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Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

21 September 2015

Afghanistan

Security situation

The situation remains unchanged. There were more attacks targeting government representatives, more bombings, and fighting between insurgents and security forces.

Fighting

The security forces launched an operation to secure the much frequented Kabul-Jalalabad Highway that is a frequent target for attacks and kidnappings on 15 September 15. At least nine civilians died in fighting between the security forces and the Taliban in Paktia province (south-east) on 16 September 15. Hundreds of Taliban fighters attacked two district capitals in the southern province of Uruzgan. A military operation against fighters of 'Islamic State' is ongoing in Nangarhar province (east). It is said that they drove the population of Achin district from their houses. The Taliban ordered people to leave their houses in Deh Yak district in the south-eastern province of Ghazni to avoid getting into the line of fire on 20 September 15. There was further fighting in Helmand (south), Farah (west), Kunar (east), Badakhshan (north-east).

Targeted attacks

At least five civilians and one soldier lost their lives in Ghazni province (south-east) on 15 September 15 when the Taliban fired at a vehicle in which two soldiers and several civilians were riding. On the same day at least two civilians died in the bombing of a market place in Kapisa province in central Afghanistan. A suicide bomber blew himself up at a police station in Paghman, a Kabul suburb, on 16 September 15, killing at least four people, including a senior police officer. More than 40 people were injured. Also on 16 September 15 four police officers died in Balkh (north) when their vehicle hit a booby trap. In the southern province of Uruzgan a tribal elder was attacked and injured by the Taliban on 16 September 15. There was a civilian casualty as a result of the suicide bombing of a convoy of foreign soldiers in Kandahar (south) on 17 September 15. The Taliban attacked the head of police of a district in Uruzgan province in the south on 17 September 15, killing one officer and wounding four. On the same day a student was killed and four more were wounded in a Taliban ambush. A car with four civilians hit a roadside bomb in Khak-i-Jabbar district on 18 September 15, they were killed and another seven civilians were injured. On 19.05.15 the bodies of four workers of a telecommunications company who had previously been kidnapped by the Taliban were discovered in Herat province (west). At least 28 civilians died in a bomb attack in Asadabad (capital of the Kunar province in the east) on 20 September 15. Two more civilians became the victims of a suicide bomber in Kandahar (south) on the same day.

Closure of schools in Nangarhar

In recent weeks followers of IS forced 57 schools in the districts of Achin, Kot, and Dih Balah in the eastern province of Nangarhar to close down. This affected about 30,000 children.

Iraq

Human rights violations

The human rights organization Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that Shiite militias in Tikrit and the neighbouring cities of Albu Ajil, al-Alam, and al-Dur had abducted over 200 Sunni and destroyed residential houses and businesses together with the Iraqi military after retaking the region from IS in the spring of 2015. No trace had as yet been found of at least 160 of those abducted. HRW said that an Iraqi officer reported on 18 September 15 that the Shiite militias should withdraw from Tikrit and be replaced by police units. Shiite militias are considered to have more military strength than the army and are said to hold power over many districts of Baghdad.

Syria

Renewed efforts to end the civil war?

At a meeting in Berlin on 20 September 15 German Foreign Minister Steinmeier and his US colleague Kerry advocated making a new effort to end the civil war in Syria that has so far claimed over 250,000 lives and has driven 12 million Syrians from their homes. They favoured the inclusion of Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Russia in such talks to come up with a political solution for the situation in Syria. Against the background of recent reports of a stronger Russian military involvement in Syria Steinmeier welcomed Kerry's talks with his Russian counterpart Lavrov. Following US information Russia recently built an airport near Lattakia and deployed tanks, artillery and troops as well as several fighter jets to Syria. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov denied any plans to step up Russian military presence in Syria and said that the soldiers currently stationed in Syria are merely assisting in the handling of Russian arms.

UNHCR funding to improve

Both politicians, Kerry and Steinmeier, also said that they would push for increased funding of the UN refugee organisation UNHCR at the upcoming UN General Assembly and with the G7 group. UNHCR will need USD 1.8 bn to maintain last year's the level of services.

