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Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

7 March 2016

Afghanistan

Military confrontations

Further airstrikes and clashes took place last week between the Taliban and government troops, the Taliban and ISIS militants and between rebel groups. Civilians who got caught between the fronts were frequently among the casualties. On 1 March 2016, a man was killed in a missile attack in Pul-i-Khumri, the capital of Baghlan province, in north-eastern Afghanistan. Two of his children were also wounded. The missile landed between the governor's residence and the police headquarters. The Afghan authorities have accused the Taliban of firing missiles indiscriminately into government institutions. At least 17 missiles have been fired into Pul-i-Khumri so far this year, killing and wounding several persons. This situation is similar in Marawara district in Kunar (eastern Afghanistan) where on 1 March 2016 14 civilians who came under crossfire were wounded and one was killed.

Furthermore, fighting also took place in the provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar (eastern Afghanistan), Badakhshan, Baghlan (north-eastern Afghanistan), Faryab (northern Afghanistan), Helmand, Kandahar und Uruzgan (southern Afghanistan).

Targeted bombings and attacks

On 29 February 2016, four civilians were wounded in a suicide bombing in Kabul. In the capital of Farah province (western Afghanistan), at least four children were killed in a bomb blast. In Kandahar province (southern Afghanistan), four police officers were gunned down in a suspected insider attack.

On 2 March 2016, five Taliban insurgents attacked security forces near the Indian Consulate in Jalalabad (the capital of Nangarhar province, western Afghanistan). One police officer and two civilians were killed alongside the insurgents in a gunfire exchange and in a suicide bombing. 19 persons were wounded.

On 3 March 2016, two persons were killed and 24 were wounded in a suicide bombing on a bazaar in Dawlat Abad district in Balkh northern province.

On 5 March 2016, two Turkish nationals were shot dead and three persons were injured in Kabul.

Afghan soldier jailed for 15 years for desertion

An Afghan National Army (ANA) soldier was sentenced to 15 years in jail for desertion and joining enemy ranks by a military court in eastern Nangarhar province of Afghanistan. The court decision is not yet final.

Pakistan

Court bombing

At least eight persons were killed and 27 were wounded in a suicide bombing on a court building in Shabqadar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on 7 March 2016.

Police prevent child marriage

Police in Punjab have reportedly rescued a nine-year-old girl from being married off to a 14-year-old boy. They arrested four village elders of the council, who had ordered the "compensation wedding" to settle a dispute between two families. This intervention is rare as Pakistan is a country where child marriage is culturally acceptable despite the fact that it is banned. Under the current laws, parents of child brides are

punishable by a month in prison and a fine of around ten dollars. A powerful religious group blocked a bill to impose harsher penalties for marrying off girls as young as eight or nine as well as the proposal to raise the minimum age for marriage from 16 to 18. According to UNICEF data, three per cent of girls in Pakistan are married before they turn 15, and over 25 percent before they turn 18.

Syria

Fragile truce

The situation has improved tangibly. There has been a 90 percent reduction in violence. Notwithstanding this, both sides have claimed the ceasefire has been violated since 26 February 2016 and that hundreds of persons have been killed. 135 persons have reportedly been killed in the areas subject to the ceasefire and 550 persons have reportedly been killed in the regions under the control of ISIS or Jabhat al-Nusra that are not covered by the ceasefire.

Protests against Assad

The opposition seized the opportunity on 3 March 2016 to stage a protest against Bashar al-Assad in the regions covered by the ceasefire east of Aleppo, in Homs and in Idlib province under the motto: "The revolution goes on". Furthermore, the opposition has demanded the release of prisoners and an end to sieges.

Yemen

Massacre on Christian retirement home in Aden

Suspected jihadists attacked a Catholic retirement home run by nuns from the order founded by Mother Teresa of Calcutta in Aden on 3 March 2016, killing at least 16 people, including four nuns. Pope Francis has condemned the attack as a senseless, diabolical act. So far, nobody has claimed responsibility for the attack. The local U.N. representative suspects it was carried out by members of ISIS. There has always been a Christian presence in liberal-minded Aden, contrary to North Yemen. During British colonial times prior to 1967, it had 22 Churches, of which only five remain. After the civil war broke out, ISIS destroyed a church and set a second church on fire. The Christian graveyard was desecrated.

