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Group 22 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

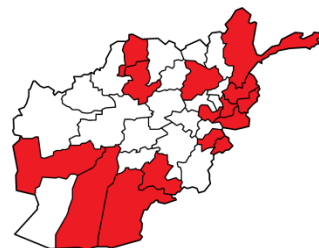
Briefing Notes

13 February 2017

Afghanistan

Armed conflicts

Armed conflicts, cleansing campaigns and raids by security forces continue unabated; the same applies to suicide bombings and attacks by rebels in which civilians are being killed or wounded. According to press reports, the following provinces were affected last week: Badakhshan (north-eastern Afghanistan), Helmand (southern Afghanistan, where at least 25 civilians were reportedly killed in NATO airstrikes on 9 and 10 February 2017), Zabul (southern Afghanistan), Nangarhar (eastern Afghanistan), Paktia and Khost (south-eastern Afghanistan).



Suicide bombings

On 6 February 2017, two women and a child were killed and four persons were wounded in a mortar attack in Alingar district, Laghman province (eastern Afghanistan). Three Afghan troops were killed in a bomb blast in Behsud district, Nangarhar province (eastern Afghanistan). In Karan dim wa Manjan, Badakhshan province (north-eastern Afghanistan), three attacks by the Taliban on lapis lazuli mines were foiled.

On 7 February 2017, the head of the administration of Khak-i-Safaid district in Farah province (western Afghanistan) was killed in a bomb blast.

On 7 February 2017, a suicide bomber blew himself up in front of the High Court in Kabul, killing at least 21 persons and wounding at least 45. ISIS have claimed responsibility for the attack. According to UNAMA, 89 judges, public prosecutors and other judicial employees have been killed since 2014, 214 have been wounded.

On 8 February 2017, unknown gunmen shot six Red Cross workers in Jawzian province (northern Afghanistan). According to the police chief of the province, ISIS have claimed responsibility for the attack. The Red Cross has suspended its work in Afghanistan for the time being. Up to now, ISIS had only been operating in Nangarhar and Kunar provinces in eastern Afghanistan.

Two civilians were killed and one person was wounded in a suicide bombing in Dand-i-Patan district, Paktia province (south-eastern Afghanistan).

On 10 February 2017, a member of the provincial council in Baghlan (north-eastern Afghanistan) was gunned down along with his three bodyguards.

On 11 February 2017, at least six persons were killed and 21 were wounded in a bombing in front of a branch of Kabul Bank in Lashkargah (Helmand). In Sar-i-Pul province (northern Afghanistan), dozens of fighters belonging to a local militia reportedly joined the Taliban.

On 12 February 2017, the deputy chief of police of Khost province (south-eastern Afghanistan) was gunned down in Kandahar (south-eastern Afghanistan). In Jawzian (northern Afghanistan), one person died in an attack against the police.

On 13 February 2017, a tribal elder was shot dead in Kandahar.

Mob lynches couple for “immoral acts”

A mob lynched an 18-year-old woman and her 19-year-old boyfriend in Wana district, Nuristan province (eastern Afghanistan) on 12 February 2017. The woman had been forced to marry a man against her wishes and was in a relationship with the 19-year-old man. The couple were arrested for “immoral acts” and were

detained at a police station when villagers and relatives stormed into the police station and shot the couple dead. The government has launched an inquiry.

Iraq

Persons killed and wounded during protests in Baghdad

At least seven persons were killed and over 200 were wounded at a rally involving supporters of the Shia preacher Muqtada al-Sadr in Baghdad on 11 February 2017. After dispersing the crowds in the rally which had started off peacefully, several missiles were also fired at the so-called Green Zone. The protestors demanded new voting rights in respect of the provincial elections scheduled for the autumn and a reappointment of the electoral commission.

Turkey

Additional civil servants fired

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan issued a new emergency decree, firing almost 4,500 civil servants on 7 February 2017 for allegedly having ties with terrorist organisations and endangering national security. The Ministry of Education was the hardest hit, losing 2,585 workers, most of them teachers. 330 university employees and 1,300 police officers and other law enforcement workers were also dismissed. Other agencies affected include the election commission, the state broadcaster TRT, the EU Ministry, the Foreign Ministry and other public authorities. The names of all the persons dismissed were included in Annexes to the new decree.

