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Group 41 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

23 December 2013

Afghanistan

Security situation

On 18 December 2013, a suicide commando of the Taliban targeted a parking lot at Forward Operating Base that is used by trucks transporting vehicles belonging to the International Security Assistance Force in Torkham (Nangarhar province, eastern Afghanistan, crossing point with Pakistan), wounding two Afghan police officers.

Iraq

Security situation

Suicide bombings continue to occur in Iraq on a daily basis. The number of civilians killed is estimated by Iraq Body Count (on 22 December 2013) to be in the region of 738. The number of civilians killed in Iraq in the course of 2013 is over 9,200.

At least 70 people were killed in a series of bombings on 16 December 2013. Another report says 82 persons were killed. Seven bombs detonated in a number of districts in Baghdad alone. Other suicide bombings were carried out in Mosul, Basra, in the south of the country and in the western province of Anbar. In Tikrit (Salahaddin province), armed insurgents raided the seat of the provincial government, taking 40 employees hostage. They were then freed by the state-run anti-terror unit. A member of the city council and two police officers were killed along with the three suicide bombers.

A total of nine persons were killed in a number of suicide bombings targeting Shia pilgrims on 18 December 2013. At least eight persons were killed in a wave of attacks on Shia pilgrims on 17 December 2013; at least 24 persons were killed in two car bomb attacks targeting pilgrims on 16 December 2013. 23 persons were reportedly killed in suicide blasts throughout the country on 17 December 2013 and 15 persons were killed on 18 December 2013.

At least 65 persons were killed in suicide bombings on 19 December 2013, 44 in Baghdad alone.

Between 33 and 42 persons were killed on 20 December 2013, another 41 persons were wounded. Tuz Khurmato (Salahaddin province) was the worst affected area. Twelve persons were killed at a market there and another 31 people were wounded. There were additional fatalities in suicide bombings in Kirkuk, Hawija and Mosul.

At least 18 high-ranking officers of the Iraqi Army were killed in a blast in the city of Rutba in Anbar province on 21 December 2013, 32 troops were wounded. Between 28 and 52 persons were killed throughout the country according to various reports.

On 22 December 2013, at least 17 people were killed in suicide bombings in Mosul, Baghdad and Kirkuk.

Executions

According to a press release issued on 19 December 2013, seven persons were executed who had been found guilty of terrorist crimes. This brings the number of executions carried out in 2013 up to around 170.

Syria

Serious air strikes on Aleppo / security situation

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the number of persons killed in the air strike on Aleppo on 15 December 2013 (cf. BN of 16 December 2013) has risen to at least 76, including 28 children. At least 44 persons, including six children, were killed in three districts of Aleppo on 22 December 2013 according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. According to opposition sources, crude explosives-filled barrels were used. Government troops began bombarding districts of Aleppo a week ago which are under the control of rebels. Since then, around 200 persons have reportedly been killed. There have been reports of air strikes on other locations in Aleppo province.

Several people, including five children, were killed in the vicinity of Homs on 22 December 2013 when a truck loaded with explosives blew up in front of a school.

According to the estimates of activists, around 126,000 persons have lost their lives so far in the Syrian civil war. The United Nations predicts that more than 4 million Syrians will flee to neighbouring countries in 2014, almost twice as many as today. The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) assumes that around 2.9 million persons have been displaced. Since the conflict broke out in March 2011, more than 2.3 million Syrians have fled to neighbouring countries.

Regime making suspected opposition activists disappear

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic comprising groups of experts appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Council has accused the Syrian regime in the report it published on 19 December 2013 of being responsible for the systematic disappearance of suspected opposition activists to secret prisons as a deliberate civil war tactic and of withholding all information about their fate.

Situation of journalists

According to a report published by "Reporters without borders", the situation of journalists in Syria is becoming more and more precarious. The high number of abductions is particularly worrying. Syria is among the five most dangerous countries in the world for journalists.