Lebanon/Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia sanctions Lebanon

After urging Saudi citizens to leave Lebanon, Saudi Arabia halted a USD 4 billion relief package and declared the Shia Hezbollah a terrorist organisation together with the other Gulf states (Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates) on 2 March 2016. It has obviously not been decided yet whether airline traffic between Riad and Beirut will be suspended, Saudi Arabia will withdraw its billions of deposits from the Lebanese Central Bank and whether tens of thousands of the 300,000 Lebanese guest workers will be expelled. Saudi Arabia is accusing Lebanon of not doing enough to fight Hezbollah. The sanctions will also affect Iran indirectly which supports Hezbollah.

Turkey

Zaman newspaper taken over

Police officers stormed the offices of the anti-government newspaper Zaman in Istanbul on 4 March 2016 to enforce a court decision to place it and its sister outlets under the management of trustees. The step prompted two days of protests which riot police dispersed using tear gas and water cannons. The official reason for the court decision is as yet unknown. The front page of the newspaper on Sunday depicted a photo of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and included a number of favourable articles about him. Zaman is one of the largest-circulating newspapers in Turkey and supports the movement led by the preacher Fethullah Gülen who is living in the US in exile. Gülen's Hizmet movement has been declared a terrorist organisation in Turkey because it has been accused of planning a coup to overthrow the government. Prime Minister Ahmet

Davutoğlu justified the takeover at the weekend referring saying that journalists working at the newspaper were planning a coup. One day after the newspaper was taken over, police officers once again used tear gas and water cannons to disperse the crowds, setting up barricades in front of the building in order to keep supporters away.

Suicide bombings

On 4 March 2016, a car bomb exploded near a police station and adjacent barracks in Nusaybin (south-eastern Turkey). According to media reports, two police officers were killed and many others were wounded. The PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) is being held responsible for the attack.

On 3 March 2016, two women fired shots and threw a grenade at a bus carrying riot police in Istanbul as it was driving towards the entrance to a police station in Bayrampasa. According to media report, nobody was injured. Police returned fire, killing both attackers. The radical leftist Revolutionary People's Liberation Party–Front DHKP-C has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Nigeria

Around 300 killed in attacks by herdsmen on farmers

Between 23 and 29 February 2016, Muslim Fulani herdsmen attacks mostly Christian farmers in Agatu Local Government Area according to the police chief of Benue state in central Nigeria. Armed Fulani herdsmen razed the villages of Okokolo, Aila, Adagbo, Akwu, Omikuidi, Ocholonya and Odugbeho and killed around 300 villagers. Around 7,000 persons fled the attacks. President Muhammadu Buhari has launched an inquiry into the attacks.

Somalia

Security situation

One AMISOM soldier and two civilians were killed in consecutive explosions which occurred at the main road that passes through Bardhere town in Gedo region in southern Somalia on 5 March 2016. Three additional landmines were defused.

A hand grenade attack on an AMISOM base in Afgoye (Lower Shabelle Region) on 3 March 2016 missed its target for the most part. According to residents, up to 13 persons were wounded in the attacks on civilian residential districts. Al-Shabaab is being held responsible for both incidents.

A landmine blast struck a military escorting convoy carrying Somali Defence Minister near the airport of Kismayo town (Lower Juba Region) on 4 March 2016. The Minister escaped unhurt in the bomb explosion but five troops were killed. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Unknown assailants launched a hand grenade attack on a Somali Army patrol in Merka (Lower Shabelle Region) on 3 March 2016, wounding one civilian.

Al-Shabaab militants raided an AMISOM base in Merka (Lower Shabelle Region) in the early hours of 2 March 2016. AMISOM subsequently carried out a security operation in the town.

On 1 March 2016, units of the Somali Army and Kenyan AMISOM troops attacked al-Shabaab militants in the town of Abdalla-Birole near Kismayo. Six insurgents were reportedly killed.

Militants of the Islamist Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a (ASWJ) launched an attack on security forces of the interim government of Galmudug (Interim Galmudug Administration – IGA; parts of the regions Galgudud and Mudug) in the early hours of 2 March 2016 in Dhusamareb. Negotiations between IGA and ASWJ on distribution of power had previously failed. The ASWJ had refused the offer to integrate its militants into the IGA security forces. Four persons were reportedly killed in the clashes. Clashes took place between al-Shabaab militants and IGA security forces in the town of El Abdi (Galgudud region) on 1 March 2016. According to al-Shabaab, ten IGA troops and several civilians were killed.

