

Group 41 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

9 December 2013

Afghanistan

Attacks on security forces

Four police officers were killed in a suicide bombing in Nerkh District in Wardak Province on 2 December 2013. 17 other people were wounded.

Four police officers were killed in a suicide bombing in Marjah District in Helmand province on 4 December 2013.

Five members of the Afghan security forces and two Taliban insurgents were killed in an attack carried out by the Taliban at a checkpoint in Musa Qala District which is also located in Helmand province.

Five killed in drone strike

Five persons were killed in a drone strike at a meeting of Taliban insurgents in Manogay District in Kunar province, including the local Taliban leader, Mawlawi Attaullah. There were no civilian casualties.

Afghanistan/Iran

Cooperation agreement to be signed with Iran

President Hamid Karzai and Iran's President Hassan Rouhani agreed during a visit President Karzai made to Tehran on 8 December 2013 to conclude a long-term agreement encompassing cooperation at political, economic and cultural level as well as a security deal. The official signing is due to take place shortly.

Numerous arrests

The well-known Iranian singer Amir Tatalu and several IT workers were arrested by Iranian Morality Police on 4 December 2013 in connection with security issues according to a report published in the pro-reform newspaper "Etemad". The Morality Police Chief confirmed the arrests and urged the so-called underground musicians to carry out their activities within the legal framework. Many fans have called for Tatalu's release on his Facebook page (which has over 570,000 followers).

The news agency Fars also reported that several employees of the "Narenji" website had been arrested in the city of Kerman in southern Iran. Fars quoted security officers who said that the persons arrested had been in contact with foreigners and had committed a number of offences.

Iraq

...

Security situation

Last week suicide bombings were carried out on a daily basis, killing and injuring many people. At least 39 persons were injured and more than 100 were wounded in the most recent wave of attacks carried out on 8 December 2013. At least 22 people were killed in Baghdad alone, nine in attacks on shops that sell alcohol. Baghdad is the target of bombings on an almost daily basis. Residential districts that have a large Shia Muslim population are the frequent target of attacks.

Syria

High-ranking Commander of the Hezbollah killed

On 8 December 2013, a high-ranking Commander of the Lebanese Hezbollah militia, Ali Bassi, was killed in fighting. Hezbollah militiamen who are backed by Iran are fighting in the Syrian war on the side of the Syrian government.

Unknown fate of twelve nuns

Syrian rebels and jihadist militants are said to have captured the Christian city of Maaloula north of Damascus on 1/2 December 2013 which has been the scene of heavy fighting for months. According to initial reports, militants stormed the Orthodox convent of Mar Thekla (Mar Takla). Islamist rebels (belonging to the al-Nusra-Front and the organisation Ahrar al-Kalamun Brigades) reportedly abducted twelve Syrian and Lebanese nuns, saying they would hold them hostage until certain prisoners were released. Pro-government Syrian media have accused the rebels of using the nuns as a "human shield". The Mother Superior of Saidnaya Convent in Damascus province said on the evening of 2 December 2013 that the twelve nuns had been taken to a safe location in Yabroud in the North East of Syria. Pope Francis asked people to pray for the nuns on 4 December 2013. The broadcasting station al-Jazeera aired a video of women dressed in black robes in which one of the nuns said a group was protecting them and had taken them to a safe location.

EU Commissioner speaks of humanitarian crises

In a statement to mark the 1000th day of the Syrian crisis, Kristalina Georgieva, European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, said that the Syrian conflict had become the most disastrous humanitarian crisis in decades. She said that more than 100,000 people had been killed and several millions had been displaced. Georgieva insisted that a political solution to the conflict be found at the peace conference scheduled for 22 January 2014.

Lebanon

Hezbollah Commander shot dead in Beirut

An influential Commander of the Lebanese Hezbollah militia, Hassan al-Lakis, was shot dead in Beirut at midnight on 4 December 2013. He was in charge of procuring Iranian armaments for Hezbollah and reportedly had close links with the Syrian Army and Iranian Generals. The Hezbollah has blamed Israel for the assassination but Israel denies any involvement.

