

Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

11 January 2016

Afghanistan . . .

Military confrontations

Fighting has been taking place in Nangarhar province (eastern Afghanistan) between ISIS fighters, the Taliban and Afghan security forces in the past few weeks. The districts hit hardest are Batikot und Chaparhar. ISIS is attempting to gain a foothold in the province. On 5 January 2016, several missiles fired by Pakistan into border districts in Afghanistan caused damage to property. These districts frequently come under fire in the battle between the Pakistani Army and the Taliban.

Fighting rages on in Helmand province (Sangin and Marja provinces) (cf. BN of 21 December 2015 and 4 January 2016). The Taliban reportedly has 40 percent of the province under its control. Fighting also took place in Kunar, Laghman (eastern Afghanistan), Faryab (northern Afghanistan), Badakhshan and Takhar (north-eastern Afghanistan).

Inhabitants of the city of Kunduz (north-eastern Afghanistan) continue to lament the presence of the Taliban and uncertainty in the suburbs 100 days after the city was seized back from the Taliban.

Suicide bombings and attacks

Two suicide bombings were carried out in Kabul on 4 January 2016 (cf. BN of 4 January 2016). One suicide bombing was carried out close to Kabul Airport, killing one person and wounding around 30 people. Another suicide bomb targeted a convoy of the Federal Armed Forces. Two troops sustained minor injuries. The attack on the Indian Consulate in Mazar-e Sharif (Balkh province, northern Afghanistan, cf BN of 4 January 2016) was repulsed after 24 hours). One police officer was killed, five police officers and four civilians were wounded. In Samangan province (northern Afghanistan), unknown gunmen shot down a member of the High Peace Council. The suspected assassin was arrested the following day. In Jowzjan province (northern Afghanistan), the security forces managed to free a judge who had been abducted by the Taliban. The bodies of two Afghan troops who had been abducted by the Taliban were found in Ghazni province (south-eastern Afghanistan). On 5 January 2016, an explosion took place near the Indian Consulate in Jalalabad (Nangarhar, eastern Afghanistan), nobody was injured. In Helmand (southern Afghanistan, Nad Ali district), members of the Taliban hanged a man in public who had been accused of raping a girl. On 6 November 2015, the home of a politician came under siege for several minutes in Charikar (centre of Parwan province, central Afghanistan), nobody was injured. Three civilians were killed in an explosion in Kama (Nangarhar province, eastern Afghanistan) on 10 January 2016.

Recruitment of child soldiers by the Taliban

Government representatives from Badakhshan province (north-eastern Afghanistan) claim that the Taliban have recruited hundreds of children in the province and are giving them military training.

Iraq . . .

ISIS leader killed

According to Iraqi military sources, a leader of ISIS was killed in an Iraqi airstrike in western Iraq. He is said to be a high-ranking military commander in western Iraq and in eastern Syria called Assi Ali Mohammed Nasser al-Obeidi. He had reportedly served in Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard.

Attack on Peshmerga camp

According to a press release of 8 January 2016, ISIS militants attacked a Peshmerga camp with Turkish military trainers in Bashika (near Mosul). According to Turkish sources, no Turkish troops were injured or killed. Seventeen ISIS militants were allegedly killed in the fighting.

Syria

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Russian airstrike on prison

At least 57 persons are said to have been killed in a Russian airstrike on a prison complex run by Al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) in Maarat al-Numan (Idlib province), including many prisoners and five civilians. The building in which rival rebel groups were reportedly held is close to a popular market.

Peace talks

The Syrian government has agreed to take part in peace talks due to take place in Geneva on 25 January 2016 if it receives a list of leaders of the opposition attending as well as a list of the groups classified as terrorist organisations. It is doubtful whether the talks will take place. The opposition groups are demanding some gestures by the government before the talks, including lifting sieges imposed on rebel-held areas and ending airstrikes.. The growing tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia which are supporting different sides in the Syrian conflict are also likely to hamper any peace talks.

