

Group 22 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

21 November 2016

Afghanistan

IS leader killed in drone attack

According to information from a spokesperson for the governor of the province of Nangarhar in East Afghanistan, Mullah Bosorg and seven other IS fighters were killed in a US drone attack on 18.11.16. IS has yet to confirm the reports.

International Criminal Court: Possible US war crimes

According to a preliminary inquiry report from the International Criminal Court in The Hague, members of the US army and the CIA may have committed war crimes by torturing prisoners. Members of the US armed forces have allegedly brutally mistreated and/or tortured at least 61 prisoners. The report also claims that CIA staff have mistreated at least 27 prisoners in Afghanistan and in secret prisons in Poland, Lithuania and Romania. Interrogation methods are alleged to have been used which “amount to the war crime of torture”. The report claims that this is not a matter of isolated instances, but rather the result of a deliberate policy. Most of the cases are alleged to have occurred between 2003 and 2004, while some charges relate to incidents up to the year 2014.

According to information from her office, chief prosecutor Bensouda is considering broadening the investigations. As the USA has not ratified the Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court, it is unlikely that it will cooperate in connection with the investigations.

Chief prosecutor Bensouda also suspects the Taliban and its allies of being responsible for the deaths of some 17,000 civilians as a result of numerous attacks on schools, hospitals and mosques between 2007 and the end of 2015. For war crimes in the 1980s and 1990s, the report first and foremost holds Gulbuddin Hekmatjar responsible, the Hizb-e-Islami leader known as the “butcher of Kabul”. He signed a peace accord with the Afghan government in September 2016 which grants him protection from prosecution.

Kabul: Attack on Shiite mosque

A suicide attacker killed and injured dozens of people in an attack on Shiites who had gathered at a mosque in Kabul on 21.11.16 for a ceremony marking the 40th day of the Ashura festival. The police put the death toll at 27, while the health ministry has reported more than 30 people dead and 85 injured. The number of fatalities is expected to rise. The Taliban have denied responsibility.

Turkey

Demonstration against persecution of Kurdish politicians

On 20.11.16 several thousand people demonstrated in Istanbul against the persecution of Kurdish politicians. The demonstrators were for the most part supporters of the pro-Kurdish opposition party HDP and the secular opposition party CHP. Ten HDP MPs have been arrested in recent weeks.

Mayors dismissed

On 17.11.16 the Turkish government dismissed the mayors in Van, Mardin, Tunceli and Siirt in the Kurd-dominated south-east of the country and placed some local government areas under central government

administration. Back in September 2016, the elected mayors in numerous Kurd-dominated communities, including Diyarbakir, were dismissed and replaced by government administrators. The mayors are accused of links to the PKK. Among the dismissed mayors is the only Christian mayoress in Turkey, Februniye Akyol who, as the deputy of Ahmet Türk, one of the most prominent Kurdish politicians in the country, was deputy senior mayor of Mardin.

Scientists detained

According to media reports, the government ordered the arrest of more than 100 scientists in Istanbul on 17.11.16. The Technical University of Yildiz was reportedly one of the focal points of the arrests. More than 70 academics are reported to have been arrested in several simultaneous raids carried out in Istanbul on 18.11.16. They are accused of having links to the Gülen movement, which is classified as a terrorist organisation.

Syria

Use of chemical weapons

On 17.11.16 the UN Security Council extended by a further year the mandate for investigations into the use of chemical weapons in Syria, which are being carried out by the UN and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. The Council charged the commission with identifying the perpetrators, organisers and instigators of attacks with chemical weapons. On the Security Council, Russia also approved the extension, having previously voiced reservations.

Fighting in Aleppo

Last week the Syrian government continued its air raids on Aleppo as part of its new major offensive. According to media reports, the attacks were also aimed at the medical infrastructure, including a children's hospital. There were reports of more than 60 civilian fatalities.

On 20.11.16 the Syrian government rejected UN special envoy Staffan De Mistura's proposal that the eastern part of Aleppo be granted autonomy as part of a ceasefire agreement.

Egypt

IS: Two priests beheaded

According to reports in various media, the IS terrorist militia has published photographs showing the murder of two elderly men. According to IS the victims are Coptic priests who were beheaded for spying. According to one press report the victims are Bedouins whom IS wrongly took to be priests.

