

Information Centre on Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

18 February 2013

Afghanistan

Security situation

On 13 February 2013, ten civilians (most of them women and children) were killed in a NATO air strike in the village of Chawgam (district of Shigal in the province of Kunar in eastern Afghanistan). Five other civilians were injured. The goal of the air strike was to facilitate a ground attack on a valley held by the Taliban. In response to the strike, Afghanistan plans to do without international air force support in residential areas in the future. President Karzai announced that a decree to that effect would be valid from 17 February 2013. The US plan to withdraw more than half of their troops from Afghanistan by February 2014. Currently, 66,000 US soldiers are still deployed in Iraq.

Pakistan

Province of Belujistan: More than 80 dead and 169 injured in bomb attack

On 15 February 2013, a bomb exploded in Kirani Road, near a market in the Hazara Town quarter in Quetta, where members of the Shia Hazara minority live. According to initial reports, between 80 and 87 people were killed and between 169 and 200 injured. The banned Islamist Sunni terror organisation Lashkar-e-Jhangvi claimed responsibility for the attack. A furious crowd initially threw stones at security and rescue personnel, shot at them and hindered them to get to the scene of the blast. The security forces believe it was a suicide attack. The mourning Hazara community announced that they will not bury the dead and gave the government 48 hours to find the culprits. They also demanded that the army should take on the security officials' duties in the province. On 10 January 2013, an attack on the Hazara community in Quetta already killed 102 and wounded more than 100.

Province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: people killed and injured by several attacks

On 18 February 2013, four people were killed and seven injured in an attack on the office of the Political Agent (the head of the administration and representative of the President and the Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in the FATA tribal area) in Bara Road, Peshawar. A jirga (assembly of tribal elders) organised by the Political Agent was taking place when two men entered the premises. One of them exploded a bomb while the other opened gunfire.

On 14 February 2013, several blasts killed at least 21 people and injured more than 20 in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

In the district of Hangu, a suicide attacker drove a vehicle laden with explosives into a police office in the area of Kurram-Pul. Eleven people, some of them security officers, lost their lives and more than 23 were wounded.

Five suicide attackers stormed the police station of Miryan, Noorarh, in the district of Bannu; all of them and a civilian were killed. The Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for this event.

A roadside bomb in the area of Hassanzai Dara in the FATA agency Orakzai killed four tribe members and wounded more than 20 when two vehicles of the tribe drove past. The victims belonged to the Malakdin Khel and Zahkhakhel tribes.

Iraq

Security situation

On 11 February 2013, attacks in Mosul killed at least 13 people and injured 18.

On 16 February 2013, several bombings killed at least ten people. Tal Afar (province of Niniveh), Mosul (province of Niniveh) and Tuz Khurmato (province of Salahaddin) were hit hardest.

On 17 February 2013, car bombs in quarters of Baghdad mainly inhabited by Shia Muslims killed at least 26 people. According to a press release dated 18 February 2013, al-Qaeda in Iraq (Islamic State of Iraq) claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Iraqi security forces block roads to Baghdad

On 15 February 2013, Iraqi security forces blocked the roads to Baghdad in order to prevent mass protests by Sunnis in the capital. Protesters met in the cities Samarra, Falluja, Mosul and Kirkuk as well as in al-Adhamiya, a suburb of Baghdad. Demonstrations have taken place since December 2012.

Syria

Continued fights/clashes on the Golan Heights

The fighting in Syria continues. Following serious clashes between the government troops and insurgents, which caused about 40,000 people to flee from al-Shaddade, a city in eastern Syria, to Hasaka, the provincial capital, the rebels captured the city on 14 February 2013. At least 100 soldiers and 30 fighters of the Islamist al-Nusra front were killed in the three-day fights.

Syrian government troops and rebels also fought on the Golan Heights on 16 February 2013. The rebels allegedly attacked a military police checkpoint in Khan Arnabeh, near the ceasefire line monitored by the UN, and the Syrian army shelled both Khan Arnabeh and nearby village Jubata al-Khashab in response.

Since the unrest in Syria started two years ago, there have been isolated incidents on the Golan Heights, which were occupied by Israel in the Six-Day War in 1967. One year after the Yom Kippur War of 1973, a buffer zone under UN control was established. In the current conflict, Syrian grenades hit Israeli territory and the Israeli army shot back. Five wounded Syrians are currently being treated in Israeli hospitals. Syria and Israel are officially at war.

UN High Commissioner calls on international community to intervene

On 16 February 2013, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay called on the international community to take action immediately. She said there were several options, from military intervention and sending peacekeeping troops to involving the International Criminal Court. She claimed there was proof that President Assad was guilty of crimes of war and crimes against humanity.

Brahimi calls for internal dialogue in Syria

International peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi welcomed the opposition's offer of a dialogue on 17 February 2013 and called on the Syrian government to enter into negotiations, which might be held under the UN's protection.

