

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	753
Land:	Irak
Kilde:	Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge
Titel:	Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration. Briefing Notes
Udgivet:	27. oktober 2014
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	15. december 2014

Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

27 October 2014

Afghanistan

Security situation

On 21.10.14, a bomb attack on a military bus in Kabul killed at least four soldiers and wounded a dozen others, among them also civilians. In Marja district (southern Helmand province), three police officers lost their lives in an attack on a checkpoint. In western Ghor province, pro-government militias succeeded in driving the Taliban fighters out of Charsadda district. In Panjwai and Maiwand districts (southern Kandahar province), at least 38 insurgents were killed in military operations.

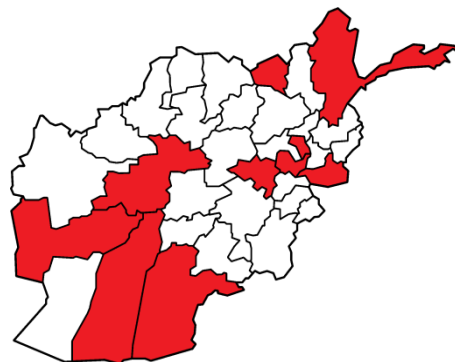
On 22.10.14, the chief of the border police in southern Helmand province survived a suicide attack in the provincial capital of Lashkargah. In north-eastern Kunduz province (Imam Sahib district), severe clashes between insurgents and Afghan security forces killed six people on each side. In north-eastern Badakhshan province (Drayam district), at least 10 insurgents were killed in a military operation.

On 23.10.14, three children burnt to death in a house during fights between the police and Taliban insurgents in Greshk town (Helmand province), where a fire had broken out.

One day later, at least five civilians died in Khogyani district (eastern Nangarhar province), when Taliban fighters opened fire on their vehicle. In central Kapisa province, several incidents claimed the lives of two police officers and wounded another three. In western Farah province, a secret service officer was killed.

On 25.10.14, local politicians stated that the two districts of Dasht-I-Archi and Imam Sahib (north-eastern Kunduz province) were likely to move under the control of Taliban militants. The Afghan army is intending to launch an operation against the Taliban in these districts. In southern Kandahar, two guards were killed in two incidents. In western Farah province, the bodies of two local politicians were found who had been kidnapped two days earlier. Other clashes in the province killed at least 25 security officers and insurgents.

On 26.10.14, a staff member of the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) was killed in a bomb attack. In southern Kandahar, two civilians lost their lives in two bomb blasts. In Kabul, two rockets were launched; information is not yet available on the number of victims.



Criminal investigations against journalists for blasphemy

On 21.10.14, investigations were started against columnists of the newspaper 'The Afghanistan Express' who are accused of having published an opinion piece with blasphemous content.

Mullah sentenced for raping 11-year-old girl

On 26.10.14, an Afghan mullah was sentenced to 20 years in prison in northern Kunduz city after finding him guilty of raping an 11-year-old girl in a mosque in Kunduz last May.

Pakistan

Security situation

On 23.10.14, several blasts in and around the city of Quetta (Balochistan) killed at least 13 people. The attacks were targeted at a bus full of Shia Muslim Hazaras, at the chief of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl party (JUI-F) and at a vehicle of the paramilitary border troops. On the same day, new clashes between militants and security forces in Khyber tribal region claimed the lives of three insurgents and three security officers.

On 22.10.14, a polio team was attacked in Bajaur tribal region.

‘Honour killing’

On 21.10.14, an armed mob killed a woman and a man who had married against the wishes of their families in Punjab province.

Iraq

Successful operations against IS militia

As was reported by Iraqi security circles, joint operations of government troops, Kurds and Shia Muslim militias succeeded in regaining strategically important areas from the extremist Islamist militia IS last weekend. Among these are the northern city of Sumar inhabited mainly by ethnic Kurds and several surrounding towns and villages. It was also reported that soldiers and Shia Muslim militia fighters had successfully retaken the town of Jurf al-Sakhar south of Baghdad and forced the IS militia to retreat from several villages in the Himreen Mountains overlooking important IS supply lines.

