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Directorate 22 - Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

18 May 2015

Afghanistan

Terrorist attacks

A roadside bomb in the district of Arghistan (province of Kandahar) killed five civilians and injured three on 12 May 2015.

According to UNAMA reports, guests were taken hostage in a hotel in Kabul on 13 May 2015. 14 persons were killed and several others injured when Afghan security forces stormed the hotel. A US citizen and an Italian are among the victims. According to reports, at least one Taliban fighter was killed.

A German and a British member of EUPOL, the EU police mission to Afghanistan, died on 17 May 2015 near Kabul airport when a suicide attacker drove into their car. 18 Afghan civilians were injured by the explosion.

Iraq

IS gaining ground

Iraqi security forces reported that IS succeeded in capturing the city of Ramadi in western Iraq on 17 May 2015. More than 500 civilians and security officials were reportedly killed in the fights in the past few days, and thousands have fled from the city. Ramadi is the capital of the province of Anbar (western Iraq) and is situated about 100 km west of Baghdad. The city's loss is a serious blow for the Iraqi army, which has been fighting IS in the area for months.

Pakistan

Attack in Karachi

An attack on a bus carrying Shia Muslims in Karachi killed more than 40 people and injured more than 20 on 14 May 2015. Gunmen stopped the bus on its way to a mosque and shot the passengers. The Sunni group Jundullah ("Soldiers of God") took responsibility for the attack. It is a splinter group of the Pakistani Taliban, which pledged allegiance to IS in 2014.

North Waziristan

On 15 May, the Pakistani air force bombarded rebel hideouts in North Waziristan. It reported that 17 extremists had been killed, among them members of Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Afghans and Uzbeks. At least four extremists died in a US drone attack on 16 May 2015. Reportedly, they were Taliban from the province of Punjab and foreign fighters.

Iran

2.5 million Afghans

Interior minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli told IRIB News on 12 May 2015 that 2.5 million Afghan citizens were currently living in Iran. He explained that about five million Afghans had been expelled during the past ten years, but that many of them had returned, mainly due to the difficult living conditions in Afghanistan. Insufficient border controls by Afghanistan and Pakistan had contributed to this development.

Yemen

Shaky ceasefire ended

On 12 May 2015, a five-day ceasefire was announced, but on 14 May 2015, both sides already accused the other of breaking the truce. The website Aden al-Ghad cited eyewitnesses who said that planes of the Saudi-led alliance had bombarded Houthi positions in Aden three times on the morning of 14 May 2015. In turn, the military alliance reported twelve Houthi violations of the ceasefire.

Only a few hours after the end of the ceasefire the alliance resumed its air strikes on the Houthi rebels in the night between 17 and 18 May 2015.

Palestinian autonomous areas

Vatican speaks of “Palestinian state”

A treaty on the status of the Catholic church in the Palestinian areas, which will be signed soon, expressly speaks of the “State of Palestine”. Unofficially, the Vatican has been treating the Palestinian areas as an independent state for some time now. So far, about 135 countries around the world have recognised the area as a sovereign state. Most western countries take the stance that a Palestinian state should not be recognised until a solution for a peace with Israel is found.

Syria

Fight for Palmyra/US ground action

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported on 16 May 2015 that IS had entered areas north of Tadmur, the city in whose south-west areas the World Heritage ruins of Palmyra are situated. In the meantime, official Syrian authorities announced that the IS offensive had failed. They said that IS had retreated after serious fights, which led to numerous casualties on both sides.

The US reported that IS leader Abu Sayyaf was killed in a ground action on 16 May 2015. Abu Sayyaf reportedly played an important role in the oil, gas and financial operations of IS.

Egypt

Mursi sentenced to death

On 16 May 2015, a Cairo court sentenced former president Mohammed Mursi and more than hundred other defendants to death. Mursi, who, together with hundreds of other prisoners, had escaped from a jail in Wadi Natrun during the 2011 revolution, was found guilty of espionage and a mass prison break. The espionage charge is based on claims that Mursi colluded with Hamas and Hezbollah to execute the jail break.

The sentence will be reviewed by the grand mufti of al-Azhar university, Egypt’s highest religious authority. In addition, the sentence is open to appeal. The court decision met with considerable international criticism. Mursi had been sentenced to 20 years in jail in April 2015 (see BN of 27 April 2015).

Judges murdered

Shortly after the sentence against Mursi, three judges were murdered in the city of al-Arish on the Sinai peninsula, reportedly by Islamist terrorists.

