

Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

18 January 2016

Afghanistan

Military confrontations

More military operations were carried out last week against rebels and more attacks were carried out against army and police checkpoints and convoys. The provinces worst affected were Kandahar, Helmand, Zabul (southern Afghanistan), Nangarhar (eastern Afghanistan), Farah (western Afghanistan), Takhar (north-eastern Afghanistan), Jawzjan, Faryab (northern Afghanistan).

According to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), over 700 civilians were killed or wounded in 2015.

Suicide bombings and attacks

At least seven members of the security forces and three attackers were killed in a suicide attack on the Pakistani consulate in Jalalabad (Nangarhar province, eastern Afghanistan) on 13 January 2016, eleven persons were wounded. The car of a suicide bomber exploded prematurely in Lashkargah (capital of Helmand province) also on 13 January 2016, killing the suicide bomber. In Qarabagh district in Ghazni province in south-eastern Afghanistan, a commander of the Afghan Local Police (ALP) and three of his bodyguards were killed in a suicide bombing on 13 January 2016. On 16 January 2016, a missile was fired on a bank in Parwan (Central Afghanistan), nobody was injured. At least 13 civilians were killed and 14 were wounded in a suicide bombing in Jalalabad on 17 January 2016. The target of the suicide bomber was a jirga (traditional assembly of leaders) at the politician's home.

Pakistan/Afghanistan

Afghan nationals deported

Last week, Pakistan reportedly arrested 160 Afghan nationals who were residing unlawfully in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and moved them across the border crossing point in Torkham to Afghanistan.

Pakistan

Suicide bombings

On 13 January 2016, at least 15 persons were killed and 30 were wounded in a bombing of an office of a polio vaccination team in Quetta.

No harsher penalties for child marriage

A bill submitted by the government party envisaging harsher penalties for marriage with children was rejected by the Council of Islamic Ideology, after deeming it "un-Islamic" and "blasphemous". The bill was therefore thrown out. The statutory minimum age for marriage is 16 for girls and 18 for boys. Those who breach the law receive a fine and 30 days' imprisonment. According to estimates, one partner in 30 percent of all marriages is underage.

Iraq

ISIS launches massive attack near Tikrit

According to Iraqi security forces, ISIS fighters launched a massive attack against Iraqi security forces near the city of Tikrit (Salahaddin province) on 14 January 2016. The reportedly approached the city from several directions and managed to bring part of the main road junction between Tikrit and Kirkuk under their control.

Suicide bombings

On 11 January 2016, a large number of persons were killed in a series of suicide bombings in Baghdad. At least 18 persons were killed in a single suicide bombing at a shopping centre carried out by several suicide bombers in the business district of al-Yadida in eastern Baghdad which has a large Shia population.

Two bombs later went off in the eastern town of Muqdadiya (Diyala province, around 80 kilometres north-east of Baghdad), killing at least 23 people. At least two persons were killed in another suicide bombing near the city of Baquba which is also in Diyala province. Around 100 persons were wounded. The bombings hit areas that have a very large Shia and Sunni population.

Journalists killed

According to a press release, armed militiamen shot dead two Iraqi TV journalists returning from a reporting trip in the city of Baquba (Diyala province) on 12 January 2016

Iraqi nationals living abroad issued with passports

According to a press release issued on 11 January 2016, the Federal Foreign Office says the Iraqi Embassy in Berlin has so far issued 1,400 Iraqi returnees with passports. At the end of October 2015, it had issued 150 passports to Iraqi nationals returning home. The Finnish government reported on similar trends several weeks ago.

Syria

Clashes in Deir ez-Zor/civilians abducted

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, ISIS invaded the province of Deir ez-Zor in northern Syria on 16 January 2016 which resulted in heavy fighting in the suburb of al-Baghalijeh in the city of the same name. More than 130 persons were reportedly killed, including at least 85 civilians and 50 Syrian government troops and regime fighters. 400 civilians, including women and children, were abducted. They are said to have been taken to the west of the province and in the direction of Raqqa province which is around 125 kilometres north-west. Deir ez-Zor is around 450 kilometres north-east of Damascus and is largely under the control of ISIS; around 250,000 persons are being prevented from leaving this area. According to reports about the poor conditions in the province, a Russian transport aircraft reportedly dropped around 22 tonnes of food and medical supplies in the province.

Airstrikes on Raqqa province

Raqqa province was also the scene of ground fighting and airstrikes although it is unclear whether the coalition led by the U.S. or the Syrian or Russian air force were behind them. At least 40 persons were reportedly killed.