Arab newspaper publishes peace plan for Syria

The Arab newspaper "al-Sharq al-Awsat" published a peace plan for Syria on 14 February 2013, which is said to have been prepared by members of the Syrian-based "tolerated opposition" and representatives of the Syrian regime. This plan foresees the creation of a transitional, two-chamber parliament and the involvement of Vice President Faruq al-Scharaa. It might form the basis for concrete negotiations. The plan does not say anything about the future of current President Bashar al-Assad.

Kidnappings

The opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported on 16 February 2013 that kidnappings had taken place in the province of Idlib in northern Syria. At least 300 people, many of them Sunni women and children, were allegedly kidnapped by militia which support the regime. Reportedly, this was a retaliation act for the kidnapping of 42 Shia Muslims (mostly women and children) on 14 February 2013, who were going to Damascus on a bus. It is unclear just who kidnapped this group. The UN Special Representative on Sexual

Violence in Conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura from Sierra Leone, called for the women to be released. She said she had received information that armed men had kidnapped and raped women and girls.

EU foreign ministers to discuss arms embargo against Syria

On 18 February 2013, the EU foreign ministers met in Brussels in order to discuss an extension of the EU weapons embargo against Syria, which will run out at the end of February 2013. The UK, France and Italy support a loosening of the embargo in order to support the Syrian opposition. In contrast, most other EU governments are in favour of extending the embargo.

Lebanon

Attack on aid organisation for Syrian refugees

On 17 February 2013, unidentified men bombed an aid organisation for Syrian refugees, which is known for its opposition to the Syrian regime, in Tripoli. Tensions between pro and anti-Syrian forces in Lebanon have increased since the beginning of the unrest in Syria in March 2011. Also on 17 February 2013, the opposition Syrian National Council accused the Shia Lebanese Hizbollah militia, which supports the Syrian government, of taking arms in the conflict in Syria. Hizbollah reportedly attacked Syrian villages in the region of Kusseir, near the Lebanese border, and killed civilians.

Iran

Reporters Without Borders: Targeted threats to journalists ahead of presidential elections

Reporters Without Borders claims that, four months ahead of the presidential elections in Iran, journalists are being threatened and bullied. With a total of 62 journalists and bloggers detained, Iran is the country where persecution of media personnel is most evident. In the past two weeks alone, 15 journalists were arrested. Reporters Without Borders has called on the United Nations to investigate the incidents.

Tunisia

Demonstration for Islamist governing party, continued negotiations

On 16 February 2013, more than 15,000 people participated in a demonstration for the Islamist Ennahda party announced as "March of the Millions". Buses brought them to Tunis from all over the country to show their support for the party. They chanted slogans against the media, the opposition and France, the former colonial power. The leading government party Ennahda had organised the demonstration itself. There is a dispute about a cabinet reshuffle, with the Ennahda leaders not wanting to see the formation a cabinet of experts, which Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali, a moderate Ennahda member, had demanded last week. Jebali threatened to step down if his suggestions were not implemented. Key opposition parties, employers and trade unions are so far supporting Jebali's suggestion. After talks on 15 February 2013, Jebali lifted his ultimatum for an agreement until Saturday in order to facilitate continued negotiations with the political parties.

Kosovo

Fifth anniversary of independence

Five years after its independence on 17 February 2008, Kosovo is still faced with enormous problems. Its status is still disputed. Only 99 out of 193 UN member states have recognised Kosovo. Besides Serbia, Russia and China, the EU member states Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Romania and Slovakia are refusing to recognise the country.

There are still international missions to ensure security (KFOR) and support institution building (EULEX) in the country. In the last few years, however, the KFOR deployment has been reduced gradually to currently about 5,500 troops as the security situation has improved. The EULEX mission is to end by June 2014. At the moment, no further troop reductions are on the cards, as there is the risk of an escalation in northern

Kosovo. The situation in the north of the country, which is mostly populated by Serbs, is still fragile. So far, the Kosovar government has not succeeded in effectively gaining control of the area. Serbia is running its own administrative institutions in this part of the country (with the EU as a mediator, negotiations on a dissolution of Serb institutions in northern Kosovo are to start on 20 February 2013).

Moreover, the country has to deal with problems concerning the rule of law, with corruption and with organised crime. From a social and economic vantage point, Kosovo is one of the poorest regions in Europe. The average unemployment rate is about 45%, but about 70% of those aged 15-25 are unemployed. 30% of the population live below the poverty threshold.

Visa exemption not yet on the cards

According to a report on the implementation of agreed-upon reform steps towards a visa exemption, which the EU Commission released on 12 February 2013, the Kosovar government has to make further efforts. Among other things, a new law on inter-agency cooperation in border management and a law to combat trafficking in human beings need to be adopted. Still, the government has taken a number of useful measures, for example in the fight against organised crime.

Kosovo is the only country in the western Balkans which does not benefit from a visa exemption.

