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Group 22 - Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

9 January 2017

Afghanistan

Armed conflicts

Armed conflicts, attacks and bombings continue in which civilians are also being killed or wounded. According to press reports, the following provinces have been affected in recent weeks: Laghman, Nangarhar, Uruzgan, Helmand, Kunduz, Maidan Wardak, Farah, Jawzjan, Ghazni, Badakhshan, Nimruz, Logar, Sar-i-Pul, Kapisa, Takhar, Herat, Nuristan, Paktia, Paktika, Balkh, Zabul and Faryab (where armed conflicts have led to more than 1,800 families being displaced). On 4 January 2017, two Bundeswehr helicopters on a flight from Kunduz to Mazar-e Sharif came under fire. It is thought the Taliban is responsible for the attack. Armed conflicts erupted between nomads and residents over land usage rights in Logar on 7 January 2017. One person was killed and three were wounded.



Targeted attacks

On 19 December 2016, a bomb exploded in front of the provincial council in Logar (centre). There were no casualties. In Nangarhar (eastern Afghanistan), a bombing was carried out against a district chief, wounding eight persons.

On 20 December 2016, a member of the Red Cross was abducted in northern Afghanistan.

On 21 December 2016, two children were killed in a bomb attack carried out in Zabul (southern Afghanistan), two children and one woman were wounded.

On 22 December 2016, eight persons were killed in the bombing of the home of a Member of Parliament in Kabul, seven persons were wounded. In Kandahar (southern Afghanistan), several persons, including children, were killed in a number of incidents.

On 26 December 2016, one police officer was killed and eight were wounded in a bomb attack against the deputy chief of police of Helmand (southern Afghanistan). Unknown gunmen shot a physician in Nangarhar (eastern Afghanistan).

On 29 December 2016, unknown gunmen shot dead a representative of the Hindus and Sikhs in Kunduz (north-eastern Afghanistan).

On 30 December 2016, one civilian was killed in a bombing in Kandahar (southern Afghanistan), two civilians were wounded.

On 1 January 2017, a man was beaten to death by the Taliban in Faryab (western Afghanistan).

On 2 January 2017, one police officer was killed and five were wounded in a bombing targeting a district chief of police in Logar (central Afghanistan).

On 3 January 2017, a suicide bomber was killed at a mosque in Zabul (southern Afghanistan) when his belt containing explosives detonated prematurely. The Taliban abducted ten workers in Kandahar (southern Afghanistan).

On 4 January 2017, an employee of school authorities was gunned down in broad daylight in Ghazni (south-eastern Afghanistan).

On 5 January 2017, members of the Taliban shot a police officer in Nawa district, Helmand province (southern Afghanistan). Suicide bombings were carried out in Jalalabad (the capital of Nangarhar, eastern Afghanistan), in Parwan (central Afghanistan) and in Faryab (western Afghanistan), killing several civilians and wounding others.

On 6 January 2017, a bomb detonated in the Pul-i-Sokhta district of Kabul. There were no casualties.

On 7 January 2017, eight miners were killed and four were wounded in a bombing in Baghlan (north-eastern Afghanistan).

Police attacks were reportedly carried out against journalists in Herat, Farah and Nangarhar.

Death sentence

19 of 76 detained kidnappers were sentenced to death in Herat (western Afghanistan) on 20 December 2016. The kidnappers belong to five groups who had abducted 35 persons in Herat in the past eight months.

Private prisons

Residents of Kunduz province claim that illegal armed groups have been running private prisons Kunduz province.

Lashings

In Ghazni province (south-eastern Afghanistan), members of the Taliban claim they punished six men with 25 to 39 lashings for committing a number of different offences.

Pakistan

Christian accused of blasphemy

A Christian was accused of blasphemy in a village near Lahore on 6 January 2017. He reportedly tore up the Koran and threw the pages onto the street. Police officers arrested him and members of his family in order to prevent riots from breaking out.

Turkey

Attacks

On 1 January 2017, a shooting spree at a night club in Istanbul claimed the lives of 39 persons. ISIS has claimed responsibility for the attack. The gunman is still at large.

On 5 January 2017, four persons were killed in front of a court building in Izmir in a gunfire exchange between police officers and suspected Kurdish extremists after the police officers had tried to stop a vehicle at a checkpoint. According to reports by the official news agency Anadolu, two of the extremists were shot dead, a third is said to have fled the scene. One police officer and a court clerk were reportedly killed, the extremists reportedly detonated a car bomb when they fled the scene.

State of emergency extended

Turkey's government has extended the state of emergency by 90 days until 19 April 2017. The Turkish Parliament passed a relevant motion on 3 January 2017. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had declared a state of emergency after an attempted coup on 15 July 2016. Ongoing terrorist attacks were given as the reason for extending the state of emergency.

