

Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

25 April 2016

Afghanistan

Military confrontations

Armed clashes, air and rocket attacks, raids etc. are continuing. Among the affected areas are Kunduz (where Taliban insurgents launched new attacks on the city with at least 6 civilians killed and 147 injured); northeastern Baghlan; eastern Nangarhar, Laghman and Kunar; southern Ghazni; central Logar and Kapisa; southern Uruzgan, Zabul and Kandahar; western Farah and Faryab, as well as northern Jawzjan provinces. Many civilians were killed in air and mortar attacks in several provinces.

In the first three months of 2016, UNAMA registered 1,943 civilian victims (600 killed and 1,343 injured), which is an increase of two percent compared to the time period January-February 2015.

Attacks and assaults

On 11 April 2016, a suicide attack on a bus carrying recruits of the Afghan army killed more than 12 people and wounded at least 38 others in Sara Rud district of eastern Nangarhar province.

On 12 April, a police officer shot dead five of his colleagues during an 'insider attack' in Spin Boldak district of Kandahar province.

On 13 April, dozens of travellers were abducted by armed men in northern Faryab province. In northeastern Takhar province, a member of the provincial council was killed in a shootout between armed militias.

On 14 April, the police commander responsible for the northeastern Kunduz-Takhar-Highway was killed together with three of his guards in Takhar province.

On 19 April, Taliban militants attacked the main intelligence headquarters in Kabul. After a suicide attacker detonated a truck packed with explosives, several gunmen battled with the security officers. Apparently, more than 300 people were injured and at least 64 killed.

On 20 April, a member of the High Peace Council and a guard were shot dead in southeastern Paktika. In southeastern Nangarhar, at least nine civilians were killed in a bomb attack on a bus station.

On 21 April, Taliban insurgents executed a civilian in central Kapisa for spying for the Afghan government.

On 22 April, special forces of the Afghan military shot dead three civilians during a night search operation in southeastern Khost.

On 24 April, a district registrar was gunned down in southeastern Khost. In southern Helmand, a suicide attack on a presidential adviser left two people dead and two others injured. In southeastern Paktika, a bomb attack killed one police officer and wounded another five.

Iran

New 'morality police'

Since 18 April 2016, a new undercover police unit is operating in Tehran, deployed to report suspected transgressions like violation of the dress code requiring women to wear a veil, harassment of women, nuisance through noise or reckless driving. They are not allowed to punish such behaviour, but instead report it to the police. Apparently, a 7,000-strong undercover moral police force has been deployed in the capital Tehran.

Pakistan

New attack against polio vaccination teams

On 20 April 2016, seven police officers were shot dead who were guarding a polio vaccination campaign in Karachi. An offspring of the Pakistani Taliban (Jamaatul Ahrar) has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Provincial minister for minority affairs killed

On 22 April 2016, the minister for minority affairs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province was killed by Taliban insurgents.

Bangladesh

Islam remains state religion

On 28 March 2016, the High Court dismissed the request to no longer recognise Islam as the official state religion within moments after opening the case (see BN of 7 March 2016).

University professor stabbed to death by ISIS supporters

On 23 April 2016, ISIS supporters killed an English language professor in the city of Rajshahi for promoting atheism. He was the fourth professor from this university to have been murdered by suspected Islamists in recent years.

Iraq

Clashes between Kurdish Peshmerga and Shiite Turkmen

On 23/24 April 2016, at least ten people were killed and several others wounded in clashes between Kurdish Peshmerga fighters and Shiite Turkmen militias in the area around Tuz Khurmatu (175 km north of Baghdad, Salahaddin province). Since ISIS was driven out of the area, there have been repeated fights between these groups.

Attacks in Baghdad

On 22 April 2016, at least eight people died and 32 others were wounded in a suicide attack on a Shiite mosque in the southwestern parts of the city

On 24 April, at least 14 people (both security forces and civilians) lost their lives in suicide attacks in two suburbs of Baghdad; at least 28 others were injured in the incidents.

