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Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

3 November 2014

Afghanistan

Security situation

On 27.10.14, Taliban insurgents stormed a court in northeastern Kunduz city and killed six prosecutors, a police officer and one civilian. Two police officers and four prosecutors were left injured. In northeastern Badakhshan province, 19 insurgents and four police officers were killed in clashes. In Ghorak district (southern Kandahar province), a major operation was launched against the insurgents.

On 28.10.14, clashes in southeastern Ghazni province claimed the lives of three insurgents and of two civilians. A member of the Afghan Local Police (ALP) was injured. In Bagram district (central Parwan province), a NATO soldier was injured in a suicide attack.

On 29.10.14, clashes in Warduj district (northeastern Badakhshan province) claimed the lives of 15 insurgents, among them fighters from Chechnya and Uzbekistan. An air-raid in southeastern Paktika province killed a dozen insurgents.

On 30.10.14, incidents in southern Kandahar and in central Maidan Wardak province claimed the lives of six insurgents and two women; a dozen people were left wounded. In northern Faryab, two people were shot dead, one of them a staff member of the local school authority; three border police officers were wounded.

On 31.10.14, at least ten civilians were killed in a bomb blast in Mehtarlam, capital of central Laghman province. In clashes between two armed groups in Pashtunkot district (northern Faryab province), four civilians were killed and five others injured.

Am 01.11.14, a suicide car bomber killed six police officers and four soldiers in central Logar province, leaving at least 20 civilians wounded. North of Kabul city, a rocket launched by Taliban insurgents missed its target, a US base, and hit Bagram detention facility instead, injuring at least 26 prisoners. In southern Kandahar province, an unidentified gunman shot dead the deputy provincial governor who was attending a class at the university.

According to U.S. military estimates, 7,000-9,000 Afghan police or troops have been killed or wounded so far this year.

Internally displaced people

According to the UNHCR IDP update, the month of September saw an increase of 33,240 to a total of 755,011 internally displaced people. The major causes of displacement were armed conflicts between anti-governmental elements and Afghan national security forces as well as harassment and intimidation by insurgents, UNHCR reported. Other reasons included military operations conducted by the security forces, general insecurity, inter-tribal disputes, armed conflict between different anti-government factions and cross-border rocket shelling from Pakistan. Most refugees fled to Kabul province (11,722 individuals). Refugee movements were recorded from/within the following provinces: Kabul, Maidan Wardak, Logar, Kapisa, Parwan (central Afghanistan), Kunduz (northeast), Nuristan, Laghman, Nangarhar, Kunar (east), Ghazni (southeast), Helmand (south), Farah, Badghis (west).

Voluntary returns

In the first nine month of 2014, a total of 13,845 Afghan refugees voluntarily repatriated to their home country with the support of UNHCR, representing a decrease of 59% compared to the same period of last year. The majority of returnees came from Pakistan (9,918 individuals, 71.6%), while 3,734 (27%) came from Iran, the others from India, Tajikistan, Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Ukraine.

Deportations of Afghan nationals from Iran and Pakistan

According to UN figures, a total of 153,191 individuals not registered as refugees were sent back from Iran to Afghanistan, a decrease of 4% compared to the same period last year. 98% of these were young men staying illegally in Iran in order to look for work. In the same time period, Pakistan deported 6,388 individuals, representing an increase of 34% compared to last year. Nearly all of these deportees were men.

Pakistan

Security situation

On 28.10.14, a civilian was killed in a new border incident in Kashmir. Since 06.10.14, at least 20 civilians have lost their lives. Thousands of people have fled their homes on either side of the 'Line of Control' separating Indian- and Pakistani-controlled Kashmir.

In the army offensive against the Taliban, which had started in mid-June in the tribal region of North Waziristan, 1,150 extremists have been killed, the Pakistani military said. In Khyber tribal region, where the army began to intensify their offensive last week, eight soldiers and 21 Taliban insurgents were killed on 29.10.14. Since 13.10.14, more than 171,000 people have escaped from Khyber region to the cities of Peshawar and Kohat, it was reported.

In South Waziristan, a US drone strike launched on 30.10.14 killed at least seven people, among them a Haqqani Network commander known as Abdullah Haqqani, who is said to have ordered suicide attacks in Afghanistan. On 02.11.14, a suicide bomber killed at least 45 people at the Wagah road crossing between the Indian city of Amritsar and the Pakistani city of Lahore.

Iraq

Recent developments

According to Iraq Body Count (IBC), at least 1,797 civilians were killed in Iraq in October.