Yemen

Many killed and wounded in suicide bombing

At least 52 people, including two German experts from Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit and one of its Yemeni employees were killed after a suicide car bomb attack rocked Yemen's Defense Ministry in the capital Sanaa on 5 December 2013. Around 100 people were wounded. A radical Islamist group that has links with al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the attack on 6 December 2013. Members of al-Qaeda had made several assassination attempts on Muhammad Nasser Ahmed in the past. Yemen's government is fighting al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula operatives together with the US (AQAP).

Two members of the security forces were killed in two additional incidents on 8 December 2013 when a gunman opened fire on the vehicle of Jassin Said Noman in the capital Sanaa. Noman, who survived the assassination attempt is a lead presidential adviser and General Secretary of the Socialist Party.

Libya

Sharia law the foundation of legislation

Libya's National Assembly voted on 4 December 2013 to make Islamic Sharia Law the foundation of all legislation and state institutions in the country. A special committee is to review all existing legislation in order to guarantee that it complies with Islamic law and to propose amendments if it does not. The decision is likely to impact first and foremost Libya's banking, criminal and financial regulations and statutes. Two years after the uprising which ousted Muammar Gaddafi, Libya remains without a new constitution.

Morocco

Ruling in the trial involving image of teenagers kissing

The trial against three teenagers aged between 14 and 15 who were accused of public indecency after pictures of two of them kissing were posted on Facebook ended on 6 December 2013 when they were reprimanded. A photograph of the boy and girl kissing had been published by another boy on Facebook. They were subsequently arrested and accused of public indecency. They faced up to two years in prison. The trial has sparked protests at home and abroad.

Turkey

Readmission of refugees

Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu agreed to conclude a readmission agreement for refugees who had entered the EU unlawfully via Turkish soil at a meeting held in Brussels on 5 December 2013. The agreement is to be signed in Ankara on 16 December 2013 following lengthy negotiations.

In return, the European Union has said it is willing to begin talks on the gradual reduction of travel restrictions for Turkish nationals. It will probably be several years before the visa exemption applies in full.

Egypt

Draft Constitution presented

The Constitutional Committee presented the draft of a new Constitution to interim-President Adly Mansour on 3 December 2013. A referendum on the new constitution must be held within one month. No date has been set yet for the referendum. The referendum will decide whether the President or the Parliament needs to be re-elected within 90 days. The draft contains, inter alia, provisions that will enable Parliament to impeach the President. A two-thirds majority of Parliament will be needed to amend the Constitution. Future Presidents will also be obliged to disclose their assets each year.

The Salafist al-Nur party is urging its supporters to vote for the draft constitution.

Demonstrations dispersed

Police officers dispersed two demonstrations organised by the Muslim Brotherhood in Alexandria on 6 December 2013 when fighting broke out between members of the Muslim Brotherhood and local residents. Most of the rallies demanded the release of the 21 women belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood from Alexandria who were handed down lengthy prison sentences for protest-related charges in November.

Protestors released

On 7 December 2013, a court of appeals in Alexandria ordered the release of the 21 women who are members of the Muslim Brotherhood. The 21 women, including seven minors, had been found guilty of acts of violence at a demonstration by a court of first instance in Alexandria in late October 2013. The adult defendants were handed 11-year prison sentences, while seven minors were ordered into a juvenile facility until their 18th birthdays. The adult defendants were handed one-year suspended sentences, while seven minors were put on three months' probation.

A court in Cairo ordered the release of 155 persons on 7 December 2013 who had been detained by police during clashes.

Trial against leading members of the Muslim Brotherhood

The trial of the Muslim Brotherhood's supreme guide, Mohammed Badie, began in the Egyptian capital on Monday. Two other defendants were accused of inciting violence. The charges relate to the death of 14 protesters during violent demonstrations in Gizeh in July 2012.

Badie, along with 14 co-defendants, also face charges in a separate case related to the shooting deaths of five protesters in Cairo in July 2013.

However, in late October 2013 three judges overseeing the trial stepped down, citing feelings of "uneasiness" without providing further details. It has not been determined yet when the trial will continue.

