

Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

1 December 2014

Afghanistan

Security situation

Also last week saw military confrontations and attacks in various parts of the country, targeting Afghan security officers, government representatives and also foreigners (e.g. attacks in Kabul on 27. and 29.11.14 on British diplomats and a foreign aid organisation). In the incidents, also uninvolved civilians were killed or injured.

The UN has reported that a total of 7,965 civilians were killed or injured in the period 01.01.- 30.09.14, a rise of 14 percent compared to the same time period of 2013. The main reasons for the death toll among civilians were major military confrontations, followed by improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Pakistan

Actress sentenced for blasphemy

A court in Gilgit (part of Kashmir administratively controlled by Pakistan) has sentenced well-known actress Veena Malik to 26 years in prison for blasphemy. She participated in a mock TV wedding scene staged on a show broadcast by Geo TV and based on the marriage of the Prophet Mohamed's daughter. Her husband and the chief executive of the media group were also sentenced for the apparent religious offence. The defendants have appealed the verdict; in general, rulings of the courts in Gilgit-Baltistan are not enforced in other parts of Pakistan.

The European Parliament (EP) has urged Pakistan to review its blasphemy laws, stating that there have been more than 1,400 blasphemy cases since 1987. Sentences have never been enforced so far.

Polio vaccination workers killed

Once again, polio workers were killed in Pakistan. On 26.11.14, three female health workers and their male driver were attacked by gunmen and shot dead in the city of Quetta. Taliban insurgents and other groups regularly attack vaccination workers, accusing them of being western spies. Pakistan is one of only three countries where the polio disease is still endemic, the others being Nigeria and Afghanistan. Polio cases this year stand at a 15-year high of 265 in Pakistan.

Iraq

More tribal members killed

The Iraqi ministry of human rights reports that on 26.11.14, fighters of the Islamic State (IS) executed at least 74 members of the Albu Mahal, Albu Fahd and Albu Ali al-Jassem tribes in the surroundings of Ramadi (Anbar province). Apparently, the victims' houses were blown up after they refused to join the fighting on the side of the terror group.

Fights between IS militants and Kurdish Peshmerga near Mosul dam

On 26.11.14, Kurdish Peshmerga fighters killed 124 IS militants including seven leaders near Mosul dam, the Kurdish military reported. The Kurdish report named the IS leaders as Abu Bilal, Abu Baraa al-Turki,

Abu Akram al-Turki, Abu Muslim al-Turki, Abu Sumaya al-Turki, Abu Abdul Hmaid al-Turki and Muhamad Rasul Beg al-Masri.

According to the Peshmerga, most of the militants killed were of Uzbek and Chechen nationality.

‘Ghost soldiers’ in Iraqi army

According to a press report, an investigation into ‘ghost soldiers’ has revealed around 50,000 false names on the defence ministry rolls. These ‘ghost soldiers’ only existed on personnel sheets and on payrolls, the report said.

Turkey

Plans for tightening the right to demonstrate

On 25.11.14, a draft law was taken to the Turkish parliament proposing greater powers for police on matters including the use of weapons and strengthening the criminal law. The draft would define Molotov cocktails and fireworks as weapons of assault, allowing police to respond with their own firearms. Another measure suggested is the use of coloured water in water cannons allowing police to recognize suspected criminals after the event. Also, high prison terms are planned:

- up to three years for carrying posters or banners showing the symbols of prohibited organisations;
- up to four years for protesters carrying forbidden devices such as slingshots;
- up to five years for protesters who conceal their face and participate in a rally in support of a terror organisation.

Syria

Security situation

On 25.11.14, the Syrian air force launched the most serious bomb attacks to date on the IS stronghold of al-Raqqa. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the air strikes have killed at least 63 people; other sources put the death toll at more than 115. Apparently, more than 100 people were injured. On 28.11.14, the Observatory reported that scores of civilians were killed in air strikes carried out by the Syrian army over the past 40 days.

Also the US-led coalition forces have carried out at least 30 air strikes against IS positions, mainly in Raqqa province; one of the targets was a former regime military base captured by the jihadists.

IS attack on border crossing

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reports that IS militants have launched new attacks on the Syrian border town of Kobane, with several suicide bombers blowing themselves up. At least one jihadist attacked the Syrian-Turkish border crossing post located on the northern part of the town on 29.11.14, using Turkish territory for the raid. However, the Turkish government press office at the border town of Suruc denied the allegations. After the attack, a fierce clash erupted between the defenders of Kobane and IS militants, claiming the lives of at least 30 people, it was reported. Fighting for the town of Kobane has been ongoing since September 2014. Most recently, the defenders of the town have succeeded in halting the IS advance and pushing back the militants.

