

Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

5 October 2015

Afghanistan

Situation in Kunduz

Following the capture of Kunduz, capital of the same-named province and home to a quarter million people, by the Taliban on 28 September 2015, Afghan security forces launched a major counter-offensive with NATO support. On 1 October 2015, the Afghan government reported that their forces had retaken the city, albeit with the Taliban insurgents not driven out completely. On 4 October 2015, the provincial government stated that roughly 70 percent of the city were under their control again and that the remaining insurgent Taliban were being cleared out. During the military operation, the US forces carried out air strikes on 4 October 2015, hitting a hospital run by medical charity Doctors Without Borders. Apparently, at least 22 people were killed, among them 12 hospital staff, and at least 37 people were injured.

Continuing fights

Apart from Kunduz, fighting and military operations of the Afghan security forces have continued in the other northeastern provinces of Takhar, Baghlan and Badakhshan, where the Taliban are reported to have captured several districts. There were also fights in eastern Nangarhar province (with military operations against IS insurgents), in southern Kandahar, Zabul, and Uruzgan provinces, in western Badghis and Farah provinces (where the Taliban claim to have captured one district), in northern Jowzjan, Sar-e-Pul and Faryab provinces and in central Kapisa province.

Targeted attacks

In southwestern Paktika province, two Taliban insurgents and a security officer lost their lives on 1 October 2015, when a road construction company was attacked. On 3 October 2015, the dead bodies of three customs department officers who had been abducted by the Taliban were found in western Farah province. On 4 October 2015, two secret service members were injured in an attack in northern Faryab province. In another bomb attack launched on the same day in southeastern Ghazni province, at least two police officers and seven civilians were wounded.

Iraq

Casualty figures

According to information provided by Iraq Body Count (IBC), a total of 1,181 civilians were killed in September 2015.

The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) reports 537 civilian casualties and 925 wounded civilians (including the figures for Anbar province) for September 2015. Additionally, a total of 180 Iraqi armed forces, Peshmerga fighters and other allies were killed (without victims in operations launched in Anbar) and 291 wounded.

Baghdad was the most affected province with 840 civilian victims (257 killed, 583 injured). The toll in Diyala province was 67 killed and 86 injured, in Salahaddin province 87 killed and 64 injured, in Ninive province 75 killed and 8 injured and in Kirkuk 16 killed and 6 injured.

The Anbar Health Directorate reported 204 civilian victims (28 killed and 176 injured). UNAMI has pointed out that these are minimum figures, since it is impossible to verify the actual numbers of victims in conflict areas.

Attacks in Baghdad

Two suicide attacks launched in Baghdad city on 3 October 2015 claimed the lives of at least 18 people and injured another 60. The attacks were targeted at two Shia neighbourhoods in the north of the city.

Cholera infections

According to information provided by the Ministry of Health, the number of cholera cases in Iraq has surpassed 800, claiming at least 10 lives. The first cases were recorded in the region of Abu Ghraib. Since then, the epidemic has spread to various southern towns including Basra. The conditions in overcrowded refugee camps have compounded the problem, it was stated.

Baghdad's Green Zone opened to public

On 4 October 2015, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared the so-called Green Zone (Baghdad's government quarter) open to the public. The heavily fortified area of roughly 10 sq km is home to major political institutions and foreign embassies. However, some restrictions would remain, the Prime Minister said, with most streets requiring a special pass to be accessed.

Iraq calls for international aid

On 1 October 2015, Iraqi Prime Minister called for international aid before the UN General Assembly, the German Press Agency reported. In particular, he asked for logistical support, including for the care of refugees.

