

Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

2 February 2015

Afghanistan

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Security situation

The situation remains unchanged. Several security incidents occurred again last week. On 2 February 2015, two attacks were carried out against police officers in the provinces of Herat (in the west) and Kandahar (in the south), claiming the lives of eleven police officers. On 1 February 2015, armed clashes occurred in the north-western province of Faryab and in the southern province of Helmand, claiming several lives. In addition to armed clashes, there were fresh bomb attacks, including an attack in Nuristan (east of the country) on 31 January 2015 that killed six border police officers. Further bomb attacks on police occurred in Nangarhar (east) and Herat (west). In Laghman province (east), 16 civilians were killed and 39 were wounded in a suicide attack carried out at a police officer's funeral. In Samangan (north), seven civilians were injured in a bomb attack on a mosque. There were additional targeted attacks around the country. A public servant was shot dead at a mosque in Helmand on 30 January 2015. Three US military advisers were shot dead at Kabul airport. The gunmen reportedly belong to the Afghan security forces.

Pakistan

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Suicide bombing on Shia mosque

At least 60 persons were killed and over 30 were wounded in a suicide bombing on a Shia mosque in Shikarpur (Sindh) on 30 January 2015. The Jundallah militant group which has been linked to Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed that they had carried out the attack.

Iraq

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Security situation

According to Iraq Body Count (IBC), 1,431 civilians were killed in 2015.

UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) claims 790 civilians were killed and 1,469 were wounded in January 2015. 585 members of the Iraqi security forces were killed and 771 were wounded. Baghdad was the hardest hit with 1,014 civilian casualties (256 of whom were killed and 758 of whom were wounded). According to information which UNAMI received from the "Health Directorate" in Anbar, there were 779 civilian casualties in Anbar province (195 of whom were killed, 584 of whom were wounded) in January 2015, 49 civilians were killed and 375 were wounded in Ramadi and 146 civilians were killed and 209 wounded in Fallujah. 114 persons were killed and 49 wounded in Diyala province, 100 persons were killed and 52 wounded in Salahaddin province, 85 persons killed and 12 were wounded in Ninive and 14 persons were killed and 6 wounded in Kirkuk province.

UNAMI has pointed out that these figures merely reflect the minimum number of casualties as the number of casualties could not be verified in the conflict-ridden areas.

On 30 January 2015, the Islamic State in Iraq (ISIS) launched an offensive in the city of Kirkuk (Kirkuk province). Several car bombs detonated; suicide bombers blew themselves up close to Kurdish security

forces. A Peshmerga commander and five troops were killed in the blasts. At least 40 Kurdish Peshmerga soldiers were reportedly wounded. Kurdish units managed to repel the attack with the support of airstrikes. On 31 January 2015, Peshmerga soldiers managed to bring an oilfield west of Kirkuk which had been seized by ISIS the previous day under its control. It is the one of the largest oilfields in Iraq.

Sunni politicians and tribesmen from Diyala province have accused Shia militia of killing at least 70 male villagers, including children and adolescents in the village of Barwana.

Airliner under fire

A plane carrying 154 passengers came under fire after landing at Baghdad International Airport in a suspected Islamic State attack on 26 January 2015. Nobody was injured.

Iraq/Syria

Foreign militants

The number of foreign militants who have volunteered to fight on the side of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria is reportedly more than 20,000. This is the result of inquiries carried out by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) which partners with King's College in London. According to ICSR, around 11,000 militants came from the Middle East. Up to 3,000 Tunisians have reportedly moved to the conflict-ridden region. 2,500 militants reportedly came from Saudi Arabia. 1,500 militants came from Russia, Morocco and Jordan. ICSR estimates that five to ten percent of the foreign militants have since been killed and that another ten to 30 percent have meanwhile left the war-torn region.

