

Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

29 September 2014

Afghanistan

Security situation

Last week hundreds of Taliban attacked the western district of Ajristan in Ghazni province in the south-east. Reportedly the provincial government prohibited all contacts to the police in this district on 26 September 2014, after the Taliban had taken control of several villages and police stations. The authorities announced that over 100 people had lost their lives there in the last few days and that the Taliban beheaded 15 people.

Further fighting and bomb attacks occurred in Khost (south-east), Laghman, Nangarhar (east), Logar, Maidan Wardak, Parwan (centre), Kandahar, Uruzgan (south), Balkh, Faryab (north), and Kunduz (north-east); these confrontations also claimed civilian victims.

Representatives of state authorities were attacked on 25 September 2014, both in Ghazni province in the south-east and in Helmand province in the south, in each case unknown killers assassinated a public prosecutor. In Logar province in central Afghanistan the driver of a mine clearing unit was kidnapped. A secret serviceman was killed in Kunar in the east.

On 29 September 2014 shortly before the swearing in of the new Afghan president in Kabul many casualties resulted from a bomb explosion near Kabul airport.

President Ghani sworn in

In the morning of 29 September 2014 Ashraf Ghani followed Hamid Karzai in the office of president when he was sworn in. This is the first democratic transfer of power in the country's entire history.

Sexual abuse

According to investigations by the non-governmental organization New Afghanistan Women Association (NAWA) 245 cases of sexual abuse were registered in the provinces of Kunduz, Takhar, Jawzjan, Herat, Balkh, and Sar-i-Pul in the last six months. 65 victims were children between the ages of one and 13 years, 25 of them died as a consequence. The abusers had been powerful individuals, commanders of illegal militias, and other armed individuals, it said. The report also states that most of the offences had not been reported and the perpetrators had not been prosecuted. The Ministry for Woman Affairs announced that in 2013 1,500 cases of violence against women had been recorded and in the first half of 2014 the number had risen to 3,000.

Human smugglers

The director of the organization "Kinderhilfe Afghanistan" has findings that mafia-like smuggler organizations operate in Kabul that offer travel to Europe for prices between 8,000 and 13,000 euros. Depending on the price the people have to travel by lorry, bus or private car with hotel accommodation or by airplane with forged passports and visas. The price includes a detailed story of the flight and names of witnesses.

Pakistan

Security situation

A large number of insurgents, a police officer, and at least seven civilians died in army attacks on insurgent hideouts, fire exchanges at check points, and two suicide bombings during last week in north-western Pakistan. Many people were wounded.

Iraq

Development of the situation

The media reported bombings of IS positions in Fallujah (Anbar province) by the French air force on 27 September 2014, while British fighter bombers which were in operation on 27 September 2014 could not identify suitable targets and therefore did not strike.

On 22 September 2014 IS fighters shot a female human rights activist who had criticized the terror group on social networks on a public square in the centre of Mosul.

Syria

US intelligence agencies underestimated IS

On 28 September 2014 US-President Obama admitted in an interview that the US intelligence agencies had underestimated the IS terror militia and overrated the Iraqi army's capacity to fight the group. Since mid-August the US have conducted air raids on IS positions in Iraq and since mid-September 2014 also in Syria. Also Arab countries are participating in the attacks; France and the UK are supporting the attacks in Iraq. In revenge IS called for kidnappings and assassinations of citizens of those countries belonging to the alliance with the US anywhere in the world.

Alleged leader of the Khorasan group killed?

Site, a company specialized in monitoring Islamist internet sites, reported on 28 September 2014 that Muhsin al-Fadhli, who is considered to be the leader of the Khorasan group, and Abu Jusuf al-Turki, a commander, had been killed in US air strikes in northern Syria. Only a week ago the US had upgraded the group from an unknown terror group to the biggest direct threat for the West. It is said that the group was founded by al-Qaeda veterans to prepare attacks in the US and Europe.