Somalia

Prime Minister loses vote of confidence

Prime Minister Abdi Farah Shirdon lost the vote of confidence in Parliament on 2 December 2013 after just one year in office. He lost by 184 votes to 65. The government will remain in office until a successor has been appointed.

al-Shabaab kill traditional leader

The dead body of a well-known traditional leader who had been taken hostage by al-Shabaab militants a week ago was found near the town of Elbur in the Galgudud region. He and other elders were reportedly ordered by al-Shabaab militants to collect money from members of their clan for the Islamists. They reportedly refused to do so. Other clan elders are said to have fled the region.

Member of Parliament killed

A member of the Somalian Parliament was killed when a car bomb exploded in Mogadishu on 6 December 2013.

Several persons killed in suicide bombing in Bosasso

At least seven people were killed and 37 were wounded when a suicide bomber rammed a car into a convoy escorting two foreign employees of the security company Saracen near a busy market area in Bosaso, in Somalia's Puntland region on 5 December 2013. The foreigners managed to escape without injury. Puntland's government is holding al-Shabaab responsible for the attack.

Central African Republic

French military operation

According to French Minister of Defence, the French military operation in the Central African Republic began on 6 December 2013. The country is at risk of religious and ethnic divide after Muslim rebels ousted President François Bozize in March 2013. France will be sending 1,000 more troops to the country in the days to come.

Fighting between Muslim rebels and Christian militia

Up to 400 people have been killed in the past few days in fighting between Muslim rebels and Christian militiamen according to reports by members of the Red Cross who are on site. They say the situation remains dubious and dangerous.

Nigeria

Boko Haram: Mayhem unleashed at military facilities

Several hundred members of the Islamist organisation Boko Haram unleashed mayhem on military facilities in Maiduguri (capital of the North East Borno State) in an ambush that began at 3 am and lasted several hours in the early hours of 2 December 2013. One target was the base of the "72 Composite Group" of the

Nigerian Air Force at the civilian airport. Although the attacks were curtailed, according to military sources, Boko Haram managed to destroy two helicopters and three aircraft. They also destroyed a large number of buildings and vehicles belonging to the 33rd Artillery Regiment of the Nigerian Army. West of Maiduguri, they burnt down the police station in Bulumkutu, razing five petrol stations and around 20 refuelling vehicles. According to military sources, 24 insurgents and two soldiers were killed in the attacks. According to press reports, several civilians were also killed. It also led to the imposition of a 24-hour curfew on Maiduguri by the Borno State Government which was shortened to 7 pm and 6 am on 3 December 2013. The communications network that had been disconnected in May 2013 as part of a military offensive against Boko Haram was also restored. The intention is to allow the people facing attacks by Boko Haram to communicate with security forces.

Prior to the ambush on 2 December 2013, the Air Force had pounded the Gwoza Mountains close to the border with Cameroon which is a safe haven for terrorists, killing more than 50 insurgents.

Kosovo

France withdraws troops

Around 300 French KFOR troops, the majority of whom were deployed in the North of Kosovo, are to pull out of the area. Military operations in Mali, Côte d'Ivoire and the Central African Republic requiring large number of troops are the reason for the withdrawal.

At present, KFOR (Kosovo Force) comprises approx. 5,000 troops from 31 countries, around 700 from Germany. The presence of the peace-keeping troops is considered to be necessary as the situation in the North remains unstable. NATO has no plans to reduce the numbers of its peacekeeping troops in the foreseeable future – contrary to last year's plans.

West Balkans

EU Home Affairs Ministers confirm visa exemption clause

At a meeting of Home Affairs Ministers held in Brussels on 5 December 2013, the Ministers confirmed a decision taken in August 2013 (cf. BN of 30 September 2013) allowing EU Member States to lift the visa exemption in future for a country if they are witnessing a "substantial and sudden increase" in the number of illegal migrants or unfounded applications for asylum. This measure is, however, seen as a last resort and can be taken for six months only. EU Member States will need to file an application to implement this measure which will require the approval of the majority of EU Member States. So far there has been no concrete evidence to suggest any country will be implementing this protective clause.

Russian Federation

Protests to be allowed at the Olympic Games

Contrary to expectations, political protests will be allowed to take place at the Winter Olympics in Sochi in February 2014 (the opening ceremony is due to be held on 7 February 2014). Official sources say this is necessary in order to do justice to the Olympic Charter. In doing so, Russia appears to have responded to appeals to guarantee the right of freedom of expression even during the Olympic Games. Advance notification must be given of any rallies to be held in the city of Sochi.

