

## Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

# Briefing Notes

8 September 2014

### Afghanistan

#### Security situation

On 01 September 2014 the security forces could prevent two suicide bombings in the western province of Farah. In the Farah district of Posht-e-Koh 16 civilians had been targeted and murdered on their way to work by the Taliban on 30 August 2014. In the provincial capital Farah City the bodies of a district deputy and a school principal were found on 04 September 2014. Both had been abducted by insurgents two days earlier.

On 03 September 2014 the Head of the Office for Pilgrimages and Religious Affairs in the south-eastern province of Ghazni was kidnapped and murdered three days later, probably by insurgents.

The Taliban attacked a building of the Afghan secret service in Ghazni city, the capital of that province, on 04 September 2014, killing at least 26 and wounding about 150. At least four civilians were among the casualties.

Several days of operations by the Afghan security forces against insurgents left many dead and wounded, including civilians, in the northern province of Kunduz. The provincial government announced that three of the seven districts of that province are still controlled by the insurgents, in this case probably by the Taliban and fighters of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).

Further fighting with insurgents has been reported from the provinces of Farah, (west), Helmand (south), Paktika (south-east), Logar (centre), Nangarhar (east), Faryab, and Balkh (north).

### Pakistan

#### Security situation

The Pakistani army reported that in the north-western border region more than 910 militants have been killed and several bomb building workshops and ammunition factories have been destroyed. The former rebel strongholds Miran Shah, Mir Ali, Datta Khel, Boya, and Degan in Northern Waziristan have been cleared, the report said.

#### Taliban splinter group formed

It is said that a Pakistani Taliban grouping called Jamat-ul-Ahrar (group of liberation fighters) has split off from the Pakistani Taliban umbrella organisation (TTP). The group's leader is allegedly well connected to al-Qaeda. A group of the Mehsud tribe is said to have broken away already some months ago.

#### IS calling for fighters

Last week calls to join the IS militia in Iraq appeared in the border region to Afghanistan.

#### Government crisis

Last week protesting government opponents and the police clashed violently in the capital. At least three protesters were killed. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif whom government critics accuse of election fraud, refuses to resign.

#### Natural disasters

Floods, mud slides and collapsing houses claimed over 100 casualties in the Kashmir region over the weekend.

## **Syria**

### **The US and Syria bomb Islamic State units**

For the first time the US air-force attacked Islamic State (IS) units in western Iraq near Haditha dam. The Syrian air-force attacked IS strongholds in the country's north-east, among them the cities of ar-Raqqah and Deir ez-Zor. Even Iran's foreign minister warned against the IS militia and called for international action against it. US President Obama announced an action plan against IS to be disclosed on 10 September 2014.

## **Lebanon**

### **Christians gear up to fight IS**

According to a press report of 06 September 2014 the Christians in Lebanon are preparing themselves to fight against the IS fighters. Business with arms had never been as brisk on the black market. Christians felt at risk, e.g. because church walls were sprayed with phrases like "Islamic State is coming", the report continued. Because Lebanon has the highest percentage of Christian population in the Middle East (the Munzinger Archive says about 35%) many Christians have fled to Lebanon before.

## **Palestinian Autonomous Areas**

### **Abbas threatens to abandon government of national unity**

There are reports that Palestinian President Abbas threatened the radical Islamist Hamas, that is holding power in the Gaza Strip, to quit cooperating with Hamas in the government of national unity, if Hamas does not accept the government's authority. In a visit to Cairo on 06 September 2014 Abbas complained that there are 27 under-secretaries of ministries exercising power in the Gaza Strip. Abbas commissioned a delegation with negotiating a new partnership with Hamas. Hamas has been holding power in Gaza since 2007 while the West Bank has been governed by the Fatah under Abbas' leadership. In early June the two organizations had again formed a government of national unity.

### **Palestinians protest confiscation of land**

Hundreds of Palestinians protested on 05 September 2014 after Israel had announced a major confiscation of land on 31 August 2014; 400 hectares in the south of the West Bank between Hebron and Bethlehem are to be declared Israeli territory. The protesters demand an end to Israel's settlement policy in Palestinian areas. The occupation violates international law and is one of the major obstacles to finding a solution for the Middle East conflict by establishing two separate states for Israel and the Palestinians. The decision was also criticised by the US government, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, and German Foreign Minister Steinmeier.

