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Directorate 22 - Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

11 May 2015

Afghanistan

Terrorist attacks

A police spokesman announced on 10 May 2015 that at least three people were killed and 16 injured in a suicide attack on a shuttle bus which brought employees of the Attorney General's Office home. Reportedly, all victims were civilians and some of them were women. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack. Also on 10 May 2015, the Taliban attacked the intelligence agency's office in Kandahar. Three assailants were killed and several government employees injured.

Death sentences after lynching

A Kabul court sentenced four men to death who had beaten and killed a 27-year-old woman in March 2015 because she was accused of having burned the Koran. Eight defendants were sentenced to 16 years in prison each, 18 were acquitted. A total of 49 persons had been charged with the killing, among them 19 policemen who had not done anything to stop the murder. The court postponed the pronouncement of the sentence for these policemen on 10 May 2015; no new date was set.

Iraq

Casualties of prison riot

In the night of 8 to 9 May 2015, at least 30 prisoners and six policemen were killed when prisoners broke out from a jail in Khalis, a city in the province of Diyala about 75 kilometres north of Baghdad. 40 inmates escaped. According to other sources, 33 or 51 prisoners and twelve or 16 policemen were killed and more than 200 prisoners broke out. Some sources say that a fight among the prisoners broke out. When the guards intervened, they had their weapons seized. According to other reports, IS militants attacked the prison and detonated car bombs in front of the gates and walls. Jailbreaks take place with some regularity in Iraq. The most spectacular attempt took place in Abu Ghraib in July 2013. Back then, between 500 and 1,000 prisoners escaped.

Pakistan

Helicopter shot down, ambassadors killed

The Taliban (TTP) claimed they had shot down a helicopter in the Naltar valley (region of Gilgit-Baltistan). At least six people died, among them the Norwegian and Philippine ambassadors. The diplomats were on their way to a ceremony attended by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who was the target of the attack. Sharif's helicopter was allegedly flying towards the same destination at the time of the crash, but turned back and landed safely in Islamabad.

Attacks claim further lives

On 8 May 2015, separatist rebels killed 20 construction workers and injured several people in the province of Baluchistan. Reportedly, the assailants asked the workers where they came from and shot all those who were not from the province. The rebel group Baluch Liberation Front (BLF) took responsibility for the attack.

According to the police, the victims came from the provinces of Punjab and Sindh. The construction workers were working on army projects and were guarded by paramilitary groups, who were said to have fled when they saw they were outnumbered. The BLF threatened further attacks.

A bomb explosion in the village of Barkamar in the district of Bajaur near the Afghan border killed at least six people on 11 May 2015, among them a pro-government tribe leader.

Iran

340 executions in 2015 so far

According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Iran, Ahmed Shaheed, and UN Special Rapporteur on summary or arbitrary executions, Christof Heyns, a total of 98 prisoners were executed between 9 and 26 April 2015. This would raise the number of executions reported to UNO since the beginning of the year to 340. Most defendants were charged with drug-trafficking-related crimes.

President emphasises right to demonstrate

In a speech on “National Teachers’ Day”, President Hassan Rouhani expressly underlined that his government recognised the right to demonstrate. This was his response to a workers’ demonstration in Tehran on 1 May. Demonstrations on Labour Day had been prohibited for eight years before.

President calls for more freedom for young people

Hassan Rouhani has called for more social freedom for young people. He said young people could not be confined, particularly not in the age of the internet, in order to preserve their national and religious identity. According to Rouhani, freedom and Islam are not a contradiction. Conservative groups have already criticised Rouhani for demanding larger freedoms, particularly on the internet. They call for continued internet censorship, which also includes restricted access to social media.

“Satanic” and “homosexual” hairstyles banned

Mohammad Govahi, the president of Iran's Barbers Union, explained to the news agency Isna that new rules on islam-compliant hairstyles would apply. “Satanic” and “homosexual” hairstyles were banned. Shops who cut hair in such styles would have their licences revoked. Govahi also pronounced a ban on tattoos, tanning booths and eyebrow plucking. According to Govahi, these rules were compliant with the principles set out by revolutionary leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

Yemen

Fighting claims numerous casualties

According to local reports, Saudi airstrikes on the provincial capital of Saada in the heartland of the Shia Houthi rebel movement in northern Yemen killed at least 34 civilians on 6 May 2015. On 5 May 2015, the Houthis had fired shells and missiles on the Saudi border town of Najran. According to Saudi reports of 6 May 2015, four people were killed by this attack, among them an army officer.

Also on 6 May 2015, about 32 civilians were killed by shelling in Aden after they had fled to the sea due to the fights. Houthi rebels are reported to have opened the fire.

Ceasefire

The Saudi-led military alliance announced a five-day ceasefire to allow humanitarian aid from 12 May 2015.