New attacks on Yazidis

Last week, Islamic State terrorists launched a new attack on Yazidis in the Sinjar mountain range (Ninive province). As was reported by Kurdish news site Rudaw, there are approx. 7,000 civilians left in the area around Sinjar. Apparently, they have formed a kind of militia with the help of Kurdish trainers. Some 300 IS fighters were reported to besiege the mountain. In early August, around 80,000 refugees, most of them Yazidis, had been trapped in the area, after IS had taken control over the area.

Attacks on Kurdish security forces

On 20.10.14, IS militants launched about 15 near-simultaneous attacks on Kurdish territory in Iraq, including strategically important areas near Mosul dam.

Bomb attacks in Baghdad

On 22.10.14, least 28 people were killed in attacks launched in the Shia Muslim districts of Sadr City and Karrada. Apparently, the IS militants are behind the attacks.

Ministers responsible for security appointed

On 18.10.14, both the defence and interior ministers were approved. For the post of defence minister, Sunni Muslim Khaled al-Obeidi (Chaled al Obaidi) was selected. Under the Saddam Hussein regime, he had served as an officer in the air force. Mohammed Salem al-Ghabban, a Shia Muslim lawmaker, was approved as minister of interior. He belongs to the State of Law Alliance bloc of Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi and his predecessor, Nouri al-Maliki. Former foreign minister Hoshyar Zebari was entrusted with the portfolio of finance.

Iran

Mass protests against acid attacks on women

On 22.10.14, a mass protest took place against a spate of acid attacks on women in the city of Isfahan. Figures concerning the number of protesters attending the rally, called through a social media campaign, are varying between 1,000 and 2,000. The number of victims has not been verified yet. Unofficial sources put the figure at 30. A student reported that the perpetrators had come close to her on motorbikes and had flung acid into her face. Apparently, the women were attacked because they were immodestly dressed. The police

chief of Isfahan confirmed that eight such incidents had occurred in the last months, with four suspected perpetrators being arrested.

Since Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979, women must observe the Islamic dress code and wear long, loose-fitting clothing and a veil covering the hair and neck. Particularly in large cities, however, many women are wearing only a thin veil that hardly covers the hair and tight clothing.

Reyhaneh Jabbari hanged despite national and international protests

Despite national and international protests, 26-year-old interior designer Reyhaneh Jabbari was executed on 25.10.14, after having spent five years in the death row. She had been convicted of murdering Morteza Abdolali Sarbandi, a former employee of Iran's ministry of intelligence. Apparently, he had offered to hire her to redesign his office and took her to his apartment where he tried to sexually abuse her. She then grabbed a knife and stabbed him. According to reports from the U.N. and international human rights groups, her confession was obtained under intense pressure from the prosecutor's office.

Battle against IS

Iran will continue to support the fight against the terror militia IS until the end, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani communicated in a meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi on 21.10.14 in Tehran. In view of the border to Iraq and the IS hostility against Shia Muslims (who make up the majority of the citizen population in both countries), the fight against the terror militia was of strategic importance, it was stated. Iran is said to have been one of the first countries to provide the Kurds in northern Iraq with weapons in their fight against the IS.

Yemen

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Attacks and clashes claim death toll

As was reported by tribal representatives, at least 20 Shia Muslim al-Houthi rebels were killed in clashes in the night of 20.10.14, when Sunni Muslim fighters of the al-Qaeda ally 'Ansar al-Sharia' ('Partisans of Islamic Law') detonated a vehicle in front of a building in the city of Rada (central al-Bayda province). Twelve rebels were captured during the attack and further fights, it was stated. As yet, there is no information available on the number of victims on the side of the Ansar al-Sharia extremists. The Sunni militias succeeded in cutting off a supply line of the al-Houthi rebels, the report goes on. Some days before, the rebels had advanced to the region which is dominated by Sunni Muslim inhabitants.