Famine threatens thousands in Madaya

Thousands of persons face death by starvation in the Syrian city of Madaya (which is located approx. 25 km north-west of Damascus) which has been under siege by the Lebanese Hezbollah for the past 170 days. According to a spokesperson for the World Food Programme (WFP), the 40,000 residents of the city received the last aid consignment in October 2015. Twenty three persons reportedly starved to death in December 2015 alone. The government approved aid supplies on 7 January 2016. For logistics reasons, supplies will not reach the city until 11 January 2016 at the earliest.

Civilians killed in airstrike by US-led coalition

Eight children and three women were killed in a bombing carried out by the U.S.-led international coalition in the north of al-Raqqa province, the Syrian main stronghold of the Islamic State group, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported in a press release on 7 January 2016 . According to the NGO, the area north of al-Raqqa has been the scene of fighting since late 2015 between ISIS and the recently-established Alliance of Syrian Democratic Forces, also known as the Syrian Democratic Council which Kurdish People's Protection Units and several Arab and Christian rebel groups belong to.

Syria/Turkey

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Visa required for entry to Turkey by sea or by air

Since 8 January 2016, all Syrians entering Turkey by sea or by air need a visa. However, Syrian refugees entering Turkey by land do not require a visa. Turkey says it has taken this measure to prevent persons holding forged documents from entering the country. It says this does nothing to change its basic willingness to admit refugees.

Turkey

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Trial against Fethullah Gülen

On 6 January 2016, the trial against the Islamic cleric, Fethullah Gülen, began in Istanbul. Fethullah Gülen, who is living in the U.S. , is charged in absentia with attempting to overthrow the government and of leading a terrorist organisation. 69 other people, including former police chiefs, have been charged with him. The Turkish government claims that Gülen has been running a parallel state by getting his followers into key

positions in state institutions and has called for his extradition from the U.S, so far to no avail. The prosecution are seeking life imprisonment for Gülen and nearly all the other defendants.

Offensive against PKK

Violent confrontations have been taking place between the Army and PKK (Kurdish Workers' Party) supporters for weeks in the south-east of the country. A curfew was imposed in the Sur district of Diyarbakir on 2 December 2015 and in the towns of Cizre and Silopi on 14 December 2015. Security forces have deployed tanks and are fighting armed supporters of the PKK youth organisation YDG-H there. According to media reports, the pro-Kurdish party People's Democracy Party HDP claims that at least 70 civilians have been killed in the towns of Sur, Cizre und Silopi since the curfews were imposed. The Army claims to have "neutralised" over 320 terrorists, but concedes that it too has suffered some losses. On 9 January 2016, Army representatives announced that 18 militants and one soldier had been killed the previous day and that several persons were injured in clashes in Diyarbakır and Cizre. Twelve PKK militants and one police officers were reportedly killed in a raid on the city of Van in the early hours of 10 January 2016.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan highlighted the levels the conflict had reached in his New Year's address. He said that 3,100 terrorists and 200 security officers had been killed in 2015. He gave no indication as to how many civilians had been killed.

According to HDP sources, clashes between the PKK and security forces had claimed around 400 lives and that 342 civilians had also been killed.

Lebanon

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Suspected mastermind of twin blasts in Beirut arrested

Around two months after the twin suicide bombings in Beirut (12 November 2015) which claimed 44 lives, the Lebanese police announced on 10 January 2016 that they had arrested the person suspected of masterminding the attacks, a man by the name of Abu Talha. He is accused of being in communication with the Islamic State in Raqqa and of being the chief coordinator of a cell that prepared a string of explosions in Lebanon.

Suicide bombing on Israeli military convoy in the border region with Lebanon

According to a press release of 4 January 2016, an Israeli military convoy was the target of a suicide bomb along the Israeli-Lebanese border. Two jeeps were hit. There is no information available about casualties so far. The Israeli Army retaliated by shelling targets in southern Lebanon. The group "Martyr Samir Kuntar" which belongs to Hezbollah has claimed responsibility for the attack. Samir Kuntar, a well-known member of Hezbollah, was killed in an Israeli airstrike in a suburb of Damascus in December 2015.

