

Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

24 November 2014

Afghanistan

Security situation

In its latest progress report for 2014 (as of 01.11.14), the German federal government states that no significant changes could be observed regarding the security situation compared to the previous report. However, anti-government forces have increased their operational capabilities in particular in rural Pashtun-dominated areas, the report says.

As from January 2015, up to 850 German soldiers will participate in the NATO-led 'Resolute Support Mission'.

Last week, Afghan security forces launched several operations against insurgents, mainly in the following provinces: Zabul, Kandahar, Farah, Uruzgan, Ghazni, Khost, Sar-e-Pul, Nangarhar, Takhar, Kunduz, Faryab, Kunar, Logar, Parwan, Paktika and Helmand.

Also the insurgents carried out attacks and raids with scores of civilians among the victims. On 17.11.14, Taliban fighters stopped a bus carrying civilians in western Farah province and killed four individuals. On 18.11.14, a suicide attack launched by Taliban members killed the two perpetrators, two Afghan guards, three Afghan civilians and a foreigner in the Tarakhel area of Kabul, where mainly foreign companies are located. In southeastern Khost province, a woman died when her car was hit by an explosive device which detonated at the roadside; 13 civilian bystanders were injured. In Baghlan-e-Markazi district (northeastern Baghlan province), at least 20 civilians were injured by a bomb explosion during a buzkashi game. On 20.11.14, Taliban insurgents attacked a guest house used by foreigners in the eastern part of the capital Kabul. In the incident, the four attackers and one guard were killed, another guard was wounded. In western Farah province, insurgents burnt down a school for girls. In Asadabad, capital of eastern Kunar province, a rocket attack killed a student and wounded another six. On 23.11.14, six civilians died in a bomb attack on a market in eastern Khost province. In Injil district (western Herat province), a police chief lost his life in a bomb attack. On the same day, a suicide attacker blew himself up during a volleyball game in southeastern Paktika province, killing at least 45 people and injuring another 80.

Public lashing

On 18.11.14, a young man and his girlfriend were each given 100 lashes in public for having sex outside of marriage in Kohistan district of central Kapisa province, after a state court had ordered the punishment.

Pakistan

Death sentences for 'honour killing'

After a 25-year old woman who was pregnant at the time had been stoned to death in public on 27.05.14 in Lahore (see BN of 02.06.14), her father, two of her brothers and her alleged husband were sentenced to death on 19.11.14 for murder. Women's rights organisations estimate that approx. 1,500 women are victims of honour killings every year.

Iraq

Attack in autonomous Kurdish region

On 19.11.14, a suicide attack launched in Erbil claimed the lives of at least four people. The suicide bomber detonated the explosive in his car outside the governorate building after having tried to enter the premises which are protected by high walls. The Islamic State (IS) has threatened to launch attacks in the KRG region. However, so far no-one has claimed responsibility for the incident. The Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga forces are supporting the Syrian Kurds in the battle for the border town of Kobane in northern Syria.

The bombing is the worst attack on Erbil since 29.09.13, when militants struck the headquarters of the Asayesh security forces, killing seven people and wounding more than 60.

Iraqi security forces enter oil refinery

On 18.11.14, Iraqi security forces reached the country's largest oil refinery near the town of Baiji after breaking the IS siege of the area, it was reported. Apparently, all mines and explosives have been cleared by the security forces. IS had taken control of the refinery five months ago.

Attacks in Anbar province

In an IS attack near the city of Ramadi (Anbar province), approx. 20 tribal fighters were reportedly killed on 22.11.14. There are varying versions of the incident. Police say that fighters from the Albu Mahal and Albu Fahad tribes were besieged until they ran out of ammunition. Then, 23 of them were executed by jihadists. A commander of tribesmen, however, said that 15 jihadists had entered the area pretending to be students. They were provided with weapons and killed 25 members of the Albu Fahad tribe. The Iraqi defence ministry spoke of violent clashes between security forces and tribesmen on one side, and the jihadists on the other. On 21.11.14, IS had started a major offensive to gain complete control of the city of Ramadi, the ministry said.