Protests in rebel-held areas against US air strikes

The protests against air strikes by the US and other countries during the traditional Friday protests in the rebel-held areas in Syria became stronger. Jabhat al-Nusra – a group close to al-Qaeda, which was reportedly targeted by the first strikes on 23 September 2014 together with IS - announced on the internet, that this was war not against the group, but against Islam.

Major IS offensive on Ain al-Arab

Ain al-Arab (Kurdish: Kobane) in northern Syria is under heavy IS fire. Since 27 September 2014 also mortars are fired for the first time. Since 24 September 2014 about 1,500 Kurdish Peshmerga fighters have concentrated in the city and therefore on 28 September 2014 a total of about 1,800 Peshmerga soldiers are said to stand at the ready there.

Turkish president calls for the deployment of ground troops

Turkish President Erdogan advocated the deployment of ground troops in Syria, because air strikes were not enough to bring about a lasting solution in the fight against the terrorists. On 02 October 2014 the Turkish parliament will vote on whether or not Turkey will join the US-led coalition against IS.

Turkey

Refugee situation

On 24 September 2014 in his address to the UN General Assembly Turkish President Erdogan accused the UN of failure regarding the growing Islamist terrorist movement in the Middle East; he requested the support of European countries to cope with the increasing number of refugees. On 02 October 2014 the Turkish parliament will debate a potential interference in Syria.

Reportedly about 150,000 people (mostly Kurds) fled to Turkey within a few days as IS advanced with heavy fighting on the city of Ain al-Arab (Kurdish: Kobane) that is close to the border. The UNHCR estimates that their number could soon reach 400,000.

Headscarf/body adornments

On 23 September 2014 the Turkish government allowed the wearing of headscarves in secondary schools. Accordingly female students may wear a scarf as of fifth grade. „Who wants to wear a scarf may do so, who does not want to, won't wear one" Prime Minister Davutoglu told the broadcasting station NTV. „Everybody may live as he or she considers right“. This decision is part of the governing party AKP's policy to expand "liberties", he said. Since AKP came into government in 2002 it was one of its major goals to relax the prohibition of wearing a headscarf in public institutions. The secular parliamentary opposition is vehemently opposing the wearing of headscarves at school and also several trade unions of the teaching profession voiced strong criticism.

According to recent reports the government banned students from wearing tattoos, piercings, and beards among other things. The media said that in this way the Islamist government wanted to motivate students to be more disciplined.

Iran

The attorney general demands ban of communication software

The attorney general wants a prohibition of almost all communication software on smartphones in Iran – thus reiterating its demand from earlier this year.

The agency requested the Minister of Communication to block the very popular smartphone communication apps „Viber“, „Tango“, and „WhatsApp“ within a month. The ISNA news agency reported that the attorney general said that it would resort to its own means, if the ministry failed to impose the ban. As reason for the demand to ban the apps the report stated that because of them information could reach other countries which is considered a risk. Contrary thereto President Hassan Rohani is working for lifting the censorship of the internet. The strictly conservative clergy and its political supporters consider such networks to be US methods of spying and using them a sin ("bring ruin to earth"- "Mofzed bil Arz").

Wide support for President Rohani

Shortly before Hassan Rohani's departure for the UN General Assembly the results of two separate surveys were published. Accordingly the voters largely approve of their president, in particular of his policy of détente. The reformist daily "Shargh" ("East") wrote on 24 September 2014 that 30 million Iranians would vote for Hassan Rohani, if elections were held tomorrow. In the 2013 elections he had received almost 19 million votes. Independent Iranian sources say that President Rohani can continue to count on the support of the revolutionary leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei. However, in his comments of Rohani's policies he always makes provisions to change his mind, if the nuclear negotiations should fail.

Yemen

President Hadi: rebels should clear Sanaa /rebels attacked

The news site „al-Mashhad al-Yemeni“ reported that a few days after the agreement of a ceasefire on 21 September 2014 President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi called upon the Shiite al-Houthi rebels to leave the capital Sanaa. The rebels had made their way to the very centre of town and also stormed the central army command.