Turkey

Investigations against Dogan Media

The Turkish attorney general initiated investigations against the Dogan Media group for engaging in „terrorist propaganda" on 15 September 15. Dogan Media is one of the country's leading media groups and publishes the Turkish daily 'Hürriyet' among others. The government accuses the group of sympathising with the banned PKK. Enraged AKP followers had attacked the paper's office building in Istanbul already last week. The Turkish government is currently taking harsh action against the press. A Dutch female journalist has recently been expelled from the country for allegedly engaging in propaganda for the PKK.

Anti-PKK protest

Tens of thousands took to the streets in Istanbul with the slogan "Millions of Breaths as One Voice against Terror" to protest against the violence of Kurdish extremists on 20 September 15. A massive police turnout accompanied the protest. This was the biggest anti-PKK protest in Turkey ever. In his address to the crowd President Erdogan said that no-one would succeed in splitting the Kurds and the Turks, Turkey was not facing an ethnic, but a terror problem.

The army continued its air strikes against the PKK and attacked its bases in northern Iraq last week.

Israel

Harsh action against Palestinian stone-throwers

The Israeli prime minister intends to take much harsher action against Palestinians involved in violent clashes. Nethanjahu said on 17 September 15 that the government had decided a change of policy and „declared war“ on those throwing stones or incendiary devices. The rules of engagement of the security forces would be changed and penalties including for minor perpetrators and their parents would become tougher. The government was also considering the use of snipers against rock-throwers if they posed a threat to life and limb, however, only to aim at the aggressor's legs. On 13 September 15 masked youths had thrown rocks

and fire crackers against police as it stormed the Al-Aqsa mosque on the Temple Mount in which they had barricaded. The youths wanted to prevent Jewish faithful from visiting the Temple Mount on the Jewish new year's festival. Muslims are generally allowed to pray on the Temple Mount, but on certain occasions the mount is also opened to Jewish visitors.

Yemen

Exiled government returns to Aden

After spending half a year in Saudi Arabian exile, Yemen's government returned to the port city of Aden. Upon the arrival of Prime Minister Khaled Bahah and seven of his government ministers in the temporary capital, a government spokesman informed on 16 September 15 that the government had transferred its offices from Riad to Aden. At the time there are no indications that also the head of state Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi will return. Stronger resistance in Taes is to be organized from Aden, the spokesman said. The country's third largest city is still partially controlled by the Shiite Houthi rebels. The government in Aden also intends to organize relief for the suffering population of Yemen.

Almost 100 casualties in air strikes

The health ministry that is close to the rebels said that at least 95 people died in the air strikes of the Saudi Arabian military coalition on war-torn Yemen on 11 and 12 September 15. Only in the capital Sanaa there had been 57 fatalities and 130 wounded, it said and that 38 civilians had died in the northern province of Saada. The Saudi-led military alliance did not comment on the reports.

Imminent flows of refugees

Impoverished Yemen that has a population of about 24 million received about 300,000 foreign refugees every year recently, most of them from Somalia. Now migration is starting to flow the other way from Yemen to the horn of Africa. Many try to move on from there, e.g. to Egypt. It is only a matter of time until Yemenites will also join the stream of refugees heading to Europe.

The war in Yemen that the Saudi-led alliance is waging against the Houthi rebels from the air and, since taking Aden in July, also on the ground, is a humanitarian disaster. After only a few months of war there are already thousands of victims. There are about one and a half million internal refugees, but the supply situation for almost everybody is extremely bad.

Lebanon

Protesters demand new elections

Thousands in Beirut demanded early parliamentary elections in the evening of 20 September 15. Protests against the government - triggered by a rubbish crisis - have repeatedly been held since mid-July. (The rubbish is piling up on streets, plots of land and river beds). Meanwhile the rubbish crisis has grown into a state crisis; the entire political class is accused of corruption and incompetence. These are the first mass protests in Lebanon that are not dominated by party alliances or religion. Lebanon is politically paralyzed, the parliament is divided between the block around US and Saudi Arabian supported Saad Hariri and the Hezbollah camp supported by Iran and Syria.

Western and Central Africa

Children fleeing Boko Haram

The UN children's relief organization UNICEF reported on 18 September 15 that over 1.4 million children are fleeing from the Islamist terror organization Boko Haram in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. About 1.2 million children, over half of them younger than five, were displaced only in northern Nigeria. Because of the terrorist's attacks 500,000 children had fled in the past five months.

