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Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

16 November 2015

Afghanistan

Security situation

The security situation has remained unchanged. Attacks and combat operations are continuing. According to an internal situation report of the German embassy in Kabul quoted in the media, the threat situation has worsened significantly, with massive attacks by the Taliban to be expected before the traditional winter break. The German defence ministry intends to increase the number of soldiers stationed in Afghanistan from 130 to 980.

Military conflicts

In southeastern Paktika province, heavy clashes between Taliban insurgents and security forces have been reported in the last days. Since 9 November 2015, the Taliban have been besieging the administrative centre of Waza Khwa district. On 9 November, Afghan government representatives stated that 40 percent of Imam Sahib district in northeastern Kunduz province were controlled by Taliban insurgents led by foreign combatants. On 10 November, Taliban fighters attacked police forces in Deh Rawood district (southern Uruzgan province), killing at least three officers. In southeastern Khost province, two civilians were killed by Afghan special forces during a night raid. On 12 November, more fights erupted in northeastern Baghlan province, southern Nimroz province and eastern Nangarhar province. On 14 November, local politicians warned that Pashtonkot district (northwestern Faryab province) might fall into the hands of the insurgents unless the security forces were rapidly strengthened.

In Zabul, heavy fights are ongoing between several Taliban groups and IS fighters.

Targeted attacks

On 9 November 2015, a bomb attack was launched on a district chief in eastern Nangarhar province, killing a child and four adults. In southern Zabul province, a Taliban shadow governor was killed in a suicide attack launched by IS militants. On 11 November, Taliban members were reported to have taken twelve civilians hostage in southeastern Paktia province (Sayed Karam district). On 15 November, a civilian died and twelve others were injured in a car bomb attack on foreign troops in southern Helmand province.

IS recruitment attempts

The Afghan military reports that IS has started recruiting fighters in eastern Kunar province.

Woman saved from death by stoning

As was reported on 12 November 2015, a young woman accused of adultery has been saved from being stoned to death by local clerics and village leaders in northern Jawzjan province for lack of evidence.

Iraq

Attack in Baghdad

On 13 November 2015, a suicide attack left at least 18 people dead and another 41 injured in Baghdad. Apparently, the perpetrator blew himself up during the funeral of a Shiite fighter in the capital's southwestern neighbourhood.

Kurdish fighters retake Sinjar town

The President of Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has stated that on 13 November 2015, Kurdish forces liberated the town of Sinjar (Ninive province) from IS insurgents. Already on 12 November, Kurdish Peshmerga fighters had succeeded in taking parts of the highway connecting the areas so far under IS control with the northeastern parts of Syria. This major offensive was backed by air power from the international coalition. During the operation, at least 29 surrounding villages were retaken from IS.

Mass graves detected

After the recapture of the town of Sinjar, the bodies of dozens of Yazidis have been detected in mass graves. The bodies were most likely victims of IS terrorists.

UNHCR warns of new refugee exodus

Bruno Geddo, UNHCR representative in Iraq, said that a new refugee exodus was expected in case the Iraqi forces start an offensive to retake the city of Mosul from IS militants. The agency was preparing to support the refugees, but there would not be enough room for all, he said. The number of internally displaced people had already reached 3.2 million, a tenth of the population, he added.

Syria

French air strikes on city of Raqqa/Denmark considers military operations against IS in Syria

In the evening of 15 November 2015, France launched a fierce assault on the IS stronghold Raqqa. In coordination with US forces, ten fighter jets dropped 20 bombs on several sites, including a command centre, a recruitment centre, an arms depot and a training camp. France began engaging in airstrikes against IS targets in Iraq in September 2014 and against targets in Syria in September 2015.

Following the deadly attacks in Paris, Denmark (which had joined the coalition of air forces against the IS terrorists in Iraq with seven fighter aircraft) is considering operations of its air force also in Syria. Recently, the fighter jets have been pulled back temporarily for maintenance and are scheduled to be operative again by mid-2016. However, an extension of airstrikes beyond Iraq needs approval by parliament.

International Syria Support Group agrees on roadmap for peace in Syria

On 14 November 2015, the International Syria Support Group whose members include the U.S., Russia, China, Great Britain, France, Germany, Iran and Saudi Arabia, agreed on a concrete calendar for transition in Syria on its meeting in Vienna. A meeting of representatives of the Syrian government and opposition members is planned to take place before the end of the year. A transitional government is to be formed within six months, elections would be held within 18 months under UN supervision. UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura is tasked to organize the activities and to implement at least regional ceasefires. The participants chose Paris for their next meeting within a month.

