

Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

25 January 2016

Afghanistan

Military confrontations

On 21 January 2016, the Taliban seized parts of Darqad district in Takhar province (in north-eastern Afghanistan) following heavy fighting.

Residents of Baghlan province in north-eastern Afghanistan claimed the Taliban forced them to dig graves. Further fighting took place in Faryab (northern Afghanistan), Badakhshan (in north-eastern Afghanistan), Nangarhar (in eastern Afghanistan), Kandahar (in southern Afghanistan). Fighting is ongoing in Helmand province in southern Afghanistan (cf. recent weeks' BN).

According to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, Kandahar in southern Afghanistan was the province with the highest civilian death toll in 2015. 874 civilians were either killed or wounded in the conflict in Kandahar last year (448 persons were killed, 426 were wounded). Most of the casualties (450) were killed in roadside bombings, 150 persons were singled out and killed.

Targeted bombings and attacks

In Nimruz province, a member of the Afghan secret service was killed by unknown gunmen on 19 January 2016. In Helmand province (southern Afghanistan), an employee of the Transport Ministry was killed in a Taliban attack, another was wounded. On 20 January 2016, a suicide car bomber targeted a minibus carrying journalists working for Tolo News, Afghanistan's first 24-hour news channel. The seven journalists in the minibus were killed and at least 25 persons were wounded. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for Wednesday's attack, although the Taliban had threatened Tolo News several times in the past. Two days later, the secret service arrested eight members of the Haqqani network in connection with the attack. On 21 January 2016, a security guard was killed in an attack in Zabul province (in southern Afghanistan), one civilian was wounded. On 24 January 2016, an unknown gunman wounded two policewomen in Herat (western Afghanistan) who were on their way home.

Executed for adultery

Two men and two women were executed in Herat province (in western Afghanistan) for committing adultery. There is no information available yet about those who carried out the execution or about the circumstances surrounding it.

Taliban control schools in Kunduz

The Taliban reportedly have over 300 schools under their control in Kunduz province (north-eastern Afghanistan) where they are also recruiting fighters.

Pakistan

Attack on university

At least 21 persons were killed in an attack on a University/school in Charsadda on 20 January 2015. The Taliban commander Umar Mansoor has claimed responsibility for the attack, the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has distanced itself.

Iraq

Attacks by Kurdish Peshmerga forces

According to reports by Amnesty International, Peshmerga forces destroyed houses in villages and towns in the provinces of Ninive, Kirkuk und Diyala which they had reconquered from ISIS between September 2014 and March 2015.

Syria

Rabia in Lattakia province under government control

On 24 January 2016 , government troops managed to retake the strategically important town of Rabia in Lattakia province. Rabia is the hometown of the Alawites which Bashar al-Assad also belongs to. The town was held by Syrian rebels since 2012 and was under control of several groups, including Syrian Turkmen, militants of the al Qaeda-affiliated Nusra Front. With the help of Russian combat aircraft, the Army and affiliated militia have managed to push back the rebels further and further in the past few months .

Airstrikes by Russian airforce

More than 90 civilians were reportedly killed in Russian airstrikes in eastern Syria at the weekend. On 22 January 2016, 44 persons were killed in an airstrike in Deir ez-Zor 44 and on 23 January 2016, 47 persons were killed in Chasham.

Peace talks likely to be deferred

The peace talks that were due to begin on 25 January 2016, are likely to be postponed . The dispute over what delegations are to take part in the peace talks is the reason why the talks are being postponed. The countries involved in the Syrian conflict have widely diverging ideas about what opposition groups should be invited to participate in the talks. Whereas Saudi Arabia would like radical rebel groups such as Ahrar al-Sham to participate, Russia is pressing for moderate opposition groups tolerated by Damascus. Turkey objects to Kurdish militia taking part who regard the West as important allies against the jihadists. Assad's government will make its final decision about its participation in the peace talks contingent on the list of opposition groups. The USA and Russia agreed that UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, would invite two opposition delegations to Geneva, de Mistura will announce further details on 25 January 2016.