Syria

Russian air strikes

On 30 September 2015, Russia began carrying out air strikes in Syria; during the first 4 days, more than 60 attacks have been launched against roughly 50 positions. During the weekend, IS positions in northwestern Idlib province and in the eastern IS stronghold of Raqqa were attacked, a military spokesperson said. Since the beginning of Russia's air strikes, at least 39 civilians and 14 combatants (mainly IS) have been killed, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. Russian sources say that the attacks are targeted against IS and other terrorists groups including the al-Nusra Front. With regard to the Free Syrian Army (FSA), Russian foreign minister Lavrov said on 1 October 2015 that they were an important part of the political process and not a terror organisation, rejecting the notion that Russia was also attacking moderate Syrian groups. Turkish President Erdogan labelled the Russian attacks as unacceptable; British Prime Minister Cameron and US-President Obama accused Russia of backing the 'butcher' Assad because the Russian forces were only strengthening IS by mainly targeting moderate groups.

U.S. halts training of moderate Syrian rebels

In view of major setbacks, the U.S. has suspended its programme to train moderate Syrian rebels, Pentagon spokesman Peter Cook said on 29 September 2015. The actual movement of new recruits from Syria to training camps in Turkey and Jordan was paused, while training of the cohorts currently in the programme was continued, he said. In spring 2015, the U.S. had started to train moderate rebels for the fight against the IS militia. The \$500m programme aimed at training around 5,000 fighters annually and then send them to Syria. So far, however, only a few fighters have entered Syria. Moreover, the Pentagon had to admit recently that some of the fighters had given a weapons stockpile to al-Nusra, supposedly in exchange for safe passage through a controlled area (see BN of 28 September 2015).

New concept to put pressure on IS

On 4 October 2015, the New York Times reported that the U.S.-led coalition fighting the Islamic State has begun preparing a major front to put pressure on the IS stronghold of Raqqa. The measures are intended to empower up to 5,000 Arab fighters and 20,000 Kurdish combatants in an offensive backed by coalition warplanes to put pressure on the town and to cut off critical IS supply lines. In this context, President Obama

ordered the Pentagon, for the first time, to directly provide ammunition and perhaps arms to Syrian rebels, the newspaper reported.

IS continues systematic destruction of antique sites

On 4 October 2015, IS militants blew up Palmyra's Arch of Triumph, which had been built between 193 and 211 AD. After the terror militia had captured the town in May 2015, they have looted ancient tombs and destroyed sculptures and antique temples deemed to be un-Islamic and a manifestation of polytheism.

Turkey

Kurdish politicians and journalists detained

Local media reported that the Turkish police arrested approx. 44 Kurdish activists in Istanbul on 02 October 2015. Among them were several executives of the Kurdish HDP party, trade unionists and the managing editor of a Kurdish newspaper. The arrested are accused of supporting the banned PKK party and of establishing a political academy.

Israel

Jerusalem Old City ban on Palestinians

In recent days, the West Bank has been the scene of clashes between Palestinians and Israeli soldiers, with dozens of injured reported by the Palestinian side. The unrest erupted after an attack on 3 October 2015 in Jerusalem, where a young Palestinian attacked several Israelis with a knife, killing two men and injuring a woman and a baby before he was shot dead by police officers. The Palestinian leadership has accused Israel of conflict escalation, while Israeli politicians are blaming Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas for triggering violence.

Palestinian Autonomous Areas

President Abbas threatens to pull out of Oslo Accords

In a speech before the UN General Assembly held on 30 September 2015, Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas declared that the Palestinians could not continue to be bound by the Oslo peace agreements of 1993 if Israel continued to violate them. The Oslo Accords, having the ultimate aim of a two-state solution, have long been deemed to have failed, since negotiations on the contentious issues of Jerusalem, the refugees, the border and the status of the Jewish settlements have not resulted in a satisfactory conclusion.

Yemen

Pro-government forces retake Bab al-Mandab strait

The coalition forces of Yemeni President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi have recaptured from Shia Muslim Houthi rebels the Bab al-Mandab strait, the strategic southern entrance to the Red Sea and gateway to the Suez Canal, one of the world's most important trade corridors. The pro-government forces were supported by the coalition of Sunni states led by Saudi Arabia who regularly engages in air strikes against the Houthi rebels. After return from exile in Saudi Arabia, the Yemeni government declared the southern port city of Aden as its provisional capital because Sanaa is still under control of Houthi rebels.