Attacks on Houthi rebels and the US embassy

Within only two hours after the Houthi leader had publicly announced the ceasefire with the government a car bomb targeted a rebel check point in Sanaa's north-west. The bombers are still unknown.

Ansar Al-Sharia (close to al-Qaeda) targeted the fighters of the Shite Houthi tribe in several assaults on 28 September 2014. Security sources reported that at least 15 people were killed and many wounded (according to other sources there were 40 casualties or no less than 50) in a suicide bombing in the city of Majsar, east of the capital Sanaa. The assassin drove his car directly into the hospital that served as operational base for the Houthi rebels. The media also reported further attacks near Sanaa, in which extremists had fired at a car with rebels killing five of them. Two Houthi rebels are said to have been wounded by a bomb. The reports also said that the Sunni extremists had mainly targeted Yemen's military until now. However, since the

Houthi took control of the capital Ansar al-Sharia seems to specifically seek out members of the Shiite rebel group for its attacks.

Ansar al-Sharia also took responsibility for a rocket fired on the US embassy in Sanaa on 27 September 2014. Reportedly the rocket detonated 150 m away from the embassy, wounding two guards and destroying cars.

Israel

Supreme Court: Government must close down internment camps for African refugees

The Supreme Court in Jerusalem ruled on 22 September 2014 that Israel must close down a controversial internment camp for African refugees within three months. The ruling also prohibits the detention of refugees for one year without a trial. The Israeli news site „ynet“ described the court's ruling as a "legal drama" for the government. The human rights organization „Human Rights Watch“ had strongly criticised Israel for the deportation of almost 7,000 African refugees at the beginning of September. The Israeli government considers the almost 48,000 refugees from Africa to be illegal immigrants. Politicians keep reiterating that it is beyond the capacities of this small country to take in a larger number of refugees.

Egypt

IS calls for attacks

On 22 September 2014 IS called for attacks against the security forces on the Sinai peninsula. A member of the extremist Ansar Beit al-Makdis, that is active on Sinai and has killed hundreds of members of the security forces over the last year, announced that IS had given them guidance on how to be more effective.

Algeria

Hostage murdered

The French tourist Hervé Gourdel who had been kidnapped in Kabylei on 21 September 2014 has been beheaded by the Islamist kidnappers. The grouping Jund al-Khalifa (soldiers of the caliphate) had claimed responsibility for the kidnapping on 22 September 2014 and demanded that the French president should stop all air raids on positions of the IS terror militia in Iraq within 24 hours. The Algerian terror group responsible for the kidnapping and the murder said that it had separated from the Al-Qaeda in Maghreb organization only last week to enter into an alliance with the IS jihadists.

West Africa

The spreading of Ebola

Unless the measures to contain Ebola are stepped up immediately the World Health Organization (WHO) expects about 20,000 new infections until the beginning of November 2014. An analysis WHO made jointly with the Imperial College in London shows that until 14 September 2014 70.8 % of those infected had died of the virus. According to WHO figures published on 25 September 2014 2,917 people have died of the disease since the first infections became known in West Africa about half a year ago.

Liberian Information Minister Brown warned on 23 September 2014 that the state may collapse in view of the continuing Ebola epidemic. The delay in international aid could cause social structures to break down and trigger new civil wars.

After the nationwide curfew (19 to 21 September 2014) the government of Sierra Leone has put 1.2 million people in quarantine to contain the epidemic. The measures apply to three districts and twelve tribal areas, President Ernest Bai Koroma said in a TV address on 24 September 2014. Port Loko, Bombali, and Moyamba will be isolated with immediate effect, the quarantine already applies in the eastern districts of Kenema and Kailahun. When these new measures will become effective, over one third of Sierra Leone's population will have lost its freedom of movement.