Pakistan

Security situation

At least three people were killed and 14 were wounded in a suicide bombing in front of a Shia mosque near the city of Rawalpindi on 17 December 2013. The blast was the last in a series of acts of violence between Shia and Sunni Muslims which began with violent clashes in November (cf. BN of 18 November 2013).

Five Pakistani troops were reportedly killed in an attack carried out by Ansarul Mujahideen, one of the lesser known sub-groups of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, (TTP) targeting an Army checkpoint in North Waziristan Agency (in a suburb of the town Mir Ali) on 18 December 2013. According to Army sources, 33 militants of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and three civilians were reportedly killed on 19 December 2013 in the subsequent military operation carried out on 19 December 2013. It is virtually impossible to obtain independent information from the area as military operations continue, a curfew has been imposed and foreign journalists and relief organisations have been banned from entering the territory. A TTP spokesperson said the attack on the checkpoint was an act of revenge for the assassination of TTP Chief Hakimullah Mehsud. The TTP spokesperson said the Pakistani military will continue to be a target. The new head of the TTP-Chef Mullah Fazlullah refuses to take part in peace talks.

Turkey

Anti-corruption operation in Turkey

Several major raids have been carried out in Istanbul and Ankara since 17 December 2013 probing corruption, money-laundering and blackmail in which over 80 persons suspected of corruption and organised crime have been arrested. The sons of Interior Minister Muammer Guler, Economy Minister Zafer Caglayan and Environment Minister Erdogan Bayraktar were among those detained. Several high-ranking civil servants and well-known businessmen were also detained. Police searching the home of detained Halkbank general

1 manager reportedly found \$4.5m in cash hidden in shoe boxes in his library. The accusations of corruption
2 involve key policy areas of Prime Minister Erdogan, such as trade with Iran and prestigious building projects.
3 Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has denounced the large-scale arrests in leading circles of the
4 country as a "dirty operation" and political plotting against his government. Five police chiefs who oversaw
5 raids in Istanbul and Ankara were sacked without charges for "abuse of office" on 18 December 2013, in-
6 cluding the heads of the financial crime unit, the smuggling unit and organised crime units. Two new public
7 prosecutors were appointed to assisted the public prosecutors in charge of the inquiry. A total of 29 high-
8 ranking police officers were reassigned in connection with the raids.

9 **Turkish police use tear gas**

10 According to a press release, Turkish police officers used tear gas and water canons to disperse crowds at a
11 demonstration held on 22 December 2013. Thousands took to the streets, wielding banners which called for
12 the resignation of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and protesting against the recent dismissal of doz-
13 ens of police chiefs.

14 **Egypt**

15 **Moursi to go on trial for third time**

16 The public prosecutor in Cairo accused ousted President Mohammed Moursi and 132 other persons on 21
17 December 2013 of a jail breakout and of organising the jail breakouts of other persons during the uprising
18 against former President Mubarak. The Palestinian group Hamas and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah
19 were reportedly involved in the breakout of Moursi and other members of the Muslim Brotherhood from
20 Wadi Natrun jail. On 18 December 2013, the public prosecutor charged Moursi with terrorism and espio-
21 nage. Moursi also faces charges in a separate trial in which he is charged with being responsible for the death
22 of seven opposition activists during his term in office.

23 **Secular activists charged**

24 After three well-known activists of the 2011 uprising were each sentenced to three years in prison for taking
25 part in an illegal rally a few weeks ago and for attacking police officers, the opposition now fears that the
26 government will not just crack down on Islamists but also on secular-oriented activists.

27 **Demonstrations dispersed**

28 Police in Cairo used tear gas to disperse rallies held by the Muslim Brotherhood on 20 December 2013 press-
29 ing for the Moursi's release. Protest marches were also held in Alexandria. Police officers arrested 85 pro-
30 testers nationwide.

