

Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

9 May 2016

short version due to the current staffing situation!

Afghanistan

Military confrontations

Fighting, air raids and other confrontations took place in numerous provinces last week, among them Helmand, Kunduz, Kandahar, Kunar, Parwan, Zabul, Paktia, Herat, Nangarhar and Balkh.

New ‘insider attack’ and defections to Taliban insurgents

On 7 May 2016, three police officers were killed by a colleague in what is termed an ‘insider attack’ in Ghazni. On 8 May, eight police officers defected to the Taliban in Uruzgan.

Executions

On 8 May 2016 and for the first time since 2014, six men (four Taliban fighters, a member of the Haqqani network and an al-Qaeda member) were executed for terror attacks. The Taliban have announced revenge actions for the executions.

Captives liberated in raid on Taliban prison

On 6 May 2016, Afghan special forces, operating with international support, stormed a Taliban prison and liberated 60 captives in southern Helmand province.

Female police officer shot dead

On 4 May 2016, a female police officer was shot dead on the street by unidentified gunmen.

Pakistan

Human rights activist killed

On 7 May 2016, human rights activist Khurram Zaki was shot dead on the street in the city of Karachi. A former journalist, Zaki had campaigned for human rights on his website and had spoken out against violent groups like the Taliban. Also, he was a leading member of the campaign against radical Islamist cleric Maulana Abdul Aziz.

‘Honour killing’

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, a 15-year old girl has been killed on the order of a village council because she was alleged to have helped a neighbour and her boyfriend escape.

Iraq

ISIS attacks several towns

On 3 May 2016, ISIS fighters attacked several Kurdish Peshmerga positions north of Mosul (Ninive province). Apparently, this was the largest ISIS offensive in months. Military sources said that ISIS terrorists also launched attacks in areas roughly 40 km west of Erbil (Erbil province), but were eventually driven back with the help of air support by the US-led coalition.

Offensive around Mosul / internally displaced people

The United Nations fear that the ongoing joint Iraqi-Kurdish operation around Mosul may displace tens of thousands of people in the coming weeks. UNHCR has reported that since the beginning of the offensive in March 2016, more and more civilians have fled from the combat region. The military operation aims at retaking Mosul from ISIS control. Apparently the armed forces are still around 50 km south of Iraq's second largest city.

Mass graves discovered

On 6 May 2016, a UN envoy said that more than 50 mass graves have been found in the last months in parts of Iraq that were previously controlled by ISIS insurgents. Most recently, three graves found in the city of Ramadi in April contained the remains of around 40 people, it was stated.

Lebanon

Start of municipal elections

On 8 May 2016, the first local elections since 2010 started. The first balloting round covered Beirut and two provinces of the Bekaa Valley. The elections will last until the end of May in the other provinces of Lebanon. The war in Syria has intensified political tensions. The country has not had a president for the past two years nor voted for a parliament since 2009. Twice already, parliament has extended its own mandate.

Syria

Ceasefire in Aleppo

On 4 May 2016, the ceasefire in Aleppo, initially scheduled to last until early 7 May 2016, was extended for another 72 hours. The last weeks have seen the fiercest fights between government forces and rebels in weeks. Apparently, more than 280 civilians have been killed since 22 April 2016.

Fighting despite ceasefire

Despite the ceasefire, clashes were reported from Deir ez-Zor, Damascus, Homs und Daraa provinces on 7 May 2016, with more than 70 people killed. Already on 5 May, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported an air attack on a refugee camp in a rebel-held area near Aleppo, which killed at least 28 people.

Turkish forces launch attack on ISIS

On 7 May 2016, the Turkish army killed 55 insurgents in an attack on ISIS positions north of Aleppo, it was reported. Since the beginning of 2016, the Turkish border town of Kilis has been repeatedly targeted by attacks from Syria. Since summer 2016, Turkey has been actively involved in air attacks against ISIS militants and has fallen victim to attacks several times.