Town of Hit recaptured

On 14 April 2016, dpa news agency quoted Iraqi officials saying that the Iraqi forces have recaptured and completely liberated the ISIS-held town of Hit (Anbar province, roughly 180 km west of Baghdad). The town is located on a key supply route linking IS-held territory in Iraq and Syria. It had been seized by ISIS militants in autumn 2014.

Syria

Humanitarian aid delivered

On 21 April 2016, the largest-ever aid convoy for the population affected reached the country since the beginning of the civil war. The International Committee of the Red Cross reported that a total of 65 trucks of Red Cross and Red Crescent packed with food, medicine and medical equipment arrived in the besieged rebel-held western town of Rastan and its surroundings in the province of Homs, delivering aid to the area's 120,000 residents.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reports that, under the auspices of UN and the Syrian Red Crescent team, 250 injured and sick people and their relatives have been evacuated from the besieged towns of Madaya and Zabadani and brought to rebel-held northwestern Idlib province for medical treatment. Also, 250 people have been rescued from the besieged towns of Kefraya and al-Foua (southwest of Aleppo).

Air attacks and clashes / ceasefire is unravelling

The partial ceasefire (which does not include territories held by ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra) in place since the end of February 2016 appears to be collapsing. There are reports about air attacks on market places in northwestern Idlib province leaving 44 civilians dead, the Syrian Observatory says. Also, clashes have been reported from Latakia, Homs and Hama regions. In April 2016, fighting was resumed in Aleppo province. On 18 April, several major anti-government militant groups, among them Jaysh al-Islam and Ahrar al-Sham, announced a new offensive against government forces. On the same day, about ten rebel groups launched a large-scale retaliation offensive against government forces in Latakia province. Fights were also reported from the area bordering Turkey, where ISIS is active; apparently, the Islamic State militants attacked several refugee camps. At least 30,000 people were said to have fled from the jihadists. On 19 April, Riad Hijab, chief coordinator of the High Negotiations Committee HNC, called for international observers to be sent into Syria to monitor the truce and to hold ceasefire violators to account. On 19 April, at least 44 people were killed in air attacks.

Opposition leaves peace talks

On 13 April 2016, peace talks were continued in Geneva. On 18 April, Syrian opposition coordinator Hijab suspended the group's formal participation, saying that it was unacceptable for the negotiations to go on while the Syrian government continued to bombard and starve civilians. The opposition delegation kept a small technical team in Switzerland.

Parliamentary elections

In the parliamentary elections held on 13 April 2016, Syria's 'National Unity' list, a merger of the Baath party and several minor political parties, gained around 80 percent of the votes. Every candidate on the 200-strong list won one of the parliament's 250 seats. The electoral commission put the voter turnout at 58 percent. However, elections took place only in areas under government control. The opposition had called for a boycott of the elections. Both the UN and the Syrian opposition do not recognise the vote. The UN is envisaging to hold parliamentary and presidential elections within the next 18 months in the context of the peace process.

Yemen

Houthi rebel delegates are attending peace talks

Following a two-day delay, the delegates of Yemeni Houthi rebels arrived in Kuwait on 20 April 2016 after assurances from UN special envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed and several ambassadors that the truce would be respected. Initially, the new round of negotiations had been scheduled to start on 18 April 2016. On that day, the delegation of Houthi rebels and representatives of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh were unable to leave the capital due to severe fighting.

Offensive against al-Qaeda

On 24 April 2016, Yemeni government forces and their Emirate allies advanced into the southern city of Mukalla, an al-Qaeda stronghold. Apparently, the extremists have withdrawn from the city. The advance was covered by airstrikes of the Arab coalition. The Saudi-led military coalition killed more than 800 al-Qaeda fighters in the offensive, among them several senior leaders, the pro-government coalition said.