Terrorist suspects arrested

On 9 February 2017, Turkish security forces arrested four terrorist suspects in Gaziantep, seizing 24 explosive belts which they were obviously planning to use in a high-profile attack. The belts contained around 150 kilos of explosives. Security forces also confiscated two guns and other material.

Referendum on the Constitution scheduled for 16 April 2017

By signing a document on 10 February 2017, President Erdogan paved the way for a referendum on constitutional reform to introduce a presidential system. The referendum is due to be held on 16 April 2017.

Syria

AI report on mass executions

According to a report published by Amnesty International on 7 February 2017, the Syrian regime has killed thousands of people in mass executions. Up to 13,000 persons were reportedly executed between 2011 and 2015 following show trials lasting just a few minutes at the military prison Saydnaya near Damascus. The victims are overwhelmingly ordinary civilians who are thought to have opposed the government. The report is based on 84 eyewitness accounts and accounts by public officials as well as former inmates, judges and lawyers. The Syrian government denies the allegations made in the report.

Members of Al-Qaeda killed

According to US sources, eleven members of Al-Qaeda were killed in US airstrikes on 9 February 2017, including the high-ranking terrorist Abu Hani al-Masri who has close links with leaders of the terrorist organisation. Al-Masri reportedly worked as a security guard at training camps and recruited and trained a large number of terrorists.

Yemen

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reported on 10 February 2017 that the civilian population is in a terrible plight. More and more persons are being caught in the crossfire between government troops and rebels. The ICRC says the situation is particularly precarious in the port city of Al-Mokha and in Taz and Dhufar. Pro-government troops had announced on 8 February 2017 that they had taken back Al-Mokha fully from Shia rebels.

Tunisia

Terror cell destroyed

According to reports by government sources on 11 February 2017, police smashed a suspected terror cell comprising six terrorists whose members had been in touch with ISIS in Libya. The UN estimates that up to 5,500 Tunisians have joined jihadi groups in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Mali. The Tunisian authorities suspect this figure stands at 3,000 militants. In a recently published report, Amnesty International accused security forces of using violence and arresting people arbitrarily in their crackdown on terror, calling to mind the era of former President Ben Ali.

Zimbabwe

Pastor Evan Mawarire released on bail

On 9 February 2017, Pastor Evan Mawarire, Zimbabwe's currently best-known civil rights activist, was released from Chikurubi high security prison in Harare. On 8 February 2017, the High Court of Harare had granted a \$300 bail. Mawarire had been arrested on 1 February 2017 at Harare airport upon his return from a voluntary six-months spent in exile in the USA on charges of having attempted to overthrow the regime of President Robert Mugabe (cf. BN of 6 February 2017).

Nigeria

Boko Haram: attacks in Borno and Yobe

In the early hours of 11 February 2017, Boko Haram militants attacked the village of Musa (Askira Uba Local Government Area), setting buildings on fire.

On 10 February 2017, a military convoy was ambushed by Boko Haram at a junction between Ajiri and Dikwa (Dikwa Local Government Area). Military sources claim seven troops were killed and around twenty were wounded. Thirty terrorists were reportedly killed.

On 7 February 2017, two female suicide bombers attempted to carry out a bombing on motorists at the state-owned NNPC petrol station on Damboa Road in Maiduguri (capital of Borno state). The attack was foiled by members of the paramilitary organisation NSCDC (Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corp); both women were arrested. On 5 February 2017, Boko Haram militants attacked the town of Sawawa which is around 30 km north of Damaturu (the capital of Yobe State). After the troops had gained control of the military base there, they burned down most of the town.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Large number of persons killed in clashes between the military and the Kamwina Nsapu militia

On 9 and 10 February 2017, violent clashes erupted between the Kamwina Nsapu militia and the military in the town of Chimbulu (Kasai Central province, central Congo). According to reports by local Red Cross workers on 12 February 2017, at least 90 persons were killed. The United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) places the death toll at 50. The fighting was triggered by a raid waged by militiamen who entered a military base wielding knives and batons. The militia was reportedly acting in retaliation for the death of their leader Kamwina Nsapu who was killed by police in

August 2016. The militia revolted in the aftermath of Nsapu's death, occupying several towns, including the provincial capital of Kananga which they held in their grip for 48 hours in early December 2016..

