

Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

2 May 2016

Afghanistan

Offensive of government forces

On 30 April 2016, Afghanistan's defence ministry stated that government forces launched a major offensive against Taliban insurgents in eight provinces. In the eastern parts of the country, a total of 80 anti-government fighters, among them nine ISIS insurgents, were killed within 24 hours, the ministry said. The operation was launched in reaction to the spring offensive announced by the Taliban.

Iraq

Casualty figures

According to Iraq Body Count (IBC), a total of 1,050 civilians were killed in April 2016.

The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) recorded 410 civilians killed and another 973 injured in April 2016. Moreover, 331 members of the Iraqi security forces were killed and 401 injured (including Peshmerga and other allies but excluding Anbar operations).

Baghdad was the worst affected province with 874 civilian casualties (232 killed, 642 injured). Ninive province recorded 72 killed and 30 injured, Salahaddin 32 killed and 24 injured, Diyala 17 killed and 15 injured, Kirkuk 16 killed and 10 injured and Basrah province 8 killed and 16 injured.

According to information obtained from the Health Directorate in Anbar, 252 civilian casualties were recorded in April 2016 (27 killed and 225 injured).

UNAMI points out that these figures are to be considered a minimum, since reports of victims cannot be verified in conflict areas.

Attacks

On 1 May 2016, at least 30 people were killed and another 55 injured in a double attack in the town of Samawa (southern Muthanna province), which has a mainly Shiite population. ISIS has claimed responsibility for the attack.

On 30 April 2016, at least 19 people died and at least 48 others were injured in a car bomb attack east of Baghdad. Also in the capital, at least two individuals died in a blast at the checkpoint of a Shiite militia.

Political developments

On 30 April 2016, supporters of Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr stormed Iraq's parliament in Baghdad; they demanded the installation of a cabinet consisting of independent technocrats and accused the government of corruption and incompetence.

Iran

Reformers gain votes in runoff parliamentary election

In the second round of parliamentary elections held on 29 April 2016, President Rouhani's moderate reform allies gained votes but failed to secure an absolute majority. According to official results published on

30 April 2016, the pro-Rouhani coalition took 38 of the 68 seats that were contested, thus gaining 133 seats in the new 290-member parliament. The conservatives took 125 seats. A total of 17 women won seats in both election rounds (eight more than at present), which is the largest number ever since Iran's Islamic Revolution of 1979. Only 16 cleric MPs were voted in (compared to 27 in the outgoing parliament). The new parliament will convene in May, after the Guardian Council has confirmed the results.

The second round of parliamentary elections was for the remaining 68 positions in the 290-seat chamber that were not decided in February's general election.

High prison sentences for journalists

Four Iranian journalists who had been arrested for alleged propaganda against the regime and for contacts to foreign governments in November 2015 have now been sentenced to prison terms between five and ten years by a Revolutionary Court in Tehran. The judgment is open to appeal. This is the first time in Hassan Rouhani's presidency that journalists were handed down such harsh jail sentences.

Morality police

The announcement of deploying undercover morality police in Tehran has led to political disagreement between conservative and government circles. After a public outcry and in view of the reluctant attitude of the interior ministry, the morality police will not be empowered to monitor observance of the dress code.

Syria

Renewed fighting in Aleppo/efforts to maintain the ceasefire

Although the ceasefire is still in place in principle, severe fighting is going on in the city and province of Aleppo. In the Geneva talks, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry is trying to prevent the final breakdown of the truce. He has repeatedly called upon Russia to use its influence on the Syrian government so that air attacks on Aleppo are halted. Russia has initially refused to do so, saying that terror groups need to be eradicated. Most recently, however, efforts to enforce the ceasefire appear to have gathered momentum.

Yemen

Government suspends participation in peace talks

On 1 May 2016, the Yemeni government suspended participation in the peace negotiations because the Houthi rebels violated the ceasefire and took over control of an important military base. Peace talks had started on 21 April 2016; representatives of government and rebels began face-to-face talks on 30 April.