Israel

Veteran organisation criticizes Gaza operation

On 4 May 2015 the veteran organisation Breaking the Silence published anonymised testimonies of more than 60 soldiers, which included, however, their ranks, units and places of operation. Some soldiers reported

that their commanders had usually ordered them to shoot without delay as the Palestinian civilians had been asked before to leave the area. According to UN reports, most of the 2,000 Palestinian victims of the Gaza War were civilians. Moreover, according to the testimonies, there were almost no efforts to prevent damage to the infrastructure and to private homes. Amnesty International has charged Israel and Hamas, which is governing in the Gaza Strip, with war crimes in the Gaza War.

Turkey/Saudi-Arabia

Alliance against Assad

According to reports released on 7 May 2015, Turkey and Saudi-Arabia decided on an agreement to provide logistics and financial support to the rebels who fight against Syrian President Assad.

Syria

Traces of poison gas

Recent reports say that, in December 2014 and January 2015, international inspectors found traces of the nerve gas sarin when they searched a military research unit. The gas had not been declared to the experts of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). In 2013, Syria had bowed to international pressure and agreed to give up its complete arsenal of chemical weapons.

Intensive fights and attack

According to reports dated 7 May 2015, Syrian government troops and allied Hizbollah fighters on the one side and insurgents on the other clashed near the border to Lebanon. Shells reportedly came down on the Lebanon side of the border, too. In the last few weeks the Syrian army suffered serious losses in the north-west of the country. For example, Islamist rebels captured the towns Idlib and Jisr al-Shughur.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights announced on 6 May 2015 that an IS car bomb killed at least 16 Kurdish security officers in the city of al-Hasakeh in the north-east of the country; the attackers were killed in the subsequent clash with Kurdish fighters. The region, which is near the border to Iraq and Turkey, has seen intensive fighting between IS and Kurdish units for months now. North-west of the city, IS overran several villages inhabited mainly by Christians a few weeks ago.

Guinea

Renewed protests over presidential elections

On 7 May, protests about the date of the presidential elections (see BN of 20 April 2015) flared up again in several quarters of Conakry. Young people erected roadblocks and burned them; in response, the police used tear gas. At least six people were injured.

Mali

Rebel attack on Ténenkou

On 5 May 2015, the Coordination Movement for Azawad (CMA) attacked the city of Ténenkou near Mopti (central Mali); ten attackers and one government soldier were killed and three soldiers were injured. The CMA has so far refused to sign a peace agreement with the government. The agreement may still be signed until 15 May 2015.

Central African Republic

Child soldiers to be released

On 5 May 2015, the leaders of eight armed groups signed an agreement in Bangui which says that thousands of child soldiers are to be released and no new ones recruited. The agreement does not include either a time-

table or details. UNICEF estimates that up to 10,000 children have been deployed as fighters, sex slaves and spies as well as to fetch and carry.

Burundi

Nkurunziza allowed to run for third term of office

On 5 May 2015, the constitutional court permitted incumbent Pierre Nkurunziza to run for a third term in the presidential elections on 26 June 2015. On 4 May 2015, the court's vice-president fled the country, claiming that the judges had been threatened ahead of the decision and that he was afraid for his life. On 6 May 2015 Nkurunziza declared that, if he won the elections, he would not run for a fourth term. The opposition continues to call for protests.

Protests

At least four people died in protests in Bujumbura on 7 May 2015. After the government had ordered a stop to the continued protests, security officers started on 10 May 2015 to destroy roadblocks erected by the demonstrators. One person was killed. Since 25 April 2015, there have been at least 18 casualties, including security officers. According to UN figures, about 25,000 persons have fled to Rwanda, 18,000 to Tanzania and 8,000 to the DR of the Congo so far.

DR of the Congo

Fight against ADF insurgents

According to reports dated 6 May 2015, the army killed 16 members of the Ugandan islamist rebel group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in fights in Kokola (about 40 km north of the city of Beni in the province of North Kivu) on 3 May 2015. Four soldiers died as well. Since the beginning of 2014, the army has been engaged in the anti-rebel operation Sukola I. The insurgents are charged with having killed about 300 people near Beni between October and December 2014. The ADF, who are now active in the DR of the Congo, initially fought against the Ugandan government.

The ADF are thought to be responsible for a trap which killed two Tanzanian soldiers of the UN peace mission MONUSCO on 5 May 2015.

Nigeria

Injured in attack on school

Several pupils were injured in an attack on the College of Administrative and Business Studies in the city of Potiskum (federal state of Yobe) on 8 May 2015. One attacker blew himself up, the second was arrested. According to other reports, there was only one attacker. Boko Haram is being held responsible for the attack.

