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Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

12 October 2015

Afghanistan

Security situation

According to the Russian intelligent service, there are meanwhile some 3,500 IS fighters active in Afghanistan. On 7 October 2015, a Muslim preacher was killed by IS supporters in eastern Nangarhar province. On the previous day, a video had been published, apparently showing IS militants beheading an alleged spy in Nangarhar. On 9 October, Taliban insurgents launched an attack on government troops in central Logar province, killing at least three civilians. On the same day, three bombs were detonated near a religious congregation site in Kabul, killing a civilian and wounding another three. IS insurgents are blamed for the attack. Security forces were able to prevent another attack on a restaurant in the country's capital. On 10 October 2015, at least three civilians lost their lives in a suicide attack on a NATO convoy in Kabul launched by Taliban fighters.

Situation in Kunduz

The Afghan military reports that fights are continuing in northeastern Kunduz city. Meanwhile, around 60 percent of the city is fully controlled by security forces, it was stated. According to the authorities, the battle over Kunduz has meanwhile displaced more than 100,000 people who have moved to Balkh, Baghlan, Sar-e-Pul and Kabul provinces.

An analysis published by the Long War Journal says that 31 of Afghanistan's 398 districts are now under Taliban control, and another 37 districts are contested.

Iraq

Executions carried out by IS

On 5 October 2015, IS insurgents shot dead 70 captured members of the Sunni Abu Nimr (Albu Nimr) tribe in Ramadi, Anbar province. The tribal leader said that all of the victims were civilians, among them dozens of women and children.

Attacks

On 5 October 2015, a total of at least 50 people were killed and more than 100 wounded in three car bomb attacks. One of the attacks was launched at a market in Zubair town, southern Basra province, killing at least 10 people and wounding at least another 25. The other attacks took place in Khalis town (Diyala province) and in Husseinija (roughly 20 km north of Baghdad). IS has claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Protests in Iraq's Kurdistan region

On 10 October 2015, two people lost their lives during protests against Massoud Barzani in Iraq's Kurdistan region. They were shot dead by security forces when trying to raid the headquarters of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP). Already on the day before, two protesters were killed in a similar incident. Apparently, the protests grew out of anger as wages have not been paid for several months now.

Airstrike on IS leader's convoy

The Iraqi military claims to have attacked the convoy of IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in Anbar province on 11 October 2015. There is no information on al-Baghdadi's fate.

Syria

Russian air raids/ security forces loyal to Assad gain ground

Since 30 September 2015, Russia has been conducting air raids in Syria, officially against IS insurgents; however, there are indications that also other rebel groups are targeted. The Russian side has stated that on 11 October 2015, its air force carried out more than 60 missions in Hama, Latakia, Idlib and ar-Raqqa provinces. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, there are no major IS bases in these areas. It was reported that Syrian government troops, supported by the Russian air strikes and fighters from Hizbollah, had recaptured the strategically important plateau of Tal Skik in Idlib province from the rebels. The province had been under almost complete control of the Jaysh al-Fatah (the Army of Conquest), to which groups like Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham belong. On 7 October 2015, government troops were reported to have also launched a major offensive in central Hama province, where they gained control of three key towns east of the highway linking the capital Damascus with the northern city of Aleppo; they also carried out successful operations along the highway and in northern parts of Latakia province. The pro-government newspaper al-Watan reports that the government forces have recaptured 70 sq. km with nearly a dozen villages.

Human Rights Watch accused the Russian air force on 11 October 2015 of using an advanced type of cluster bombs. On 4 October 2015, Russian warplanes had dropped the munition on Kafr Halab, a village southwest of Aleppo, or else the bombs had been deployed to the Syrian army, the organisation said.

Rebels launch new offensive in Aleppo

After IS fighters had drawn nearer to about 20 km from Aleppo on 09 October 2015, Syrian rebels launched a counter-offensive on 10 October and recaptured the village of Tal Soussin. Also, the village of Tall Qrah was under heavy fire.

Turkey

Deadly blasts in Ankara

On 10 October 2015, two explosions in the centre of Ankara killed at least 95 people and wounded more than 300 others. The shelling hit near the central train station where people were gathering for a march organised by leftist groups, among them the pro-Kurdish HDP, to demand an end to the violence between the PKK party and the Turkish government. Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu announced three days of national mourning. The motivation and origin of the attacks are not yet clear; so far, no-one has claimed responsibility. State security sources say initial signs suggested IS behind the deadly blasts, while government and opposition are mutually shifting the blame on each other. After the attacks, thousands took to the streets in Istanbul and other cities, protesting against President Erdogan and the Turkish government.