Turkey

Prime Minister resigns

On 5 May 2015, Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu announced his resignation as party leader and head of government after an interlocution with President Erdogan. Turkey's ruling AK Party will hold an extraordinary congress to elect a successor on 22 May. Davutoglu, former foreign minister, had taken over the office of PM and leader of the AKP when Erdogan was elected President.

Prison sentences for reporters

On 7 May 2016, two prominent journalists of Cumhuriyet newspaper were handed down prison sentences for revealing state secrets. Can Dündar, editor-in-chief was sentenced to five years and ten months

imprisonment, and Erdem Gül, the paper's Ankara bureau chief, was convicted to five years. Their lawyer announced to appeal against the verdicts. The reporters were acquitted of the charges of espionage and of having planned to overthrow the government. However, the court separated charges of links to terrorist organisations, and the reporters now await a verdict in a separate trial.

While the court was deliberating the judgment, Can Dündar was shot at by an attacker outside the court building. The journalist remained unhurt.

The proceedings had been initiated on the grounds that Cumhuriyet reported on alleged arms shipments to Syrian extremists through Turkey in 2015.

Yemen

A small number of US soldiers deployed again in Yemen

On 6 May 2016, a Pentagon spokesman said that after more than a year, a 'small number' of US troops were deployed in the port city of Mukalla to support Arab forces battling al-Qaeda insurgents. In 2015, the city had been briefly seized by the extremist 'al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula' terror group, but has meanwhile been retaken by Yemeni troops and their Arab allies. In early 2015, the U.S. had withdrawn all of its ground troops from Yemen after the ouster of President Hadi by the Shiite Houthi rebels. However, military aircraft and ships remained in the region.

Peace negotiations resumed

After the Yemeni government had suspended participation in the peace talks on 1 May 2016, negotiations have been resumed, the UN special envoy reported on 4 May.

Kenya/Somalia/South Sudan

Plans to close refugee camps

One year after the first announcement, Kenya is about to implement the closure of the two refugee camps Dadaab and Kakuma. In Dadaab, more than 350,000 mainly Somali refugees have been hosted for 25 years. The Kakuma camp hosts some 190,000 refugees mainly from South Sudan who had escaped from the civil war there. Apparently, the government has already disbanded the state refugee authority and is elaborating a plan for the closure of the two camps providing for the transfer of the refugees to Somalia. The government cites security challenges, accusing the Somali terror militia al-Shabaab of recruiting fighters in the camps and launching terror attacks in Kenya.

Kenya

Potential plans of anthrax attack

Kenyan police say that the security forces have broken a terror network with close links to ISIS which had planned an attack using anthrax. On 6 May 2016, a young medical doctor was arrested who is believed to be the mastermind of the potential attack.

Somalia

Attacks and assaults

Attacks attributed to the al-Shabaab militia took place on 2 May 2016 in Mogadishu's districts of Heliwa (booby trap on an AMISOM convoy; no information on the number of victims) and Waberi (AMISOM headquarters, no victims), and on 3 May at the cattle market in Afgoi (Lower Shabelle region; six injured, among them several Somali soldiers). On 9 May, a car bomb suicide attack on the traffic police headquarters in Mogadishu's Shangani district killed at least two people and injured another eight. On 6 May, al-Shabaab fighters attacked several AMISOM checkpoints near the town of Berdhere (Gedo Region); three Islamist insurgents and one Somali soldier lost their lives in the incidents.

Uganda/Somalia

Uganda considers withdrawal from AMISOM

A spokesman of the Ugandan army has confirmed reports that the government considers withdrawing their troops from the African Union's peace-keeping mission. No details were given on the reasons for such a move. Currently, Uganda has deployed the largest contingent of more than 6,200 soldiers and 200 police officers to AMISOM's 22,000-strong mission. Other contributing countries are Burundi (around 5,400 troops), Ethiopia (4,400), Kenya (3,700 soldiers and around 50 police officers) and Djibouti (2,000). Among the police-contributing countries are also Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Ghana.