Fighting in Diyala province

On 23.11.14, Kurdish Peshmerga fighters recaptured large parts of the city of Jalawla (Diyala province) and a military base nearby, a press release said. IS militants had captured the city in the beginning of August.

Death sentence for Sunni politician

DPA news agency reported on 23.11.14 that Sunni ex-MP Ahmad al-Alwani had just been sentenced to death. He was charged with inciting protest against the Shia-led government. Al-Alwani originated from Anbar province and was detained in 2013 during a raid, the report said. The decision can be taken to appeal.

Turkey

Military support for Iraq

Last week, the Turkish government offered Iraq military assistance in the fight against the IS insurgents. On 20.11.14, Iraq's Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said that his government would examine the offer. Discussions on the feasibility of training the planned new National Guard in Turkey were envisaged, he said; also, armament of the Iraqi forces was on the table. Turkey's Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu showed willingness for cooperation between the two countries' intelligence agencies in the fight against terrorism. Turkey was making progress in combatting militant Islamism, he added, stating that so far, more than thousand suspected extremists had been detained when trying to cross the Turkish border into Syria. Besides, cooperation with western intelligence agencies regarding the exchange of information on suspected jihadists was working better than before, he said.

Turkey to open mosques in universities

Turkey's Religious Affairs Directorate (Diyanet) is planning to open a mosque in every state university. Last week, the president of the authority Mehmet Görmez said that construction was underway in more than 80 universities; 15 were already opened to prayer. 50 new mosques were due to be opened in 2015, he said.

Syria/Turkey

Partial retreat of FSA from Aleppo

Around 14,000 rebel fighters of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), who are supported by Western countries, have left the frontlines in Aleppo, thus giving up the defence of Syria's second-largest city, the Turkish newspaper 'Radikal' reported on 18.11.14, citing high-rank security sources from Ankara. Apparently, many of the fighters escaped to Turkey. Despite fierce attacks by the Syrian army, FSA fighters had defended the city located roughly 50 km away from the Turkish border for months. Turkey's foreign minister warned of a new refugee influx of up to 2 million if Aleppo were to fall into the hands of the Syrian army.

Syria

US-led airstrikes on IS insurgents have killed more than 900 people

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reports that airstrike by US-led forces in Syria have killed about 910 people since the start of the campaign against IS militants. The majority of the deaths were fighters from IS and al-Qaeda offspring al-Nusra. 52 civilians were reportedly also killed, among them eight children and five women. Given the difficult access to some of the areas under attack, the actual figures may be higher. On 23.09.14, the US Air Force had started the campaign against IS insurgents in Syria with the support of Arab allies. In Iraq, The US Air Force is launching attacks on IS bases together with European partners.

About 60 German IS fighters killed

The president of the Federal Constitutional Protection Office Hans-Georg Maaßen stated that roughly 550 radicals have travelled from Germany to join the fighting in Syria and Iraq, most of them in the last six weeks. Approx. 60 have been killed, at least nine of them in suicide attacks, he said. About 180 have returned to Germany, he added.

Iran

Female student released on bail

A female student who had been arrested in summer for trying to watch a men's volleyball match of Iran's national team in Tehran was released on bail. In Iran, women are banned from watching men's sports events. The female student had been sentenced to one year in prison for 'distributing propaganda against the state'.

Israel

Ashkelon mayor bans Arab construction workers

Itamar Shimoni, mayor of the city of Ashkelon, has triggered public outrage, also among cabinet members, with his ban of all Arab construction workers presently posted at pre-schools for an indefinite period. He decided to temporarily close down all sites where Arabs work to construct bomb shelters at local schools. Interior minister Gilad Erdan responded that, while he understood the mayor and citizens' concern, it was impossible to generalize and tarnish an entire community within Israel. Science minister Yaakov Peri accused the mayor in the Israeli army radio, saying the attempt to block the employment of Israeli Arabs just because they were Arabs, was not only racist and immoral, but also illegal. Avivit Simani, chair of the city's parent association, called the decision a populist ploy. As the port city of Ashkelon (north of Gaza strip, 110,000 inhabitants) had been hit by many rockets and grenades in summer, numerous new bunkers are being constructed in the area.

