

Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

17 December 2012

Afghanistan

Security situation

Two civilians and one US soldier were killed and 17 civilians and four troops were wounded in a suicide bombing carried out by the Taliban in front of a NATO base close to Kandahar Airport (South Afghanistan). The suicide bomber blew up his car just as a convoy was entering the base. Ten young girls aged between nine and eleven were killed in the Nangarhar province, East Afghanistan, on 17 December 2012 when they stepped on a landmine. The explosion detonated when they were collecting firewood. It is thought that the landmine dates back to the times of the Soviet campaign.

According to United Nation sources, 4,801 security relevant incidents occurred between 1 August 2012 and 31 October 2012, representing a 14 percent decrease year-on-year. 70 percent of the incidents occurred in the South and East. Contrary to the downward trend, there has been a rise in incidents in the southern and eastern provinces of Kandahar, Kunar, Nangarhar, Logar and Wardak and in the northern Faryab province. The number of civilian casualties has risen by 28 percent to 2,557 in the period between 1 August 2012 and 31 October 2012.

Pakistan

Amnesty International reports on human rights violations by the Army and the Taliban

Amnesty International published a report on 13 December 2012 (“The Hands of Cruelty”: Abuses by Armed Forces and the Taliban in Pakistan’s Tribal Areas) about human rights abuses by Pakistani security forces and the Taliban in Pakistan’s tribal areas. It reports on arbitrary arrests, torture and abductions by the Army. The Taliban is accused, inter alia, of carrying out arbitrary attacks on innocent civilians, executing troops in detention, engaging in alleged espionage as well as torture and abductions.

The Pakistani government has been urged to revoke the “Actions in Aid of Civil Power Regulations 2011” to subject the tribal areas to Pakistani law and to the competency of Parliament instead of continuing to apply the rules of the Frontier Crimes Regulations which date back to colonial times. Furthermore, the Pakistani government has been urged to prosecute violations of human rights both by the Military and by the Taliban.

A spokesperson of the Pakistani Army immediately denied the report by Amnesty International. He said it contained a collection of lies that are part of a malicious propaganda campaign against the Armed Forces.

Karachi – violent killings

On 13 December 2012, a police officer was killed on his way to work in Baldia Town district, an activist of the Muttahida Quami Movement party was killed in the Paper Market area close to the city centre, a customs officer and his nephew were killed in the Labour Colony area (Landhi district), a leader of the Bengali Action Committee in Al-Noor Society (Gulberg district) was killed, a shop owner was killed in Mithadar (Sad-dar Town. One person was killed in Rasheedabad (Baldia Town), Allah Wali Chowrangi (Jamshjed Quar-ters), in Rizvia Society (Liaquatabad Town) and in Gulitan-e-Jauhar. It is unlikely that there is any link between the crimes and the identify of all the perpetrators is unknown.

A bomb exploded in Landhi district of Karachi on 12 December 2012. The identity of the bombers is unknown. The same day, unidentified persons shot two people and injured eight in the Rasheedabad neighbourhood in the district of Baldia Town. A police officer was gunned down by unidentified gunmen in

another incident in Ittehad Town (Baldia Town district). A doctor was also shot by unidentified gunmen in a shop for medical supplies in Zia Colony of Korangi district.

Two rangers and one traffic police officer were shot dead by unidentified gunmen at Ali Asif checkpoint in the vicinity of the superhighway on 10 December 2012.

Belochistan – violent killings

On 13 December 2012, armed motorcyclists opened fire in Qandari Bazar, Quetta, seriously wounding three people. At least two of the victims belong to the Shia minority of the Hazara. A member of the Hazara was shot in a similar incident in Quetta. One man was shot dead at a dressmakers' on Sarki Road. A doctor was also shot dead in Mastung District, ca. 25 km South of Quetta. The identity is not known of any of the perpetrators in all cases.

