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Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

19 June 2017

Afghanistan

Fights are continuing, with cleansing campaigns and raids carried out by the security forces as well as attacks and assaults by the insurgents, in which civilians are killed or wounded. According to press reports, the following provinces were affected during the last week:

Attacks

On 18 June 2017, radical Islamist Taliban insurgents stormed a police station in the town of Gardez (southwestern Paktia province), killing at least five policemen and injuring another eight. Apparently, also five of the attackers were killed in the incident; moreover, several civilians were killed or wounded.

On 17 June, seven US soldiers were wounded when an Afghan soldier attacked foreign military stationed at Camp Shaheen near the northern town of Mazar-e-Sharif. On 21 April, at least 140 soldiers had been killed in this army base in an attack launched by the Taliban (see BN of 24 April 2017).

On 15 June, an attack on the Shiite al-Zahra mosque in Kabul left at least six people dead and several others wounded. IS has claimed responsibility for the attack.

On 14 June, the explosion of a bomb hidden in a motorcycle killed seven people, among them six children, and injured several other individuals in eastern Paktika province. A suicide attack on a checkpoint in Gereshk district (southern Helmand) left several insurgents dead.

IS media leader killed

US forces have reported that already on 3 June 2017, they killed IS media leader Jawad Khan in southeastern Nangarhar province, thus disrupting the connections of the local IS to the terror group in Syria.

US sends more troops

The Pentagon plans to deploy 4,000 additional troops to Afghanistan.

Columbia

Several people killed in attack

On 18 June 2017, a bomb explosion in a shopping mall in the capital of Bogota claimed the lives of three people. Several others were wounded. The background to the attack is unclear.

Egypt

Bomb attack in Cairo

Apparently, a bomb attack in Cairo has killed a policeman and injured four others. An improvised explosive device was detonated by mobile phone near a police vehicle parking on the roadside.

So far, no-one has claimed responsibility for the attack. Recently, IS and other Islamist groups have been carrying out attacks in the region.

Eritrea/Djibouti

Border tensions

The government of Djibouti has accused Eritrean soldiers of occupying territory in a contested border area. The African Union confirmed that Djibouti has officially lodged a complaint. So far, there has been no reaction from Eritrea.

The mountainous region has been disputed for a long time. In 2010, Qatar had brokered a peace agreement. Since then, Qatari troops controlled the area to ensure that the agreement is properly implemented. In the beginning of the week, Eritrea (like several Arab countries before) cut all diplomatic ties to Qatar. In return, Qatar has pulled its troops from the area.

FYR Macedonia

Appointment of new government

On 31 May 2017, parliament confirmed Prime Minister Zoran Zaev's new government. The coalition is made up of Social Democrats, the ethnic-Albanian political party Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) and the Alliance for Albanians. The ethnic Albanian Party Besa did not join the government cabinet, but has signalled to support the coalition in parliament.

First of all, the new government will aim at settling the long-standing dispute over the country's name and to find a solution to the issue of accession both to NATO and EU. Since 2005, Greece has used its veto to block the integration process, opposing the use of the name 'Macedonia' since it also has a region with the same name.

Iran/Syria

Iran attacks IS positions

In reaction to the IS attacks on the parliamentary building and on the tomb of Ayatollah Khomeini in Tehran on 7 June 2017 (see BN of 12 June 2017), the Iranian Revolutionary guards said they have launched missiles into eastern Syria targeting IS positions in the oil-rich region of Deir Al-Zour (Deir el-Zor).

Iraq

Situation in refugee camps

According to reports of 12 June 2017, a food delivery of a Qatari charity organisation for fast-breaking meals has left hundreds ill from food poisoning in a refugee camp in Iraq. More than 800 cases have been recorded; a report that a child had died proved to be false. The owner of the restaurant in Erbil who had prepared the food was arrested, together with several staff members of the NGO.

Mosul

On 14 June 2017, the Iraqi forces reported that they reclaimed the Zanjili district of Mosul. Still, up to 200,000 civilians are trapped in the IS-held quarters of Mosul. At present, it is not possible to provide a reliable estimate of civilian casualties. Experience of the past few weeks suggest that numbers go into the hundreds every week. Civilians are still being abused by IS insurgents as human shields, and they are systematically prevented from escaping. The number of civilians who attempted to escape and were killed by booby traps and shots in the last week may well go into the hundreds.

There are increasing reports on atrocities committed by Iraqi forces. Footage shows Iraqi soldiers arbitrarily torturing civilians, mainly Sunni Muslims. However, violence is not only committed by Shiite members of the military.

Border to Syria

On 17 June 2017, Iraqi security forces reported that they reclaimed the IS-held al-Waleed border crossing to Syria. This checkpoint on the highway between Damascus and Baghdad is of vital strategic importance. A

US military camp is situated nearby in At-Tanf (Syria), some kilometres inland near the tri-border region of Syria, Jordan and Iraq, in a neutral zone respected by IS insurgents and government forces.

At the same time, a major operation has been launched on the IS-held towns of Annah and Rawa. On 18 June, the only bridge in Rawa was destroyed in order to divide the town in two and to cut off a major supply route. The IS group is still controlling several towns in Anbar province and is regularly carrying out counter-attacks and assaults behind the lines.

PKK

On 18 June 2017, it was reported that the PKK has started to introduce administrative structures to Khanasor (northern Nineveh province) from the north Syrian Rojava region which is under control of the Syrian wing of the Kurdistan Worker's party YPG. Iraqi politicians have expressed concern that this may be the prelude to annexation of the region by Syria's Kurdish region.

Kirkuk region

On 18 June 2017, IS militants shot dead 34 civilians in Hawija, mostly women and children, for attempting to flee the areas under IS control.

