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Directorate 22 - Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

1 June 2015

Afghanistan

Security situation

Taliban attacks and fights between rebels and Afghan security forces took place again during the past week. On 27 May 2015, Taliban fighters once again made the headlines by launching another attack on a guesthouse in a diplomatic area of Kabul, the Afghan capital. Four men tried to storm the guesthouse and were killed by security officials in a gun battle which lasted about six hours. According to the reports, there were neither civilian nor military casualties.

Taliban and security forces also clashed in the southern province of Helmand, where 14 policemen and seven soldiers died in heavy fighting on 26 May 2014. In Logar (central Afghanistan), a school was hit by an air strike on 31 May 2015. Two pupils died and four other civilians were injured. In addition, there was fighting in Kandahar and Uruzgan (southern Afghanistan), Maidan Wardak (central Afghanistan), Herat and Farah (western Afghanistan), Ghazni (south-eastern Afghanistan), Jawzjan, Samangan and Balkh (northern Afghanistan) and Nangarhar (eastern Afghanistan).

Targeted attacks on government representatives and opponents of the rebels took place in Herat (western Afghanistan), where a tribe elder was shot dead on 26 May 2015, and in Takhar (north-eastern Afghanistan), where a high-ranking judicial officer and his son were murdered on 27 May 2015. On 30 May 2015, a member of the High Peace Council was murdered in Badghis (western Afghanistan) and a teacher in Helmand (southern Afghanistan).

On 25 and 27 May 2015, bomb attacks claimed civilian casualties in Kandahar and in Helmand (southern Afghanistan), respectively.

In Nangarhar (eastern Afghanistan), several people were killed in fights between the Taliban and defectors to IS on 27 May 2015. Since 28 May 2015, Taliban and IS supporters have been fighting each other in Farah (western Afghanistan).

A German development aid worker who had been kidnapped by the Taliban in Kunduz (north-eastern Afghanistan) in mid-April was released on 29 May 2015. The circumstances are still unclear.

Iraq

IS attacks

On 29 May 2015, IS took responsibility for bomb attacks on two hotels in Baghdad, which claimed at least nine lives. The security authorities reported that a car bomb exploded in the parking lot of Ishtar Hotel. A suicide bomber blew himself up in the parking lot of the Babylon Hotel.

Mass graves in Tikrit

The Iraqi ministry of health announced on 28 May 2015 that 470 bodies had been found in several mass graves in the city of Tikrit (province of Salahaddin). They are said to be victims of an IS massacre in summer 2014.

Parts of Ramadi retaken

On 26 May 2015, Shia militiamen started a campaign against IS to reclaim Ramadi (province of Anbar). According to reports, they cooperate with Iraqi army in this endeavour. The Iraqi army claims that, together with its allies, it has retaken the quarters Taesh and Humeyra.

Humanitarian situation

According to UN reports, about eight million Iraqis are in urgent need of humanitarian aid. This applies in particular to about three million people who have fled their homes due to the IS advance since June 2014.

Syria

Islamist groups take last government stronghold in the province of Idlib

The Syrian Observatory for Human rights reported on 28 May 2015 that the al-Nusra Front and its allies took control of the city of Ariha after heavy clashes with government troops. The army, its Lebanese Hezbollah allies and Iranian fighters are said to have withdrawn from the city. Ariha was the last government-controlled city in the north-western province of Idlib. The Observatory relies on a large informant network.

Al-Qaeda in Syria offers west an alliance in the fight against Assad

Abu Muhammad al-Jaulani, the leader of Jabhat al-Nusra ("Support Front"), said in an interview with the Qatari TV station al-Jazeera that top al-Qaeda commander Ayman al-Zawahri had ordered him not to attack the west. Al-Jaulani obviously wants to disperse the west's suspicions of the Jihadists who want to topple the regime in Damascus. He said Syrian president Bashar al-Assad would be overthrown before long.

