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Directorate 22 - Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

20 April 2015

Afghanistan

UNAMA statistics on civilian casualties of the conflict in the first quarter of 2015

According to a UNAMA report (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan), the number of civilian casualties of the conflict in the first quarter of 2015 is roughly the same as in the first quarter of 2014. 655 civilians were killed and 1,155 injured (overall, there were 1,810 casualties). The number of civilian deaths as reported by the UNAMA is almost double that announced last week by the Afghan news station TOLONews (350; see BN of 13 April 2015). Fighting on the ground between rebels and government troops claimed the largest number of civilian victims (521). Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were the second most important reason for civilian casualties (430). Targeted attacks on civilians (309 victims) ranked third, claiming 34% more casualties than in the first quarter of 2014. The remaining casualties were killed or injured in suicide attacks (268 casualties), air strikes (15) and other incidents. The total number of casualties includes 172 women and 430 children, which were mostly killed or injured in fights in inhabited areas. UNAMA expects the fighting to increase in the coming months.

IS claims responsibility for attack

On 18 April 2015, a suicide bomber blew himself up in front of a bank in Jalalabad (province of Nangarhar, east of the country). At least 32 people were killed and more than 120 injured. A spokesman for “Islamic State” claimed responsibility for the attack. The Taliban said they were not behind the blast.

Shia muslims beheaded

The bodies of five members of the Shia Hazara minority, who had been kidnapped before, were found in the province of Ghazni (south-eastern Afghanistan) on 17 April 2015. The culprits have not been identified yet. A group of rebels who claim to have joined IS may be behind the attack.

Other security-relevant events

Attacks and fighting also took place in the provinces of Helmand and Zabul (south of the country), Baghlan, Badakhshan (north-east), Kunar, Laghman (east), Farah, Ghor, Herat (west), Faryab, Balkh, Jowzjan (north), Paktia, Paktika, Khost, Ghazni (south-east), Maidan Wardak and Kapisa (central Afghanistan).

Iran/Afghanistan

Joint action against IS planned

Hassan Rouhani and Ashraf Ghani, the presidents of Iran and Afghanistan, respectively, agreed in Tehran on 19 April 2015 to jointly fight IS, as the terrorist group’s attacks are threatening to spill over to the region as a whole. The two countries will not only to exchange information, but also cooperate in military operations.

Yemen

Government does not accept Iran's peace plan

Despite new initiatives for a political solution to the conflict between the government and the Houthi rebels, who are supported by Iran, an end to the fighting does not seem likely in the near future. The government refused an Iranian peace plan on the weekend. This initiative foresees an immediate ceasefire, an end to all military operations, humanitarian help and the creation of a government of national unity. However, government spokesman Rajeh Badi told Reuters that the plan was only a "political manoeuvre". Iran had criticised the US for supporting the Saudi-led air strikes on the Shia Houthi rebels. Meanwhile, China also tried to act as a mediator, as the country is dependent on oil imports from the region.

Iraq

Tens of thousands of refugees in the province of Anbar

According to UN reports, more than 90,000 refugees have been driven out of their homes by fights between government troops and IS in the province of Anbar. Following an IS assault on the city of Ramadi, thousands of people have fled for Baghdad and Fallujah during the weekend, among them security forces. Aid organisations have started to provide the refugees with the bare necessities. According to government spokespersons, the Iraqi army is collecting troops to attack IS near Ramadi.

Kurds beat back IS near Kirkuk

Peshmerga fighters successfully beat back IS in an attack south of Kirkuk and conquered 84 square kilometres of ground. The offensive was launched on 18 April 2015, with the Kurds on the ground being supported by US air strikes. At least 35 IS fighters are said to have been killed.

Attack on US consulate in Erbil

A suicide bomber is said to have killed nine people outside the US consulate in the city of Erbil in northern Iraq on 17 April 2015. IS claimed responsibility for the attack.