Iran

Iranian woman filmed dancing on Tehran tube train without veil

A video posted to the ‘My Stealthy Freedom’ Facebook page could have severe consequences for the young woman who was filmed dancing in a tube train without a veil. The act of defiance is directed against both the ban on dancing in public and the strict dress-code for women. It was only in October that a group of six Iranian women and men were sentenced to 91 lashes and suspended prison terms of six months for filming themselves dancing to Pharrell William’s song ‘Happy’ and posting the clip on Youtube.

Yemen

Reconciliation meeting between Sunni and Shiite Muslims

For the first time, representatives of rival Sunni and Shiite Muslim groups met for official negotiations. In the night of 29.11.14, the Shiite Ansar-u-Allah militia stated that their leader Abdelmalek al-Houthi had met a delegation of Sunni Muslim al-Islah party to de-escalate the crisis between the two factions. In the evening of 27.11.14, al-Islah had indicated its willingness to cooperate. Apparently, the meeting aimed at preventing a religious war. Since long-time president Saleh was ousted in 2012, violence and political turmoil have been raging across the country. Recently, the Shiite al-Houthi rebels, who are already controlling the capital of Sanaa, have extended their influence in central and east Yemen. They are now demanding greater political influence. Their offensive has been met with resistance by Sunni tribal militias close to al-Islah and 'al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula' (AQAP) who fight against the Shiites.

Egypt

Mubarak cleared of murder charges

On 29.11.14, a Cairo criminal court dropped all charges against former president Mubarak in connection with the deaths of more than 800 protesters in spring 2011 and with embezzlement, for which he had been convicted to life in prison in 2012. This verdict was now annulled due to procedural defects.

Anti-government protest rallies

On 28.11.14, the protest rallies organised by the 'Salafist Front' were poorly attended. Violent clashes occurred only in one quarter in eastern Cairo, claiming the lives of two protesters. Before, the government had announced to use 'deadly violence' against troublemakers. More than 100 people with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood were arrested in advance of the Salafist demonstrations. In this context, two police officers were shot dead in two incidents.

Tunisia

Preliminary results of presidential elections

On 25.11.14, Tunisia's election authorities announced the preliminary results. Beji Caid Essebsi (Nidaa Tounis party) secured 39.5 percent of the vote, followed by incumbent President Moncef Marzouki with 33.4 percent; voter turnout was 62.9 percent. The run-off vote is scheduled for 28.12.14.

Libya

IS takes control of port city of Derna

On 27.11.14, Human Rights Watch reported that jihadists have unleashed a 'reign of terror' in the eastern town of Derna. Members of the Majlis Shura Shabab al-Islam and Ansar al-Sharia militias committed serious crimes, among them three executions, beheadings of three Derna residents and several public floggings, the organisation said. In October 2014, the two militias had announced to be part of the caliphate proclaimed by IS extremists.

Nigeria

Bomb attack on Kano's Grand Mosque

On 28.11.14, a triple blast went off at the main mosque of Kano (biggest city in Muslim-dominated northern Nigeria) at about 2pm, as Muslims were at Friday prayers, with two devices exploding inside the mosque and one outside. In the resulting chaos, worshippers were shot at by several people. The governor of Kano State said on 29.11.14 that the attack killed 100 people and wounded another 135. Some Nigerian news agencies put the death toll at around 200. The attack bore the hallmarks of Islamist Boko Haram militants. The mosque is next to the palace of the emir of Kano, Muhammad Sanusi II, who is the second highest Islamic

authority in Nigeria. In mid-November 2014, the emir had called upon the population to pick up arms and fight back against Boko Haram.

Boko Haram attack on Damaturu

On 01.12.14 at around 5am, Boko Haram militants detonated explosives along Gujba Road in the city of Damaturu (capital of northeastern Yobe State) and set ablaze the mobile police force base located on this road. Apparently, clashes are continuing between the attackers and government forces.

Bomb attack near Mubi

In the morning of 27.11.14, a roadside bomb exploded near a bus station roughly 30 km west of the town of Mubi (in the north of Adamawa State) in Mararaba-Mubi area, where a combined team of the military and local hunters was on a routine patrol of the area. Between 25 and 40 people, among them five soldiers, were killed in the incident.

Suicide attack in Maiduguri

On 25.11.14 at around 11am, two young female suicide bombers, suspected Boko Haram members, hit a popular Monday market along Chalarams Road in Maiduguri (capital of northeastern Borno State). Firstly, one of the women set off her bomb. About ten minutes later, when the scene was crowded by rescuers and residents, the second woman detonated an explosive device. At least 67 people are reported to have been killed and around 98 seriously injured.

Damasak seized by Boko Haram

On 24.11.14, Boko Haram militants captured the town of Damasak, an important trade centre (administrative centre of the Local Government Area Mobbar, Borno State, close to the border with Niger). Before, they had chased away around 300 soldiers from the military camp in the town.