The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) gave the following figures for the month of October: 856 civilians killed and 1,490 injured, 417 security forces members killed and 520 injured. Iraq's capital Baghdad was worst affected, with 1,362 civilian casualties (379 killed, 983 injured), followed by the provinces of Salahaddin (167 killed, 204 injured), Diyala (100 killed, 174 injured), Niniveh (87 killed, 9 injured), Babil (61 killed, 29 injured), Kirkuk (16 killed, 47 injured) and Karbala (17 killed, 40 injured). These figures do not include the number of victims in Anbar province.

According to a press release dated 01.11.14, Iraq Peshmerga Kurds launched a new offensive in Niniveh province to liberate the town of Sinjar from the control of the IS terrorists, with unspecified losses among the IS fighters.

Mass executions in Anbar province

On 30.10.14, between 150 and 220 bodies were found in Anbar province, as was reported by several media outlets. Apparently, the dead were members of the Sunni Muslim Abu Nimr tribe allied to the Iraqi government.

40 men, six women and four children were killed in the night of 02.11.14, it was reported. An Iraqi press release put the figure of victims at 67.

Already on 29.10.14, IS militant fighters were reported to have executed at least 30 male members of the Abu Nimr tribe in Anbar province (other sources put the figure at 48 victims at least).

Apparently, IS insurgents have taken 125 other hostages in Anbar province.

Bomb attacks in Baghdad

In Baghdad and its surroundings, several bomb attacks claimed the lives of at least 24 people on 01.11.14. One bomb was detonated near a tent for Shia Muslim pilgrims. Presently, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims are on their way to Karbala for the climax of the religious festival of Ashura taking place on 04.11.14.

Suicide attack near Jurf al-Sakhar

On 27.10.14, a suicide bomber killed at least 27 Shia Muslim opponents of the IS terror militia near the town of Jurf al-Sakhar.

Iran

UN concerned over increase in executions and restrictions on human rights

On 27.10.14, the UN rapporteur on the human rights situation in Iran warned about a recent surge in executions and the deteriorating human rights situation. Since moderate President Hassan Rouhani took office in June 2013, at least 852 people, including eight juvenile offenders, have been executed, the report said.

The rapporteur also criticised the record on freedom of information. He noted that 35 journalists are currently in jail, and about 300 individuals are imprisoned because of their religious beliefs, among them 120 Baha'is. In November, the UN General Assembly is expected to vote on a draft resolution put forward by Canada condemning human rights abuses in Iran.

Parliament rejects President Rouhani's third nominee for minister

On 29.10.14, Iran's ultraconservative-dominated parliament (Majlis) dismissed President Hassan Rouhani's third nominee for the post of science minister with a 160-79 vote against him. The decision shows the problems the President is facing with the implementation of the reforms he had announced in the election campaign. The choice is sensitive as the science minister also sets the ideological direction for universities, which have been a hotbed of pro-democracy protests against the conservative leadership.

Iranian woman detained after trying to watch a volleyball match

25-year Ghoncheh Ghavami, who has a British passport and dual British-Iranian citizenship, has been sentenced to a year in prison by a Tehran court. She was part of a group of women who tried to watch a men's volleyball match. Women are strictly prohibited from watching men's sport events. Amnesty International and the British Foreign Office spoke of an 'appalling verdict' and demanded the immediate release of the woman.

Yemen

Al-Houthi rebels extend their control further south

One day after their announcement of 28.10.14 to leave the Yemeni capital Sanaa, the al-Houthi rebels made new conquests in the southern parts of the country. They took control of the embattled city of Radmah (Ibb province), a local Sunni tribal fighter told the German news Agency dpa on 29.10.14. The Shia al-Houthi rebels fight for influence in the predominantly Sunni Muslim country. Since mid-September, they are in control of Sanaa, and started to advance further south two weeks ago. Both al-Qaeda insurgents (al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula AQAP) and Sunni tribes confront the rebels. The severe fighting has shifted to the southern al-Bayda province. Since 29.10.14, clashes in Radaa city claimed the lives of 26 al-Houthi rebels, Yemeni news site 'Al-Masdar Online' reported on 30.10.14, referring to information provided by tribal fighters. Three casualties were noted among the tribal supporters, the report said.

Shia and Sunni factions agree to form government

The Shia al-Houthi rebels and their Sunni opponents have agreed to form a government of technocrats in an effort to put an end to the severe crisis.

As was officially reported, both sides signed an agreement on 01.11.14 in the presence of a UN envoy in Sanaa, mandating President Mansour Hadi and Prime Minister Khaled Bahah to form a 'competent national government'. The parties involved in the conflict have also committed themselves to supporting the cabinet.