Syria

IS retreats from most of Yarmouk

On 15 April 2015, residents of the Palestinian refugee camp Yarmouk said that, while IS members were still fighting against members of the Palestinian group Aknaf al-Maqdis, which is linked to Hamas, at the northern entry of the camp, hundreds of IS fighters had returned to their stronghold in neighbouring Hajar. The al-Nusra Front is now reported to be the strongest force in the camp; it and Aknaf al-Maqdis are enemies, too.

Libya

IS video reported to show execution of 30 Christians

On 19 April 2015, the Libyan branch of IS released a half-hour video with the title "Followers of the cross from the enemy Ethiopian Church" on the internet. The video shows about 15 men who are beheaded on a beach and 15 others who are shot in the head in a desert area. The victims are believed to be kidnapped members of the Ethiopian Church. According to the video, they were killed in the province of Barqa in eastern Libya and the province of Fazzan in southern Libya. The authenticity of the video has not been verified yet.

Burundi

Thousands fleeing to neighbouring countries

According to a UNHCR news story dated 17 April 2015, about 7,000 Burundis have fled to neighbouring Rwanda and about thousand to the DR of the Congo since the beginning of April because they are afraid of

violence in connection with the presidential elections scheduled for June 2015. Discussions about a potential third term of office of incumbent Pierre Nkurunziza are currently the most important domestic issue. On 17 April 2015, security forces dispersed a demonstration in Bujumbura, the capital of Burundi; hundreds of opposition supporters had protested against Nkurunziza's running again for office.

Central African Republic

Current Situation

Babacar Gaye, the UN Special Representative and Head of the UN mission (MINUSCA) in the Central African Republic, reported on 14 April 2015 to the UN Security Council that the situation was still tense. Large parts of the population were still threatened by attacks by the Séléka and the Anti-Balaka, and the humanitarian crisis was intensifying. Since the beginning of the year, the UN has registered 50,000 new internal refugees.

Peace efforts

Francois Bozizé, the former president of the Central African Republic, and his successor Michel Djotodia, the leader of the Muslim rebel coalition Séléka, which pushed Bozizé out of office in 2013, signed a peace agreement in Nairobi (Kenya) on 14 April 2015. On 8 April 2015, representatives of the Séléka and the Anti-Balaka had already agreed on a ceasefire in Nairobi.

The transitional government led by Catherine Samba-Panza has not been involved in any of the agreements. Samba-Panza, who criticised the negotiations in Kenya, is planning her own peace initiative, the "Bangui Forum", in Bangui, the country's capital, for the end of 2015. This forum is to pave the way for general elections.

Nigeria

57 soldiers sentenced to death acquitted

According to a press release dated 16 April 2015, a military court in Abuja acquitted 57 soldiers who had been sentenced to death in December 2014. They had been charged with having refused to fight against Boko Haram in August 2014.

More than 2,000 women and girls kidnapped

On the first anniversary of the kidnapping of 276 school girls from a school of Chibok in north-eastern Nigeria (219 of whom have not been found yet), Amnesty International (ai) released the report "Our job is to shoot, slaughter and kill: Boko Haram's reign of terror" on 14 April 2015. The report documents war crimes and human rights violations of Boko Haram. According to ai estimates, Boko Haram has kidnapped more than 2,000 young women and girls since the beginning of 2014 and forced them to marry Boko Haram members. In addition, some young men were kidnapped and forced to become fighters or spies for Boko Haram. At least 5,500 civilians were killed between January 2014 and March 2015, with at least 817 dead in one of 46 bomb attacks.

800,000 children displaced

A UNICEF report released on 13 April 2015 says that fear of Boko Haram and the fights between the terrorists on the one hand and government troops and armed civilian forces on the other has caused the number of internal refugees to almost double within a year, to 1.2 million. Moreover, more than 200,000 people have fled to neighbouring Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. 800,000 children have been displaced. Between 2012 and 2014, more than 300 schools were destroyed or heavily damaged by targeted attacks in north-eastern Nigeria, and at least 196 teachers and 314 pupils were killed.

