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Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

15 August 2016

Afghanistan

The fighting, attacks and ambushes continue, in some cases killing and injuring also civilians. According to media reports the following provinces were particularly affected last week: Khost, Badakhshan, Ghor, Helmand, Baghlan, Paktya, Paktika, Nangarhar, Herat, Laghman and Nuristan. Because of the fighting raging in the southern province of Helmand 3,000 families had to leave their houses in the last 15 days.

Attacks

On 09 August 2016 one civilian died and 15 were injured in a suicide bombing in Mazar-e-Sharif (Balkh province, north). The house of a member of parliament in Parwan was attacked. Several civilians, including children, were killed by road mines in Kandahar (south).

A bomb explosion in Shindand district (Herat, west) caused four casualties, two of them Afghan soldiers, on 11 August 2016. Nine people were wounded.

On 12 August 2016 a roadside bomb in Kandahar (south) claimed four civilian lives.

More bomb explosions in Kandahar, Uruzgan (south), Sar-e Pul, and Balkh (north) on 13 August 2016 killed or injured ten civilians.

The head of the police of Helmand province (south) survived an assault on 14 August 2016.

An officer of the Afghan army and a civilian were wounded by a bomb in Kabul on 15 August 2016.

Iraq

Offensive against IS forces in northern Iraq

In the morning of 14 August 2016 Kurdish Peshmerga fighters launched an offensive against IS forces in northern Iraq. Media reported that the Peshmerga advanced from the village of Wardak (approx. 30 km south-east of Mosul) after artillery fire and several air strikes. The Kurdish administration said that the operation is preparing an offensive on Mosul and that several villages around Mosul have been retaken. This city, with a population over one million, has been considered IS' de facto capital since its forces conquered the city two years ago. It is the last major Iraqi city controlled by the jihadist militia. The Iraqi army and the Peshmerga are currently expanding their positions around Mosul.

Bangladesh

Another death sentence for war crimes

On 10 August 2016 a former official of the opposition party Jamaat-e-Islami was sentenced to death for war crimes committed during the 1971 war of independence. The special war crimes tribunal has been sitting for six years and has so far handed down sentences against 34 people, including several party officials of Jamaat-e-Islami.

Turkey

Attacks in the south-east

A report on 10 August 2016 stated that at least twelve people were killed and many wounded in three attacks in the south-east last week. According to the authorities, the PKK is responsible for these attacks.

One of them occurred in Sirnak province, near the border to Iraq. The media reported that missiles were fired at Turkish military vehicles from the Iraqi side killing four soldiers and wounding nine. Furthermore one of several bombs exploded near the city of Kiziltepe in Mardin province. The bomb was apparently targeting a police bus, three casualties are reported. Almost simultaneously a car bomb went off next to a police bus, killing five, in Diyarbakir province.

Syria

Continued attacks on the city and province of Aleppo

At least 51 civilians are reported dead after attacks on Aleppo on 13 August 2016. 15 allegedly died in Syrian air force air strikes on the rebel-held east of Aleppo, while nine fell victim to rebel gunfire on the government-controlled western part. There was no indication of the stable three hour ceasefire announced by Russia last week.

Syrian and Russian air strikes are held responsible for 27 deaths in three cities and one village in the western part of the province.

Russian air raids on in Idleb and Deir-es-Zor provinces

In Aleppo's neighbouring province, Idleb, Russia allegedly also flew attacks, mainly targeting the cities of Jisr-al-Shugur, Binnish, and the provincial capital of Idleb. Over 120 civilian casualties were reported from Idleb.

Russia announced that six long-range bombers flew raids against IS fighters near Deir e-Zor in eastern Syria, killing a large number of them.

Former inhabitants return to Manbij

After fighters of the „Syria Democratic Forces“ (SDF) succeeded in driving IS from Manbij in Aleppo province, thousands of its inhabitants that had fled at the time it was conquered by IS in 2014, returned to the city on the weekend.

During its retreat IS had abducted about 2,000 inhabitants as human shields who were released on 14 August 2016.

Yemen

Al-Qaeda driven from two towns

One of Yemen's provincial governments announced that the Islamist al-Qaeda group lost two of its strongholds in the east. The provincial governor of Abjan, al-Chader Muhammad al-Saidi, told Reuters news agency that government troops took control of Jinjibar and Djaar on 14 August 2016. About 40 presumed al-Qaeda fighters had been killed in the fight and the others fled. The Saudi-led coalition supported the government troops with air strikes. Already previously, Al-Qaeda on the Arab Peninsula (AQAP), a particularly radical wing of the terrorist organisation, had been repeatedly driven from these two towns, but had always managed to return.

