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Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

29 August 2016

Afghanistan

Armed confrontations

The fighting, attacks and ambushes continue claiming also civilian deaths and wounded. According to media reports the following provinces were particularly affected last week: Kunduz (allegedly the Taliban took control of the district capital of Khandbad; inhabitants and local politicians said that the Taliban are controlling 80% of the province's territory), Faryab (here as well, the Taliban conquered one district), Nangarhar (both the Taliban and IS followers are fighting in this province), Helmand (the ongoing conflict reportedly meant the destruction of 26 schools in three districts), Paktia (allegedly the Taliban took Janikhel district, a major transport hub), as well as the provinces of Nimroz, Sar-i-Pul, Jawzjan, Parwan, Ghor, and Takhar.

Attacks

The insurgents beheaded a university student whom they suspected of working for the Afghan army in the western province of Faryab on 22 August 2016. A girl died and three children were wounded in a bomb attack in Jawzjan province (north). A suicide assassin attacked a NATO convoy in Bagram district in the central province of Parwan and injured three Afghan policemen.

A suicide bomber and two further persons attacked the American University in Kabul on 24 August 2016. The attackers barricaded themselves on the campus and engaged in several hours of gun-battle with the security forces. At least ten people were killed and at least 37 wounded. Reportedly 23 attacks in Kabul have caused 286 casualties and wounded 851 people this year.

A member of the lower chamber of parliament was attacked in Balkh (north) on 25 August 2016 and at least three civilians died and dozens were injured by this attack. A woman is said to have been beheaded by her in-laws because of family disputes in the western province of Badghis. A member of parliament from Badghis province was injured in a Taliban attack in Herat (west).

On 26 August 2016 four policemen were killed by a colleague in a so-called insider attack in Uruzgan (south).

On 27 August 2016 unknown assassins murdered a staff member of the cultural ministry in Logar (centre).

On 29 August 2016 three civilians (including a woman and a child) died in a bomb attack in Ghor (west).

Iraq

Elite unit takes al-Kajara

After a battle with IS an Iraqi elite unit succeeded in taking the IS-controlled city of al-Kajara (Kajjarah) about 60 km west of Mosul on 25 August 2016. Thus IS is losing further ground in Iraq. The Iraqi command intends to reconquer Mosul in September. The UNHCR in Geneva expects up to 1.2 million people to flee during the battle for Mosul.

Turkey

Assault on police station

The media reported that a car bombing of the police headquarters in the city of Cizre in south-eastern Turkey claimed the lives of at least eleven people and wounded more than 70 on 26 August 2016. The Turkish authorities hold the PKK responsible for the attack.

Turkey/Syria

Turkish military operation in Syria

On 24 August 2016 the Turkish military launched its operation „Euphrates Shield" by flying air raids in the border area with Syria which were followed by the first ground attack involving several tanks advancing onto Syrian territory. The attacks were directed against IS positions in Jarabulus, one of IS' last major strongholds near the Turkish border. The Turkish army also fired at positions of the Syrian Kurdish militia YPG and the alliance of the „Syrian Democratic Forces“. More military vehicles passed the border on the following days. Turkish president Erdogan stated that the operation's aim was to finally put an end to the attacks on the Turkish border and was directed against the threat posed to Turkey by terrorist organisations like IS or the YPG militia. The official news agency Anadolu reported that the Turkish artillery had also focused its fire on positions of the Syrian-Kurdish militia YPG in northern Syria, because they had failed to respond to demands to retreat. Turkey insists on the YPG's retreat from the area west of the Euphrates, because it sees an autonomous Kurdish region along its border with Syria as a threat to national security. Although the SDF military alliance led by the YPG militia had promised the US, who are supporting the alliance in its fight against IS, to accept the Euphrates as the red line, the Kurdish units had ignored that promise.

Syria

US and Russia intent on finding a joint solution for peace

After talks held in Geneva Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov and his US colleague Kerry agreed on 26 August 2016 to cooperate in the Syrian conflict to put an end to the fighting. Experts from both countries will work out the details in the next days. John Kerry was unable, though, to convince his Russian colleague to stop the air raids on Aleppo.

