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Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

26 June 2017

Afghanistan

Security situation

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:

On 20 June 2017, eight Afghan security guards were killed and two wounded in an attack on the largest US military base at Bagram (Parwan province, 75 km north of Kabul).

Apparently, suspected IS fighters and radical Islamist Taliban insurgents attacked Darzab district in northern Jowzjan province, capturing parts of the area. Reports say that Taliban and IS fought against each other and also against the security forces. Several security force members were killed, it was reported.

A road bomb in southern Helmand province killed five police officers and their commander.

On 22 June, a suicide bomber killed at least 36 people and wounded another 59 in Helmand province. Apparently, he was targeting Afghan soldiers waiting for their pay in front of a bank in the city of Lashkar Gah. The Taliban have claimed responsibility for the attack.

On 25 June, Taliban insurgents were reported to have killed at least ten police officers and wounded several others at a checkpoint at Salma dam in western Herat province.

Afghan forces recapture Tora Bora

Official reports of 19 June say that Afghan forces have completely recaptured the strategically important Tora Bora caves in eastern Nangarhar province. It was only on 14 June that IS militants had captured the location near the border to Pakistan from the Taliban after several days of fighting. The location became known as a temporary hideout of Osama bin Laden.

Elections

The elections originally scheduled to be held in May 2015 are now set for 7 July 2018. Disputes over electoral reforms and the composition of the electoral commissions have led to the delay of the parliamentary vote.

Albania

Socialists take lead in elections

Exit polls give a lead for PM Edi Rama (running for a second consecutive term) and his Socialist Party in Albania's parliamentary elections held on 25 June 2017, with 45-49 percent of the vote. With this result, the SP may decide to govern alone. The opposition Democratic Party came second with 30-34 percent, followed by the Socialists' former junior partner LSI (Social Movement for Integration). Voter turnout was at 45 percent.

The low voter turnout may reflect disappointment over corruption and lack of progress in everyday life. The average monthly income is around 340 Euro; one in three young people able to work is unemployed. In a representative survey, 56 percent of the respondents said that they would like to leave the country as soon as possible due to the social and economic crisis.

Since 2014, Albania has been an official EU candidate, hoping to begin accession negotiations by the end of this year. In its latest country report, the EU has criticised the slow and ineffective judiciary system and widespread corruption in Albania.

Central African Republic

New violence after peace agreement

On 19 June 2017, the government concluded a peace agreement with 13 of the country's 14 rebel groups in the Italian capital Rome. The rebel groups shall be given the opportunity to participate in the political process and to achieve the integration of their fighters in the army. Despite a ceasefire agreement, which was also concluded, at least 40 people (other sources put the figure at around 100) lost their lives in clashes between anti-Balaka militias and a faction of the Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de Centrafrique (FPRC) in the central town of Bria on 20 June.

In 2013, a conflict between predominantly Muslim rebels and the government had plunged the country in a civil war. Despite the establishment of a United Nations peacekeeping mission, violence has further escalated in recent weeks. Large parts of the country are now controlled by the rebels.

DR Congo

New rebel group attacks city of Beni

In the morning of 22 June 2017, armed fighters stormed Beni, the district capital in the eastern province of the same name and engaged in fierce fighting with the government troops. In the afternoon, security forces succeeded in driving the attackers out of the city. The military said that 13 of the assailants were killed and six others injured; three soldiers lost their lives. A rebel group named National Revolutionary Movement (MNR) has claimed responsibility. Its existence became known for the first time one week before the attack, when their spokesman John Mangaiko called to fight against President Kabila, demanding him to hold elections and then step down from office. It was only on 11 June that unknown attackers stormed the central prison of Beni and released 930 inmates, among them some 200 fighters of several armed groups.

Egypt

State of emergency extended

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has extended the state of emergency until October. During this time, special powers are in place for the security forces, and civil rights are restricted.

Attack on Christian Coptic church thwarted

In Alexandria, police has detained six individuals for planning to carry out an attack on a Coptic church. One of the suspects had planned to detonate an explosive device in the church, and another one wanted to blow himself up when police arrived at the scene.

FYR Macedonia

Fresh start after change of government

Nearly six months after parliamentary elections and a long and severe constitutional crisis culminating in a bloody attack on the parliament (see BN of 19 June 2017), the new government led by Social Democrat Prime Minister Zoran Zaev is determined to lead the country out of two years of political crisis.

