

Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

15 February 2016

Afghanistan

Civilian casualties rise once again in 2015

According to UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan), the number of civilian casualties in 2015 rose once again, with the highest number of civilian deaths and injuries recorded in a single year since 2009. In its latest report (Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2015), UNAMA documented 11,002 civilian casualties (3,545 deaths and 7,457 injured) in 2015. The latest figures show an overall increase of four percent during 2015 in total civilian casualties compared to the previous year. There was a particularly large increase in women casualties and child casualties. Ground engagements between the conflicting parties claimed the majority of casualties (37 percent). The situation in the north-east of Afghanistan is the main reason for the sharp rise in casualties (above all after the Taliban briefly seized the city of Kunduz). Whereas the number of casualties decreased slightly in all regions, it rose in the north-east from 929 to 1,978. All in all, it can be assumed that the number of casualties and fatalities is higher than indicated by UNAMA as not all cases were documented.

Military clashes last week

Following clashes with security forces, the Taliban cut power supply lines in Faryab province early last week which supply power from Turkmenistan. Several Taliban insurgents and Afghan troops were killed in clashes in the north-eastern province of Baghlan last week. Around 800 civilians were reportedly killed or wounded and over 1,000 have allegedly fled. In the meantime, the Taliban have offered to allow the destroyed power lines to be repaired if the Army suspends its operations. The power lines supply electricity from Uzbekistan, inter alia, to the capital of Kabul which has been afflicted with power shortages since late January. In the provinces of Herat and Farah in western Afghanistan, six troops and eight insurgents died in attacks on Army checkpoints. The governor of Kunduz province announced on 9 January 2016 that the suburbs of the provincial capital were under the control of the Taliban. Fighting and targeted military operations also took place in Nangarhar (eastern Afghanistan) and an offensive against the Taliban launched by the Army in Maidan Wardak (central Afghanistan) sparked heavy fighting. Heavy fighting has taken place between two rival Taliban groups in Paktika (south-east Afghanistan) since 13 February 2016. Further fighting also took place in Ghazni (south-eastern Afghanistan). In Helmand (southern Afghanistan), Pakistani troops reportedly advanced to four kilometres shy of Afghan territory at the weekend.

Number of deliberate killings rose in 2015

According to UNAMA (see above), the number of civilian casualties targeted was higher in 2015 than the previous year. These included deliberate killings of aid workers, tribal elders, civilian Government officials, mullahs, government and justice officials.

Targeted bombings and attacks last week

On 8 February 2016, at least six persons were killed and another nine were wounded when a suicide bomb detonated at a market in Paktika province (south-eastern Afghanistan). The attack was aimed at the district governor of Yahyakhel district. At least six persons were killed in another suicide attack in front of a bakery in Gardez (Paktia province, south-eastern Afghanistan).

On 10 February 2016, the Director of the Public Health Office was wounded in Khost (eastern Afghanistan) when gunmen shot him in the back. In Nimruz (southern Afghanistan), four members of the secret service

were wounded in an attack and one civilian was killed when a roadside bomb exploded in Faryab (northern Afghanistan). Six police officers were killed by colleagues in a so-called insider attack in Kandahar (southern Afghanistan), seven others were wounded.

Three police officers were wounded in a explosives attack in Farah City (western Afghanistan) on 1 February 2016.

Number of abductions in Nimruz province increases

Residents of Nimruz province in southern Afghanistan are concerned about the rising number of abductions. Businesspeople and wealthy persons are reportedly no longer sending their children to school or college. It is feared they will stop investing in the area.

Land grabbing is becoming a security problem

In Logar province in central Afghanistan, so-called land grabbing, unlawful land acquisition, is becoming a serious security problem.

Iraq

Execution

The first execution in months took place on 4 February 2016. The man executed was charged with being involved in acts of terrorism three years before.

Voluntary departures

According to a press release, 1,970 Iraqi nationals have left Germany voluntarily since 1 September 2015. The majority departed on scheduled Iraqi Airways flights. Some stated the failure of human traffickers to keep their promises whereas others stated family reasons in Iraq as the reason for their departure.

Syria

Security conference on Syria

Representatives of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) from 17 countries as well as the United Nations, the European Union and the Arab League agreed on a 3-point plan at a security conference held in Munich on 12 February 2016 leading to a reduction in violence and more relief supplies for Syria. A nationwide cessation of hostilities is due to commence in one week. Notwithstanding this, it will continue to be possible to fight ISIS, the al-Nusra Front and other groups designated as terrorist organisations by the United Nations Security Council. However, the agreement is already being called into question. Many observers assume that the Assad regime with the support of Russia and also the rebels intend to use the remaining time for territorial gains. The road map for implementing the cessation of hostilities threatened to reach a stalemate at the weekend.

