

Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

13 June 2016

Short version due to current staffing constraints

Afghanistan

Security situation

Fights, attacks and raids are continuing. Last week, Afghan security forces started operations in Nangarhar, Paktika, Ghazni, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Baghlan, Balkh, Jawzjan, Faryab, Kunduz and Helmand provinces.

Targeted attacks

Last week, several travellers were abducted by Taliban insurgents on the highway connecting southeastern Ghazni and Paktika provinces. On 7 June 2016, the dead bodies of 12 kidnapped people were found in Anbar district (Ghazni province). Apparently, they were members of the Afghan security forces executed by Taliban members. Also in northeastern Kunduz province, at least 47 people were kidnapped (see BN of 6 June 2016). In Jalalabad (eastern Nangarhar province), a local radio station was attacked with grenades on 8 June; nobody was hurt. In this province, both Taliban insurgents and ISIS militants are active; journalists are frequently targeted by the Islamists. On 10 June, at least 3 people were killed by an improvised explosive device which was detonated during Friday prayer in front of a mosque in Rodat district (Nangarhar province). On 11 June, ISIS fighters killed 6 police officers in Haska Mina district, a spokesman of the Nangarhar provincial governor stated. In the battle that followed, 15 ISIS fighters were killed, the report went on.

Pakistan

‘Honour killings’

On 10 June 2016, a man killed his 18-year old daughter and her 35-year old husband in Lahore for marrying without their family’s consent; he also killed a neighbour for supporting his daughter’s marriage. Pakistan’s Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif condemned the ‘honour killings’ as un-Islamic and ordered a comprehensive investigation into the case. Shortly before, other such incidents had occurred. On 8 June, a mother set her 16-year old daughter on fire after the girl had married without her parents’ consent. On 1 June, several people burned a 19-year old teacher who had refused to marry the son of the school director for whom she had been working in Murree (Punjab). In the beginning of May, the village elders of a small place near Abbottabad (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province) had ordered the killing of a 16-year old girl because she had helped a friend to elope who had wanted to marry a man of her own choice. Police arrested 13 individuals, among them the girl’s mother.

In connection with the incidents in in Lahore, Murree and Abbottabad, a group of at least 40 clerics of the orthodox Islamic Barelvi school of thought (adhering to Sufism and reflecting popular understandings of Islam, in contrast to the purist Islamic Deobandi movement) issued a fatwa on 12 June 2016, condemning ‘honour killings’ as un-Islamic and calling on the government to protect the rights of women. The independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan says that nearly 1,100 women were killed by relatives in Pakistan last year in so-called honour killings, with many more cases going unreported.

Iraq

Attacks

On 7 June 2016, a car bomb attack killed at least 8 people and left another 24 wounded in the city centre of Karbala; ISIS militants are held responsible for the attack. On 9 June, a bomb attack in a commercial area of Baghdad killed at least 15 people and injured more than 50 others. On the same day, 7 soldiers were killed and another 20 people injured in a suicide attack at the entrance of a military base in Taji, (some 20 km northeast of Baghdad).

Ongoing fights in Fallujah

Government troops and allied militias have resumed their advance towards the city centre, after their operation in the city's outskirts was stalled last week. The military reports that on 7 June 2016, ISIS fighters were driven out of the city's southern Shuhada al-Thania neighbourhood. UN officials say that 90,000 civilians are presently trapped in the city; previous estimates had put the number at around 50,000 (see BN of 6 June 2016). On 9 June, Human Rights Watch reported the execution of at least 17 Sunni Muslim men by members of the police and armed militias. Besides, Shiite Muslim militias have arrested and severely assaulted hundreds of Sunni Muslims in the surroundings of the city, HRW said.

Syria

Air strikes on Idlib and Maarat al-Numan

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reports that at least 21 people have been killed in air strikes by Syrian or Russian warplanes in recent days; among the targets was a market in Idlib. The city and its surrounding are a stronghold of Islamist groups including Jabhat al-Nusra (JN). On 12 June, attacks in nearby Maarat al-Numan apparently killed 6 civilians.

