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Directorate 22 - Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

4 May 2015

Afghanistan

Security situation

Fights, assaults and targeted Taliban attacks continued during the past week. In particular, the north-eastern province of Kunduz saw heavy fighting between insurgents and Afghan security forces. Military operations in the area are continuing; people living in villages around Kunduz, the provincial capital, were asked to leave their homes. Taliban attacks and military offensives also led to fighting in Zabul (southern Afghanistan), Faryab (northern Afghanistan), Ghazni, Khost (south-eastern Afghanistan), Uruzgan (southern Afghanistan) and Badakhshan (north-eastern Afghanistan). In addition, there were several attacks on government officials and institutions, for example on the director of the public health directorate in Kandahar (southern Afghanistan), on an advisor of the ministry of the interior and an employee of the prosecutor's office in Kabul, on a district chief in Nangarhar (eastern Afghanistan), on the governor's seat and on secret service employees in Farah (western Afghanistan), on two teachers in Kunar (east), on a tribe elder in Uruzgan (southern Afghanistan) and on a high-ranking official of the ministry for women affairs in Logar (centre Afghanistan). Attacks on Afghan policemen, which led to civilian casualties in some cases, took place in Khost (south-eastern Afghanistan), Nimroz (southern Afghanistan) and Badghis (western Afghanistan). In Helmand (south), a mosque was attacked on 29 April 2015.

Iraq

More than 800 people killed in April 2015

According to a UNAMI report dated 3 May 2015, at least 812 people were killed by violence and armed conflict in April 2015. At least 1,726 people were injured. Moreover, numerous people died from indirect effects of violence, such as lack of water or healthcare.

Hundreds of Yazidis killed?

Reports according to which IS fighters killed or kidnapped numerous Yazidis in Tal Afar near Mosul on 1 May 2015 have not been officially confirmed so far. On 2 May 2015, the Yazidi Progress Party spoke of 300 victims, the human rights committee (a non-governmental organisation) in Iraq of about 70.

Series of bombings in Baghdad

IS is being held responsible for a series of attacks that rocked Baghdad, the Iraqi capital, in the last few days. On 2 May 2015, a car bomb exploded in front of a restaurant in the city centre and killed at least 13 people; at least 40 were injured. Similar attacks on 1 May 2015 are said to have claimed 23 lives. Assaults took place in other provinces of the country, too.

IS establishes TV station in Mosul

Mosul residents reported on 27 April 2015 that IS established its first TV station in the city. The station is said to broadcast mainly sermons and reports on military operations and is reportedly called "Islamic Caliphate in Ninawah".

Iran/Iraq

MEK president invited to testify before US Congress

Maryam Rajavi, the president of the “National Council of Resistance of Iran” of the People's Mujahedin (Mujahedin-e Khalq-e Iran, MEK), was invited by the US Congress to testify on 29 April 2015 via videoconference on threats to her organisation from IS and other issues. About 2,900 MEK members have been interned in “Camp Liberty” in Iraq for some time now. Iran classifies MEK as a terrorist organisation. In the US, MEK was on the list of terrorist organisations until 2012.

Yemen

Precarious healthcare situation

On 29 April 2015, the ministry of public health reported that 70% of the hospitals might be closed down in the near future due to a lack of medical equipment. All international organisations were asked to provide medical relief.

Effects of air strikes

The severe Saudi-led air strikes have reportedly killed more than 3,500 people and injured 6,000 so far. Recently, the runway of Sanaa airport was destroyed, reportedly to prevent an Iranian aircraft from landing.

Turkey

Decisions in the Gezi process

On 29 April 2015, i.e. almost two years after the Gezi Park protests against the government in Istanbul, all 26 defendants were acquitted. Several of them are members of Taksim Solidarity, an umbrella group which had helped to organise the protests. The prosecution had regarded them as the leaders of the protest and charged them with having set up a criminal group and participated in unauthorised demonstrations. The prosecution had demanded sentences of up to 13 years in jail.

Initially, people had demonstrated against plans to construct buildings in the place of the small Gezi park in Taksim Square at the centre of Istanbul. The police's heavy-handed response and the government's unwillingness to yield had caused the protests to spread across the country.

Turmoil on 1 May

Despite a government ban on demonstrations, there were some protests in the centre of Istanbul on 1 May, five weeks ahead of the parliamentary elections. Using water cannons, tear gas and batons, the police cracked down on trade union members and demonstrators who tried to reach the central Taksim Square. According to reports, 203 demonstrators were arrested and 24 people, among them six policemen, injured. More than 1,500 participants had demonstrated peacefully for hours before the clash. The organisers had tried, but failed to negotiate with the police about marching to cordoned-off Taksim Square.

Syria

More than 2,000 executions by IS

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reports that, after having established a caliphate in parts of Syria at the end of June 2014, IS has executed at least 2,154 people outside of fights, among them 1,362 civilians, 126 IS fighters and 137 members of al-Nusra Front. 930 members of the Sunni Shaitat tribe were executed in the east of the country, and hundreds of others have gone missing. Moreover, numerous Kurds have gone missing in the battle of Kobane.

Civilians killed in air strike

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an air strike of the US-led alliance on IS positions near the city of Kobane killed at least 52 civilians on 1 May 2015. Allegedly, not one IS fighter was killed by

the strike. The Pentagon claimed that six air strikes destroyed seven IS positions and an IS vehicle, but did not mention any civilian casualties.