Islamists executed

Six men who were allegedly members of the terrorist organisation Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, which is active in the north of the Sinai peninsula and has pledged allegiance to IS, were executed on 17 May 2015. They had

been sentenced for attacks on security officials in October 2014. Human rights organisations had criticised the trials and called for a suspension of the executions.

Libya

Situation of refugees

According to an Amnesty International report released on 11 May 2015, refugees are regularly robbed, tortured, kidnapped and sexually abused. Amnesty wrote that Islamist groups targeted Christians, mostly from Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Nigeria. They claimed that IS recently killed 49 Christians.

Mali

Peace agreement signed

On 15 May 2015, the government and key rebel groups signed an “agreement on peace and reconciliation” in Mali. However, the Coordination Movement for Azawad (CMA) demands more autonomy for the northern areas of the country and has not yet signed the agreement. Still, a CMA representative initialled the document when the agreement was concluded on 14 May 2015 in Algiers.

On 27 April 2015, pro-government troops and CMA began to clash over the city of Menaka in the north of the country. The fights continued up to and on 17 May 2015.

Central African Republic

Rebels sign ceasefire agreement

Rival rebel groups in the Central African Republic have signed a ceasefire agreement after drawn-out negotiations brokered by the UN. A UN special envoy declared that the ten rebel groups had also agreed to a disarmament, demobilisation, reinsertion and repatriation process.

The country has experienced massive violence since the Muslim Séléka militia ousted long-term president François Bozizé in 2013. As Séléka was charged with human rights violations, the Christian Anti-Balaka militia emerged, which fought Muslims. Since then, both sides have been involved in severe human rights violations. More than 5,000 people have died. President Catherine Samba-Panza is currently heading a transition government, which tries – jointly with a UN peacekeeping mission – to stabilise the country.

Burundi

Failed coup

The coup attempt by parts of the army has failed. General Godefroid Niyombare, the leader, told the news agency AFP on 15 May 2015 that the insurgents had decided to give up. Several leaders were arrested. On the day before, Niyombare had declared that president Pierre Nkurunziza had been ousted and the government dissolved. However, the army generals and the police remained loyal to the president. Nkurunziza, who participated in a crisis summit of the East African Community (EAC) in Tanzania at the time of the coup, has returned to Burundi.

The UNCHR reports that, for fear of retaliation by the security forces, more than 100,000 Burundians, most of them members of the Tutsi minority, have fled to Tanzania and Rwanda.

Background

In February, Niyombare had been dismissed as intelligence chief after having advised the president not to run for a third term. Parliamentary elections are scheduled for 26 May 2015, and presidential elections will take place later. The EAC has been calling for a postponement of the elections.

DR of the Congo

Rebel attack and protests

On 11 May 2015, armed men, probably members of the rebel group ADF (Allied Democratic Forces), attacked the village of Beni in the east of the country. At least 23 persons, among them women and children, were killed. Hundreds of locals violently protested against the attack on 12 May 2015. It was the third major militia attack on villages in the Kivu area in the last few weeks.

Nigeria

People killed and injured by suicide bomber

Seven people were killed and more than 30 injured when a young girl blew herself up at the central bus station in Damaturu (north-east of the country) on 17 May 2015. An eyewitness said the girl had detonated the bomb when she noticed the guards at the gates of the station. So far, Boko Haram has not taken responsibility for the attack.

Boko Haram captures important city

According to a government official of the federal state of Borno, the Islamist group Boko Haram captured the strategically important city of Marte. Since 2013, both Boko Haram and the government army have repeatedly retaken the city, which is situated near important trade routes between Nigeria and several neighbouring countries.

Sudan

Election results confirmed

On 17 May 2015, the Supreme Court confirmed the results of the presidential and parliamentary elections, which took place in April 2015. The court dismissed 122 out of 126 challenges submitted by political parties and candidates. It accepted four challenges and declared the candidates for parliamentary seats as winners. Afterwards, the court asked the national electoral commission to announce the official final results. President al-Bashir was re-elected with 94% of the vote. His ruling National Congress Party (NCP) won 323 of a total of 426 parliamentary seats. The Democratic Unionist Party led by al-Mirghani got 25 of the remaining seats, and the Democratic Unionist Party led by Jalal al-Dagair 15. 19 seats went to independent candidates.