ISIS attacks in Damascus suburb

On 11 June 2016, at least 8 people were killed in a twin attack in al-Sayyida Zainab, the Damascus suburb which is considered to be the resting place of the Prophet Mohammad's granddaughter. ISIS militants have claimed responsibility for the attack. Since the beginning of 2016, around 180 people have been killed by ISIS attacks in al-Sayyida Zainab. Syrian Prime Minister Wael al-Halki has blamed the attacks on Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Situation in the ISIS-held city of Manbij

On 10 June 2016, the rebel alliance Syrian Democratic Forces SDF apparently cut off the road from Raqqa to Turkey, closing the circle of siege around the northern city of Manbij (Aleppo province) which had come under ISIS control in 2014. One day later, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights stated that tens of thousands of civilians were trapped in the city and attacked by warplanes of the international military coalition. Fights around the city have killed at least 193 ISIS fighters, 22 rebels and 37 civilians, reports say.

Food convoy to Daraya

On 9 June 2016, a UN convoy reached the besieged town of Daraya (approx. 8,000 inhabitants), marking the first delivery of food supplies to the town since 2012. Daraya was among the first towns to participate in the 2011 uprising against president Assad and was considered to be a rebel stronghold for a long time.

Lebanon

Results of municipal elections

In May, municipal mayoral elections were held in the six governorates over four weeks: on 8 May 2016 in Beirut and Beqaa, on 15 May in Mount Lebanon, on 22 May in Natabieh and in South Lebanon and lastly on 29 May in North Lebanon. Despite the precarious general conditions of the country and the volatile situation in the whole Middle East, no major security-related incidents were reported. Apparently, nearly 2,000 cases of vote buying or voter interference were documented.

Already in January, the two main Christian parties, i.e. the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) led by Michel Aoun and the Lebanese Forces (LF) headed by Samir Geagea had engaged in a tactical alliance, although they have been enemies for decades. In many cities and communities, they had set up joint electoral lists, challenging coalitions of local families and independent Christian politicians of the 14-March camp. Despite this political union, the results of the municipal elections showed that the Christian camp is as fragmented as rarely before.

In the Shiite camp, Hezbollah formed an alliance with Amal (as previously in 2010) and was challenged by local family clans, civil society initiatives and leftist groups. The competition, which was unexpectedly strong, was a sign of the population's disappointment with corruption within the organisation, with lacking economic progress in Shiite-dominated areas and with Hezbollah's involvement in the civil war in Syria. Also, former Prime Minister Saad Hariri's 14-March-coalition came under pressure by the civil society movement 'Beirut Madinati' ('Beirut is my city'). The results share characteristics in all constituencies, i.e. a resounding rejection of the present power structures and general discontent with the political establishment.

Yemen

Saudi Arabia removed from UN blacklist for violating children's rights

One day after the United Nations had blacklisted the Saudi Arabia-led military coalition in Yemen for violating children's rights (see BN of 6 June 2016), the organisation gave in to pressure from Saudi Arabia and removed the country from the list again pending a joint review by the international body, Ban Ki Moon's office said.

Turkey

Attacks

On 7 June 2016, a car bomb in Istanbul blew up a police bus, killing at least 7 policemen and 5 civilians and leaving another 36 people injured. The militant group Kurdistan Freedom Hawks (TAK – Teyrêbazên Azadîya Kurdistan) has claimed responsibility for the attack. The Turkish government regards the TAK as a subgroup of the banned PKK which so far has distanced itself from TAK. One day after this incident, another car bomb attack on a police headquarters in the city of Midyat killed at least 4 people and wounded another 50. Apparently, the victims were two policemen and two civilians. The PKK has claimed responsibility for the Midyat attack.

Libya

Fight over Sirte

Media reports say that militias aligned with Libya's new unity government succeeded to advance into the embattled ISIS stronghold of Sirte last week. The ISIS fighters barricaded themselves in a densely populated area in the city centre and were preparing for lengthy street battles, the reports say. In November 2014, the first ISIS followers had entered the city and taken over control three months later. The city of Sirte is located in the centre of a coastal strip of about 200 km controlled by the ISIS militia. So far, the advance to Sirte has been the most significant military achievement of Libya's UN-supported unity government which came into office in Tripoli in the beginning of April 2016.

Eritrea

Heavy fighting in Eritrean-Ethiopian border region

On 12 June 2016, severe fighting erupted along the Eritrean-Ethiopian border. Press reports say that Eritrean military units have advanced to territory held by Ethiopia near the town of Tserona. In a counter-attack, Ethiopian soldiers



apparently have seized control of several Eritrean villages; the population has been evacuated, the reports say. Apparently, fighting has also erupted near the town of Zalambessa south of Senafe. Ethiopia and Eritrea are accusing each other of having started the aggression.