Further dismissals

On 7 January 2017, three new decrees were issued, according to media reports, suspending more than 6,000 government employees from their jobs and banning dozens of organisations. They include 2,687 police officers, 1,699 civil servants working at the Ministry of Justice and 838 civil servants working at the Ministry of Health. Hundreds of civil servants from other ministries as well as 631 academics and eight members of the national council have reportedly also been dismissed. Since the failed military coup in July 2016, over 41,000 persons have been arrested and more than 100,000 persons have been dismissed or suspended from their jobs.

The new decrees now permit the Turkish authorities to sell businesses taken over by the government after the attempted coup that have been placed under enforced government administration.

Syria

Ceasefire failure

The ceasefire brokered by Russia and Turkey which entered into force ten days ago has since been broken by both sides. The Syrian Air force bombarded above all the rebels in the Barada valley that is important for the water supply to Damascus as almost 70 percent of drinking water comes from the capital of this region. After a bombing destroyed the pumping station in the Barada valley two weeks ago, disrupting the water supply, the Syrian Army and allied militia launched an attack on 8 January 2017 in a bid to restore the water supply. Armed clashes and bombings continue unabated. At least 48 persons were killed in a car bombing in the north Syrian city of Azaz on 7 January 2017. According to members of the opposition, a car bomb detonated at a market in front of the court building which was completely destroyed. Azaz which is located north of Aleppo near Turkey is under the control of the rebels. At least ten persons were killed and several persons were seriously wounded in a bombing carried out in the coastal town of Jablah on 5 January 2017 when a car bomb detonated, according to media reports. ISIS is being blamed for the attacks.

Iran

Ex-President Rafsanjani dies

Hashemi Rafsanjani died of a heart attack in Tehran on 8 January 2017 at the age of 82. He had been President of the Islamic Republic from 1989 to 1997 and was one of the most influential politicians who sought contact with the West.

Yemen

More than 60 killed in armed clashes

According to army sources, 55 Houthi rebels and 13 pro-government forces were killed in two days of fighting between the Yemeni Army and Shia Houthi rebels close to the strategically important strait of Bab al-Mandab. UN sources say more than 7,000 persons have been killed since the military intervention led by Saudi Arabia began in March 2015.

Morocco

Mohammed-Al-Fatih schools to be closed

According to the Ministry of the Interior in Rabat, all Mohammed-Al-Fatih schools in Morocco are to be closed within 4 weeks as they allegedly spread the ideology of the movement linked to Turkish national Fethullah Gülen which the Turkish government is cracking down on. The group's ideology and ideas are contrary to the principles of the Moroccan educational and religious system, the statement said. The closure of seven schools catering for a total of 2,500 pupils has reportedly been ordered in Rabat, Fes, Casablanca, Tanger and Tetouan.

Egypt

Suicide bombing on the Sinai peninsula

At least eight police officers were killed and 13 persons were wounded in a truck bomb attack on an Egyptian security checkpoint carried out at the holiday resort of El-Arish on the Sinai peninsula on 8 January 2017. The bomb was concealed in a road sweeper. So far, no group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Somalia

Bombings

At least three persons were killed in two car bombings at a checkpoint near the headquarters of AMISOM and at a popular hotel in Mogadishu on 2 January 2017. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Three persons were killed in a bombing of a District Commissioner convoy in Baidoa (Bay Region) on 31 December 2016. The District Commissioner remained unharmed. Al-Shabaab also claimed responsibility for the attack. Unknown gunmen shot a Colonel of the Somali Army in the Yaqshid district of Mogadishu on 3 January 2017.

At least four guards were killed when a car bomb detonated in Mogadishu on 4 January 2017. The explosives concealed under a UN-owned vehicle detonated at a garage beside the premises of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Armed conflicts

Al-Shabaab militants killed three Somali troops in an ambush carried out on 2 January 2017 close to Yurkud in the north of Gedo Region. Somali troops and Kenyan AMISOM units seized the town of Busar on 3 January 2017 in the south of Gedo Region, taking it back from Al-Shabaab.

New ceasefire agreement concluded between Puntland and Galmudug

The President of the semi-autonomous regions of Puntland and Galmudug agreed a ceasefire in Mogadishu on 2 January 2017. Puntland and Galmudug have been embroiled in a conflict since September 2015 over control of the town of Gaalkacyo in Mudug Region (cf. BN of 7 November 2016). This is the third ceasefire agreement to be reached since hostilities broke out.

Elections

243 newly-elected Members of Parliament were sworn in on 27 December 2016 amidst strict security precautions. The election was marred by numerous accusations of corruption and bribery. The presidential election scheduled for 28 December 2016 which had been postponed several times is now due to take place on 24 January 2017.

