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Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

22 February 2016

Afghanistan

Military confrontations

Further clashes took place last week between the Taliban and government troops, the Taliban and ISIS militants and between rebel groups. The provinces hit hardest were Helmand, Zabul (southern Afghanistan), Kapisa, Nangarhar (eastern Afghanistan), Balkh, Jawzjan (northern Afghanistan), Kunduz, Baghlan, Takhar and Badakhshan (north-eastern Afghanistan).

Targeted bombings and attacks

On 15 February 2016, a member of the public prosecutor's office and a civilian were gunned down in Nimruz (southern Afghanistan). A cleric was shot dead in Jalalabad (capital of Nangarhar province).

On 17 February 2016, two civilians were killed in a suicide bombing in front of a bank in Maimana (capital of Faryab province, northern Afghanistan), twelve others were wounded.

Members of the Afghan National Army in search of insurgents raided a clinic run by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan in Maidan Wardak province (central Afghanistan) on 18 February 2016. Two patients and one staff member were killed in the attack. The body of a young man who had been abducted three weeks previously was found in Nimruz (southern Afghanistan). He was reportedly the brother of a district police chief. Residents of the province claim that the number of abductions is on the rise. Five Afghan members of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) were abducted and released after several days in Ghazni province (south-eastern Afghanistan) on 16 February 2016.

On 19 February 2016, an officer of the Afghan secret service was killed in a suicide bombing in Khost (eastern Afghanistan).

On 20 February 2016, at least five civilians were killed in two suicide bombings in Paktika province.

On 21 February 2016, four tribal elders were abducted in Logar province (central Afghanistan). The Taliban deny any involvement in the attack.

Recruitment of child soldiers by the Taliban

According to findings of the human rights organisation Human Rights Watch, the Taliban added scores of children to their ranks in 2015. The Taliban recruited and deployed more than 100 children aged between 13 and 17 from Kunduz province in 2015 alone. The children were recruited from madrasas in Kunduz, Takhar, and Badakhshan province (north-eastern Afghanistan). In the years 2013 to 2014, the Taliban managed to expand their influence in parts of these provinces, training child soldiers there instead of sending them to North Waziristan in Pakistan as they used to do. HRW reported on several cases in which Taliban commanders from Kunduz recruited child soldiers for their armed groups and spoke to parents who had tried unsuccessfully to secure the return of their children. Many of the children were killed during the fighting in Kunduz. The Afghan government, by contrast, has urged the U.N. to remove Afghanistan from the list of countries recruiting child soldiers after the Afghan Parliament adopted a law that has made the recruitment of child soldiers a punishable offence.

Media staff leave Afghanistan

According to information provided by the news agency Pajhvok Afghan News, 108 journalists and media staff left Afghanistan in 2015 in order to apply for asylum in a western country. The number of attacks and threats against journalists has increased recently.

Pakistan

351 executions in 14 months

Since Pakistan lifted a moratorium on executions in December 2014, 351 persons have been executed. According to reports by human rights organisations, Pakistan now ranks third after China and Iran in terms of executions. Those executed reportedly include young persons and persons with intellectual disabilities. They say some of the trials were unfair.

Iraq

Persons detained in Fallujah

According to army sources, clashes between Iraqi tribesmen and the Islamic State (IS) militant group in Fallujah were halted on 19 February 2016 after ISIS militants detained more than 100 residents. A local official estimated that the number of detainees was about 60. The tribes fear that the detainees would be executed.

Further death sentences

In Baghdad, 40 suspected ISIS supporters were sentenced to death on charges of involvement in a massacre in Tikrit (Salahaddin province).

Deaths owing to lack of food and medical supplies

According to UNHCR sources, at least 76 persons have died of starvation and lack of medical supplies in Fallujah (Anbar province), around 70 kilometres west of Baghdad. 65 of them failed to receive the medication they needed, eleven died of food poisoning. According to UNHCR sources, no aides can access the city as it is under the control of ISIS. Last week, around 200 persons died as a result of the blockade, according to medical sources.