Tunisia

Presidential elections

On 23.11.14, the first post-revolution presidential elections were held with a voter turnout of 53 percent. A total of 28 candidates stood for election. The Islamist party Ennahda did not field a candidate. 87-year old

Beji Caid Essebsi, leader of Nidaa Tounes (strongest parliamentary party) appears to have won the most votes (around 48 percent), but missed the absolute majority. Interim president Moncef Marzouki gained some 27 percent. Around 100.000 members of the security forces were deployed to ensure the safety of voters and the voting process; no incidents were reported.

The official final results are not expected before 26.11.14. The provisional date for a runoff is 28.12.14.

Libya

UN adds Ansar al-Sharia to terror list

On 19.11.14, the UN Security Council blacklisted two offsprings of Islamist terror group Ansar al-Sharia, at the request of US, UK and France. The measure targets Ansar al-Sharia Benghazi and its sister group Ansar al-Sharia Derna, which both have links to al-Qaeda and are operating in the two eastern Libyan cities. The sanctions include an arms embargo, a travel ban and the freeze of assets.

Nigeria

Military success of the army in Adamawa State

On 19.11.14, a joint effort of army, local hunters and members of the Civilian Task Force vigilante group succeeded in recapturing the three towns of Gombi, Hong and Pelia, which had been taken by the Islamist terror group Boko Haram on 13.11.14.

Boko Haram attacks on civilians in Borno State

On 20.11.14, suspected Boko Haram fighters blocked a route near the village of Dogon Fili on the shores of Lake Chad and attacked a group of fish traders, killing 48 of them by slaughtering some and drowning others in the lake.

On 19.11.14, the village of Azaya Kura (Mafa Local Government Area) was attacked by suspected Boko Haram fighters. According to the village leader, the attackers killed at least 45 inhabitants, destroyed half of the houses, set cars on fire and stole food and livestock.

DR Congo

Civilians massacred in eastern DR Congo

In the evening of 20.11.14, between 50 and 80 people were reportedly killed by attackers in army uniforms armed with axes and machetes in the villages of Tepiomba and Vemba (near the district capital Beni) in eastern Congolese North Kivu province. Members of the Islamist Allied Democratic Forces rebel group ADF (originally operating in Uganda), who have been blamed for killing more than 200 villagers living near Beni since October, may be responsible for the attack. Apparently, parts of the army have started to make common cause with the rebels.

Police operation kills at least 51 youths

A report released by Human Rights Watch on 18.11.14 accuses Congolese police officers of executing 51 youth during an anti-gang campaign ('Operation Likofi', iron fist) in the capital Kinshasa. Another 33 disappeared without a trace during the operation which started on 15.11.13 and is scheduled to last for three months, the report said.

UNHCR is alarmed at humanitarian situation in Katanga province

On 18.11.14, the UN refugee agency warned of a humanitarian catastrophe in southern Katanga province. With a total of 600,000 internally displaced people, Katanga is the third most affected province after North and South Kivu, UNHCR said. 400,000 people have fled during the last three months alone; more than 71,000 have been newly displaced. The situation is worst in the northern parts of Katanga, i.e. in the territory of Kalemie and in the so-called 'triangle of death' between the towns of Manono, Mitwaba and Pweto. The civilian population is suffering from looting and burning of houses, extortion, torture, forced labour and recruitment into armed groups as well as sexual violence. The situation is caused by violence between the

Luba and Twa tribes which flared up earlier this year, but also by attacks of the Mai Mai 'Bataka Katanga' militia as well as by military operations.

Burkina Faso

Isaac Zida appointed as transitional prime minister

On 19.11.14, transitional President Michel Kafando appointed Lt Col Isaac Zida as prime minister of a transitional government yet to be formed. Kafando himself had been appointed transitional president only two days before by an electoral committee, thus replacing former military leader Zida. As one of his first official acts, Zida dismissed numerous senior officials with close ties to ex-president Blaise Compaoré who was ousted at the end of October, among them city and regional councillors and the head of the state electricity company Sonabel. Burkina Faso's transitional period is scheduled to end in November 2015 with general elections.

