

Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

30 May 2016

short version due to current staffing situation!

Afghanistan

New Taliban leader

After the killing of Mullah Akhtar Mansoor, the Taliban's supreme council stated on 25 May 2016 that Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada was appointed to be the new 'Emir al-Momineen' (Commander of the Faithful). 56-year old Akhundzada, so far deputy to Mansoor, has not participated in the fight in Afghanistan but has been serving instead as Islamic legal scholar and as a chief of the sharia-based justice system. He is regarded as the spiritual father of the Taliban's young guard. His religious school, originally located in Kandahar and moved to the Pakistani border town of Chaman following expulsion by the US invasion of 2001, is deemed to be a cadre training unit.

Mullah Yaqoob, the oldest son of Mullah Omar, and Sirajuddin Haqqani were appointed as deputy supreme leaders of the group.

Suicide attack in Kabul

On 25 May 2016, a suicide attack on a bus carrying staff from a court killed at least 10 people in a suburb of Kabul.

Iraq

Fight for Fallujah

Media report that on 23 May 2016, the Iraqi army, supported by allied militants and fighter jets, has launched an operation to retake the ISIS stronghold of Fallujah, roughly 50 km west of Baghdad. On 29 May, special forces advanced to the city for the first time since the offensive on Fallujah was started. On 27 May, hundreds of inhabitants had managed to escape from the town under siege, mostly women and children. Still, there are more than 50,000 civilians in the city trapped by the assault.

The US-led military coalition says its air strikes have killed more than 70 enemy fighters, including local ISIS commander Maher al-Bilawi.

Syria

ISIS offensive

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, ISIS started a major operation in northern Syria last week, advancing towards one of the last two rebel-held towns. Apparently, the insurgents launched a surprise offensive on the defence facilities of the town of Marea, killing dozens of people. Marea is about 20 km south of the Turkish border and, apart from Azaz, the only major town in the area which is still controlled by the rebels. The area borders ISIS territory to the east and Kurdish areas to the west. According to Human Rights Watch, tens of thousands have escaped from ISIS and are now surrounded in the area around Azaz.

Attacks claim scores of lives

On 23 May 2016, a series of bomb attacks in the towns of Tartus and Jableh claimed the lives of more than 150 people, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reports. Apparently, a total of seven car bombs killed

at least 100 people in Jableh and over 50 in Tartus, most of them civilians. ISIS has claimed responsibility for the attacks. Apparently, the attacks targeted taxi and bus stops in the two coastal towns. In Jableh, an electricity company and a hospital were also hit. The two towns are located in Latakia province which is controlled by the Syrian army. The province is deemed a pro-government stronghold. Tartus is home to a Russian naval facility.

Chief negotiator of peace talks resigns

Media report that the chief peace negotiator of Syria's main opposition bloc resigned on 30 May 2016 over the failure of the Geneva peace talks. He said that the talks failed to introduce a political transition without President Bashar al-Assad. Also, the release of thousands of prisoners was not secured, he added, blaming the stubbornness of the Syrian regime and the continued bombardments and aggression towards the Syrian people by President Assad's air force for the failure.

Egypt

Attacks against Christians

On 20 May 2016, hundreds of Muslims ransacked and torched the homes of seven Christian families in a village in southern Minyan province because a Christian allegedly had a relationship with a Muslim woman, the Orthodox Coptic church said. On 26 May, President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi ordered authorities to bring those behind the attacks to justice. Apparently, five people involved in the attacks have been detained so far.

Kenya

Protests against electoral commission turn deadly

On 23 May 2016, protests against Kenya's electoral commission took place in several cities, with media reporting at least three people killed in the incidents. For weeks now, a dispute has been going on between opposition and government about the composition of the electoral body (Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission – IEBC). Since 25 April 2016, the country's major cities, among them the capital of Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu, have been the scene of protest rallies on four of the five past Mondays. The opposition supporters say the commission is being politically biased, and they demand the replacement of its members before the parliamentary and presidential elections due in 2017. The government rejects these demands. Police have used violence to disperse the protesters several times. For 30 May 2016, the opposition has called off the protest marches to allow for talks with the government.