31 **Violence on Sinai**

32 The leader of an extremist militia group was killed on the Sinai peninsula near the city of Al-Arish on 16
33 December 2013. He had been held responsible for a blast in 2012 which claimed the lives of 16 troops.
34 Two soldiers were killed in a gunfire exchange with extremists on 20 December 2013. Eight troops were
35 wounded and three extremists were killed in clashes close to the town of Rafah.

36 **Mali**

37 **Provisional results of parliamentary elections**

38 The re-run of the parliamentary elections took place on 15 December 2013. According to provisional results,
39 the party of President Keita, The Rally for Mali (RPM) won 60 of 147 seats in the national assembly and was
40 forced to forge a coalition in order to obtain the absolute majority of 74 seats. Turnout in the re-run was
41 approx. 37 percent, slightly lower than the first round of voting when turnout was 38.6 percent.
42 In the first round of parliamentary elections held on 24 November 2013, only 20 seats were allocated. 6.5
43 million citizens were to decide on the remaining 127 seats at the re-run of the parliamentary elections sched-
44 uled for 15 December 2013.

South Sudan:

Hundreds killed in clashes

The United Nations has reported that several hundred people were killed in clashes that erupted in the early hours of 16 December 2013 in the capital of Juba. Reports suggest that up to 500 persons were killed and around 800 were wounded. President Salva Kiir declared a state of emergency. According to the United Nations Secretary-General, more than 40,000 people have so far sought refuge at United Nations compounds. The Federal Foreign Office has been warning people since 17 December 2013 not to travel to the capital owing to gun battles between sections of the Army.

While Salva Kiir said the coup had failed in a television address that aired on 16 December 2013, fighting has since spread to different parts of the country. Rebels brought the capital of Bor in Jonglei State under their control on 18 December 2013. They also seized the oil-rich Unity State after the Regional Commander of the SPLA, General James Koang Choul, defected to Salva Kiir's rival and opponent, former Vice-President Machar. Oil production has been suspended.

Things have reportedly calmed down in Juba in the meantime.

Background:

President Salva Kiir Mayard who belongs to the Dinka tribe and his former Vice-President Riek Machar who belongs to the Nuer people have long been caught up in a power struggle. The Nuer feel marginalised by the Dinka who dominate state institutions. After Machar announced in the spring of 2013 that he would be standing against Kiir in the 2015 presidential elections, Kiir sacked the entire cabinet and Vice-President Machar in July 2013, accusing them of incompetence.

Riek Machar Teny Dhurgon is one of the most colourful figures in South Sudan. Born in 1952, he obtained a PhD in mechanical engineering in 1984 when he joined the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) led by John Garang. Riek fell out with the SPLM/A leader John Garang in 1991 and formed a splinter group, the SPLM/A-Nasir. He has been held responsible for the massacre of around 2,000 civilians belonging to the Dinka tribe in Bor the same year. He signed a peace deal with the government of Khartoum in 1997 and was appointed a member of the government by President al-Bashir. In the year 2000, Machar changed sides again and rejoined the SPLM/A.

Central African Republic

Current situation

Human rights organisations are reporting of spiralling violence throughout the country. Amnesty International reported on 19 December 2013 that war crimes and crimes against humanity are being committed. The organisation says people are being unlawfully executed, houses of worship are being destroyed and people are being driven out of their villages. In Bangui, Christian militias known as "anti-balaka" (anti-machete) have killed around 60 Muslim men since 5 December 2013. The fighters from the former Seleka rebel group killed approximately 1,000 Christian men, looting their homes as an act of revenge. A small number of women and children have also been killed. 614,000 people throughout the country have been displaced, 189,000 in Bangui alone (which is equivalent to 25 percent of the population).

Human Rights Watch also reported on 19 December 2013 that anti-balaka have murdered hundreds of Muslims in Ouham province since September, pillaging their homes and robbing their livestock. The ex-Séléka responded with acts of revenge.