For the first time since 2006, the national-conservative party of longstanding head of government Nikola Gruevski (VMRO-DPMNE) is no longer part of the government. Stripped of immunity and influence, Gruevski and his closest associates now face criminal persecution. Investigations have started against Gruevski and ten high officials for illegal party financing, money laundering and corruption.

The new PM is facing huge tasks, with a society that is deeply divided both politically and ethnically, a social and economic situation that needs correction, and an inflated administrative sector covering up a significant portion of unemployment (around 24 percent). The EU is demanding radical reforms and changes in personnel of judiciary and police. The Prime Minister hopes that the long-awaited EU accession negotiations will start next year.

Iran/Qatar

Iran seeks stronger relationship with Qatar

On 25 June 2017, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani stated after a telephone conversation with the Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, that Tehran would stand by Qatar's people and government. Iran's air and sea space would be open to Doha at any time, he added. On 5 June 2017, Saudi-Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Morocco had cut off diplomatic relations with Qatar and imposed a traffic and trade blockade.

Iraq

Mosul

On 20 June 2017, IS counterattacks were repelled in some of the liberated quarters of the city. Also, the Iraqi forces stated that they have brought the last road leading out of the old city under their control, thus completely encircling the IS insurgents. About 2,300 civilians were evacuated by the Iraqi troops via a new Tigris bridge. On 23 June, the Iraqi forces stated that they had rescued some 200 civilians trapped inside five booby-trapped houses and used as human shields. It is assumed that there are still several hundred IS insurgents hiding in the old city, holding around 100,000 civilians as hostages.

Also on 20 June, the reinstated city council decided to deport the families of IS insurgents and to relocate them to special camps. For weeks now, IS fighters have been carrying out revenge acts including murder in the camps and also in the city's liberated areas. Besides, the council decided to massively restrict influx to and internal migration within the city. In future, only those families will be allowed to return to the city who prove that they lived there before June 2014, and they will only be allowed to return to the same place of residence they had occupied before. The only exceptions will be for families whose houses have been destroyed. Family members of IS insurgents will be banned from returning to the city. The council's decisions have been met with harsh criticism, because many IS fighters did not join the terror militia voluntarily, meaning that many innocent people will be punished.

On 21 June, IS fighters blew up Mosul's Great Mosque of al-Nuri, where the caliphate had been declared by IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in 2014 and where he had made his only public appearance during a Friday prayer service. Government forces were just about to capture the mosque which is of high symbolic importance. Apparently, the IS insurgents wanted to prevent the end of the caliphate being declared in this mosque.

On 23 June, a mortar attack on a busy market in the liberated area of Mosul claimed the lives of at least 10 people. A suicide bomber mixed with the crowd escaping the site and blew himself up; the number of victims is not yet known. Three other assailants attacked several locations in the eastern part of the city and killed at least four people.

The conditions in the refugee camps around the city are marked by lack of food and medicine. On 19 June, the death of a starved child became known; this has been one of many such news in recent weeks.

Situation of children

On 22 June 2017, UNHCR released a statement saying that presently around 5 million children are in need of urgent humanitarian aid in Iraq.

Kirkuk province

Apparently, IS has ceased to use seals saying 'Islamic State' on its administrative documents in Kirkuk province. The background is unclear yet. It is presumed that this is a sign of infighting within the terror group. Still, a major part of Kirkuk province is controlled by IS.

On 20 June 2017, seven civilians blamed for cooperating with the Iraqi security authorities were executed and then dismembered in public after the prayer marking the beginning of the common meal of Fast-breaking (Eid al-Fitr) in the city of Hawija. IS insurgents are still controlling significant parts of western Kirkuk province.

Anbar province

In Anbar province, Fawaz al-Rawi, one of the most important finance facilitators of the IS terror group, was killed together with several other individuals in an air raid carried out by Iraqi forces. In recent weeks,

several leading IS cadres have been killed in Anbar province. In the area under IS control, air raids have killed several dozens of insurgents. Apparently, a suicide bomber blew himself up during a meeting of high-rank IS officers and killed several of them on 25 June 2017.

In Fallujah, stabilisation efforts are ongoing. Meanwhile, the important waterworks are operational again; a lot of explosive remnants of war have been cleared including five power plants, 12 health facilities, 13 sewage networks, 19 water points and 88 schools. Around 60 percent of the city's inhabitants have access to water again. However, mine clearing operations have not reached the same level in the living quarters. About a year ago, Fallujah was recaptured from the IS insurgents. Still, the city has been regularly targeted by IS terror attacks.