Lebanon

Rivals for the position of President reach agreement

On 18 January 2016, Samir Geagea, Chairperson of the Forces Libanaises Party and alliance partner of the mainly Sunni future movement in Parliament, announced that he would support his former rival for the position of President Michel Aoun. Aoun is the favoured candidate of the Amal Party and of Hezbollah. So far, the parties have been unable to agree on a successor for former President Michel Suleiman who resigned in May 2014; none of the 35 votes held so far produced the quorum.

Yemen

UNO demands that relief organisation have unrestricted access to people in need.

The United Nations has demanded that relief organisations have unrestricted access to civilians in need. According to the Resident Coordinator (RC) of the United Nations in Yemen, Jamie McGoldrick, supplies are not reaching 4 million out of the 11 million people in Yemen. He said that around 200,000 persons in the besieged city of Taiz have been cut off from supplies for months.

Libya

Establishment of a unity government

In order to implement the plan brokered by the United Nations, the warring factions set up a unity government on 19 January 2016. This was announced by the Presidential Council comprising 9 members. The new cabinet is to have 32 ministers who will be led by prime minister-designate Fayez al-Sarraj. According to media reports, however, only seven of the nine members of the Presidential Council have signed the document approving the new cabinet. It is not yet clear where the new government will be seated and whether it will be in a position to rule. The internationally recognised government in Tobruk has yet to recognise the new unity government; the same applies to the rival government in Tripoli which has already expressed its opposition.

Tunisia

Demonstrations

Protests against the economic policy broke out in several cities last week. They began in the central town of Kasserine where a 28-year-old man was electrocuted after climbing up an electricity pole during a rally in front of government offices. On 22 January 2016, a nationwide night-time curfew was imposed but unrest and clashes with the security forces continued. Around 600 persons were arrested. Several persons were wounded. The Prime Minister said after a crisis meeting held on 24 January 2016 that the security forces had the situation, by and large, under control.

Egypt

Terror on the Sinai Peninsula

On 20 January 2016, extremists gunned down seven policemen in the North Sinai-Peninsula. A branch of ISIS which is active in this region has claimed responsibility for the shootings.

Bomb explosions near Giza

According to reports by Egyptian security sources on 21 January 2016, six persons were killed when two bombs exploded as police arrived in their vehicles in front of a building in Giza where suspected militants were hiding, 23 persons were wounded. Most of the casualties were reportedly policemen. According to the Ministry of the Interior, the offensive was aimed against an arsenal of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood.

5th anniversary of mass protests - nationwide campaigns announced

Representatives of the secular and liberal opposition and representatives of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood have announced nationwide rallies against the government of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on 25 January 2016, the fifth anniversary of the outbreak of mass protests which led to the toppling of President Mubarak. The authorities arrested several persons in the run-up to the protests. A military presence with armoured personnel carriers and armoured tanks is rounding up on Tahrir Square in Cairo.

Nigeria

Success in the fight against terrorism

On 22 January 2016, three suicide bombers belonging to the terrorist organisation Boko Haram were apprehended by troops as they tried to enter the city of Maiduguri, according to a report issued by military sources on 23 January 2016. One of them was gunned down by troops, two others blew themselves up. It was also announced that in the past five days, 90 suspects were killed during military operations against Boko Haram in the states of Yobe und Borno and that 270 hostages were freed.

Nigeria/Cameroon/Chad

Nigerians who fled return

According to official sources, around 15,000 residents of the Nigerian town of Gamboru (which is located along the border with Cameroon, Borno state) returned to Nigeria from Cameroon between 20 January and 22 January 2016. They had fled Gamboru in August 2014 when the terrorist organisation Boko Haram seized the town. Chadian troops drove the terrorists out of the town in February 2015. As most of the town of Gamboru has been destroyed, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) will be providing the returnees with relief supplies in the next few days.