Togo

Presidential elections

Long-term head of state Faure Gnassingbé was re-elected for a third term in the presidential elections on 25 April 2015. According to the final result, which was confirmed by the constitutional court on 3 May 2015, Gnassingbé won 58.8% of the vote. Among the three remaining candidates, only Jean-Pierre Fabre obtained a significant share (35.2%). 3.5 million people were called to the polls. Voter participation amounted to 53 – 55 %. According to electoral observers sent by the African Union (AU), the elections were free, transparent and peaceful. However, the opposition complained of fraud.

A few days before the elections, amnesty international accused the government of having interfered with the freedom of assembly and free speech. The human rights organisation also claimed that the army had shot at protesters at a demonstration in March.

Benin

Government coalition wins parliamentary elections

According to the final result, which was confirmed by the constitutional court on 3 May 2015, the alliance Force Cauris pour un Bénin Emergent (FCBE) of president Thomas Boni Yayi won the parliamentary elections on 27 April 2015; it obtained 33 out of 83 seats. Voter participation amounted to about 66 %.

Burundi

Protests against president Nkurunziza continue

Protests against president Pierre Nkurunziza's running for a third term in office continued during the past week. At least seven people have died so far. According to police reports, two grenade attacks on police stations in Bujumbura killed two policemen and a civilian and injured several people on 1 May 2015. More than 400 people have been arrested so far, among them Pierre Claver Mbonimpa, a well-known human rights activists and government opponent. He was arrested on 27 April 2015. On 29 April 2015, the telecommunications authority blocked social media on the internet.

Kenya

LGBT rights strengthened

On 24 April 2015, the Kenyan High Court decided that the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (NGLHRC) can be officially registered. In 2013, the group's application had been rejected on the grounds that homosexual relationships were a criminal offence. NGLHRC, which fights for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) rights, had filed a suit in court.

Nigeria

About 700 Boko Haram captives freed

The army announced that, in its offensive in the Sambisa Forest in the federal state of Borno between 28 and 30 April 2015, it had freed almost 700 women and children kept prisoners by the terrorist organisation Boko Haram. On 3 May 2015, 275 of them were taken to a refugee camp near Yola, the capital of the federal state

of Adamawa, to receive initial treatment. The army also stated that more than a dozen Boko Haram camps in the Sambisa Forest, the last major terrorist retreat, had been destroyed.

Villagers killed by army?

Villagers reported that armed people wearing military uniforms attacked and partially burned several villages inhabited by members of the Tarok tribe in the Local Government Area of Wase (state of Plateau in central Nigeria) in the night of 2 May 2015. About 40 inhabitants are said to have been killed. Members of the military Special Task Force are thought to have committed this act; the unit is stationed in Plateau in order to keep the peace. The attacks might have been revenge, as six soldiers are said to have been killed by Tarok tribe members on 30 April 2015. A spokesman for the army denied that soldiers had killed civilians, saying that they had fought against militiamen in the area.

Sudan

Al-Bashir re-elected

President Omar al-Bashir was re-elected with about 94% of the vote. The national electoral board announced on 27 April 2015 that 46.4% of the 13 million voters had gone to the polls. Observers of the African Union estimate, however, that voter participation only amounted to 30 – 35%. The opposition had largely boycotted the elections. Human rights organisations reported that the security forces arrested dozens of al-Bashir opponents ahead of, during and after the four-day elections.

In 2009, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for against the 71-year-old president, who seized power in a coup in 1989. The ICC has charged al-Bashir with war crimes and crimes against humanity in connection with the conflict in Darfur.

South Sudan

Child soldiers released

According to UNICEF reports, the South Sudanese rebel militia SSDA-Cobra Faction (South Sudan Democratic Movement-Cobra Faction) released 283 child soldiers in the federal state of Jonglei. Since January 2015, a total of 1,757 children and teenagers recruited by SSDA-Cobra Faction have been released. All child soldiers of this militia group have reportedly been demobilised. Before this step, the rebel group had signed a peace agreement with the government of South Sudan. UNICEF estimates that the parties to the conflict in South Sudan have recruited at least 12,000 child soldiers (see BN of 23 February and 30 March 2015).

Georgia

Government coalition has failed

On 29 April 2015, Levan Kipiani, the Georgian minister of sport, stepped down, making him the seventh minister to resign in a matter of months. That means that, under the provisions of the constitution, the cabinet of Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili has failed, as more than one-third of its 20 members had to be replaced. Georgian president Giorgi Margvelashvili will have to appoint a new prime minister within a week. Parliament has the right to propose a new candidate. As the “Georgian Dream” party alliance of incumbent Garibashvili has a comfortable majority in parliament, he will probably be nominated again.

Ukraine

Situation in the east of the country

Despite the ceasefire agreement, pro-Russian rebels claim that the Ukrainian army engaged in major attacks in eastern Ukraine on 3 May 2015. The Ukrainian army is said to have shelled the separatist city of Donetsk several times and to have deployed tanks and other heavy weapons, which it should have withdrawn under the peace agreement. Separatist leader Eduard Basurin claimed that the rebels did not respond to the fire. However, the Ukrainian army accused the rebels of having intensified their attacks and used rocket launchers and other heavy artillery on 28 April 2015. One soldier was reportedly killed and 14 injured.

Thailand

According to media reports, the military junta closed down the opposition TV station Peace TV. The station had already been forced to suspend broadcasting from 10 to 17 April 2015.

North Korea

Opponents executed

According to reports from South Korea, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has ordered the execution of 15 high-ranking government officials in 2015. One of them is the deputy minister for forestry, who is said to have criticised reforestation plans.