Nigeria

Boko Haram: Attacks in Maiduguri

At around midnight on 18.11.16 a suicide attacker attempted to enter the Custom House camp for internally displaced people in Maiduguri-Gambouru/Ngala Street in Maiduguri (capital of the north-eastern federal state of Borno). When he failed to stop at the entry checkpoint he was shot dead by police. This caused his suicide vest to explode.

Four other suicide attackers blew themselves up in Maiduguri in the course of the same day: two at a checkpoint at the Federal High Court in the Jikkari Polo district, one at the Muna Garage bus station and one at a checkpoint at the entrance to the city some metres away from the bus station. Apart from the four attackers, two members of a citizens' militia also died in the attacks.

UN: 75,000 at risk of starvation in the north-east of the country

On 15.11.16 Peter Lundberg, UN aid coordinator for Nigeria, warned of an impending severe famine in north-east Nigeria and the adjoining regions as a result of the insurgency by the Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram. As a result of the food crisis, some 14 million people will be in urgent need of

humanitarian aid as of 2017. Lundberg stated that around 75,000 children were already at risk of dying in the next two months. Since the terrorists were largely forced out of the area by the military, aid organisations have had access for the first time to the regions which were formerly under Boko Haram's control and are able to assess the extent of the humanitarian crisis.

Clashes between Shiite sect IMN and security forces claim lives once again

On 14.11.16 several thousand members of the Shiite sect Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) set off on their annual procession from Kano (capital of the northern federal state of the same name) to the Shiite Arbain festivities in the city of Zaria (federal state of Kaduna) where the sect has its headquarters. According to eye witnesses, the police fired tear gas at the procession to disperse the crowd at around 8 a.m. in the village of Kwanar Dawaki on the outskirts of Kano. This gave rise to violent clashes in which eight Shiites and one police officer died, according to police sources. The IMN puts the death toll at 50. The police claim that the IMN members had blocked the Kano-Kaduna highway and had attacked the police with various weapons, including bows and arrows and machetes. Most recently, around ten IMN members were shot dead by the security forces who took action to prevent an IMN procession in Funtua (federal state of Katsina) on 12.10.16.

DR Congo

17 opposition activists arrested

According to Jose Maria Aranaz, director of the UN human rights bureau in Congo, 17 people were arrested in Lubumbashi (south-east) on 19.11.16 because they were wearing yellow T-shirts. These were intended to show president Kabila the "yellow card" - before the people show him the "red card" on 19.12.16, the date on which his term of office is to end under the constitution.

New prime minister appointed

On 17.11.16 president Joseph Kabila appointed opposition politician Samy Badibanga as the new prime minister. He succeeds Matata Ponyo in office, who submitted his and his government's resignation to president Kabila on 14.11.16. Badibanga is the the floor leader of the largest opposition party, UDPS. He was expelled from the UDPS together with other UDPS parliamentarians in 2012 for refusing to follow the boycott of parliament which had been ordered by the party's president, Etienne Tshisekedi. Kongo's largest opposition alliance, Rassemblement ('Gathering'), to which the UDPS also belongs, described Badibanga's appointment as a provocation, stating that it would not deter the opposition from staging protests to force Kabila to resign at the end of his constitutional term of office, on 19.12.16.

The appointment of a new prime minister from the opposition ranks took place under the terms of an agreement which was signed on 18.10.16. This was the result of a political dialogue between the government, sections of civil society and a small fraction of the opposition. Among other things, the agreement provides for parliamentary and presidential elections in April 2018, Kabila's retention of the presidency until then and the formation of a new government for the transition period, which is to include the opposition. The "political dialogue" was boycotted by Rassemblement.

Somalia

Hostilities

According to unconfirmed reports, at least 12 Al-Shabaab fighters were allegedly killed in an ambush by AMISOM and Somali forces in the area of Mogadishu airport (Lower Shabelle region) on 14.11.16. After Somali troops and AMISOM units had taken the town of Tiye glow (region of Bakool) without a fight on 15.11.16, Al-Shabaab launched a counter-offensive on the same day by exploding a car bomb. The detonation and the ensuing exchange of fire claimed the lives of at least 20 members of the Somali security forces. On 16.11.16 Al-Shabaab fighters attacked an AMISOM base in the Lower Shabelle region. AMISOM repelled the attack. On 18.11.16 Al-Shabaab fighters carried out several attacks on civilian and military targets in the Lower Shabelle region (towns of Muri and Bufow).

