

Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

19 October 2015

Afghanistan

Security situation

In view of the tense security situation, the U.S. decided to halt the withdrawal of American military forces in Afghanistan. The current U.S. force of 9,800 troops would remain throughout 2016, it was stated.

Attacks and fighting have continued over the last week. On 19 October 2015, fierce battles were reported from Shindand district in western Herat province where Taliban insurgents attacked the district capital. Also from southern Helmand province, severe clashes were reported between Afghan security forces and Taliban members who had started coordinated attacks on military and police bases. In Ghormach district (northern Faryab province), Taliban insurgents attacked the district administration headquarters. Apparently, the governor's office and the police headquarters were set on fire. On 16 October 2015, Afghan security forces thwarted a Taliban attack on the Dawlat Shah district centre in eastern Laghman province. On 14 October 2015, Chahar Dara district in northeastern Kunduz province was said to be retaken from the Taliban by Afghan troops.

In addition, targeted attacks were carried out, for example on 13 October 2015, when a police officer was killed in a suicide attack in Kandahar, and on 12 October 2015, when a female staff member of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) was killed, also in Kandahar province.

Reports on grave violations committed by Taliban insurgents in Kunduz

After capturing Kunduz, the Taliban militants have launched systematic attacks not only against people advocating women's rights, against journalists and against women employed in the civil service. Also, women's shelters were among the main targets. There have been reports on targeted attacks, rapes and cases of kidnapping.

Kidnapped German aid worker set free

A female aid worker of the German development organisation GIZ who had been abducted in August 2015 was released on 17 October 2015. No further information is available.

Iraq

General situation

Reports say that Iraqi forces are converging on IS positions both in Ramadi (Anbar province) and in or near Baiji (Salahaddin province). Iraqi security forces claim to have retaken Baiji refinery with the help of Shia militias.

Internally displaced persons

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has reported that displacement in Iraq exceeds 3.2 million in the time period January 2014 until end of September 2015. Of those, around 42 percent were from Anbar province, IOM stated.

Cholera outbreak

On 13 October 2015, media reported that more than 1,400 cases of cholera have been registered in Iraq. Apparently, also the Kurdish Region is affected, with the majority of cases registered in the refugee camps.

Crisis in Kurdistan Region

As was reported by the press on 13 October 2015, the political crisis has escalated between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Gorran party. On 13 October 2015, the prime minister of Iraqi Kurdistan Nechirvan Barzani removed five ministers from his cabinet who are all members of the Gorran party. KDP is accusing the Gorran party of being responsible for protests against the Kurdistan Regional Government which had turned into riots killing several people. Among the direct reasons triggering the protests was the government's failure to pay out salaries.

Syria

Russian embassy shelled

On 13 October 2015, two mortars hit the ground of the Russian embassy in Damascus. No-one was harmed; the building remained intact. Panic broke out among the 300 demonstrators who had gathered in front of the embassy to support the Russian air strikes in Syria.

Fighting and territorial gains of Syrian army

On 17 October 2015, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that the Syrian army and its Russian allies have retaken three villages in an offensive near the city of Aleppo. Further clashes with the IS and the rebels were reported from the eastern parts of the country, from northern Hama, Idleb and Latakia provinces, from the rebel-controlled areas near Homs and Damascus as well as from southern Daraa province bordering Jordan.

Extremist leader killed in air strike

On 15 October 2015, Sanafi al-Nasr, leader of a militant Islamist group known as the Khorasan which is linked to al-Qaida, was killed in an air strike by the U.S.-led coalition in northwest Syria.

Ammunition for rebels / new alliance

On 11 October 2015, U.S. military cargo planes dropped 112 pallets of ammunition to rebel groups in northern Syria to support them in their fight against IS militants. CNN reports that 50 tons of small arms ammunition were delivered to the rebels groups. The main allies in the fight against IS are the Syrian Kurdish People's Defence Units YPG. On 12 October 2015, YPG and Syrian Arab rebel militias formed a new alliance calling themselves the Democratic Forces of Syria.

U.S. and Russia agree on airspace safety in Syria

As was reported on 16 October 2015, the U.S. and Russia have reached agreement on coordinating airspace over Syria in order to avoid confrontations in their separate air campaigns in Syria.