Meanwhile Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan declared that his country was free of Ebola. Before experts had warned against prematurely announcing the end of the epidemic in the country. According to WHO statements 20 Ebola cases were confirmed in Nigeria since July and eight patients died. The director of the Ebola emergency centre in Lagos had stressed that the Ebola outbreak could only be declared as having ended in Nigeria when 42 days had passed after the most recent Ebola case. According to WHO no new infections have been recorded in Nigeria since 08 September 2014, thus Nigeria could only be declared as free of Ebola on 20 October 2014.

Somalia

Al-Shabaab stones a woman

Al-Shabaab members stoned a 33-year-old woman for adultery in Baraw (about 180km south of Mogadishu) on 26 September 2014. Allegedly the mother of three had confessed to have been married to three men simultaneously.

Nigeria

Military successes in fighting Boko Haram

The defence ministry announced on 24 September 2014 that 135 fighters of the Boko Haram terror organization had surrendered to the army and handed over their entire equipment in the Biu Local Government Area (LGA) in Borno state.

Boko Haram kills Christians

In the Hawul LGA in Borno state Boko Haram fighters ambushed the village of Shaffa on 24 September 2014 and the village of Shindiffu on the next day. The majority of the population in both villages are Christians and Boko Haram killed a priest, a teacher and 18 mostly Christians civilians. Ten churches, a hospital, the building of a girl's school and several houses were destroyed. When the attackers were moving on towards another village almost all of them were killed by soldiers.

Boko-Haram leader Shekau killed?

The Nigerian defence ministry announced on 24 September 2014 that the army had killed Boko-Haram commander Mohammed Bashir on 17 September 2014 in the battle for the city of Konduga (about 40km from Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state in the north-east). Bashir had appeared as double of the „late Abubakar Shekau“ in the terror organization's videos. According to earlier announcements of the Nigerian security forces Boko Haram leader Shekau died already in 2009 or at the end of July/beginning of August 2013 from serious injuries sustained in a battle on 30 June 2013 in Cameroon. Cameroon's army had reported Shekau's death already on 21 September 2014, saying that Shekau was killed in an air raid of the Cameroonian air force in his hideout in Nigeria. There is no independent confirmation of his death.

Central African Republic

International Criminal Court investigates

Last week the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague officially initiated a probe into war crimes after preliminary examinations had yielded substantial cause. The probe is directed against Séléka and anti-Balaka that the court accuses of crimes against humanity and war crimes including murder, rape, forced displacement, persecution, pillaging, attacks against humanitarian missions and the use of child soldiers in a report published on 24 September 2014.

Ukraine

Association agreement with EU ratified

The European and the Ukrainian parliaments ratified a comprehensive association agreement on 16 September 2014. For the vote both parliaments had been connected via video to hold a joint session. The agreement was unanimously adopted in Kiev. In Strasbourg 535 members voted for, 127 against and 35 abstained.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said that his country will continue to work towards full EU membership for which the signing of the association agreement was the first, however, decisive step.

Initially, only the political part of the agreement is to be implemented. At short notice the effectiveness of the free trade agreement had been delayed until the end of 2015, following an agreement between EU Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavel Klimkin, and Russian Economics Minister Alexei Ulyukayev on 19 September 2014. According to De Gucht the Moscow government had requested 2,400 changes in the agreement and threatened Ukraine with massive restrictions of its important trade with Russia. The current move is a concession to the Russian reservations by the EU which thus signalled that it is prepared to negotiate. Originally the signature of the association agreement had been scheduled already for 2013. Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovitch yielded to pressure from Moscow by stopping it and moving closer to Russia which caused the massive protests that ultimately led to the current violent conflict.

Separatists in Eastern Ukraine insist on their own regional parliaments

Against the opposition of the Kiev government pro-Russian separatists organized elections for 02 November 2014 in Eastern Ukraine. On 23 September 2014 the insurgents in Donetsk and Luhansk announced that the vote for regional parliaments shall strengthen their move towards independence. They refused to participate in the parliamentary elections in Ukraine to be held on 26 October 2014.

