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Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

26 October 2015

Afghanistan

Security situation

The situation in Afghanistan remains unchanged, with continuing attacks and hostilities. Apparently, the Taliban insurgents are increasingly undertaking large-scale attacks on targets of strategical importance or on provincial and district centres, in addition to the guerrilla tactics practised so far. Apart from Taliban members, an increasing number of IS terrorists is active in the country.

Last week, Taliban insurgents seized the centre of Ghormach district (northern Faryab province) and captured the province police chief and several policemen. On 23 October 2015, the dead body of the police chief was found. The army has started an offensive to retake control of Ghormach district. In the fights, 15 civilians were reported killed; however, exact figures are not available. Apparently, the conflict has so far displaced around 7,000 people. In eastern Nangarhar and southern Zabul provinces, ten insurgents, among them six IS fighters, were killed in military operations, as was reported by official sources on 19 October 2015. In central Kapisa province, an attack of 2,000 Taliban fighters on Ala Sai district was fended off on 19 October 2015. The province has been the scene of intense fighting during the last two weeks. On 20 October, at least 20 Taliban fighters were killed in a joint military operation conducted by Afghan and U.S. forces in central Logar province. On 21 October 2015, fighting erupted between security forces and Taliban insurgents in Ghorian district of western Herat province. In southern Helmand province, the armed forces started an attack on the Taliban who are threatening the districts of Nad Ali and Greshk and also the provincial capital of Lashkargah. In southern Kandahar province, a Taliban attack failed on a police station in the town of Spin Boldak bordering Pakistan. In northern Jawzjan province, at least 20 Taliban militants were killed in operations of the security forces intended to clear the area of militants on 22 October 2015. The situation in the province remains uncertain.

In northeastern Kunduz province, at least 70 civilians were reported killed and 180 wounded during the last weeks.

Targeted attacks have also occurred, e.g. in Andkhoy district of northern Faryab province on 19 October 2015, where six civilians were killed and 15 others wounded in an attack on a former jihad commander. In western Farah province, six police officers were reported missing from their checkpoint. The Taliban claim that the policemen had defected and joined the insurgents. In northern Jawzjan province, a tribal leader from neighbouring Balkh province was abducted and executed by Taliban militants. On 20 October 2015, at least three people lost their lives in Jalalabad (eastern Nangarhar province) in an attack on a police vehicle. In northern Faryab province, a bomb attack on a former commander of Junbish-i-Islami forces killed five people and injured another 19. On 22 October 2015, a member of the provincial council of Nangarhar survived a bomb attack unhurt. In southeastern Ghazni province, the district chief of Jaghatu was killed by Taliban militants. In the capital of southern Kandahar province, a bomb went off near a local radio station. On 26 October 2015, two security guards working for the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission were killed and two others wounded in a bomb attack in Jalalabad (Nangarhar province).

Iraq

Hostages liberated

During the night of 22 October 2015, US, Kurdish and Iraqi forces jointly started a raid on an IS prison near the town of Hawija (roughly 300 km north of Baghdad) and rescued some 70 Kurdish hostages. One member of the US force was killed in the operation, officials say. Apparently, the operation was conducted following a request from the Kurdish side. The hostages were facing imminent execution, it was reported.

Iraqi forces claim success against IS rebels

The Iraqi security forces reported that they have fully retaken the city of Baiji, roughly 200 km north of Baghdad, from the IS militants. Baiji is situated on the main road between Baghdad and the IS-held city of Mosul. For months now, the Iraqi army and Shia militias allied to them have been trying to retake the town. In their most recent offensive, they were backed by U.S.-led airstrikes.

Mass graves detected

Apparently, Iraqi forces have found 19 different mass graves containing 365 bodies in the town of Baiji (Salahaddin province). As yet, there is no information on whether all of the corpses were IS combatants and at what point in time they were killed.

