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Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

15 May 2017

Afghanistan

Armed clashes

Fights are continuing, with cleansing campaigns and raids carried out by the security forces as well as attacks and assaults by the insurgents, in which civilians are killed or wounded. According to press reports, the following provinces were affected during the last week: Kandahar, Helmand, Zabul (south), Farah, Herat (west), Samangan (north: here, Taliban insurgents were trying to take control of the coalmines in Dara-i-Suf Bala district), Faryab (north), Nangarhar (east), Kunduz (northeast) und Badakhshan (northeast; government officials say that Zebak district has been recaptured from the Taliban). In Barmal district of southeastern Paktika province, new fights have erupted between Afghan and Pakistani security forces (see BN of 8 May 2017).

Attacks and assaults

On 7 and 8 May 2017, four individuals were targeted in deadly attacks in the southern city of Kandahar. The victims were a staff member of the police headquarters, a police officer, a soldier and a media advisor of the provincial government.

On 9 May, a bomb attack killed the head of the Ulema Council (Afghanistan's highest religious body) together with seven of his students in central Parwan province. In western Farah province, a police officer was shot dead. In eastern Kunar, the head of the IS recruiting campaign was arrested. In eastern Nangarhar, three civilians were injured in a bomb explosion.

On 10 May, a road bomb detonated in southern Helmand province, killing one civilian and wounding four others. A similar incident in western Herat province claimed the lives of seven civilians, among them women and children.

On 11 May, a senior staff of a petroleum company was killed in northern Faryab. In Adraskan district of western Herat province, fights erupted between rivaling Taliban factions, killing at least 20 combatants.

On 14 May, a mortar shell attack on a children's playground in Laghman province left five children dead and two injured. The Taliban are blamed for the attack.

Albania

Large anti-government protest

On 13 May 2017, ten thousands of supporters of the opposition democratic party (PD) took to the streets of Tirana in protest against Prime Minister Edi Rama's ruling socialist party (PS). The opposition is accusing the government of being entangled in organized crime and demands Rama's resignation, the establishment of an interim government and the postponement of the elections which are scheduled to be held on 18 June 2017. For months now, the largest opposition party has been boycotting parliament and intends to also boycott the upcoming elections (see BN of 8 May 2017).

Prime Minister Rama, in turn, accuses the opposition of provoking a state crisis in order to prevent a comprehensive reform of the justice system. In his view, many judges and prosecutors are still closely affiliated with the democrats who had been the ruling party from 2005 to 2013.

There is international concern that the situation may escalate out of control.

Central African Republic

Rebel attack claims several lives

On 12-13 May 2017, several groups, among them rebels of the anti-Balaka militia, launched attacks against the south-eastern town of Bangassou near the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo. Their main target was the town's Tokoyo district where mainly Muslims live. Also, the UN peacekeepers' MINUSCA base was attacked. One of the peacekeepers and an unknown number of civilians were killed. Already on 8 May, five UN soldiers were killed in the neighbouring village of Yogofongo by insurgents suspected to be associated with the anti-Balaka militia.

China

Trial against human rights lawyer

On 8 May 2017, human rights lawyer Xie Yang pleaded guilty of charges of incitement to subversion before a court in Changsha (Hunan province). Officially, he has been released on bail, but it is likely that he was put under house arrest. So far, no judgment has been delivered yet. Xie Yang had been arrested in a crackdown against lawyers and activists which had started in July 2015 (see BN of 10 August 2015). In January 2017, his lawyer Chen Jiangang had said that he was tortured in detention.

Côte d'Ivoire

Army mutiny leaves one dead and several others injured

According to local media reports, mutinous soldiers killed at least one individual and wounded 16 others when attacking civilians. The incident happened on 12 May 2017 in Bouaké, the country's second largest city, when inhabitants requested the soldiers demanding their pay to go back to their barracks. Clashes and injuries were also reported from other parts of the country.

