

Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

11 April 2016

Afghanistan

Military confrontations

Armed confrontations, air and rocket attacks as well as raids were reported in the following provinces: Paktika (south-east), Nangarhar and Nursitan (east), Samangan (north), Herat (west) and Kandahar (south).

Attacks and assaults

On 4 April 2016, two people were killed and ten injured in an attack on a police guesthouse in eastern Nangarhar province.

On 5 April 2016, at least seven civilians died and 25 others were injured in a suicide attack near a clinic and a school in Siah Gird district (central Parwan province). In northeastern Kunduz province, two Taliban dressed in burqas stormed a police checkpoint. Both attackers were killed.

On 6 April 2016, reports were released saying that during the last five years, insurgents have executed a total of 25 individuals for espionage in Nejrab district (central Kapisa province). In western Herat province, the chairman of Shindand district council was shot dead on 6 April 2016.

On 10 April 2016, a rocket hit Kabul without causing any damage. In eastern Nangarhar, a child was killed and at least six people wounded in several explosions.

On 11 April 2016, several education ministry staff were attacked in Kabul; one official was killed and seven were injured.

Attacks and threats on schools

According to information obtained by the Afghan education ministry, a total of 615 schools had to close because of violence in the country's eleven most volatile regions in 2015. Most affected were the southern provinces, with 105 of Helmand's 545 schools shut down, 150 of 545 in neighbouring Kandahar and 140 out of 242 schools in Zabul province.

Iraq

Attacks

On 4 April 2016, at least 25 people died in several suicide attacks in the city of Nasirija (around 300km south of Baghdad) and Basrah (around 550km southeast of Baghdad). On the same day, a suicide attacker drove his vehicle into a checkpoint in a suburb of Baghdad. North of Baghdad, the headquarters of paramilitary troops were attacked.

Return to Ramadi

Apparently, more and more internally displaced people are returning to the city of Ramadi (Anbar province). So far, over 9,000 people have returned to areas that have been cleared of mines and booby traps.

Financial aid

The US State Department has pledged another 155 million dollars (approx. 136m EUR) in humanitarian aid for Iraq's displaced families. This new funding would bring total U.S. humanitarian assistance to Iraq to more than 778m US\$ since 2014.

Syria

Fighting in Aleppo and Damascus

On 6 April 2016, the fiercest fighting took place south of Aleppo since beginning of the truce, when Russian armed forces stepped up efforts to stop the advance of Jabhat al-Nusra (JN). Also, fighting between the Kurdish YPG and Islamist insurgents continued. Near Damascus, ISIS fighters attacked Syrian government forces, targeting also the Tishrin power station and Syrian soldiers stationed near the airport. The government forces retaliated with air-raids on ISIS positions.

Plan for military operation in Aleppo

On 10 April 2016, Syrian Prime Minister Wael al-Halqi said to Russian lawmakers in Damascus that Syrian troops and Russia were jointly preparing a major operation to retake control of the country's second-largest city of Aleppo, with the Russian air force supporting Syrian ground forces. Opposition representatives are fearing a collapse of the fragile truce.

Yemen

Heavy fights in Marib province

On 8 April 2016, heavy fights broke out again between pro-government troops and Houthi rebels in Marib province, with at least 12 militants killed (the rebels put the number at 35).

Ceasefire in place

Apparently, the ceasefire which entered into force on 10 April 2016 has largely held in the first hours. However, individual breaches took place in the central city of Taiz in the night of 11 April. Also, there have been reports of air-raids by the Saudi-led military in Taiz and Lahj provinces. The rebel-held capital Sanaa, however, has apparently remained quiet. Peace talks are scheduled to take place in Kuwait on 18 April 2016.

Turkey

Implementation of refugee agreement

On 7 April 2016, the Turkish government announced in the official journal that Syrians would be granted temporary protection status, meaning that Syrians deported from Greece would not be sent back to their country of origin. With this, Turkey reacted to reports by human rights organisations saying that refugees were deported to Syria.

On 7 April 2016, Turkish President Erdogan publicly threatened not to implement the migrant agreement if the EU failed to comply.

Sudan

More than 100,000 refugees in Darfur

The UN says that escalating fights in Darfur have forced around 138,000 people to flee their home since the end of March 2016.

Referendum on administrative status of Darfur

On 11 April 2016, a three-day-referendum started on the future administrative structure of the region. Voters are invited to decide on whether to retain the current five states or return to the former one-region system for Darfur.

West Africa/Ebola

New Ebola victims

A new fatal Ebola infection has been reported in Liberia. The country had been declared Ebola-free by the WHO on 14 January 2016. This new case has brought the number of confirmed deaths to three, with more than 100 people placed under quarantine. Also in Guinea, a new case has been confirmed. There, 800 people have been treated with an experimental vaccine because of possible contacts with eight infected people, the WHO reports. In total, more than 1,000 contacts have been identified and are under observation.

Somalia

Security situation

At present, al-Shabaab insurgents are increasingly targeting their attacks at foreigners and government members. On 5 April 2016, a member of the Somali parliament was severely wounded in Mogadishu in an attack on his vehicle; two bodyguards were confirmed killed in the shooting. On the same day, suspected al-Shabaab fighters attacked the residence of a high-rank military officer in Mogadishu. They opened fire on the security guards but were prevented from entering the house.