Cameroon

Villages attacked by Boko Haram

In the night from 16 to 17 April 2015, Boko Haram fighters attacked the village of Bia (district of Kolofata) in the region Extrême-Nord. Most of the 19 victims were beheaded.

DR of the Congo

19 civilians killed in the area of Beni

On the morning of 15 April 2015, attackers armed with machetes killed 18 people in the village of Mbau (about 30 km from the district capital Beni) in North Kivu, a province in eastern Congo. Reportedly, the Islamist rebel group ADF (Allied Democratic Forces) is responsible. This group was initially active in Uganda and is said to have killed about 300 villagers in the region around Beni since the beginning of October 2014.

Seven pro-democracy activists arrested

According to a report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) released on 15 April 2015, three of the about 30 persons arrested on 15 March 2015 in Kinshasa during a workshop of the youth movement Filimbi (see BN of 23 March 2015) are still detained. One of them is Fred Bauma, a leader of the pro-democracy movement LUCHA ("Struggle for Change"). The group is based in the city of Goma (eastern Congo). On 7 April 2015, between 15 and 20 LUCHA members demonstrated for the release of Bauma and the other two detainees on a main road in Goma. Four of them were arrested by the police and brought to the central prison of Goma. They are charged with inciting disobedience to public authority.

Sudan

Presidential elections

Parliamentary and presidential elections were held from 13 to 16 April 2015. Observers estimate that only 10 - 20% of the 13.3 million voters went to the polls. The result is likely to be released on 27 April 2015. Large parts of the opposition, for example the National Umma Party (NUP) led by former prime minister Sadiq al-Mahdi, boycotted the elections. The opposition is calling for a transitional government and a new constitution.

President al-Bashir is widely expected to remain in office for another five years.

In the federal state of South Kordofan, SPLA-N rebels are said to have killed 136 civilians and injured 150 in attacks on polling stations.

Somalia

Attack in Mogadishu

An attack on the Somali ministry for university education claimed several lives in Mogadishu on 14 April 2015. Depending on the source, the number of victims ranges between at least five and 15. Following a car bomb explosion, attackers stormed the ministry building. The victims include government workers, security guards, civilians and three attackers. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack.

Attack in Puntland

Nine Kenyan and Somali workers were killed on 20 April 2015 when a bomb planted under a bus seat exploded. The workers were to be driven to the United Nations compound in Garowe, the regional capital. The police suspect al-Shabaab.

Mali

Attack on UN troops

Three civilians died in a suicide attack on a base of the UN military mission MINUSMA in Ansongo (region of Gao in the north-east of the country) on 15 April 2015. Nine blue helmets and seven civilians were injured. Since July 2013, at least 35 UN soldiers have been killed and 140 injured.

Guinea

Protests by the opposition

Since 13 April 2015, opposition supporters and security forces have been battling each other on the streets of Conakry, the capital. At least three people were killed and about 50 injured. The clashes were caused by a dispute about the date of the elections (the regional elections are to be delayed until 2016, after the presidential elections on 11 October 2015).

Kosovo

Protests against the government

Several thousands demonstrated peacefully against the government on 18 April 2015 under the slogan "Thiefs into prison, not into the government". The criticism was directed mainly at the influence of the authorities on the judicial system and the media. The demonstrators carried Albanian flags and maps of Greater Albania. Kosovars are increasingly frustrated by the political standstill. Seven years after the declaration of independence, the hoped-for political, economic and social turnaround has not taken place. Demonstrations against the government started in January 2015, and the country has experienced the most severe breakouts of violence since its independence.