Syria

Jabhat al-Nusra jihadists seize positions of moderate rebels in Idlib province

Supported by IS militants, al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra captured the headquarters of the 'Syria Revolutionaries' Front' on 01.11.14, and the stronghold of the 'Hazm Movement' in Idlib province one day later. Both groups are alliances of smaller groups who have formed this year and are in possession of modern armour-piercing rockets apparently supplied by the U.S.. The commander of the Revolutionaries' Front, Jamal Maarouf, is accused of being a warlord and an opportunistic war profiteer. Apparently, he will be brought to justice before a Sharia court. With these territorial gains, Jabhat al-Nusra has largely eliminated the moderate rebels siding with the U.S. between Aleppo and Hama.

Reinforcements arrive in Kobane

On 31.10.14, a total of 150 Peshmerga fighters from northern Iraq arrived in Kobane (Ain al-Arab) with heavy weapons to support the Kurdish units. The Free Syrian Army (FSA) sent 200 fighters. Air-raids on IS bases have been continued under U.S. leadership.

Syria/Lebanon

Berlin conference on Syria refugee response

At the end of an international refugee conference in Berlin, German foreign minister Steinmeier announced on 28.10.14 that Germany would increase its assistance to Syria's neighbours providing them 500m euros over the next three years for humanitarian aid and development co-operation. In the last years, some 3-5 million Syrians (estimates varying) have fled abroad, most of them to Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon. In these countries, the massive influx of refugees has caused disruption and social tensions. Other countries were urged to contribute their fair share to the aid to Syria.

For the time period 2012-2014, Germany's contribution to the Syrian neighbours amounts to 630m euros. Additionally, Germany has committed 140m euros in extra funding this year for winter aid.

West Bank/Israel

Increase in violent incidents in east Jerusalem

Almost daily, clashes are occurring in Jerusalem's Arab neighbourhoods such as Silwan, Beit Hanina or Abu Tor, with Palestinians throwing stones and firebombs and Israeli police officers responding to the attacks. Experts fear the beginning of a 'Third Intifada'. The unrest started months ago and was overshadowed in July and August by the 50-day Gaza conflict. Most recently, Prime Minister Netanyahu's approval of a plan for the construction of 1,060 new housing units in east Jerusalem on 27.10.14 sparked massive protests. The plans include some 400 units in southern Har Homa and 660 in eastern Ramat Shlomo districts. On 29.10.14, the U.N. Security Council discussed the topic in an emergency meeting requested by Jordan. New fierce clashes erupted on 30.10.14 after Israeli police killed a Palestinian assassination suspect in Jerusalem and temporarily closed down the Temple Mount compound.

Turkey

Support for Kobane

On 01.11.14, thousands of ethnic Kurds took to the streets to show solidarity with the defenders of Kobane. The largest rally in Diyarbakir was attended by 15,000 peaceful marchers, Dogan news agency reported. In Istanbul, around thousand people gathered near central Taksim Square.

Tunisia

Parliamentary election results

According to the official final result released on 30.10.14 by the electoral committee, the secularist Nida Tunis party has won most seats (85 of 217) and is given a mandate to form a government. The ruling Islamist party Ennahda came second (69 seats) and conceded defeat. Running a distant third was the Free Patriotic Union (16 seats), followed by the Popular Front (15 seats) and the liberal Afek Tounes party (8 seats). The remaining 24 seats were split among another dozen small parties. Nida Tunis has ruled out a coalition with Ennahda and announced to turn to a collection of smaller parties to gain the necessary 109-seat majority.

West Africa/Ebola

Recent developments

According to information provided by WHO on 29.10.14, the number of new infections recorded in Liberia shows for the first time a 25 percent reduction in cases compared to the previous week. The Liberian government is currently examining the figures in order to avoid a misrepresentation of data.

On 27.10.14, the newly appointed EU Ebola Response Coordinator Christos Stylianides presented an action plan in Brussels to fight the disease. He said that the overall number of hospital beds in the region needed to increase from 1,000 at present to 5,000 as soon as possible. With eight medical and support staff required per bed, at least 40,000 staff in place were needed, he added. The newly founded Energy Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) will be used to accelerate the mobilization of national capacities.

Entry restrictions

On 27.10.14, Australia decided to suspend entry visas for people from the Ebola-affected countries Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea. Entry is allowed only for permanent visa holders who must undergo a 21-day quarantine process before departure. People who have obtained a visa before 27.10.14, but who are not yet travelling, will be denied entry.

