

Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

9 March 2015

Afghanistan

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Security situation

Last week, insurgents, security forces and once again civilians were killed in clashes between security forces and insurgents in Faryab province (north), Baghlan, Kunduz (north-east), Nangarhar (east), Helmand and in Zabul (southern Afghanistan). In the north-eastern province Badakhshan, the Taliban seized Yamgan district which resulted in a serious lack of food in the area. A government employee was abducted in Wardak (central Afghanistan) and staff of a relief organisation were abducted in Uruzgan (southern Afghanistan). On 3 March 2015, Afghan security forces launched an operation against the abductors of 30 Hazara in Zabul province (cf. BN of 2 March 2015). They have not yet managed to release the prisoners who had been taken to Ghazni province. However, around 50 government opponents were killed most of whom were foreign militants from Kyrgyzstan. On 5 March 2015, clashes are said to have broken out between the Taliban and supporters of ISIS in Zabul province. At least seven ISIS militants were reportedly killed. On 7 March 2015, armed forces attacked a Sufi mosque in Kabul, killing at least six persons and injuring another five.

Human rights violations by officials

According to a report published by the human rights organisation Human Rights Watch, officials and commanders of pro-government militia have been guilty of many serious human rights abuses in recent years which have long gone unpunished. The report mentions, for instance, eight persons who have held or continue to hold high office. Commanders of the Afghan Local Police, provincial chiefs of police, high-ranking secret service officials, governors and former ministers fund private militia and abuse their positions in many ways. They are accused of being directly and indirectly involved in crimes such as murder, rape, robbery, theft, torture and arbitrary detentions. Those accused deny all the charges raised in the report.

Iraq

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Security situation

According to US sources, Iraqi security forces managed to push back ISIS militants from the city of Al-Bagdadi in Anbar province on 6 March 2015 which is located around 120 kilometres west of Baghdad. They were reportedly supported by the anti-ISIS coalition with airstrikes and by Sunni tribal fighters.

The Iraqi army claims it managed to capture the city of Al-Dur south of Tikrit (Salahaddin province) within the framework of its offensive against ISIS with the support of Shia militiamen.

Turkey

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Websites blocked

According to media reports, the Turkish government blocked the website of the French satirical magazine "Charlie Hebdo" last week. A court in Ankara banned the website at the petition of the telecommunication authority. The website of the satirical magazine belongs to a number of websites whose access was blocked

after the authorities had filed a petition to the courts last month because they are thought to insult religious feelings, including the website of the only Atheism Association in Turkey.

Syria . . .

Airstrike on ISIS oil refinery

A US-led coalition air strike in Syria hit an oil refinery run by the Islamic State militant group on 8 March 2015, killing 30 people, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported. The oil refinery is located north-east of the city Tel Abjad near the border with Turkey. The dead include refinery workers and Islamic State militants

Heavy fighting in Aleppo

On 4 March 2015, media reports claim at least forty persons were killed in an attempt to storm the Syrian air force intelligence offices. Opponents of President Assad blew up a tunnel that they dug (into the regime-controlled sector) and then attacked the area surrounding the air force intelligence headquarters in a bid to seize it. At least 20 members of regime security forces, 14 rebels and six civilians were killed, according to reports by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The day after the attack, heavy fighting broke out between rebels and government troops, claiming numerous casualties on both sides.

Lebanon . . .

Syrian refugees

The Maronite Lebanese General and politician Michel Aoun urged the Lebanese authorities on 3 March 2015 to facilitate the entry of Assyrian Christians. According to reports by the "Daily Star", 17 Assyrian Christians had fled an onslaught by ISIS in north-eastern Syria in the early hours of 3 March 2015 arriving in Lebanon, and a further 23 were waiting at the Masnaa' crossing on Lebanon's eastern border, to be given permission to enter the country. Official Lebanese representatives have reportedly agreed to their admission despite entry restrictions for Syrian refugees (cf. BN of 12 January 2015).

Egypt . . .

Muslim Brother executed

An Islamist who received the death penalty was executed at a prison in Alexandria on 7 March 2015. The incident is the first to have taken place since the military-led ouster of former Islamist President Mohamed Morsi in June 2013. He was charged with throwing a child off a rooftop in Alexandria during a rally following the coup against President Morsi in July 2013. One victim was killed.

