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Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

07 September 2015

Afghanistan

Security situation

The situation remains unchanged. There were more attacks targeting government representatives and more fighting between insurgents and security forces. In addition thereto, last week saw more intense violent confrontations between rivalling groups.

Internal conflicts among the Taliban

In the southern province of Zabul several people died in fighting between two rivalling Taliban fractions on 31 August 15. Also in Ghazni province (south-east) the Taliban fought another insurgent group on 01 September 15. In Kunduz (north-east) one Taliban fighter killed 14 of his comrades-in-arms. There were further armed internal clashes in Jawzjan and Faryab (north) on 02 September 15 which also claimed several civilian victims. Allegedly a large number of the fighters of the new Taliban head Mullah Akhtar Mansour are besieging the positions of Taliban leader Mullah Mansour Dadullah in Khan Afghan district in Zabul province (south), because he denied plead allegiance to the new supreme Taliban leader.

Internal refugees and combats

2,000 new internal refugees who left their homes for fear of military confrontations are reported from Kunduz province (north-east). In fighting on 02 September 15 at least twelve Taliban and one civilian died there. Also in Ghazni province in the south-east dozens of families fled the fighting in Qarabagh district. In Faryab (north) Taliban seized several villages and military equipment on 01 September 15. Military operations in Ahmadabad district in Paktia province (south-east) left at least 32 Taliban fighters dead on 02 September 15. Seven policemen were killed on 03 September 15 in a Taliban attack of a police checkpoint in Helmand (south).

Targeted attacks

The military attorney general of Baghlan province (north-east) was shot on 01 September 15, probably by Taliban. In Ghazni province (south-east) six civilians died in the explosion of a roadside bomb. It is unclear who is behind the attack, normally such IED (Improvised Explosive Device) are used by Taliban against vehicles of the security forces, thereby frequently causing victims among the civilian population. Unknown killers assassinated the 13 passengers of two vehicles in the Sari district of the northern province of Balkh on 04 September 15. The attackers stopped the vehicles and shot all male passengers. The victims were members of the Shiite minority of the Hazara. The Taliban denied responsibility for the killings.

Assaults of women

In Baghlan province in the north-east the Taliban forced an engaged and an already married woman to marry Taliban commanders. Two other women were murdered.

Iraq

Number of victims

Iraq Body Count (IBC) announced that according to their data 1,535 civilians had been killed in August 2015.

The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) reported 585 civilian casualties and 1,103 wounded (including the victims in Anbar province) for August 2015. Furthermore 740 members of the Iraqi army, Peshmerga fighters and other allies (excluding the victims caused by the Anbar operation) were killed and 708 were wounded.

Baghdad was most affected with 1,069 civilian victims (318 dead, 751 injured). The toll in Diyala province was 108 dead and 162 injured, in Ninive province 69 dead and 3 injured, in Salahaddin province 23 dead and 13 injured, and in Kirkuk province 17 dead and 15 injured. In Anbar province there were 187 civilian victims (39 dead and 148 wounded). UNAMI pointed out that these are the minimum figures, because the numbers of victims cannot be verified in the conflict areas.

Assaults

In a series of bomb attacks on market places and residential areas in Baghdad nine people were killed and 25 more wounded on 03 September 15. When a bomb detonated in Tarmiya (about 25 km north of Baghdad) three people died and eight were wounded.

IS executes tribal leaders in Mosul

An IS firing squad executed two Arab tribal leaders in Mosul on 03 September 15. They had been abducted by IS some time ago.

IS retakes areas in Iraq

The US Department of Defense stated that IS regained control of areas it had lost near the town of Baiji (Salahaddin province).

Turkish workers kidnapped

18 Turkish workers of a construction site for a football stadium in Baghdad were kidnapped in the night of 02 September 15. The motives for the abductions are still unknown.

Syria

UK and France to participate in US military operation?

Both countries are considering joining the US military operations in Syria. According to the Sunday Times British Prime Minister Cameron will seek approval for air raids of IS Syria from parliament at the beginning of October 2015. France and Australia joined the US-led alliance, but so far declined to attack Syria. According to information of Le Monde President Hollande has consulted about a change of policy with his defence staff in France. The reasons for this reportedly are the Syrian refugees, the lack of success in fighting IS and Russia's growing presence in the region.

