

Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

6 October 2014

Afghanistan

Security situation

On 01.10.14, two suicide attacks launched by Taliban fighters on Afghan military vehicles in Kabul claimed the lives of at least seven people and wounded more than 15 others.

Further military clashes with insurgents including bomb attacks, drone attacks and airstrikes occurred last week in central Logar province, in northern Baghlan province, in north-western Faryab province, in north-eastern Kunduz province, in eastern Nangarhar and Laghman provinces as well as in southern Zabul, Helmand and Kandahar provinces. The Taliban's claims to have conquered Registan district in Kandahar Province have been rejected by the Afghan authorities. The authorities stated that the Taliban fighters had laid land mines along the Kabul-Kandahar highway and on roads of south-eastern Ghazni Province, where the Taliban last week stopped a bus and shot dead three passengers.

In Gardez district (south-eastern Paktia Province), Taliban fighters were reported to have hanged three people for robbery.

New Afghan Government signs Security Agreement

On 30.09.14, the new Afghan President Ashraf Ghani signed the security pact with the U.S. and NATO. Under the agreement, around 12,000 NATO personnel will remain in the country after 31.12.14. Germany has offered to send up to 800 soldiers to participate in the operation named 'Resolute Support'. The key mission aim is to train and support the Afghan security forces. Foreign soldiers continue to have immunity under Afghan law.

Pakistan

Security situation

On 04.10.14, five people were killed and another 25 injured in a bomb blast on a bazar in Quetta city. The attack was launched against Shia Muslim Hazaras. An attack on a bus stop killed six people and injured another 17 in the town of Kohat (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province). One day before, another attack on a bus in the city of Peshawar (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) had killed at least seven people and injured another six.

Iraq

UN Report on war crimes committed by IS insurgents

The *UN Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Armed Conflict in Iraq: 6 July to 10 September 2014* accuses Islamic State jihadists of gross human rights violations in Iraq, among them beheadings, systematic mass execution, rapes and forced recruitment of children. Religious and ethnic minorities including Turkmens, Kurds, Christians and Yezidi have been affected just like Sunni Muslim clerics, tribal leaders, but also teachers and medical doctors refusing allegiance to the IS insurgents, the report says.

The report also speaks of violation of laws of war committed by the Iraqi government forces.

Syria

IS: Terrorists disguised as ‘refugees’ for Europe

From decoded communication of the IS leadership, US intelligence claims to have gathered information that Islamic State fighters are planning to enter Turkey disguised as Syrian refugees, and to travel on to Europe with fake passports so they can launch terror attacks, with Germany standing in the focus of the jihadist terrorists. As yet, there is no information available on concrete plans for attacks.

Continuing fights around Kobane

Despite airstrikes by the U.S.-led coalition against the IS insurgents, the Islamists are continuing their attacks on Kurdish units with tanks and grenades. The Kurdish town of Kobane (Arab: Ain al-Arab) near the Syrian-Turkish border is cornered on three sides by the IS militia. The jihadists are currently trying to storm a strategically important hill to the south-east of Kobane, from where it would be easier to storm the town. A female Kurdish fighter has carried out a suicide bomb attack against an IS position near the embattled town.

Pakistani Tehreek-e-Taliban declare allegiance to IS

The Pakistani Taliban have vowed support for militant Islamists and to send to Syria 1,000-1,500 Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) fighters, who have close ties to al-Qaeda. There is no formal alliance between the two terror groups. In actual fact, IS and TTP are rivals in the spectrum of radical Islamic groups, with IS having overtaken the terror network al Qaeda which is a close ally to the Taliban.

Turkey

Parliament passes motion for military action in Iraq and Syria

On 02.10.14, the Turkish parliament backed a motion to participate in the anti-IS coalition, passing the resolution to join the campaign against IS in Iraq and Syria with a vast majority.

The decision includes a legal framework for the deployment of foreign military forces in Turkey and the use of Turkish bases by partner forces as part of the campaign against IS. The mandate lasts for one year to launch military actions against terror organisations with ground forces or other military means. Apparently, it is also envisaged to establish buffer zones in both Iraqi and Syrian territory to establish security zones for refugees. It is still unclear if and when the Turkish government will make use of the mandate. Several government politicians have stated that the first concern was to secure Turkey's borders.

Egypt

Alleged spies beheaded by extremists

On 06.10.14, an Egyptian news site reported that the Islamic extremist Sinai-based group Ansar Beit al-Makdis had released an internet video showing the beheading of four men accused of spying for Israel's intelligence agency Mossad.

Libya

Continuing fights

On 02.10.14, at least 31 soldiers were killed and hundreds wounded in a major attack launched by Islamist insurgents on a military base in Benghazi. In a double strike, Islamist militants of so-called Shura Council had attacked the military base of Benina airport located outside the city. According to media reports, two vehicles loaded with explosives drove into an army checkpoint. The resulting fights continued until the night of Friday, when soldiers succeeded in securing the area.

The attack occurred only one day after the Libyan army had declared a ceasefire in the country torn by fighting militias. The decision was taken out of respect for the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mekka ('Haj') which began on 02.10.14.

After a UN-facilitated dialogue between rivaling members of parliament had taken place several days before, the new government was sworn in on 28.09.14. The parliament in Tobruk approved Prime Minister

Abdullah al-Thinni and his twelve cabinet members. Although al-Thinni's government and the parliament in Tobruk are recognized at the international level, they have nearly no influence in Libya itself.