Amnesty International accuses Kurdish PYD of violating international humanitarian law

In a report released on 13 October 2015, Amnesty International accuses the Kurds in northern Syria of war crimes. In the area controlled by the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), thousands of people were displaced and entire villages demolished, apparently in retaliation for the perceived support of their Arab or Turkmen residents for the IS or other armed groups.

Turkey

Ankara bombers identified

On 15 October 2015, the Turkish government said that the two men behind the Ankara attack of 9 October had been identified. Both are believed to be part of the Adiyaman cell which has links to IS. Turkish Prime Minister Davutoglu said that previous connections to PKK groups were also under investigation. Apparently,

one of the culprits is the brother of the suicide bomber who had killed more than 30 people in the border town of Suruc in July 2015. Media reported that on 14 October 2015, Ankara police, intelligence and security chiefs were suspended in an effort to further the investigation into the attacks. Before, President Erdogan had admitted an intelligence failure which he said would be probed in special investigations. As of 16 October 2015, the Turkish authorities have detained ten other suspects in connection with the attacks, some of whom are believed to have links to IS or PKK.

EU-Turkey joint action plan

On 15 October 2015, EU leaders agreed to give political support for an action plan. In return for strengthening border management, Turkey is to receive financial aid (at least €1 billion) and fast-track access to visas. The next step would be an agreement on burden-sharing for the next years, with the EU willing to take on a significant share.

German Chancellor Merkel offers concessions to Turkey

In a visit on 18 October 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel made major concessions to Turkey, signalling willingness to enter into discussions on the demand to be put on the list of safe countries of origin from the Turkish side. She also promised that stronger financial EU efforts to tackle the refugee crisis would not fail because of Germany. The chancellor also showed willingness to help accelerate the path to visa-free travel to the EU for Turks and to push forward the stalled EU accession negotiations.

Yemen

Friendly-fire incident

On 17 October 2015, Saudi-led air force mistakenly attacked a Yemeni military camp in a mountain range near the city of Taiz, killing 30 soldiers and wounding another 40 of their own coalition. This region is the scene of fighting between coalition troops and supporters of ousted President Ali Abdullah Saleh who has formed an alliance with Shia Houthi rebels.

South Sudan

UN peacekeeping mission extended

On 9 October 2015, the UN Security Council extended the mandate of the UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) until 15 December 2015, urging the conflicting parties to implement the peace agreement reached in September as quickly as possible.

Withdrawal of Ugandan forces

On 12 October 2015, Uganda's People Defence Forces (UPDF) started leaving South Sudan; this process is scheduled to end within 45 days. The withdrawal was one of the main demands of the South Sudanese rebels in the recently signed peace agreement. In December 2013, Uganda had deployed its troops in three bases (Bor, Nesitu and the international airport of Juba) to support President Salva Kiir. In response to President Kiir's unilateral decree to increase the number of administrative states to 28, senior rebel leader General Oloni announced to take up arms again against Kiir's forces.

Egypt

Deadly bomb attack

An Egyptian news agency has reported that on 14 October 2015, in north Sinai's provincial capital of el-Arish one civilian and a soldier were killed by a roadside bomb; six police officers were wounded. An Islamist group with links to IS has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Parliamentary elections

On 18 and 19 October 2015, around 27 million electors were called to vote for a new parliament in 14 of the country's 27 governorates. The remaining voters will cast their ballots on 22 and 23 November 2015. Official election results are not expected before early December. The first day of voting on 18 October saw a very low turnout. Experts say that the new parliament will be unlikely to challenge incumbent President al-Sisi, since the majority of the parties running in the elections are in support of the route taken by the government.

Tunisia

Attempt to rescue hostage

The Tunisian defence ministry has reported that on 12 October 2015, two Tunisian soldiers were killed and two others wounded in clashes with Islamist insurgents in the mountain region of Kasserine bordering Algeria. The incident occurred after security forces had launched a search operation for a missing person thought to be kidnapped. The Islamist Uqba Nafi brigade declared to have killed the hostage, the ministry said.