Aid convoy reached Madaya/further convoys on the way

On 11 January 2016, an aid convoy reached the besieged town of Madaya for the first time since October 2015 (cf. BN of 11 January 2016). On 14 January 2016, 44 trucks brought aid supplies to Madaya. 21 trucks are reportedly en route to the besieged Shia villages of al-Fua and Kefraja in Idlib province.

Turkey

Response to bombing in Istanbul

In the wake of the suicide bombing in Istanbul on 12 January 2016, in which ten Germans were killed and at least 15 persons were wounded, the Turkish army attacked almost 500 ISIS positions in the neighbouring

countries Iraq and Syria on 14 January 2016 according to government sources. Over 200 ISIS supporters were killed within the space of 48 hours. None of these reports have been confirmed yet by Syria or Iraq. The Turkish government has blamed ISIS for the suicide bombing in Istanbul and has identified a 27 or 28-year-old Syrian national as the suicide bomber who was registered in Turkey as a refugee. ISIS has not yet claimed responsibility for the attack. Following the blast, Turkish police arrested over 70 suspects in seven cities. On 17 January 2016, 16 suspects were brought before a judge.

Suicide bombings in the south-east

On 13 January 2016, at least six persons were killed and over 40 were wounded in a suicide attack on a police station in the city of Cinar in Diyarbakir province. The perpetrators detonated a car bomb and the attackers then reportedly fired rockets at the headquarters. Officials blamed the blast on Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) militants.

On 17 January 2016, according to Turkish security forces, three police officers were killed and four were wounded in an attack in Sirnak province (south-east Turkey) when Kurdish extremists detonated a bomb as an armoured vehicle driven by security forces drove past.

Work permit for Syrian refugees

The Turkish Minister for European Affairs announced on 11 January 2016 that Turkey is planning to furnish Syrian refugees with a work permit that will be issued six months after they have registered. Refugees with a limited residence permit will be allowed to work in the refugee camp. The regulation has already been approved by the Council of Ministers and entered into force when it was published in the Official Journal on 15 January 2016. In companies, the quota of refugees is not allowed to exceed ten percent of the Turkish personnel.

ECHR on ban of former Kurdish party

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg ruled unanimously on 12 January 2016 that the ban on the former Kurdish party, the Democratic Society Party (Demokratik Toplum Partisi) (DTP), is a violation of fundamental rights. The DTP which was founded in 2005 was the fourth strongest party at the regional elections in March 2009 and the leading party in areas inhabited by Kurds. It was banned by Turkey's Constitutional Court in 2009. In the view of the Constitutional Court, the party was considered to be the political branch of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party PKK, inter alia, because the DTP had consistently refused to call the PKK a terrorist organisation. The Constitutional Court rated this as proof that there were close ties between the DTP and the PKK. The ECHR ruled, by contrast, that the speeches delivered by the leader of the DTP party did not involve any direct or indirect support of the PKK or its leader Abdullah Öcalan. In consequence, the Court did not detect any serious violation of fundamental rights such as a threat of political pluralism or the basic principles of democracy that would have justified banning the party.

Burkina Faso

Islamist terrorist attack in the capital – killing many

On 15 January 2016, three or four assailants raided the Café Cappuccino on picturesque "Kwame Nkrumah" boulevard in the capital of Ouagadougou and started to execute people at point-blank range. They then attacked foreigners at the popular luxury Splendid Hotel directly across the road. They occupied the hotel and sprayed bullets, killing guests. During the morning of 16 January 2016, Burkinese security forces raided the hotel with the support of French and U.S. special forces. The Yibi Hotel located nearby which several terrorists withdrew to was also involved in the fighting. 156 hostages were freed during the liberation campaign, around 50 civilians and four security officers were injured. At least three terrorists were killed. At least 29 hotel guests were killed, the majority of whom were white foreigners. According to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) which claimed responsibility for the attack, the Al-Mourabitoun group carried out the attack.

Cameroon

Suicide bombing on mosque

On 13 January 2016, a suicide bomber blew himself up in the Extrême North region during morning prayers at a mosque in the village of Kouyape (near the town of Kolofata, along the border with Nigeria). At least twelve persons were killed. The terrorist organisation is being blamed for the attack.

Somalia

African Union base attacked

On 15 January 2016, fighters from the radical Islamist al-Shabab militia attacked a base for African Union peacekeepers in Somalia in Ceel Cado (El-Ade), in the Gedo region, south-western Somalia. Dozens of persons were killed and injured in the attack. There is no information available yet on the number of casualties. Somalian and Kenyan troops are deployed at the base.

Nigeria

Niger-Delta amnesty programme extended

On 14 January 2016, a spokesperson for the Niger-Delta amnesty programme announced that it was to be extended for a further year. President Muhammadu Buhari had announced in May 2015 that he wanted to end the programme in late 2015.