AQAP extends control

The Sunni extremist group Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is extending its control in the southern parts of the country. According to the German Press agency dpa, the fighters established several checkpoints in Ibb province (south of Sanaa) on 22.10.14. At the same time, the Shia al-Houthi rebels last week made an advance from Sanaa, which is under control of the group, towards south and gained control over several towns. Local Sunni tribes and AQAP fighters tried to counter the advance. According to a report published by Yemeni news site Al-Masdar Online, AQAP fighters captured the town of Mudhaykhirah in the centre of Ibb province on 21.10.14. Apparently, Yemen's army cannot respond to the operations.

US drones support Houthi rebels against AQAP fighters

On 26.10.14, the Yemeni news site Al-Masdar Online reported that al-Houthi rebels have seized Qifa tribal region northwest of the city of Rada, a major AQAP stronghold in southern al-Bayda province, with the support of US drones. The region has been hit by severe fights for several days.

Lebanon

Thousands flee violence in north

After deadly fighting had started on the evening of 24.10.14 between government troops and armed Islamists allegedly affiliated to the al-Nusra Front, thousands of civilians fled the region on 26.10.14 during a ceasefire approved by the government forces.

Since the beginning of the civil war in Syria, Tripoli has been the scene of regular fighting between Sunni militants and Alawites who have links to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. At the same time, the Sunni extremists are fighting against the Lebanese army whom they are accusing of being allied with the Shia Hezbollah movement. On 26.10.14, a spokesman of the al-Nusra Front, al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, threatened to execute a Lebanese soldier who had been captured during fights in the eastern town of Aarsal near the Syrian border.

West Bank/Israel

Palestinians banned from bus lines in West Bank

From November 2014, Palestinians from the West Bank who work in Israel will not be allowed to ride in buses with Israeli settlers when returning from their work, defence minister Moshe Yaalon announced, as was reported by Haaretz newspaper. Every day, hundreds of Palestinians living in the West Bank use public buses to go to work in Israel and to return home.

Saudi-Arabia

Rising tensions between Sunni and Shia Muslims

The death sentence issued last week against prominent Shia Muslim Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr has stirred new violence in Saudi Arabia. There is a debate going on whether Iran is behind the unrest or whether the reason is the discrimination against Shia Muslims in Saudi Arabia. Last weekend, a Shia militia in Iraq called for attacks on Saudi institutions. The Saudi authorities must anticipate serious consequences if the death sentence is not revoked. There were also threatening comments from Iran regarding the imminent execution. The Saudi authorities are accusing Sheikh Nimr of stirring up violence between the religious confessions and of organising protests. Also, he is accused of disobedience to the king. Amnesty International has voiced sharp criticism of the sentence.

Shia Muslims account for approx. 10-15 percent of the population. They are discriminated against in various ways; for example, there are restrictions on certain professions, and the school curriculum follows the Wahhabi Islam.

Turkey/Syria

Support for fighters in Kobane

On 23.10.14, President Erdogan announced that Turkey will allow some 150 to 200 Kurdish fighters from northern Iran to cross into Kobane to help defend the Syrian border town against the Islamic State. The establishment of a corridor for Kurdish fighters, however, is still rejected by Turkey. On 22.10.14, the parliament of the northern Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government had decided to deploy heavily armed fighters to Kobane. The direct route from Iraq to the besieged town via Syrian territory is blocked by the IS militia. Shortly before the Peshmerga fighters were expected to arrive, the IS started a major offensive in Kobane, trying to cut off the town from its access to the Turkish border. The Kurdish fighters succeeded in fending off the attack. On 24.10.14, President Erdogan stated that the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) had agreed to the passage of 1,300 fighters of the moderate rebel group Free Syrian Army (FSA) to Kobane and announced talks on the transit route. Shortly afterwards, the PYD chairman denied the agreement.