Army continues fight against Boko Haram

The Nigerian army claims that seven Boko Haram camps were destroyed and several terrorists killed in an operation in the Sambisa Forest (federal state of Borno) on 5 May 2015. 25 women and children were reportedly set free.

Sudan

Airstrikes on the Nuba mountains

According to the human rights organisation Human Rights Watch (HRW), the Sudanese army killed at least 100 civilians, among them 26 children, in arbitrary airstrikes on Nuba villages in southern Kordofan. Moreover, the organisation claims to have found evidence that hospitals and other humanitarian facilities were bombed. HRW has been calling on the UN Security Council to take sanctions against the Sudanese government.

Since South Sudan split from the rest of the country in 2011, the governments in both Khartoum and Juba have raised claims on certain areas of the federal states of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile. The rebel organisation SPLM-N (Sudan People's Liberation Movement - North; a branch of the South Sudanese government party SPLM which is active in Sudan) has been fighting to unite these areas with South Sudan.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Casualties of serious fights between security forces and ethnic Albanians

On 9/10 May, the police and an armed terrorist group of about 30 ethnic Albanians clashed in the city of Kumanovo in northern Macedonia. According to reports, at least 22 people, among them eight policemen, were killed and an unknown number injured, including 37 policemen. The clashes started on 9 May 2015 with a raid in a quarter mostly inhabited by ethnic Albanians. A suspected plot to conduct a terrorist attack on civilians and government institutions was to be derailed.

The police were attacked with shells and automatic weapons. Hundreds of families fled from the war-like situation and crossed the nearby border to Serbia. The ministry of the interior claims that part of the group came from Kosovo. Meanwhile, the police operation is over and the armed group has been "neutralised".

Only two weeks ago, 40 Kosovo Albanians had taken control of a police post on the Macedonian border and demanded the establishment of an Albanian state in Macedonia (see BN of 27 April 2015). Some observers have raised doubts about the official version of the events and claim that the government staged an ethnic conflict in order to divert attention from domestic crises (see below).

The violent clashes have intensified concerns about a destabilisation of the region as a whole. The Nato Secretary-General has called for an investigation.

Violent protests against the government

At least 38 people were injured when a demonstration against the government turned into a riot on 5 May 2015. Only hours before, opposition leader Zoran Zaev, a member of the social democratic party (SDMS), had released video footage which allegedly showed Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski (VMRO-DPMNE) and other government members discussing how to hush up the death of a 22-year-old who died in 2011 after having been beaten up by policemen. The protesters called the government "murderers" and asked them to step down. Zaev has announced further protests during the remainder of May.

Background

The political situation has been tense since January. Zaev has accused the government of Prime Minister Gruevski of having tapped into the conversations of 20,000 people, among them politicians, journalists and religious leaders. He has been releasing footage of bugged telephone calls every week. The conversations are about electoral fraud and large-scale corruption. Gruevski has refuted the charges. He paints himself as the victim of a conspiracy and claims that the opposition plans a coup. The EU expressed concern and called for an independent investigation. There are fears that the situation will deteriorate and that ethnic tensions might re-emerge (see BN of 23 February, 16 March and 27 April 2015).

Kosovo

Charges of terrorism

On 7 May 2015, a special department of the Kosovar prosecutor's office charged 32 persons with having engaged in terrorist activities. They are charged with having recruited terrorists, organising and participating in terrorist groups and having illegally owned weapons. Some of the defendants are suspected of having fought for IS in Syria, others are charged with having recruited new IS members.

Ukraine

Situation in the east of the country

On 6 May 2015, five soldiers were killed and twelve injured within 24 hours according to the Ukrainian army. Four soldiers died when a mine exploded near Avdivka, a town near the airport of Donetsk. One sol-

dier was killed near Svitlodarsk, a city near Debaltseve, a strategically important railway hub, which the pro-Russian separatists captured in February. The violence erupted shortly before a meeting of the Ukraine contact group and representatives of the rebels in Minsk (Belarus). The implementation of the shaky peace agreement was to be discussed once again. The contact group consists of representatives of the governments in Kiev and Moscow and of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which is to monitor the ceasefire in eastern Ukraine.

China

Xinjiang: Authorities force shops to sell alcohol and cigarettes

Radio Free Asia reported on 4 May 2015 that all restaurants and supermarkets in the village of Aktash in the prefecture of Hotan have to stock several brands of alcohol and cigarette products and promote them with eye-catching displays. Otherwise, their businesses might be closed down. Shopkeepers have not been selling either alcohol or cigarettes since 2012, as the mostly Muslim population spurned such products and shopkeepers were afraid of negative reactions. The measure of 29 April 2015 probably aims to prevent the increasing radicalisation of parts of the Muslim population. In the recent past, there have been several violent clashes between Uigurs and security officials in the prefecture of Hotan.