Somalia

Decapitations

The bodies of three beheaded young men were found in the village of Raaso (Hiiran region) on 15 September 15. Two of them are brothers that al-Shabaab had arrested in the village of Buqaqable one week before accusing them of cooperation with Ethiopian military.

Security situation

The governor of Lower Shabelle region stated that al-Shabaab fighters attacked Yaqbariweyne army base (120 km south-west of Mogadishu) on 18 September 15 and held it for a short period. Al-Shabaab announced that 13 Somali soldiers had been killed during the operation. Allegedly the army has meanwhile reconquered the base. Al-Shabaab took control of the Janale military base (approx. 65 km south of Mogadishu) on 17 September 15. Also on 17 September 15 at least three soldiers were killed and ten wounded in a bomb explosion in the southern port city of Kismayo. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack. Al-Shabaab fighters attacked a convoy of two members of parliament near Beledweyne (Hiiran region) on 16 September 15. The Somali army's security guards killed six of the attackers.

A spokesman of the moderate-Islamist militia Ahlu Sunna (ASWJ) announced on 16 September 15 that ASWJ will wage war against Galmudug and start its offensive by retaking the cities of Abudwak and Adaaco. For several years the local government of Galmudug has been trying to win recognition as an autonomous federal state from the Somali government. The headquarters of ASWJ which is fighting against al-Shabaab is located in Abudwak (see BN of 31.08.15).

Ethiopia

Ethiopian rebel leader turns himself in to Sudanese army

The Sudan Tribune reported on 14 September 15 that about 800 rebels of the Ethiopian Tigray People's Democratic Movement (TPDM), under the leadership of General Mola Asgedom, had crossed the Eritrean-Sudanese border and turned themselves in to the military there after fighting between the TPDM and the Eritrean army. Seven of the rebels were reported killed. Ethiopian sources said that the rebels would return to Ethiopia, as had been agreed in secret talks with the TPDM leadership.

This is a surprising turn of events, because the TPDM has been fighting violently for the independence of the Ethiopian region of Tigray with the consent of the Eritrean government for about 14 years. For years Ethiopia and Eritrea have been accusing each other of supporting militant groups. The Eritrean government has not responded to the reports.



Kenya

Report: Human rights violations by the security forces

In its report published on 15 September 15 Kenya's national human rights commission KNCHR documented over 120 cases of serious human rights violations committed by the country's security forces in the fight against terrorism since 2013, including 25 extra-judicial killings and 81 cases of disappearances. According to the report such violations, which also include arbitrary arrests, extortions, and torture, are widespread, systematic and well-coordinated. They affected individuals and groups that were suspected of being linked to acts of terror in different parts of the country.

Burkina Faso

Coup by the presidential guard

Members of the presidential guard (Régiment de sécurité présidentielle - RSP) stormed the meeting of the interim government in the presidential palace in the capital Ouagadougou on 16 September 15. Interim President Kafando, Prime Minister Zida and two ministers were arrested. On 17 September 15 a military

spokesman announced that President Kafando had been dismissed and the government dissolved and that a "National Council for Democracy" would be formed. General Gilbert Diendéré was appointed as president of the council. As reason for the coup he stated that the election law adopted by the interim government had excluded supporters of former President Campaoré from standing in the presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for 11 October 15. The coup had been triggered by the recommendation to dissolve the RSP that was made in the report of a truth and reconciliation commission published on 21 September 15. The military council announced on 18 September 15 that all those mentioned above who had been arrested during the coup had been released again with the exception of Prime Minister Zida (who remains under house arrest).

The Chairman of the West African Economic Community (ECOWAS), Senegal's head of state Macky Sall, and Benin's President Thomas Boni Yayi went to Ouagadougou to hold mediation talks. According to them they failed in reinstalling a civilian government. Sall intends to present an as yet unsigned draft of the negotiation results at a special Ecowas summit on 22 September 15.

During the regime of president Campaoré, who was ousted after mass protests in October 2014, General Gilbert Diendéré had held the positions of head of the secret service and commander of the RSP for many decades.

Casualties during protests against military council

Despite massive military presence in the streets of Ouagadougou violent protests against the military coup erupted on 17 September 15. The protesters demanded the release of the arrested president and the members of the government and holding the presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for 11 October 15. The protests were quelled by soldiers. Reportedly at least ten persons were killed and more than one hundred injured in violent protests since the coup.