Yemen

At least 40 rebels killed

Air strikes of the Saudi-Arabian-led coalition and ground attacks of the Yemeni army against the Shia Houthi rebels and their allies killed at least 40 rebels in the second-largest city of Aden on 28 May 2015. A source from the environment of the Houthi militia told the news agency AFP that the rebels had suffered serious losses. Amnesty International charged the Houthi rebels and their allies on 28 May 2015 with using air defence weapons in residential areas and thus killing or maiming civilians.

Palestinian autonomous areas

Amnesty accuses Hamas of war crimes

Amnesty International has accused the Islamist Hamas organisation of war crimes against Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip during the war against Israel in 2014. A report published on 27 May 2015 says that Palestinians who were thought to collaborate with Israel had been kidnapped, tortured and killed for vengeance and in order to spread fear in the Gaza Strip. In March 2015, Amnesty had charged Israel with war crimes during the 50-day war between the Palestinians and Israel, which ended in August 2014. According to Palestinian reports, more than 2,100 Palestinians were killed, most of them civilians. Israel said that 67 Israeli soldiers and six civilians had lost their lives.

Libya

Attack on Prime Minister

Abdullah al-Thani, the prime minister of the internationally recognised government in Tobruk, announced that he narrowly escaped an assassination attempt on 26 May 2015. Unknown gunmen shot on his car when it left the grounds of the parliamentary buildings. Al-Thani was uninjured; a bodyguard was lightly wounded.

People killed in suicide attack

The government news agency Lana reported that, on 31 May 2015, a suicide attacker killed five guards and injured eight people near a checkpoint in the city of Misrata in western Libya. Reports that IS was responsible have not been confirmed yet.

Mali

Attacks on MINUSMA

On 31 May 2015, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) claimed responsibility for two attacks on MINUSMA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali): one missile attack on a MINUSMA position in the north, which killed one man and injured another on 25 May 2015, and a mine trap on the route of a convoy, which claimed three lives on 28 May 2015.

Ethiopia

Government party dominates parliamentary elections

As expected, the governing EPRDF coalition won the parliamentary elections. According to early partial results, it won at least 442 of 547 parliamentary seats. The release of the final result is scheduled for 22 June 2015. So far, the opposition has not won a single seat. In 2010, EPRDF got 99.6% of all parliamentary mandates in the elections.

The European Union stated that the elections had been orderly, but unfair. Arrests of journalists and opposition politicians, the closedown of several media and obstacles for the opposition during the election campaign had prevented an open debate and overall had a negative effect on the electoral environment.

Burundi

Situation deteriorates

Since Zedi Feruzi, the leader of the opposition party UPC (Union for Peace and Development), was shot dead by unknown attackers on 23 May 2015 in Bujumbura, the capital of Burundi, the situation has deteriorated further. On 31 May 2015, the representatives of the East African Community urged the Burundi government at a summit in Dar Es Salaam to postpone the presidential elections scheduled for 26 June 2015. On 28 May 2015 the European Union suspended its election monitoring mission, saying that the situation did not permit credible elections. The influential Catholic church also withdrew from the electoral procedure due to the turmoil. The EU mission claims that fear and a climate of general intimidation were prevalent, that the police used excessive force against government opponents and that demonstrations had been banned. Since president Pierre Nkurunziza's declaration on 25 April 2015 that he planned to run for a third term in office at least 30 people have been killed in violent clashes between the police and protesters. During the last few days several opposition politicians have gone underground because they did not feel secure any more.

Nigeria

President Buhari sworn in

On 29 May 2015, the inauguration of Muslim president Muhammadu Buhari, who was elected on 28 March 2015, took place in Abuja, the country's capital. Former military ruler Buhari (1983 - 1985) was the first opposition candidate who won the presidential elections since Nigeria's independence in 1960. Buhari said his main aims were to fight the terrorist organisation Boko Haram and eradicate corruption.