The fighting continues

The heavy fighting for Aleppo continues. The Syrian Human Rights Observatory reported that 16 civilians were killed on 27 August 2016 by barrel bombs. On 29 August 2016 the Observatory reported that the Syrian army had flown air raids on the last district of Homs that is still offering resistance, for the first time after one year. Homs had been considered as one of the hubs of the uprising against Assad.

Government troops take over the rebel stronghold of Daraya

The government announced that after four years of siege it is back in control in the former rebel stronghold Daraya near the capital Damascus. On 25 August 2016 the government had agreed on the city's evacuation with the rebels. They are supposed to leave Daraya before 04 September 2016 and will be allowed to move to the city of Idlib that is also controlled by anti-government forces. Thousands of civilians are permitted to move to the emergency camps the government set up on the outskirts of the city.

Iran

Executions apparently no deterrent for drug smuggling

A committee of inquiry of Iran's justice ministry stated that the effect of executions on stopping drug smuggling is unsatisfactory. Tasnim news agency reported on 27 August 2016 that according to the committee's chairman, Mohammad Baqer Olfat, the volume and diversity of the drugs smuggled to Iran had rather increased than decreased.

Iran/Yemen

Arms supplies to Shia Houthi rebels denied

Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif denied the allegation that the Houthi rebels in Yemen were receiving weapons from Iran. On 25 August 2016 US Secretary of State John Kerry had warned that Iranian arms supplies to the Houthi rebels would not only pose a threat to Saudi Arabia, but also to the US. On 26 August 2016 Zarif rejected these allegations as unfounded.

Yemen

At least 45 casualties in attack

The aid organisation Doctors without Borders reported at least 45 casualties and over 60 injured after a suicide bombing in Yemen. Eye witnesses said that the attacker drove his car into a building used by the local militia in the port city of Aden. As yet it is unclear who is responsible for the attack.

UN report deplores crimes against humanity

The UN reported that at least 3,799 civilians have been killed and 6,711 wounded in the civil war since March 2015. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zaid Raad al-Hussein, said in Geneva on 25 August 2016 that all of the armed groups involved had committed serious crimes against the population. The report accuses the parties to the conflict of arbitrary attacks on civilians, such as bombing residential areas, markets, hospitals and schools. Civilians had been killed by stray bombs, land mines and snipers.

Libya

Unity government fails to win confidence

On 22 August 2016 the internationally recognized Libyan parliament in Tobruk again failed to endorse the unity government (61 of the 101 deputies who were present rejected the list of ministers, 39 abstained and one voted favourably). The unity government under the leadership of Prime Minister Fajis al-Sarraj, mediated in December 2015 by the UN, is supposed to provide a uniform political leadership for Libya for which it requires the parliament's confidence. Parliament had already denied the unity government its confidence in January 2016.

Heavy fighting for the last IS positions in Sirte

The unity government's troops launched an attack on the last districts in Sirte that are still under IS control on 28 August 2016. Reportedly 34 Libyan fighters lost their lives and more than 180 people were wounded.

Egypt

Tougher penalties for Female Genital Mutilation

Egypt's government announced a bill that will provide for prison terms between five and seven years for female genital mutilation. Currently the statutory prison term is between three months and two years. Anyone forcing a woman into genital mutilation shall receive a three year prison sentence. If the mutilated woman dies or suffers permanent physical damage the offender will in addition have to do hard labour while serving the sentence. Although FGM has been banned since 2008 it is still widespread in many rural areas and practised by both Muslims and Christians.