South Sudan

The government formed after the peace agreement of August 2015 has become operational. President Salva Kiir has retained his office. Riek Machar, who had led an armed rebellion against the government after he had been removed from the office of Vice President, now holds the office of First Vice-President. In line with the peace agreement, a power-sharing ratio of 53%, 33% and 7% for government, armed opposition and other political parties was implemented, i.e. Salva Kiir nominated 30 ministers and Riek Machar 10. Moreover, 4 ministers were appointed by the other political factions.

Nigeria

Attacks on pipelines

On 4 and 5 May 2016, a new rebel group calling themselves 'Niger Delta Avengers' destroyed the main pipelines linking Warri and Kaduna refineries, the Chevron company reports. The militia members are demanding a greater share of oil profits for local communities.

Several villages liberated from Boko Haram terrorists

According to military reports, the army has liberated seven villages in Borno State that had been seized by suspected Boko Haram fighters. Apparently, one of the terrorists was apprehended in the incident.

Egypt

Eight police officers killed

On 7 May 2016, unidentified gunmen killed eight policemen in Cairo's Helwan district. ISIS has claimed responsibility for the attack, saying that it was in revenge for the arrest of women. At the same time, the Popular Resistance Movement also claimed responsibility for the attack.

Death penalty for journalists

In the proceedings against former President Mohamed Mursi, a Cairo Court sentenced six of his co-defendants to death, among them two journalists working for Qatar-based broadcaster Al Jazeera and another female reporter. The journalists were accused of having passed on information to Qatar. The Al Jazeera reporters and the female journalist were sentenced in absentia. The judgments are open to appeal.

Lawyer detained

On 8 May 2016, a prominent human rights lawyer was ordered to be held in custody for 15 days pending investigations. Apparently, eight other people were also detained. They are accused of having attempted to overthrow the government and disseminated false news. The defendants had called for protests against the government's plans to hand two islands under Egyptian control over to Saudi Arabia.

FYR Macedonia

Daily protests

For four weeks now, protests are staged every day in Macedonia. The movement has become known as the 'Colourful Revolution' because it is driven by protesters of many different political hues, and also because people regularly throw bags of paint at government buildings. The new protest wave was triggered by President Ivanov's declaration of a general amnesty, pardoning all those allegedly involved in the bugging scandal made public 2015. The protesters demand the president's resignation, the repeal of the amnesty and the postponement of the elections scheduled for 5 June 2016. (see BN of 24 April 2016).

Early parliamentary elections are becoming increasingly unlikely. Apart from the leading opposition forces and the social democrats (SDSM), also the oppositional Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) and the small co-governing Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) have decided to boycott the elections. The national conservative VMRO-DPMNE, which has been ruling the country since 2006, insists on the election to take place as scheduled.

Kosovo

European Commission recommends abolition of visa obligation

On 4 May 2016, the European Commission proposed a visa liberalisation for Kosovo nationals, stating that the technical criteria are fulfilled. Thus, citizens of Kosovo will be able to travel freely within all EU states (except the United Kingdom and Ireland) including the Schengen member states Switzerland, Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein. Visa-free travel is to be implemented at the end of June 2016. The Commission's proposal needs to be assessed by the European Parliament and by the Council of Ministers. Kosovo's Minister of European Integration Bekim Collaku assured that the abolition of visa obligation will not trigger a new mass emigration to Schengen states.

Since 2012, the European Commission has been negotiating visa liberalisation for Kosovo nationals. In December 2015, the Commission concluded that Kosovo did not yet meet all the conditions. It remains questionable whether the shortcomings have been remedied in the meantime. Several observers assume that the European Commission issued the recommendation mainly for political reasons, since a special treatment of Kosovo could hardly have been justified in the light of the simultaneous recommendation to liberate the visa requirements for Turkey.

Bangladesh

Sufi Muslim cruelly murdered

On 6 May 2016, the dead body of a local leader of the Sufi community (Islamic movement with ascetic and mystical elements) was found in Bangladesh. The man had been hacked to death. Probably, the perpetrators were Islamic fundamentalists.

Death sentence against leader of Jamaat-e-Islami confirmed

The Supreme Court has upheld the verdict pronounced in 2014 against Motiur Rahman Nizami, the head of the country's largest Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami. He had been condemned to death for war crimes committed during the war of independence in 1971.