ISIS using yperite (mustard gas)

According to diplomatic sources, ISIS used yperite (mustard gas) against Kurdish fighters south of the Kurdish city of Erbil (Erbil province) in 2015. Laboratory tests of samples taken by Kurdish fighters last August during a gas attack have not yet been completed.

Attack on PKK strongholds in northern Iraq

According to a press release citing Iraqi media reports, the Turkish airforce pounded strongholds of the Kurdistan Workers' Party PKK in northern Iraq on 17 February 2016. It remains unclear whether the airstrikes were linked to the terrorist attack carried out in Ankara on 17 February 2016.

Syria

Bombings in Homs and Damascus/government troops carry on with offensive

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, multiple bomb blasts near Syria's holiest Shia shrine south of Damascus on 21 February 2016 saw 96 people lose their lives. The Syrian state new agency SANA claims the number of persons killed was at least 83. Twin car bombs that exploded in Homs on 21 February 2016 killed at least 59 persons. The bombings were carried out in the Alawite district which is largely controlled by Syrian government troops. ISIS has allegedly claimed responsibility for the attacks. Syrian government troops are continuing with their offensive in Aleppo. On 21 February 2016, they reportedly managed to regain control over 31 villages in the northern part of the province with the help of Russian airstrikes.

Ceasefire talks

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry announced following a telephone conversation with Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov that they had reached a provisional agreement on the terms of a cessation of hostilities in Syria that could begin in the next few days.

Iran

Musicians arrested

Two musicians from a heavy metal band were arrested in Iran (as happened previously in mid-November 2015) for allegedly producing Satanic music. They were released on a bail bond of US \$ 30,000 and are now awaiting trial. They could face several years' imprisonment or even the death penalty.

Yemen

Fighting rages on/ no further peace talks scheduled at present

The United Nations special envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, who was to broker peace talks between the Yemeni government and the Houthi rebels, informed the U.N. Security Council on 17 February 2016 that he is unable to arrange a new round of peace talks because the two sides are deeply divided. He condemned the growing violence in Yemen involving airstrikes and ground fighting. After the Islamist network Al-Qaeda seized the city of Assan in southern Yemen in early February 2016, it managed to further expand its area of influence in southern Yemen when it seized the city of Ahwar last week. On 17 February 2016, a suicide bombing was carried out at Camp Ras Abbas in western Yemen which ISIS has claimed responsibility for. Nine soldiers were killed (other sources claim 14 soldiers were killed).

The Yemeni government and the Houthi rebels had met in Switzerland in December 2015 in order to discuss conflict solutions in talks brokered by the U.N. The original plan was to resume peace talks by mid-January 2016, however this date has been postponed time and again. More than 6,000 persons have been killed in the conflict since March 2015, approx. half of them civilians.

Turkey

Suicide bombings

The Turkish government is blaming the Kurdistan Workers' Party PKK and the People's Protection Units YPG of carrying out the car bombing in Ankara on 17 February 2016, killing 28 persons (27 troops and one government official) and wounding over 60 persons. The YPG is the armed branch of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party PYD. In the meantime, 22 suspects have been arrested in connection with the car bombing. The bombing was aimed at buses belonging to the Turkish army that were carrying troops in the government district of Cankaya close to Parliament. Both the PKK and the PYD have so far denied they are responsible for the bombing. However, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu says he has received information and proof from the Ministry of the Interior and the secret service. He adhered to this opinion even when the terrorist group linked to the PKK terrorist organisation named as the Kurdistan Freedom Hawks (TAK) claimed responsibility for the bombings on 19 February 2016.

The Turkish airforce has stepped up its pounding of PKK strongholds in northern Iraq and is continuing with artillery shelling of YPG strongholds in Syria.