South Sudan

Government forces attack rebel area

South Sudan rebels say that government forces repeatedly attacked rebel positions in the northern part of the country last week. However, these reports have not been confirmed. The alleged attacks would be a violation of the peace agreement signed between the conflicting parties. On 3 October 2015, President Salva Kiir

announced that South Sudan's 10 existing states would be divided into 28. South Sudanese rebels say this was a unilateral move by the government.

Egypt

Gaza tunnels flooded

In mid-September 2015, the Egyptian army started flooding tunnels to Gaza with water from the Mediterranean Sea. Gaza's Hamas government fears that houses might collapse along the Gaza border. According to a high-rank Egyptian military official already 99 percent of the tunnels have been destroyed. However, the Egyptian military made no comments on the flooding. Egyptian official plans of creating a buffer zone at the border call for clearing 79 sq km on the Gaza border including parts of the city of Rafah, affecting 78,000 of its approx. 270,000 inhabitants.

Death sentences

In the governorate of Giza, 16 jihadists were sentenced to death in an appeals procedure on 1 October 2015. The defendants were charged with the killing of 25 Egyptian police officers during a rocket attack on the Sinai Peninsula in August 2013. The previous verdict, a long-term prison sentence, was repealed by an Egyptian court of cassation.

Two Egyptian policemen shot dead

The Egyptian interior ministry said that two policemen were shot dead by fighters of a radical Islamist group affiliated to IS in the Sinai Peninsula on 3 October 2015.

Uganda

LGBTI activist wins Alternative Nobel Prize

As was announced on 1 October 2015, Kasha Jacqueline Nabagesera will be awarded Sweden's Right Livelihood Award for her campaigns for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersexual people in Uganda. At the end of 2014, she published Uganda's first LGBTI periodical called Bombastic Magazine which aims at providing information on the lives of sexual minorities and to promote tolerance in Uganda. The magazine was distributed throughout the country and is also available online. Ms Nabagesera, co-founder of the organisation Freedom And Roam Uganda (FARUG), shares the award and the prize money totalling 320,000 EUR with two other laureates. In 2013, she had received the Nuremberg International Human Rights Award.

In recent years, Uganda has raised concern with draft legislation introducing the death penalty for homosexuals under certain circumstances. The milder version of the bill containing 'only' a life-in-prison sentence had entered into force in February 2014, but was overturned in August 2014 following an appeal lodged by several activists, among them Ms Nabagesera.

Burundi

Violent eruption claims several lives

Violent clashes between anti-government protesters and security forces in Bujumbura claimed the lives of about a dozen people on 3 October 2015. Apparently, the clashes were triggered by the police who tried to detain several youth in the Mutakura neighbourhood.

Sanctions

On 1 October 2015, the European Council adopted travel restrictions and an asset freeze against four civil officers with close ties to President Pierre Nkurunziza. They are accused of violently undermining democracy or obstructing efforts to achieve a political solution for the current crisis in Burundi.

Central African Republic

Tense situation in Bangui

After the unrest of 26 September 2015 (see BN of 28 September 2015), the situation remains tense in the capital of Bangui. At least 36 people have lost their lives so far. More than 42,000 escaped violence; some of them fled near the city's airport, where already 11,000 refugees are staying close to the UN MINUSCA peace mission base. Protesters have set up barricades in the streets of Bangui, demanding the resignation of transitional President Catherine Samba-Panza, the withdrawal of international military and the rearmament of the army which had been largely dissolved after the Muslim Séléka took over power. During the unrest, the establishments of several aid organisations were looted. A night curfew is in force. It was only on 28 September that the security forces started to actively patrol the city. On the same day, MINUSCA soldiers prevented protesters from storming the presidential palace. The peacekeepers have rejected allegations that at least six people were killed in the operation. After the escape of around 500 prisoners from Bangui's main prison Ngaragba, among them many fighters of the anti-Balaka militia who are responsible for human rights violations, observers fear that the situation may escalate. Marie-Therese Keita Bocoum, the United Nations' independent expert on CAR, warned that the country could descend again into civil war unless the fights are rapidly contained and the militias disarmed. The International Committee of the Red Cross was alarmed at the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Bangui. The elections, which had already been postponed several times and were now scheduled to be held on 18 October 2015, were delayed once more.