Corruption charges dropped

The Turkish state prosecutors have dropped the corruption investigation, which had attracted worldwide attention and led to the resignation of four ministers in December 2013. At the time, the prosecutors had arrested several dozen suspects, among them two sons of cabinet members, an Iranian businessman with close links to the government and the head of the largest state-owned bank. The defendants were charged with money laundering, bribery in public procurement, illegal money transfers and gold smuggling, apparently undermining in this way the sanctions against Iran. As a consequence, hundreds of police officers and several state prosecutors working on the case were transferred to other posts for disciplinary reasons. On

17.10.14, all charges against 53 suspects were dropped. The Istanbul Chief Prosecutor's Office stated that there were no grounds for legal action because evidence was either insufficient or had not been collected properly. Besides, there were no sufficient indications for a criminal offence or for organised crime. The only proceedings left are those against the former director of the state-owned Halkbank, Süleyman Arslan. In his house, several million dollars had been confiscated stored in shoe boxes, which he claims to have collected in order to support charities. Investigations against him are continuing, but only regarding the charge of unauthorised collection of donations.

Egypt

Attack on military positions in the Sinai Peninsula

On 24.10.14, a suspected suicide attack on a military position in the Sinai Peninsula killed 33 soldiers. Two days later, President al-Sisi announced harsh measures against radical Islamists, including the relocation of residents near the border to the Gaza Strip to establish a military buffer zone and the extension of the three-month state of emergency in parts of North Sinai.

Tunisia

Peaceful parliamentary elections

In view of the precarious security situation, more than 70,000 security personnel were deployed to guard the polling stations on 26.10.14. Despite some irregularities, elections were peaceful. The results are expected to be announced on 27.10.14.

West Africa/Ebola

Recent developments

After a New York doctor who recently returned from treating Ebola patients in Guinea became the first person in the city to test positive for the disease, New York State and New Jersey increased their safety-control procedures, ordering a mandatory quarantine for all doctors and nurses returning from Ebola regions. Already on 21.10.14, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security had announced that all travellers from Ebola outbreak countries in West Africa were to be funnelled through one of five U.S. airports with enhanced screening. On 23.10.14, measures were put in place to identify and screen anyone who has been present in Liberia, Sierra Leone or Guinea in the preceding 21 days (i.e. the maximum incubation period for the Ebola virus), taking temperatures twice daily and transmitting the results to a representative of the health authority CDC. After intense debates on the mandatory quarantine for health care workers returning from Ebola regions, the New York State government loosened the quarantine rules on 26.10.14, announcing that returning health care workers can instead quarantine themselves in their homes for the 21 days.

Mali confirmed its first case of Ebola on 23.10.14. The patient is a two-year-old girl who recently arrived from Guinea, the health ministry stated.

In Sierra Leone, violence broke out on 22.10.14. In the eastern town of Koidu, armed youths attacked several police officers who tried to force the taking of blood samples for Ebola testing. Similar incidents have been reported from other regions of the country.

Côte d'Ivoire

Trial against Simone Gbagbo

On 22.10.14, the trial against former Ivorian First Lady Simone Gbagbo and former Prime Minister Aké N'Gbo started in Abidjan. They face charges of genocide, undermining state security and directing or participating in an insurrectional movement in connection with the electoral defeat of Laurent Gbagbo in the disputed presidential elections held in November 2010. Simone Gbagbo is also under an arrest warrant from the ICC for crimes against humanity. Until now, the Ivorian authorities have refused to transfer her to The Hague, saying the trial shall take place before a national court. Laurent Gbagbo himself is presently on trial

for war crimes before the ICC. Some 3,000 people had been killed by May 2011 in the violence following President Gbagbo's loss to Alassane Outtara. The former President has been imprisoned at The Hague since November 2011.

Uganda

'Gay' trial dismissed

On 22.10.14, a court in Kampala dismissed the case against two defendants accused of homosexual acts for lack of evidence. The two men had been detained in January because they were living together. They were charged under a 1950s penal code which remains in force and prescribes jail for those found guilty of homosexual acts. After strong international criticism, the Ugandan Constitutional Court annulled tough anti-gay legislation in August that had been signed into law only in February.

Botswana

Parliamentary and indirect presidential elections

In the parliamentary elections held on 24.10.14, the ruling party Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) of President and head of government Lieutenant General Seretse Khama Ian Khama secured a majority with 37 out of 57 seats. The opposition coalition Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC) gained 17, the Botswana Congress Party (BCP) three seats. Elections were peaceful. On 26.10.14, the newly elected parliament confirmed the president, giving Ian Khama a second term. The inauguration will take place on 28.10.14.

