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Group 22 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

28 November 2016

Afghanistan

Armed clashes

Hostilities, raids and attacks, some involving fatalities or injuries among the civilian population, continue to occur. According to press reports, the following provinces were affected in recent weeks: Nuristan, Laghman, Nangarhar, Paktika, Ghazni, Logar, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Ghor, Herat, Farah, Faryab, Kunduz, Helmand, Sar-i-Pul.

Over 500 civilians are reported to have been killed and over 1,200 injured in the fighting in Kunduz this year.

Attacks

On 22.11.16 a member of the provincial council of Farah (West Afghanistan) survived an assassination attempt. Three of his bodyguards were injured.

On 23.11.16 a magnetic bomb attached to a vehicle exploded in Kabul without causing any casualties.

On 25.11.16 five people, including one police officer, were killed in a bomb attack in Jalalabad (Nangarhar, East Afghanistan). 27 people were injured.

On 26.11.16 the Afghan vice-president and warlord, Dostum, allegedly had a political opponent beaten up and subsequently abducted.

Germany to vacate consulate general in Mazar-e Sharif

According to press reports, the German ministry of foreign affairs is to vacate its consulate general in Mazar-e Sharif and the staff are to be relocated to the German armed forces' Camp Marmal outside the city. The reports state that the consulate was too seriously damaged in the attack on 11.11.16 and the diplomats can be protected more effectively at the camp.

Iraq

Attack on Shiite pilgrims claims many lives

According to police information, at least 74 people were killed in a suicide attack on buses carrying pilgrims near the town of Hilla to the south of Baghdad on 24.11.16. More than 100 people were reportedly injured. Many of the victims are Shiite pilgrims from Iran who had celebrated a public holiday in Kerbela and were on their way home. The IS has claimed responsibility for the attack.

The fight for Mosul

With the city surrounded by so-called Popular Mobilization Units (a Shiite militia supported by Iran which is fighting in alliance with the Iraqi army), thousands of civilians have fled the city of Tal Afar, which lies to the west of Mosul. Turkey has stated that it will not accept the city with its predominantly Turkmen population being conquered by Shiite fighters.

Shiite militias cut off the last supply route to Mosul on 23.11.16, leaving the city and the IS-held surrounding area isolated from the outside world.

Iran

Small-scale drug dealing

In future, dealing with small quantities of drugs is to be punishable with prison sentences of between 25 and 30 years, instead of the death sentence. According to the ISNA news agency, the Iranian parliament passed a bill to this effect on 23.11.16. The country has one of the highest execution rates worldwide. The majority of death sentences are handed down for drug-related crime or the sexual abuse of children.

Yemen

Ceasefire fails once again

The ceasefire between government troops and rebels which was agreed for the weekend of 19./20.11.16 was not extended. The parties to the conflict accused each other of having broken the agreements. The 48-hour ceasefire was the sixth attempt to curb the violence in Yemen.

Turkey

EU parliament calls for accession negotiations to be stopped

On 24.11.16 the European Parliament voted by a large majority in favour of a suspension of EU accession negotiations with Turkey. The resolution is a reaction to the Turkish government's clampdown on civil servants, media and opposition activists in the wake of the attempted coup in July 2016. The parliamentarians accuse the Turkish president of disproportionate repression. They wish to suspend negotiations until Ankara returns to a constitutional course. The resolution is not binding for the EU Commission and the member states. Turkish president Erdogan was indignant, describing the vote as meaningless and threatening to end the refugee agreement.

Further dismissals

According to media reports, Turkish president Erdogan dismissed over 15,000 more public service employees under two new decrees issued under the state of emergency last week. Those dismissed were civil servants, soldiers and police officers. Numerous establishments were also closed once again, including 375 associations, 18 foundations and a health centre. All are accused of having links to terrorist organisations. The new decrees also represent a continuation of the clampdown on the media, with seven regional newspapers and a local radio station being forced to shut down.

More than 110,000 civil servants have been dismissed and several thousand arrested since the attempted coup. For the most part, they are accused of having links to the Gülen movement.

Attack in Adana

A car bomb blew up in the car park of the governor's office in the provincial capital of Adana in southern Turkey on 24.11.16. According to media reports, two people were killed and more than 33 injured.

No-one has claimed responsibility for the attack so far. The Turkish government is blaming the attack on the PKK.

Suspended teachers allowed to return to work

According to information released by the Turkish government on 25.11.16, some 6,000 teachers are to be allowed to return to their jobs for the time being. The teachers were suspended under suspicion of having links to terrorist organisations in connection with the attempted coup. The government stated that investigations into the teachers' contacts and their possible involvement in the failed coup would be continued, however.