## **Yemen**

### **Fighting**

When the Shiite rebels and their followers after three weeks of protests also blocked the access roads to the international airport, Yemeni security forces tried to break the blockade with tear gas, water canons, and bulldozers. Several people suffered gunshot wounds and one woman died. The Shiite Houthis consider the government's concessions offered last week to be insufficient and continue to call of the government's resignation and the restitution of the subsidies for energy. For six years (until 2010) they had fought against former president Ali Abdullah Saleh and after he was ousted continued their fight against the Islamists that are close to the governing party Islah in the country's north.

Fighting in the province of al-Jauf (north) demanded 40 casualties over the weekend.

## **Turkey**

### **Corruption investigations discontinued**

On 01 September 2014 the Istanbul Prosecutor's Office announced that the corruption allegations against the son of Turkish President Erdogan and 95 other suspects would be dropped due to lack of evidence to bring charges. These proceedings had merely been an attempt to topple the government. Corruption investigations against Bilal Erdogan and other suspects had been initiated on 25 December 2013. Thereafter the Turkish government ordered the transfer of many of the policemen and prosecutors involved in the investigations, had several policemen arrested and blamed the corruption allegations on the movement of the cleric Fethullah Gülen.

## **Egypt**

### **Eleven policemen killed in bombing**

Eleven policemen died in a bomb attack on their armoured car in the north of the Sinai Peninsula on 02 September 2014. Extremist groupings, now also including IS cells, have repeatedly targeted the military and the police in Sinai. It is said that 500 members of the security forces have been killed in attacks there over the last year.

### **Homosexuals arrested**

The Egyptian state news agency reported on 06 September 2014 that seven men have been arrested, initially for four days, in connection with the publication of a video of a same-sex marriage on charges of "homosexual excesses". A search is on for two others. The men are to stand trial also for the publication of photos offending public morals.

Same-sex relationships are not expressly illegal, but other offences like fornication or shameful behaviour in public are often used for the criminal prosecution of homosexuals. In April 2014 three men had been given eight year prison sentences and a fourth one three years for allegedly organizing "abnormal parties" and wearing women's clothing.

## **Libya**

### **Counter-government founded in Tripoli**

According to a press release of 06 September 2014 the followers of the former Islamist dominated parliament founded a counter-government in Tripoli which is headed by the university professor Omar al-Hassi. The counter-government's cabinet consists of 13 ministers who were sworn in on 06 September 2014. The formation of a second government splits the country in two. In Cyrenaika province most tribes support the former government led by Abdullah al-Thinni. The local councils in Libya's west are on the side of the Misrata alliance and thus support the counter-government.

## **West Africa/Ebola**

### **More Ebola infections and victims**

On 03 September 2014 WHO reported that the number of Ebola victims had climbed to 1,900 and that of infections to 3,500. This is the highest number of registered infections since Ebola was discovered in 1976. The UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) warned of a food shortage in the affected regions saying that the closure of borders, the isolation of border areas, and trade restrictions had already caused supply shortages and massive price increases. On 22 August 2014 Senegal closed its borders to Guinea for the second time within one year and cut all air and maritime transport with Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone to prevent the virus from spreading. On 07 September 2014 US President Obama announced the deployment of troops to the West African countries affected by Ebola, to set up quarantine stations and protect the international aid workers. Obama described the Ebola epidemic as a threat to the national security of the US.

## **Somalia**

### **Al-Shabaab leader Godane is dead**

On 05 September 2014 the US Department of Defence announced the death of Ahmed Abdi Godane „Abu Zubayr“. Al-Shabaab's leader had been killed in an US air strike when he met with militia commanders on 01 September 2014. Two other high-ranking members had also died in the attack, the report said.

The news station al-Jazeera reported on 06 September 2014 that the Islamists vowed vengeance for Godane's death. According to the Somali security minister the secret service had information of al-Shabaab plans to attack hospitals, schools, and government buildings. The Somali government offered al-Shabaab followers an amnesty if they surrender within 45 days.

Al-Shabaab appointed Sheikh Ahmed Umar „Abu Ubaida“ as Godane's successor. Not much is known about the Sheikh, who is thought to be in his early forties, coming from the area around Kismayo, belonging to the Dir Clan and having joined al-Shabaab in 2006. Allegedly he was involved in a shake-up within the militia and the killing of Omar Hammami "al-Amriki" after the latter fell out with Godane. He also is said to have been the Islamist's "governor" in the regions of Bay and Bakool. However, observers consider it possible that "Abu Ubaida" is a totally different person whose name al-Shabaab will not disclose for security reasons.