Turkey

Ergenekon judgment overturned

On 21 April 2016, Turkey's supreme court of appeal overturned the convictions of hundreds of military officials, journalists and academics for plotting to overthrow the government. The court ruled that the convictions lacked evidence for the existence of a terrorist organisation planning to topple the government. The secret gang named 'Ergenekon' had allegedly tried to bring down the Islamic-conservative AKP government with its then PM Erdogan. In the trial, which had run for five years, 275 suspected had been prosecuted for plotting. In 2013, most of the accused were convicted to long-term prison sentences for

attempting a coup. 16 people were handed down life sentences, among them former General Staff Ilker Basbug and journalist Tuncay Özkan. Also, dozens of high-rank military officials were convicted; 21 were acquitted. While most of the sentences were not executed for lack of enforceability, many of the convicted were subject to travel restrictions and other restricting measures. Also, a large number of defendants spent a long time in pre-trial detention. All of the defendants have rejected the claims against them, saying that Ergenekon was an invention of the government to damage the army's reputation. The court of appeal now found that the trial had been marred by inconsistencies such as illegal wiretappings by the secret service and the defective composition of the tribunal which had handed down the sentences.

Dozens of alleged Gülen supporters arrested

Last week, security forces stepped up measures against supporters of Islamic cleric Fethullah Gülen. Media reports say that at least 101 people were arrested in raids carried out in Istanbul and in eight Turkish provinces. In total, more than 140 arrest warrants were issued for alleged membership in a terrorist organisation and for financial support of terrorist activities. Among the arrested are 41 employees of Islamic lender Bank Asya, which had been founded by followers of Gülen and was placed under compulsory administration by the government last year.

Mali

French soldiers killed in mine blast

On 12 April 2016, three French soldiers died near the northern town of Tessalit when their armoured car hit a landmine, bringing French army casualties to 17 since operations began in January 2013 ('Opération Serval').

Protests against French forces in town of Kidal

On 18 April 2016, a protest rally was staged against French military forces in the northeastern town of Kidal. Security forces used tear gas and fired warning shots to disperse the crowd. At least one individual was killed and six others were injured. The protests were triggered when French army forces arrested some suspected Islamists.

Red Cross staff kidnapped

The International Committee of the Red Cross has reported three staff members missing since 17 April 2016. The last contact to the team was near the northern village of Abeibara from where the aid workers wanted to return to Kidal.

Chad

Presidential elections

Incumbent Idriss Déby won the presidential elections held on 10 April 2016 with a majority of 61.6 percent of the votes, the national election commission stated on 21 April in the capital N'Djamena. Opposition leader Saleh Kebzabo came second with 12.8 percent. A total of 6 million registered voters had been called to elect the new president among 13 candidates. President Déby has been ruling the country for 26 years.

Gambia

Protests

On 16 April 2016, 12 protesters were arrested after a rally against President Jammeh, who has been in power since 1994 and is planning to run for president again in the next elections scheduled for December 2016. Already on 14 April, arrests were made after a protest rally. Amnesty International reports that a political activist died in pre-trial detention.

Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia

Mediterranean Sea: shipwreck claims scores of lives

Both UNHCR and IOM confirmed reports of eyewitnesses that last week, a boat with several hundred migrants sank in the Mediterranean Sea between Libya and Italy. According to IOM, the victims came from Egypt, Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia. The disaster happened when 200 people who had started their journey from Libya on another vessel were to get onto a bigger boat which was already overcrowded; the boat capsized and rapidly sank. The 41 survivors who had started their journey on different vessels, were able to save their lives because they had either not yet entered the vessel or managed to swim back to smaller boats.

Somalia

Security situation

On 19 April 2016, unidentified gunmen dressed in Somali army uniforms shot at civilians in Mogadishu's Hodan district, killing three children and wounding a dozen other people. Eyewitnesses say that the perpetrators opened fire after they were disturbed while conducting a robbery.

On the same day, a woman and her six children died when unknown militiamen put fire to their house in the port city of Merca in what appears to have been a related clan dispute.

Also on 19 April, ten or twelve school children were kidnapped from a village school in Harardhere district (Mudug region), apparently by al-Shabaab fighters.

On 21 April, a roadside bomb killed six Ethiopian AMISOM soldiers in Bay region. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Also on 21 April, AMISOM units and Somali soldiers attacked al-Shabaab camps in two villages near El Bur (Galgudud region), killing at least 25 insurgents. Three Somali soldiers were said to have lost their lives in the operation.