Illegal diamond trade used to finance militias

In a report published on 30 September 2015, Amnesty International accuses diamond buyers to have hoarded huge stockpiles of diamonds worth several million dollars without having adequately recorded where they have come from. It could therefore not be excluded that so-called 'conflict diamonds' were among them, i.e. diamonds mined illegally under the control of anti-Balaka and armed Séléka serving to fund these militias, the organisation stated.

Western and Central Africa

Current figures of victims in Boko Haram conflict

According to information provided by Amnesty International on 30 September 2015, more than 3,500 civilians have been killed by Boko Haram terrorists in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger since the beginning of the year. Since the beginning of June 2015 alone, when Nigerian President Buhari came into power, the death toll was at least 1,600.

Nigeria

Series of suicide attacks in Abuja und Maiduguri

On 2 October 2015, two suicide bombers carried out attacks in two suburbs of Nigeria's capital Abuja. The blasts happened near a police station ad a bus stop. Nigeria's National Emergency Management Agency stated that 18 people were killed and more than 40 wounded in the attacks.

On 1 October 2015, four suicide bombers blew themselves up simultaneously in the outskirts of Maiduguri (capital of northern Borno State). The attacks targeted the Ajilari Cross area near Maiduguri airport and a military base. Besides the perpetrators, 10 people were killed and 39 others injured, the military said. The Islamist Boko Haram terror organisation is blamed for the attacks.

More than 400 Boko Haram members surrender in Borno State

According to unverifiable information provided by the military on 1 October 2015, a total of 80 Boko Haram insurgents surrendered en masse to troops near the town of Bama. Already on 25 September, the army had reported the surrender of 200 terrorists after the recapturing of the town of Banki bordering Cameroon from the insurgents. On 24 September, the military had circulated a statement saying that another group of 135 terrorists had surrendered with their weapons around Biu Local Government Area.

DR Congo / Rwanda

Prison sentences imposed in trial against Rwandan FDLR leadership

On 28 September 2015, the Higher Regional Court (OLG) Stuttgart issued a prison sentence of 13 years against Ignace Murwanashyaka, the President of the Rwandan Hutu rebel group FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda), for being a ringleader of a foreign terrorist organization and for aiding and abetting to four war crimes. He was found guilty of having substantially supported war crimes in the DR Congo, especially the massacre of FDLR troops in the eastern Congolese villages of Mianga, Busuringi, Chiriba und Manje, where nearly 200 civilians were killed. Murwanashyaka's deputy Straton Musoni, who had resigned from his position and left the FDLR three years ago, was sentenced to eight years in prison for heading and participating in a terrorist organization. He was released after the judgement, because he had already served more than two thirds of his prison term on remand.

This has been the first trial under the International Criminal Code (VStGB), which had come into force in Germany in 2002, allowing the indictment of war criminals wherever the crime was committed. The court stated that the trial, which had started in May 2011 and lasted for 320 trial days, showed the limits of the logistic possibilities for a German court to apply international criminal law in order to solve crimes committed abroad. Already during the trial, the federal prosecutor had to drop eleven of sixteen charges.

The FDLR continues to be responsible for severe human rights violations against the civilian population in the two eastern Congolese provinces of North and South Kivu.