The BDP has been the ruling party since Botswana, considered one of Africa's most stable democracies, gained independence in 1966. The Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance has ranked the country third. Botswana is one of the countries with middle-income status. Still, around 20 percent of the 2.5m inhabitants are living in poverty, in a country that is the world's largest producer of diamonds. Besides poverty, problems include the dependence on mining, widespread corruption and a HIV infection rate of over 30 percent among the 15-49-year old. The 5,000 San people, also known as Bushmen or Basarwa, regard themselves as being discriminated against. Critics are accusing Ian Khama of an autocratic leadership style.

Nigeria

Country declared Ebola-free

On 20.10.14, the World Health Organisation WHO declared Nigeria to be Ebola-free again, with no new cases in the past 42 days (double the incubation period for the disease) since the last possible and/or confirmed case.

Boko Haram abducts dozens more women and girls

Despite a ceasefire announced by the military leadership on 17.10.14, suspected members of the Islamist terror group Boko Haram kidnapped at least 30 young women and men and killed 17 others in an attack on Ndongo village (Mafa Local Government Area, Borno State) on 23. and 24.10.14. Also in Adamawa State, suspected Boko Haram fighters attacked the villages of Waga Mangoro and Garta (Madagali LGA), abducted 50-60 girls, killed several people and torched houses on 18.10.14. Apparently, several kidnapped were released shortly afterwards. According to official information provided by the Nigerian government, negotiations are held in Chad's capital N'Djamena with Boko Haram on the release of more than 200 schoolgirls who had been abducted by the terrorists in northern Chibok in April. A report of Human Rights Watch released on 27.10.14 says that since 2009, Boko Haram has abducted at least 500 girls and women from northern Nigeria and has perpetrated numerous human rights abuses against them.

Bomb blast in Bauchi State

As was reported by the police, five people were killed and twelve injured in a bomb attack launched at the bus station of the city of Azare (northern Bauchi State) on 22.10.14 around 10pm. As yet, no-one has claimed responsibility for the attack. In recent times, Boko Haram has attacked bus stations several times.

DR Congo

Protests against MONUSCO/ADF attacks in Congo

On 21./22.10.14, a large number of youths attacked bases of the UN peacekeeping Mission (MONUSCO) in the city of Beni (North Kivu province in Eastern Congo) and demanded the withdrawal of the blue helmets. This was the protesters' reaction to the death of two young men who had attacked a joint patrol of peacekeepers and Congolese soldiers on 20.10.14. and were killed in the skirmish. The incidents occurred on the background of lethal attacks conducted by suspected fighters of the Ugandan Islamist rebel group ADF (Allied Democratic Forces) on villages in the surroundings of Beni. In the night of 17.10.14, they had slashed about two dozens of people to death in the village of Erengeti (north of Beni) using axes and machetes, and killed over two dozen in the villages of Ngadi and Kadu on 15.10.14.

Cameroon

Successes in the fight against Boko Haram

According to a communication of the Cameroonian defence ministry of 17.10.14, fights occurred between the military and Boko Haram, after members of the terror organisation had passed the border between Nigeria and Cameroon in the area between the Cameroonian towns of Limani and Amchide (Region Extrême-Nord) on 15./16.10.14. In the clashes, 107 Boko Haram fighters and eight Cameroonian soldiers were reportedly killed.

Serbia/Albania/Kosovo

Tensions between Serbs and Albanians

Since the qualifying match for the European Football Championship between Serbia and Albania, tensions have risen between the two ethnic groups. The match, which took place on 14.10.14 in Belgrade, was discontinued when excesses occurred after a drone had flown over the playing field displaying a Greater Albania flag. In several northern Serbian cities, Albanian bakeries and snack bars were damaged. Bars in Novi Sad had to be protected by the Serbian special police force. Also, a mosque was targeted by Serbian nationalists.

The incident also caused unrest in Kosovo and led to violent confrontations between Serbs and Albanians in Vienna. The first visit of an Albanian President in Serbia after 69 years, scheduled for 22.10.14, was postponed to November.