The parliamentary election involved an indirect election. Around 14,000 delegates selected by 135 clan elders voted for the Members of the Lower House of Parliament. Representatives of the regions elected the 43 Members of the Upper House of Parliament. Both Houses of Parliaments will elect the President.

Gambia

Dispute over presidential office comes to a head

According to a report published in the online Freedom Newspaper on 4 January 2017, the Commander of the National Republican Guard (NRG), General Saul Badjie, has begun handing out uniforms to rebels. They are considered to be the bodyguards of the Gambia's current President Yahya Jammeh who refuses to stand down despite being defeated in the presidential election held on 1 December 2016. The Army Chief declared his loyalty to Yahya Jammeh, the outgoing President, in a public address delivered on New Year's Day according to the pro-government Daily Observer newspaper. According to the newspaper, the Army Chief said the Army supported Jammeh. After failed negotiation attempts, the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) decided on 29 December 2016 to deploy troops to Gambia. According to the mandate, units of the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) are to be led by Senegal. Their mandate is to protect the President-elect and the population and to ensure the presidential election runs smoothly. 19 January 2017 is considered to be the last date for preventing intervention by the ESF. This is the day on which President-elect Adama Barrow must be sworn in according to the Constitution. Yahya Jammeh responded to the announced intervention by ECOWAS in his New Year's address broadcast on 31 December 2016, saying the envisaged deployment of troops was a declaration of war. He closed down three radio stations on 1 January 2017. The Chairman of the Electoral Commission, Alieu Momar Njie, fled Gambia to Senegal on 3 January 2017 according to reports by the news agencies AFP and Reuters. Several of his staff members have reportedly fled too. On 10 January 2017, the Supreme Court commenced hearing the petition filed by President Jammeh which claims that mistakes were made in counting the votes,

Mali

Head of NGO abducted

The French Ministry of the Interior confirmed on 25 December 2016 that the head of a non-governmental organisation which helps children suffering from malnutrition had been abducted. Authorities are looking for Sophie Petronin who was kidnapped on 24 December 2016. The Ministry did not divulge any details about the circumstances under which she was abducted.

Chad

Border with Libya closed

Chad closed its border with Libya for fear of Islamist terrorists and armed militia. The border region is now a military zone, Chad's Prime Minister Albert Pahimi Padacke said on 5 January 2017. The move is intended to prevent any disruption of the peace, he said. According to the most recent military successes against the terrorist organisation ISIS, some extremists have converged towards Chad, the Prime Minister said on national television. The border spans hundreds of kilometres through a sparsely-populated desert area. It therefore remains unclear how effective Chad will be in its attempt to close the border which is unsecured in some places.

Nigeria

Boko Haram: Army seizes camp in the Sambisa Forest

On 24 December 2016, President Muhammadu Buhari announced that the Army had seized the zero camp of the Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram in the heart of the Sambisa Forest on 23 December 2016 following military operations lasting months. He said this was the last stronghold of Boko Haram in the Sambisa Forest where rebels had been hiding (the Sambisa Forest spans around 1,300 square kilometres, south-eastern Nigeria in the capital of Maiduguri in Borno State, Nigeria). According to President Buhari, terrorists are on the run and no longer have a place to hide. In a video broadcast on 29 December 2016, Abubkar Shekau, one of the leaders of at least two Boko-Haram groups denied reports that they had been driven out of the Sambisa Forest.

Boko-Haram: Hostages released and Army arrests

According to Army sources, the Army freed around 1,880 civilians from the clutch of Boko Haram and arrested over 500 Islamists in the Sambisa Forest between 14 and 21 December 2016. Around 2,600 civilians thought to belong to Boko Haram were arrested in the two subsequent weeks.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Agreement reached between the government and the opposition on road map for change of power by the end of 2017

On 31 December 2016, an agreement brokered over several weeks by the Catholic Bishops' Conference was signed by the government and most members of the opposition, laying out the road map for a peaceful transition from the regime of the current President Joseph Kabila to his democratically-elected successor. The core issues of the agreement include:

The presidential election scheduled for November 2016 will be held before the end of December 2017;

President Kabila, whose second and final constitutional mandate ended on 19 December 2016, will remain in office during the transitional period but will not seek a third mandate;

Ban on constitutional amendments during the transitional period that would allow President Kabila to run for a third time;

Formation of an interim government under the leadership of the largest opposition alliance Rassemblement (Rally) which has spearheaded the protests against President Kabila remaining in office up to now;

Formation of a National Transition Council under the management of the President of Rassemblement, Etienne Tshisekedi, who will oversee observance of the agreement.