Suicide bombing on party convention of the Awami National Party

A bomb exploded at the venue of a party convention of Awami National Party (ANP) in Kulladher (Charsadda District, near Peshawar). Seven people including two police officers were wounded. The event had not yet begun. A spokesperson of the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Ehsanullah Ehsan, claimed the organisation is responsible for the bombing. He said this was just the beginning of these type of actions against the ANP and Muttahida Quami Movement parties, adding that the cause was the parties' secular orientation. They had been urged to desist from organising these type of events. However, the parties are unlikely to meet this demand especially given the fact that parliamentary elections are to be held next spring.

Syria

Fighting continues

According to media reports, government troops have launched an offensive in order to regain control over the suburbs of Damascus. At least 25 people were allegedly killed in the bombing of a mosque in Damascus on 16 December 2012. Several districts were bombed including the district of Jarmuk which had the largest Palestinian refugee camp before the fighting broke out. Many Syrians have also sought refuge here. The leaders of the "People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC)", Ahmed has allegedly left his Headquarters in Jarmuk and has moved to the coastal town of Tartus. There is a growing divide between the Palestinians. Some of them – such as Ahmed Jibril – support the regime, whereas others support the rebels.

According to information provided by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights which has its Headquarters in London, at least 125 people were killed or wounded in attacks carried out against the village of Akrab (Hama province) on 11 December 2012. It is not yet clear whether the rebels or pro-government shabiha militia were responsible for the attack.

Fighting lasted several days in the North over one of the largest military academies that was considered to be the last remaining Army base in the region surrounding Aleppo. Meanwhile the rebels are said to have seized the infantry base Muslimijeh. At least 270 people are thought to have been killed nationwide.

Calls for cooperation between the regime and rebels also from Iran

The most important ally of the Syrian regime, Iran, has called for constitutional reform and elections. Iran has called upon rebel groups and the Syrian government to form a "National Reconciliation Committee" that will pave the way for the establishment of an interim government. It said all warfare should be terminated immediately and that economic sanctions should be lifted. The Syrian Vice-President Faruk al-Scharaa subsequently told the Lebanese newspaper "al-Akhbar" that he was in favour of establishing a government of national unity that would put an end to civil war as neither side could win the war.

Opposition alliance upgraded/West anticipates imminent end to the regime

Following in the EU's footsteps, US President Barak Obama also recognised the Syrian opposition block "National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces" as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people on 11 December 2012. In doing so, he acknowledged the alliance which was still being referred to as the "legitimate representative of the hopes of the Syrian people" back in November 2012. On 12 December 2012, the participants of a meeting of representatives of 114 nations and 14 international or-

organisations followed suit in the Moroccan city of Marrakesh, agreeing to officially recognise the opposition. Nato General Secretary Rasmussen said on 13 December 2012 that he expected the regime to come to an end soon. The US shares this view.

US considers al-Nusra-Front to be an international terrorist organisation

On 11 December 2012, news leaked of a decree signed by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on 20 November 2012 according to which the al-Nusra-Front is considered to be an “international terrorist organisation” since it is an ally of the Al-Qaeda terrorist network in Iraq. The extremist organisation has claimed responsibility in the very recent past for several suicide bombings in Syria which claimed large numbers of casualties. It refuses to acknowledge the Syrian National Coalition set up in November 2012 and is demanding the establishment of a strictly Islamic state. Criticism of this US decision is mounting in Syria.

EU and Germany step up humanitarian aid

The European Commission has announced that it will be increasing its humanitarian aid for the people of Syria by a further EUR 30 million bringing it up to EUR 126 million. More than 1.2 million people have been displaced within Syria because of the civil war. Almost 500,000 Syrians have flown to neighbouring countries. The German Foreign Minister announced before the meeting of the International Friends of Syria group in Marrakesh that German aid for victims of the Syrian conflict would be increased by an additional EUR 22 million, bringing the total up to more than EUR 90 million.

Turkey

Numerous arrests at KCK operations

85 suspects were arrested in connection with the investigations conducted against the pro-PKK organisation “Koma Civakên Kurdistan” (KCK, Union of Communities in Kurdistan) on 8 December 2012 while operations were carried out simultaneously under the management of the public prosecutor of Diyarbakir in Siirt, Batman and Mardin. The suspects include the mayor of the town of Siirt, Selim Sadak. Some of the suspects, including Sadak, were released after two days. 48 remain in detention.