Background

The tensions were triggered by the flag of 'Greater Albania' displayed by a drone. 'Greater Albania', which is propagated by some ethnic Albanians, not only includes Albania and Kosovo, but also the south Serbian region of Presevo Valley, the west of Macedonia and parts of Montenegro and northern Greece. The conflict between Serbs and Albanians dates back to the Albanian declaration of independence after the first Balkan war in 1912 and intensified after the displacement of the Kosovo Albanian population at the end of the 1990s and the independence of Kosovo in 2008. Meanwhile, a normalization process is taking place between Serbia, Kosovo and Albania, but many people still have resentments against the other ethnic group.

Ukraine

Parliamentary elections – clear victory for pro-European parties

After about 30 % of all ballots cast was counted, the pro-European parties of President Poroshenko und PM Yatsenyuk were almost on a par in the morning of 27.10.14. Another pro-European party labelled as liberal and moderate, the Self Reliance (Samopomish) led by Lviv Mayor Andriy Sadowyi, secured third place in the poll with around 14% of the vote. For the first time, the communists are not represented in parliament. Compared with the last opinion polls, a major shift in the balance of power in the government camp is to be noted. For a long time, pollsters had expected PM Yatsenyuk's 'People's Front' to achieve only a single-digit result, while the 'Block Poroshenko' was forecast to secure more than 30%. President Poroshenko saw

these results as a powerful demonstration of the Ukrainian people for a closer link with the EU. He announced that coalition talks would start quickly.

Reliable results are expected to come in at the end of 27.10.14. In parliament, 27 of 450 seats are to remain vacant, because the respective constituencies are located in the rebel-held areas of Eastern Ukraine and on the Crimean peninsula annexed by Russia. Their inhabitants could not participate in the elections of 26.10.14.

Sri Lanka

Early presidential elections

According to official information, the presidential elections originally scheduled for November 2016 will be brought forward to January 2015. The exact date was already fixed, but would be communicated at a later point in time, a government representative said on 20.10.14.

The change of the election date is motivated by the declining popularity of the governing United People's Freedom Alliance. In September, the party of President-in-Office Mahinda Rajapaksa had lost more than 20 percentage points in regional elections in the province of Uva, while the opposition United National Party more than doubled its seats. Rajapaksa had been re-elected in January 2010, gaining 57.8% of all votes cast. The limitation to two terms of office has been abolished by a constitutional amendment.

China

Decision on judicial reform

The Communist Party's Central Committee announced a judicial reform in its last annual meeting (20.-23.10.14), which was focused on strengthening the rule of law. The final document, which was made public, contained only a summary of the resolutions, thus disappointing all those who had hoped for a wide-ranging reform. According to this document, the leadership of the Communist Party over the judiciary will be maintained. At the same time, it is intended to prevent individual officials to interfere with the judiciary. The ultimate target is to install a legal system compatible with the particular Chinese model of socialism, the document reads.

Fewer executions

On 20.10.14, the Dui Hua Foundation reported that the number of executions has decreased from 3,000 in 2012 to 2,400 in 2013. Since 2002 (12,000 executions), the number has been constantly declining, the Foundation says. For 2014, this trend is likely to be offset by the use of capital punishment in anti-terrorism campaigns in Xinjiang and the anti-corruption campaign nationwide. The figures are estimates, since the exact number of executions is a state secret.

Hong Kong protests

The talks between protesters and government representatives, which were broadcast live on TV, ended without results on 21.10.2014. Eleven people were arrested after scuffles between protesters and police officers in the commercial district Mong Kok on Kowloon peninsula. According to an official communication dated 23.10.14, they are now accused of bodily harm and illegal possession of weapons. Before, associations of the transport sector had obtained an interim injunction that the block of public roads in Mong Kong be ended. The majority of the protesters are still staying in the protest camps in Admiralty and Causeway Bay on Hong Kong Island. A 'street vote' on what the next step should be, announced on 24.10.14 and due to be held on 26.10.-27.10., was cancelled on short notice by the protesters.