Syria

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ISIS denies relief for 600,000 people

According to Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator (ASG/DERC) for OCHA, Kang Kyung-wha, out of the 12.2 million people inside Syria needing humanitarian aid, 600,000 people are in two Syrian cities controlled by the Islamic State group. The UN has called for donations of US \$ 2.9 billion (EUR 2.6 billion) from its members.

ISIS withdraws from Kobani

ISIS militants are withdrawing from areas around the Syrian town of Kobani (Ain al-Arab) along the border between Syria and Turkey following a siege that lasted several months.

Blast at the centre of Damascus

The hardline Sunni group Jabhat al-Nusra (al-Nusra Front) carried out a bombing on a bus carrying pilgrims from Lebanon in the centre of Damascus on 1 February 2015. At least six persons were killed and more than twenty were wounded. While fighting between the rebels and government troops has raged on the outskirts of Damascus, attacks in the centre are less common.

Syria/Lebanon/Israel

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Tension soars along Israeli border with Syria and Lebanon

High alert has been issued along the border between Israel, Syria and Lebanon. On 28 January 2015, Hezbollah fired at least one missile on north Israel (close to the Har Dov region). The IDF responded with artillery fire, shelling several targets in southern Lebanon. Israel had launched an attack on the Golan Heights on 18 January 2015, killing six Hezbollah fighters and a high-ranking Iranian officer. This explains why tensions have been soaring along the border between Israel and Syria in the past few days. The Israeli air force struck two Syrian military bases on 28 January 2015 which had been firing at targets on the Golan Heights.

Israel/Gaza

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Violations of human rights in the last Gaza war

The Israel Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories B'Tselem (B'Tselem in Hebrew literally means "in the image of, cf. Genesis 1.27) has accused the IDF of using excessive force in a series of recent West Bank incidents that led to the deaths of Palestinian civilians in the summer of 2014 during the Gaza war. One of the hallmarks of the conflict was the many airstrikes targeting people's homes. A report published by B'Tselem on 28 January 2015 says that buildings were even destroyed while civilians were at home. It said the destruction was the "result of a policy adopted by government representatives and supreme military commanders". B'Tselem says Israel did not target civilian residences because they were being used for military purposes but because a certain person was living there. Many of the attacks had been disproportionately to the IDF's benefit. B'Tselem investigated 70 airstrikes in which 606 people were killed. 70 percent were killed in their residences, and were civilians under the age of 18 or over the age of 60. During the ground and air offensive lasting 50 days, the IDF killed almost 2,200 Palestinians, around 70 percent of whom were civilians according to UN sources; 67 IDF troops and six civilians were killed on the Israeli side. B'Tselem claims in the report that Hamas carried out the attacks from civilian residential areas and has also violated international humanitarian law.

Egypt

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Attacks on the Sinai Peninsula

At least 25 persons were killed and 60 were wounded in a series of attacks in the cities of El-Arisch, Scheik Suwajid and Rafa. Most of the casualties were police officers and soldiers. While an army spokesperson blames the Muslim Brotherhood, the extremist organisation Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, which officially joined ISIS on 14 November 2014 has claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Libya

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Attack on a hotel in Tripoli

Militants attacked the Corinthia Hotel in the Libyan capital Tripoli on 27 January 2015, killing at least ten people (security forces and guests) including five foreigners. The hotel was mostly empty at the time of the attack. According to reports by the Libyan news agency Lana, four armed men ignited a car bomb in front of the hotel and then entered the hotel firing shots indiscriminately around them. The Corinthia Hotel is popular among foreign diplomats and journalists and is a venue for negotiations. The Islamist group "Tripolis Province of the Islamic State" has claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it had been carried out in retaliation for the death of the jihadist Abu Anas al-Libi who has been detained in a US jail since 2 January 2015. He is considered to have masterminded the attacks on the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 in which 200 people were killed.