Airstrikes on the Sinai Peninsula

According to hitherto unconfirmed reports from security circles, a total of 40 Islamist militants were killed in airstrikes carried out by the army in the North of the Sinai Peninsula on 5 March 2015 and 6 March 2015.

Suicide bombings

One person was killed and five people were wounded when two bombs detonated in front of a supermarket belonging to the French supermarket chain Carrefour in Alexandria on 8 March 2015. Two police officers were killed and 16 persons were wounded when a bomb exploded in front of a bank branch in Cairo on 7 March 2014.

Libya . . .

Khalifa Haftar sworn in as Libyan army chief

The internationally recognised Parliament of Libya nominated retired General Khalifa al-Haftar, who had served as military chief of staff under Gaddafi, as Major General and Commander of the Libyan Army on 2

March 2015. This officially completed the coalition of his "Operation Dignity" with government forces. The General has been fighting militant Islamists alongside army troops for several months. He has said several times that he will continue to take military action against the Islamists regardless of endeavours to find a political solution.

Meanwhile, representatives of the rival parliaments took part in direct negotiations brokered by the UN to find a solution to the conflict in Morocco on 5 March 2015.

Mali

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Suicide bombings

On 8 March 2015, at least three persons were killed in a suicide bombing carried out on a military base of the UN peacekeepers in northern Mali.

On 7 March 2015, five persons, including two security officers, were killed in a suicide bombing at a night club in the capital of Bamako. One of the persons killed, a Belgian national, was working as a security officer for the EU delegation in Bamako. The Al-Murabitun organisation of the Algerian Islamist Mokhtar Belmokhtar claimed responsibility for the attack in a video broadcast.

Eritrea

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Deadly clashes in Adi Keyh

An Eritrean opposition website is reporting of clashes between the Eritrean Army and students in Adi Keyh and surroundings which is around 100 kilometres south of the capital Asmara. One civilian was reportedly shot dead in early March. A student was killed when she was run over by an army vehicle. Several seriously wounded persons have been brought to hospitals in Asmara. The unrest shows no signs of abating. Nothing is known about the circumstances.

Tanzania

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Four persons sentenced to death for murdering Albino woman

A court in Mwanza (northern Tanzania) has sentenced four people to death for the murder of an albino woman. The killers who were convicted include the husband of the murdered woman. The 32-year-old had been murdered and maimed in 2008. The victim had her both arms and a leg hacked off with an axe and machete after being attacked while eating dinner in her village.

According to reports, attacks on people with albinism have claimed the lives of at least 74 people, including children, since 2000. Despite a ban, self-proclaimed witchdoctors use their body parts for rituals. Albinos are considered to bring luck and wealth in Tanzania and other parts of Africa. According to a UN expert, albino body parts sell for around EUR500, with an entire corpse fetching EUR65,000.

Somalia

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Journalists arrested

Police in the Republic of Somaliland which is not recognised under international law arrested two TV journalists in the north-west of Somalia for betraying Somaliland. Around 20 journalists are said to have been arrested in Somaliland in the past two years. The majority of them work for working for UK-based Somali channels.

South Sudan:

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Peace talks fail

Following talks lasting several days between President Salva Kiir and his former Vice-President Riek Machar, negotiations between the rival parties have reportedly failed according to information provided by

the Ethiopian Prime Minister and Chairpersons of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) on 6 March 2015. In February 2015, Kiir and Machar had agreed to take a decision by 5 March 2015 on how to proceed in finding a solution to the civil war that has been raging on for 14 months and in particular about the future division of power (cf. BN of 9 February 2015).

Following a resolution adopted recently by the UN Security Council, Salva Kiir and Riek Machar can be banned from travelling and may have their accounts blocked.

Nigeria . . .

Boko Haram pledges allegiance to ISIS

On 7 March 2015, the Nigerian militant group Boko Haram pledged allegiance to Islamic State (ISIS), according to an audio statement broadcast via Twitter. The message is believed to be by the group's leader, Abubakar Shekau, who pledges allegiance to the leader of the "Islamit State"(ISIS) Abu Bark Al-Bagdadi.