Attacks

Several police officers were killed in an attack by Al-Shabaab on a police station in Burhakabo (Bay region) on 14.11.16. On 15.11.16 suspected Al-Shabaab fighters opened fire on a bus which was en route from Mogadishu to Marka (Lower Shabelle region). The driver and one passenger were injured. Five people were injured in a bomb attack on a restaurant in Ksimayo (Lower Juba region) which is popular with the security forces.

Security situation

Since the partial withdrawal of Ethiopian AMISOM troops in September and October 2016, AMISOM and Somali security forces belonging both to the government and the regional administrations have been endeavouring to regain the ensuing territorial losses. AMISOM is calling for 4,000 soldiers in order to be able to continue the mission successfully. AMISOM is supposed to have a total force of around 22,000 men. The soldiers come from Ethiopia (approx. 4,400 to date), Uganda (approx. 6,200), Burundi (approx. 5,500), Kenya (approx. 3,600) and Djibouti (2,000).

Kenya

Closure of refugee camp deferred

According to an announcement on 16.11.16, the government has postponed by six months the closure of the Dadaab refugee camp, which was originally planned for the end of November 2016, because basic provisions cannot be guaranteed for the returnees. The government stated that voluntary returns to Somalia are to continue, however. According to the UNHCR, more than 280,000 refugees, for the most part Somalis, were living at the camp in July/August 2016.

Kosovo/Albania

IS attack on Israeli national team thwarted

Security forces in Kosovo have evidently thwarted several planned attacks by IS supporters. According to the Kosovar police, one planned attack was aimed at the Israeli national football team during a World Cup qualifying match in neighbouring Albania. 18 terrorist suspects were arrested in Kosovo on 17.11.16, while six were detained in Albania and Macedonia. According to the police, explosives, other bomb-making materials and religious writings were found in the suspected terrorists' homes. The terrorist group allegedly also had several specific targets in their sights.

Eleven suspected Islamist terrorists were arrested in Albania and Kosovo back on 06.11.16. The security forces of the two countries reported that the suspects had been planning attacks or participating in the recruitment of fighters for IS.

In relation to the size of the countries' populations, particularly large numbers of Albanian and Kosovar nationals are fighting for IS in Syria or Iraq. Both countries have amended their criminal laws accordingly: participation in armed conflicts abroad is punishable by up to ten years' imprisonment.

India

Extremists attack military convoy

At least three members of the army were killed in an attack by rebels in the north-eastern federal state of Assam on 20.11.16. According to police information, the extremists stopped a military convoy by blowing up a roadside bomb in the town of Didboi in the Tinsukia district. Then they shot at the convoy. The security

authorities suspect that the attack was carried out by the ULFA terrorist militia (United Liberation Front of Assam). This is the largest separatist militia in Assam, where attacks are a frequent occurrence.

Myanmar

Violence in Rakhine State

According to a report from Human Rights Watch on 21.11.16, the analysis of satellite images confirms that 820 buildings were destroyed by fire in five villages inhabited by Muslim Rohingya in the district of Maungdaw (Rakhine State) between 10. and 17.11.16. On 13.11.16 the human rights organisation had reported on a different wave of destruction by fire in three villages in the district (cf. BN of 14.11.16). On 15.11.16 the military rejected accusations that it was responsible for the suspected arson, blaming Muslim attackers instead. The military also claimed that far fewer buildings had been affected than was claimed. Local sources accuse the military of human rights violations, stating that thousands of people have become internally displaced as a result of the violence and that there is only limited scope for providing them with humanitarian aid. The sources put the death toll so far at around 130, and arrests at around 300. Many hundreds of people fled into neighbouring Bangladesh, whose border guard prevented the illegal entry of 278 Rohingya between 01.10.16 and 17.11.16.

In the wake of an attack on a border police post on 09.10.16 (cf. BN of 10.10.16) the Myanmar military has sealed off the region and is combing the area for perpetrators and stolen weapons. Independent reporting is practically impossible.

China

Hong Kong: Court excludes MPs from parliament

On 15.11.16 Hong Kong's High Court excluded two opposition MPs from parliament because they had amended the text of their oath of office without due authority on 12.10.16. The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China had already excluded the two MPs from the Hong Kong parliament on the same grounds on 07.11.16 (cf. BN of 07.11.16). Their mandates are to be allocated to new MPs in by-elections.

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