Also on 5 April, al-Shabaab insurgents ambushed an AMISOM convoy carrying Ethiopian soldiers near the town of el Buur (Galguduud region). Four of the attackers were killed in the confrontation.

On 6 April 2016, security forces detained 500 people in Yaqshid district of Mogadishu for suspected al-Shabaab ties and kept 30 for additional questioning.

On 7 April 2016, Somali units of AMISOM secured several small villages near Dinsoor (Bay region).

Also on 7 April, al-Shabaab members launched a mortar attack on the presidential palace in Mogadishu, killing two civilians and wounding 13 others.

On 8 April 2016, an AMISOM convoy was ambushed by al-Shabaab in Middle Shabelle region; seven insurgents were killed in the confrontation.

Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for a car bomb attack launched on 9 April 2016 on a restaurant in Mogadishu with at least three civilians killed and five others wounded. Apparently, the restaurant was a meeting place for Somali security forces.

Already in March, al-Shabaab fighters had attacked and temporarily seized the coastal village of Garmal (Puntland) from the sea. In this context, Puntland's President Abdiweli Mohamed Ali Gaas said that the weapons secured from the militants came from raids on AMISOM bases in Lower Shabelle and Gedo regions.

Al-Shabaab terrorists executed

On 9 April 2016, two al-Shabaab insurgents were executed after a military court had found them guilty of murdering a female journalist in December 2015.

New jihadist organisation

A new Salafi-jihadist organization, 'Jabha East Africa' (East Africa Front), consisting of former al-Shabaab fighters, has proclaimed its oath of loyalty to the emir of ISIS, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi in a statement on a Twitter account. They called for militants to leave al-Shabaab and to open new fronts in eastern Africa.

Eritrea

Recruits killed in Asmara?

Opposition media have claimed that on 3 April 2016, Eritrean security forces killed several young conscripts in the capital Asmara who tried to escape the convoy they were travelling in. It all started when two conscripts escaped in the capital's northwestern Mai Temenai quarter and were immediately killed, the unconfirmed reports say. At first, the convoy continued on its journey, but then the situation escalated in the city centre at the Shuq market, it was said. Allegedly, family members and friends of the conscripts tried to stop the military truck with a bus. Then, the soldiers opened fire at escaping conscripts; there were also civilian victims. Some of them died of their wounds in hospital, the reports said.

Apparently, the recruits were on their way from Arkudet to a military training camp, the reports say. Initially, the Eritrean authorities made no comments on the alleged incident. Sometime later, a government representative stated that several soldiers had fallen off the truck and were fatally injured, the unconfirmed reports went on.

Time and again, reports are circulating in the Eritrean diaspora which cannot be independently verified due to the government's restrictive information policy.

Kenya

Case dismissed by ICC

The International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague has dismissed the case against leading Kenyan politicians on charges of crimes against humanity in the context of the 2007 elections. On 5 April 2016, the court announced to terminate the case against the last two defendants, Kenya's vice president William Samoei Ruto and the journalist Joshua Arap Sang, over insufficient evidence. This does not exclude a new procedure before the ICC itself or before national courts in case of new evidence. Both prosecutors and judges say that political interference had made a fair trial impossible.

Already in December 2014, proceedings against incumbent President Uhuru Kenyatta had been dropped after ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda had withdrawn the charges for lack of sufficient evidence. Some witnesses for the prosecution had retracted their testimony or were no longer willing to give evidence. Already at that time, Ms Bensouda had criticised the Kenyan government of hampering the proceedings and of intimidating witnesses.

More than 1,000 people had been killed in the violence following the 2007 elections, and around 600,000 people were displaced. When the Kenyan justice system failed to try those responsible for the violence, the ICC took up the prosecution.

Uhuru Kenyatta became the first head of state to appear before the ICC.

Republic of Congo

Fights in Brazzaville following presidential elections

On 4 April 2016, armed assailants attacked military checkpoints, police stations and government buildings in several opposition strongholds located in the southern parts of the country's capital Brazzaville. Twelve assailants, three police officers and two civilians were killed in the fierce fights, government circles reported. Eye witnesses say that the attackers demanded the resignation of President Denis Sassou Nguesso who won 60 percent of votes in the disputed elections held on 20 March 2016. In the morning of 5 April, the situation was calm again. Security services arrested some 50 ex-militants of the Ninja-Nsilulu militia held responsible for the attacks. During the civil war (1997–1999), the militia had fought against supporters of Sassou Nguesso. At the time, their leader had been the father of Guy-Brice Parfait Kolelas, the opposition candidate who came second in the March polls. On 6 April, Kolelas gave up resistance and called upon his followers to accept Sassou Nguesso as President despite the questionable official election results.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Thousands with links to radical Islamists

According to information provided by the security authorities, several thousand people have contacts with radical Islamist movements.