Mali

Nine UN peacekeepers killed

On 03.10.14, nine UN peacekeepers from Niger were killed in an ambush in northern Mali. Armed gunmen on motorbikes attacked the soldiers who were travelling in a convoy near the town of Manaka. Since the deployment of the UN mission MINUSMA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali) in July 2013, 30 peacekeepers have been killed and 90 injured in Mali.

Apparently, several split-up Islamist groups have installed themselves in the northern parts of the country.

Somalia

Al-Shabaab withdraws from Barawe base

As was reported by AMISOM, African Union and Somali forces were able to capture the port city of Barawe (Brava), roughly 200 km south-west of Mogadishu, on 05.10.14. Apparently, the al-Shabaab fighters left the city before the army's advance.

Barawe, the last port controlled by al-Shabaab, was strategically important for financing the militia. It was used for the export of charcoal to the Middle East and as a supply route for weapons and fighters.

Fighting in Puntland

On 01.10.14, the president of the semi-autonomous region of Puntland, Abdiwali Mohammed Ali Gaas, stated that more than 20 Islamist fighters were killed in an attack launched by the military on an al-Shabaab base in the Galgala mountains east of the capital of Boosaaso (Bari region). The president has offered an amnesty to al-Shabaab fighters if they lay down their arms within 30 days.

Ukraine

Fragile ceasefire in eastern Ukraine – heavy fighting in Donetsk

Since 29.09.14, heavy fighting has been continuing in the eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk. According to information from the city council, five people lost their lives on 03.10.14 alone. Apparently, the fights are concentrated in northern parts of the city close to the airport. The Kiev government says that the army is still in control of the airport, after military support and weapons have arrived. Following the ceasefire declared on 05.09.14, which so far has remained relatively stable, the rebels started new attempts to take the strategically important airport last week.

Kiev and the rebels are blaming each other for the death of a Swiss Red Cross Humanitarian Aid Worker in Donetsk on 02.10.14. The Ukrainian foreign ministry has accused the separatists of intending to intimidate the humanitarian aid organisations, calling the incident a terrorist act. The rebels, in turn, are blaming the army of having opened the fire at the city indiscriminately and of being responsible for the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Worker's death. Moscow also has blamed the Ukrainian armed forces for his death. The Russian authorities argued that Donetsk was controlled by the rebels and shelled by the Ukrainian Army.

On 05.09.14, the Ukrainian government and the separatists had agreed a ceasefire in Belarus to put an end to months of fighting. Since then, almost 70 people have died. In a second agreement, both parties undertook to establish a 30-km buffer zone to be put under international control.

Russian Federation/Northern Caucasus

Attack in Grozny kills five police officers

In the evening of 05.10.14, a suicide bomber blew himself up in the Chechen capital of Grozny, killing five police officers. According to the Russian Investigation Committee (Russia's supreme investigating authority), twelve more police officers were seriously injured in the attack which took place in the vicinity of a concert hall. Allegedly, the perpetrator was a 19 year old citizen of the Russian republic of Chechnya. The attack occurred on the 38th birthday of Chechen president Ramsan Kadyrov. Festivities were to be held in the concert hall to celebrate his birthday. Kadyrov leads the Russian constituent republic in an authoritarian manner. After the two Chechen wars, the country and particularly its capital Grozny have been reconstructed with considerable financial support from Moscow. Hence, Chechnya has remained rather calm in the last years, contrary to the neighbouring republic of Dagestan. The last suicide attack in Grozny had killed four soldiers in 2012.

Chechens fighting for IS in Syria

A large number of Chechens are fighting in the Syrian civil war on the side of the Islamist extremists against the government forces. In the beginning of September 2014, Chechen fighters allied to IS made threats to the Russian president because he supports Syrian president Bashar al-Assad both politically and with weapons.

China

Hong Kong: Partial withdrawal of protesters

After Hong Kong's chief executive, Leung Chun Ying, had set the deadline for the protesters to clear all streets at 06.10.14, warning them that he would take measures to implement the order, the protesters have lifted the blockade on important roads and administrative buildings. Roughly 1,000 protesters stayed in the government quarter in the night of 06.10.14, but they let the civil servants enter the buildings in the morning. However, many supporters of the pro-democracy movement have announced that they would take to the streets again. Student representatives are continuing negotiations for a meeting with the government which has signalled willingness to reach an agreement. The conditions of the meeting and the targets of the talks are under dispute. In recent days, riot police units had repeatedly used tear gas against the protesters.

The pro-democracy movement's main demand is a change of the electoral reform imposed by Beijing, providing a direct vote for Hong Kong's leader in 2017 on the condition that candidates must be approved by Beijing. The protesters, in turn, demand free elections. Last week, tens of thousands had joined the protesters, bringing two quarters of the city to a complete halt.

The blockades and rallies, led mostly by thousands of students and young supporters of the Occupy-Central pro-democracy movement, overshadowed the celebrations of the 65th Anniversary of the foundation of the People's Republic held on 01.10.14. Hong Kong, which had been under British rule until 1997, is increasingly influenced by mainland China. There is a growing danger that freedoms will be cut back which are presently enjoyed by the people, including the freedom of press. At present, Hong Kong's status is that of a special administrative region of China, with its free market economy and strong levels of domestic autonomy being preserved.