Already in January, a nation-wide mutiny had broken out (see BN of 9 and 23 January 2017), when soldiers demanded better pay. So far, the government has paid them only a part of the bonuses promised, referring to a financial squeeze after a collapse in the price of cocoa, the country's main export good. Many civilians fail to understand the soldiers' demands, which they consider to be excessive.

DR Congo

New national unity government

On 9 May 2017, President Kabila announced a list of 60 ministers and deputy ministers of the transitional government under the new Prime Minister Bruno Tshibala who had been nominated already on 7 April. The President kept most former ministers from his previous government; four new ministers were nominated from the opposition. Congo's main opposition bloc rejected the new government and called on Kabila to name a government that reflected the terms of the agreement concluded on 31 December 2016 (see BN of 9 January 2017).

New Ebola outbreak

A new Ebola outbreak has been registered in the health district of Likati (northeastern Bas-Uélé province), with nine suspected cases since 22 April 2017. Of these, three deaths were registered.

Eritrea/United Arab Emirates

UAE accused of airstrikes against Eritrean fishermen

According to reports provided by the Eritrean opposition group Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSADO), an attack of the United Arab Emirates airforce on Eritrean fishermen killed one individual and wounded several others on 11 May 2017. The incident took place in Eritrean waters in the Danakil region. RSADO handed over a list containing the names of the victims to the Sudan Tribune newspaper. Apparently, the victims were ethnic Afar from the village Edd (Nus-Zoba Central Southern Red Sea).

RSADO further reports that such airstrikes have been carried out again and again recently, targeting Afar civilians suspected of supplying goods to the Yemeni Houthi militias, who are targeted by the UAE in alliance with Saudi Arabia.

India

Around 1,000 civilians evacuated from Kashmir villages after shelling by Pakistani army

After continuing exchange of fire at the Pakistani border which has claimed the lives of at least two civilians, the Indian authorities evacuated around 1,000 residents of Jammu and Kashmir on 14 May 2017. Indian media reported that the Pakistani army had fired across the border, targeting Indian military positions and villages in Rajouri district. Observers fear that this incident may further escalate tensions between India and Pakistan over Kashmir.

Iraq

On 11 May 2017, around 40 families from western Mossul tried to cross the Tigris river to reach the areas liberated from the IS insurgents. Apparently, they were targeted by IS snipers. So far, 64 dead bodies have been washed ashore the Tigris river, among them those of many children. On 14 May, 16 women were reportedly shot dead who were trying to escape.

Unknown people have raised an IS flag in a refugee camp south of Mosul. This information has intensified feelings of insecurity, as it is now assumed that IS supporters or combatants have actually entered the camp. Since the beginning of the campaign, around 403,000 have fled from Mossul.

The Kirkuk governor stated that the number of internally displaced people living in his province has reached half a million. Reports say that Kurdish security forces have confiscated the documents of displaced Sunni Turkmen and expelled them from the province.

In the Abu Ghraib region near Baghdad, around 200 families have returned to their houses. Since 2014, security troops have been removing the explosives and landmines placed there by IS insurgents. Also in the Nineveh plain, reconstruction work has started, namely in the towns of Karamles, Bartella and Qaraqosh.

According to the Iraqi ministry of migration, around 40,000 displaced families have returned to Anbar province; roughly 11,000 families went back to Salahaddin province and around 5,000 to Diyala province. It is unclear whether the difficult situation in the refugee camps has increased the willingness to return.

Kosovo

Government loses no-confidence vote

On 10 May 2017, Kosovo lawmakers dismissed the government of Prime Minister Isa Mustafa (LDK) in a no-confidence motion. This has triggered new parliamentary elections set for 11 June 2017, more than one year prior to the expiration of the regular term. The ruling coalition of President Thaci's Democratic Party (PDK) and Prime Minister Mustafa's Democratic League (LDK) fell because not only the three opposition parties (AAK, NISMA; Vetvendosje), but also some deputies from the PDK voted against the government.