Al-Shabaab militants killed four Somali army soldiers and injured eight in Mogadishu on 29 February 2016.

Al-Shabaab militants killed several soldiers in an attack launched on a military base in the town of Lanta-Buro (Lower Shabelle Region) on 29 February 2016. The extremists seized the town briefly and fled before the arrival of units of the Somali army and AMISOM the following day.

Former head of al-Shabaab radio sentenced to death

On 3 March 2016, a military court sentenced a former media director of al-Shabaab to death. He is said to have worked for Radio Andalus, the radio station established by al-Shabaab, since 2008 until his arrest in 2014 and has reportedly confessed to being involved in the assassination of at least five journalists.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Prison sentences of Lucha activists reduced

On 4 March 2016, an appeals court reduced the prison sentences for six Congolese activists from Struggle for Change (Lucha) handed down on 24 February 2016 from two years to six months. They had been arrested in the early hours of 15 February 2016 in the eastern Congolese metropolis of Goma when they were preparing banners calling for a nationwide general strike on 16 February 2016, demanding that President Joseph Kabila step down when his term ends this year.

Burundi

250,000 refugees in neighbouring countries

According to a statement issued by the UNHCR on 4 March 2016, 250,473 people have fled Burundi since President Pierre Nkurunziza announced plans to run for a third term (April 2015), and have sought shelter in the neighbouring countries of Tanzania (131,834), Rwanda (73,926), Uganda (22,330), Democratic Republic of Congo (21,186) and Zambia (1,197).

Ukraine

Little progress made in Normandy talks

According to Federal Foreign Minister, Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, little or no progress was made in the talks held between the Foreign Ministers of France, Russia, Ukraine and Germany about the Ukraine conflict in Paris on 3 March 2016. In particular, no agreement was reached on a Ukrainian special status law for the separatist areas that would enable local elections to be held by the middle of the year. All that was agreed was a timeframe and the principles for the clearing of mines in twelve areas as well as for terminating and withdrawing heavy weaponry and weapons of less than 100 mm calibre along the ceasefire line. A decision was also taken on the disengagement of troops in places that have witnessed the most serious violations of the ceasefire.

Hostilities increase in eastern Ukraine

On 1 March 2016, General Philip M. Breedlove, Commander of the U.S. European Command, gave testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on the increase in hostilities in the past few weeks. He said there had been 71 clashes and sniper incidents in the past 24 hours. Around 450 such incidents occurred over the past week. He said it was particularly worrying that heavy weapons were being used which were thought to have been withdrawn from the combat zone. It is virtually impossible to indicate which party has violated the ceasefire as the OSCE observers do not have free access to the territories.

Bangladesh

Abolition of state religion possible

According to media reports, the government is considering abolishing Islam as the state religion. A wave of terrorist attacks on religious minorities such as Hindus or Christians in recent months sparked the move. According to the Constitution, Bangladesh is a secular state on the one hand, although Islam had been the state religion since 1988 on the other.

China

Hong Kong Trial against leader of the democracy movement

The trial against three leaders of the democracy movement "Occupy Central With Love And Peace" launched in 2014 began on 29 February 2016. Joshua Wong (19), who heads the academic activist group Scholarism, Alex Chow (25), former general-secretary of the Hong Kong Federation of Students, and Nathan Law (22), current leader of the student federation are on trial for inciting and participating in an illegal assembly. They face up to five years in prison.

The unsuccessful protests organised by the movement for free elections of the Hong Kong President which tens of thousands of people participated in had brought parts of Hong Kong city centre to its knees between late September and December 2014.

Tibet: self-immolation

A young Tibetan monk died after setting himself on fire in the Tibetan Autonomous Kardze Prefecture (in Chinese: Ganzi, Sichuan Province) on 29 February 2016 to protest against Chinese rule. He died of his injuries the same day. According to Radio Free Asia, this is the 144th case of self-immolation since 2009.

India/China

Self-immolation

On 29 February 2016, a Tibetan boy self immolated in Dehradun (capital of Uttarakhand state) in protest against China's Tibet policy. He died several days later.