DR Congo

Protests against plans to postpone elections turn violent

On 26 May 2016, protests against plans to postpone the presidential elections due in November turned violent in the capital of Kinshasa and other cities. Apparently, at least one individual was killed and several people were detained. A third term of President Joseph Kabila is barred by the country's constitution. On 11 May, however, Congo's supreme court had decided that the President would be allowed to remain in power if the elections due were not held. Opposition representatives accuse Kabila of trying to postpone the elections in order to extend his rule.

Mali

UN peacekeepers killed in central Mali

On 28 May 2016, five peacekeepers were killed in an attack on a UN mission near the town of Sévaré in central Mali; another soldier was severely injured. The town of Sévaré is located near the central city of Mopti. On 29 May, the UN said this has been the first time that peacekeepers were ambushed in the central parts of the country.

Somalia

21 al-Shabaab fighters killed

On 23 May 2016, the Kenyan military stated that Kenyan AMISOM soldiers killed 21 al-Shabaab militants in a fight in Lower Juba Region near the Kenyan border. An al-Shabaab spokesman said their fighters had killed five soldiers and wounded another eight.

Serbia

Number of refugees in transit is on the increase again

Despite the closure of the Balkan route via Macedonia in the beginning of March 2016, a constant daily flow of up to 200 people seeking protection is arriving in Serbia (mainly via Bulgaria), most of them from Afghanistan, Pakistan or Syria. While only few of them lodge an asylum application in Serbia, most of the refugees intend to travel on to Hungary, which, however, admits only small groups of up to 20 people (mostly families with small children) on a daily basis. Hence, many refugees have been stranded in the transit zone at the Serbian-Hungarian border. Presently, there are around 300-400 refugees stuck at the Rözke/Horgos border crossing point. Their living conditions are squalid, with no access to toilets or showers. Food and clean clothes are provided only by humanitarian aid organisations.

In Belgrade, around 100-200 refugees are registered in the initial reception facility near the main train station every day. In Krnjaca at the outskirts of the capital, the Serbian authorities have set up a refugee camp containing 800 beds.

Kosovo

Hate preacher jailed for 10 years

An Imam from Ferizaj was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment for promoting and recruiting on behalf of a terrorist group. The prosecutor accused him of having recruited several Kosovars to go and fight for the Islamic State terror group. In the same trial, two other people were sentenced to 7 and 8 years, respectively. Apparently, over 300 Kosovars have gone abroad to join ISIS in the last two years.

Montenegro

NATO Accession Protocol signed - protests from opposition parties and from Russia

On 19 May 2016, the Accession Protocol was signed by the foreign ministers of the 28 NATO member states. However, Montenegro's definitive admission to NATO is not expected to take place before the spring of 2017, since the Protocol will have to be ratified by the parliaments of all member states.

For Russia, the signature of the protocol is a provocative act and an intrusion into its traditional sphere of influence. Moscow has threatened Montenegro to break all economic relations if the country were to become a full NATO member. Neither does the opposition agree with this approach. Since October 2015, the opposition alliance Democratic Front (DF), the NGO 'No to NATO' and other groups have been staging protests. But according to an opinion poll, 47.3 % of the population are in favour of joining NATO.

Montenegro has no more than 650,000 inhabitants and a small army of just some 2,000 soldiers. The country which separated from Serbia in 2006, is suffering from mismanagement and corruption. Poverty and lack of economic prospects continue to create a significant migration potential.

Ukraine

Military activities intensified

On 24 May 2016, the secretary of Ukraine's national security and defence council Oleksander Turchynov stated that seven soldiers were killed and nine injured in eastern Ukraine in the last 24-hour period. He said that the rebels used heavy weapons that shouldn't have been there under the Minsk agreement. This has been the highest reported daily casualty figure since August 2015, he added. Apparently, the fighting took place

near the town of Avdiivka north of Donetsk. The separatist news agency DAN said that Ukrainian security forces shelled western suburbs of Donetsk in the evening of 23 May 2016, damaging eight residential buildings.

China/India

PM of Tibetan government-in-exile sworn in

On 27 May 2016, Lobsang Sangay was sworn in as the Prime Minister of the Tibetan government-in-exile in the Indian city of Dharamsala. Last March, he had been re-elected for a second term with 57% of all votes. The government-in-exile is not recognized by any country worldwide.