Albania

Mass emigration

According to Albanian press releases, there is currently a mass exodus, mainly from the communities of Vlora, Shkoder, Kukes and Tropoja in northern Albania. In particular, families with small children are on their way to Europe, mainly to Germany. The number of emigrants has reportedly reached a record high during the past two months. An unusually high number of travellers have recently applied for biometric passports. The Albanian government has told people not to trust the promises of human traffickers and explained that was no chance of being granted asylum for economic reasons in Europe.

During the past two decades, about 1.4 million Albanians have left the country. Albania's population has been shrinking for years. Migrants are leaving the country mostly for economic reasons (bad living conditions, unemployment, low wages; see BN of 12 January 2015).

Russian Federation

Security situation in North Caucasus

In 2014, the number of casualties in the North Caucasus region declined again. The Russian internet newspaper "Caucasian Knot" reports that at least 341 people were killed in fights and attacks (2013: at least 529; 2012: 700; 2011: 736 dead). In Dagestan, the number of casualties declined palpably, too, but this North Caucasus republic remained the most violent area. Most special operations of the security forces against armed groups took place in Dagestan. In 2014, at least 208 people were killed in the main crisis region in North Caucasus (2013: 341). In Chechnya, the number of casualties rose from 39 to 52 due to two major suicide bombings in 2014. In Kabardino-Balkaria, the number of victims dropped to 49 (2013: 92), and in Ingushetia to 21 (2013: 36). The other North Caucasus republics (Adygeia, Karachevo-Cherkesia and North Ossetia) experienced a calm year, with only one person killed. Ten people died in 2014 in the region of Stavropol, which has been part of the federal district of North Caucasus for some years now.

Ukraine

Situation in the east of the country

The situation remains unstable. Two months after the beginning of the ceasefire in eastern Ukraine six Ukrainian soldiers were killed in heavy fights. For the first time, the Ukrainian military named Russian army units which have been allegedly sent to eastern Ukraine. The 15th mechanised infantry brigade of the Russian army, the 8th mechanised infantry brigade and the 331st and the 98th airborne divisions are said to be in action.

On 14 and 15 April 2015, about 300 US paratroopers arrived in Ukraine to train 900 soldiers of the Ukrainian national guard, which is under the command of the Ukrainian ministry of the interior and consists mainly of former Maidan fighters, for six months and organise joint military exercises.

Political murders

Within 24 hours, a well-known pro-Russian journalist and a supporter of overthrown president Viktor Yanukovich, who had toed Moscow's line, were killed in Kiev. According to police reports, Oleg Kalashnikov, a member of parliament belonging to Yanukovich's Party of the Regions, was found dead in his home on the evening of 15 April 2015. On 16 April 2015, journalist Oles Buzyna, editor-in-chief of a newspaper which was critical of the government, was shot in the street near the centre of the city. The police have started murder investigations. Meanwhile, a nationalist group called Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) has claimed responsibility for this and other attacks and has threatened to kill other persons guilty of "anti-Ukrainian" activities if they did not leave the country within 72 hours.

China

Gao Yu sentenced

On 17 April 2015, a court in Beijing sentenced 71-year-old well-known journalist Gao Yu to seven in years in prison for leaking state secrets. Her trial took place back in November 2014; she had been arrested in April 2014. She was probably charged with having passed the internal "Document No. 9" of the Communist Party to contacts abroad; this document focuses on the party ideals and warns against western values. In May 2014, the Chinese state television broadcast her confession, which she denounced later on as forced.

Activists set free on bail

Five feminist activists who had been arrested at the beginning of March (see BN of 30 March 2015) were set free on bail on 13 April 2015.

Colombia

Setback for the peace process

The guerilla group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) attacked a military patrol in the department of Cauca in the night from 14 to 15 April 2015 and killed at least ten soldiers. On 15 April 2015, president Juan Manuel Santos ordered renewed air strikes against the rebels. They had been suspended in March 2015 after FARC had announced a unilateral ceasefire. The government and the rebels started peace talks back in 2012.