The vote followed months of political dispute among the two major coalition partners. The coalition did not receive the support of a majority in parliament to implement core projects such as the demarcation of the border with neighbouring Montenegro, a constitutional settlement for the ethnic Serbian minority or the establishment of an army. The border agreement with Montenegro remains the top condition to achieve visa liberalisation with the EU. Last year, the opposition had boycotted parliamentary work by firing tear gas for several months.

This is the third government in a row to fall before the end of its mandate. From its very beginning, the coalition was fragile, having been formed in December 2014 only in the absence of alternatives. The polarisation between the parties is most likely to continue after the new elections.

Fewer German troops in Kosovo

On 10 May 2015, the German cabinet decided to continue to be part of the NATO-led Kosovo Force, but reduced the ceiling on troops from 1,350 to 800, saying that the security situation in Kosovo remained stable.

Also, there were no indications of an imminent risk of deterioration of the situation and of increased threat, the Cabinet stated.

Libya

On 9 May 2017, the International Criminal Court prosecutor Fatou Bensouda said she was examining the feasibility of opening an investigation into migrant-related crimes in Libya and that her office was collecting information in order to indict the major actors. Presently, there are around 20,000 refugees from Sub-Saharan countries in Libya who are in practice being treated like slaves.

In Benghazi, severe fighting has taken place between the Libyan National Army (LNA) and Ansar Al-Sharia forces who control parts of the city, killing at least two dozens of LNA fighters by the middle of the week. There is no information on losses regarding the side of Ansar Al-Sharia and on civilian deaths. On 14 May, LNA conducted several airstrikes. Large parts of the city of Benghazi are sealed off, traffic has nearly broken down.

In the capital Tripoli there was heavy fighting in the city centre; two rival local militias (the Ghazewy and the Nawasi Brigade) were battling for control of the area. The kidnapping of the university's deputy head of finance has led to the cessation of all lectures. In recent months, university staff have repeatedly been the target of abductions.

After last week's meeting of rivalling army commander Khalifa Haftar and the head of Libya's transitional government Ferraz as-Serraj in Abu Dhabi, new negotiations are scheduled to be held in Cairo. Great hopes are placed on a possible accord between Haftar with his LNA and the transitional government to further stabilise of the country.

Nigeria

Boko Haram: suicide attack in Maiduguri

Police reports say that on 14 May 2017 around 1:30am, three male suicide bombers entered the university premises in Maiduguri (capital of northeastern Borno state). When they were detected by the guards, they detonated their explosive belts, killing themselves and one guard and injuring one soldier.

Pakistan

Attacks in Balochistan

On 12 May 2017, unknown men launched a bomb attack on the deputy chairman of Pakistan's senate, Abdul Ghafoor Haideri, killing at least 25 people and wounding another 42, among them also Haideri. The attack occurred in Mastung/Balochistan.

On 13 May, at least 9 workers were killed on a construction site near the port city of Gwadar/Balochistan when an attack was launched on a Chinese infrastructure project. So far, no-one has claimed responsibility, but it is suspected that behind the attack are nationalist rebels who reject the Chinese presence in the area.

Palestinian Autonomous Areas/Gaza

Al-Fatah wins municipal elections in the West Bank

On 14 May 2017, the central electorate commission published the preliminary results of the municipal elections in the West Bank. Al-Fatah, the ruling party of President Mahmoud Abbas, won in nearly all of the cities, including Hamas strongholds such as Hebron. With 53 percent, voter turnout was similar to the last elections held in 2012. The results came in as expected, since the rivalling radical Islamic Hamas party, which is ruling in Gaza, had boycotted the election. The boycott was the result of a longstanding intra-Palestinian political dispute.

Somalia

Attacks

On 8 May 2017, al-Shabaab fighters killed at least three soldiers of the Somali National Army (SNA) with a booby trap near Shalanbod town in Lower Shabelle region.

On the same day, a car bomb placed by al-Shabaab fighters right in front of the immigration ministry in Mogadishu killed at least eight people, among them a SNA major general. The attack was aimed at members of the security forces. On 9 May, al-Shabaab shelled an AMISOM base in Arbacow village outside Mogadishu. On 10 May, a clan elder was shot dead in the Waberi neighbourhood of Mogadishu.