Diyala province

On 22 June, the Iraqi air force and the Popular Mobilisation Units announced a major offensive in order to recapture the remaining IS positions in the province.

Salahaddin province

In Salahaddin, a member of the so-called 'Cubs of the Caliphate' (children forcibly recruited to fight for the IS) was killed because he had refused to kill his family.

Libya

Tripoli/Tawergha/Misrata

On 19 June 2017, an agreement was concluded between representatives of the inhabitants of Tawergha and Misrata allowing for the return of displaced residents of Tawergha (an individual ethnic group of Libyans) to their home town which they had left at the end of 2011. A date was not set for the start of return. The government recognized by the UN is to monitor the return.

On 23 June, Mitiga airport was closed again due to new fighting around the airport's premises. The airport had only recently been reopened.

After the agreement on the right of the inhabitants of Tawergha to return home, some of them tried on 22 June to go back to their home town. However, they were forced back from the town by a Misrata militia.

On occasion of the 'Eid al-Fitr' (festival of breaking the fast), militias released several prisoners in both Misrata and Tripoli, among them 17 ethnic Tawerghas, some of whom had been detained for years.

Benghazi

The Libyan National Army (LNA) of Khalifa Haftar has brought Benghazi's Souq al-Hout quarter under control. Now, fights are moving to the northern parts around the old city which is still partly held by militant Islamists. On 23 June 2017, two soldiers died when a mine exploded in the part under LNA control. Apparently, LNA forces are now targeting the Al-Sabri neighbourhood north of the historic old town. On 23 June, they launched an intense bombing campaign in the quarter.

On 23 June the Benghazi Defence Brigades (who had fought against the LNA for several years and were recently driven out of Benghazi's Jufra neighbourhood) announced their willingness to disband and be integrated into a new Libyan army. Apparently, also local militias operating in Benghazi are being urged to dissolve. The small Al-Majouri Protection Forces seem to have done so and handed over their vehicles and weapons to the LNA.

Sirte

The US embassy has provided 5,000 Ramadan baskets for families in the city scarred by war.

Zintan

In recent weeks, signals of rapprochement have been sent from the city of Zintan (located in the west of the country, but adhering to the Tobruk government in the east) to the Presidential Council (PC) of the UN-recognized government. Representatives of both the Tobruk government and the PC have been invited for talks to Zintan, in an apparent attempt to position itself as some kind of neutral negotiator. At least the Council has signalled cautious support for the idea. Also, negotiations are underway with regard to the return of refugees to Tripoli from Zintan.

Ethnic Berbers (Amazigh)

On 22 June 2017, the Libyan Amazigh news agency Fassato reported that several officers of the ethnic Amazigh minority are planning to establish an 'Amazigh military council'. There is no further information on the current situation.

Mali

Tribal conflict between ethnic Fulani and Dogon

According to information provided by the Malian army, a tribal conflict in central Mopti region claimed the lives of 27 members of the nomadic Fulani (also called Fulbe or Peul) and of four ethnic Dogon people on 20 June 2017. Apparently, the clash was a revenge action of the Dogon for the killing of one of their people in the previous week. The Dogon are accusing the Fulani of colluding with cleric Amadou Koufa who is a member of an Islamist group.

Nigeria

Boko Haram: Suicide attack in Kofa village

Police reports say that on the evening of 18 June 2017, five female suicide bombers attacked the village of Kofa (near Maiduguri, capital of northeastern Borno state). Two of them were killed by security forces when trying to enter the premises of Dalori camp for internally displaced people. Two others of them blew themselves up near a mosque in Kofa; the last one detonated herself in a house, killing twelve villagers.

Boko Haram: Attack on police convoy

Roughly 30 km away from Maiduguri, an ambush on a police convoy heading for a funeral procession killed one police officer and one civilian and wounded another six individuals.

Pakistan

Series of attacks leaves many dead and injured

On 23 June 2017, a bomb placed in a car in front of the provincial police chief's office in Quetta (southwestern Balochistan province) killed at least 13 people and injured many more. In northwestern Parachinar, two explosions went off at a market, killing 37 people and injuring more than 150 others. The town at the border to Afghanistan is the capital of the semi-autonomous tribal area of Kurram, where there are frequent clashes between Sunnites and Shiites. The Sunni group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi appears to have claimed responsibility for the bombing. Another attack targeting police was reported in Karachi, capital of southern Sindh province.

