab militants from sneaking in.

On 27 October 2015, SNA units attacked around 30 al-Shabaab fighters in Dinsor (Bay region) who were extorting money from the local population. Apparently, around 15 Islamists were killed in the operation.

In Moqokori village (Hiraan region), SNA troops repelled an attack by al-Shabaab militants on a military base on 28 October 2015. An unknown number of al-Shabaab fighters were killed in the fight.

After a Kenyan plane crashed near Omar Beere village (Lower Shabelle region) on 28 October 2015, al-Shabaab claimed to have taken hostage the surviving crew members.

On 29 October 2015, four Islamist militants were killed in a clash between al-Shabaab fighters and nomadic herders. The herders had refused to pay money to the Islamist group.

Al-Shabaab claims to have killed six SNA soldiers in an ambush near Elbur village (Galguduud region) on 29 October 2015.

Kenyan security sources say that al-Shabaab militants are presently jailing large numbers of their members, many of them foreigners, who they believe would defect from al-Qaeda to IS. Already on 24 October 2015, two high-rank Islamists had apparently been arrested. They were suspected to have connections to Abdul Qadir Mumin, the spiritual leader of the al-Shabaab cell operating in Puntland. Mumin has recently sworn loyalty to IS.

Egypt

Russian plane crash in Sinai

After Flight 7K-9268 of the Russian airline Kogalymavia/Metrojet, scheduled from Sharm el-Sheikh to St. Petersburg, had crashed in Sinai on 31 October 2015, killing all 244 people on board, the cause of the crash is still unclear. While immediately after the crash, the local IS affiliate Wilayat Sinai had claimed to have downed the plane in revenge for Russia's intervention in Syria, the Egyptian authorities say that the crash was most likely caused by a technical fault. Russian investigators say that the airbus A321-231 had broken up at high altitude, which would explain the debris scattered over a large area. It is considered unlikely that the Wilayat Sinai terrorists have the means to shoot down aircraft cruising at an altitude of over 4,500 meters. Emirates, Air France-KLM and Lufthansa have suspended flying over Sinai pending the investigation into the cause of the crash.

Mali

Security zone around Kidal town lifted

On 27 October 2015, the UN peacekeeping mission MINUSMA announced the lift of the 20-km security zone around the northern town of Kidal by 2 November 2015. Fears of an attack have diminished after rival clans of Tuareg Ifoghas and Imghad signed a peace deal, pledging to end the feud and to solve political and economic conflicts via dialogue in the future. The security zone had been imposed on 20 August 2015. Kidal is considered a stronghold of separatist Tuareg rebel groups dominated by the Ifoghas clan. The Imghad clan, however, is considered pro-government. The conflicts have been waged by clan militias (Ifoghas: Ansar al-Dine, MNLA / Imghad: Gambia Miliz).

Côte d'Ivoire

Ivorian President re-elected

In the presidential poll, Alassane Ouattara (73) won his second five-year term with nearly 84 percent of the votes. The decisive factor in his re-election was the significant social and economic progress during his first term of office. Of the six candidates who had challenged him, Pascal Affi N'Guessan who ran for the party of

former leader Laurent Gbagbo gained most votes (9 percent). Voter turnout was at roughly 60 percent. The elections were peaceful; however, the weeks before had seen several protests against a second term of office of President Ouattara in the economic hub of Abidjan. Amnesty International has accused the government of intimidating and arbitrarily arresting opposition supporters.

Chad

Boko Haram attacks

On 1 November 2015, two soldiers and eleven suspected Boko Haram fighters were killed in attacks on two military posts near Bamou and Kaiga Kinguiya communities near Lake Chad (bordering Nigeria), military sources said. In Bamou, eleven civilians were left injured after the attacks.

In the neighbouring Diffa region (south Niger), 14 civilians lost their lives in a suspected Boko Haram attack. The village of Ala was looted.

Tanzania

Partial annulment of Presidential poll – opposition calls for vote recount

After presidential elections were held on 25 October 2015, the final results are not yet known. The national electoral commission said that John Magufuli, candidate of the Chama Cha Mapinduzi party (CMM, 'Party of the Revolution') which has been governing the country since independence, has gained 58.5 percent of votes, while his main rival, former Prime Minister Edward Lowassa secured nearly 40 percent. Magufuli takes over office from Jakaya Kikwete who had to step down after two terms in office.

Edward Lowassa had initially also been a member of the ruling party, but joined the opposition CHADEMA party ('Party for Democracy and Development'), when CCM nominated labour minister Magufuli as presidential candidate. Lowassa calls for a complete recount of votes, citing voting irregularities in the semi-autonomous island territory of Zanzibar. There, the electoral commission had annulled the poll citing irregularities and violence, although international observers had declared the election largely free and fair. According to the figures available, opposition party Chama Cha Wananchi (CCW 'Civic United Front') had won the elections in Zanzibar. After the nullification of the results, the party spoke of attempts to challenge their victory.