Côte d'Ivoire

Ivorian troops protest

In recent days, numerous soldiers have protested over unpaid benefits in several cities. In the second-largest city of Bouaké, they set up barricades and occupied the state TV headquarters. In the commercial capital of Abidjan (seat of parliament), traffic was severely disrupted. Defence minister Paul Koffi urged the protesters to return to the barracks, and announced payments to the roughly 9,000 soldiers. They are former rebels who were integrated into the army after the end of the turmoil in the wake of the contested presidential elections in mid-2011. They are demanding outstanding payments and bonuses they were promised while fighting for the rebels.

Kenya/Somalia

Al-Shabaab attack on bus / military retaliation

On 22.11.14 al-Shabaab militants killed at least 28 passengers from a bus. They took control of the bus in the village of Arabia (Mandera district) and drove to the Somali border, where they shot dead all passengers who failed to cite verses from the Koran. The insurgents, roughly 100 militants, then fled into Somalia on foot. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack. Their spokesman Sheikh Ali Mohammed Rage said it was a revenge for the 'desecration of mosques, killings, arrests of Muslims in Kenya'. The Kenyan military responded with a raid inside Somalia, where they found out the militants' camp and killed more than 100 individuals, it was officially stated.

Mosque raids

On 17.11.14, an individual was killed in raids on two Mombasa mosques deemed by the security authorities to be recruitment centres for al-Shabaab militants. Police secured hand grenades, a pistol and a knife and temporarily closed the mosques. On the next day, some youths launched revenge attacks and killed at least three people. On 19.11.14, security forces searched two more mosques and temporarily closed them after finding weapons. Police had arrested 376 people during the raids, but 91 have meanwhile been released.

Somalia

Assassinations

In Mudug region, a journalist was killed by an unidentified attacker on 19.11.14. The incident was the third murder of a Somali journalist this year.

On 18.11.14, alleged al Shabaab fighters shot dead a US citizen of Somali origin in Mogadishu. The engineer worked as a town planner on behalf of the Somali government.

On 17.11.14, the presidential palace in Mogadishu was shelled, again by alleged al-Shabaab fighters. Nobody was injured in the attack.

On 16.11.14, unidentified attackers killed an immigration officer and a civilian with a car bomb in Mogadishu.

Vote of no confidence

The vote of no confidence against Prime Minister Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed (see BN of 17.11.14) will be tabled for discussion at the parliament session on 24.11.14.

Sudan

Ban on mass rape investigation

Following reports of mass rapes of about 200 women and girls by Sudanese soldiers in the village of Tabit (North Darfur), the Sudanese government blocked UN on-site investigations on 18.11.14.

Apparently, the crimes had been committed by army members already on 31.10.14, possibly in retaliation for the disappearance of a soldier. The accusations had enraged the local population and increased existing tensions. While UNAMID (United Nations Mission in Darfur or African Union/United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur) representatives were initially not allowed to visit the village, they were granted access for the first time on 09.11.14, but did not find any evidence. However, the inhabitants were apparently intimidated by the armed forces. As a reason for the ban on new investigations, the Sudanese foreign ministry cited security concerns.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has called on the government to grant the UNIMAD representatives immediate access.

Kosovo

Agreement on formation of a government coalition

After months of deadlock (see BN of 16.06.14, 28.07.14 and 03.11.14), the two major parties (Democratic Party of Kosovo PDK and Democratic League LDK) agreed on the formation of a government coalition on 19.11.14. Isa Mustafa (LDK), the current president of parliament and former mayor of Priština, is apparently to become prime minister, while the LDK will probably provide the new president of parliament. The two parties share 67 seats out of 120. Since the 20 MPs of minorities will probably join them, a stable majority is secured. The agreement also paves the way for the inauguration of parliament which has failed twice due to the political impasse.