On 31.10.14, Canada suspended entry visas for people from Ebola-stricken countries.

On 30.10.14, North Korea imposed a 21-day mandatory quarantine for all arrivals from abroad. People coming from Ebola-affected areas will be quarantined in a government-appointed hotel under medical supervision.

Niger

Tillabéry region hit by several attacks

On 30.10.14, at least twelve people, including nine members of Niger's security forces, were killed in simultaneous attacks launched in the western Tillabéry region near the border with Mali. At the same time, an attack was launched on a prison in the town of Ouallam in what appears to have been an attempt to free the inmates, dozens of whom were able to escape. Another attack was launched at a camp in the region hosting Malian refugees.

Mali

French anti-terror operation

In the night of 29.10.14, clashes between French soldiers and approx. 30 AQMI Islamist militants in northern Tigharghar mountains claimed the life of a French sergeant from a parachutist unit and left two others injured in the night of 29.10.14. His death raised to 10 the number of French soldiers killed since January 2013. The French operation in the mountain region, which is believed to be a retreat area for Islamist insurgents, was a response to a new influx of Islamists and to increasing attacks against MINUSMA.

Nigeria

Boko Haram denies ceasefire claims and speedy release of the Chibok girls

In a video published on 31.10.14, the leader of the Islamist terror organisation Boko Haram, Abubakar Shekau, denied a ceasefire agreement which had been announced by the Nigerian government on 17.10.14. He stated that he did not know a man called Danladi Adamu, the alleged Boko Haram negotiator, with whom government representatives claimed to have negotiated the ceasefire. Shekau also excluded the release of more than 200 school girls who had been abducted in northeastern Chibok city in April 2014. The girls had been married off long since, and there was no way back in this war, he said.

Boko Haram bomb attack on bus station

At around 9:30am on 31.10.14, several bombs exploded at a bus station of the state-owned 'Gombe Line' in Gombe city (capital of northeastern Gombe State). Around 30 people were killed in the attack attributed to Boko Haram.

Boko Haram takes second largest city in Adamawa State

On 29.10.14, Boko Haram militants seized the city of Mubi, where the Adamawa State University is located. With a population of ca. 100,000, Mubi is the second largest city in northeastern Adamawa State. According to eye-witnesses, Boko Haram militants cut off the hands of several individuals who had stolen the belongings of inhabitants who had fled the city.

Burkina Faso

Military takeover

Around noon on 31.10.14, President Compaoré stepped down after violent protests against a planned extension of his term of office, and fled to neighbouring Ivory Coast on 01.11.14. He had come to power in a coup in 1987. According to opposition sources, the protests claimed 30 lives; the news agency AFP could confirm only 4 deaths.

In the afternoon of 31.10.14, army chief General Honoré Traoré declared himself head of state. However, in a radio address transmitted the following night, Lt. Col. Yacouba Isaac Zida, second-in-command of the presidential guard, stated that he would be the country's transitional leader. He also announced the suspension of the constitution and elections within three months. On 01.11.14, the power struggle among the military leadership was put to an end by Honoré Traoré declaring that the military leaders had unanimously decided Zida to become the new transitional President. Since the early morning hours of 02.11.14, thousands gathered at the main Place de la Nation in the capital Ouagadougou to protest against the military takeover. Under Burkina Faso's constitution, the president of the senate would have to take over after President Compaoré's resignation. In the afternoon, the army disbanded the demonstration using tear gas grenades and firing shots in the air, and occupied the broadcasting headquarters of state radio and TV station RTB. At least one demonstrator was killed. After a meeting between the military leadership and leading representatives of the opposition including the head of the largest opposition group in parliament, Zéphirin Diabré, a military spokesman announced in the evening of 02.11.14 that a 'transition body' would be appointed to reorganise the country in a 'broad consensus'.

Kosovo

Deadlock over government formation

Five months after the early parliamentary elections of 08.06.14, neither a new government has formed in Kosovo nor has the parliament started its work. Although Prime Minister Hashim Thaci's Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) won the parliamentary elections, it no longer has a working majority in parliament, as it has been outnumbered by a coalition of opposition parties who want to form a government themselves (see BN of 16.06.14 and 28.07.14).

On 01.10.14, parliament attempted to elect a speaker for the third time without success. The judgement of the constitutional court that only the winning party is entitled to nominate the speaker of the parliament, has led

to a stalemate: the opposition (although having gained the majority in parliament) can do nothing without the PDK, the largest group in parliament; but neither can the PDK form a government without a partner capable of gaining a majority. The PDK demands new elections. The opposition is against it. Media report that the international community has urged Kosovo to find a solution by 08.11.14 at the latest.