Mali

Troops search Gao for hidden Islamists

Following the suicide attacks of 8 and 9 February 2013 on the road between Gao and Bourem, two other attackers were arrested in Gao on 9 February 2013 before they were able to explode their bombs. Another suicide attack took place on 11 February 2013 at a checkpoint in the north of the city.

On 13 February 2013, French and Malian soldiers searched numerous houses in several quarters of Gao. An eyewitness told the news agency dpa that a number of people had been arrested. Army spokesman Modibo Traore emphasised that the city was calm again after serious clashes between the army and Islamist fighters.

Elections in Mali scheduled

A new president is to be elected on 7 July 2013 and a new parliament on 21 July 2013. The news agency Mali Actualités reported that these dates were announced by Colonel Moussa Sinko Coulibaly, the Minister of the Interior of the Malian transitional government.

Somalia

Suicide attacks in Galkayo and Mogadishu

On 11 February 2013, a suicide attacker killed at least four people when he blew himself up in a car in the city of Galkayo (region of Mudug). Observers believe that the attack was targeted at the vice-police commander of Puntland. The radical Islamist group al-Shabaab is said to have claimed responsibility. Galkayo is divided. The north of the city belongs to Puntland, an autonomous state in the north-east of Somalia, the south is controlled by the regional administration of "Galmudug".

A car bomb attack on a restaurant on the popular lido of Mogadishu killed at least two people and injured several others on 16 February 2013. The office of the Somalian Prime Minister said that unidentified terrorists were responsible.

Al-Shabaab driven out of strategically important towns

On 14 February 2013, units of the Somalian army and AMISOM drove out al-Shabaab from the three small towns Janalle, Aw Dhigle and Barire south-west of Mogadishu and recaptured them. The towns are on the main supply road of al-Shabaab, which connects the port of Baraawe (which is controlled by Islamists) and their stronghold Burhakaba in central Somalia.

Tensions between President and Prime Minister?

A Somalian online newspaper reported on 18 February 2013 that there are tensions between President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and Prime Minister Abdi Farah Shirdon. Reportedly, there are signs that the President

is trying to influence the government. Several ministers have allegedly threatened to resign. Moreover, there are differences of opinion about the use of foreign aid and the creation of federal states.

Nigeria

Seven foreigners kidnapped in northern Nigeria

In one of the most serious kidnappings of the last few years in Nigeria, seven foreign employees of the Lebanese roadbuilding company Setraco (four Lebanese, one Italian, one Greek and one British national) were kidnapped early in the morning of 17 February 2013. Unidentified armed men attacked a workers' camp of the firm in the north Nigerian town of Jama'are in the federal state of Bauchi. A security guard was killed in the attack.

Before this incident, there had been several failed attacks on the local prison and the police station in the night between 16 and 17 February 2013. Two police cars were destroyed.

Zimbabwe

Referendum on the constitution and elections announced

88-year-old President Mugabe, who has been governing Zimbabwe since the country's independence in 1980, decided on 15 February 2013 to hold a referendum on a new constitution on 16 March 2013. The draft constitution contains key new provisions, such as a limit on the president's term of office (two 5-year periods), the abolishment of his immunity and more rights for parliament. Presidential and parliamentary elections are to take place in July 2013. The adoption of the new constitution is regarded as certain, as President Mugabe's ZANU-PF ("Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front") and Prime Minister Tsvangirai's MDC ("Movement for Democratic Change") parties agreed on the draft in January 2013.

Tsvangirai had been Mugabe's opponent in the most recent presidential elections in 2008, but had withdrawn from the second round at the end of June 2008 after 300 of his supporters (this is the number he mentioned) had been killed. Under pressure from other countries in the region, Mugabe and Tsvangirai agreed on a division of power in September 2008, with Tsvangirai becoming Prime Minister in a government of national unity.

Uganda

Theatre producer who supports homosexuals deported from Uganda

British-born David Cecil, who produced the first play with homosexual content in Uganda, was deported from the country. Cecil had been sentenced in September 2012 for having gone against the Ugandan media authority and staged the play "The River and the Mountain" without its authorisation.

Cameroon

Death threats against human-rights lawyers

Human Rights Watch asked President Biya in a letter to take immediate action against repeated death threats against two human-rights lawyers, Alice Nkom and Michel Togu , who represent people who are charged with homosexuality.

China

More than 100 self-immolations of Tibetans since 2009

Exile Tibetan sources reported on 13 February 2013 that another self-immolation took place on 3 February 2013 in the prefecture of Ngaba (Chinese: Aba) in the province of Sichuan. This incident raised the number of self-incinerations registered since 2009 to 100; according to the International Campaign for Tibet, at least 81 Tibetans died. Another self-immolation took place in the prefecture of Kanhlo (Chinese: Gannan) in the province of Gansu on 13 February 2013; it was reported on 14 February 2013. On 13 February 2013, a self-incineration of a Tibetan was also reported from the Nepalese capital Kathmandu.