After the elections of 08.06.14, the PDK had not found a coalition partner, as the opposition parties wanted to form a government themselves. It was only under pressure from the US and the EU that the new coalition has come into being. Until now, the deep distrust between the parties has prevented any political agreement. The relations between PDK and LDK have been very tense for years. The PDK was formed from the Kosovo Liberation Army UÇK, whereas the LDK had pursued a non-military policy in the conflict with Serbia. The agreement has met with fierce criticism from opposition parties who are accusing the LDK of treason.

Ukraine

Political and economic situation in eastern Ukraine

Despite the ceasefire agreed on 05.09.14, fighting in eastern Ukraine is continuing with undiminished intensity. Since the beginning of the ceasefire, almost 1,000 people have lost their lives. Fighting is concentrated on the cities of Donetsk and Luhansk. Apparently, an offensive of the separatists is imminent; NATO has confirmed Russian military transports in eastern Ukraine.

After months of conflict, the economic effects are considerable. Citing a confidential document, a German news magazine reported that in large parts of eastern Ukraine, the economy has come to a standstill and that the supply situation is extremely tight. In the Donetsk region alone, industrial production has fallen by 59 percent compared to the year before; in neighbouring Luhansk, the decrease was 85 percent. 40,000 small enterprises in Eastern Ukraine had to file for bankruptcy. All chemical factories in the region are standing idle, as do 69 of 93 coal mines and seven steel plants. Meanwhile, more than half of the productive population have lost their jobs. Food production has fallen by nearly 30 percent; almost 5,000 homes have

been destroyed. A social and economic catastrophe is looming over the country. The report says that about one million Ukrainian citizens have fled to Russia, and roughly 400,000 more have sought refuge in other regions of Ukraine.

China

Situation in Hong Kong

On 15.11.14, Chinese authorities prevented the departure to Mainland China of several leading student representatives and activists of the protest movement at Hong Kong International Airport. The activists had planned to hold talks on the aims of their movement with the Chinese leadership in Beijing. On 18.11.14, policemen and workers removed road blocks near a protest camp in the Admiralty district following a court order. There were no incidents. On 19.11.14, demonstrators attempted to force entry to the parliament building (Hong Kong's Legislative Council). Several protesters were arrested.

Since the end of September, demonstrators have been blocking major roads to enforce democratic elections in Hong Kong in 2017.

Mongolia

New prime minister appointed

On 21.11.14, parliament approved the appointment of the Democratic Party's Chimed Saikhanbileg as the new prime minister. The opposition Mongolian People's Party, having boycotted the vote, announced its willingness to support Saikhanbileg.

On 05.11.14, parliament had removed former Prime Minister Norov Altankhuyag from office, who was allegedly involved in nepotism and corruption scandals. The new prime minister has to form a government within two weeks.

Myanmar

Military action in Kachin State claims dozens of lives

On 19.11.14, at least 22 fighters of different rebel organisations were killed in an artillery attack of the military targeting a training camp of the rebel movement *Kachin Independence Army* (KIA) in Laiza (Kachin State). A ceasefire between KIA rebels and government forces negotiated in 1994 had ended in 2011 after attacks of the military. Since then, fighting has erupted again and again. The KIA is one of the few rebel groups who have not concluded a bilateral ceasefire agreement with the government. Joint negotiations with more than a dozen rebel groups are underway at national level.

North Korea

Resolution calling for measures against North Korea

On 18.11.14, the UN General Assembly's human rights committee approved a resolution urging the Security Council to refer the country's harsh human rights situation to the International Criminal Court in The Hague. This would allow personal charges against the North Korean leadership. The resolution introduced by the EU and Japan is based on a UN report released in February describing serious crimes against humanity, especially in the system of forced labour camps. It is expected that the UN General Assembly will adopt the resolution in December. However, Russia and China both hold the power of veto in the Security Council.

Colombia

Government suspends talks with FARC after abduction of three people

After the rebel organisation *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) abducted an army general and two other people at Las Mercedes (Choco province) on 16.11.14, Colombian President Juan

Manuel Santos suspended peace talks with the rebel organisation that began two years ago in Havana, Cuba. The rebels say they may cancel the release of the hostages because of heavy military presence in the area where they are being held. The handover was announced to take place this week.