Saudi Arabia

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More executions carried out under the rule of new King

Five executions have been carried out in Saudi Arabia in the past week under the rule of the new King Salman. According to official sources, a convicted murderer was beheaded in Medina on 1 February 2015. King Salman came to the throne on 23 January 2015 following the death of King Abdallah. During King Abdallah's ten-year rule, 80 executions were carried out each year. 87 executions were carried out in 2014. 27 executions were carried out in 2010. Saudi Arabia has come under the fire of international criticism for the executions.

Yemen

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Houthi rebels expand power/issue ultimatum to solve the government crisis

One week after clashes between Shia rebels and the Yemeni army, the Houthi are steadily gaining ground in Sanaa. The rebels sparked violent clashes in a rally held against them in the capital on 26 January 2015. The Yemeni news agency "Al-Masdar Online" reported that Houthi rebels had attacked protesters with knives and had threatened journalists. Houthi rebels had already used violence to disperse a rally of several dozen opponents on 25 January 2015. Most of the protestors who were Sunnis had gathered near the University in Sanaa to protest against the growing influence of the Houthi in the capital. Last week the rebels had surrounded several government buildings, forcing President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi to amend a constitutional bill to accommodate their wishes. President Hadi subsequently resigned. However, the Yemeni Parliament has not yet accept his resignation. In this context, Houthi militiamen gave the political forces in Yemen three days to find a solution to the government crisis. Otherwise they threatened that "revolutionary leaders" would look after the future of the country. This was announced by the militiamen without any further explanation in Sanaa on 1 February 2015.

South Sudan: . . .

New agreement between Kiir and Machar

South Sudan's President Salva Kiir and his rival, rebel leader of the rebellion against the South Sudanese government, Riek Machar, agreed a peace deal in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa brokered by IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development) on 2 February 2015 to put an end to the hostilities that have been ongoing for the past 13 months. It is the seventh ceasefire agreement. All of the former deals broke down just a few hours after they were signed. IGAD is threatening to impose sanctions and to consult the UN Security Council and the Peace and Security Council of the African Union if either side breaks the truce.

Somalia . . .

Attack on Kenyan troops

14 people were killed in heavy clashes between Kenyan troops and Al-Shabaab militants in Kismayo on 28 February 2015, a spokesman for the group's local administration said. The majority are said to have been Al-Shabaab militants. According to Al-Shabaab sources, ten Kenyans and four Somalians were killed. The clashes erupted when a Kenyan convoy became embroiled in an ambush by the Al-Shabaab rebels close to the port in south Somalia.

Airstrike on Al-Shabaab

More than 40 Islamists were killed and many others were wounded in an airstrike on an Al-Shabaab training camp in the Lower Shabelle region on 30 January 2015 according to reports by the governor of the region. It is not clear whether the airstrike was carried out by the US or AMISOM.

Nigeria . . .

Boko Haram attack on Maiduguri once again repelled

On 1 February 2015, fighters of the Islamist Boko Haram group attacked Maiduguri from several sides at roughly 3am local time (Maiduguri has a population of around two million, it is the capital of Borno State in the north-east of Nigeria). They tried to enter the city via the four suburbs Ngom, Dalwa, Molai and Jawuri. The heaviest fighting took place in Dalwa (which is around 20 km from Maiduguri), where around 50 terrorists were killed. They were, however, repelled by troops backed by vigilantes. According to unconfirmed reports, around 70 terrorists and ten civilians were killed in the clashes. Some reports claim several hundred insurgents were killed. Boko Haram waged its most recent attack on Maiduguri on 25 January 2015.

African Union approves deployment of troops to fight Boko Haram

On 30 January 2015, at a summit of the international community held in Addis Ababa, the African Union Peace and Security Council approved the mobilisation and immediate deployment of up to 7,500 troops to Nigeria to fight Boko Haram for a period of one year to begin with. Troop contingents are to be deployed

from Chad, Niger, Cameroon and Benin. The decision was welcomed by UN Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki Moon. The US agreed to provide technical aid.

Boko Haram militants have been attacking targets in the neighbouring countries Cameroon, Niger and Chad since the end of 2013 at least.