Ongoing fights

In the city of Latakia, at least 23 people have been killed in two attacks. On 10 November, the Syrian army retook Kweyres airbase (east of Aleppo) which had been besieged by IS insurgents for two years. The whole northwestern area of Syria has been the site of a massive offensive operation launched by the Syrian military supported by the Russian air force and by fighters from Iran and Lebanon.

Lebanon

Bomb attacks in Beirut

On 12 November 2015, two suicide bombers blew themselves up in a well-known commercial road in the predominantly Shiite neighbourhood Burj al-Barajneh in the southern suburb area of Beirut, considered a stronghold of Hezbollah who is supporting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's troops in the fight against IS insurgents and other rebel groups. 44 people were killed and more than 200 injured in the attack. IS militants have claimed responsibility for the attack. On 15 November, 11 people were arrested in connection with the bombings (8 Syrian and 3 Lebanese citizens). The Syrians were seized in a Palestinian refugee camp in Burj al-Barajneh and in a flat in Beirut's eastern Ashrafiyya quarter.

Pakistan

More than 300 executions since lift of moratorium

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has reported that since December 2014, more than 300 people have been put to death, most of them for murder.

Turkey

EU progress report

In its latest Progress Report on Turkey of 10 November 2015, the European Commission continued to sharply criticize the Turkish government of a slowdown in the political reform process compared to the previous year. In particular, the EU noted setbacks regarding the implementation of basic democratic rights such as the rights to freedom of expression and of assembly, regarding the fight against corruption and also regarding the protection of human rights. Other criticized issues are the lack of data protection laws and insufficient laws governing the internet. Besides, the EU notes with regret that the settlement process of the Kurdish issue came to a halt and urges the government to resume the Kurdish peace process. On the positive side, the report expressly noted the country's considerable efforts to give shelter to Syrian refugees.

The Turkish government has dismissed the EU's criticism. The competent ministry said that some of the comments regarding the issues of the rule of law and the freedom of the press and of expression were unfair and excessive. In particular, criticism on President Erdogan's exercise of office were rejected as unacceptable. Objective and adequate criticism, however, would be thoroughly examined, the ministry said.

Ongoing fights against PKK

The situation remains tense in the southeastern part of the country. For more than a week now, three districts of the town of Silvan near Diyarbakır have been under curfew. PKK fighters are reported to have entrenched themselves in the houses and to engage in street fights with the Turkish army, with at least 6 people killed since 9 November 2015. A PKK attack on a police vehicle in the Turkish-Iraqi border area left three police officers dead on 11 November. Furthermore, PKK fighters launched attacks with explosive devices on military convoys in Silvan and Yuksekova districts, killing several people and wounding dozens of others.

Terror attack prevented

The Turkish government reports that on 13 November 2015, a large-scale terror attack was prevented in Istanbul. Police detained five suspects (among them a close associate of British IS fighter Jihadi John) who apparently entered Turkey that week from Syria in order to launch an attack. The blast in Istanbul had been planned to happen on the same day as the Paris attacks. On 15 November, police detained seven more suspects in Ankara who are believed to belong to the IS militants, the press reported.

Suspected jihadist blows himself up during police raid

On 15 November 2015, a suspected IS terrorist blew himself up during a police raid in the town of Gaziantep, the Turkish authorities reported. When police entered his apartment, he detonated explosives fastened to his body, injuring five police officers, one of them seriously. Apparently, two members of the terror group managed to escape. On the previous day, four suspected IS militants were killed by the Turkish army near Gaziantep when they approached a military checkpoint near the Syrian border in a car.

Yemen

Ongoing fights

So far, the Saudi Arabia-led coalition has not yet succeeded in capturing Yemen's third largest city of Taiz. Apparently, the Houthi rebels have retaken areas they had already lost in the southwestern part of the country. After both Mauritania and Senegal had deployed soldiers to Yemen during the last weeks, also Sudan and the Emirates have sent troops to Aden. Additionally, Saudi Arabia is reported to have contracted 800 mercenaries from Colombia to fight in Yemen. Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula (AQAP) has published videos apparently showing the arrest of al-Houthi fighters in Al-Bayda governorate and fighting in Taiz. Fierce street fights are reported from this city.

