

Group 41 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

16 December 2013

Afghanistan

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Security situation

On 11 December 2013, a suicide bomber blew himself up at the airport in the capital of Kabul right beside a convoy of the Bundeswehr. Nobody apart from the suicide bomber was injured or killed. The Taliban have claimed responsibility for the attack and claim that 10 soldiers were killed.

According to United Nations sources, the security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated in the second half of 2013. 5,284 incidents were recorded between 16 August 2013 and 15 November 2013. This represents a 13.9 percent increase year-on-year. In the first ten months of the year, the number of security relevant incidents rose by 13.2 percent compared to the same period in 2012. However, the number of incidents was 16 percent lower than in 2011.

Police rescue woman from being stoned to death

Afghan police rescued a woman from being stoned to death in Kunduz province (Dasht-i-Archi district) in northern Afghanistan after they had been informed by relatives. The woman's husband had accused her of cheating on him. A Taliban court sentenced the woman to death by stoning.

Iraq

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Security situation

In the past week, at least 14 persons were killed and several persons were injured when a car bomb exploded in a Sunni residential district in the town of Buhris (Diyala province) north-east of Baghdad on 9 December 2013. Several people, including two police officers belonging to the Sahwa militia, were killed in a number of explosions close to Baghdad. The Sahwa militia who are also known as Sons of Iraq are being backed by the Iraqi government in their battle against al-Qaeda. The militia have been the repeated target of attacks.

At least eleven persons were killed and 19 were injured in a suicide bombing at the Shia Abu-Idris shrine in Bakuba.

On 13 December 2013, gunmen shot 18 workers working on a gas pipeline between Iran and Iraq in the town of Beladrus (north-east of Baghdad). Further attacks were carried out nationwide, killing many people.

At least 17 persons were killed and many wounded in a series of bombings on 14 December 2013, including seven persons living in the Bajaa Shia residential district of Baghdad.

According to the broadcasting company Al-Mosulijah, unidentified gunmen fired shots killing a TV presenter on 15 December 2013. She is the fourth journalist to be assassinated in Mosul since October. At least 20 people were killed in other attacks carried out throughout the country.

Iraq is witnessing the most serious wave of violence in five years. The background is rising tension particularly between Sunni and Shia Muslims.

Oil pipeline between Northern Iraq and Turkey

In November 2013, the government of the Autonomous Region Kurdistan concluded an agreement with the Turkish government to put a pipeline from Kirkuk to Ceyhan in Turkey into operation. Baghdad considers the agreement to be a breach of Iraq's constitution because it was not coordinated with the central government.

Syria

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Security situation

At least 36 people, including 15 children, were killed in air strikes in Aleppo on 15 December 2013. Many people were reportedly killed in the past few days in the city of Adra (close to Damascus). According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, those killed belonged to religious minorities.

According to the findings of chemical weapons inspectors, poisonous gas has been used regularly in Syria. In its final report on poisonous gas attacks published on 12 December 2013, experts investigated at least five instances of alleged use and found that chemical weapons were either used, or likely used, in four of those instances.

Questions surrounding whereabouts of rebel Commander

According to media reports, the Chief of Staff of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), Salim Idriss, fled Syria for Doha (in Qatar) on 8 December 2013 after militiamen from the Islamic Front besieged his Headquarters and warehouse containing military gear in Bab al-Hawa close to the Turkish border. Observers rate his fleeing as a sign that the FSA is losing ground. The FSA denies this report. According to FSA sources, Idriss is in the South of Turkey near the Syrian border.

Air bridge to Syria established

The UN has set up an air bridge between Iraq and the north-east of Syria in order to resupply the inaccessible areas in the north east of Syria.

Lebanon

Lebanese sniper kills Israeli soldiers

A military incident occurred along the Israeli-Lebanese border on the evening of 15 December 2013. According to a military report, an Israeli soldier was shot dead by a Lebanese soldier close to the crossing point Rosh Hanikra. The gunman was a sniper who opened fire on an Israeli vehicle. Israel says it will not tolerate such aggression and therefore reserves the right of self defence. The Israeli Army submitted harsh criticism of the "breach of Israel's sovereignty" to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). A UNIFIL spokesperson announced that UNIFIL is in contact with both sides in a bid to prevent the fragile political situation from spiralling out of control.