Suicide attacks in Potiskum and Gombe

A suicide bomber blew himself up in front of the home of Sabo Garbu, a member of the House of Representatives, in the city of Potiskum (north-eastern Yobe state). Around ten persons were killed. Garbu remained unharmed. The same day, a man and woman riding a motor cycle blew themselves up close to a mosque in Gombe (which is the capital of Gombe State), killing five people.

Nigeria/Chad

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Chadian troops retake Malam Fatori from Boko Haram

On 29 January 2015, elements of the Chadian Army successfully retook Malam Fatori (seat of the administration of Abadam Local Government Area) on Lake Chad (in the north-eastern Borno state) from Boko Haram after 48 hours of fighting. The terrorists have held the city in their grip since the end of October 2014.

Cameroon/Chad

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Chadian troops repel Boko Haram attack on Fatokol

According to Chadian army sources, Boko Haram insurgents attacked the city of Fotokol (along the border with Nigeria, Far North Region) on 29 and 30 January 2015. Three Chadian soldiers and 123 terrorists were reportedly killed in the attack.

Central African Republic

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Ceasefire talks /humanitarian crisis

According to a statement issued on 28 January 2015, senior representatives of the anti-balaka rebels and the Seleka movement adopted a ceasefire, a cessation of hostilities, and a DDRR (Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration) agreement at peace talks held in Nairobi (Kenya) on 23 January 2015. The agreement will not enter into force until after a formal signing. It also provides for the establishment of an interim government which will replace the current government led by President Catherine Samba Panza. It is not yet known how the talks will be continued. The government of the Central African Republic which was not party to the talks rejected the agreement on 29 January 2015.

According to a press release issued by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on 26 January 2015, the displacement site of Batangafo in the north daily receives hundreds of people driven from their homes by violence. According to Claire Bourgeois, the Senior Humanitarian Coordinator (SHC) in the Central African Republic, there are now more than 30,000 internally displaced persons in the city's largest shelter. Bourgeois emphasized that immediate action is needed to ensure the safety and protection of civilians who are at severe risk of attacks in the region. It is one of the most serious humanitarian emergencies in the world, she said. 2.7 million people, over half of the population, are in dire need of immediate assistance. On 23 January 2015, UNHCR launched a funding appeal for \$331 million to help more than 460,000 Central African Republic refugees struggling to survive across the region who the agency expects will be seeking refuge in Cameroon, Chad, the Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) by the end of the year. According to UN estimates, around 425,000 persons have so far fled to neighbouring countries, around 190,000 since December 2013. Around 430,000 internally displaced persons are living in the Central African Republic; around 36,000 of whom are staying in the main site of the city, hoping to leave the country.

Ukraine

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Situation in the East

The fighting in east Ukraine has spread like wildfire since the missile attack launched by separatists on the port of Mariupol on 24 January 2015. The fighting is the heaviest witnessed since the ceasefire agreement of Minsk was concluded in September 2014. 55 towns and villages have reportedly been ambushed by pro-Russian separatists. There has been heavy shelling and artillery fighting above all in the strategic towns of Debaltseve and Mariupol.

Talks between members of the contact group – which includes representatives of the Ukrainian government, the separatists and Russia – about a ceasefire in the Belarus capital of Minsk were abandoned after just four hours at the weekend. Both sides blame each other for the failure of the talks.

The USA which has hitherto limited its assistance to financial aid is considering supplying arms following the breakdown in the talks. In a report published by the US government, former army leaders are in favour of supplying, inter alia, reconnaissance drones, Humvee High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles, anti-tank missiles and other defensive weapons worth US\$ 3 bn.

"Bounties for destroying rebel tanks, vehicles or aircraft"

According to a decision taken by the Ukrainian government, Ukrainian troops will be rewarded with bounties if they destroy rebel tanks, vehicles or aircraft. Each fighter who destroys a vehicle of the insurgents is to receive the equivalent of EUR 600, EUR 2,400 for a tank and EUR 6,000 for a fighter aircraft.