The International Red Cross reports that since the beginning of the air raids, around 100 healthcare facilities have been deliberately targeted.

IS militants have claimed responsibility for several bomb attacks in the Houthi-controlled area around the capital of Sanaa during the last weeks, among them an attack on a mosque.

Egypt

African refugees killed in Sinai

In the Egyptian-Israeli border area near the town of Rafah, the dead bodies of 15 African refugees have been found. Explanations are differing with regard to the circumstances of the deaths, with some sources saying that Egyptian police had shot at a group of people trying to cross the border to Israel illegally. Apparently, eight more individuals were arrested. Other sources say that the police forces had found the dead bodies of the refugees. It is unclear where the refugees had come from; there is the speculation that they were Sudanese.

Sudan

Opposition figure arrested

Returning from a meeting of Sudanese opposition members in Paris, the head of the Sudanese National Alliance Party (SNAP), who is at the same time a leading figure of the opposition alliance National Consensus Forces (NCF), was arrested by agents of the Sudanese National Security Services (NISS) at Khartoum airport. Already before, the Sudanese security service had seized the passports of five leading opposition members, namely three members of the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP), the head of the Sudanese Congress Party (SCP) and the leader of the Unified National Unionist Party (UNUP). Apart from those groups, also delegates from the National Umma Party (NUP), the Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF) and the Civil Society Initiative (CSI) had participated in the four-days meeting in Paris organized by Sudan Call, an umbrella organisation of opposition parties established in December 2014. A NCF spokesman expressed concern that more opposition members would be arrested in the future.

Somalia

Dozens killed in Kismayo

At least five people were killed and 25 injured in an attack launched by al-Shabaab members on premises used by the transitional regional administration of Jubaland near the southern port city of Kismayo on 14 November 2015. The regional administration said that security forces fended off the attackers and killed six Islamists.

Deadly clashes after forced eviction in Galkayo

A clash between clan militias and Puntland forces in the northern town of Galkayo has killed three people and left ten others injured. Apparently, the attack was linked to the recent eviction of people who had been living in the former ministry of works compound since 1991, when the central government collapsed.

Niger

Attack by Boko-Haram

On 11 November 2015, around 25 people were killed in an attack launched by Boko Haram militants on a village in Bosso district (southeastern region bordering Lake Chad) and subsequent clashes between the Islamist insurgents and the army.

Smuggling routes discovered

In northern Agadez region, security forces have discovered 629 explosives, 41 fuses and 310 electrical cables hidden in a bus.

Former Speaker of the National Assembly Amadou arrested in Niger

On 14 November 2015, Hama Amadou, former PM and opposition candidate, was arrested after returning from exile to his home country. He had left the country in 2014 after an arrest warrant was issued against him and 30 other figures from political, military and economic circles for trading new-born babies. In summer 2013, Amadou had joined the opposition and became the main rival of President Mahamadou Issoufou.

Chad

State of emergency declared

On 9 November 2015, Chad's government announced a state of emergency in the Lake Chad region bordering Nigeria. Before, Islamists had launched a double attack claiming five lives in Ngouboua village. The emergency legislation gives authorities the option of placing a ban on gatherings and on the movement of people and vehicles in the area and allowing the search of homes, e.g. for arms depots.

Nigeria

Boko Haram: more than 60 hostages liberated

On 11 November 2015, the Nigerian army stated that in an operation destroying several Boko Haram camps in the area between Damboa and Bitta (northeastern Borno state), a total of 61 hostages, mainly women and children, were rescued from the terrorists. During the operation, four jihadists were killed.

Burundi

UN Security Council warns of sanctions against those inciting violence

Given the growing fears that the country could continue sliding into a genocide similar to that in neighbouring Rwanda in 1994, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution on 12 November 2015, warning of possible sanctions against those responsible for the violence without defining these further. UN observers are to be deployed to the country. Also, the Security Council urged UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to submit recommendations for a UN peacekeeping presence within two weeks.

Ukraine

Six soldiers killed and twelve injured in eastern Ukraine

On 14 November 2015, military spokesman Andriy Lyssenko accused the pro-Russian separatists of having violated the ceasefire in Eastern Ukraine in a mortar and gunfire attack. He said that at least five Ukrainian soldiers have been killed and other four injured. Among others, the insurgents used 82mm mortars in the town of Marjinka in the outskirts of Donetsk city, he said. Also in the Luhansk region, militant groups have committed provocations, the spokesman added. On 15 November, Ukrainian sources stated that another soldier was killed and eight injured by mortar fire near Avdiyivka. After the agreement of the latest ceasefire in the beginning of September 2015, fighting had reached its lowest level since the conflict had erupted 19 months ago. However, recent weeks have seen an increase in ceasefire violations.