Turkey

Charges filed against Gezi protestors

According to the Public Prosecutor in Istanbul, charges were filed on 10 December 2013 against a total of 255 persons who took part in the Gezi Park protests in the summer of 2013 and several preliminary investigations were also filed. The charges against ten suspects were dropped owing to lack of evidence. The defendants including seven foreigners are accused of violating the right of assembly and damaging public property. This represents the highest number of charges filed since the rallies held in the summer of 2013. According to the newspaper Hürriyet, more than 40 different charges have since been filed against 308 protestors. Police officers have also been charged with the death of protestors.

Tunisia

New Head of Government appointed

On 14 December 2013, the conservative-Islamic Ennahdha government and the opposition finally reached agreement on the appointment of a new Prime Minister for the cabinet of experts of the interim government, completing a drawn-out selection negotiation. The new Prime Minister, Mehdi Jomaa, a 51-year-old engineer, has been serving as an independent minister in the cabinet since March 2013. He will face the difficult task of guiding the country out of a now four-month long political deadlock. The roadmap of National Dialogue envisages forming a new independent and impartial cabinet made up of experts. A new constitution is to be adopted within the space of one month, the universal franchise is to be reformed and the path is to be cleared for re-elections.

Mehdi Jomaa worked in private industry between 1988 and March 2013, most recently as Director of the Aerospace Department of Hutchison, a company belonging to the French group Total.

Egypt

Referendum on new constitution

Interim-President Adly Mansour announced on 14 December 2013 that a referendum will be held on the constitution on 14 and 15 January 2014 (cf. BN of 9 December 2013).

The draft constitution comprises respect for human rights. It determines Islam as the state religion. The principles of sharia law are to provide the basis of legislation. However, political activity on religious grounds is to be banned. The provisions defining the privileges of the military are particularly controversial. The Chief of Staff of the Army, for instance, is to have the right to appoint the Minister of Defence in the next two legislative periods. According to a different provision, civilians can continue being put on trial before military courts if they are accused of being involved in attacks against the Army.

Attack on police barracks

One police officer was killed on 12 December 2013 when a car bomb exploded in front of a police barracks in the town of Ismailia along the Suez Canal. Between 18 and 43 persons were reportedly wounded.

Two persons killed at demonstrations

Two persons were killed during clashes between supporters and opponents of ousted President Moursi in Suez and Cairo. 54 persons were arrested by police in Mahalla in northern Egypt. Police officers dispersed the crowds using tear gas. The authorities say the rallies were unlawful as no advance notice had been given.

Mali

Suicide bombing in the run-up to parliamentary elections

On 14 December 2013, a car packed with explosives parked in front of a bank, guarded by UN peacekeeping troops, was detonated by a suicide bomber. Two UN peacekeepers from Senegal were killed in the blast. Seven other UN peacekeeping troops and four Malian soldiers were reportedly wounded. Malian Islamists have reportedly claimed responsibility for the attack.

In the first round of parliamentary elections held on 24 November 2013, only 20 seats were allocated. 6.5 million citizens will decide on the remaining 127 seats at parliamentary elections scheduled for 14 December 2013. The results will be announced by the end of the week.

Central African Republic

Fighting continues unabated (cf. BN of 9 September 2013)

More than 500 people were killed in the capital of Bangui last weekend alone. More than 40,000 people gathered at the airport in the capital in search of protection. According to UN sources, suffering among the people in the Central African Republic is growing. According to a spokesperson of UNHCR, 160,000 people, among them women and children, have been displaced in the capital of Bangui alone.