Somalia

Al-Shabaab beaten

The governor of Lower Shabelle announced that government troops had started a counterattack on 15 May 2015 and recaptured two cities (Awdhegel and Mubarak, about 75 km west of Mogadishu) which al-Shabaab had taken shortly before. Four persons, among them two soldiers, were reportedly killed in the fight. More than 20 Islamist militants were killed.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Government crisis after serious fights

Police operations in the city of Kumanovo led to bloody clashes, during which 22 people were killed and 37 injured (see BN of 11 May 2015). In the aftermath, the minister of the interior, the minister of transport and the intelligence chief stepped down because they were charged with having made major mistakes during the police operations. According to official statements, the police hoped to prevent a terrorist attack by the Albanian organisation UCK (Kosovo Liberation Army). The opposition and the media accused the government of misinforming the public. There is no reliable information about what really happened and why. Speculation is ranging far and wide, from an actual attack by an Albanian terrorist group to the government's having orchestrated the clashes.

The police operation caused concern in Serbia, Kosovo, Albania and Bulgaria. Serbia and Bulgaria sent troops to the border to Macedonia.

Large-scale anti-government demonstrations – opposition calling for early elections

Even though the police had blocked the roads, more than 20,000 people participated in a peaceful demonstration against the government in Skopje on 17 May 2015. The protests were organised by 14 opposition parties – some of them Albanian –, NGOs, civil society organisations and representatives of all ethnic groups. They charged prime minister Gruevski with being corrupt and involved in criminal activities and with implementing an increasingly authoritarian regime. According to the opposition, 20,000 people have been wiretapped. The opposition social democrats have boycotted parliament for more than a year now, saying that the government has engaged in massive electoral fraud. EU-brokered talks between Gruevski and opposition leader Zaev on 14 May 2015 did not yield any results. They are to be resumed on 18 May 2015.

About 4,000 people continued to protest after the end of the official demonstration. The protesters plan to wait in front of the government building until Gruevski steps down. However, government supporters will meet as well in front of the parliamentary building on 18 May 2015. There is a risk of violent clashes if the two camps meet.

Ukraine

Situation in the east of the country

The fighting continued. A spokesman for the Ukrainian army said that the situation was most dangerous near the village of Shyrokyne (Sea of Azov) and around the destroyed airport at Donetsk. He announced that four soldiers had been injured by shelling. The pro-Russian separatists spoke of a civilian casualty near Shyrokyne.

Ban on communist and national-socialist propaganda

President Poroshenko has signed into law legislation which bans all communist and national-socialist propaganda. A more detailed explanation says that these laws will ban Soviet symbols, condemn the Communist regime, open up the archives of the Soviet intelligence services and recognise those nationalists who fought side-by-side with the national socialists against the “Soviet occupation” as fighters for Ukrainian independence. The ban also applies to symbols, street names, flags, monuments and commemorative plaques.

Nemtsov report: 220 Russian soldiers killed in the war in eastern Ukraine

On 12 May 2015, a report by opposition politician Boris Nemtsov was released posthumously in Moscow. It says that at least 220 Russian soldiers were killed in the war in eastern Ukraine. These soldiers officially left the Russian army and fought as “volunteers” for the pro-Russian separatists in 2014. According to the Nemtsov report, Russia has spent more than one billion dollars on support for the rebels so far.

Georgia

ECHR awards non-pecuniary damage to homosexual demonstration participants

On 12 May 2015, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that, in 2012, Georgia did not sufficiently protect the participants in a gay rights demonstration against violence from militant groups. Thirteen demonstration participants and the homosexuals organisation Identoba had filed a suit. The plaintiffs were awarded non-pecuniary damage ranging from EUR 1,500 to EUR 4,000. On 17 May 2012, about 30 protesters had taken part in the Gay Pride demonstration on the International Day against Homophobia. Members of two orthodox-conservative groups had encircled them and called them names. Moreover, there had been some violence. Witnesses stated that only a few policemen had been present and had done nothing to stop the violence.

North Korea

Reports of execution of minister of defence withdrawn

On 15 May 2015, the South Korean intelligence service withdrew reports on the ousting and execution of Hyon Yong Chol, the North Korean minister of defence. A spokesman said that, while Hyon had certainly been removed from office, reports of his execution could not be confirmed at the moment.

Reports from the circles of the South Korean parliament had initially suggested that the minister had been killed by anti-aircraft weapons in front of hundreds of spectators at the end of April because he had criticised the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. Hyon was a member of Kim's closest circle. He had been appointed minister of defence only about one year ago.