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Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

12 September 2016

Afghanistan

Several attacks in Kabul

Three attackers were killed and six people injured during fighting on the premises of the Care aid organization in Kabul on 06 September 2016. A TV station reported that the attack had actually targeted the neighbouring office of the head of the secret service NDS. On the previous day Kabul had already been shaken by several other bombings. Among them a double bombing by the Taliban in front of the defence ministry that claimed at least 35 victims and probably injured over 100.

Fighting in southern Afghanistan

On 08 September 2016 Afghan security forces were able to defeat an attempt by the Taliban to gain control of the capital of Uruzgan province by mounting a counter offensive. The fighting lasted more than five days and the Taliban temporarily even succeeded in entering the town of Tarin Kot, whereupon many civilians fled and gave reports of looting. The head of the town's security forces said that the insurgents suffered heavy losses. In the evening of 11 September 2016 the Afghan army launched a new offensive in Tarin Kot's direct surroundings with US air support. Reportedly dozens of insurgents were killed during this operation, but the government troops also had losses.

Attack in northern Afghanistan

In Baghlan province eight people died on 08 September 2016 when a bomb detonated in a crowded market place that had been attached to a bicycle.

Iraq

IS attacks in Baghdad – many casualties

At least 19 lives were lost when a car bomb exploded in the central Karrada district of Baghdad in the evening of 05 September 2016. According to information published by Iraq's ministry of health on 06 September 2016 30 people were wounded. The Sunni terrorist militia IS claimed responsibility for the attack stating that it was directed against Shia. Site, a company specialised on monitoring Islamist websites, reported that IS announced further attacks on Shia communities.

The IS terrorist militia had also stated that it was behind the attack on a shopping centre in Baghdad in the night of 10 September 2016. The police and rescue forces reported that ten people had died in this attack and 30 had been wounded. The attack hit the capital shortly before the Muslim feast of Eid-el-Kabir. The shopping centre was busy with many people shopping for the upcoming festivities.

Turkey

Regional administrations dismissed on suspicion of PKK contacts

Mayors and city councillors were dismissed and replaced by official trustees on suspicions of supporting the banned Kurdish workers party PKK (in four cases for supporting the cleric Gülen) in 28 predominantly Kurdish localities in Turkey's east and south-east. This was the first time action was taken against elected

representatives of the people. Twelve mayors were reportedly taken into custody. Protests resulted in several places which were countered with water cannons and tear gas by the police. As recently as the beginning of September more than 11,000 public employees in the education sector were suspended on suspicions of having contacts to the banned Kurdish workers party (PKK).

In total about 43,000 public employees and almost 5,000 members of the military have lost their jobs since the foiled coup in mid-July.

Iran

Protests against Saudi Arabia

09 September 2016 ten thousands rallied nationwide against Saudi Arabia at state organized demonstrations. The media reported that there also were manifestations in Tehran after Friday prayers. Iran blames the Saudi government for the fatal mass stampede of pilgrims in 2015 in which hundreds, including Iranians, died. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were broken off in January 2016. Due to the diplomatic crisis no Iranian pilgrims will participate in the Hajj this year.

Syria

In the night to 10 September 2016 the foreign ministers of the US and Russia presented a plan for a ceasefire which is to start with the celebrations for this year's Eid-el-Kabir on 12 September 2016 at sunset (17:45 CET). The plan calls for an end to all air raids and fighting between the government and the rebels. Aid is to be delivered to all besieged areas. If the ceasefire will be observed for seven days the US and Russia intend to jointly advance against IS and Fatah al-Sham (formerly Al-Nusra Front), both of which are excluded from the ceasefire. The Syrian government reportedly agreed to the ceasefire. Iran, the government's most important ally next to Russia, as well as the Lebanese Hezbollah militia that is also on the government's side, welcomed the ceasefire. Turkey, however, insists that it intends to continue to fight Kurdish militias in Turkey and Syria. The Syrian Free Army, an umbrella for different rebel groups, stated that it will cooperate positively. The Islamist rebel group Ahrar al-Sham rejected the agreement, arguing that it will only strengthen the regime.

Many civilians killed

Prior to the onset of the ceasefire dozens of people lost their lives in air strikes. According to the Syrian Human Rights Observatory at least 62 persons died and 90 were allegedly injured on a market place and in residential areas of the rebel-controlled city of Idlib. The Observatory also said that twelve civilians were killed in the city of Aleppo. Another 18 deaths are reported from the province of the same name.

Yemen

Casualties in air strikes

According to eye witness reports at least 22 civilians fell victim of the Saudi-led alliance's air strikes on a construction site near the capital of Sanaa. The military coalition has been repeatedly accused of attacking civilians and civilian institutions like hospitals. A spokesman of the military coalition assured that the attacks were only directed against the Houthi rebels.

Ten soldiers were killed and 14 wounded in an attack on an army road block in al-Wadi (south Abyan province) on 11 September 2016.

Somalia

Attacks

Al-Shabaab fighters staged several attacks in Mogadishu on 05 and 06 September 2016. A mortar fired at the presidential palace injured seven people, an exploding grenade three soldiers. There was an assassination attempt with a car bomb on a well-known businessman, probably authored by al-Shabaab.

Fighting

The US confirmed air strikes against al-Shabaab positions in the town of Toratorow (Lower Shabelle region) on 05 September 2016, in which four al-Shabaab fighters were killed. On 06 September 2016 al-Shabaab attacked positions of the Somali army (SNA) and the Ethiopian AMISOM contingent near the village of Budbud (Galguduud region). Reportedly both sides suffered heavy losses. On 07 September 2016 al-Shabaab fighters attacked a SNA base in Qoryooley (Lower Shabelle region) and were repelled. AMISOM and SNA units took control of the village of Abdalla Birole (Lower Juba region) on 08 September 2016. On 09 September 2016 Somali special units attacked an al-Shabaab position in Labaatan Jirrow (Bay region). According to information from Somali sources more than twelve extremists were killed in the operation.