The former President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua had offer an amnesty to militants in the oil-rich Niger Delta in 2009 in order to put an end to the Niger-Delta conflict, offering them amnesty, monthly financial support, training and reintegration into society if they laid down their arms. The offer was accepted by all known rebel leaders and their supporters. Before then, militant attacks on oil production facilities and abductions of employees working in the natural oil industry had led to a sharp decline in oil production.

As the training and reintegration programme has only been completed by some of the 30,000 former militants admitted to the programme, it was feared that new unrest could erupt in Delta if the programme was terminated.

Burundi

Serious violations of human rights by security forces

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, accused security forces and members of the militia attached to the pro-government movement known as the Imbonerakure on 15 January 2016 of torture, rape and executions. The victims have reportedly been buried in mass graves. It appears that members of the ethnic minority of the Tutsi are being deliberately targeted. In the wake of attacks on military facilities on 11 December 2015, security officers reportedly carried out acts of retaliation in the capital of Bujumbura which included gang rape.

Coup generals sentenced

Four generals involved in a failed coup attempt staged in May 2015 were sentenced to life in jail on 15 January 2016. Nine persons were sentenced to 30 years in prison, eight persons were sentenced to five years in prison.

Serbia

Snap elections announced

Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic has unexpectedly announced that snap elections will be held. Despite having a stable majority in Parliament, Vucic wants his people to issue him with a new mandate after being just two years in office in order to complete the reform process and Serbia's accession to the EU in 2020. It is a foregone conclusion that the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) will win the election. Vucic continues to have

widespread support among the population. Economic experts criticise that bringing parliamentary elections forward is both politically unnecessary and expensive.

FYROM Macedonia

Prime Minister resigns

On 15 January 2016, Macedonia's Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski who has been in office since 2006 tendered his resignation.

He did so on the basis of an agreement with the opposition that had been brokered by the EU in July 2015. An interim government including opposition parties is to be set up before re-elections are held in April 2016. A special public prosecutor is also to be appointed and an election committee with equal participation is to be set up to clean up the electoral register which had been rigged. A Committee for Freedom of the Media is also to be set up.

Background:

Macedonia has been in the throes of a political crisis since parliamentary elections were held in April 2014. The Social Democratic Union of Macedonia had accused Nikola Gruevski's party (the Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity VMRO-DPMNE) of electoral fraud. The crisis had come to a head the previous year when the SDSM accused the government of wiretapping 20,000 persons. The wiretapped conversations involve electoral fraud and large-scale corruption. The EU stepped in in June 2015 following public protests and a dubious police offensive against Albanian terrorists in May.

Increase in number of forged passports along the Macedonian-Greek border

According to reports, more than 150 forged passports are seized daily along the border between Macedonia and Greece. Since mid-November, Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans are the only nationals allowed to enter Macedonia. According to official statements, there has been a sharp rise in the number of nationals of other country. For each Syrian, Iraqi or Afghan national, 1.5 persons from other countries are refused entry which is leading to an increase in the number of persons crossing the border unlawfully.

Azerbaijan

Dozens arrested at protests

On 12 January 2016, police officers arrested more than 50 persons taking part in unapproved protests, according to reports by the Ministry of the Interior of the south-Caucasian Republic that has an authoritarian regime. Local media reported on clashes between protestors and police officers in the city of Siyazan. Protests were also held in other parts of the country. According to the reports, the protests were held primarily because of the poor economic situation and the sharp rise in many food products.

China

Measures against critical lawyers

According to reports by the Hong Kong Organisation Chinese Human Rights Lawyers Concern Group (CHRLCG), at least 317 lawyers and other persons dealing with civil rights issues at the Fengrui law firm have been the targets of a crackdown (i.e. they have been arrested, imprisoned or interrogated). 33 remain in detention or "residential surveillance," or have disappeared.

Taiwan

Opposition win elections

Tsai Ing-wen from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) opposition party won the presidential election held on 16 January 2016 after garnering 56 percent of the votes. Tsai will be Taiwan's first female president. The candidate of the Kuomintang (KMT), the party of current President Ma Ying-jeou, Eric Chu garnered 31

percent of the votes. The DPP also won the parliamentary elections the same day. It won 68 of the 113 seats in Parliament.

China's leaders see Taiwan as a renegade province and have warned Taiwan's incoming political leaders against any move towards independence from China. Taiwan's current President Ma Ying-jeou, who is no longer permitted to stand having served two terms in office, pursued a rapprochement with the China which Tsai Ing-wen who wants independence from China will not be pursuing.