New air strikes on PKK camps

Regardless of what had happened in Ankara, the Turkish air force continued to bomb PKK camps in northern Iraq on 11 October 2015. Security circles also said that 14 PKK militants have been killed in air strikes in eastern Diyarbakir province. The attacks were conducted despite the fact that only hours after the blast in Ankara, the PKK had pledged to stop attacks in Turkey ahead of elections, saying that it would not resume them unless Kurdish fighters were attacked first by government troops. The Turkish government rejected the announcement as pure campaign strategy.

Despite the attacks and the disputes, the parliamentary elections are scheduled to take place as planned on 1 November 2015. However, Turkey has requested the EU to suspend talks on co-operation on the refugee issue in view of the attacks, it was reported.

Iran

US correspondent convicted

Washington Post correspondent Jason Rezaian, who has been imprisoned since July 2014, has been convicted for espionage and propaganda against the Islamic Republic (see BN of 28 July 2014). He was accused of having passed insider information to the White House. Jason Rezaian has rejected the charges. The verdict is open to appeal.

Israel

Escalating violence / Tougher penalties for stone-throwers

Clashes are continuing in Arab East Jerusalem and on the West Bank, with brutal street fights in Jerusalem. Many Palestinians were wounded in Hebron, Nablus, Abu Dis and Tulkarem on the West Bank. On 10 October 2015, Israeli security forces shot dead five Palestinians after two of them apparently had attacked orthodox Jewish men. In retaliation for bomb attacks from Gaza, Israel carried out air strikes on Hamas positions. Israel's cabinet unanimously approved imposing minimum ten-year military detention terms on stone-throwers and issuing harsh fines on parents of minor rock-throwers.

Access to Temple Mount restricted

In view of the escalating violence, Israel has once again restricted access to the Temple Mount. Muslim men under the age of 50 will be barred from Friday prayers.

Yemen

Amnesty International accuses Saudi Arabia-led military coalition of war crimes

Amnesty International has accused the Arab coalition fighting in Yemen of war crimes. The organisation's report "uncovers yet more evidence of unlawful air strikes carried out by the Saudi Arabia-led coalition, some of which amount to war crimes", Amnesty International's senior crisis response adviser Donatella Rovera said. The report published on 7 October 2015 details the results of Amnesty International field investigations into 13 air strikes in northern Sa'da city, which had killed around 100 civilians, among them 59 children. Amnesty researchers also found evidence of cluster bombs being used in the campaign, which are banned under international law.

Ongoing Civil War

On 6 October 2015, two suicide bombers detonated car bombs in front of Aden's al-Qasr-Hotel, the temporary headquarters of the Yemeni government, killing 15 people and wounding several ministers. The IS has claimed responsibility for the attack. On the same day, IS also claimed responsibility for a suicide attack on al-Nour mosque in the northern part of Sanaa, killing seven people. In Sanban, a rebel-held town roughly 100 km south of Sanaa, an air strike allegedly carried out by the Arab coalition killed 51 people at a wedding party. However, the military blames the Houthi rebels for the attack. On 7 October 2015, Yemeni government forces and their allies apparently captured the town of Sirwah, the last outpost of the Houthi rebels in the key Marib province. Also, Yemen's pro-government forces appear to have retaken the strategically important coastal town of Dhubab after three days of heavy clashes that killed at least 100 people.

Sudan

National dialogue

On 10 October 2015, the National Dialogue process was started in Sudan's capital Khartoum, attended by the ruling party members as well as opposition members and representatives of regional militias to discuss ways of ensuring the creation of a durable peace. The talks included issues such as the creation of a new constitution, the recognition of political parties, the economic development of Sudan and its foreign relations.

South Sudan

AU sets up special court

On 29 September 2015, the African Union (AU) announced the setup of a special court to try war crimes suspects in South Sudan. The formation of the court is part of the peace agreement signed by President Salva Kiir and rebel leader Riek Machar in September. The African Union has strong objections against the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Also South Sudan does not recognise the ICC's judgements. In the new special court, a mix of international and South Sudanese judges will prosecute war crimes committed by both parties.