The US advised Russia against extending its military support for Assad

On 05 September 15 US Secretary of State John Kerry voiced his concern about reports of Russian plans to massively expand its military support for the Syrian regime in a phone call with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov. He said that he feared that this might result in a further escalation of the conflict in Syria. The New York Times reported that Russia deployed an advance command to Syria and that housing units and a control station had been taken to a Syrian airport near the city of Lattakia. The US and Russia intend to continue their talks on the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York at the end of September.

IS releases hostages

Against the payment of Jizya (a tax for non-Muslims) IS released 15 Christian hostages it had kept for weeks in the village of al-Karjataan in Homs province on 04 September 15. IS had conquered al-Karjataan at the beginning of August and abducted at least 230 villagers, including many Christians. The priest Jacques Mourad who had been kidnapped from the Mar Elia monastery has not yet been released. The Vatican news agency Fides reported on 04 September 15 that negotiations about the release of Mourad and other Christian hostages, who are said to be in good health, are still ongoing.

Turkey

Fights with PKK

The media reported on 06 September 15 that at least ten soldiers were killed and many wounded when two army vehicles hit a booby trap in Daglica that had been planted by the PKK in Hakkari province (south-eastern Turkey). According to the report this started heavy fighting between the soldiers and PKK fighters, in which some of them were killed. Furthermore the report said that the army initiated a large-scale operation against the PKK in the region, including by deploying fighter planes. Turkish soldiers had stormed the city of Cizre near the Syrian border in the night of 06 September 15. Inhabitants said that several civilians were killed in the operation. Already on 04 September 15 a curfew had been imposed on the city of about 100,000 with a predominantly Kurdish population, after the PKK had stepped up its attacks against security forces. Two policemen were killed in what is suspected to have been an attack by the PKK in Diyarbakir on 06 September 15. Four policemen were killed in a bomb explosion by alleged PKK fighters in Mardin province on 03 September 15.

Iran

Enforcement of the dress code

The head of traffic police announced that cars will now be confiscated in Tehran when, in the view of the security forces, negligently veiled or unveiled women are riding in them. The owners need a court order to regain possession of their cars. Since the Islamist revolution in 1979 all women, including foreigners, must wear a headscarf or a chador.

Execution of a Kurdish activist

ai reported that Kurdish activist Behrouz Alkhani (30) had been executed on 28 August 15 although his appeal was still pending at the Supreme Court. Furthermore the authorities refused to release his body to his family. Alkhani's family confirmed his activities for PJAK, but denied that he had committed a murder. Amnesty criticized the procedure saying that Alkhani's execution had yet again proved the authorities' determination to continue its merciless wave of executions that had already taken a toll of 700 lives this year.

Yemen

Dozens die in bombings at a mosque

In two suicide bombings of a mosque in the capital Sanaa on 02 September 15 at least 28 people died according to information from the rescue forces. Doctors informed that about 75 people had been injured. Eyewitnesses said that a suicide bomber detonated an explosives belt. The jihadist terror militia IS claimed responsibility for the attacks. In the recent past IS terrorists had committed several attacks in Yemen.

Palestinian Autonomous Areas/Gaza

UNCTAD report warns that Gaza Strip may become uninhabitable

In the view of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) the Gaza Strip - subjected to war and blockades by Israel - might become 'uninhabitable' by 2020. In its annual report published on 1 September 15 the UN organisation says that the three Israeli military offensives since the end of 2008/beginning of 2009 had caused economic losses close to three times the size of Gaza's local gross domestic product. Already prior to the Israeli attack in 2014, that destroyed even more of the already inadequate infrastructure, only 40 % of the power demand in the Gaza Strip could be met. Last year the unemployment rate reached an unprecedented high of 44% and for young women even more than 80%. 72% of all households in Gaza have to battle food insecurity. According to the report the number of Palestinian refugees in UNWRA camps (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) that depend on UN food supplies increased from 72,000 people in the year 2000 to 868,000 in May 2015.

