

Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

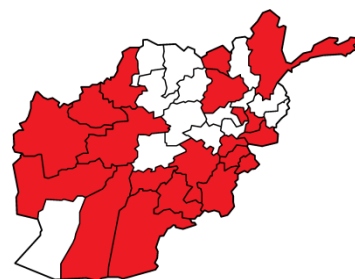
Briefing Notes

29 May 2017

Afghanistan

Armed clashes

Fights are continuing, with cleansing campaigns and raids carried out by the security forces as well as attacks and assaults by the insurgents, in which civilians are killed or wounded. According to press reports, the following provinces were affected during the last week: Ghazni, Paktia, Khost (southeast), Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan (south), Faryab (north), Kunduz, Badakhshan, Baghlan (northeast; here, the road between Pul-i-Khumri and Mazar-e Sharif and that between Kunduz and Khanabad were blocked due to fights), Ghor, Herat, Badghis, Farah (west), Nangarhar, Laghman (east), Kapisa und Logar (centre).



Attacks and assaults

On 22 May 2017, a girls' school was blown up by unidentified extremists in southeastern Ghazni province. In central Logar, the chairman of the Islamic scholars' council of the province was killed.

On 23 May, three civilians were killed and four others injured in a bomb attack in Maiwand district of southern Kandahar province.

On 24 May, a staff member of the school authority of southeastern Ghazni province was killed in a bomb attack.

On 25 May, a teacher was killed and nine pupils were injured in northeastern Kunduz when a grenade hit launched by Taliban insurgents hit a school.

On 26 May, a roadside bomb killed ten civilians and wounded another six in western Herat.

On 27 May, a bomb attack targeting the local police in the capital of eastern Khost province killed 13 individuals and wounded another eight, among them several children.

On 28 May, eleven people were freed from Taliban captivity in southern Helmand. In central Logar, the Khoshi district chief and two of his guards were injured in an attack launched by insurgents. In southern Zabul, six members of the Afghan police forces lost their lives in an insider attack. In Tagah district (northeastern Badakhshan province), Taliban insurgents seized several villages.

China

Zhejiang: video surveillance in Protestant churches

In China's Zhejiang province, officials have installed video cameras in the majority of Protestant Christian churches. Those communities who refused to have surveillance systems installed were cut off from water and electricity supply. Zhejiang province has one of the largest Protestant populations of China.

Xinjiang: measures against terrorism

In the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, authorities have called upon the people to hand over all Qurans published before 2012 (including officially authorised versions) due to 'extremist content'. This is part of the 'Three Illegals and One Item' campaign that bans certain religious materials, certain forms of religious activities and religious teaching as well as items deemed to be tools of terrorism (including knives or remote-controlled toys).

DR Congo

Humanitarian situation in Kasai region

According to UNICEF estimates, nearly 400,000 children are at risk of severe acute malnutrition in the five Kasai provinces (Greater Kasai). Moreover, the region's health infrastructures are no longer operational due to an ongoing armed conflict which had erupted in August 2016 after the death of traditional leader Kamwina Nsapu during fights between his militia and government forces.

Internally displaced persons

On 24 May 2017, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center reported that during 2016, more than 920,000 people were forced to flee their homes in the country due to violent conflicts. Thus, the Democratic Republic of Congo had the highest number of people displaced by conflict in the world in 2016, the organisation said.

Egypt

Coptic Christians killed

On 26 May 2017, extremist gunmen attacked a bus filled with Coptic travellers in central al-Minya province and killed at least 29 Christians. The IS terror group has claimed responsibility for the attack. In retaliation, the Egyptian air force bombed six base camps of the extremists in the Libyan coastal town of Derna, the state TV said. President al-Sisi announced that Egypt would not hesitate to attack more terrorist camps. During the mourning ceremony, participants demanded better protection for Coptic Christians.

Iran

Supreme Leader Khamenei lashes out against Saudi Arabian government

On 28 May 2017, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the final say in all strategic issues, called the Saudi leaders 'idiots' who believe they can win the friendship of the enemies of Islam with money, Fars news agency reports. With this, Khamenei referred to the huge order of weapons to US companies. Sunni Muslim Saudi Arabia and Shiite Iran are involved in several conflicts in the region.

Iraq

Mosul

Last week, the coalition forces succeeded in liberating more quarters of the city. Meanwhile, there are increasing reports that the withdrawing IS insurgents execute men who are fit for service and who refuse to join them. The estimated number of civilians under IS control in the city is between 200,000 and 300,000.

Diyala and Anbar provinces

Apparently, fighting against IS insurgents is going on in these two provinces.

Sinjar Region

Despite repeated warnings from the Kurdish Regional Government, the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU, Shiite militias) are closing in on the area of Sinjar (also known as Shingal) region in the northwestern part of the country. There are open demands from the PMU to suspend Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution which grants the KRG region the right to resolve its future status through a referendum among the region's inhabitants.

Libya

Clashes in Tripoli

Tripoli was the scene of several days of fighting, when supporters of the Fajr-Libya government tried to recapture positions lost to the Serraj government. The latter said that 52 of its fighters were killed. The total

number of victims, however, is likely to be much higher, with both sides using heavy weapons. Apparently, the fighting is still ongoing.

On 28 May 2017, it was reported that the presidential guard of the Serraj government took over control of Tripoli airport. The opposition Kani militia then closed several roads leading to the airport. An ultimatum to clear the roads expires on 29 May 2017.

Arrests in Tripoli

In the context of the Manchester terror attack, several individuals have been arrested by an anti-terror squad of the Serraj government. Apparently, the perpetrator's father (who worked for the police) and one of his brothers have been detained.