Saudi Arabia/Iran

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Tension rises between Iran and Saudi Arabia

The conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia is coming to a head after the execution of the Shia cleric Nimr Baqir al-Nimr on 2 January 2016, an advocate of protests against the discrimination of Shia Muslims in Saudi-Arabia. Crowds broke into the Saudi Embassy in Tehran after his execution, setting fires. Saudi Arabia and several of its allies have suspended diplomatic relations with Iran or have scaled back diplomatic ties with Iran. Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister announced on 9 January 2016 following a special meeting with his counterparts from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – whose members include Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Oman – that his country would consider further measures in the event that Iran continues to pursue its policy. The GCC condemned the Iranian government's intervention in the interior affairs of Saudi Arabia.

Yemen

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Hostilities

Saudi combat aircraft reportedly targeted the Embassy of Iran on 7 January 2016, damaging property and injuring security officers. On 10 January 2016, at least four persons were reportedly killed and ten were wounded in a rocket attack on a clinic run by Médecins Sans Frontières in the north of the country.

Since September 2014, troops of President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi have been fighting against Shia Houthi rebels and their allies. Since March 2015, a military alliance led by Saudi-Arabia has been fighting on the side of the Yemeni government along with other Sunni countries in the war against Houthi rebels who are supported by Iran. Since then, around 6,000 persons, half of them civilians, have reportedly been killed and 28,000 persons have been injured. The resistance of the rebels began as a fight against marginalisation and discrimination.

Peace talks deferred

The peace talks due to take place on 14 January 2016 have been postponed until 20 or 23 January 2016 according to government sources. The UN Special Envoy wants to encourage the Houthi rebels to participate in the talks. Talks between the conflicting parties that had been initiated by the UN failed in December 2015.

Saudi Arabia ends ceasefire

The military alliance led by Saudi Arabia ended the ceasefire declared on 2 January 2016 and launched a new wave of airstrikes. It stated ongoing rebel attacks on Saudi cities and border posts as the reason. The ceasefire had originally been declared unilaterally by Saudi Arabia and its allies for the duration of the peace talks in Switzerland and had been extended after the talks broke down. Despite the ceasefire, pro-government troops launched a large-scale offensive in the north of the country on 18 December 2015 and managed to win back several cities.

Are cluster bombs being used?

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated in early January 2016 that the remnants of cluster bombs had been found in the north-west of the country. UN- Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon voiced his concern on 8 January 2016 about reports that the military coalition led by Saudi-Arabia had been using cluster bombs, for instance, in the city of Sana'a on 6 January 2016. He emphasised that the use of cluster bombs in densely-populated areas could be classified as war crimes. According to an international convention signed in 2008, cluster bombs are banned. However, Saudi Arabia has not yet signed the convention.

Libya

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Attack on training centre

At least 70 persons were killed and over 100 were wounded in a suicide blast on a police training camp in Zliten, western Libya on 7 January 2016. The city councillor of Zliten said a truck rigged with explosives drove through the gates of the facility and exploded close to a group of police cadets. Security officers of the coast guard undergo training at the facility. The majority of those killed are thought to be police cadets. On 8 January 2016, a branch of ISIS published a letter claiming responsibility for the attack on the Internet. There has been no evidence of the presence of ISIS in the region around Zliten up to now. ISIS has a coastal strip of the Mediterranean around the city of Sirte in Libya under its control and is trying to conquer oilfields.

Ghana/USA

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Ghana takes in Guantánamo detainees

The US Department of Defence announced on 6 January 2016 that Yemeni detainees held at Guantánamo Bay had been released and transferred to Ghana. They will be kept under surveillance for the next two years after which they will be permitted to leave the country. Neither of the men are considered to pose a security risk. They cannot be transferred to Yemen, inter alia, because of the civil war in the country. Only 105 detainees are still being held at the US base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, 46 of whom are not considered to pose a security risk. Ghana is the first sub-Saharan country to take in Guantánamo detainees.