Human Rights Watch accuses ruling KDP party of killing protesters

Human Rights Watch says that security forces of President Massoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) are responsible for the death of five protesters who were killed in the beginning of October 2015. The forces had opened fire on protesters in two Iraqi cities, the organisation said. In the beginning of October, thousands of people had gathered in several towns and cities across Sulaimaniya province in protest against the deteriorating economic situation and against corruption. During these protests, offices of the ruling party had been attacked and set on fire, HRW stated.

Annual Ashura ceremony under tight security

The gathering of millions of Shiites for the Ashura religious commemoration passed under tight security imposed in Kerbala province. The pilgrim route from Baghdad to Kerbala and the city of Kerbala were guarded by more than 20,000 policemen and soldiers.

Cholera infections

On 21 October 2015, the UN reported that the number of cholera infections had exceeded 1,600 cases. The Iraqi government has reported a total of 1,800 cases and six deaths from the disease.

Syria

New Russian airstrikes

Since Russia's intervention began in late September 2015, a total of over 900 aerial missions have been carried out in Syria, resulting in the destruction of more than 800 targets, the Russian military reported. Also, Russia's air force is deployed to support the ground offensive against President Assad's opponents in the greater Aleppo area.

Persistent ground fighting

Ground fighting is also continuing in Syria. On 23 October 2015, IS militants cut off an important Syrian army supply route to Aleppo southeast of the city. In this region, the opposition forces are apparently fighting against the regime and fighters from the Lebanese Hezbollah, from Iran and also against IS militants. The UN reports that some 35,000 people have escaped to rural areas west of Aleppo from southern suburbs of Aleppo, from Hader and Serbeh. The rebels are controlling the eastern and southern parts of the city, while the western part is under the control of pro-government fighters.

HRW urges Russia to give information on deadly attacks

Human Rights Watch has demanded information from Russia on airstrikes launched in the northern part of the city of Homs on 15 October 2015, which had claimed the lives of 59 civilians. One attack hit the house of

a local commander of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), killing 46 people, among them 32 children and 12 women. Both local residents and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights attribute these attacks to Russia's air force.

Russia and the US make efforts to find a political solution

Despite the unsuccessful outcome of a meeting between Russian foreign minister Lavrov and the US Secretary of State Kerry on 23 October 2015 in Vienna, both politicians intend to continue consultations on the conflict in Syria. Mr Lavrov wants other Middle East countries (Iran, Egypt, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan) to be included in the talks with the US. He also demanded elections in Syria as part of a political solution. While the US and its allies are demanding Bashar al-Assad's resignation, Russia is one of the closest associates of the Syrian regime.

U.S. Secretary of State holds talks with King of Saudi Arabia

On 24 October 2015, Saudi Arabia's monarch King Salman and US Secretary of State John Kerry agreed to increase support to Syria's moderate opposition. Both countries are conducting air strikes against IS militants in Syria and in Iraq. Furthermore, both politicians agreed that a political transition in Syria will only be possible without President Assad.

Pakistan

Attack on Shiite mosque and on religious procession

On 22 October 2015, a deadly blast of a suicide bomber hit a Shiite mosque in the town of Chalgari in southwestern Baluchistan province, killing at least ten people and wounding twelve more. Responsibility was claimed by Sunni terror group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, which has ties to al-Qaida. On 23 October 2015, another suicide attack was carried out on a Shiite religious procession in Jacobabad (Sindh); at least 33 people were reported injured in the incident.

Presently, the Shiite Muslims are observing the Sacred Month of Muharram in commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad.

In Pakistan, there is continuing inter-confessional violence between Sunni Muslims and the Shiite Muslim minority, committed or instigated by extremist groups. According to the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, 2014 saw a total of 71 incidents with 168 Shiites killed and another 226 wounded.