The civil war in Yemen has claimed over 6,500 lives so far, about half of them civilians. More than 2.5 million people had to flee.

Arab military coalition bombs Sanaa

The Saudi-led military coalition bombed the capital of Sanaa for the first time in five months after peace talks remained unsuccessful. Inhabitants reported on 09 August 2016 that the presidential palace and a military base had been among the targets. Yemeni sources stated that at least 14 civilians had died and nine had been wounded in the air strikes. Nine more were injured when fighter jets attacked a food factory in Sanaa. This was reported by sources close to the ministry of health, also on 09 August 2016.

Libya

IS headquarters and large parts of the city of Sirte conquered

On 10 August 2016 the militias of the unity government in Tripoli reinforced by international military support conquered large parts of the port city of Sirte, including the IS headquarters that had been set up in the former Ouagadougou conference centre in June 2015.

Sudan

Opposition groups sign roadmap for peace and dialogue

After lengthy negotiations four opposition and rebel groups signed a roadmap for negotiations with the Sudanese government on 09 August 2016 after mediation by the African Union High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP). The negotiations shall lead to a ceasefire and humanitarian access to the embattled areas in Darfur, Blue Nile, and South Kordofan. The signatories are NUP (National Umma Party), SPLM-N (Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North; the branch of the South Sudanese SPLM active in Sudan), JEM (Justice and Equality Movement) and SLM-MM (Sudan Liberation Movement – Minni Minawi). The South Sudanese government had signed the roadmap already in March of 2016.

South Sudan

Renewed fighting – UN intends to reinforce US peacekeeping force

Heavy fighting had first broken out in July 2016 giving rise to fears of a renewed outbreak of the civil war, then on 13 August 2016 confrontations between government troops and followers of the opposition resumed. To the south-west of the capital of Juba two civilians and one soldier were reportedly killed. The reports also say that there was heavy fighting in the Yei region through which the road from Juba to the neighbouring country Uganda leads. The situation quieted down somewhat on 14 August 2016. The UN Security Council intends to send an additional 4,000 UN troops to South Sudan, which the government rejects. Although there already is a UN peacekeeping force of 12,000 to prevent confrontations, fighting broke out repeatedly, also after the peace agreement had been signed in August 2015. The population is living through difficult times: about five of the eleven million South Sudanese are threatened by hunger and the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator O'Brien said that 250,000 children suffer from malnutrition. The relief organisations cannot reach the people that fled to the jungle to escape the insecurity.

Chad

President Déby sworn in for his fifth term

Overshadowed by opposition protests and the death of a protester, President Idriss Déby started his fifth term in office. On 8 August 2016 he was sworn in in the presence of many African heads of state and French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian in the capital N'Djamena. Déby has been in office already since 1990. According to official announcements he received more than 60% of the vote in the April elections. The opposition assumes that the elections were fraudulent and demands the cancellation of the results.

Nigeria

Boko Haram offers exchange of Chibok girls for detained fighters

The fraction of the Islamist terror organization Boko Haram that is led by Shekau published a video on 14 August 2016 showing about 50 of the more than 270 schoolgirls that the terrorists kidnapped from a boarding school in the city of Chibok in April 2014. Some succeeded in fleeing shortly after their abduction; about 220 are still missing. A spokesman said that about 40 of the girls are married and that some had died in air strikes of the Nigerian air force. He offered the girls' release in return for the release of detained Boko Haram members.

Democratic Republic of Congo

ADF rebels kill 42 civilians

In the evening of 13 August 2016 alleged fighters of the Islamist rebel group ADF (Allied Democratic Forces) killed at least 42 civilians in an attack on Rwangoma, a suburb of the district capital of Beni. An army spokesman explained that with this massacre ADF had wanted to take revenge for army operations against the group. ADF is said to have killed more than 600 civilians in and around Beni since October 2014.

Human Rights Watch expert expelled

On 08 August 2016 the Congolese authorities set Ira Sawyer, a long-standing expert of the human rights organisation Human Rights Watch (HRW), a 48 hour deadline to leave the country. HRW Executive Director, Kenneth Roth, said that this was a brazen attempt to muzzle reporting on the government's brutal repression of those supporting the limitation of President Kabila's term until December 2016. According to the official election committee the presidential election date originally set for 27 November 2016 cannot be maintained for logistical and financial reasons. On 11 May 2016 the Supreme Court had ruled that Kabila may stay in office until the elections will actually be held.

Ethiopia

Amnesty: Dozens of dissidents killed during protests

On 09 August 2016 Amnesty International (AI) reported that about one hundred people were killed and hundreds injured when security forces used violence against protesters in the regional state of Oromia. A diplomat mentioned 49 fatalities. Observers are stressing that these incidents happened at many different places and there was hardly any communication from some of these to the outside.