Egypt

Egypt to buy helicopter carriers from France

On 5 October 2015, the French defence ministry confirmed that Egypt is buying two Mistral helicopter carriers originally designed for Russia. On 10 October, the deal was signed in Cairo by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and the French Prime Minister Manuel Valls. The vessels will be delivered to the Egyptian military already in March 2016 for a reported €950 million. Also, an agreement was concluded on military cooperation.

Attack in Cairo

In the night to 8 October 2015, an explosive device planted by unknown militants went off near Cairo's Azbakeya police station, leaving two citizens injured.

Libya

Agreement on new national unity government

After months of peace negotiations, the two rival parties have agreed on a government of national unity. After lengthy talks in the Moroccan city of Skhirat with the participation of 150 representatives of Libyan groups, UN envoy for Libya Bernardino Leon presented a list with candidates for a national unity government on 8 October 2015. Fayeza Sarraj, presently member of the Tobruk parliament, was nominated as Prime Minister. The list also includes three deputies for the prime minister - representing the country's south, east and west - and two more ministers to complete the presidential council. The proposed list of candidates needs to be approved by both governments.

Tunisia

State of emergency lifted

On 2 October 2015, President Beji Caid Essebsi lifted the emergency declared shortly after 38 foreigners had been killed in an attack on a beach resort in Sousse on 26 June 2015. The President explained that the security situation has improved.

Burundi

Family member of prominent activist shot dead

On 9 October 2015, the son-in-law of Pierre Claver Mbonimpa, prominent human rights activist and president of the Association for the Protection of Human Rights and Incarcerated Persons (ADPRODH), was shot dead in Bujumbura by unidentified gunmen. Pierre Claver Mbonimpa himself had been injured in an attack in August (see BN of 10 August 2015) and is presently in Belgium for medical treatment.

Rwanda

Debate on third term for President Kagame

On 8 October 2015, Rwanda's supreme court rejected a petition by the opposition Democratic Green Party who wanted to prevent President Kagame from running a third term. The current constitution sets a two-term limit for presidents. President Kagame's current term expires in 2017. It is however expected that he will strive for a third term.

President Kagame enjoys widespread support from large parts of the population, because he brought peace to the country after the genocide of 1994 and boosted the country's economy. However, there is hardly any room for political opposition or free media. Therefore, observers doubt that a referendum on the constitution would be free and fair.

Guinea

Presidential elections

On 11 October 2015, presidential elections were held under strict security restrictions and without major incident. Incumbent President Alpha Condé (77) and his main rival Cellou Dalein Diallo (63), had both called upon their supporters to avoid violence. However, AP news agency has reported five deaths since 8 October. On 10 October, dozens of people were injured in the capital of Conakry, when supporters of government and opposition threw stones at each other. The opposition had requested to postpone the elections and accused President Condé of manipulation. In 2010, long-term opposition leader Alpha Condé had defeated Cellou Dalein Diallo in the second ballot, replacing the military regime as the first democratically elected President since independence from France in 1958.

West Africa/Ebola

No new cases of Ebola

On 7 October 2015, the WHO stated that the three countries hit hardest by the disease have recorded their first week (27 September to 4 October 2015) with no new cases since the outbreak began in March 2014. However, over 500 contacts remain under follow-up in Guinea, and some 290 people who may have had contact with someone infected remain untraceable, WHO said. In Sierra Leone, the last person to receive treatment had been released on 26 September 2015. Liberia had been declared free of Ebola on 3 September.

Chad

Boko Haram: bomb attacks in Baga Sola

On 10 October 2015, several attacks left at least 41 people dead and dozens injured in the town of Baga Sola, on the market place and in the suburb quarter of Kousseri. Apparently, the five attackers also lost their lives. Authorities blame the radical Islamist Boko Haram terror militia for being behind the attacks.

Baga Sola is the largest town on Lake Chad. Around 6,000 refugees from Nigeria and Niger are living in camps in the area.

Fights in border region claim dozens of lives

On 6 October 2015, fights between suspected Boko Haram terrorists and the Chadian military left 48 people dead (11 soldiers and 37 extremists); apparently, 13 soldiers were wounded.