Bangladesh

Attack on Shia Muslim community

On 24 October 2015, a bomb attack was launched on a Shiite site in Dhaka, when people gathered for the annual Ashura procession. More than 100 people were reported wounded, one individual was killed. The IS has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Turkey

Deadly raid

In the morning of 26 October 2015, two police officers and at least four suspected IS militants were killed when police raided a house in the city of Diyarbakir, security circles said. Three IS insurgents were arrested. After the attack in Ankara on 10 October 2015, which had claimed the lives of more than 100 people, the Turkish security forces have stepped up crackdown campaigns on suspected IS terrorists.

Jail sentences in Gezi Park trial

On 23 October 2015, more than two years after the Gezi Park protests, a Turkish criminal court in Istanbul found 244 protesters guilty and handed down prison sentences from two to up to 14 months. Prosecutors had sought up to 12 years prison time for some defendants. Some of the sentences were suspended on probation or were changed into fine; seven defendants were acquitted. Four doctors, who had given medical aid to protesters inside a mosque, were sentenced to ten months in prison on probation for 'polluting a mosque'.

Other defendants were charged with crimes such as civil disobedience, violation of the law on assembly and damaging public property. Four defendants' cases were separated from the others.

Israel

Violent clashes between Israelis and Palestinians

On 21 October 2015, a 15-year-old Palestinian girl was shot by Israeli soldiers after a failed knife attack on a West Bank settlement. The army said that the suspected infiltrator had refused calls to halt. When she moved on despite warning shots in the air, the soldiers fired at her, injuring her slightly, the Israeli military stated. In the evening of the same day, Israeli soldiers shot dead a Jewish civilian they believed to be a Palestinian terrorist. A police spokesman said the suspected attacker had tried to beat the soldiers and to snatch their weapons.

Also on 21 October, another Jewish civilian was shot dead by security officers in a bus in Jerusalem after a dispute with two guards. When the man reached out for the weapon of one of the guards, he was considered to be a terrorist and killed.

On 22 October 2015, two Palestinians were blocked from entering a mosque in the town of Beit Shemesh near Jerusalem, as was reported by the Israeli police.

On 23 October 2015, more than 90 people were injured in clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinian protesters in the West Bank and in Gaza. When Palestinian protesters threw stones at the soldiers, the Israeli army used tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition to disperse the crowd.

On 25 October 2015, violence erupted between Palestinians and Israeli security forces in the city of Hebron/West Bank, after a Palestinian woman had attacked Israeli border police officers with a knife and was shot dead.

The Palestinian security forces have reported that Jewish settlers attacked and seriously wounded a 20-year old Palestinian near Bethlehem.

Agreement between Israel and Jordan on new rules for Temple Mount

Following talks with Jordan's King Abdullah II in Amman on 25 October 2015, US Secretary of State John Kerry announced at a press conference that Israel and Jordan have agreed on a 24-hour video surveillance at Temple Mount. This would aim for maximum transparency and help ease tensions on the site, he said.

Yemen

Data on the war in Yemen

The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other sources have stated that so far, fighting in Yemen has left 5,000 people dead and another 26,000 wounded, with 86 percent of those killed and injured being civilians. Almost 2.3 million people have fled their homes, and more than 21 million (about 80 percent of the population) were in desperate need of humanitarian assistance, it was reported. Many of those with the means to leave the country, that is Yemen's middle and upper classes, have already left, the reports went on.

Somalia

Consultative forum for 2016 elections

On 19 October 2015, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmake, parliamentary speaker Mohamed Osman Jawari, representatives of Puntland and of the interim regional administrations of Galmudug,¹ Jubaland² and the Interim South West Administration (ISWA)³ launched the National Consultative Forum (NCF) for the elections scheduled to take place in August 2016. In the next months, a series of regional consultations are planned to decide on the form of the 2016 electoral process that

¹ Galmudug comprises the southern half of the city and district of Gaalkayo in Mudug region and some more areas in Mudug and Galguduud regions.