Cameroon

Suicide bombings claim at least five lives

In two suicide bombings in the city of Mora close to the Nigerian border (Extrême-Nord region) at least five people died on 20 September 15. Boko Haram is held responsible for these attacks in the district of Galdi at the city entrance.

In this region about 100 people have been killed by Boko Haram suicide attacks since July 2015.

Nigeria

Bombings in Maiduguri

The army stated that in the Maiduguri districts of Gomari and Ajilari three bombs exploded simultaneously on 20 September 15. The Boko Haram terror organization is held responsible for the eight casualties caused by these bombings.

90 people liberated from Boko Haram captivity

The army said on 18 September 15 that soldiers had succeeded in liberating 23 men, 33 women and 34 children held by the Boko Haram terror organization in the villages of Dissa and Balazala (Maiduguri state, Gwoza Local Government Area) on 18 September 15.

Serbia

Situation on the Serbian-Hungarian border

In coordination with Serbian authorities Hungary opened the main border crossing at Rözske-Horgos 1, that had been closed since 15 September 15, on 20 September 15 (see BN of 14 September 15). In future entering refugees are to be processed at the smaller border crossing Horgos 2 close by. As a result of the closure of the last border crossing at Rözske in the night of 15 September 15 and the uncompromising protective operations on the Serbian-Hungarian border the flow of refugees had shifted in the direction of Croatia. Hundreds of refugees protested against the closure policy. One by one Croatia also closed down seven of

eight border crossings with Serbia, because it was unable to cope with the influx. On 18 September 15 the Croatian government declared that it was unable to register the 17,000 refugees that had arrived in the course of a few days.

Montenegro

Montenegro considers accession to NATO

On 16 September 15 the parliament adopted a resolution to seek NATO membership. US Vice-president Joe Biden had assured Prime Minister Milo Dukanović already on 14 September 15 of the support of the Balkan country's accession to NATO at the meeting of NATO foreign ministers in December.

China

Activist released

The authorities released activist Guo Yushan from prison against bond on 15 September 15. In 2012 Guo had helped the blind civil rights activist Chen Guangcheng to escape from house arrest and flee to the US embassy in Beijing. After diplomatic complications between China and the US, Chen had been permitted to travel to the US, while several of his supporters became targets of state actions (see BN of 07 May 12). Guo had been arrested in October 2014 for „illegal business activities“.

Nepal

New constitution

The Nepalese parliament adopted a new constitution with a large majority. Five sixths of the members voted for the 300 articles the constitution consists of. This constitution will replace the interim constitution in force since the end of the civil war in 2006 by which also the monarchy had been abolished. The segregation of religion and state is now enshrined in the constitution and some parts of the Hindu majority had protested against this. About 81 percent of the Nepalese are Hindus, nine percent are Buddhists and four percent Muslims. Some ethnic groups (Tharu, Madhesi) opposed the definition of the borders and the size of the seven federal provinces into which the country will now be divided.

Security was especially tight during the vote. There had been massive protests over the past weeks in which 40 people died.

Pakistan

Attack on airbase

Taliban fighters attacked a base of Pakistan's air force near Peshawar (Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province) on 18 September 15. Reportedly they killed at least 30 people.

Sri Lanka

UN report on the war in Sri Lanka - war crimes committed by both sides

A UN report published on 16 September 15 said that war crimes were „most likely“ committed during Sri Lanka's civil war. This applied both to the Tamil rebels of the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) and the armed forces. The UN recommended an international special tribunal to prosecute the crimes, the government of President Maithripala Sirisena, however, rejected this proposal. Instead, Foreign Minister Samaraweera had announced two days before that the country wanted to establish a Truth Commission to cope with the past according to the South African model. Furthermore an office would be set up to look into the claims for war reparations. Thousands of Tamils decry the loss of relatives, of houses and having had to flee.

The civil war had ended in May 2009 after more than 25 years after the army ruthlessly put down the LTTE's uprising. According to earlier estimates by the UN up to 40,000 civilians died only in the last few months of the war. The new report talks of bombings of specially set up security zones, torture, systematic sexual violence and the forced recruitment of children. Many people had disappeared, many of them probably after surrendering to the army.