Nigeria

Boko Haram: fights in the area bordering Nigeria

On 6 October 2015, a suicide bomber blew himself up near a mosque in Buhari housing estate inhabited mainly by government staff in the Yobe State capital Damaturu. Apart from the perpetrator himself, one

more individual was killed in the attack. About an hour later, a second attack followed near a shop in the same estate, killing four people.

On the same day, a third suicide bomber launched an attack at a Fulani settlement on the outskirts of Damaturu, leaving eleven people dead.

Boko Haram: suicide attack in Borno State

On 6 October 2015, shortly before morning prayers, two suicide bombers blew themselves up near a mosque in the town of Gubio (administrative seat of the same-named local government area in Borno State). The attack, apparently carried out by Boko Haram members, left twelve people dead.

Boko Haram: attack on military base

In the early hours of 6 October 2015, Boko Haram terrorists attacked the 120 Task Force Battalion located at Goniri, Yobe State. Military officials said that the attack was repelled. In the clashes, more than 100 Boko Haram members and seven soldiers were killed.

DR Congo

Crackdown on peaceful demonstration

In a report released on 6 October 2015, Human Rights Watch accuses senior security force and ruling party officials to have hired more than 100 thugs, who were paid about 60 Euro each to assault a peaceful political demonstration on 15 September at the St. Therese athletics field in Kinshasa's N'djili commune. The protesters were up against a feared unconstitutional extension of President Kabila's term of office which will end in December 2016. During the demonstration, the thugs attacked the participants with clubs and sticks, injuring more than a dozen of them, HRW reported. One of the attackers was killed, several others were left injured.

Cameroon

Double suicide attacks near Mora town

On 11 October 2015, two female suicide bombers aged between 13 and 17 years blew themselves up in Kangaleri village (around 30 km from the town of Mora, Region Extrême-Nord), leaving at least nine people killed and 29 others injured.

Somalia

Assassination

On 8 October 2015, the nephew of Somalia's President was killed by al-Shabab militants in the capital Mogadishu. The gunmen who opened fire on his vehicle also killed a lawyer.

FYR Macedonia / Serbia

Continuing stream of refugees on the Balkan route

On 11 October 2015, the official TV station RTS stated that about 17,000 refugees were registered during the last 48 hours in the south Serbian town of Presevo. The registration office in Presevo was currently working around the clock, it was said (see also BN of 5 October 2015). Presently, the Camp in Presevo offers space for about 1,000 refugees. Secretary of employment Aleksandar Vulin announced the opening of a new camp close to the Macedonian border in Bujanovac.

Ukraine

Local elections postponed

Four days after the Ukraine Summit held in Paris, the pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine announced to postpone the local elections planned in the conflicted regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. The votings originally scheduled for 11 October and 1 November 2015, respectively, are now due to take place next year. The government in Kiev had sharply criticized the election dates set by the rebels.

Kyrgyzstan

Parliamentary elections

On 4 October 2015, a total of 2.7m Kyrgyz voters were called to elect a new parliament. 14 parties stood for election. President Almazbek Atambayev's Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK) won the election gaining 27.4 percent of all votes, followed by the nationalist Ata-Zhurt party (approx. 21 percent). Six parties will be represented in the parliament consisting of 120 members. Voter turnout was approx. 60 percent. OSCE had not detected any irregularities and judged the elections to have been free and peaceful.

Belarus

President Lukashenko wins the presidential elections

On 11 October 2015, Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko won the presidential elections. According to preliminary results, the 61 years old authoritarian leader received 83.5 percent of all votes, with a turnout of almost 87 percent. The three challenging candidates who were admitted did not gain more than single digit percentages. Hence Lukashenko, who has been in power since 1994, will now begin his fifth term in office. There was the possibility for opponents of Lukashenko's rule to vote against all candidates: at the national level, 6.4 percent of all voters made use of this alternative; the highest percentage of such votes (20.6) was counted in the capital Minsk, the election commission stated. In Minsk, Lukashenko gained only 65.6 percent, which is his worst result on the national level. On election night, several dozen opposition activists protested against the elections which they insisted were rigged. Security forces were present, but did not intervene.

Background

President Lukashenko, who is governing the former Soviet republic of some 10 million people with utmost severity, is often billed Europe's 'last dictator'. Belarus is the last European country to have death penalty.