At least six troops were killed in a further attack on the Turkish army in Lice in Diyarbakir province on 18 February 2016. According to Turkish army sources, a convoy searching for mines on the highway was the target of the attack. The PKK is thought to have carried out the attack.

Tunisia

State of emergency

Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi extended for another month a state of emergency in the country on 21 February 2016. The last state of emergency was declared on 24 November 2015 in the wake of the terrorist attack in Tunis.

Niger

Parliamentary and presidential elections

Parliamentary and presidential elections took place on 21 February 2016. President Mahamadou Issoufou, who stood for re-election, claimed that he had protected the country, by and large, from terrorism in the region. Fourteen other candidates ran for the presidency alongside Mahamadou Issoufou. The most promising candidates were considered to be former Prime Minister Seyni Oumarou and Hama Amadou. Unless one of the candidates manages to garner more than 50 percent of the votes cast, a run-off is likely to be held on 20 March 2016. Amadou has been behind bars since November 2015 on baby-trafficking charges. He says the accusations are politically motivated.

Sudan

Fighting in Blue Nile state

According to a spokesperson for the SPLM-N (Sudan People's Liberation Movement – North, a branch of the South Sudanese SPLM that operates in South Sudan), SPLM-N fighters repulsed an attack against the strategically important region of Jebel Kolgo, 30 kilometres south west of the Blue Nile state capital of Ed-Damazin on 20 February 2016. He said that 200 government troops and several officers were killed in the clashes which lasted almost 24 hours. The SPLM-N has been fighting against the government in South Korofan and Blue Nile since 2011 since the referendum on whether the region should remain a part of Sudan or become independent that formed part of the peace agreement of 2005 has failed to take place.

South Sudan

Clashes at refugee camp

On 17 and 18 February 2016, 18 persons were killed and 50 were wounded in clashes at an UNMISS (United Nations Mission in South Sudan) refugee camp which gives shelter to more than 47,000 displaced persons. The United Nations Security Council, the EU and the Troika countries (USA, UK and Norway) have condemned the acts of violence in the camp near Malakal (Upper Nile state) and are accusing members of the South Sudanese government for being involved in the clashes which initially erupted between members of the ethnic groups of the Shilluk and the Dinka inside the camp. There are credible reports that armed gunmen wearing the uniform of South Sudan's army had infiltrated the camp and had been involved in the fighting. Clashes have broken out repeatedly between Shilluk and Dinka in the region around Malakal over land disputes and water rights.

Somalia

Security situation

Muhyadin Mohamed Haji Ibrahim, who was Defence Minister during the former interim-government, was killed in a car bomb explosion in Mogadishu on 15 February 2016. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack. In the early hours of 16 February 2016, al-Shabaab militants attacked military bases and police compounds in the market town of Afgooye and surrounding villages in the Middle Shabelle region. Eight Somali army troops were killed in the attack. According to al-Shabaab, 35 troops of the Somali National Army troops and AMISOM were killed. The extremists withdrew shortly afterwards. Unknown gunmen thought to be al-Shabaab militants in a speeding car opened fire on a vehicle carrying Turkish construction company employees in Mogadishu's Bullo-Hubey village on 16 February 2016. At least one person was killed. Unknown perpetrators attempted to assassinate the Minister for Social Affairs of the Regional Administration of Jubaland on 18 February 2016 in a car bomb. However, the bomb was discovered before it could detonate. On 18 February 2016, al-Shabaab militants attacked an AMISOM convoy near Mararey (Lower Shabelle Region). According to AMISOM, there were no casualties. On 18 February 2016, NISA (National Intelligence and Security Agency) saw 300 al-Shabaab suspects nabbed in a successful operation in the districts of Hiliva and Yakshid in Mogadishu. After being interrogated, all but 26 were released.

Suspected spy executed

An al-Shabaab court in the village Eel Warre near the town Bulo-Barde (Hiiran region) sentenced a man to death on 16 February 2016. He had been accused of acting as a spy for the Somali government and AMISOM. The sentence was carried out by shooting.