Israel

Israel is planning to build barricades on the border to Jordan

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced the beginning of the construction of barricades on the border to Jordan on 06 September 15. This is to prevent that Israel will be overrun by a wave of illegal migrants and terrorism. He said that the first section would run along the eastern border to Jordan from the beach resort Eilat to the newly planned airport near Timna. This will be the fourth barricade that Israel erects along its borders. There are already border fences along the border with Egypt, on the annexed Golan Heights with Syria and on the West Bank where walls and fences often deeply penetrate into the occupied Palestinian territory.

Somalia

AMISOM base attacked

In an al-Shabaab attack on an AMISOM base in Janale (about 80km south-west of Mogadishu, Lower Shabelle region) between - depending on the source - 12 and fifty Ugandan AMISOM soldiers were killed. Al-Shabaab announced that the attack was in revenge for an AMISOM attack of a marriage in which several guests had been killed in the town of Merka in mid-July. Observers see a link between this attack in Janale and another attack of an AMISOM base in June 2015 in which dozens of Burundian soldiers were killed. According to them Al-Shabaab uses such operations to prove its continuing fighting power and to convince the Somali population that AMISOM cannot even protect itself, let alone the population.

Mali

Tuareg conflict rekindled

After clashes between the Tuareg self-defence group Imghad, allies (Gatia) and the coordination of the Azawad movements (CMA) in three locations of the Kidal region, the UN mission MINUSMA declared the establishment of a 20 km security zone around Kidal already on 18 August 15.

Attack on UN mission

On 01 September 15 a MINUSMA UN convoy was shelled on the route between Gao and Ansongo and one person was wounded. Two Malian soldiers were shot by unknown persons in Timbuktu on the road leading to Taoudenit.

Chad

Death sentences for Boko Haram members

On 28 August 15 ten alleged members of the Boko Haram terror group were sentenced to death and executed on the next day. According to the court order that the AFP news agency had consulted, the charges included the formation of an illegal association, using explosives and illegal possession of arms and drugs. The trial took place at a secret location and dealt with the suicide bombings of 15 June 15, in which 38 people had been killed and 101 injured in the capital N'Djamena.

Already on 22/23 August 15 military commanders from Benin, Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria, and Chad had met in N'Djamena to finalize plans for putting together the joint international task force (MJTF) against Boko Haram. They decided that the headquarters of the 8,700 men force shall be in Chad's capital.

Cameroon

Casualties in bomb attacks

Two bombings of a military camp and a market place in the city of Kerawa (region Extreme Nord) claimed at least 19 lives and wounded many others on 03 September 15. Following first reports these attacks, that are

attributed to Boko Haram, were made by female suicide bombers. In February 2015 a battle between the terror organization and Cameroon's army had raged in the city.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Rebel leader standing trial at ICC

On 02 September 15 the trial against former rebel leader Bosco Ntaganda started at the International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague. 18 charges have been raised against him for war crimes and crimes against humanity, including recruiting child soldiers, murder, rape and sexual slavery in the Ituri district of the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2002 and 2003. Between 2002 and 2005 Ntaganda headed the military operations of the Union des patriotes congolais (UPC). In 2012 the ICC sentenced UPC leader Thomas Lubanga to 14 years in prison for recruiting child soldiers.

Nigeria

Military drives Boko Haram from the border town of Gamboru

On 01 September 15 the military retook the economically and strategically important border town of Gamboru from Boko Haram. The terror organization had occupied the city on the border to Cameroon in Borno state in May 2014.

Many casualties in attacks on villages

Unknown persons ambushed the villages of Kolori and Ba'ana Imam in Borno state on 31 August 15 killing at least 24 people. At least another five people died in an attack on the village Mainari in Borno state on 02 September 15. These incidents are blamed on Boko Haram.

More than 2.1 million internal refugees

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) informed on 04 September 15 that the Boko Haram conflict has so far caused more than 2.1 million people to flee internally in the federal states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, Yobe, and Nassarawa as well as in the federal territory of Abuja. More than 1.6 million internal refugees are living in Borno state alone.

