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Group 22 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

20 March 2017

Summarised edition owing to reprioritisation of tasks

Afghanistan

Armed conflicts

Armed conflicts, cleansing campaigns and raids by security forces continue unabated; the same applies to suicide bombings and attacks by rebels in which civilians are being killed or wounded. According to press reports, the following provinces were affected last week: Nangarhar (eastern Afghanistan), Paktika, Paktia, Ghazni (south-eastern Afghanistan), Helmand, Kandahar, Zabul, Uruzgan (southern Afghanistan), Kunduz, Baghlan (north-eastern Afghanistan), Farah (western Afghanistan), Faryab (northern Afghanistan), Logar and Kabul (central Afghanistan).

Suicide bombings and attacks

On 13 March 2017, a minibus hit a roadside bomb in the 10th police district of the capital Kabul, killing one woman and wounding at least 29 persons who were employees of a telecommunications company. In Nangarhar (eastern Afghanistan) three children were killed when a booby trap exploded. In the 8th police district of Kabul, unknown gunmen shot dead two police officers. In Obe district of Herat province (western Afghanistan), members of the Taliban amputated the hand and foot of a young man who had reportedly committed a robbery.

On 16 March 2017, ISIS militants beheaded three tribal elders in Sayyad district of Sar-i-Pul province (in northern Afghanistan). In Samangan (northern Afghanistan), an important Taliban Commander and an explosives expert of the Jundullah militia were arrested.

On 17 March 2017, two Afghan troop were killed in a suicide bombing in Khost (south-eastern Afghanistan), wounding at least 29 persons, including civilians. In Nangarhar, one person was killed in a suicide bombing in front of a mosque. Another suicide bombing took place in Surkh Rod district of Nangarhar province. The bombing was targeted against the competent provincial officer responsible for Haj and religious affairs whose brother had been killed in the bombing.

On 18 March 2017, gunfire broke out in Faryab (northern Afghanistan) between supporters of Jamiat-e Islami and Junbesh-e Mellie.

On 19 March 2017, four police officers were wounded in a suicide bombing in Nesh district (Kandahar province, southern Afghanistan). In Helmand province, an Afghan soldier wounded three US troops in a so-called insider attack. In Farah province (western Afghanistan), three tourists were abducted by the Taliban.

Iraq

Tens of thousands of persons flee western Mosul

The Army announced on 14 March 2017 that it had gained control of the main railway station, also stating that government troops had gained control of the bus terminus located nearby. The railway station used to be an important transport and trade hub. It has been unused since the US invasion of 2003.

According to an estimate by IOM, almost 100,000 persons have fled western Mosul since fighting erupted there. The number of persons who have fled their homes has increased to around 230,000, the majority of whom are staying in camps.

Attack in Tikrit

At least seven persons were killed and according to official sources 40 persons were wounded in a car bombing in Tikrit on 15 March 2017. Last week, 30 persons were killed and at least 26 persons were wounded in an attack on a wedding party in the village of Hajaj around 20 kilometres north of Tikrit. The Iraqi Army had liberated the city from the clutches of ISIS in 2015.

Macedonia

President refuses to give the opposition a mandate to form a government

Although the current government party, the Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) led by Nikola Gruevski won the majority of votes at the parliamentary elections in December 2016, it failed to form a government. In early March 2017, the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) in opposition agreed with the strongest party of the Albanian minority party Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) to form a majority coalition and pledged to make Albanian an official language of the country.

Now President Gjorge Ivanov, who supports the VMRO-DPMNE, has refused to issue the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) with a mandate to form a government. Large-scale rallies that are obviously being encouraged by the former government party which sees its power diminishing are warning of "forced Albanisation" and are fuelling concern about a "Greater Albania" and a "binational state". It is feared that the conflict could destabilise the entire region. The political crisis in Macedonia has been ongoing since 2015.

Syria

Airstrike on mosque

The pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights says that at least 42 people were killed and dozens more wounded in an airstrike on a mosque during evening prayer in the village of Al-Jinnah held by rebels west of Aleppo on 16 March 2017.

According to a report by the AFP news agency, the US Army has claimed responsibility for the attack. The competent US Central Command announced at the same time that the mosque had not been deliberately targeted. Rather the attack was directed at a meeting of extremists belonging to the Al-Qaeda terrorist network that was being held at a building 15 metres away from the mosque. It claims the mosque is still standing.

Suicide attacks in Damascus

According to media reports, at least 39 persons were killed in two suicide attacks carried out in Damascus on 15 March 2017. The first suicide bomber reportedly detonated his explosive device in front of the judicial palace when police officers tried to prevent him from entering the building. Over 25 persons were killed in the bombing. The second suicide attack reportedly took place in Rabwa district in the north-west of the city when a suicide bomber detonated an explosive belt in a restaurant. Over 70 persons were killed in suicide attacks in Damascus on 11 March 2017.

Kurzausgabe