Democratic Republic of Congo

At least 21 villagers massacred in North Kivu

At least 21 villagers were hacked to death on 13 and 14 December 2013 in the villages Musuku and Mwenda not far from Beni, in Congo's North Kivu province, according to a statement issued by the MONUSCO peacekeeping mission. Three girls appear to have been raped and then beheaded. Members of the Muslim

rebel group ADF-NALU (Allied Democratic Forces – National Army For The Liberation Of Uganda) from Uganda comprising up to 1,400 rebels are being held responsible for the massacre.

Uganda

Parliament adopts anti-gay bill

On 20 December 2013, the Parliament of Uganda adopted a law that has been controversial for years containing tough penalties for homosexuality. Repeat offenders will be jailed for life. The death penalty clause provided for in certain cases in a former bill was dropped from the final version. Under the law, anyone who fails to report gays and lesbians to the police will face prison sentences. Now anybody found practising, recruiting for or publicising homosexuality will be committing a felony. The approved text must now be signed by President Yoweri Museveni.

Somalia

Parliament confirms new Prime Minister

The Federal Parliament of Somalia endorsed the nomination of the new Prime Minister of the country Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed by a vast majority on 21 December 2013. The 54-year-old had previously worked for the Islamic Development Bank in Saudi Arabia. He will be replacing the former Prime Minister Abdi Farah Shirdon who was sacked by the parliament in a vote of no confidence on 2 December 2013 following a row with President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. According to the Constitution, Ahmed is obliged to appoint a cabinet within 30 days.

Six persons killed in attack on doctors

Six persons were killed including three Syrians, one Somali doctor, and two bodyguards while travelling towards a health clinic near Mogadishu on 11 December 2013 when gunman began firing indiscriminately at their vehicle. Another Syrian doctor and a Somali doctor sustained serious injuries. Local police are blaming the al-Shabaab militant group for the attack.

Serbia

EU accession talks to begin in January 2014

The EU Foreign Ministers agreed on 17 December 2013 to launch accession talks with Serbia on 21 January 2014. In doing so, they are acknowledging the progress Serbia has made in its relations with Kosovo. However, it was pointed out that Serbia will need to conclude a legally binding agreement with Kosovo by the time the negotiations come to a conclusion.

Negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with Kosovo began in October and are to be brought to a conclusion by the spring of 2014. Talks on the candidate status of Albania are to begin in June 2014.

Russian Federation

Russian Parliament decides on amnesty

Two musicians from the punk collective Pussy Riot will come under the amnesty adopted by Parliament. In the amnesty law adopted on 18 December 2013, explicit mention is made of mothers of underage children involved in "hooliganism". The 24-year-old singer Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and 25-year-old Maria Alyokhina had been sentenced to imprisonment the previous year. They had protested against Putin in a cathedral. The move by the Russian judiciary produced an international outcry. Even the Supreme Court condemned the decision last week, saying it was full of errors. The law enforcement authorities now have six months to enforce the amnesty. This means the two women will have to present several documents in order to be released, for instance proof that they have custody of their underage children. Under regular circum-

stances, the women would have been released in March 2014. It is anticipated that they will be released in the next few days. According to recent reports, Maria Alyokhina was released on 23 December 2013. The amnesty law was also expected to bring about the release of the Greenpeace activists recently arrested. The 30 men and women who protested against oil exploration at an oil platform in the Arctic several weeks ago were detained temporarily but were subsequently released on bail. Putin confirmed that they would not face trial for hooliganism. They are now free to leave the country following their protest against destruction of the environment in the Arctic. Observers assume that around 20,000 prisoners will benefit from the amnesty law presented by President Putin.