Nigeria

Around 500 hostages freed from Boko Haram violence

On 17 February 2016, the army headquarters announced that it had managed to free 195 hostages from the grip of terrorists in the two Local Government Areas Bama und Dikwa, Borno state. One day previously, a military spokesperson Sani Usman reported that troops in search of a Boko Haram hideout in Borno state had combed through 13 villages in the two Local Government Areas Mafa and Dikwa. Five terrorists were killed and 350 hostages were released, including five girls from Cameroon.

Niger Delta amnesty programme to continue for 2 years

On 15 February 2016, the Special Assistant to the President and Coordinator for the Niger-Delta amnesty programme, former General Paul Boroh, announced that the programme will be extended for two years until the end of 2017. So far, only around 17,300 out of the 30,000 former militants of the oil-rich Niger Delta have been admitted to the amnesty programme launched in 2009. For more information about the amnesty programme, please refer to BN of 18 January 2016.

Democratic Republic of Congo

One-day general strike without riots

A one-day general strike in the Democratic Republic of Congo shut down most businesses in many cities in the country, including Kinshasa and Goma on 16 February 2016. The strike was aimed against the presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for November 2016 being deferred on technical grounds (updating the electoral register). This would have extended the term of President Joseph Kabila whose mandate ends in December 2016. Most of the large opposition parties had called for strike action, including the UDPS and the G7 party coalition. According to the activist group Lucha, six of its members were arrested in the metropolis of Goma in eastern Congo in the early hours of 16 February 2016 as they were preparing to distribute flyers during the strike.

Cameroon/Nigeria

162 Boko Haram militants killed

According to a statement issued by Cameroon's Communication Minister on 15 February 2016, Cameroon's special forces managed to retake the border town of Goshi on Nigerian territory that had been held by Boko Haram in a military operation carried out between 11 and 14 February 2016. 162 Boko Haram militants were reportedly killed and around 100 people being held by the insurgents were freed. The military offensive was carried out by Cameroon's army as part of the multinational intervention troops fighting Boko Haram with the support of the Nigerian army.

Cameroon

Boko Haram: At least 24 persons killed in suicide bombing at market

On 19 February 2016 at around 08:30 a.m., two female suicide bombers dressed as traders blew themselves up at a market in Meme, Far North Region, killing at least 24 persons and injuring 50 others. The terrorist organisation is being blamed for the attack.

Central African Republic

Touadéra wins run-off presidential election

Faustin Archange Touadera has won the country's presidential elections held on 14 February 2016, the national election body announced. Running as an independent candidate, he garnered 63 percent of the votes. His main rival, Anicet Georges Dologuélé (Union pour le Renouveau Centrafricain – URCA), who had won the first round held on 30 December 2015 but who claimed votes had been rigged, accepted the result of the election. International observers said that although there were some irregularities, this had not affected the result of the election.

Uganda

Ruling President wins presidential elections

The President of Uganda, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni (government party National Resistance Movement – NRM), won the presidential elections held on 18 February 2016 ahead of seven other candidates, garnering 60 percent of the votes cast. Dr. Kizza Besigye (Forum for Democratic Change – FDC), his most promising rival, garnered 35 percent of the votes. Dr. Besigye had been arrested briefly on 15 February 2016 at a protest rally of his supporters in the capital of Kampala. At least one person was killed. Dr. Besigye was arrested temporarily again on the day the elections were held when he attempted to enter a building in Kampala where the opposition claim vote rigging was to take place. Dr. Besigye has been under house arrest since his arrest on 19 February 2016 at a meeting of leading members of his party at their headquarters in Kampala. Access to social media has been disrupted since election day. International election observers have criticised, inter alia, the delays lasting several hours, with which polling stations were opened especially in bastions of the opposition as well as failure to meet democratic standards. The opposition claims there is evidence of vote rigging.