Fear of radicalisation by Arab investors

An increasing number of Arab investors are active in Bosnia, planning several large-scale projects, residential complexes and resorts amounting to billions. Many Bosnians fear that the influx of Arab investors will foster Wahabism, a fundamentalist strain of Islam. Moderate Bosnian Muslims are worried about the risk of further radicalisation.

Western Balkans

Strong interest in working visa for citizens of Western Balkans countries

From the beginning of December to the end of February 2016, more than 800 working visa were issued to citizens of the six Western Balkans countries. Both the interest in the Balkans countries and that of German employers is said to be even greater.

The German government had decided to open up the labour market in October 2015, when asylum law was amended and Kosovo, Albania and Montenegro were considered to be safe countries of origin in addition to Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia. By way of compensation, citizens of the Balkans countries were to be granted prospects for legal immigration. Pursuant to the new German employment regulations, the issue of entry permits is subject to a concrete working or training contract complying with the collective labour agreements and to the approval of the federal employment agency.

Kosovo

Inauguration of Hashim Thaçi marred by protests

On 7 April 2016, Hashim Thaçi was officially installed in his office as Kosovo's new President. Protesters tried to disrupt the inauguration ceremony with tear gas. The elections in February had been accompanied by protests of the opposition (see BN of 29 February 2016).

Background

From 2008 to 2014 Thaçi had been Kosovo's first Prime Minister; afterwards, he served as deputy PM and Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Since 2000, the 47-year old co-founder and leader of the Kosovo Liberation Army UÇK has been the leader of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (DPK). He has been repeatedly blamed for corruption and links to organised crime. Also, his name appeared in a report of Swiss Council of Europe Investigator Dick Marty in 2010 on the alleged involvement of the former UÇK leadership in organ trafficking. According to this report, he was a leading member of the so-called group of Drenica and involved in the killing of Serbian prisoners with the purpose to sell their organs for transplantation during the Kosovo war and afterwards. Thaçi himself is denying these accusations. So far, investigations or proceedings have been brought against him neither in Kosovo nor under international jurisdiction.

Stabilisation and Association Agreement enters into force

On 1 April 2016, the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU entered into force. The agreement aims at strengthening the political and economic ties and at preparing for eventual accession to the European Union at a later stage.

This has been the first concrete step towards accession, although the country is still not recognized as an independent state by five member states of the EU (Romania, Slovakia, Greece, Spain and Cyprus). Being the only country in the Western Balkans whose citizens need a visa to enter the Schengen area, Kosovo is hoping for the introduction of visa-free travel as a next step in the near future.

FYR Macedonia

Opposition intends to boycott parliamentary elections

The major opposition party SDSM (Social Democratic Union) intends to boycott parliamentary elections scheduled for 5 May 2016. In their view, the conditions for free and fair elections have not yet been met, since the electoral registers have not been updated and media freedom is not guaranteed.

Macedonia is facing a critical situation again. Initially, the early elections were intended to be a new start for discordant ruling and opposition parties. Under pressure from the EU Commission, government and opposition had agreed in summer 2015 on a cabinet reshuffle and on early elections to end the political crisis that has been smouldering since the last parliamentary elections held in April 2014. The opposition had accused the government led by Prime Minister Gruevski (VMRO DPMNE) of electoral fraud. In 2015, the crisis exacerbated when the government was blamed for the interception of 20,000 citizens.

Ukraine

New fighting in Donetsk region

Ukrainian army and pro-Russian separatists blame each other for several attacks in eastern Ukraine. The area most affected is the region north of Donetsk. According to the Ukrainian military, separatists have launched an attack on an industrial zone in the southern part of the town of Avdiivka, with eight government soldiers injured during the weekend, some of them severely. Pro-Russian separatists have said in turn that Ukrainian government troops attacked some residential areas in the north of Donetsk.

Azerbaijan/Armenia

Ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh at risk

After a ceasefire in the southern Caucasus region was agreed on 5 April 2016 between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the first serious infringement occurred on 8 April, as was reported from the region of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is de facto separated from Azerbaijan. The authorities of the state, which is not internationally recognized, say that the Azeri army killed two Armenian soldiers in skirmishes.

The incident might jeopardise the ceasefire brokered by Russia. Azerbaijan has refused once again to directly negotiate with Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia is and will remain the only interlocutor for a settlement of the dispute, Azeri President Ilham Aliyev said. On 8 April 2016, the authoritarian head of state met with the Russian Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev in Baku, where the mediation talks continued. Medvedev warned the conflicting parties not to resume the fighting. Since the beginning of April, the latest confrontations have left more than 80 soldiers from both sides dead. Civilians were also killed in the clashes.

Myanmar

Amnesty/prison sentences for activists

On 7 April 2016, Aung San Suu Kyi announced the release of political prisoners. More than 100 prisoners have already been freed under an amnesty. Among them are more than 60 student protesters and other supporters who were been arrested in connection with the protest rallies against changes in education policy in March 2015.

The organisation 'Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)' has documented 121 political prisoners still incarcerated and a further 414 facing trial (as of beginning of April).

On 8 April 2016, a court in the city of Mandalay sentenced two activists to two years in prison for alleged contacts to a rebel organisation.