Human Rights Watch had already reported that since November 2015 security forces had killed over 400 people and arrested tens of thousands in their efforts to crush protests (see BN of 20 June 2016). These protests had erupted when government plans to expand the territory of the capital and to integrate some of the surroundings into the city, became known. Farmers fear enforced resettlement because of this.

Protests were also held in several towns in the northern region of Amhara. The Welkait, a sub-group of the Amhara ethnic group, seek the integration of their settlement area will be integrated into the Amhara region and reject its administration by the neighbouring Tigray region. AI reports that over 30 protesters died in the city of Bahir Dar alone. The government blames the protests on foreign enemies in cooperation with a local force and under leadership of the social media, stating that flags of a terrorist group had been found, arms, knives, hand grenades, flyers and extremist banners.

The two largest population groups, the Oromo (about 34%) and the Amhara (about 27%), live in Oromia and Amhara. They have been feeling discriminated since the Tigray (about 6%) have been dominating politics after the TPLF/EPRDF (Tigray People's Liberation Front/Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front) came into power in 1991. At the time the military dictator Mengistu was ousted with considerable involvement of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

Observers are concerned about growing ethnic tensions which might endanger the country's stability. Ethiopia is considered a reliable partner of the West in the fight against radical Islamists at the Horn of Africa: the US' drones start for Yemen from there and Ethiopia is supporting the African Union's Somalia mission. The country also houses hundreds of thousands of refugees from Eritrea and South Sudan.

Ukraine

Ukraine conflict escalates

On 11 August 2016 Ukrainian President Poroshenko announced that he ordered combat readiness for the army along the de facto border to Eastern Ukraine and to the Crimean peninsula in the Black Sea that was annexed by Russia. Previously the Russian internal secret service FSB had published a statement on 10 August 2016 that the FSB had prevented "terrorist attacks" of Ukrainian "saboteurs" in Crimea on the

previous weekend. One FSB agent and a Russian soldier had been killed during their arrest, the statement said. Russian President Putin commented that these two deaths would not go unpunished. Russian TV showed images of explosives and a man presented as Ukrainian secret service agent Yevgen Panov. The Kiev government stated that the agent had been abducted in Ukraine. At an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council, called on the initiative of Ukraine on 11 August 2016, representatives of both parties to the conflict warned against an escalation. Despite the new tensions, the Ukrainian military reported no increase in fighting with pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine's east. The Deputy Head of the OSCE mission, Hug, said on 12 August 2016 that reports about Ukrainian sabotage in Crimea could not be confirmed nor were there any indications that Moscow was concentrating its troops there.

FYR Macedonia

Disastrous storm

On 06 August 2016 devastating storms with extensive torrential rains caused serious flooding and landslides that left 22 dead. A state of emergency was declared for Skopje and the city of Tetovo in the north-west, where the storm mainly struck the north-eastern suburbs of Singelik, Stajkovci, Smilkovci and Creševo. Houses and infrastructure suffered so severely that more than 1,000 inhabitants had to be evacuated. The EU Emergency Response Centre took action and promised Macedonia extensive assistance. Already in August 2015 Macedonia had experienced a major storm in which five people died.

Serbia

New government formed – Lesbian appointed as minister

Three months after the early elections former and current Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić introduced his new cabinet. The governing coalition has a sound majority. It consists of the national conservative Serbian Progress Party (SNS), the pro-Russian socialists (SPS), and the Federation of Vojvodina-Hungary. The appointment of independent politician Ana Brnabić as Public Administration Minister caused quite a stir, because she is the first homosexual minister in conservative Serbia. The Gay Straight Alliance hopes that this will increase acceptance for the LGBT community.

In his government statement of six hours Vučić declared as his main objectives the conclusion of the EU accession talks by 2019, good cooperation with both the EU and Russia, structural reforms, and boosting the economy.

Thailand

Series of bombings causes casualties

A total of eleven bombs detonated on 11 and 12 August 2016 in several regions in the south: on the vacation island of Phuket, in the resort town of Hua Hin and in the provinces of Trang and Surat Thani. Four people died and more than 30 were wounded, including four German nationals. The police discovered several bombs that had not gone off. No-one claimed responsibility for the attacks. These bombings were obviously coordinated, but the police think they are not related to international terrorism, but rather to domestic dissent motivated by internal policy. For instance, Queen Sirikit's 84th birthday was celebrated on 12 August 2016. Then on 07 August 2016 the population voted for a new constitution in a controversial referendum that secures extensive rights for the acting military government even beyond the elections scheduled for 2017. Furthermore Muslim rebels are fighting for independence in the south and occasionally plant bombs.