Putin signs pardon for Khodorkovsky

President Putin announced suddenly that he was planning to pardon his political adversary Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who had been in jail for 10 years. The Presidential Administration made an announcement to this effect on 20 December 2013. Guided by humanitarian principles, the decree said that the 50-year-old Mikhail Borisovich Khodorkovsky should be pardoned and freed from any further punishment in the form of imprisonment. The pardon came into immediate effect. Mr Khodorkovsky, the former Yukos oil tycoon, has been in prison since 2003 after being convicted in two trials on charges including fraud and embezzlement. Khodorkovsky was free to leave the Segezha prison camp in the region of Karelia which is close to the Finnish border the same day. Khodorkovsky openly admitted to being a member of the opposition before being sentenced to imprisonment. Khodorkovsky who was once one of the wealthiest men in Russia also backed the construction of an oil pipeline to China managed by his company which was competing with the state-owned companies. Human rights groups criticised both trials and have said they considered the 50-year-old to be a political prisoner.

Russian President Putin surprised everyone when he spoke of pardoning Khodorkovsky on 19 December 2013. However, the newspaper Kommersant reported that security service staff had met Khodorkovsky, in prison to initiate steps for the pardon. In early December 2013, talks were conducted between the former oligarch and security services without lawyers. At these talks, security service staff raised the possibility of a third trial and warned Khodorkovsky that the health of his mother who is suffering from cancer was deteriorating. Mr Khodorkovsky, once the richest man in Russia, previously said he would not request a pardon because this would be seen to be admitting guilt. According to the Kremlin, a pardon in Russia is still always associated with an admission of guilt - which is what prevented Khodorkovsky, from accepting a pardon for so long.

Ukraine

Sunday demonstrations continue

On 22 December 2013, for the fifth time in succession, tens of thousands of people demonstrated against the pro-Russian leadership at a mass Sunday rally. Opposition leader Vitali Klitschko addressed the crowd on Independence Square, Maidan Nezalezhnosti, in the centre of Kiev. The Kremlin critic Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who was recently released from a Russian prison camp, spoke to the crowd that had gathered on Independence Square from Berlin. The Ukrainian opposition announced the creation of a nationwide organisation called Maidan, which aims to champion a constitutional amendment and closer ties with the EU. The Maidan council includes representatives of the parliamentary opposition as well as the singer Ruslana and the former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko.

Turkmenistan

Results of the parliamentary election in Turkmenistan

Results of the parliamentary election in Turkmenistan The Democratic Party of Turkmenistan won 47 of the 125 seats in parliament, with the new Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs gaining 14 seats. The remaining seats are occupied by independent representatives of unions and of women's and youth organisations which, like the new Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, are considered loyal to the government.

China

Contradictory reports of violent incident in Xinjiang

As reported in the BN of 16 December 2013, police officers killed 14 people in a violent incident that occurred in a town near Kashgar in Xinjiang on 15 December 2013. The official statement described it as the response to an attack carried out by a terrorist group. However, according, among other things, to a report from Radio Free Asia on 18 December 2013, with reference to local sources, 14 members of an Uyghur extended family, including six women, who had got together to prepare for a wedding, were allegedly killed. According to the report, during an investigation at the house, the local police chief lifted a Muslim woman's veil, triggering a violent response during the course of which he and the head of state security in the district as well as 14 members of the Uyghur extended family were killed..

Korea (Democratic People's Republic)

Results of the parliamentary election in Turkmenistan

The North-Korean party and army leadership has pledged its unconditional loyalty to ruler Kim Jong-un following the execution of leading politicians. On 17 December 2013, North Korea celebrated the second anniversary of the death of former ruler Kim Jong-il as well as the second anniversary of the assumption of power by his son. Following the unexpected execution of Kim's uncle and mentor, Jang Song-thaek, last week, the celebrations attracted greater attention than usual at home and abroad. The images broadcast on state television did not show Kim's aunt, Kim Kyong-huiek. Kim's uncle Jang was long regarded as the country's second most powerful figure. The 67-year-old was also rumoured to have a good relationship with the military. Jang and a number of followers were executed for high treason. Other military officers, such as the former Chief of the General Staff, Ri Yong-ho, have not appeared in public for months. Their fate remains unclear.