² Jubaland comprises the regions Gedo, Middle Juba and Lower Juba.

³ ISWA (also called South West State of Somalia) comprises the regions Bay, Bakool and Lower Shabelle.

enhances the legitimacy of the incoming government and that enables all Somali citizens to play a role in determining the country's path. Ahlu Sunna wal Jamaa (ASWJ), a moderate Islamist militia fighting against al-Shabaab in central Somalia, was not invited to the consultation. ASWJ has meanwhile declared not to be bound by any decisions of the NCF.

Security situation

On 19 October 2015, al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the killing of a staff member of Somalia's finance ministry on the previous day. On 20 October 2015, two people were killed in violent clashes over grazing rights in Afgoi district (Lower Shabelle region). On the same day, the Somali police arrested two al-Shabaab commanders in Qoryoley (Lower Shabelle region). Also on 20 October 2015, the Somali army and AMISOM took control of the town of Wabho (Galguduud region) without a fight, from where al-Shabaab had retreated shortly before. After the takeover, al-Shabaab militants ambushed a convoy of Ethiopian AMISOM units out of the town. There is no information on casualties. On 22 October 2015, government troops pushed al-Shabaab fighters out of a village in Halgan area (Hiraan region); one militant was killed in the operation. On 21 October 2015, an Imam was shot dead in Abduwak town (Galguduud region) by unidentified gunmen. Local witnesses say that ASWJ was behind the attack. Abduwak is the site of ASWJ's headquarters. In September 2015, fighting between the transitional government forces of Galmudug and ASWJ had ended with the government troops taking over the town.

Egypt

Attacks in Sinai

On 24 October 2015, the secretary of the Salafist al-Nur party and candidate in Egypt's parliamentary elections was shot dead in the town of el-Arish. Al-Nur, who supports the Egyptian government's moves against the Muslim Brotherhood, has experienced a popularity decline.

Attacks on 23.10.15 and 24 October 2015 claimed the lives of one and three police officers respectively.

Secular coalition withdraws from parliamentary elections

On 24 October 2015, a coalition including 17 political parties and revolutionary movements of 2011 named 'Call of Egypt' declared to withdraw from the ongoing elections. In the first stage of the elections, the list had not managed to capture any of the seats designated for electoral lists. A coalition representative said that political opponents had bought votes, thus manipulating the results.

South Sudan

Famine risk

According to FAO, WFP and UNICEF, at least 30,000 people are living in extreme conditions and are facing starvation death, and another 10,000 are on the brink of famine. The worst affected area is the northern state of Unity.

Libya

Government rejects UN power-sharing proposal

On 19 October 2015, Libya's internationally recognized parliament in Tobruk rejected a UN proposal for a unity government. In the beginning of October, UN special envoy to Libya Bernardino León had negotiated a candidate list for the unity government after talks with 150 representatives of Libyan groups in the Moroccan city of Skhirrat, however without the participation of the rivaling governments and parliaments. Western and Arab countries had urged the conflicting parties to accept the compromise. It is unclear if and when the peace negotiations will be continued. Bernardino León's mandate for Libya terminates this October; the German diplomat Martin Kobler will replace him.

On 23 October 2015, at least five people were killed and another 30 wounded in Benghazi when rockets hit protesters who demonstrated against the UN power-sharing proposal.

Kenya

Hundreds of former terrorist group members return to Kenya

According to a report compiled jointly by IOM, the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims and the Kenyan interior ministry, around 700 Kenyan citizens have returned from abroad after quitting militant groups. The majority decided to return home after promises of economic benefits were broken, the report said. Others took advantage of the amnesty offered by the government in April 2015 for enlisted terror recruits. Although the report did not specify the terror groups the returnees initially joined, Somalia-based al-Shabaab and an IS branch operating in Somalia have been actively recruiting in Kenya, intelligence reports say. Some of the returnees said they were forcibly recruited, the report went on. The majority indicated they had received some form of military training; a third of them had been unemployed before joining the armed group.