Tanzania is considered a political and economic anchor of stability in a conflict prone region. However, there are still significant differences between Zanzibar and mainland Tanzania. While the islands are predominantly Muslim with a strong Arab influence, the mainland population is mostly Christian.

Burundi

Deadly clashes

On 26 and 27 October 2015, violent clashes and targeted killings claimed more than a dozen lives in Bujumbura, Gitega and other places. On 31 October, police shot dead at least one individual in violent disputes after a funeral near Bujumbura.

Rwanda

Constitutional amendment adopted

On 29 October 2015, Rwanda's lower house of parliament adopted an amendment to the constitution cutting presidential terms to five years from seven with a limit of two terms. At the same time, an exception was made for incumbent President Paul Kagame to extend his rule beyond a second term that ends in 2017 and possibly stay on until 2034. The amendments to the constitutions have to be backed by the senate and also put to a referendum, but are not expected to stumble at either stage.

Central African Republic

Election date, new acts of violence

On 28 October 2015, the national election commission set the new date for presidential and parliamentary elections at 13 December 2015. A potential second round of the presidential elections is scheduled to be held on 24 January 2016. The elections initially set for 18 October 2015 were suspended after violent eruptions.

On 26 October 2015, three envoys of the Muslim Séléka rebel coalition who had come to Bangui for peace negotiations were kidnapped and killed. In an apparent act of retaliation, three Christians were then abducted and killed. Reportedly, there has been another fatality. On 29 October, four more persons were killed in Bangui.

West Africa/Ebola

Guinea

Information from WHO dated 16 October 2015 confirmed two new cases of Ebola. While the new case in Western Forecariah is assigned to a known chain of infection, the case in Conakry seems to be a new outbreak of the virus.

Nigeria

More than 300 Boko Haram hostages liberated

According to the Nigerian military, army units launched an offensive against the terrorist Organisation Boko Haram in the country's northeast on 27 October 2015. The operation was aimed at several Boko Haram camps on the edge of Sambisa forest near the villages of Bulajilin and Manawashe. In the operation, 30 terrorists were killed and 338 hostages liberated (192 children, 138 women and 8 men); in addition, four camps were destroyed. Also, four suspected suicide bombers were killed who were on their way to Gubula town in Adamawa state.

Republic of Congo

Constitutional referendum successful

The official results of the referendum held on 25 October 2015, published on 27 October, indicate that nearly 93 percent of the voters (with the turnout at approx. 72 percent) were in favour of the proposed constitutional amendments (annulment of both the two-term limit for the presidency and the age limit of 70 years for candidates), thus allowing current President Denis Sassou Nguesso to run for a third term. The opposition, who had called for an election boycott, has now raised concerns of electoral fraud in view of the high voter turnout officially announced.

DR Congo

Provincial Commissioners appointed

On 29 October 2015, President Kabila appointed 21 special commissioners to provisionally govern the 21 provinces which have been newly formed in July by splitting up the existing 11 provinces.

Ukraine

Head of UKROP party detained

In the morning of 31 October 2015, the leader of the nationalist UKROP party Hennadiy Korban was arrested by secret service agents in Dnipropetrovsk; UKROP party and campaign offices were also searched in several cities. The public prosecutor's charges against Korban include formation of a criminal association, abduction, smuggling, embezzlement of donated funds and murder. Korban is considered a close confidant

of oligarch Igor Kolomoisky, who had been dismissed from his post as governor of Dnipropetrovsk by President Poroshenko in spring.

Belarus

EU sanctions suspended

After an easing of repressive measures against President Lukashenko's political opponents and the release of several political prisoners, the EU has suspended its sanctions on Belarus for four months to encourage further positive developments. The travel ban on 170 Belarussian citizens (among them President Lukashenko) has been suspended until the end of February 2016. Also, frozen accounts will be unblocked. In spring 2016, the EU will decide whether the sanctions will be completely dropped. The embargo on arms and materials which can be used for internal repression will remain in place.

Kosovo

Kosovo signs Association Agreement with EU

On 27 October 2015, the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the EU and Kosovo was signed in Strasbourg. The agreement is a first step towards EU integration and aims at strengthening the process of democratisation, establishment of the rule of law and economic integration. The agreement is expected to come into force in spring 2016. As a next step, Kosovo hopes to be granted a visa waiver scheme.

The integration process is burdened not only by Kosovo's disputed international status (its independence is not recognized by five EU member states— Romania, Slovakia, Greece, Spain and Cyprus) and the difficult relations with Serbia, but also by weaknesses in the rule of law and a democratic deficit.

China

New family planning policy

After the conclusion of the fifth plenary session of CPC's Central Committee, the broad lines of the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016 – 2020) were announced on 29 October 2015, including a loosening of the country's family planning policy. Thus, married couples may have two children in future. According to a communication issued by the national board of health and family planning on 2 September 2015, the National People's Congress will ratify the regulation in March 2016. Until then, the existing rules must continue to be implemented.

Internet freedom

The organisation Freedom House has highlighted China as the country with the most severe restrictions on internet freedom, followed by Syria and Iran. This was stated in the organisation's annual report on internet freedom issued on 28 October 2015.