Central African Republic

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Presidential elections: Run-off necessary

The Election Committee announced the preliminary result of the presidential elections held on 30 December 2015 on 7 January 2016. None of the 30 candidates won the requisite majority of 50 percent of the votes cast. A second round of elections will therefore be held on 31 January 2016 between the two hopefuls, Anicet Georges Dologuélé (who garnered 23.8 percent of the votes, Prime Minister between 1999 and 2001) and Faustin Archange Touadéra (who garnered 19.4 percent of the votes, Prime Minister between 2008 and early 2013). The result of the parliamentary elections held at the same time has not yet been announced. The elections were conducted without any major incidents following initial delays caused by logistics problems. The turnout was around 79 percent.

Ethiopia

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Several persons killed during protests

According to reports by human rights activists, at least 140 persons were killed by Ethiopian security forces in the Oromia region within the space of two months. Many people had been injured and arrested according to Human Rights Watch. The Ethiopian government has not commented on the reports but has confirmed that five people were killed.

The protests were aimed against the looming displacement of farmers as part of the regional reforms in the area surrounding the capital of Addis Ababa. The protests erupted in November 2015 and spread to several hundred locations, including Haramaya, Jarso, Walliso und Robe.

Nigeria

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Death penalty for blasphemy

On 4 January 2016, an Upper Sharia Court in Kano, northern Nigeria, sentenced an Islamic scholar, Abdulaziz Dauda, popularly known as Abdul Inyass, who is a member of the Tijānī Sufi order to death by hanging for blasphemous statements made against the holy Prophet Muhammad. He is accused of claiming that the Senegalese cleric Sheikh Ibrahim Niassé (the initiator of the Tijānī Sufi order of Islam in West Africa who died in 1975) was "greater than the Prophet" at a talk he held in Kano on 5 May 2015. The judge however said Inyass had 30 days to appeal the judgment.

The Sharia Court had sentenced 13 persons arrested with Dauda, eight men and one woman to death for blasphemy, four persons were released without charges.

Democratic Republic of Congo

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Attack by FDLR

In the early hours of the morning of 7 January 2016, militants of the Rwandan Hutu rebel organisation FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) attacked civilians in the village of Miriki, 110 kilometres (65 miles) north of Goma, capital of conflict-torn North Kivu province which is inhabited by the ethnic group of the Nande. 15 villagers were killed and eight were wounded. According to a spokesperson of the Congolese Army, the attack was an act of retaliation by the FDLR for a series of attacks carried out by Nande Mai-Mai militia against the FDLR.

Kosovo

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Rioting at large-scale anti-government rally

Tens of thousands of anti-government protestors took to the streets of Pristina on 9 January 2016. They threw petrol bombs and Molotov cocktails and tried to set a government building on fire. The police responded with water canons and tear gas. Several people were wounded and some were arrested. The three opposition parties, Vetevendosje (Self-determination), die Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) and

Nisma (Initiative) are calling for re-elections and are accusing the government of jeopardising the country's sovereignty. They want to prevent the agreement with Serbia which gives the Serbian minority in the North autonomy rights. The opposition has announced it will continue to protest until the government resigns. The demonstration represents the climax of the crisis which has been ongoing for months. Last week, opposition parties had stalled the work of Parliament several times by carrying out tear gas attacks. 13 members of the opposition were arrested. The government and opposition parties have been at loggerheads since the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) led by ex-Prime Minister Hashim Thaci entered into a grand coalition with the then leader of the opposition and current Prime Minister, Isa Mustafa, of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) in December 2014.

China

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Protests in Hong Kong

Thousands of Hong Kongers took to the city's streets on 10 January 2016 to protest against the mysterious disappearance of five Chinese publishers and booksellers who were reportedly taken by Chinese authorities. A book due to be published about Chinese president Xi Jinping prompted the protests. As the freedom of the press and opinion are far greater on the mainland than in the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong, many critical media are relocated and sold to Hong Kong.