Burkina Faso

Army retakes barracks of presidential guard after heavy clashes

When the rebels of the presidential guard (RSP) started to refuse continuing their disarmament in the evening of 27 September 2015, the regular army advanced to their barracks situated near the Presidents Palace in Ouagadougou. In the night of 30 September, the army succeeded in retaking the embattled barracks after clashes with the RSP. Interim president Kafando stated that there were no casualties. On 1 October 2015, General Gilbert Diendéré, RSP leader and instigator of the failed coup of 16 September 2015, was handed over to the authorities by the Apostolic Nunciature, where he had sought refuge on 30 September. He is to be brought before a court of justice.

FYR Macedonia / Serbia

Continuing flow of refugees on Balkan route

According to UNHCR, there is a continuing daily influx of up to 2,500 refugees from Greece to Macedonia. In the camp near Gevgelija, they receive a document entitling them to stay in the country for 72 hours. However, they are not allowed to leave the camp in this time. They wait until the arrival of one of the trains provided by Macedonia for their transport to the Serbian border. In a report published on 21 September 2015, Human Rights Watch has levelled serious accusations against the Macedonian police for their dealing with refugees. In view of the continuing flow of refugees, aid organisations are fearing a humanitarian catastrophe given that winter is approaching. Official statistics say that since the beginning of the refugee crisis in spring, a total of roughly 200,000 people have crossed Serbia. In Presevo on the Macedonian-Serbian border, there are about 1,000 new refugees arriving every day. There, they are registered to enable them to travel on. On the weekend of 3/4 October 2015, a new crowd of several thousand people crossed the border between Serbia and Croatia.

Montenegro

Anti-government protests

The opposition Democratic Front is staging anti-government protests, trying to force Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic to resign and to prepare for early parliamentary elections. On 27 September 2015, about 4,000 people peacefully took to the streets in Podgorica. Several hundred protesters built a tent camp in the government district, with the firm intention to stay there until Mr Djukanovic resigns.

Prime Minister Djukanovic has been in power almost without interruption since 1991, serving in different roles (prime minister, president, leader of the Democratic Party of Socialists). For a long time now, he has been accused of nepotism, corruption and maladministration. Since 2012, protests against the ‘System Djukanovic’ have been increasing. Also, criticism at home and abroad is rising due to the absence of promised reforms. The European Union notes continuing shortcomings in the rule of law and human rights sectors. Nepotism, widespread corruption and the influence of organised crime continue to be deemed major obstacles to development.

Ukraine

Ukraine Summit

After the Ukraine Crisis Summit of 2 October 2015 in Paris, signs of detente begin to show in the conflicted region of eastern Ukraine. Both pro-Russian separatists and government units say they have started the partial withdrawal of weapons which had been agreed some days before the summit. However, the controversial issue of the elections planned by the insurgents remains, which the Kiev government refuses to accept. The meeting of the heads of state and government held in the French Capital could not resolve this problem. The pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine are not willing to postpone the local elections announced for 18 October and 1 November. In the rest of Ukraine, local elections are scheduled for 25 October. The Kiev government rejects the elections in the eastern part of the country as illegal because pro-government candidates are to be excluded from running for office. In Paris, news was circulated that Russian President Putin had agreed to use his influence that elections can be held under Ukrainian law.

Caritas Ukraine issues warnings of another refugee wave

The president of Caritas Ukraine, Andrij Waskowycz ,has warned the EU that another refugee wave was likely to come. In Ukraine, more than 1.4 million internally displaced persons have already been registered, but the number of unregistered persons was probably twice as high, he said. He called upon the EU to urgently intensify assistance for Ukraine, as the country is unable to cope with providing aid to millions of refugees.

India

Death penalties following bomb attacks

On 29 September 2015, five men were sentenced to death for their involvement in the Mumbai bomb attacks in 2006. On 11 July 2006, seven explosive devices had detonated within a few minutes in overcrowded commuter trains, killing 189 people and injuring 800 more. Four more defendants were handed down life sentences. Apparently, these men are members of the militant student organisation Islamic Movement of India, which is supported by the Pakistani terrorist organisation Lashkar-e-Taiba. Also, the investigators were convinced that the Pakistani military secret service ISI had been involved in the attacks. Pakistan has rejected these allegations.