Coptic Orthodox church approves bill on church construction

The synod of the Coptic Orthodox church approved the draft law on the construction of churches. Sources inside the church, however, said that the draft is controversial. It seems to have too many gaps and technical details which would still allow to find pretexts to prevent the construction of churches. The new law is to replace the current regulations that date back to the times of the Ottoman empire which stipulate rules for the construction of churches that do not apply to mosques, e.g. no construction near schools, government

buildings or residential areas. The implementation of these rules often meant that the construction of churches was not permitted in areas inhabited by Christians, especially in Upper Egypt. Within the church there is some resistance against the bill. Especially the youth movements in Christian communities are demanding a review of the draft.

Somalia

Attack on Mogadishu restaurant

Ten people died and at least 15 were wounded when a restaurant at the Lido of Mogadishu was attacked on 25 August 2016. The attackers stormed the restaurant after exploding a car bomb and at times held about 30 people hostage. It took the security forces eight hours to regain control of the situation. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack.

Targeted assaults on individuals

Al-Shabaab fighters are suspected of being responsible for the killing of a high-ranking security officer in Mogadishu's district of Dharkenley on 24 August 2016. A policeman was shot at Bakara market in Mogadishu probably also by an al-Shabaab fighter on 24 August 2016. The fire was returned by SNA soldiers, killing the assassin and an uninvolved civilian. At least 13 people were injured by a bomb exploding in front of a cafe in Bardhere (Gedo region) on 25 August 2016. Al-Shabaab is suspected to be behind the attack that was probably aimed at the district commissioner.

Fighting engaging security forces

In clashes between al-Shabaab, the Somali National Army (SNA) and AMISOM eight al-Shabaab fighters were killed near the village of Goof Gaduud (Bay region) on 22 August 2016 and on 14 August 2016. Seven al-Shabaab fighters and eight Somali soldiers died in an attack on a Somali army base near the village of Moragabey (Hudur region) on 22 August 2016. Several soldiers were wounded in an ambush on a SNA and AMISOM convoy near Belet Weyne (Hiiran region) on 23 August 2016 after SNA and AMISON had taken control of the villages of Luuq, Jelow, and Baar near to Belet Weyne. In an attack on an al-Shabaab training camp near Qansah Dhere (Bay region) the SNA killed an Islamist commander and seven fighters on 23 August 2016. A civilian was killed and three were injured in the shelling of a government building in Mogadishu's Hamarweyne district on 23 August 2016. On 25 August 2016 five SNA soldiers were wounded by an exploding bomb in Bulo Mareer (Lower Shabelle region).

Sudan

Christians facing death penalty

According to a press release of the Society for Threatened Peoples two Sudanese priests, a Czech missionary and filmmaker as well as a human rights activist who converted to Christianity are facing the death penalty. Their trial started on 21 August 2016. They had been arrested already in December 2015 and had for the most time not been allowed to contact their families and lawyers. They are charged with espionage, inciting to hatred and violence against the authorities, discrediting the state and disseminating false information against the state. The Czech missionary had made a film on the persecution of Christians in Sudan without official approval and had been supported by three of his co-defendants.

Nigeria

Blasphemy: Eight people killed by mob

The governor of the north-western state of Zamfara, Abdulazis Yari, informed that a student in the small town of Talata Mafara had been beaten up by fellow students at the local polytechnic on 22 August 2016 after making a contemptuous remark about the Prophet Mohammed. The owner of a neighbouring shop took him to hospital. When the students learnt that their victim was still alive, they marched to the hospital where the victim was taken to safety by police. The mob then burnt down the shop of the man who had helped him

and moved on to his private home. They set fire to the house burning the wives and children of the helper, eight people in total.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Calls for a general strike in Kinshasa meets with response

The call of the largest opposition alliance Rassemblement to hold a nationwide general strike on 23 August 2016 met with response, especially in the capital Kinshasa. The police fired tear gas at dozens of followers of the main opposition party UDPS who had set up barricades near their party headquarters in the Limete district and were throwing stones. The purpose of the strike was to underline the opposition's call for the resignation of President Kabila at the end of his constitutional term in office on 19 December 2016.