Russian Federation

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NGO "Memorial" will not be closed down

The well-known human rights organisation "Memorial" in the Russian Federation, will remain open. On 28 January 2015, Russia's Supreme Court threw out a lawsuit filed by the Ministry of Justice against the country's oldest human rights organisation Memorial, seeking its closure. The Ministry acknowledged during the hearings that "Memorial" had addressed all its complaints. In September 2014, the Russian Ministry of Justice has demanded the closure of the NGO primarily on formal grounds. The independent human rights organisation groups together more than 60 agencies nationwide.

Background:

"Memorial" is of special importance in Russia and globally. The "Memorial" organisation was established in Moscow in the late 1980s. The dissident and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Andrei Sakharov, was elected first chairperson of the organisation in 1989. Memorial is celebrated for leading efforts to uncover Soviet history, above all the victims of Stalinism. Later on, "Memorial" focused first and foremost on violations of human rights in North Caucasus in general and Chechnya in particular. Legislation for non-governmental organisations has been tightened hugely since the autumn of 2012. NGOs receiving funds from foreign countries and that are involved in politics have since been obliged to register officially as "foreign agents". Those refusing to do so face penalties or closure. Many organisations regard it as a defamation campaign and refuse to register. They are entered into the register of "foreign agents" without their approval, which happened with "Memorial" in 2014.

Kosovo

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Heavy rioting

Heavy riots broke out between protestors and security forces on the streets of Pristina on 27 January 2014. Dozens of people were wounded, more than 120 were arrested. Thousands of protestors along with the Albanian movement (Self-Determination) demanded the dismissal of Labour and Social Welfare Minister Aleksandar Jablanovic, one of three ethnic Serbs who are members of the cabinet, who had referred to the Albanian mothers of victims of war as "savages". Several thousand protestors had already taken to the streets on 24 January 2014 to take part in anti-government rallies. They were prompted by the forthcoming negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo due to be held in Brussels on 9 February 2015. The protestors are demanding that the Trepca mines in the north which Priština still has no control of be nationalised. The protestors are

accusing the new Prime Minister Isa Mustafa of handing the mine over to the Serbs. Vetëvendosje has announced that further protests will take place.

The heaviest riots since the declaration of independence (2008) shows how tense relations are between the Albanians and the Serbs.

China ..

Hong Kong democracy movement .

Several thousand supporters of the democracy movement took to the streets once again in various parts of the city centre on 1 February 2015 for the first time since the end of the blockades within the framework of the Occupy-Central movement in December 2014.

The Chinese Human Rights Defenders organisation reported on 27 January 2015 that 113 persons who support the movement for the democratic election of Hong Kong's head of government in 2017 have been arrested on the Chinese mainland since early October 2014. 74 of them have since been released.

Sri Lanka ...

War crimes investigation announced

On 29 January 2015, the new government under Maithripala Sirisena announced plans to launch an investigation into accusations of human rights abuses in the final stages of the country's year civil war. The final phase of the war in 2009 when about 40,000 Tamil civilians were killed is considered to be particularly critical. Former president Mahinda Rajapaksa had refused to cooperate with any UN investigation into claims the army committed atrocities in the war. A national committee is to investigate events to begin with and international experts are to be consulted, if necessary. Initial talks are currently being held with the United Nations.

Prospect of land to be returned and Tamil detainees to be released

A government spokesperson said military presence will be reduced in the north which has a large Tamil population and that land occupied by the army will be returned to its original owners. Furthermore, the cases of 275 Tamils detained on the mere suspicion of having belonged to the Tamil rebel organisation LTTE are to be reviewed.

Myanmar ..

Political prisoners .

According to a report issued by the organisation Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) on 26 January 2015, 186 political prisoners remain behind bars; another 222 activists are facing charges.