## **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

### **Islamists arrested**

In a nationwide raid on 04 September 2014 16 suspected extremist Islamists - including the famous preacher of hatred Husein Bilal Bosnic - were arrested. They are charged with the foundation of a terrorist association and sending Islamist fighters to Iraq and Syria. A new law has recently been passed in Bosnia and Herzegovina that makes it an offence to incite people to fight in wars abroad. A total of 150 Bosnians are said to have gone to fight in Syria.

## **Kosovo**

### **Islamists arrested**

On 11 August 2014 40 Islamists were arrested who are suspected of having fought for the terrorist organizations IS and al-Nusra in Syria and Iraq. The charges read: Offences against the constitutional order and security of the Republic of Kosovo and formation and funding of as well as recruiting for a terrorist organization. Reportedly explosives, arms, and ammunition were seized.

Kosovo's Islamic community welcomed the arrests. It is assumed that another few hundred radical-Islamist extremists are in Kosovo.

## **Ukraine**

### **Fragile truce in Eastern Ukraine**

The ceasefire negotiated on 05 September 2014 after many months of fighting proves to be rather fragile. Explosions could be heard in the government-held port city of Mariupol in the night to 07 September 2014 and a vehicle was aflame at a government check-point. When pro-Russian rebels shot at a check-point a woman was killed and three people were wounded on 07 September 2014, a city official announced. A filling station and surrounding buildings caught fire in Mariupol, probably because of shelling. Ukrainian Interior Minister Arsen Avakov blamed the separatists for the incident and announced a reinforcement of the army. The insurgents in turn said they had been provoked by the military.

On 07 September 2014 explosions and gunfire were also heard near the separatist stronghold of Donetsk. The city is still occupied by pro-Russian militiamen, but the airport is controlled by the army. This is where fire was exchanged. The insurgents in Donetsk reported four civilian casualties. This has not been confirmed yet by independent sources. The pro-western leadership in Kiev stressed that it is strictly observing the ceasefire agreed on 05 September 2014. Both sides repeatedly accused each other of ceasefire violations.

### **Hundreds of thousands fleeing the conflict**

Vincent Cochetel, Director of the UNHCR European Office, said that the fighting in Ukraine and its consequences has uprooted more than a million people who sought protection within Ukraine and abroad. At least 260,000 were internal refugees and about 814,000 persons had gone to Russia; although not all of them could be considered to be refugees. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres is afraid that mass expulsions in some parts of Ukraine may be imminent. According to the UN almost 2,600 people have died in the conflict until now.

### **Russian Federation/North Caucasus**

#### **IS threatens to set up "Islamic Caliphate" in the Caucasus**

On 04 September 2014 "Islamic State" published a video threatening to start a war in the Caucasus, mainly in Chechnya. The video shows terrorists standing next to an old Soviet fighter jet they captured on a military airport in the Syrian province of ar-Raqqa. One of the terrorists addressed Russian President Putin announcing the "liberation" of the Caucasus and the establishment of an "Islamic Caliphate".

### **India/Bangladesh/Myanmar**

#### **Al-Qaeda establishes branch**

In a video message Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri declared on 03 September 2014 that everything would be done to liberate the Muslims on the Indian subcontinent from injustice and oppression. The objective would be the establishment of a Caliphate in Myanmar, Bangladesh, and in the largely Muslim populated Indian regions of Assam, Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir. This organization called "Kaidat al-Jihad" and led by the Pakistani Asim Umar should tear down the "artificial borders" drawn between the Muslim communities. The Indian interior ministry said that it was concerned and alerted by these threats.

Experts of terrorism interpret the message as Al-Qaeda's attempt to regain some of the attention it had recently lost to the terrorist militia Islamic State (IS). Both organizations used to be allies until the spring of 2014 when they fell out, because IS expanded its activities from Iraq to Syria against the will of the Al-Qaeda leadership.

### **China**

#### **Xinjiang: Promoting interethnic marriages**

Last week the state media reported that marriages between Han Chinese and ethnic minorities will be financially subsidized in Qiemo county (in the south of Xinjiang). Couples will receive the equivalent of about EUR 1,240 annually for the first five years. There are additional benefits when looking for housing or a job, subsidies for health care and free education for interethnic couples' children. There are only very few of these marriages at the moment. A similar policy is already in place in Tibet.

The policy is meant to relax tensions in the relations between the Han and in particular the Muslim Uighurs and to promote the assimilation of minorities into the Han dominated Chinese mainstream society. Some observers fear, however, that the policy may backfire, if the Uighurs feel that their cultural identity is at risk.