Turkey

Attacks

Media have reported that on 27 April 2016, a suicide bomber blew herself up outside the Grand Mosque in Bursa, the city's main tourist attraction, injuring eight people. On 1 May, the extremist group 'Kurdistan Freedom Hawks' (TAK) claimed responsibility for the attack. Already on 26 April, the US Embassy had updated its warning of credible indications that terrorist groups were seeking opportunities to attack popular tourist destinations throughout Turkey.

On 1 May 2016, two car bomb attacks were launched in the southeastern parts of the country. One of them was aimed at a police station in the town of Dicle (Diyarbakir province), injuring at least 10 people, as media reported. The other attack was directed against a police station in the city of Gaziantep, apparently killing two police officers and injuring another 19 policemen as well as four civilians.

Marches on International Workers' Day

On the International Workers' Day, security measures were stepped up throughout the country. In Ankara and Adana, rallies were cancelled due to an increased risk of attacks. Already ahead of May Day, the authorities had refused to allow rallies to take place on Istanbul's central Taksim Square and cordoned

off the whole area. People who tried to march to the square were stopped with water cannons and tear gas. Apparently, 24,500 police officers, 120 water cannons and several helicopters were deployed in Istanbul alone. Citing the capital's governor, state news agency Anadolu reported the detention of 207 people. Protest marches were also staged in Ankara, although several rallies had been cancelled due to attack warnings. Security forces detained for suspected ISIS supporters from Syria who were believed to have planned an attack on a rally.

Prison sentences for reprinting Charlie Hebdo cover

On 28 April 2016, a Turkish court sentenced two journalists of Cumhuriyet newspaper to two years imprisonment for blasphemy because they had reprinted a controversial cover showing the Prophet Muhammad from the French satirical magazine after the attacks on the magazine in January 2015. The defendants announced to appeal the ruling.

ECHR: Turkey discriminates against Alevi faith

In its judgment of 26 April 2016, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) held that Turkey violates the right to freedom of religion of the (roughly 20 million) followers of the Alevi faith, Turkey's second largest religious community. The court held that compared to citizens adhering to the Sunni understanding of Islam, Alevis were subjected to a difference in treatment for which there was no objective and reasonable justification. With this judgment, the complaint of more than 200 Turkish Alevis was successful. They had complained that the *cemevis* (the places where they practise their religious ceremony, the *cem*) were not granted the same status of places of worship as the mosques of the Sunni Muslim community whose expenses (maintenance of buildings and recruitment of the religious leaders as civil servants) are covered by the Directorate of Religious Affairs (DIB) which is directly subordinated to the Prime Minister. Alevis, in contrast, must pay their places of worship and their religious leaders themselves. In 2005, the Turkish government had refused a respective request of the applicants.

Morocco/Western Sahara

New demands for referendum

On 27 April 2016, the Western Sahara's Polisario Front separatist movement called upon the U.N. Security Council to pave the way for the planned referendum on self-determination in Western Sahara (which had been annexed by Morocco in 1979) in its next session scheduled for 28 April 2016. Otherwise, the resumption of war against the neighbour state would be possible, the movement stated. Morocco is refusing to proceed with the referendum. In March 2016, Morocco had pulled out its staff from MINURSO (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara/Mission des Nations Unies pour l'organisation d'un référendum au Sahara occidental) and threatened to withdraw its troops out of U.N. peacekeeping missions worldwide after U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon had used the term 'occupation' to describe Morocco's annexation of the territory. Now, the UN Security Council is pushing for a speedy resumption of the mission. There was an urgent need to restore the UN mission to full functionality, the text of a resolution reads.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Fighting between Army and Mai Mai-militia in the North East

The military has stated that on 19 May 2016, fighters of the Mai-Mai Simba militia attacked army positions in the Buiakatumai area (northeastern Ituri province, Mambasa territory). After the attack, the militia moved on to Central-Biakato community, from where it was driven out by the army. In the incident, least 12 militia men and one soldier lost their lives.