On 22 April, AMISOM soldiers and Somali units killed three al-Shabaab insurgents near the town of Wajid (Bakool region) in an operation to clear roadblocks set up by the Islamists to prevent the delivery of aid supplies.

Also on 22 April, Somalia's service NISA (National Intelligence and Security Agency) foiled an attack on a hotel in Mogadishu's Wardhigley district. NISA officers detained two suspected suicide bombers. During a gunfire, a vehicle packed with explosive devices was caused to explode injuring three civilians.

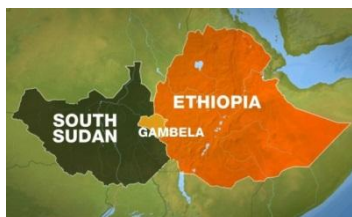
On 23 April, a hand grenade attack on a restaurant in Burhakaba (Bay region) killed at least one civilian and injured another six. Apparently, the attack was carried out by al-Shabaab insurgents.

The Somali military reports that on 24 April, at least six al-Shabaab fighters were killed in a security operation in Bay region. Three insurgents were detained in a village near Burhakaba (Bay region).

Ethiopia

Raid claims scores of civilian lives

Ethiopian government officials say that on 15 April 2016, at least 182 people were killed in a raid on several villages near the town of Jakawa (Gambella region bordering South Sudan). Apparently, the attackers were members of the Murle ethnic group living in South Sudan (Jonglei state). They are regularly accused of stealing cattle in the bordering regions. In the raid, several people, most of them children, and 2,000 cattle were deported to South Sudan, the report said. The army persecuted the attackers to the border and killed many of them. The government also announced negotiations with South Sudan to allow cross-border persecution of the raiders.



It cannot be excluded that one of the South Sudanese warring groups is responsible for the attack. Some eyewitnesses say that they saw other ethnic members among the attackers. Gambella region is mainly inhabited by ethnic Nuer, which is the group of South Sudanese President and rebel leader Riek Machar. Also, Gambella is hosting some tens of thousands of South Sudanese refugees who escaped the civil war which had broken out in 2013.

Eritrea

Freedom of the press: Eritrea last in line

On 19.04.2016, Reporters Without Borders published their 'World Press Freedom Index 2016', where Eritrea ranked last from 180 countries, thus occupying the bottom position for the ninth time in a row. The reasons given for this is the lack of free speech in President Issayas Afewerki's totalitarian dictatorship and the inhumane conditions under which several reporters are detained.

The index is concentrated on the assessment of the conditions for media and journalists in the respective country itself. The population's access to foreign media is not into consideration. In Eritrea, foreign TV channels like CNN, BBC or Al-Jazeera can be received via satellite; also, opposition websites are in principle available on the Internet.

Serbia

Early parliamentary elections end with Prime Minister Vucic gaining absolute majority

According to first results of the early elections held on 22 April 2016, Prime Minister Vucic's Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) gained an absolute majority (49.7 percent). Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic's Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), which so far has been co-ruling the country, came second with 12 percent. The extreme right wing Serb Radical Party (SRS) gained 8 percent of the votes, well above the five percent threshold, and became the country's third political force. Its leader by Vojislav Šešelj has only recently been acquitted by the International Criminal Tribunal for crimes in former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The Democratic Party (DS), which until 2014 had been ruling the country, obtained only just 6 percent. PM Vucic promised the citizens to improve the standard of living and to intensify the fight against the rampant corruption.

Although SNS already enjoyed a comfortable majority, PM Vucic went to the polls two years early in order to get a strong mandate for his country's rapprochement with the EU and for the implementation of important reforms. Critics fear an excessive concentration of power in the Prime Minister's hand. Large parts of the civil society blame him for undermining the democratic institutions with his authoritarian political style and for keeping a tight rein on both the media and the judiciary.