Israel/Palestinian Autonomous Territories

Anti-boycott Act against settlements suspended by Supreme Court

According to reports published in “Jerusalem Post”, Israel’s Supreme Court has temporarily suspended the controversial Law that punishes those who call for a boycott against settlements in the West Bank. The Court instructed the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to present reasons why the Act should not be suspended by 14 March 2013 at the very latest. This has rendered the Government’s main argument that the Law has not applied yet invalid. In the view of the human rights group Gush Shalom, which has filed an appeal against the Law, the Law violates the right of freedom of expression. At the same time, they say Palestinians in East Jerusalem have the right to protest against the Israeli occupation.

The law that was criticised in Israel and by the international community was adopted by the Knesset in July 2011. The Law says that anyone who calls for a boycott of goods from settlements or who advocates avoiding the settlement can be fined up to €10,000. Moreover, compensation can be demanded by parties calling for a boycott – even more seriously – even though the party claiming compensation will not need to furnish proof of the level of damage caused.

Response to the recognition of Palestine as a non-member observer state: Israel suspends payments

Israel’s Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman has said that Israel will suspend payment of taxes and customs to the highly-indebted Palestinian Autonomous Authority for four months. In response to Israel’s refusal to recognise the Palestinian Territories as a non-member observer state, Jerusalem has already withheld 460 million shekels (€92 million). The money Israel collects for the Palestinians would not be withheld, it would be offset against debts to the Electric Corps, Mr. Lieberman said. The Palestinians owe Israel a total of 1.6 billion shekels. Israel’s allies such as the US and the EU had explicitly urged Israel to carry on making the payments if it wanted to avoid the collapse of the Autonomy Authority with unforeseeable results.

Iraq

Christians

According to a report by Radio Vatican the Chaldean Archbishop of Kirkuk has asked Western countries to help Christians in Iraq. At the same time, however, he objected to new admission programmes for Iraqi Christians abroad. He said that countries like France, Germany, Sweden and Australia were unintentionally encouraging Christians in Iraq to flee and emigrate. He called for relief, education and agricultural projects for Christians in Iraq. The Iraqi Prime Minister Al Maliki insists that no moves should be made that might encourage Christians to emigrate.

Egypt

Narrow margin of approval for draft constitution in the first round

The referendum held in Egypt on 15 December 2012 on the new Constitution in ten of the country's provinces, including Cairo, showed a narrow majority for the Islamist-backed draft Constitution. According to the Freedom and Justice Party established by the Muslim Brotherhood, approx. 56.5 percent of the electorate voted in favour of the draft. There is general consensus in Cairo among Islamists and the opposition that the majority of voters reject the draft constitution. The opposition says there have been numerous breaches of the Election Law. They are demanding a repeat of the referendum. They say voters had been intimidated, polling stations had been closed early and that observers had been prevented from entering polling stations. They claim turnout was around 33 percent. The official result will not be announced until voting has taken place in the remaining 17 provinces (on 22 December 2012). The opposition has called for nationwide protests on 16 December 2012.

Mali

New government

The Prime Minister appointed head of the interim government in April 2012, Cheick Modibo Diarra, was arrested in the early hours of 11 December 2012 by troops. They were acting on instructions issued by Commander Amadou Haya Sanogo, one of the leaders of the military coup in March 2012. Diarra announced his resignation and that of his government on national television a few hours after his arrest on 11 December 2012. On the evening of 11 December 2012, interim President Diounkounda Traore announced that Django Cissoko would be the new head of government. Cissoko presented his new cabinet on 15 December 2012. Members of the Army which had forced former Prime Minister Diarra to resign will keep their jobs as Economy Minister, Defence Minister and Foreign Minister. Three new ministries have been created for each of the regions in the North which have been occupied by radical Islamists since the beginning of the year.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Deployment of troops stepped up in the area of Goma

Citing eye witness reports, the "New York Times" reported on 16 December 2012 that several trucks carrying Rwandan troops had recently passed the Congolese-Rwandan border and had set up camp within a radius of 20 miles around Goma (the capital of the East Congolese province of North Kivu). According to information by staff of relief organisations in Goma, the Congolese Army has also stepped up its deployment of tanks, heavy artillery and members of allied militia in the past few days. They are said to also include the Hutu militia FDLR ("Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda") which has hitherto been fought by the government Army.