Suicide bombing in Damascus

At least eight police officers were killed and a further 20 persons were wounded in a suicide bomb that detonated in Damascus on 9 February 2016. A suicide car bomber blew himself up in a car bomb at a police officers' club at a much-frequented vegetable market in the residential district of Masaken Barsain. ISIS has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Turkey

Airstrikes in Syria

Turkey's Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu announced on 14 February 2016 that Turkey would continue to pound Kurdish strongholds in northern Syria despite international appeals. He said the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed branch, the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), control vast parts of the Kurdish settlement areas in northern Syria. The Turkish Army has shelled targets near Azaz

in northern Syria in the past two days. Kurdish fighters had managed to seize a military airfield from rebels fighting against President Bashar-al-Assad with the support of Russian combat aircraft.

Potential perpetrators of attacks arrested

According to media reports, the Turkish army arrested 34 heavily armed people in Gaziantep province along the Syrian border. They seized 15 kilograms of explosives and four booby-trapped jackets. The arrested people included ten women, four men and twenty children. The other side of the Syrian border is under the control of ISIS.

Attacks on pro-government newspapers

Masked assailants threw Molotov cocktails and fired pump-action shotguns at two newspapers in Istanbul on 11 February 2016. The newspaper Yeni Safak announced on its website that the incendiary devices has started a fire but that there were no casualties. According to media reports, attacks were also carried out against the newspaper Yeni Akit. Masked assailants fired shots at the editor's office and threw Molotov cocktails at parking vehicles. Both newspapers are considered to be pro-government and support, inter alia, the military offensive against the PKK in the south-east of the country in their coverage.

Tunisia

Barrier wall against Islamists from Libya

Following several attacks by ISIS last year, Tunisia has secured its border with Libya. The barrier wall consisting of berms and water-filled trenches stretches nearly 200 kilometres from the town of Ras Jedir on the Mediterranean coast to the town of Dhiba further southwest. The barrier wall along the border with Libya is several metres high in some places. This means it will no longer with easy above all for aircraft to cross around half the length of the frontier between the two countries. According to the Tunisian Defence Minister, Farhat Hachani, there are plans to render the entire border impassable for motor vehicles and also to install electronic devices.

Libya

Plans for a unity government

Libya has meanwhile launched a further attempt to establish a unity government. Libya's Presidential Council had announced a revised list of cabinet members on 14 February 2016 after the internationally recognised Libyan Parliament in Tobruk had rejected the unity government on 25 January 2016, demanding that a new government be presented.

The new unity government is part of an agreement between the two rival Libyan government that was brokered by the U.N. and signed in December 2015. However, the agreement was disputed by both parliaments from the very outset.

According to media reports, the Parliament in Tobruk had voted against the proposed unity government because it thought it was making too many concessions to the militia. It said it would also give preference to a unity government with ten instead of the envisaged 32 members and would like the Chief Commander of the Army, General Khalifa Haftar, to retain his position. The U.N. has so far refused to amend the negotiated proposal for a unity government.

Mali

Suicide bombings

On 9 February 2016, Mali's Defence Minister Tieman Hubert Coulibaly announced that an IED (improvised explosive device) attack had been carried out on an army patrol in the city of Mondoro (Mopti Region). Three Malian soldiers were killed and two others were wounded.

On 12 February 2016, six U.N. peacekeepers were killed in an attack on a U.N. base in Kidal, 30 others were wounded. The Malian jihadist group Ansar Dine which has ties with Al-Qaeda has claimed responsibility for

the attack. Shortly after the attack in Kidal, three Malian soldiers were killed when they were ambushed by militants near Timbuktu. A spokesperson for the Malian Army said they had been ambushed by jihadists.

Chad

Presidential elections:

On 9 February 2016, the ruling President Idriss Déby was officially nominated by the MPS (Mouvement Patriotique du Salut) as its candidate for the presidential elections to be held on 10 April 2016. Déby has been in office since the military coup in 1990 and was last re-elected in 2011. If he wins the election, he has said he will reintroduce presidential term limits. These limits on presidential terms had been scrapped in a constitutional amendment in 2005.

New Prime Minister

President Idriss Déby appointed Albert Pahimi Padacké (RNDT, Rassemblement National pour la Démocratie au Tchad) as new Prime Minister on 13 February 2016. Padacké will succeed outgoing prime minister Kalezeube Pahimi Debeuf (MPS) who resigned. Padacké had previously announced his support for Déby's presidential candidacy.

Sudan

Relief convoy for Darfur

On 12 February 2016, the first U.N. convoy carrying humanitarian relief supplies arrived for persons who had fled the fighting in the Jebel Marra region (cf. BN of 8 February 2016). Trucks containing relief supplies arrived at the UNAMID base (United Nations Mission in Darfur) in Sortoni in North Darfur, according to the United Nations authority responsible for coordinating humanitarian aid. Around 23,000 displaced persons, 90 percent of whom are women and children, had fled during the previous days.

Somalia

58,000 children at risk of starvation

More than 58,000 children are at risk of dying from starvation owing to the drought in Somalia if they are not provided with urgent humanitarian assistance, the United Nations has warned. According to the world body, 4.7 million people are in urgent need of humanitarian aid. The level of malnutrition, especially among children, is of serious concern. Around 305,000 children under the age of five years are acutely malnourished.