Maiduguri: over 100 killed in Boko-Haram bombings

On 7 March 2015, over 100 persons were killed in Maiduguri (capital of north-eastern Borno state) in three suicide bombings. The first bomb detonated at around 11:30 am when a suicide bomber riding a tricycle was prevented from driving into a fish market on Baga Road and blew herself up. Around an hour later, an explosive device detonated at a bus station at a Monday morning market. A female suicide bomber blew herself up at around 1:00 pm at Borno Express bus station. Some journalists say a fourth bomb exploded at the entrance area to the post office close to the fish market.

Boko Haram driven out of Buni Yadi and Dikwa

On 7 March 2015, the Nigerian army seized the city of Buni Yadi (administrative headquarters of the Gujba Local Government Area, LGA) which had been held by Boko Haram. On 2 March 2015, Chadian troops seized the city of Dikwa (administrative headquarters of the LGA) around 80 km east of Maiduguri) from Boko Haram. 100 terrorists were persons killed.

Massacre by Boko Haram

On 3 March 2015 at around 5:30 am. Boko Haram militants attacked the remote village of Njaba (Damboa LGA) in north-eastern Borno state. According to villagers, up to 74 men and 20 children who refused to join the ranks of Boko Haram were killed.

Kosovo . .

New party leaders for the opposition movement "Vetevendosje"

The leading Kosovan opposition movement, the left-wing nationalist "Vetevendosje" (self-determination), appointed a new Chairperson on 1 March 2015, the sociologist and MP Visa Ymeri. "Vetevendosje" has 16 seats in Parliament.

Emigration to Germany decreases

The number of applications for asylum filed by Kosovan aylum seekers in Germany and Austria is visibly declining. This is being attributed to a number of joint measures implemented with Kosovo, Serbia and Austria such as stricter border controls, fast-track proceedings and information measures.

Ukraine . . .

Situation in the East

The situation remains unclear. The ceasefire agreement has led to a decrease in the number of clashes, but fighting has not stopped completely. Following the death of at least three troops and the wounding of nine army troops, the Ukrainian army is accusing pro-Russian separatists of have seriously violated the ceasefire.

Russia has once again sent a relief convoy comprising around 160 trucks carrying over 1,800 tonnes of goods - mainly food- to the regions surrounding Donetsk and Lugansk. The Ukraine criticises this as a violation of its sovereignty and is accusing Russia of restocking arms and ammunition.

According to estimates by the US army, Russia is supporting the separatists in eastern Ukraine with around 12,000 troops. And with around 29,000 troops in the Crimea. Russia is keeping 50,000 Russian troops close to the border in case the separatists suffer a setback.

Russia's and Germany's Foreign Ministers are in favour of expanding the OSCE mission by up to 1,000 observers.

Russian Federation

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Arrests in connection with Nemtsov assassination

One week after the murder of the well-known Russian opposition politician Boris Nemtsov, three suspects from north Caucasus were arrested on 6 March 2015, two suspects were arrested in Moscow and one suspect was arrested in the North Caucasus Republic of Ingushetia. One of five suspects in the murder of opposition activist Boris Nemtsov had confessed to his involvement. On 7 March 2015, a fourth suspect managed to escape arrest by blowing himself up in Grozny. Two other suspects were arrested on 8 March 2015.

The Russian investigatory authorities assume that there is an Islamist or right-wing extremist-nationalist backdrop to the assassination. But associates of Mr Nemtsov say they will not be satisfied unless prosecutors track down whoever orchestrated the killing, rather than just the people who pulled the trigger.

China

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Death toll of conflict in Xinjiang

According to a report issued by the organisation Uyghur Human Rights Project on 3 March 2015, violence between Uyghurs and other ethnic groups claimed the lives of between 656 and 715 persons mainly in Xinjiang in 2013 and 2014. The death toll in 2014 was almost twice as high as in 2013. Citing Chinese and foreign media, the organisation spoke of a total of 125 politically motivated incidents in which Uyghurs had been killed, wounded or arrested.