Burkina Faso

Military gets key posts in cabinet

In the constituent meeting of the new interim cabinet led by President Michel Kafando, which was held on 24.11.14, four ministerial posts were given to the military. Lt Col Isaac Zida, who took over the post of interim prime minister after ex-president Blaise Compaoré was ousted from office at the end of October, retained his post and also took over the ministry of defence. Likewise, the military will have control of the ministries of interior and sports as well as the department for mineral resources. The rest of the cabinet is made up of scientific and civil society actors.

West Africa / Ebola

Current Ebola situation

Mali confirmed a new case of Ebola on 24.11.14, bringing the total number of cases in the country to eight, with six of the previously identified patients having died.

In an attempt to reduce transmission via direct contact, the government of *Sierra Leone* announced a three-day closure of all shops and markets in Freetown on 27.11.14.

In *Liberia*, the labour market has completely collapsed due to the disease. One in two workers is now jobless, since many companies went bankrupt or have to be dissolved. The World Bank estimates that the total cost of Ebola to Sub-Saharan Africa's economy is between \$3 billion-\$4 billion.

On 27.11.14 the German Lufthansa company handed over to the German federal government a special Airbus A340-300 converted into an evacuation aircraft. The plane was developed on behalf of the German government with the support of the Robert-Koch-Institute in order to safely transport infected volunteers to medical centres abroad. This is the third aircraft of its kind for the transport of patients infected with Ebola.

Mali

Attack near Gao

On 25.11.14, the Malian minister of rural development Bocari Treta escaped a roadside attack on his convoy unharmed while travelling from Gao to Burem. The blast killed two soldiers and wounded another four.

Russian Federation

Security situation in Northern Caucasus

The security situation in the North Caucasus republics remains tense. Severe human rights violations and attacks are the order of the day. Violent clashes are expected to continue, fuelled by separatism, inter-ethnic conflict, jihadist movements, blood feuds, crime and excesses of the security forces.

Meanwhile, the main conflict area has shifted from Chechnya to the neighbouring republics of Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria and Ingushetia. For several years now, the republic of Dagestan has been the focal point of violence, which is reflected by the number of victims. According to the independent non-governmental organisation Kawkaski Usel, at least 529 people (including 104 civilians) were killed in Northern Caucasus in 2013 (2012: 700 deaths; 2011: 736 deaths). In Dagestan, the conflict claimed at least 641 victims in 2013, including 341 fatalities, the organisation says. Chechnya recorded a total of 101 victims of violent contentions (including 39 deaths) in 2013.

According to recent findings of the Russian online paper 'Caucasian Knot', the total number of victims in Northern Caucasus amounted to at least 356 in the first nine months of 2014 (239 dead and 117 wounded). In Dagestan, a focal point of the regional insurgency, 168 people lost their lives, in Kabardino-Balkaria there were 25 fatalities, in Ingushetia 18, in Chechnya eleven and in other areas 17. On an annualised base, at least 500 victims can be expected in Northern Caucasus in 2014, a further decline compared to previous years.

India

Attack on army post in Kashmir

On 27.11.14, a firefight between Indian troops and militant extremists, apparently originating from Pakistan, claimed at least ten lives in Kashmir. The attack occurred in the city of Arnia (Rajouri district), close to the Pakistan border. Experts say a connection is possible with the SAARC summit presently taking place in Nepal, where India and Pakistan are striving to expand expanding trade relations, and also to the regional elections ongoing since 25.11.14 in Jammu and Kashmir.

Already in October, fighting in the disputed region claimed the lives of 19 civilians and wounded dozens. Thousands have fled the region fearing further escalation of the conflict.



China

Attack in Xinjiang

According to official statements, eleven persons were killed by security forces on 28.11.14 in Shache district (prefecture of Kashgar), after they had attacked passers-by with explosive devices and knives, killing four people and injuring 14 others.

Situation in Hong Kong

On 25/26.11.14, the administration cleared most of the protest camp in Mong Kok on Kowloon peninsula, which led to violent clashes between protesters and police. At least 159 persons were arrested, including student leaders Joshua Wong and Lester Shum, who were released on bail the next day. In the night of 01.12.14, new violent protests continued in the morning in Admiralty on Hong Kong Island, with demonstrators attempting to encircle government buildings. Police responded using batons and pepper spray. The incident left more than 40 people injured, including four policemen; 32 were arrested.

There are two protest camps left now, one in Admiralty district, where parts of the barricades were already removed without resistance on 18.11.14; the other one is in Causeway Bay district on Hong Kong Island. Support for maintaining the barricades is diminishing among the people. Surveys say the majority wants to have the barricades removed.

Colombia

FARC releases kidnapped general

On 30.11.14, the rebel organisation Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) released a general and two other people who had been abducted on 16.11.14 (see BN of 24.11.14). No information was given as to whether, and if so, when the peace talks with the rebels will be resumed which had been suspended after the kidnapping.