The U.N. estimates are based on empirical values in relation to the last drought in 2011 which claimed the lives of 250,000 persons.

Turkish Airlines was probably the target of aircraft bomb attack

The attack on an Airbus of Daallo Airlines on 2 February 2016 (cf. BN of 8 February 2016) was destined for Turkish Airlines, according to a spokesperson of Daallo Airlines. The airline had cancelled its flight from Mogadishu to Djibouti because of bad weather. Many passengers therefore switched to a Daallo Airlines flight. Meanwhile, al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack. If it proves to be true, this will have been the first attack the extremists carried out on an aircraft. Somali security forces have arrested 20 persons so far who are suspected of being involved in the attack.

Government calls for reconciliation between Galmudug and ASWJ

The Somali government has invited the Ahlu Sunna wal Jamaa (ASWJ) moderate-Islamist militia to participate in talks between the interim government of Galmudug (Galmudug Interim Administration – GIA) in a bid to achieve greater inclusivity for the members of the ASWJ in the new state. Galmudug considers itself an autonomous state within the larger Federal Republic of Somalia and encompasses the southern half of the city and Gaalkayo district in Mudug region as well as territories in the regions of Mudug and Galguduud. Galmudug participates in political life at federal level. The ASWJ is fighting against al-

Shabaab in central Somalia. It is opposed to the Cabinet line-up by the government in Mogadishu which it accuses of corruption and inefficiency. There have been several military confrontations in the past between the GIA and the ASWJ.

Nigeria

Boko Haram: at least 30 persons killed in village raids

In the early hours of 12 February 2016, insurgents of the Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram raided the village of Kachifa in Borno state, Damboa Local Government Area. The following day, they raided the neighbouring village of Yakshari. At least 30 people were killed in the attacks.

Boko Haram: Around 60 killed in raid on refugee camp

During the morning of 10 February 2016, two female suicide bombers killed more than 60 people at a camp for people displaced by an insurgency of the jihadist Boko Haram group in the northeast Nigerian town of Dikwa (which is located around 85 km east of Maiduguri in Borno state, north-eastern Nigeria). A third woman bomber handed herself in to the authorities after spotting a relative at the camp. According to National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), 58 persons were killed in the blast and 78 persons were injured. Some 50,000 displaced people who are fleeing the violence carried out by the Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram currently live at the camp.

Almost 200 Shiites of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) charged

On 10 February 2016, some 191 members of the Shia sect Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) were charged by Nigerian prosecutors at an improvised court hearing held inside the central prison in the northern city of Kaduna. They are charged with illegal possession of firearms, causing a public disturbance and incitement in connection with the violence that erupted between the IMN and Nigerian soldiers in the northern city of Zaria on 12 and 14 December 2015 (cf. BN of 14 December 2015). Four of the suspects who are under the age of 18 were released on bail. The human rights organisation Human Rights Watch which has condemned the attack by the Army claims that at least 300 Shiites were killed during the clashes, citing eye witness reports and hospital sources whereas the sect itself claims more than 1,000 persons were probably killed. The Nigerian Army has declined to say how many Shiites were killed. The Kaduna state government has established a judicial commission of inquiry into the incidents that occurred in December 2015. The pro-Iranian sect led by Ibrahim Zakzaky who was arrested on 14 December 2015 has around 3 million followers in Nigeria.

More killed at pro-Biafra demonstration

In the capital of Abia in Abia state, south-eastern Nigeria, members of the pro-Biafra organisation IPOB (Indigenous People of Biafra) gathered to pray in front of the National High School on 9 February 2016. After praying, they wanted to protest for the release of their leader Nnamdi Kanu and for Biafra's independence. During the prayer session attended by IPOB members, police and soldiers swooped in to arrest the leader of the group. They fired shots at the protesters, killing between 5 and 16 members of the group, injuring several and arresting around 20. The police also arrested 25 members of the IPOB in Enugu, capital of Enugu state, on 9 February 2016, who had gathered at the Naira Triangle in preparation for a protest march.

Nnamdi Kanu, who is also the Director of Radio Biafra, was arrested by officials from the Department of State Services, DSS, in Lagos on 16 October 2015. He is currently being detained at Kuje Prison in Abuja. He is on trial at the Federal High Court in Abuja for treason.

Cameroon

Boko Haram: Attack at funeral

On 10 February 2016, two suicide bombers blew themselves up at a Muslim funeral wake in Nguetchewe, Far North Region along the border with Nigeria. Six persons attending the funeral were killed alongside the two suicide bombers, around 30 persons were wounded.

North Korea

Army General executed

According to South-Korean media reports issued on 10 February 2016, the North Korean leader Kim Jong Un ordered the execution of General Ri Yong-gil, chief of the North Korean Army's general staff in February 2016. He has been accused of corruption and factionalism.