Somalia

Kenya bombards al-Shabaab

According to reports by Kenyan army sources on 18 January 2016, after al-Shabaab attacked an AMISOM base in Ceel Cado (Gedo region) on 15 January 2016, (cf. BN of 18 January 2016), the airforce succeeded in driving al-Shabaab out of Ceel Cado and other locations in the region using heavy bombardment.

Suicide bombing and gunfire in Mogadishu

At least 20 persons were killed after a suicide car bomber and gunmen attacked a beachside hotel and a nearby restaurant on 21 January 2016. Most of the casualties were security staff and civilians. The assailants began by detonating car bombs, then raided the building and fired randomly at people. Seven of the assailants were killed in the gunfire exchange that subsequently broke out with security forces. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Russian Federation/northern Caucasus

Human rights and security situation

The general security and human rights situation remains tense in the North Caucasus region. The main conflict zone has moved from Chechnya to the neighbouring Republic of Dagestan and partially also to Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria. Although the region has received massive economic support from the Russian government, the trend towards economic problems and social instability continues.

Since 2012, the number of persons killed in North Caucasus has dropped. In 2014, at least 341 persons were killed in attacks and clashes between security forces and separatist or Islamist insurgents. In 2013, the death toll had been 529 and in 2012 it had been 700. The number of persons killed also dropped in Dagestan, the main crisis-ridden region of North Caucasus: in 2014, at least 208 persons were killed, in 2013 271 were killed and in 2012 410 were killed. This trend continued in 2015. According to the Russian online news site Caucasian Knot, at least 209 persons have been killed in North Caucasus – 135 of them in Dagestan. The reason why the number of persons killed has dropped so significantly is probably that since 2015, a growing number of militants from North Caucasus have joined ISIS in Syria and Iraq.

China

"Confessions" broadcast on national television

According to official media reports, a Swedish national who has been missing since 3 January 2016 was arrested on 19 January 2016 on suspicion of jeopardising China's national security. National television showed the confession of the human rights activist to the Chinese Urgent Action Working Group. This organisation supports lawyers, amongst others, who seek to gain support for human rights issues in China. Several of them are linked to the law firm Fengrui which the authorities have been taking action against since July 2015 (cf. BN of 18 January 2016).

Back on 17 January 2016, national television broadcast the confession of one of five publishers who sold books critical of the Chinese Communist party and was an employee of a publishing company from Hong Kong who had disappeared. (cf. BN of 11 January 2016). This person who is also a Swedish national report-

edly confessed to a drink-driving offence from 12 years ago. Observers assume that both confessions were forced, inter alia, to increase pressure on foreign activists.

Myanmar

Amnesty

On 22 January 2016, President Thein Sein granted an amnesty to more than 100 prisoners, including 52 political prisoners. In a further 77 cases, the death penalty was reduced to a prison sentence. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma), 78 political prisoners are still being detained, more than 400 others face charges on political grounds.

Nepal

Rallies against the Constitution – two persons killed

On 21 January 2016, members of a party of the large ethnic minority of the Madhesi attacked a protest by the governing Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) (CPN-UML) in Rangeli (Morang district close to the Indian border). The police intervened. Two persons were killed. Violent protests have taken place repeatedly and clashes between protesters and the police have left more than 50 people dead. The Madhesi people who inhabit the flat southern region of Nepal, are demanding more rights and have been blocking the streets from India since September 2015 which has led to major supply shortages.

On 24 January 2016, Parliament decided to introduce some constitutional amendments in a bid to stem the ongoing protests. Minority rights such as access to the public service and a new process of constituency delimitation are to be taken more effectively into account. The Madhesi consider the amendments to be inadequate. They boycotted the vote.

Columbia

Progress made in peace talks

On 19 January 2016, the government and the rebel organisation Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia agreed to adhere to the peace agreement that is currently under negotiation by establishing an international political mission comprising the UN and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, to monitor the implementation of the peace deal. The peace talks are due to be brought to a conclusion by March 2016.