Azerbaijan

Human rights activist pardoned

A court of appeal in the capital of Baku has ordered the release of human rights activist Arif Yunus. On 12 November 2015, the court reasoned its decision invoking the poor health of the 60 years old man. In August, Mr Yunus had been sentenced to 7 years in jail for alleged fraud and tax evasion. He is now barred from leaving Baku. According to information provided by human rights organisations, there are about

80 individuals imprisoned for political reasons in Azerbaijan, including Arif Yunus' wife Leila Yunus, who is also in poor health.

Kosovo

Constitutional court suspends implementation of integration plan for Serbs

The constitutional court of Kosovo has temporarily suspended the agreement granting the Serb minority far-reaching autonomy. The accord, which will now be reviewed for constitutionality, is the core issue of the EU-brokered so-called 'Brussels agreement' aimed at normalizing the relations between Kosovo and Serbia. During the last weeks, the opposition had forcibly paralyzed the parliament in order to coerce the government to revoke the agreement with Serbia, fearing that the Serb minority might be granted overly extensive autonomy rights and that the country might be divided in violation of the constitution (see BN of 19 and 26 October 2015).

Serbia's Prime Minister has accused Kosovo of breaking the agreement and threatened to take counteractive measures. Serbia's foreign minister Dacic said that regional stability was at risk again. Observers are talking about a setback for the process of rapprochement.

No admission of Kosovo to UNESCO

UNESCO, the United Nations cultural agency, has rejected Kosovo's application for membership. Particularly Serbia and Russia had opposed the admission which would have constituted an upgrading of the country's political status and a possible first step toward full UN membership.

So far, only 111 out of 193 UN member states (including 22 out of 27 EU member states), have recognised Kosovo. Not only Serbia, Russia and China continue to refuse the country's recognition under international law, but also the EU member states Spain, Romania, Slovakia, Cyprus and Greece.

Western Balkan countries

EU progress reports released

The European Commission offers all (potential) accession countries of the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) a clear European perspective and proposes that all candidate countries (including Turkey) be considered safe countries of origin. In its assessment, the EU gave mediocre marks to the Balkan countries and urged them to step up political and economic reforms.

Only the candidate countries Serbia and Montenegro received comparatively good marks. While these countries made good progress in reforms, there was still a number of areas of concern, such as corruption, organised crime and shortcomings regarding rule of law and protection of human rights, the reports say. Serbia was explicitly praised for its role in the refugee crisis.

Also the new candidate country Albania was on a good way, the EU stated. However, more efforts were needed to depoliticize the administration and to improve its efficiency; also, the protection of minorities needs to be improved.

The accession process for Macedonia remains at a standstill. According to the EU, the country has regressed and not yet overcome its domestic political crisis.

While Bosnia and Herzegovina was back on the reform path (also thanks to the 'Berlin process'), further implementation of the reform agenda was still necessary before the EU could decide on a membership application, the report says. A positive aspect worth mentioning was the entering in force of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) on 1 June 2015.

At the end of October, also Kosovo signed an SAA, thus marking a 'milestone' in the accession process. However, the country still needs to strengthen its institutions and implement economic reforms.

Myanmar

Opposition party wins parliamentary elections

On 8 November 2015, the first free parliamentary elections were held since 1990, with the elections of 2010 deeply flawed. Peace Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition party National League for Democracy (NLD) gained 348 seats out of 657 seats in parliament, the national election commission stated on 13 November. EU observers were satisfied with the electoral process. The military-aligned ruling Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) conceded defeat. Prior to the elections, the military had given assurances to accept the election results. The new parliament will convene in February or March 2016 to elect the next president, who will lead the governmental affairs. Aung San Suu Kyi is constitutionally barred from presidency since near family relations of her are foreigners. She announced that her party would choose another person for president but that she herself would make all the decisions in the background. The military will remain powerful, as the constitution allows it to keep control of the ministers of interior, defence and border security and to dissolve parliament in case of a perceived threat to peace and security. Also, 25 percent of the parliamentary seats are automatically reserved for the military under the constitution, giving it a veto over any constitutional amendments viewed as threatening its position of power.