Kenya

Attack claims several lives

Four people were killed and several injured when a car run over an improvised explosive device in northeastern Mandera county on 16 June 2017. Al-Shabaab militia is held responsible for the attack.

Kosovo

Parliamentary elections

Government formation is likely to be challenging. Winner of the snap elections is the coalition of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) and the Initiative for Kosovo Nisma (see BN of 12 June 2017), with 39 out of 120 seats. The nationalist movement Vetevendosje took the second place, and the moderate coalition led by former Prime Minister Isa Mustafa and his Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) came third.

Libya

Benghazi

Despite the dissolution of the jihadist group Ansar al-Sharia, fighting has continued in Benghazi. Currently, the Libyan National Army (LNA) is mainly fighting against the Benghazi Revolutionaries Council, a coalition of Islamist militias. During the week, air strikes were conducted against the Suq al-Hout district; meanwhile, the LNA has taken control of the district, where the symbolically important Tahrir square is located, which had been the starting point of the 2011 revolt. Also, the Misrata road has apparently been secured.

Health system

The Tobruk government's minister of health has appealed for international assistance to ensure the supply of medicines. Within the first week of June, 12 people have died of scorpion stings because the supply of antidote has run out.

Return of Gaddafi loyalists

Ali Sharif al-Rifi, former chief of staff of Gaddafi's air force, has apparently returned from exile to his home town Waddan. This seems to be in connection with the release of Gaddafi's son Saif al-Islam and of several Gaddafi loyalists by militias affiliated with the Tobruk government. Among the released, there is also former intelligence chief Abdullah Senussi. It remains unclear whether this is an individual decision or part of a general policy of the Tobruk government; also, it is not known how the other two governments have reacted so far.

Mali

Attack of Islamists at holiday resort leaves two dead

On 18 June 2017, armed Islamists attacked the Kangaba luxury resort frequented mainly by Western foreigners, located on the outskirts of the capital Bamako near the village of Dougourakoro. The Islamists killed two people. Malian security forces, supported by UN peacekeepers and French soldiers, drove the attackers out of the resort and liberated 36 hotel guests and employees. Mali's security minister Salif Traore said that four attackers were killed in the operation.

Morocco

Protesters sentenced to prison terms

25 activists who took part in protests in Morocco's northern Rif region have been sentenced to one and a half years in prison each for violating public order and participating in an armed and unauthorised demonstration. For months now, people have been protesting against poor health care, high unemployment, corruption and arbitrary administrative decisions in the region.

Myanmar

Fights in Kachin state

Since 16 June 2017, there have been clashes between military and the rebels of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Tanai(ng) district in Kachin state. The rebels control the whole region, where gold and amber are extracted. Since 6 June, when the military distributed leaflets to the population announcing a military operation and calling on people to leave the region, thousands have left their homes. Together with three other rebel groups, the KIA has formed the Northern Alliance which had attacked military bases in neighbouring northern Shan State in November 2016.

In its report published on 14 June, Amnesty International accuses both the military and the rebel groups of human rights violations against the civilian population in Shan and Kachin states. More than 98,000 people have been displaced by the ongoing conflict between government and rebels since 2011, Amnesty says.

Pakistan

Media reports say that a Facebook user has been sentenced to death pursuant to the country's blasphemy law. The judge found that he had posted derogatory comments about the Prophet Muhammad on Facebook. An appeal against the judgement is possible. NGOs have criticised the verdict.

Philippines

Continuing fights in Marawi

The Philippine military has stated that between 100 and 120 Islamist fighters are still active in Marawi, while 257 have been killed. Apparently, up to 400 civilians are trapped in the combat zone; a part of them is used as human shields by the terrorists.

Somalia

Attacks in Mogadishu

Apparently, six militants of al-Shabaab disguised as army members have attacked two restaurants in Mogadishu, killing at least 20 people and injuring 35 more. The perpetrators barricaded themselves in one of the restaurants together with about 20 hostages. After several hours, the Somali soldiers ended the hostage-taking. The perpetrators were killed; ten hostages survived.

Syria

Fighter jet shot down

On 18 June 2017, the US Air Force shot down a Syrian fighter jet. US sources say that the jet had bombarded fighters of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) south of Tabqah (northern Syria). The SDF alliance including Kurdish and Arab units is supported by the US to fight the Islamic State in the region. According to the Syrian government, the fighter jet was downed while attacking positions of the IS terror militia.

Turkey

Protest march from Ankara to Istanbul

On 15 June 2017, followers of the major opposition party DHP started a march from Ankara to Istanbul to protest against the sentencing of their MP Enis Berberoğlu. In Istanbul, other demonstrators assembled in Mack Park and in front of the Caglayan Court. On 14 June, Berberoğlu was sentenced to 25 years in prison for espionage and betrayal of state secrets for having forwarded secret information to the critical newspaper Cumhuriyet to prove Turkish weapon supplies to Syrian rebels. Reports say that on 17 June, President Erdogan warned opposition leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu not to continue the protest march. Kılıçdaroğlu was unimpressed and continued the march for justice on 18 June. The court of first instance has already sentenced the newspaper's chief editor Can Dündar and its Ankara bureau chief Erdem Gül to prison terms for having published the report. Appeal procedures are pending.

MP of pro-Kurdish HDP party arrested

On 12 June 2017, the opposition HDP party communicated that their member of parliament Pervin Buldan, who also serves as a deputy president of parliament, was arrested in Diyarbakir. Judicial proceedings are ongoing against her for membership in a terrorist association, the communication says. Buldan had already been temporarily arrested at the end of 2016.

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