Syria

Fighting over Aleppo

Last week, Syrian government troops continued their advance into the eastern part of Aleppo, which remains under the control of the rebels. According to the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the fighting has caused up to 10,000 civilians to flee in recent days - around 6,000 to the rebel-controlled zones and the remainder to government-controlled areas. Assad's troops have reportedly also managed to capture the Al-Sachur district, which lies in the middle of rebel territory.

Turkish soldiers killed in air raid

According to information from the Turkish army, three Turkish soldiers on a military operation in northern Syria were killed and several injured in air raids by Syrian government troops on 24.11.16. The Turkish DHA news agency and the opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights had initially blamed the attack on IS.

Almost one million people under siege

According to the UN, humanitarian aid is being obstructed for almost a million people, who are subjected to isolation, bombing and starving-out. 250,000 of these people are said to be in the embattled eastern part of Aleppo alone. Speaking before the UN Security Council in New York, the UN commissioner for humanitarian aid, Stephen O'Brien, held Syrian government troops to account for besieging around 850,000 people, while the remainder were the victims of various rebel groups and IS.

Egypt

Attack on Sinai peninsular

Eight soldiers were killed in an attack on a military checkpoint near to the city of Al-Arish in the north of the peninsula on 24.11.16; at least twelve people are reported to have been injured. Three attackers were killed. No-one has claimed responsibility for the attack to date, neither has the background to the attack been clarified. Islamist extremists have killed hundreds of people on the Sinai peninsula in recent years, including many police officers, soldiers and members of the intelligence service. Numerous attacks in the past were perpetrated by an organisation formerly known as Ansar Bait Al-Maqdis, which swore allegiance to IS in November 2014 and renamed itself Wilayat Sinai.

Mali

Local government elections

On 20.11.16 more than 7.2 million voters in Mali were called on to elect around 12,000 delegates in 703 local government districts throughout the country. The last local elections took place in 2009. As the councillors are elected for a term of five years, these elections should actually have taken place in 2014. They had been postponed four times, however, on account of the continuing instability in the country. Elections have now officially been held in 688 of the 703 local government districts. There were no elections in the Tuareg rebel strongholds (the regions of Kidal, Ménaka and Taoudéni in northern Mali), because the Tuareg rebel coalition, CMA (Coordination of Azawad Movements) successfully called for an election boycott, insisting that the interim administrations agreed in the peace treaty of 2015 be implemented as a precondition for participation. Even in the central Malian region of Mopti, six of the 15 local government districts were excluded from voting, while in Goundam to the south-west of the city of Timbuktu as many as 14 of 16 local government districts failed to participate in the elections. Various uncertainties and flooding were stated as official reasons why the elections did not go ahead in these areas. Numerous incidents occurred in connection with the elections. In Dialloubé (Mopti region), for example, unidentified armed bandits set the town hall, the subprefecture and the subprefect's residence on fire. Local media reported that the election papers were burned. According to information from Malian security circles, a military convoy which was transporting ballot boxes for the votes to be counted was attacked by suspected jihadists while on

its way to Douentza. Five soldiers were killed in the attack. Islamists reportedly also briefly seized control of the town of Dilli further to the west.

Sudan

Strike in protest at price increases

A three-day strike called by opposition parties which began on 27.11.16 brought some aspects of public life to a standstill, particularly in Khartoum. Markets, schools and universities remained closed. The strike was called in response to a 30% increase in fuel prices, which has caused many other goods to become more expensive. To prevent a repetition of the violent clashes which claimed numerous lives in the wake of similar price rises in 2013, the government had had opposition leaders arrested in recent weeks. Those detained include Siddiq Youssef, leader of the National Consensus Forces (NCF). This is an association of opposition parties to which the Popular Congress Party (PCP), Sadiq al-Mahdi's National Umma Party (NUP) and the Sudanese Communist Party belong. Sudan's economy has been ailing since South Sudan broke away in 2011. Three quarters of the oil stocks which formerly belonged to Sudan as a single country accrued to the Republic of South Sudan upon secession.

Somalia

Hostilities

On 21.11.16 security forces of Jubaland's regional government (regions of Gedo, Middle Juba and Lower Juba) forced Al-Shabaab fighters out of the town of Berhani (region of Lower Juba). On 22.11.16 members of a local militia and Al-Shabaab fighters clashed in the area of Mogadishu airport (Lower Shabelle region). Several people were killed on either side. Al-Shabaab drove Somali units out of the town of Goof Gaduud (Bay region) on 23.11.16. The Islamists killed at least four soldiers. On 26.11.16 the militia attacked a Somali army post in Lanta Buro (Lower Shabelle region), briefly taking control of the town. Numerous people were injured. The number of fatalities is not known. Somali units managed to regain control of the town.