Nigeria

Military accused of massacre of Shiite Muslims in Zaria by Amnesty International

In its report 'Unearthing the truth: Unlawful killings and mass cover-up in Zaria' published on 22 April 2016, Amnesty International documents the unlawful killings of more than 350 members of the Shiite

minority group 'Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN)' in the northern city of Zaria from 12-14 December 2015. According to the report, that the military meticulously destroyed most of the evidence. In a covert operation, hundreds of bodies were carted away on trucks and secretly buried in mass graves. AI published satellite images of possible mass graves. In the military operation, IMN leader Ibrahim Al-Zakzaky and his wife were arrested; his residential compound and the group's main shrine were destroyed. The confrontation between the military and IMN supporters had started when hundreds of Shiites blocked Sokoto road in front the IMN headquarters and refused to move out of the Chief of Army Staff convoy's way and became violent.

Suicide attacks on refugee camps claim dozens of lives

On 20. April 2016, two female suicide bombers blew themselves up in a camp for internally displaced persons in Banki (Borno state) near the border with Cameroon, killing 8 people and wounding another 12. Another attack of two female suicide bombers on a camp for internally displaced persons in Dikwa (Borno state) claimed more than 60 lives on 12 April.

Boko Haram hostages liberated

On 16 April 2016, the military stated that 12 Boko Haram camps were destroyed near the villages of Wulge and Walamari (north east). The military said it liberated 455 hostages and killed nearly 40 fighters of the terrorist group.

Egypt

Hundreds of protesters arrested

Amnesty International reports that on 25 April 2016, a total of 238 people were arrested across Egypt in response to anti-government protests, including foreign nationals, activists and journalists; in Cairo alone, more than 100 were detained. The protests had been triggered by government plans to hand over control of two Red Sea islands to Saudi Arabia.

Homosexuals sentenced to prison terms

A court in middle Egypt has imposed prison sentences of 3-12 years on 11 people for 'debauchery and incitement to debauchery'. Homosexuality is not punishable by law in Egypt, but often criminal offences such as 'debauchery', 'endangering state security' or 'violation of religious teachings' are used to prosecute homosexuals.

Somalia

Security situation

A Somali offshoot of ISIS has claimed responsibility for a booby trap attack on an AMISOM vehicle Mogadishu on 24 April 2016. Apparently, nobody was harmed. The incident was the first attack of ISIS in Somalia. On the same day, the Somali National Security and Intelligence Agency NISA detained a commander of the Somali branch of ISIS in Mogadishu. He is suspected of having planned attacks against AMISOM and against soldiers of the Somali National Army (SNA). It is unclear whether he was actively involved in the attack. During a joint operation of AMISOM and SNA troops in a village near Burhakaba (Bay region), six al-Shabaab fighters blew themselves up. Three Islamists were arrested. Also on 24 April, SNA and AMISOM troops attacked a checkpoint of al-Shabaab near Kismayo (Lower Shabelle region). The Islamists are present in several smaller towns near Kismayo and have brought numerous roads in the region under their control.

On 26 April, al-Shabaab fighters attacked a Somali military base located in a village near Baidoa (Bay Region). Apparently, more than ten soldiers lost their lives in the incident. The local SNA commander stated that 20 Islamists were killed and that al-Shabaab were forced to retreat after the attack. Apparently, al-Shabaab fighters have mounted a major assault against the town of Wajid in the southern Bakool Region, which was successfully repelled by SNA troops. Twelve Islamists were said to have been killed in the incident.

On 27 April, al-Shabaab briefly took control of Janale town (Lower Shabelle region). Before, AMISOM and SNA had retreated from there for unknown reasons. Shortly afterwards, the Islamists also abandoned Janale.