Background

From 1998 to 2000, the two countries had engaged in a fierce war claiming nearly 70,000 lives over the border delimitation, after Eritrea had invaded Ethiopia and seized the border town of Badme which was claimed by both. An independent boundary commission handed down a final binding decision awarding Badme to Eritrea. To date, Ethiopia has refused to accept the demarcation. Both sides have been regularly engaging in lower-scale skirmishes since then. Most recently, rumours circulated in March 2016 that the Ethiopian air force attacked Hirgigo power plant near the city of Massawa. The ‘no peace – no war’ relations with Ethiopia have driven Eritrea to justify permanent mobilization including forced conscription for indefinite periods of national service. However, the conflict cannot be analysed separately from the fact that Ethiopia had lost its direct access to the sea in 1993 when Eritrea gained independence. For Ethiopia, the situation is intolerable with the two port cities of Assab and Massawa being on Eritrean territory.

Uganda

Arrests over alleged coup plot

According to information provided by an army spokesman on 10 June, at least 30 military staff and civilians have been arrested on suspicion of plotting to overthrow President Yoweri Museveni’s government. Among the detainees is Michael Kabaziguruka, a member of parliament from the main opposition Forum for Democratic Change.

Niger

Boko Haram attacks force 50,000 people to flee

The UN Refugee Agency UNHCR has reported that devastating attacks by Boko Haram militants on 3 June 2016 on a military outpost have driven some 50,000 people from their homes in the town of Bosso which briefly fell under Boko Haram’s control. There are at least 240,000 displaced people in the troubled Diffa region in the southeastern parts of the country, UNHCR says.

Somalia

Al-Shabaab attack at AMISOM base

On 09 June 2016, an Ethiopian-run AMISOM base was attacked in Haglan (Hiiraan region), with 60 soldiers killed, a speaker of the Islamists said. AMISOM, however, stated that the attack was repulsed and that a total of 110 al-Shabaab fighters were killed in the fight.

Raid on al-Shabaab base

On 9 June 2016, at least 21 extremists and 11 soldiers lost their lives in an attack of the Somali army against an al-Shabaab base in a village near Tiyeeglow (Bakool region).

Six people executed by al-Shabaab

On 11 June 2016, al-Shabaab stated to have executed four men for alleged espionage in the village of Bulofay (Bay region). Apparently, the victims included a man who allegedly had supported the US forces in their attack against Islamist leader Ahmed Godane in September 2014. Also, al-Shabaab communicated that two Kenyan citizens were executed for alleged cooperation with several Western secret services in the Middle Juba region.

Nigeria

IPOB separatists and uninvolved people killed by army troops

On 10 June 2016, Amnesty International (AI) presented a report on an on-site investigation revealing that the Nigerian army had shot dead at least 17 unarmed members and supporters of the separatist Igbo organization IPOB (Indigenous People of Biafra) and several by-standers during a security operation conducted in three locations of the southeastern Nigerian city of Onitsha (Anambra state) in the night of 29 May and during the following day. The operation was aimed at preventing a march of IPOB members from Nkpor parking space to a nearby field in commemoration of the 49th anniversary of the separation of the Republic of Biafra from Nigeria.

Chad/Senegal

Former President of Chad appeals conviction

On 10 June 2016, former President Habré's lawyers appealed against his conviction for crimes against humanity. A court spokesperson stated that the appeal process is not expected to conclude before April 2017, as the judges first have to decide on the question of civil compensation lawsuits filed on behalf of the victims' relatives.

Ukraine

Gay Parade in Kiev

On 13 June 2016, the Kiev Pride parade took place peacefully, with some 2,000 lesbian and gay activists marching a short distance of 500 meters protected by 6,000 police officers. The event's executive director, Anna Sharygina, said that police had made it clear that no attacks on the right of assembly would be tolerated. Last year, the gay pride rally had been discontinued when right-wing radicals attacked the parade.

Vietnam

Parliamentary elections

The results of the parliamentary elections of 22 May 2016 were confirmed on 9 June and showed that the Communist Party of Vietnam gained 96 percent of the approximately 500 seats in parliament. 21 mandates were won by independent candidates authorized by the CPV. No other parties than the CPV were admitted. Apparently, voter turnout was over 99 percent.