Attacks

Numerous people were killed in a car bomb attack on the Beerta vegetable market in the Mogadishu district of Waberi on 26.11.16. The majority of the victims were civilians. The death toll reported in the media ranges from at least eight to more than 20. One suspect was arrested in connection with the attack, for which Al-Shabaab has reportedly claimed responsibility.

Elections

The Somali presidential election, which was scheduled for 30.11.16, is expected to be postponed until December, due to delays with the parliamentary elections which are currently in progress. The parliamentary elections are only around 50 % complete to date. Numerous cases of irregularities, intimidation and corruption are presently under investigation and could lead to results being declared null and void. The elections for members of parliament take the form of indirect elections. Delegates chosen by 135 clan elders elect the 275 members of the lower house of parliament. Representatives of the regions appoint the members of the upper house. The elected representatives of both chambers then elect the country's president (cf. BN of 04.10.16).

Nigeria

Many killed in operations against demonstrators

In a report published on 24.11.16, Amnesty International accuses the security forces of using excessive force against predominantly peaceful demonstrations and other gatherings of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the south-east of the country between August 2015 and August 2016. According to the report, at least 150 people were killed, the most by far in Onitsha (Anambra State) on 30.05.16, which is Biafra Remembrance Day.

Uganda

Dozens killed in clashes between military and rebels

At least 41 rebels and 14 members of the security forces were killed in armed clashes between the military and the guard of the king of the Bakonzo ethnic group, Charles Wesley Mumbere, primarily on 25. and 26.11.16. Mumbere was taken into custody on 27.11.16.

The Bakonzo live approx. 340 km to the west of the capital, Kampala, in the Kasese district close to the border with DR Congo. According to government information, some supporters of the king are calling for a republic by the name of Yiira to separate from Uganda. Mumbere is an opponent of president Yoweri Museveni. The district is regarded as an opposition stronghold.

Central African Republic

Fighting between rebel groups claims lives

At least 16 people were killed in fighting between two fractions pf the Séléka rebel coalition - the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC) and the Union pour la paix en Centrafrique (UPC) - in the town of Bria (approx. 600 km north-east of the capital, Bangui) on 21.11.16. Around 6,000 people fled to a base of the MINUSCA UN peace mission in Bria.

Montenegro

New government without Djukanovic

One month after the parliamentary elections, a new government has been formed. The democratic socialist party (DPS) which has been in power since 1991 under long-standing prime minister Milo Djukanovic emerged as the strongest party once again. A ruling alliance was formed together with minority parties (Bosniaks, Albanians and Croats) and the social democrats (SD). The former head of the secret service, Dusko Markovic, is to become the new prime minister. Djukanovic will remain the party's leader. Markovic has announced that he intends to continue the course towards integration in the EU and NATO.

The pro-Russian opposition (Democratic Front coalition - DF) decided on a boycott directly after the elections. It intends to continue its boycott until the alleged attempted coup on election day is fully clarified. 20 Serbian nationals were arrested on the grounds that they were allegedly planning attacks on government buildings and government representatives. A criminal organisation from Serbia and Russia is alleged to be behind the attempted coup, with the aim of destabilising the country and torpedoing the process of integration with the West (cf. BN of 17.10.16).

China

Xinjiang: Passports seized

Authorities in the Uighur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang are calling on the population to hand in their passports to the police for inspection. Officially, the measure is aimed at maintaining social order. According to observers, however, it is directed first and foremost an Uighurs, with the aim of further restricting their freedom of travel.

Myanmar

Armed conflict in Shan Sate

On 20.11.16 the Northern Alliance – comprising the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the Arakan Army (AA) – launched attacks on the military in the townships of Muse and Kutkai in northern Shan State. According to the Northern Alliance, the attacks are a response to activities by the military in the region. Around ten people were killed in the conflict, which lasted several days. More than 2,600 people fled to the town of Muse and around 3,000 to neighbouring China, from where some have since already returned.

Vietnam

Three activists in custody

In a statement on 21.11.16 the UN Human Rights Office for South-East Asia expressed its concern regarding the situation of three activists who were arrested in November 2016. They have reportedly been tortured. Blogger Ho Van Hai, who was arrested on 03.11.16, has been charged with propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, which is punishable with between three and 20 years in prison. Luu Van Vinh and Nguyen Van Duc Do, who were arrested on 06.11.16, are accused of following subversive activities, for which they face prison sentences of between twelve years and a life term or the death penalty. They had recently formed the Coalition of Self-determined Vietnamese Peoples, which champions democracy and human rights.

Columbia

New peace treaty signed

On 24.11.16 president Juan Manuel Santos and Rodrigo “Timochenko” Londoño, the leader of the rebel organisation Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), signed a peace treaty. An initial version of the treaty, which was signed on 26.09.16, was unexpectedly rejected by the people in a referendum on 02.10.16 (cf. BN of 04.10.16). There will not be a second referendum. Parliament will vote on the treaty.

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