UNHCR: Closure of Dadaab camp unrealistic

An UNHCR representative in Kenya informed that about 25% of the Somali refugees currently staying in Kenya wanted to return to Somalia by the end of 2016. This refers to about 70,000 refugees in the Dadaab camp. The Kenyan government's intention to close the camp in November 2016 is unrealistic, she said. The UNHCR requested the Kenyan government to extend the period for a voluntary return. Up to now about 2,000 refugees staying in the camp signed up for a return programme, according to the UNHCR. However, the Interim Jubaland Administration (for the Lower Juba, Middle Juba, and Gedo regions) so far refuses to accept them.

Kenya

Attack on police station

Three veiled women attacked policemen in a police station in Mombasa with a knife and a petrol bomb on 11 September 2016. They had pretended to denounce the theft of a mobile phone, all of them were shot. The motives for this incident are unknown.

Uzbekistan

Successor for President Karimov

On 08 September 2016 the central election authority announced presidential elections for 04 December 2016. Prime Minister Shavkat Mirziyoyev will govern as acting president until then. He is considered to be the favourite for succeeding Karimov who died on 02 September 2016.

Russian Federation/North Caucasus

Human rights and security situation

The region in North Caucasus remains the focus of human rights violations. Despite the fact that the number of victims has fallen considerably, the general security and human rights situation remains tense. In recent years the zone of major conflict in North Caucasus has shifted from Chechnya to the neighbouring republic of Dagestan, partially also to Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria. Although the Russian government is providing massive economic support economic problems and social instability persist.

The number of casualties in North Caucasus has been receding since 2012. In 2015 the number of deaths as a result of attacks and fighting between the security forces and separatist or Islamist insurgents was 209 (2014: 341; 2013: 529; 2012: 700). Although the number of victims has also clearly fallen in Dagestan, this republic in North Caucasus still reports the highest death toll and most violence. At least 126 people were killed in 2015 (2014: 208; 2013: 271; 2012: 410). The Russian internet paper Caucasian Knot reported that in North Caucasus about 70 people were killed in the first six months of 2016, 53 of these in Dagestan and four in Chechnya. The considerable reduction in the number of fatalities is probably due to the increasing number of North Caucasian fighters that have joined the IS terrorist militia in Syria and Iraq since end of 2014.

Armenia

Prime minister resigns

Following the unrest in this republic in South Caucasus a few weeks ago the head of government Ovik Abramyan resigned on 08 September 2016. Abramyan said in the capital Yerevan that the society was deeply divided over important political issues and he wanted to clear the road for a new beginning. Armed dissidents had occupied a police station in Yerevan for several days at the end of July 2016. The stand-off was accompanied by protests during which several people died. 58-year-old Abramyan had been in office since April 2014. He is the deputy chair of the Republican Party headed by President Serge Sarkisyan. Yerevan's former mayor, Karen Karapetyan, is considered to be his potential successor.

Kosovo

Resistance against controversial border agreement with Montenegro

The last condition Kosovo has to meet to be exempted from the obligation to hold a visa in the Schengen area is the ratification of an agreement with Montenegro about the demarcation of the common border. This agreement is the subject of much contention. The government lacks a sufficient majority in parliament to ratify the agreement. The opposition categorically rejects the agreement, because it would mean that 8,200 hectares of land will go to Montenegro. Opposition MPs repeatedly used tear gas in parliament to prevent the ratification. At the end of August an organization called Rugovasit (population of the mountain (border) region of Rugova) claimed responsibility for the bombing of the state TV station RTK. Members of Montenegro's anti-terrorist forces are allegedly deployed at the border to counter any border violations.

Serbia

Authorities warn of increasing numbers of refugees

Serbia is complaining about an increasing number of illegal border crossings and anticipates the numbers to go up further towards the end of the summer. The authorities said that 6,500 people have attempted to enter the country illegally from Bulgaria or Macedonia since 22 July 2016. Despite the reinforcement of police and army patrols along the border 200 refugees succeed in entering illegally every day.

4,400 registered refugees are currently staying in reception centres in Serbia. At the same time many are living in precarious situations in Belgrade and near the borders to Hungary and Croatia in vacant houses, on parking lots or simply in the fields. The state is increasingly feeling that it cannot cope anymore and asked Austria for assistance to secure the borders. Serbia has not yet closed its borders completely.

China

Hong Kong: Result of parliamentary elections

The camp loyal to Beijing won 40 of the 70 parliamentary seats in the elections of 04 September 2016, 22 went to the pan-democratic camp. The so-called localists that stood for election for the first time, secured eight seats; one of them went to the 23-year-old Nathan Law, the founder of the Demosisto Party. 40 seats were up for general free elections. The other 30 deputies were elected by representatives of groups of stakeholders, most of which are close to Beijing. At almost 60% the election turnout was the highest since Hong Kong was returned to the Peoples Republic of China in 1997.

The localist parties are advocating a greater degree of self-determination vis-a-vis the central government. They grew out of the 2014 democracy movement mostly initiated by school and university students (also: Occupy Central, Umbrella Movement). The special administrative region is subject to China's central government, but enjoys a high degree of independence, therefore also anti-government parties are represented in parliament. According to observers, Hong Kong's independence has recently come under pressure by increased interference from Beijing.