Kosovo

Repeated protests and attacks

Thousands of supporters of the three leading opposition parties took to the streets of Pristina on 17 February 2016, the eighth anniversary of Serbia's declaration of independence, to protest against the government. The protestors are demanding the government's resignation and that a date be set within the next ten days for parliamentary elections which they want to be brought forward. All in all, the protest went off peacefully. On 19 February 2016, tear gas attacks were carried out in Parliament following repeated attempts to disrupt the work of Parliament. The opposition protested against an agreement brokered by the EU between Kosovo and Serbia, providing for limited autonomy for the Serbian minority.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Application for EU membership

Bosnia's government formally applied for membership of the EU on 15 February 2016. Bosnia, alongside Kosovo, had been the only country in the West Balkans that had not yet formally applied for membership of the EU.

More than two decades after the end of the war, the ethnic division has become deeper than ever. Much-needed reforms have not been implemented. The political, economic and social situation continues to be poor. Notwithstanding this, the EU accepted the application for membership. It is intended to put pressure on politicians to carry out reforms and to offer the Bosnian people hope for the future. Many are hoping for a growth in employment. The migration potential is very high given that the unemployment rate is 30 percent.

Albania

Fight against corruption stepped up

Cameras are being installed in police uniforms in Albania in order to make the police behave better and deter them from taking bribes. The cameras that are incorporated into the police uniforms are to make police work more transparent. Criminal and disciplinary proceedings have been launched against 2,000 police officers.

Russian Federation/northern Caucasus

ISIS attack in Dagestan

Two police officers were killed and at least twelve persons were wounded, some of them seriously, in a suspected suicide attack in the Russian North Caucasus Republic of Dagestan on 15 February 2016. The police officers reportedly stopped a car at a checkpoint near the town of Jemikent in southern Dagestan when the car bomb exploded, according to a report by security authorities. It is thought to have been a suicide attack. ISIS has claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing on behalf of the Caucasus province. Security authorities in Moscow estimate that more than 2,000 Russian nationals have joined ISIS in Syria and Iraq and fear further terrorist attacks by returnees.

Ukraine

Government coalition without a majority

After Ukraine's junior coalition partner, the Samopomich (Self Reliance) party, left the pro-European coalition of Prime Minister Arseny Yatsenyuk on 18 February 2016, the government coalition which has been in place since late 2014 has lost its majority in Parliament. On 17 February 2016, the Batkivshchyna (Fatherland) party led by ex-Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko left the government and in September 2015, the Radical Party also left the government. Re-elections may be held if no government majority is achieved within the next 30 days. Critics have accused Yatsenyuk of delaying reforms and of doing too little to fight corruption.

India

Ten killed in violence between castes in northern India

At least ten persons have been killed in violent clashes between members of different castes in northern India. Another 150 persons have been wounded according to police in Haryana state on 21 February 2016. Members of the Jat caste have been protesting for several days in the districts of Rohtak, Jhajjar and Bhiwani. They are demanding a quota regulation guaranteeing government jobs or university spots. The quota regulations were introduced in India in order to overcome traditional discrimination above all of the so-called untouchables. However, the government refuses to grant privileges for the Jats who account for one-third of the population in Haryana, as they belong to the respected warrior caste in Hinduism and are therefore not socially underprivileged. Talks between government representatives and representatives of the caste have so far failed to produce any results.

Bolivia

Political tension is rising in Bolivia in the run-up to the referendum on President Evo Morales' mandate. A rally held in El Alto on 17 February 2016 got out of control resulting in six staff of the local administration being killed when a mob attacked the mayor's office, setting furniture on fire.

On 21 February 2016, Bolivia's citizens voted on a constitutional amendment determining whether President Evo Morales who has been elected until 2019 can be re-elected until 2025. Critics accuse Morales of authoritarian tendencies. The former cocalero activist has been in power since 2006 and is Bolivia's first indigenous President.