Cameroon

Language dispute: two protestors killed by troops

During the morning of 10 February 2017, around 100 persons gathered in front of a police station in the town of Ndop (North-West Region), demanding the release of detainees who are under suspicion of having set a French-speaking school on fire on 8 February 2017. According to police sources, the crowd became increasingly aggressive, leading to police officers shooting two of the protestors in self-defence.

Cameroon is divided into ten regions, two of which are English-speaking and eight of which have French as their official language. Since October/November 2016, English-speaking teachers and lawyers have engaged in strikes and rallies in order to protest against the growing preference being given to French over English in courts and schools. In December 2016, four persons taking part in anti-government protests were gunned down by security forces.

Gambia

Gambia to remain a member of the International Criminal Court

Gambia's new President Adama Barrow has announced that his country will continue to be a member of the International Criminal Court, reversing the decision taken by his predecessor Yahya Jammeh who announced to the United Nations in October 2016 that Gambia would be withdrawing its membership.

Discontent with the International Criminal Court has been rife for quite some time among African countries. Since it was established in 2002, five judgments have been handed down, all against Africans. The African Union subsequently adopted a resolution at a summit held in early February 2017, calling for a mass exit from the International Criminal Court.

Jammeh will not face trial

The 65-year-old lawyer, Ouseinu Darboe, who spent several months in prison last year and who is known locally as "Gambia's Nelson Mandela" has been appointed Foreign Minister. He has announced that the dictator Yahya Jammeh will not face trial for murder, corruption or for maintaining an anti-constitutional regime. If ever he returns to Gambia, he will have to face a "Truth Commission" based on the South African model.

Five-day week on its way

President Adama Barrow has done away with the long weekend introduced by his predecessor Yahya Jammeh. At least civil servants of the "Islamic Republic" had Fridays off – in addition to Saturdays and Sundays; President Barrow has now abolished this. However, he has shortened the weekly working day from ten hours to eight hours. On Fridays, civil servants will only be required to work until shortly before Friday prayers begin at 12.30 p.m. This means civil servants will only be required to work 36.5 hours per week.

South Sudan

SPLA Lieutenant General accuses government of ethnic cleansing

The South Sudan Lieutenant General Thomas Cirillo Swaka accused the government led by President Salva Kiir in a letter dated 11 February 2017 of ethnic cleansing and committing crimes against the civilian population, tendering his resignation. According to him, the civil war which has raged on since 2013 was planned by the government and was played out with the support of tribal militia. He has accused President Kiir, inter alia, of transforming the army into an army of Dinka who terrorised their opponents, real or perceived.

The general view is that the conflict began with a power struggle between President Salva Kiir, a Dinka and his Vice-President Riek Machar, who belongs to the ethnic group of the Nuer, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of persons so far and in 1.5 million persons being displaced.

Somalia

President elected

On 8 February 2017, the members of parliament and the representatives of the regions of the Upper House elected Mohamed Abdullahi “Farmajo” Mohamed President of Somalia in a vote held at Mogadishu airport under strictest security conditions. The 54-year-old was born in Mogadishu and belongs to the Marehan clan. He worked for Somalia’s embassy in Washington during the 1980s as an employee of Somalia’s Foreign Ministry. After civil war broke out in Somalia, he was granted asylum in the USA. He studied history and political science at the University of Buffalo/New York and after graduating worked as a civil servant for the municipality of Buffalo. He served as prime minister for eight months in 2010/2011 under President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed.

Bombings

The day before the presidential election was held, al-Shabaab militants carried out several attacks at locations in and around Mogadishu. They ambushed an AMISOM base in Albao on the outskirts of the capital, firing shots at the airport in order to prevent the election from going ahead.

Several troops were killed in an ambush by al-Shabaab militants on an AMISOM convoy near the city of Mahaday (Middle Shabelle Region) on 7 February 2017, according to reports by Islamists.

A militia that has ties with ISIS has claimed responsibility for an attack carried out at a hotel that is much-frequented by foreigners and Puntland government employees in Boosaaso (Bari Region, Puntland) on 8 February 2017, killing four security officers and two militants.

Four troops were killed and several others were wounded in an explosion of two IEDs in front of a Somali army barracks in Beledweyne (Hiran Region) on 9 February 2017. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Executions

Members of al-Shabaab executed four men in Jamame district (Lower Juba Region) on 5 February 2017 whom they accused of spying for the US, Kenya and the Somali government.