FYR Macedonia

Thousands of refugees on the Balkan route - more and more women and children

According to official statements more than 50,000 registered refugees travelled through Macedonia only in the last three months. The actual figure is estimated to exceed 70,000. The United Nations are expecting up to 3,000 refugees daily for the next months. The number of refugees that crossed from Greece into Macedonia peaked at 5,600 on 03 September 15. UNHCR informed that this number was about double the usual number and that the development of the situation in the coming weeks was difficult to forecast.

The UN stated that more and more women and children are trying to get to the northern EU countries via the Balkan route, they now account for about one third of the refugees. Furthermore about 12 % of the women were pregnant, the UN said. After Macedonia failed to stop the flow of refugees at the border crossing to Greece with the use of force, it now allows them to pass unhindered. Special buses and trains are provided for an orderly onward transport to Serbia. A ticket costs EUR 10 per person. Meanwhile there is a reception centre for registration at the border to Greece and a first accommodation camp is being erected. The supply with water and food for the refugees has greatly improved.

Serbia

Serbia plans to set up transitional accommodation for refugees

Serbia is a mere transit country, just as Macedonia. UNHCR takes the new arrivals from Macedonia by bus to the small town of Presevo for registration. There are free buses from there to Belgrade. For months about

600 people have been camping out in parks near the bus station waiting for an opportunity to continue to the Hungarian border. The authorities and population are open and friendly, bringing food, clothes and diapers. Serbian Prime Minister Vucic stated that Serbia accepted its humanitarian and European responsibility and was also prepared to take in a certain number of refugees. The Interior Ministry several times banned rallies planned by rightist groups that wanted to incite the public against refugees. In view of the upcoming winter Serbia announced the construction of two transition camps in Belgrade and Subotica near the Hungarian border. Vucic met with German Chancellor Merkel in Berlin on 7 September 15.

Ukraine

New ceasefire held

So far the new ceasefire declared on 01 September 15 that the conflicting parties had agreed on at a meeting of the Ukraine contact group in Minsk on 26 August 15, has held.

On 31 August 15 three national guard soldiers were killed in an explosion in front of the parliament in Kiev and more than 90 were wounded. Unknown persons have thrown a hand grenade and fired shots during protests against the constitutional reform for Eastern Ukraine. More than 3,000 rallied against granting special laws to the regional and local administrations of the separatist controlled areas in the country's east by way of a constitutional reform.

Azerbaijan

Investigative journalist

The investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova was sentenced to seven and a half years imprisonment and a USD 300 fine on 01 September 15. She was also ordered to refrain from any public work for three years. Ismayilova was charged with embezzlement, tax evasion and abuse of powers. Her defence counsel announced that he will lodge an appeal. Khadija Ismayilova had been arrested in December 2014. Until then she had been a freelance contributor to the office of the broadcasting station Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty which she had headed from 2008 to 2010. She researched and reported on corruption and nepotism in the governing circles and the president's family.

Human rights activists given long prison sentences.

The human rights activist Leyla Yunus, who has received numerous awards, and her husband had been sentenced to eight and a half and seven years in prison resp. already in August on charges of fraud. Before her arrest Leyla Yunus had worked on a list of political prisoners and advocated reconciliation talks with Armenia about the conflict region of Berg-Karabach.

It is said that currently about eight journalists and four bloggers are imprisoned in Azerbaijan. Since the summer of 2014 several independent journalists and human rights activists have been arrested. In the ranking on freedom of the press Azerbaijan is listed as 160 of 180 countries.

More than 100 people are said to be imprisoned for political reasons in Azerbaijan.

Thailand

Man who planted bomb arrested

On 02 September 15 the Thai police issued a warrant of arrest against a Turkish citizen who is suspected to be responsible for the bombing on 17 August 15 that claimed 20 lives. The motives for the bombings are still unknown.

Draft constitution rejected

The reform council rejected a draft for a new constitution in Thailand on 06 September 15. The main reason for the new constitution's failure is said to be article 260 that provides for setting up a committee for reforms and reconciliation. This 22 member committee could have assumed power in times of crises.