Nobel Peace Prize

Some days before, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the Tunisian national Dialogue Quartet consisting of four key organisations in Tunisian civil society (General Labour Union, Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts, the Human Rights League and the Order of Lawyers). The Nobel Committee stated that the quartet had established an alternative, peaceful political process at a time when the country was on the brink of civil war, and expressed its hope that the prize will contribute towards safeguarding democracy.

Burundi

Deadly clashes

The UN said that on 13 October 2015, nine civilians and two police officers were killed in an exchange of heavy gunfire in Bujumbura.

Uganda

Opposition leader detained

On 15 October 2015, opposition leader Kizza Besigye was arrested as he left his home in Kasangati near the capital of Kampala for a series of political rallies in the eastern part of the country. Also Ssemujju Nganda, spokesperson of his party (Forum for Democratic Change FDC) was arrested on the same day. The authorities said that the planned outdoor rallies were illegal since the permission to hold rallies was only valid in closed premises. Besigye intends to run for office in the presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled to be held in February 2016. Already on 10 October, police had violently disrupted a planned opposition rally in the western city of Rukungiri. Authorities say opposition gatherings are a threat to public peace since the official campaigning season only begins in November. In addition, a police spokesman said that Besigye's rallies were illegal because the electoral commission had not yet officially recognised his candidature. In recent times, concerns have been growing about police brutality against opposition supporters.

Guinea

Condé wins second term as President

Guinea's President Alpha Condé has won a second term in the first round with 57.9 percent of votes cast. Voter turnout was around 68 percent of roughly six million electorate. Among Condé's seven challengers, only former prime minister Diallo enjoyed significant backing with 31.4 percent. Mr Diallo rejected the results as undemocratic and announced to take action with all legal means. EU observers said the elections were mostly fair and peaceful. Apparently, missing election materials and stations opening late have not

distorted the election results. It was only Guinea's second democratic presidential election since independence from France in 1958. In the first free elections held in 2010, Alpha Condé had defeated his challenger Diallo in the presidential run-off.

Guinea-Bissau

New government sworn in

On 13 October 2015, President Jose Mario Vaz swore in the new cabinet under Prime Minister Carlos Correia. President Vaz named the new government by decree and will himself act as interim minister of internal administration and natural resources. The President's move comes after several negotiations on forming a new government had failed. Since 12 August 2015, Guinea-Bissau remained without a government, when the constitutional court had dismissed the government.

Mali

Attack in northern Mali

On 13 October 2015, the Malian military stated that suspected jihadists had launched an attack on a convoy of vehicles protected by soldiers roughly 100 km west of the city of Gao. Six civilians and a soldier were killed in the incident, two other people were left injured.

Nigeria

Boko Haram: Series of suicide attacks in Maiduguri

On 16 October 2015, four women suicide bombers blew themselves up when challenged by four soldiers as they were walking downtown from Molai suburb west of Maiduguri (capital of northeastern Borno State). When the soldiers opened fire on one of the women, she detonated her bomb, causing the explosion of the other devices held by the other three women. 22 people lost their lives, among them the four attackers.

On 15 October, two suicide bombers blew themselves up in a mosque in Molai during evening prayer. According to a national emergency agency spokesperson, more than 30 people were killed in the attack.

On 13 October 2015, three female suicide bombers detonated improvised explosive devices at different locations around Tuka Tuka village on the outskirts of Maiduguri (Ajilari Cross area). Besides the attackers, four people lost their lives according to information provided by the police; other sources say that at least seven people were killed and 39 others wounded.

Boko Haram: Attack and suicide bombing in Adamawa State

On 17 October 2015, armed gunmen launched an attack on the village of Dar (Madagali Local Government Area) in northeastern Adamawa State. When many of the villagers escaped into the bush, two female suicide bombers disguised as fleeing villagers detonated explosives where the others were hiding. At least 12 people were killed in the incident.

Burkina Faso

Coup leader charged before military court

On 16 October 2015, a spokesperson of the military justice authority stated that the leader of last month's failed coup, General Gilbert Diendere, has been charged with crimes against humanity and other offences. Also, former foreign and security minister Djibril Bassole and 21 other people are accused of murder, threatening state security and other crimes in connection with the coup. At least 11 people had been killed and 271 injured as the presidential guards were crushing protests against the coup.