Zimbabwe

Almost 70 arrests after protests

The police arrested almost 70 people for protesting in response to the call for mass protests against President Mugabe by an opposition alliance on 26 August 2016. The government denounced the rally as illegal, although the High Court had sanctioned it. The police used water cannons and tear gas. The crowd threw stones and some protesters set tires on fire and looted shops.

It was the first time since 2007 that the fragmented opposition had united again to protest against Mugabe. Mugabe warned later that there would never be an "Arab Spring" in Zimbabwe. The 92-year-old president has been in power since 1980. His opponents accuse him of failing to take action against the economic crisis and the food shortage. Another mass rally is scheduled for Friday, 02 September 16.

Tajikistan

Amnesty for thousands of prisoners

On the occasion of the upcoming 25th anniversary of independence from the former Soviet Union the central Asian republic of Tajikistan announced an amnesty for over 12,000 prisoners. The amnesty does not apply to extremists, terrorists, and murderers. About 10,000 criminal offenders had been released during the last amnesty in 2014. Critics accuse the authoritarian President Rahmon of uncompromisingly pursuing his political opponents. The 63-year-old president has led the country for the last 20 years. In May 2016 he had secured the possibility to stay in power indefinitely by means of a referendum.

Tajikistan, which is predominantly Muslim, had declared its independence from the Soviet Union on 09 September 1991. It is a country of high mountain regions on the border to Afghanistan that is considered to be susceptible to Islamist extremism. Tajikistan is among the poorest of the five former Soviet Republics in Central Asia and has a population of about eight million.

Kyrgyzstan

Casualties in large Moscow fire

In a large fire at a printing plant in the north of Moscow 17 female workers from Kyrgyzstan lost their lives. The media reported that most of them were young women. They were trapped in a changing room on the fourth floor without escape to the outside. It is assumed that the fire was caused by a defective light on the building's first floor.

Not only men from the poorer Central Asian countries migrated to the Russian Federation to support their families, but also many women. A spokesman of the Russian interior ministry stated that the workers had been staying legally in the Russian Federation.

Philippines

Islamists kill hostage

The military informed on 25 August 2016 that the Islamist Abu Sayyaf organisation killed a Filipino hostage on Jolo island after their ransom demand was not met. In April and June they had murdered two Canadian hostages. The group, that pledged allegiance to IS, is suspected of holding more hostages. According to the military's information of 26 August 2016 six members of the group were killed in fights with Abu Sayyaf on Jolo.

Islamists liberated from prison

Members of the Islamist organisation Maute, that is loyal to IS, liberated eight Islamists from the prison in Marawi on Mindanao on 27 August 2016, the men had been arrested a few days earlier. Also other inmates seized the opportunity to escape from the prison.

Thailand

Bomb attacks

Two bombs exploded at an interval of about 20 minutes near a hotel in Pattani, capital of the province of the same name, on 23 August 2016. No-one was injured by the first explosion, but the second one killed one woman and injured about 30 persons. Bombs had exploded in several locations in Thailand already on 11 and 12 August 2016 (see BN of 15 August 2016). So far no-one claimed responsibility for the bombings. Some observers suspect the Muslim separatist organisation Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) that is active in the country's south.

Vietnam

Prison sentences for activists

On 23 August 2016 a court in Khanh Hoa province sentenced the activists Nguyen Huu Quoc Duy and Nguyen Huu Thien An to three, resp. two years imprisonment. They were charged with inciting to resistance against the state. They had published articles critical of the government on social media.

Columbia

Peace deal with the FARC

The government and the rebel organisation Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) announced a peace deal on 24 August 2016 after almost four years of negotiation. The agreement calls for the rebels' disarmament, a land reform, future political participation of the FARC, fighting against drug trafficking and compensations for the conflict's victims as well as legal proceedings to address all relevant aspects of this conflict. Both sides proclaimed a final ceasefire as of 29 August 2016. The agreement is scheduled to be signed in September and a referendum is to be held on it on 02 October 2016. The result of the referendum is still open. According to the polls there are about as many advocates as opponents of the deal.

The smaller rebel organisation Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) continues its activities, its talks with the government stalled.