Ukraine

Mass protests continue in Kiev

The anti-government protests involving hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian citizens are gradually coming to a head. Protestors blocked the way to several government buildings in the capital of Kiev on 9 December 2013. They blocked road and pathways leading to the Ministries using tree trunks, large tents and private vehicles. In the opinion of opposition leader Vitali Klitschko, they are trying to step up pressure

on President Viktor Yanukovich. Klitschko visited opposition activists on Kiev's Independence Square at the weekend along with his brother Vladimir. Large numbers of people are camping there despite freezing temperatures. Opponents of President Viktor Yanukovich also face criminal prosecution. The security authorities have instituted investigations into attempts to overthrow the President – anyone found guilty will face between five and ten years in prison. This was possibly triggered by a call from former Foreign Minister Arseny Yatsenyuk who urged people to block access to the government district. Security authorities have not said whether investigations have already been instituted against certain individuals.

Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets on 8 December 2013 to protest against the government of President Yanukovich, demanding that the cabinet resign. Supporters of the pro-European opposition demanded on billboards and chanted slogans calling for immediate re-elections in the former Soviet Republic. The protest was held under the motto "March of a Million". During the rally, anti-government activists destroyed a statue of the leader of the Russian Revolution Lenin which stood three and a half metres tall. They consider the statue to be a symbol of Russia's influence on Ukraine.

Nepal

Unclear outcome of parliamentary elections

According to the final result of the parliamentary elections held two weeks ago published by the Electoral Committee in Kathmandu, the social-democratic Nepali Congress Party won 196 out of 601 seats. The Communist Party of Nepal (UML) won 175 seats and the Maoists won 80 seats. A total of 31 parties won seats in Parliament. This means the newly-elected parliament is every bit as fragmented as the former parliament. Furthermore, it means the way out of the political crisis remains unclear. The main task of Parliament will be to draw up a constitution. It remains uncertain whether the parties are willing to reach a compromise and to agree on a text. A Constituent Assembly elected in 2008 comprising the Nepali Congress Party, the Communist Party of Nepal and the Maoists as the largest parliamentary groups has failed following a four-year controversy between the parties over the powers bestowed on the Prime Minister and the President.

Bangladesh

Parties boycott parliamentary elections

Several government and opposition parties have boycotted the parliamentary elections to be held on 5 January 2014. Several opposition parties had failed to submit their candidates by 5 pm on 2 December 2013 - the deadline set by election officials. The Jatiya Party, junior partner in the current coalition and important ally of the ruling Awami League, announced on 3 December 2013 that the party would be boycotting the elections. The opposition in Bangladesh is demanding that an independent interim government be established prior to the elections on 5 January 2014 in order to prevent vote rigging (cf. BN of 2 December 0113). Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina subsequently announced that the elections may be postponed.

Several people killed during protests

Almost 60 persons were reportedly killed and thousands were wounded in nationwide protests that broke out against the government of Sheikh Hasina. Seven persons were killed on 3 December 2013 in clashes that erupted between protestors and law enforcement officers.

At least four persons were killed and 50 were wounded when anti-government activists derailed a train close to Bonarpara station on 4 December 2013.

North Korea

Ongoing development of prison camps

According to a report issued by Amnesty International, North Korea is currently expanding its secret prison camps where forced labour, torture and arbitrary killing are run of the mill. It is estimated that between 100,000 and 200,000 persons are being detained at these camps.

Veteran released

The 85-year-old US citizen Merrill Newman, veteran of the Korean War (1950 to 1953), has been released on "humanitarian grounds" and has been deported according to a statement issued by North Korea's official news agency KCNA. He had been detained for weeks for committing "hostile acts" as a tourist and during the Korean War.

Jang Song-thaek ousted

According to government sources in Pyongyang, President Kim Jong-Un has stripped the second most powerful man in the country, his uncle Jang Song-thaek, Vice-Chairperson of the National Defence Commission and member of the politburo, of his powers. Jang is accused of misrepresenting the goals of and weakening the Communist Party. Two of Jang's associates have reportedly been executed.