Nigeria

Boko Haram: Attacks on mosques

On 23 September 2015, a suicide bomber (other sources say two bombers) blew himself up during morning prayer in Maiduguri (capital of northern Borno state), killing at least 10 people and wounding another 11. On the same day a minor suicide attacker detonated an explosive device in a mosque in Jimeta, the new twin city of Yola (capital of northeastern Adamawa state). According to information given by the civil protection authority, 27 persons lost their lives in the incident and nearly a hundred more were injured.

20 Pro-Biafran demonstrators charged in court

On 21 October 2015, police officers brought to court twenty arrested members of the secessionist organisation IPOB (Indigenous People of Biafra), which is campaigning for a separate Igbo state, on various charges like treason in the southern city of Port Harcourt. The defendants are accused of treason for having participated in an unauthorised demonstration in Port Harcourt on 20 October 2015, chanting war songs against the Nigerian state and destroying a Nigerian flag hoisted at a bank building. Apparently, 24 more people are held in custody of the judiciary police on the same charges. On 27 October 2015, the court will decide on a provisional release on bail of the 20 defendants. The demonstration had been organised to demand the release of Nnamdi Kanu, IPOB leader and director of the illegal radio station Radio Biafra. He had been arrested by the State Security Service (DSS) in Lagos on 16 October.

Republic of Congo

Several people killed in protests

On 20 October 2015, banned opposition protests against a referendum to change the constitution scheduled for 25 October were held in the capital Brazzaville and in the economic centre Pointe-Noir and led to violent clashes with the security forces. According to the police, at least four protesters lost their lives in the incident; however, Mpouele Paul-Marie, the President of the coalition of opposition parties FROCAD (Republican Front for the Respect of Constitutional Order and Democratic Change) gave a number of at least 20 fatalities. The referendum is about constitutional changes, the annulment of the term limitation clause for the presidency (two terms) and the age limit of seventy years, so that current incumbent Denis Sassou Nguesso, aged 72, can run for a third term. The opposition has called for a boycott of the referendum.

Cameroon

Attacks by Boko Haram

On 23 October 2015, fighters of the terrorist organisation Boko Haram captured the town of Kerawa in the northern region Extrême-Nord near the Nigerian border. Several civilians were killed in the incident. The arriving soldiers succeeded in driving the militants back over the border into Nigeria.

On 21 October 2015, the terrorists attacked the village of Doulo (Mayo-Sava district, Extrême-Nord region), killing eight villagers and injuring nine others.

Ukraine

Local Elections

On 25 October 2015, about 30 million people were called upon to elect their local representatives and mayors. The regions in eastern Ukraine controlled by pro-Russian separatists and the Crimea peninsula, annexed by Russia in 2014, were excluded from the elections. In the eastern Ukrainian cities of Mariupol and Krasnoarmeisk, which are controlled by the Kiev government, elections were cancelled due to mistakes on the ballot papers. President Poroshenko called the non-holding of elections disastrous and unacceptable. Official election results are not yet available.

Montenegro

Severe anti-government riots

For weeks now, the 'Democratic Front' of opposition parties, NGOs and students' associations have been staging protests against the government (see BN of 5 October 2015). Protesters are camping in front of the parliament to force the resignation of President Milo Djukanovic. Already for the second time this week, heavy riots have taken place leaving a number of people injured. A demonstration attended by about 5,000 participants staged on 23 October 2015 was dispersed by the police using tear gas against the protesters, after stones and Molotov cocktails had been thrown against the security forces. The Prime Minister has offered to convene early elections in October. The next regular parliamentary elections are set for spring 2016.

The wave of protests is triggered not only by corruption and nepotism, but also by the lack of economic prospects. Djukanovic has been governing since 1991. Also the EU criticises persistent shortcomings in terms of human rights and rule of law. Nepotism, widespread corruption and the influence of organized crime continue to be considered major obstacles to the country's development.