Ukraine

Pro-Russian separatists win elections in eastern Ukraine – EU will not recognise results

As expected, rebel commander Alexander Zakharchenko emerged victorious from the elections in eastern Ukraine organised by pro-Russian separatists on 02.11.14. According to the first post-election surveys, the head of government of the 'Donetsk People's Republic' proclaimed by separatists has gained more than 81% of all votes. In neighbouring 'Luhansk People's Republic', which is likewise not recognised, incumbent Igor Plotnitski has won the vote. Final results are due to be released on 03.11.14. The Ukrainian leadership's reaction to the elections was harsh criticism. President Petro Poroshenko called the vote a 'farce'. Also, EU High Representative Federica Mogherini spoke of illegal elections impeding the peace process. The European Union will not recognise the elections, she said. Russia, however, will do so. The will of the people in eastern Ukraine would be respected, Moscow's foreign ministry said.

The rebels want to use the elections to demonstrate their independence from the pro-western government in Kiev and to consolidate their power. There were no international observers present to monitor elections. Only pro-Russian parties took part in the voting, Ukrainian parties were barred from running.

Armenia/Azerbaijan

Negotiations to resolve Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

On 24.10.14, a summit was held in Paris in search of a resolution to the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia on the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. The French Head of State Francois Hollande first met with Azeri President Ilham Aliyev at the Elysee Palace. Then, he consulted Aliyev's Armenian colleague Serzh Sargsyan, before they held a dialogue meeting in the evening.

Background

In the 1990ies, Armenian separatists supported by the government in Yerevan assumed control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region which is inhabited mainly by ethnic Armenians. The conflict claimed approx. 30,000 lives. In 1994, a ceasefire was agreed, but there is still no peace treaty. Skirmishes are continuing. The most serious incident in recent time claimed the lives of more than 20 soldiers from both sides in August 2014.

Under international law, Nagorno-Karabakh is still considered part of Azerbaijan, which regularly threatens to reconquer the region, if no negotiated solution can be achieved.

India

Woman killed for 'witchcraft'

On suspicion of being a witch, a 55-year old woman has been tortured and beaten to death by her relatives. According to police, she was accused of having bewitched the son of her brother-in-law, thus causing his disease. Altogether, twelve individuals were arrested.

A report of the UNHCR states that every year, approx. 100 suspected witches become victims of physical assault, hostility or public humiliation. Despite frequent arrests, less than one percent of those accused are actually sentenced, the report says. Often, disputes among heirs or social jealousy are playing a role in witch hunts.

Bangladesh

Jamaat-e-Islami leader sentenced to death

On 29.10.14, the death sentence was handed down to Matiur Rahman Nizami, leader of Jamaat-e-Islami, the largest Islamist party in Bangladesh. He is accused of having played a key role as a militia leader in genocide, murder, torture, rape and other crimes during the war of independence from Pakistan in 1971. The defence announced to file an appeal. Jamaat-e-Islami has called for a country-wide general strike.

Myanmar

Talks between government, military and opposition

On 31.10.14, representatives of government, military and opposition met for the first time to hold talks in the capital Nay Pyi Taw. Together with President Thein, parliament speaker Shwe Mann, commander-of-chief of the armed forces Min Aung Hlaing, opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi (National League for Democracy – NLD) and representatives of other parties discussed key issues such as the ongoing peace negotiations with the ethnic rebel groups, political reforms, confidence building measures and constitutional amendments. It was agreed that parliament will consider amending the country's constitution. Other results were not disclosed. The talks are to be continued.

Among other demands, the NLD calls for the abolition of section 436 of the constitution, which reserves 25 percent of parliamentary seats for the military, effectively giving them veto power over constitutional change. Also, the NLD insists that section 59(f) be cancelled, barring Aung San Suu Kyi as candidate for presidency in 2015, as she has two sons holding a foreign citizenship.

Protests against alleged military violence

Already on 30.09.14, journalist Aung Kyaw (also known as Par Gyi) had been taken into military custody for suspected contacts with rebels of the Karen ethnic group in Mon State. According to military sources, he was shot dead when attempting to escape on 04.10.14. The incident, which came to light only on 23.10.14, raised international concern. Protest marches against the military's actions staged without prior police authorization have led to legal charges against some of the several hundreds of demonstrators.

On 28.10.14, more than 120 national and foreign NGOs called for the government to shine a light on the case of Sumlut Roi Ja, a member of the Kachin ethnic group who probably died in military custody in 2011. Apparently, she was kidnapped, raped and killed by soldiers.