Boko Haram attacks in the federal state of Borno

On 31 May 2015, a bomb hidden in a bag of coals exploded on the Gamboru market in Maiduguri, the capital of the north-eastern federal state of Borno. One person died and three others were injured.

On 30 May 2015, a suicide bomber blew himself up in the Alhaji Haruna mosque (near the Monday market in Maiduguri) during the prayers. According to the police, 26 people died and 28 were injured, some of them seriously.

On 30 May 2015, Boko Haram fighters used anti-tank missiles in an attack on the suburb of Dala on the south-western outskirts of the city of Maiduguri. The army repelled Boko Haram. 13 people were killed and 17 injured.

On 29 May 2015, a bomb attack on a wedding party took place in the village of Tashan-Alede (Hawul Local Government Area). Reportedly, up to ten people were killed.

All attacks are laid at the door of the terrorist organisation Boko Haram, which seems to have responded to the official inauguration of president Buhari.

According to reports released on 26 May 2015, about 50 fighters suspected of being Boko Haram members attacked the city of Gubio (about 100 km north of Maiduguri) on 23 May 2015 (or, according to other sources, on 24 May 2015). The terrorists killed about 40 people and destroyed roughly 400 buildings and vehicles. Most attackers are said to have been children aged between 12 and 16.

Law against genital mutilation entered into force

On 25 May 2015, the president signed a law (the “Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015”) which bans, among other things, female genital mutilation and hurtful widowhood ceremonies. Moreover, it will be a crime in the future to leave one's spouse, one's children or other dependent relatives without ensuring their livelihood.

Kosovo

German migration and development centre opened

On 28 May 2015, German development minister Gerd Müller opened a German information and migration centre (“Deutscher Informationspunkt für Migration, Ausbildung und Karriere”, dimak) in Priština. Four employees will provide information on starting a business, economic assistance and legal ways of going to Germany to seek work. The centre was created in response to the latest wave of migrants.

Germany has supported Kosovo with almost half a billion euros during the past 15 years. In 2015, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development will provide about EUR 30 million to improve the education system and boost the economy. About EUR 3 million are to be used to reintegrate returnees.

Ukraine

New governor for the Odessa region

Ukrainian president Poroshenko has appointed former Georgian president Mikhail Saakashvili as governor of the Odessa region. Saakashvili has been one of Poroshenko's advisers since February 2015. The situation in the region is regarded as very difficult, as the area borders the Transnistria region, which has split away from the Republic of Moldova. This is a crisis area, with the Russians being involved in the conflict, too.

Malaysia/Indonesia/Thailand/Myanmar

New mass graves found

On 27 May 2015, after new graves had been found near the border to Thailand, the Malaysian police announced that, according to current knowledge, human traffickers ran about 28 camps, in each of which up to 400 refugees were kept prisoners. These camps were situated in a 50 km strip of land in the state of Perlis along the border on the Malaysian side. So far, about 150 bodies had been found; most of them were Rohingya, according to DNA analyses.

Support for refugees

On 20 May 2015, Malaysia and Indonesia agreed to take in boat refugees for a limited period of time. Up to 7,000 Bangladeshi nationals and Rohingya will be supported for up to one year.

Thailand has refused to take in refugees and said it was only willing to provide emergency help to shipwrecked people. Indonesia announced that Bangladeshi nationals were economic migrants and would be returned to Bangladesh after a few weeks. Rohingya, who are regarded as political refugees, might be taken in for up to one year, but Indonesia would look for third countries which were willing to accept them. Myanmar, which many members of the Muslim Rohingya minority have left due to discrimination and taken boats to Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, said it was only willing to make humanitarian gestures in its coastal areas.

Colombia

Fights between government troops and the rebel organisation FARC are escalating again. At least 42 rebels, among them three high-ranking FARC commanders, were killed in clashes in the Cauca region. This means that the ceasefire declared by FARC in December 2014 is over. Nevertheless, the peace talks to end the 50-year war are being continued on Cuba.