Ansar al-Sharia

The Islamist group Ansar al-Sharia has announced its dissolution. For several years now, the group has occupied parts of Benghazi and the town of Derna. The decision came due to heavy losses during several weeks' of fierce fighting in Benghazi and due to air raids on Benghazi and Derna carried out by the Libyan National Army (LNA). After the attack on Coptic Christians in neighbouring Egypt, Derna has also been hit by Egyptian airstrikes. The impact of the dissolution remains to be seen. It is also unclear whether there is a connection to the fact that Benghazi airport has at least been temporarily reopened.

Morocco

Protests in Al-Hoceima and Nador

On 26 and 27 May 2017, protests and clashes with police took place in Al-Hoceima and Nador, a region in the northeastern Rif mountain range inhabited mainly by Berbers. On 28 May, protests were peaceful again. The authorities have arrested 20 activists; the leader of the protest movement in Al-Hoceima, Nasser Zefzafi, was able to escape. The arrested individuals, aged between 26 and 27, are accused of receiving money from abroad for their protest activities.

For months now, mainly young people have marched in protest against arbitrary actions by the authorities and corruption in the region, demanding better economic and social development.

Myanmar

Peace talks continued

From 24 to 29 May 2017, the second round of peace talks between Myanmar's government and ethnic rebel groups took place in the capital Naypyidaw. It is not yet known when the talks will be continued. The first round of talks had taken place in August 2016. A quick agreement is not expected. In occasion of the peace talks, more than 250 detainees were granted an amnesty on 23 May, among them also political prisoners.

In 2015, several rebel groups concluded a ceasefire agreement with the government, while other groups have continued their armed combat to this day. Since the country gained its independence from Great Britain in 1948, ethnic rebel groups have struggled for more autonomy.

Philippines

Fights between security forces and rebels have left many dead

Since 23 May 2017, at least 100 people have lost their lives in fights between government troops and some 100 Islamist rebels in the city of Marawi (southern Mindanao island), the military states. The casualties include 61 rebels, 18 civilians, 13 soldiers and 4 policemen. The air force attacked buildings where the rebels had entrenched themselves. About 90 percent of the city's 200,000 inhabitants have fled their homes. The rebels are militants of the local Maute group and fighters of Abu Sayyaf. Both groups have committed themselves to IS. The fights were triggered when security forces unsuccessfully attempted to arrest Isnilon Hapilon, a prominent member of Abu Sayyaf and one of the most-wanted terrorists worldwide, who is believed to reside in Marawi. On 23 May, President Rodrigo Duterte imposed martial law in Mindanao for an initial 60 days.

Somalia

Attacks

On 22 May 2017, extremists threw a grenade at a police station in Jowhar (Middle Shabelle region). Apparently the attackers targeted a government official, who survived the blast; according to al-Shabaab, several security guards lost their lives. On 23 May, at least four people were killed, including two soldiers, when a suicide bomber targeted a military checkpoint in Bossaso (Bari region, Puntland). IS has claimed responsibility for the attack. Apparently, the event was the first suicide attack carried out by Islamic State in Somalia. Estimates say that between 100 and 200 IS extremists, led by the former al-Shabaab commander Abdiqadir Mumin, are conducting their operations from the Galgala hills in Bari region. On 24 May, al-Shabaab fighters set off a car bomb in front of a popular restaurant in Mogadishu's Hamar Jabjab district, killing at least 8 people and injuring another 15.

Clashes

On 22 May 2017, al-Shabaab fighters attacked a vehicle of the Somali National Army killing 7 soldiers in the locality of Awdiinle near Baidoa (Bay region). A day later, al-Shabaab insurgents attacked a SNA military base near Lantaburo (Lower Shabelle region), about 25 kilometres west of Mogadishu. Somali units and AMISOM soldiers repelled the militants. On 22 and 23 May, groups of 10 to 12 al-Shabaab fighters assaulted 14 localities in Lower Shabelle region, approx. 45 kilometres west of Mogadishu. The extremists abducted about 25 young people, burned down buildings and stole cattle. According to Al-Shabaab, 15 SNA soldiers were killed. The rebel organisation says its increase of attacks in the last weeks is a 'proactive step' to counteract the planned extension of military operations conducted by US troops and SNA.

During the last two months, Somali security forces have cleared about 26 road blocks installed by al-Shabab in Middle and Lower Shabelle regions, most of them in War Sheikh district (Middle Shabelle), about 55 km northeast of Mogadishu. The security authorities have announced similar operations in Bay region along the main road between Mogadishu and Baidoa. These road blocks are used by the extremists to extort money from travellers, to interrupt troop movements and also to obstruct the distribution of aid to the population.

Numerous arrests in Mogadishu

On 22 May 2017, Somali security forces and AMISOM units searched the houses and shops of suspects in Hodan and Wadajir districts and arrested dozens of suspected al-Shabaab fighters. Apparently, the searched buildings were used for the planning of attacks during upcoming Ramadan.

South Sudan

President Kiir declares unilateral ceasefire

According to media reports dated 22 May 2017, President Salva Kiir has declared a unilateral ceasefire within the scope of an envisaged national dialogue. The ceasefire will enter into force immediately, he said. However, rebel leader and former vice president Riek Machar is excluded from the planned national dialogue. The ceasefire is meant to create the preconditions for negotiations and to ensure the supply with relief goods for people in need.

The United Nations say that more than 7.5 million South Sudanese are in urgent need of help because of a long-lasting drought and of the civil war that had broken out at the end of 2013.

Tunisia

Protests in the south

Protests are continuing against the bad economic situation in the country's southern parts. The demonstrators demand greater economic participation in the revenues of the region's big energy companies. On 22 May 2017, a protester died after a national guard vehicle ran him over. The incident has triggered violent clashes with the national guard. In view of the unrest that has been simmering for months now, President Béji Caïd Essebsi has ordered the military to the region to protect the factories and plants.