On 27 April, suspected al-Shabaab fighters shelled the house of a member of parliament in the Hodan district of Mogadishu, injuring several members of the security forces. On the same day, three foreign al-Shabaab fighters (two British and a Dutch national) surrendered to AMISOM and SNA troops near Janale town (Lower Shabelle Region). They were suspected members of a pro-ISIS faction within al-Shabaab who fled from assaults by al-Shabaab targeting ISIS members.

During a security operation in Mogadishu's Daynile district, 15 suspected al-Shabaab members were detained by secret service and AMISOM officers.

On 28 April, al-Shabaab insurgents attacked SNA barracks in Mogadishu's Huriwa district. The assault was repelled.

Also on 28 April, al-Shabaab fighters ambushed an Ethiopian AMISOM convoy near Nur Fahah (Hiraan Region). Two civilians were injured in the incident.

On 1 May 2016, al-Shabaab fighters apparently regained control of Runirgod town (Middle Shabelle Region). Government units, who had taken the town a day before, were forced to retreat. The Islamists said that 32 soldiers were killed in the incident.

Equatorial Guinea

President confirmed in office

On 24 April 2016, acting president Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo won the presidential elections as expected, gaining about 94 percent of all votes. The 73-year-old autocratic ruler is the longest serving head of state in Africa (since 1979) and will now remain in office for seven more years. The major opposition parties boycotted the election. Observers said polling day was peaceful. The African Union had sent an observer mission to Equatorial Guinea led by former Benin president Boni Yayi. Opposition representatives complained of vote rigging. The country is a major sub-Saharan oil producer and among the richest African countries, measured in terms of gross domestic product per capita. Nevertheless, a large part of its 800,000 inhabitants live in poverty.

Burundi

Assassinations

On 25 April 2016, General Athanase Karaaruza, the security consultant of vice president Gaston Sindimwo, was shot dead by unidentified gunmen in Bujumbura; also, the General's body guard, his wife and his daughter were killed. Already on 20 April, another high-ranking military, Colonel Emmanuel Buzubona, had been killed by unidentified assailants in the capital. According to an UN statement of 27 April, a total of 31 people were killed in acts of violence during this month. Five more individuals lost their lives when four armed men opened fire on customers of a bar in Bujumbura on 28 April.

Preliminary investigations by the ICC

On 25 April 2016, International Criminal Court Chief Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda announced in The Hague that a preliminary inquiry was underway into alleged crimes committed by the country in view of reports on violence in Burundi.

Central African Republic

Extension of MINUSCA mandate

On 26 April 2016, the UN Security Council decided to extend until 31 July 2016 the mandate of the peace-keeping mission MINUSCA (Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République centrafricaine). Originally, the mandate was due to end on 30 April 2016.

Côte d’Ivoire

UN peacekeeping mission to end in 2017

On 28 April 2016, the UN Security Council agreed to wrap up the peace-keeping mission (almost 7,000 soldiers, police officers, observers and other staff) as of the end of June 2017. At the same time, the sanctions are to be lifted – among them an arms embargo, travel restrictions and frozen assets. A UN representative stated that the country has made impressive progress on its way to peace, reconciliation and security.

After parts of the armed forces had raised a mutiny in September 2002, violent clashes have occurred among the population again and again. Repeatedly, the country has been on the brink of a civil war. To maintain the ceasefire agreed in May 2003, the UN Security Council decided to establish the peace-keeping mission ONUCI (Opération des Nations Unies en Côte d’Ivoire) in February 2004.

Moldova

Anti-government protests

On 24 April 2016, new mass protests and anti-government violence erupted again in the capital Chişinău. Approx. 7,000 protesters accused the country’s elites of massive corruption and called for new elections. Clashes between government opponents and police officers left several people injured.