Fighting

On 9 May 2017, al-Shabaab militants captured the town of Goof Gaduud in Bay region, killing at least 17 government soldiers. The town exchanged hands a number of times in the past year. On 11 May, al-Shabaab fighters clashed with Ethiopian troops in Hiraan region. Several ambushes were carried out along the road to Beledweyn near the villages of Garasyani and Halgan.

SNA soldiers beheaded

On 6 May, al-Shabaab militants beheaded two captured SNA soldiers near Mahady town in Middle Shabelle region.

Warning of withdrawal of AMISOM units

On 9 May 2017, Kenyan president Uhuru Kenyatta warned of a premature withdrawal of AMISOM troops from Somalia. Before this could happen, AMISOM would have to take control of al-Shabaab, he said. To avoid a security vacuum, he would let the Kenyan troops stay in Somalia until their mission was accomplished, he added. In occasion of the international Somalia conference in London, Kenyatta also called for an upsurge of AMISOM by an additional 4,000 troops. AMISOM is scheduled to exit Somalia in mid-2018. In the past, troop-providing countries like Burundi, Uganda, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya had threatened an early withdrawal for financial and logistic reasons.

Somalia conference

At a Somalia conference in London, the United Nations' humanitarian coordinator for Somalia, Peter de Clercq, said that 1.5 billion USD were needed to prevent a great famine. As yet, not even a third of the demand has been met, he said. German foreign minister Gabriel announced to increase Germany's help for Somalia from 70 million to 140 million euros. The German federal ministry for development intends to provide aid funds of 100 million Euro. British Prime Minister Theresa May urged the participants to support the Somali government and promised to contribute to the training of the Somali security forces by providing 27 million USD over the next two years. Somali President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo called for a lift on the arms embargo which had been imposed in 1992. It was difficult for the country's security forces to conduct their fight against al-Shabaab with light weapons alone, he said. Modern heavy weapons were needed to fight the well-equipped extremists, he added.

Sudan

Christians released

President Omar al-Bashir pardons two Christians who had been arrested in December 2015 and were sentenced to prison terms of 12 years each in 2016. A local pastor and a human rights activist who had converted from Islam to Christianity had been convicted of assisting in subversive activities, propagating false news and defaming the state. On 2 January 2017, one of their fellow inmates was released for lack of evidence. Another prisoner, a Czech missionary and film maker, was released in February 2017 after he had been pardoned by the President.

Syria

Government forces have recaptured almost all rebel-held areas around Damascus

Having reconquered the capital's suburb of Qaboun, the Syrian army now controls almost all former rebel areas. The recapture was preceded by nearly three months of air strikes. According to unconfirmed reports, government and rebels have agreed that about 1,500 trapped combatants and their relatives will be allowed to leave Qaboun on Sunday.

The loss of Qaboun is considered another major setback for the rebels who already lost the neighbouring district of Barzeh before. Following an arrangement with the government, hundreds of rebels and their families were transferred to the rebel-held province of Idlib this week.

Turkey

Arrests

On 12 May 2017, at least 57 former Istanbul stock exchange traders were arrested, media reports say. Apparently, the arrests took place in six provinces; more than hundred arrest warrants were issued. The suspected are accused of involvement in the attempted coup of July 2016.

Already on 30 April, a German translator working for the left-wing Etkin news agency (ETHA) was arrested, after an arrest warrant had been issued against her on terrorist propaganda and membership in a terrorist organisation charges. Since then, she has been held in provisional custody.

Yemen

UN: Cholera crisis

On 11 May 2017, the UN confirmed 51 deaths and over 2,700 infections of cholera within two weeks. Ten therapy centres have been opened in the country's capital Sanaa. The disease had broken out in October 2016 for lack of access to clean drinking water. Around 7.6 million people in Yemen (total population: around 27 million) live in areas at high risk of cholera transmission, the UN said.

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