Western Balkans countries

Dramatic situation on the Western Balkans route

The influx of refugees on the Western Balkans route does not come to a halt. According to information provided by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the total number of refugees arriving in Greece has reached 473,000 as of 15 October 2015. On 19 October alone, a total of 8,000 more people escaped to Greece. Since Hungary closed its borders, the route has been diverted through Croatia and Slovenia. There, tightened border controls have brought the flow of refugees to a halt or else to a disorderly movement. Often, the situation is chaotic. Many refugees are forced to camp for days in cold and rain or to wade across cold rivers. In the reception camp of Brezice, several tents burnt down when a fire broke out on 20 October. Meanwhile, Slovenia feels unable to cope with the situation and has asked the EU for assistance.

Special EU summit on refugee crisis

On 24 October 2015, a special EU summit was held in Brussels including the Western Balkan countries concerned. The participants agreed to inform their neighbouring countries on any shift of the migration flows. Moreover, 50,000 places for refugees are planned to be created in initial reception camps along the Balkan route with support of the UN refugee agency, plus 50,000 more places in Greece. The plans include the improvement of the safeguarding services to the refugees and a better protection of the borders between Greece, Macedonia, Albania und Serbia with the help of FRONTEX. In Slovenia, 400 more police officers will be deployed to assist the local forces.

Kosovo

Opposition MPs let off tear gas in Kosovo's parliament

For the third time this month, opposition MPs have prevented the parliament's work by throwing tear gas at their fellow MPs (see BN of 16 October 2015). There were also street riots near the parliament building, with stones and Molotov cocktails thrown and car tyres set on fire. The opposition wants to achieve that the EU-brokered agreement is withdrawn, which would grant extensive autonomy to the Serb minority in Northern Kosovo. The opposition asserts that by implementing the agreement, the country would be divided in violation of the constitution. In the background, however, there is also a struggle for power. The opposition parties Vetëvendosje, Nisma and Ramush Haradinaj's AAK engage in a fight against Hashim Thaçi's governing PDK party.

China

Xinjiang: Authorities warn Uighurs against illegal emigration

Chinese authorities have made a film about two Uighurs who had emigrated and were returned from Thailand; the film also showed their suspected extremist motives for emigration. These two Uighurs are part of a group of about 100 others who had illegally left China and were then arrested in Thailand and returned to China in July 2015 (see BN of 13.07.15). In the beginning of August, the two men had been transferred to their home town in Aksu prefecture, where they underwent two months of re-education. The film shows both men confessing their guilt and saying that their conduct had been inspired by religious extremist thinking. Since August, the film has been shown to the local population as a warning not to emigrate illegally. The two Uighurs were brought before court; a verdict has not yet been passed. Given their alleged extremist motivation, a long-term prison sentence is expected. The fate of the other people who were returned to China is unknown.

For many Uighurs, illegal emigration appears to be a way to escape the repressive politics of the Chinese government in their homeland Xinjiang. In the last years, hundreds of them have fled from their homeland e.g. via Thailand. Many want to get to Turkey, where many Uighurs have found refuge. The Chinese authorities regularly accuse the illegal emigrants of having extremist (religious), separatist and terrorist motives. Lately, Chinese TV has repeatedly shown presumably forced confessions, e.g. of the critical female journalist Gao Yu and other prominent activists.

North Korea

Death penalty for those helping families to defect

On 19 October 2015, Radio Free Asia, citing North Korean sources, reported that anyone helping others to escape to China will be executed; relatives of the helper will be deported to remote regions. So far, only the helpers themselves were punished with prison sentences from five to seven years, RFA said. Regulations were tightened after several prisoners who had been released in amnesties granted between August and October 2015 had escaped to China with their families. Among the released prisoners there had been many alleged escape helpers and people who had been arrested for escape attempts, RFA stated.