Fatalities at protests against President Kabila remaining in office

Anti-government protests erupted on 19 December 2016, the day on which President Kabila's constitutional mandate was due to end at midnight and on 20 December 2016, with protestors demanding that Kabila step down. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, at least 40 civilians participating in the protests in the cities of Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, Goma and Matadi were killed by security forces on 23 December 2016. Around 107 persons were maltreated or wounded and at least 460 were arrested.

Burundi

Minister assassinated

In the early hours of 1 January 2017, the Minister for Water, the Environment, Regional and Urban Planning, Emmanuel Niyonkuru, was assassinated by gunshot in Bujumbura.

Côte d'Ivoire

Mutiny of troops – the situation has calmed down

The situation has calmed down in the aftermath of a mutiny by troops. According to the latest reports, gunfire has ceased; the troops have erected roadblocks and have withdrawn to their barracks.

On 6 January 2017, several troops seized control of Bouaké, the country's second-largest city. Troops throughout most parts of the country then joined the mutiny. According to eye witness accounts, gunfire erupted at an Army base in the economic capital of Abidjan on Saturday. Although the parties agreed at negotiations to terminate hostilities, this was not supported by all mutinying troops. Shortly after news of the agreement leaked, the Minister of Defence, other government representatives, journalists and troops involved in the negotiations were temporarily suspended. The troops are demanding pay increases and better working and living conditions.

Bouaké had been the scene of a rebellion in 2002 when insurgents seized control of the north of the country. This led to civil war that raged on until 2011 when president Laurent Gbagbo was overthrown. The Army meanwhile comprises former government troops and former rebels and is divided. Troops forced the government to pay bonus arrears when they staged a similar mutiny in 2014.

FYROM Macedonia

Re-run brings no change – stalemate continues

The re-run of the election demanded by the opposition owing to irregularities in a polling district did not change the original outcome of the parliamentary election held on 11 December 2016 (cf. BN of 12 December 2016). The former government party VMRO-DPMNE (the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity) garnered 38.1 percent of the votes (51 seats) and the Social Democratic Union in opposition garnered 36.7 percent of the votes (49 seats). The remaining seats went to the Albanian minority parties which will now determine the government formation. The election was intended to end the political stalemate that has lasted almost two years. The EU has voiced its concern over the ongoing tension.

The Albanian minority (which accounts for around 25 percent of the population) is represented by a large number of parties in Macedonia. It has previously always been the case that both ethnic groups in Macedonia took turns leading the government, although they were reliant on forming coalitions with minority parties to form a majority. This explains why it was generally one of the two the large Albanian parties (the DUI or the Democratic Party of Albanians) was part of the government. The Democratic Union for Integration party (DUI or BDI (Bashkimi Demokratik për Integritim) formed a coalition most recently with VMRO-DPMNE under Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski.

Kosovo

Statutory health insurance launched

Reports are circulating that the statutory health insurance adopted back in 2014 (Law No.04/L-249) was launched on 1 January 2017. The health insurance scheme is designed as a contributory and non-contributory insurance scheme. The scheme involves the provision of basic healthcare services. The insurance will cover all persons who have paid contributions into the mandatory health insurance scheme, members of their immediate families and persons who are exempt from paying health insurance premiums. In future, non-insured persons will have to pay for medical treatment themselves. No further details are known. However, improvements in access to healthcare services are expected to take time. Gaps remain in the medical infrastructure.

Up to now, there has been no statutory health insurance in Kosovo. Basic medical services were offered by public health centres free of charge or were subject to payment of a small fee. It is anticipated that there will be difficulties in the transition in the early days.

Bangladesh

Increase in number of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar

Since October 2016, at least 50,000 Muslim Rohingya have arrived in the coastal region of Cox's Bazar in the south-east of Bangladesh from Myanmar where the vast majority of the population is Buddhist. They said they had fled discrimination, oppression and armed clashes in Rakhine State, one of Myanmar's 15 states and regions.

Myanmar

Violence erupts in Rakhine State: Interim report

On 3 January 2017, an interim report was published by the government Investigation Commission on violence associated with ambushes on checkpoints in Rakhine State on 9 October 2016 (cf. BN of 10 October 2016) and the subsequent response from security forces. It says there were no cases of genocide and religious persecution against Muslim Rohingya. Violent armed attacks in the Maungdaw region were conducted by the Islamist organisation Aqa Mul Mujahidin and the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO). Charges have been filed against 485 suspects. Human Rights Watch has criticised the fact that no inquiry has been conducted.

By the end of 2016, around 50,000 Rohingya had fled violence to the neighbouring Bangladesh .

China

Xinjiang: Several persons killed in an attack on county party offices

Five persons, including three assailants, were killed in a clash at a branch of the Communist Party in Moyu district (Hotan Prefecture) on 28 December 2016. The assailants armed with knives and a bomb stormed the Moyu County party offices.