The talks that had begun on 9 December 2012 in the Ugandan capital of Kampala to settle the conflict between the Congolese government and M23 rebels reached a stalemate soon after they began, inter alia, owing to the discord over the agenda; however according to Ugandan press reports of 17 December 2012 they are to be continued this week.

Goma had been seized by M23 rebels on 20 November 2012 – according to the United Nations – with the support of Rwandan troops. On 1 December 2012, the rebels withdrew to positions 20 km north of the city after the Congolese government had agreed, inter alia, to engage in direct talks brokered by the regional organisation International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) with the rebels about their demands. Of the total number of 914,000 internally displaced persons in the province of North Kivu, around 500,000 have been displaced yet again above all due to the conflict between the government's Army and the M23 rebels since April 2012.

China

Death penalty for Uighur aircraft hijackers

A court in Hotan Prefecture (Autonomous Uighur Region Xinjiang) sentenced three men to death and another to life in prison on 11 December 2012. They are accused, inter alia, of hijacking a passenger aircraft shortly after take-off in the city of Hotan on 29 June 2012 as members of a terrorist organisation. Members of the crew and passengers managed to overcome the six hijackers. Two of the hijackers were wounded and died in prison.

Myanmar

Nationwide protests by monks

The violent way security forces have been dealing with demonstrators led to nationwide protests by Buddhist monks last week. The protests were reminiscent of the beginning of the “Saffron revolution” of 2007 which met with a brutal crackdown on anti-copper mine protesters in Sagaing Division. Security officers had disbanded several camps on 29 November 2012 which protestors had erected in front of Letpadaung Mine. More than 100 persons, including many monks, were injured. Although the authorities apologised for the attacks, the monks felt this did not go far enough. This was followed by demonstrations by monks and lay-people in Rangoon, Mandalay and other cities. More than 1,000 monks insisted in Mandalay on 12 December 2012 that the government apologise for the attacks, that those responsible be punished and that the protestors be released. They said they would continue to demonstrate until their demands had been fulfilled. Government representatives brought an official government apology to wounded monks recuperating at a hospital in Mandalay on 15 December 2012.

Russian Federation

Self-criticism by the opposition following protest in Moscow

The Russian opposition, according to *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, has responded to the unauthorised protest in Moscow at which dozens of government critics were arrested on 15 December 2012 with strong self-criticism. The “action was poorly planned”, said Ljubov Sobol, Member of the Coordination Council of the Opposition. Ilja Jashin, one of the best-known representatives of the opposition's protest movement said “we are witnessing a certain weariness; people are hoping for a quick result. But they need to realise it will not be a sprint but a marathon.” As a result, the next mass protest in Moscow will not take place until next spring. Jashin is one of the best-known faces of street rallies alongside the blogger and opposition activist Alexei Navalny, leader of the Left Front Sergei Udaltsov and TV presenter Xenia Sobchak. All four were detained for several hours at the rally on 15 December 2012. The police detained a total of 40 protestors. They have to expect high fines of up to €7,000 after the tightening of the Law of Assembly. The protest held on Lubianka Square in Moscow on 15 December 2012 had not been authorised as the authorities and organisers were unable to reach agreement on the marching route. Notwithstanding this several thousands of people took to the streets to demonstrate against Putin and to subsequently gather at the memorial at the Headquarters of the Federal Security Service which commemorates victims of the Soviet repression.

The rally against the government course of President Putin was supposed to commemorate the beginning of the wave of demonstrations in Russia one year ago. However, willingness to protest has flagged considerably in recent months.