This announcement by the separatists is contrary to a law on a special status, granting extensive autonomy to the rebel regions, which the Kiev government had adopted on 16 September 2014. The law set the date for local elections on 07.12.14. The rebels control an area extending from northern Luhansk to the Sea of Azov 230km to the south and spanning 160km from Donetsk in the west to the Russian border in the east at its widest point.

The situation in Eastern Ukraine is still tense

The insurgents stated that progress has been made in creating the agreed buffer zone in the conflict region. Fighters loyal to Moscow pulled some of their artillery back from the front line. But separatist leader Alexander Zakharchenko said that they had left their arms at places from which the Ukrainian army had not yet withdrawn.

Representatives of the Kiev government and the separatists had agreed on establishing a demilitarized zone at a meeting of the Ukraine contact group on 19 September 2014. Zakharchenko announced that the next round of negotiations could take place in about one month in the Belarusian capital Minsk. The time until then was required to implement the present agreements, he said. The ceasefire agreed on 05 September 2014 is generally observed, but the situation in Eastern Ukraine remains tense.

Serbia

Peaceful gay parade in Belgrade

With the protection of a massive police turnout the first gay pride parade in four years was held in Belgrade on 28 September 2014. Some ministers of the Serbian government and many diplomats joined the parade. The march, that had been authorized only a few hours before its start, remained peaceful. In 2010 the police and hooligans had clashed violently during the parade and in all later years it was prohibited "for security reasons". Human rights organizations and the EU kept reminding the authorities that the right to hold a rally also applied to the gay community. In particular the Orthodox Church again opposed holding such a "shameful parade".

India

Parliamentary elections: BJP loses votes

After a clear election victory in May the Hindu-nationalist governing party BJP won twelve of 32 seats in the by-elections to the regional parliaments. Thus Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party lost 14 seats. The by-

elections were required, because some MPs died and others renounced their mandate after they were elected to the lower house of the parliament in New Delhi.

India's new central government has been in office for a little over 100 days now; and the by-elections served as a first test of the mood in the country. Observers had expected Modi to implement reforms faster, because his BJP holds the absolute majority in the lower house.

China

Violence in Xinjiang

Official media reported that on 21 September 2014 50 people died in a terror attack in Luntai district in the Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture Bayingolin. There were at least four explosions in front of a shop, in a market place and in front of two police stations. 40 attackers in total had been killed; some had exploded themselves. In addition, six civilians, two policemen and two assistant policemen lost their lives. Radio Free Asia cited eyewitnesses saying that local Uygurs were probably behind the attacks as they were enraged by the extensive forced resettlements to prepare for the influx of Han Chinese. No further details are known.

Xinjiang: Life prison sentence for Ilham Tohti

On 23 September 2014 the Intermediate People's Court in Ürümqi sentenced the well-known civil rights activist Ilham Tohti (see BN of 22 September 2014) to imprisonment for life for separatism and incitement to ethnic hatred. His property will be confiscated. Observers consider Tohti to be a moderate and non-violent activist and his sentencing was harshly criticized by the international community. There are fears that the sentence will further poison the tense situation in Xinjiang.

One reason for sentencing the former professor of economics was his website Uygur Online (now blocked) for which also seven of his students had worked. They had been arrested together with him and are now awaiting trial.

Hong Kong protests

Protests during the one-week student strike that started on 22 September 2014, led to the arrest of 74, other sources say 78, protesters, 29 protesters and policemen were wounded until 28 September 2014. On 27 September 2014 ten thousands rallied in front of the seat of government. In the light of the developments the Occupy Central movement surprisingly started to block the financial district already on 28 September 2014 and continued the blockade on 29 September 2014, although the blockade had initially been announced for the beginning of October. In the previous night the police had tried to break the blockade, sometimes with the use of force, but failed to disperse the thousands of protesters; 38 policemen were wounded. The police have withdrawn meanwhile.