FYR Macedonia

General amnesty causes severe national crisis

Since 12 April 2016, when President Gjorge Ivanov (VMRO) announced that he would stop investigations into the bugging scandal which came to be known in 2015, and pardon all those involved (56 politicians were under investigation, among them three ministers), mass protests and heavy clashes between anti-government protesters and the police have occurred nearly every day. Opposition forces demand the President's resignation, the withdrawal of the amnesty and the postponement of the elections scheduled to be held on 5 May 2016. Already before, the opposition had pledged to boycott the election, saying that evidence was found indicating a new fraud (see BN of 11 April 2016). The EU and the U.S. have also criticised the general amnesty, since it protects corrupt politicians and undermines both the rule of law and the mediation efforts. Observers see a security problem for the entire EU, because a solution to the conflict is not in sight.

Background

Since 2014, Macedonia has been experiencing a serious crisis. The opposition accused the government led by Prime Minister Gruevski (VMRO-DPMNE) of electoral fraud. In 2015, the crisis exacerbated, when opposition forces blamed the government for having intercepted 20,000 people. In 2015, an agreement was mediated by the EU, intended to clarify the circumstances of the affair and to prepare for early elections. The implementation of the agreement is making no progress.

Democratization progress and human rights situation not satisfactory

In its latest assessment of the degree of democratization 'Freedom in the World 2016', the international NGO Freedom House confirms that Macedonia has further deteriorated compared to the previous year. The country is classified as 'partly free' and assigned grade 4 on a point scale from 1 to 7 (2014: 3). Shortcomings were recorded particularly regarding the rule of law and the liberty of the media. Polarisation

and concentration of power are impairing democracy. The Bertelsmann Foundation comes to the same conclusion in its current Transformation Index (BTI 2016), stating an increasing ‘oligarchisation of politics’. The US Department of State says in its latest Human Rights Report (April 2016) that Macedonia has continuing shortcomings in the field of human rights. Ethnic or sexual minorities are subject to discrimination. Particularly prison conditions are marred by human rights violations, since violence in custody is common.

Azerbaijan/Armenia

Ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh is largely holding

The Azeri defence ministry reports the killing of one Azeri soldier near the border with Nagorno-Karabakh (southern Caucasus region) on 14 April 2016. However, in general the ceasefire agreed on 5 April 2016 with Russian mediation is largely holding in the conflicted region.

In total, at least 110 people have been killed on both sides since the new outbreak of the conflict in the beginning of April 2016.

Burundi

UN: Torture and mistreatment on the increase

On 18 April 2016, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein reported a marked increase in torture and mistreatment. He said that at least 345 new cases have been recorded since the beginning of the year (since April 2015 at least 595 cases). He stated that the responsibility rests with the secret service ‘Service national de renseignements’ (SNR), the police and, to a lesser extent, the army. He added that impunity is continuing to prevail.

China

Xinjiang: high reward for clues leading to terrorists

Since 11 April 2016, authorities in Xinjiang have been paying a reward of up to five million Yuan (approx. 678,000 €) for clues leading to extremist religious or terrorist activities including illegal religious activities like the operation of religious schools without official authorization. Human rights activists see a further restriction for the Muslim Uighurs living in the region, whose religious activities are already under tight control. In September 2015, for example an Imam was convicted to seven years imprisonment after having taught religious education without official authorization in Aksu (Chinese: Akesu) prefecture. In the same prefecture, eight farmers were sentenced to seven years each for having said their prayers together in places other than those specified for this purpose by the authorities.

Indonesia/China

Four Uighur terrorists killed

In the beginning of April 2016, Indonesian police reported the killing of four out of six Uighurs who had joined the Jihadist group Eastern Indonesia Mujahideen (also known as Mujahidin Indonesia Timur – MIT) in the last few weeks. The remaining two escaped, police said. MIT members consider themselves followers of the Islamic State group. In 2015, a court in Western Jakarta had sentenced four Uighurs to six years imprisonment for having planned to join MIT. At the end of 2015, Indonesian police arrested a suspected Uighur suicide attacker on Western Java. In January 2016, two more Uighurs were arrested there.

Myanmar

Amnesty

According to official press releases, President Htin Kyaw pardoned 83 political prisoners on 17 April 2016.

Cuba

Party Congress confirms Castro in office

The Party congress of Cuba's Communist Party, held from 16 to 19 April 2016, confirmed President Raúl Castro as the Party's first secretary. Already in 2013, he had announced to resign from office in 2018.