The presidential and parliamentary elections initially scheduled for 11 October 2015, but delayed by the coup, were now set for 29 November.

Cameroon

U.S. troops deployed to Cameroon for Boko Haram fight

The United States is sending up to 300 troops to Cameroon. On 12 October 2015, an advance force of 90 military personnel was deployed near the city of Garoua in northern Cameroon to conduct airborne intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance operations in the region. These forces are equipped with unarmed surveillance drones. The U.S. troops are to provide intelligence to the 8,700-strong Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF) being set up to fight Boko Haram.

Ukraine

Partial withdrawal of weapons ahead of local elections

One week ahead of the local elections set for 25 October 2015, which are deemed to be an important indicator for the pro-western approach of President Petro Poroshenko, the conflicting parties have agreed to withdraw more weapons to stabilize the situation. On 18 October, government forces started to remove numerous howitzers and mortars in the Donetsk area. The separatists announced to begin the partial withdrawal of military equipment on 21 October 2015. In a first step, armoured vehicles and artillery were to be moved to a minimum of 15 km from the front line, they stated. The ceasefire in the Donbass area agreed in September appears to be holding for now.

Western Balkan countries

Flow of migrants redirected via Slovenia

Since early October, around 4,000 migrants arrive daily in the south Serbian town of Presevo via Macedonia. Although many of the refugees are sick and suffering from the cold, they intend to move on. Serbia is making efforts to take good care of the people who are directed to the reception centre Principovac near the Croatian border and from there to the Croatian reception camp Opatovac. After Hungary has fenced off also its green border with Croatia, migrants have now switched to a route from Serbia via Croatia and Slovenia. On 17 October 2015, a total of nearly 3,000 migrants arrived in Slovenia; on 18 October, thousand people were brought to the border in a chartered train. Croatia and Slovenia are willing to let all of them pass through as long as Austria and Germany agree to accept them.

Kosovo

Tear gas protests in parliament over establishment of ‘Serbian communities’

For weeks now, the opposition has been trying to prevent the establishment of a Serbian association of municipalities granting more rights to the Serbian minority. Opposition members had thrown eggs at Prime Minister Isa Mustafa in parliament and blocked parliamentary life. Also, the tyres of government vehicles had been punctured. Opposition MPs had set off tear gas twice to block the adoption of the disputed law. The law was passed despite the incidents. After the brief arrest of opposition leader Albin Kurti, violent protesters took to the streets on 12 October 2015.

The establishment of ‘Serbian communities’ is the core of the ‘Brussels Agreement’ to normalise relations between Serbia and Kosovo negotiated with EU mediation (see BN of 31 August 2015). The opposition, led by the nationalist Vetvendosje (self-determination) movement, is concerned that granting more autonomy to the Serbian communities will divide the country. The law has also provoked widespread popular resistance. More than 200.000 signatures have already been collected. However, there is also general discontent about the government parties and the international community. One response to the lack of prospects was a mass exodus of Kosovars to Western Europe last winter.

France considers Kosovo a safe country of origin

On 9 October 2015, the French refugee authority stated that Kosovo is considered a safe country of origin again. In December 2014, the Council of State, the highest administrative court of France, had removed Kosovo from the list due to the instable political and social situation in the country.

Myanmar

Ceasefire agreement

On 15.10.2015, Myanmar's government signed a ceasefire agreement with several armed ethnic groups (Karen National Liberation Army, Karen National Union, Arakan Liberation Party, Chin National Front, Pa-O National Liberation Organisation and the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army), parts of whom have been fighting for independence and autonomy for sixty years now. Of the remaining other rebel groups, no representative was present at the ceremony. These include the United Wa State Army, who has concluded a separate ceasefire agreement with the government, the Kachin Independence Army, and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army operating in northern Shan State. The signing ceremony was also attended by the diplomatic representatives of China, India, Japan, EU and the United Nations. Parliamentary elections are set for 8 November 2015. In view of the level of insecurity in Shan State, elections may be postponed in some districts.