Philippines

Fighting in Marawi

On 23 June 2017, the Philippine military communicated that Mahmud bin Ahmad, one of the most wanted Malaysian Islamists and a financier of the Islamists' attack on Marawi, has died from the injuries he sustained during the fighting in the city. Omarkhayam Maute, one of the two brothers leading the rebel group Maute in Marawi, was said to have also been killed. Fighting has resumed after the end of an 8-hour ceasefire proclaimed by the military in occasion of the end of Ramadan.

Security forces and school attacked by Islamists

On 21 June 2017, a group of fighters (with figures varying between 50 and 300 according to different sources) of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters BIFF apparently attacked a post of the security forces and stormed a school in Pigcawayan town in Mindanao Island (approx. 100 kilometres south of Marawi); however, the attacks could be repulsed. Four of the assailants and a member of a paramilitary unit were killed. BIFF is a splinter group of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and has committed itself to the Islamic State.

Saudi Arabia

Attack at Grand Mosque foiled

Saudi security forces say that they have detected a 'terrorist plot' and foiled an attack on Mecca's Grand Mosque, apparently planned to be carried out on 23 June 2017, marking the end of the month of fasting Ramadan. Five suspects were arrested, they reported. On that day, more than two million worshippers prayed at the Grand Mosque.

King Salman changes line of succession

The Saudi ruler has named a new heir to his throne and appointed his 31 year-old son Muhammad bin Salman as crown prince. He will become deputy prime minister and retains his defence portfolio.

About 150 executions carried out in 2016

Most of the executions (figure for 2015: 160) were for murder or drug offences. Around a third of the executions (47) were carried out in mid-2016 for charges of terrorism; among the executed was prominent Shiite cleric Nimr al-Nimr, which sparked protests in Iran.

Serbia

Serbia to elect first gay prime minister

Former Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić, who was elected President at the beginning of April, has nominated the former minister for public administration as Prime Minister. Although parliamentary consent is considered to be a pure formality, Ana Brnabic's nomination is controversial, because the 41-year-old woman does not belong to any party and lives in an openly lesbian relationship. Many politicians and the Orthodox Church have strong reservations against homosexuality, which is a taboo also among large parts of the population. Also, Brnabic entered the political arena as a newcomer only in August 2016 without any prior experience in the field. She is considered to be competent, European-oriented and independent, but loyal to Vučić. Observers expect that he will have an ongoing impact on the government's work, although as a President he will have representative tasks only.

The new government is due to be elected and sworn in at the end of June.

Somalia

New attacks in Mogadishu

On 20 June 2017, al-Shabaab militants committed a suicide attack by steering a truck against a local authority's building complex in the capital Mogadishu, killing at least 16 people. Among the victims were civilians and staff members of the authority.

On 21 June, another attack took place with a milk delivery van exploding in front of a government building. At least 15 people died.

On 22 June, at least 7 people died and 12 were wounded when an al-Shabaab suicide bomber tried to drive into a police station gate. The vehicle exploded at the building's wall.

Syria

Attacks

The Russian military has stated that it fired cruise missiles at Islamic State installations on 23 June 2017. Six missiles launched from two frigates and a submarine were directed at targets in Hama province and destroyed several IS command centres and weapons stores.

On 24 June, an Israeli fighter-jet attacked targets in Syria. The Israeli army said the operation was a reaction to Syrian attacks targeting the Golan Heights occupied by Israel. According to Syrian sources several civilians were killed in the attack. The Israeli military did not give any information on casualty figures.

Prisoners released

Media reports say that on 24 June, the government released 670 prisoners at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan. It is not known whether political prisoners were among the released.

Turkey**Legal proceedings initiated against prominent journalists**

On 19 June 2017, the first proceedings on the merits were opened against journalists who had been arrested after the attempted coup of July 2016. Among the defendants are Ahmet Altan, former editor-in-chief of the Taraf newspaper, and his brother Memet Altan, an economics professor and writer. The 17 defendants are accused of links to the Gulen movement and of involvement in the coup attempt. The trial against ten fugitive indictees is conducted in absentia. Most of the journalists have so far been held in custody without charge.

Gay Pride march banned

On 24 June 2017, a rally calling for equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people (LGBTI) scheduled for the next day in Istanbul was banned because of possible threats to the security of citizens, tourists and the public order. On 25 June, security forces prevented the activists from gathering on Istiklal Avenue, a central shopping promenade. According to media reports, police occasionally used tear gas and fired rubber bullets at the protesters. Several individuals were arrested.

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Briefing-Notes
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