Kenya

No closure of Dadaab refugee camp

Kenya’s High Court overruled the government order to close down Dadaab refugee camp on 9 February 2017. The government will lodge an appeal. Around 260,000 Somali refugees are currently living in the camp that was to be closed down by May 2016. Around 40,000 refugees returned to Somalia between December 2014 and January 2017 within the framework of an agreement concluded between UNHCR and the governments of Kenya and Somalia, the majority in 2016.

Kosovo

Kosovo Special Court becomes operational

Nineteen international judges were appointed and the Bulgarian lawyer and former International Criminal Court judge Ekaterina Trendafilova was appointed President with a four-year term under the auspices of the EU. It will investigate war crimes committed during the Kosovo war. The chief prosecutor is David Scweniman who was appointed back in July 2015. The Court will institute proceedings against persons who committed serious war crimes against Serbs, Roma and their own Albanian compatriots between 1998 and 2000. The suspected perpetrators were leaders of the Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army. The trials are expected to begin in September 2017.

The Court was set up on foot of investigations carried out by the Council of Europe which published a report on murder, torture and organ trafficking in early 2011. A very large number of Kosovar politicians were members of the Kosovo Liberation Army during the war, including President Hashim Thaci and the Chairman of Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo Kadri Veseli. The Parliament of Kosovo only agreed to

set up a special chamber to deal with war crimes in April 2014, yielding to international pressure. In Kosovo, fighters of Kosovo Liberation Army continue to be regarded as heroes.

Background

During the Kosovo war in 1998/99, it is estimated that up to 800,000 Albanians were driven out of Kosovo and that at least 13,000 persons were killed. The Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army is also said to have committed atrocities. The war ended in June 1999 following an intervention by NATO and the withdrawal of the Serbian Army from Kosovo. In 2008, Kosovo, which was initially under UN administration, unilaterally declared independence from Serbia. Serbia and several other UN member states do not recognise Kosovo's independence.

Russia/North Caucasus

Human rights and security situation

The region most heavily affected by violations of human rights continues to be the North Caucasus region. The general security and human rights situation remains tense even though the death toll is falling. In the past few years, the main conflict zone in North Caucasus has moved away from Chechnya to the neighbouring Republic of Dagestan. In addition to Dagestan and Chechnya, the human rights situation remains critical in Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria. The trend of economic problems and social instability in North Caucasus continues despite the massive economic support the region has received from the Russian government.

Since 2012, the decline in the number of persons killed in North Caucasus has remained steady. According to official reports, 208 persons were killed in fighting and clashes between security forces and separatist and Islamist insurgents in 2016 (2014: 341; 2013: 529; 2012: 700). Even though there has also been a marked decline in the death toll in Dagestan, this republic in North Caucasus remains the centre of violence and has the highest death toll. In this main crisis-ridden region, a total of 126 persons were killed in 2016 (2014: 208; 2013: 271; 2012: 410).

In 2016, the death toll remained almost on a par with the previous year. According to reports by the Russian online website Caucasian Knot in February 2017, a total of 202 persons were killed in the region of North Caucasus – 140 in Dagestan. This means the death toll for Dagestan has risen slightly over 2015. In Chechnya, the death toll was 27. Thirty five persons were killed in the remaining areas. In 2016, eight civilians were killed, 32 members of the security forces were also killed in fighting and attacks and 162 mainly Islamist militants were killed. The reason why the death toll has dropped dramatically compared to the years 2012 to 2014 is that since 2014, more militants from North Caucasus have joined the terrorist group ISIS in Syria and in Iraq.

India

Eight killed in clashes in Kashmir

At least seven persons were killed in clashes that erupted between security forces and suspected rebels in Prisalim in the southern part of Kashmir, northern India on 12 February 2017. According to police sources, two of the dead were Indian soldiers, four were suspected rebels and one was a civilian. Clashes have erupted time and again between security forces and separatists in the region.

Columbia

Peace talks launched with ELN/disarmament of FARC

On 7 February 2017, official peace talks began between the government of Columbia and the last remaining active rebel organisation in the country, Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN). The rebels released the former MP Odín Sánchez on 2 February 2017 which was the prerequisite for launching negotiations (cf. BN. of 23 January 2017).

A peace agreement was signed with the rebel organisation Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) in November 2016 (cf. BN of 5 December 2016), whose militants have gathered almost in full numbers in 26 specially-designated areas where they are to hand over their weapons under the watchful eye of the UN.

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Briefing Notes

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