Background

For months now, the country has been shaken by a political crisis and by protests. After a corruption scandal in April 2015 (the so-called ‘theft of the century’), the pro-European government was brought down by a vote of no confidence, and former head of government Vlad Filat was arrested in October 2015. Since the parliamentary elections of 2014, the country has been ruled by three (pro-Western) coalitions. The pro-Russian opposition and the civic group Platforma DA (dignity and justice) have been organizing protests for months. Both factions have erected protest camps in front of the Parliament building.

Oligarchic power structures, corruption and legal insecurity are prevalent in the Republic of Moldova. The political landscape is split into a pro-Russian and a pro-Western camp. In 2014, the country signed an association agreement with the EU against Russian protest.

Kosovo

Large-scale raid against organized crime

On 27 April 2016, a massive operation was launched against an Albanian-Serbian organised crime group by the EU rule of law mission EULEX, with about 350 officers and the support of Kosovo police forces. The case involves money laundering, real estate fraud, corruption and other crimes; dozens of bars and restaurants allegedly run by criminal gangs were inspected and six people arrested. A member of parliament of the governing PDK party (an uncle of President Hashim Thaci), who is wanted with arrest warrant, could not be apprehended.

Kosovo is one of the most corrupt countries in Europe, with widespread nepotism and close links between politicians and organised crime. The EU has demanded to step up the fight against corruption and criminal networks. While there are far-reaching political means like an action plan, anti-corruption legislation and an anti-corruption authority, implementation and enforcement have been fragmentary so far.

EULEX mandate to be extended

The EU rule of law mission EULEX, which has been active in Kosovo since 2008, will continue its activities after the expiry of its current mandate on 14 June 2016, with half of the present personnel of about 1,400 international and local staff members. Two years ago, the international representatives handed over the operative management to Kosovar judicial and police authorities; however, they are still supporting the local operators. After the Kosovo war of 1998-99, the former Serbian province was put under UN administration (UNMIK) until 2008, when independence was proclaimed.

Ukraine/Russia

Ban of Crimean Tatars' highest self-governing body

On 26 April 2016, the Supreme Court in the Russia-annexed peninsula of Crimea banned the Mejlis, the Crimean Tatars' highest ruling body, calling it an extremist group. Already on 18 April, the Russian ministry of justice had placed it on the list of organisations banned for extremist activities upon application of the Attorney General of Crimea. Mejlis chairman Refat Chubarov is a member of the Ukrainian parliament and lives in Kiev.

Ukraine

Volodymyr Groysman elected Prime Minister

On 14 April 2016, the Ukrainian parliament elected its previous speaker Volodymyr Groysman as the new Prime Minister with 257 of votes cast (necessary votes: 226). Also, it accepted the resignation request of Mr. Groysman's predecessor Arseny Yatseniuk and confirmed the new cabinet consisting of 22 ministers and deputy heads of government. The new government is made up of the 'Petro Poroshenko Bloc' faction, to which the new Prime Minister belongs, and of Arseny Yatseniuk's *Narodnyj Front* (People's Front). Formally, the coalition has a narrow majority of 227 seats in parliament.

China

New law on foreign NGOs

On 28 April 2016, the standing committee of the National People's Congress passed a law placing the activities of all foreign NGO's in China under police control. The organisations will have to submit details of their finances, their activities and their co-operation with Chinese partners. In future, their activities will need authorisation by the police and can be stopped at any time, if they are considered to be threatening the interests of the nation or of the society, e.g. in case of an organisation's commitment to human rights issues. Also, the law is apparently meant to permit even stricter control of the Chinese civil society which often benefits from foreign support. The law which is due to enter into force on 1 January 2017 has been met international criticism. Approx. 7,000 NGOs are active in China, including about 200 German organisations.

Bangladesh

Dozens murdered by extremists

According to the U.S. Ambassador in Bangladesh, Islamist extremists have committed at least 35 murders in the last 14 months. Among the victims are critics of extreme strands of Islam and liberal activists. In April 2016 alone, a university professor, an atheist blogger and two gay activists lost their lives.