Muslim militants belonging to the rebel coalition Seleka are said to have clashed repeatedly with Christian militias. France deployed another 1,600 troops to the former colony last week to support troops of the Afri-

can Union and to disarm the rebels. The French Army has already begun disarming militiamen in the capital Bangui. Two soldiers were killed in fighting in Bangui. According to eyewitness reports, a Christian taxi driver was murdered by Seleka rebels in Bangui on 13 December 2013. Reports are circulating that unarmed Muslims have been murdered by Christian militiamen on the open street. The President of the Central African Republic, Michel Djotodia, has offered to talk with leaders of the militant Christians in a bid to find a solution to the conflict.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Peace agreement between M23 rebels and the Congolese government

On 12 December 2013, Foreign Minister Raymond Tshibanda representing the Congolese government and Bertrand Bisimwa, President of the M23 rebels issued a separate "statement" in Nairobi/Kenya, bringing the peace talks to a conclusion that been held in Kampala/Uganda since December 2012. Bisimwa announced in the text he signed, inter alia, the end of the M23 rebellion and the conversion of the M23 into a lawful political party. In return, the Congolese government undertook to demobilise the former M23 rebels and to integrate them into civil society. They have been promised an amnesty which will, however, not include anyone who has committed war crimes or crimes against humanity.

Kenya

Several killed in bomb blasts

Six persons were killed and more than 30 were wounded in a blast on a bus in Nairobi on 14 December 2013. Unknown perpetrators threw a grenade at British tourists in Mombasa on 12 December 2013 although it failed to detonate. On 13 December 2013, one person was killed in a bomb blast at a restaurant in Wajir in the north-east of Kenya. So far, no group has claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Serbia/Kosovo

Dissolution of Serbian parallel structures in North Kosovo

In accordance with a deal struck with Kosovo in April 2013, all Serbian parallel authorities in North Kosovo are to be dissolved by the end of the year. The Serbian Ministry of the Interior will dismiss all police officers living in Kosovo by 31 December 2013. According to a job advertisement, they will be integrated into the Kosovar police force in future. However, no agreement has been reached yet where the court responsible for Serbia will be seated.

Nonetheless, the Serbian government is hoping that the EU heads of state and government will give the go-ahead for the launch of EU accession negotiations next week.

Russian Federation

Putin plans amnesty for 20,000 prisoners

Activists of the environmental organisation Greenpeace accused of hooliganism by Russia and other political prisoners are to be granted blanket amnesty. Russian President Vladimir Putin presented a bill to the Duma on 10 December 2013 that would grant amnesty to 20,000 prisoners. This was announced by the Chairperson of the Human Rights Council at the Kremlin, Michail Fedotov, according to the Interfax agency. This means several prisoners detained after protests against President Putin as well as the two detained members of Pussy Riot may be released.

Ukraine

Power struggle continues in Ukraine

The pro-Western Ukrainian opposition is adhering to the goal of a change of government. More than 100,000 persons took to the streets of Kiev again on 15 December 2013, gathering on Independence Square in the city centre. At the rally, they demanded the resignation of President Victor Yanukovich and the denunciation of Russia. US Senator John McCain also made an appearance. McCain had met with the leader of the opposition Vitali Klitchko and Arseni Jazehukm head of the party of the detained former head of government Julia Timoshenko on 14 December 2013, pledging his support.

The government has also mobilised its supporters. Supporters of President Yanukovich gathered in a park on 15 December 2013 at a protest. The ruling party had postponed the rally at short notice, having decided it wanted to stage its protests a few hundred meters away from the opposition. The move is seen as a sign of an endeavour to defuse the situation. A large number of police officers were on duty. The mayor of Kiev, Alexander Popov, had to stand down on 14 December 2013 owing to the brutal crackdown against the pro-Western activists in late November 2013. The Ukrainian Presidential Office announced that President Yanukovich also fired the Vice-Head of the Ukrainian Security Council, Vladimir Sivkovich.

Turkmenistan

Parliamentary elections in Turkmenistan

Parliamentary elections were held in Turkmenistan on 15 December 2013, with two parties competing for the first time. Turnout among the approx. three million electorate was 91.3 percent. The new party comprising ca. 2,000 entrepreneurs and industrialists was set up in the early spring of 2012 by President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov himself and is considered to be supportive of the government. No other opposition parties were allowed to stand in the elections. Moreover, a large number of independent candidates, the Association of Trade Unions, the Women's Union, Magtymguly Youth Organization and several groups of citizens nominated their candidates for 125 seats in Parliament. The results have not been announced yet.

Bangladesh

Unrest following the execution of Islamist leader

Riots broke out throughout Bangladesh following the execution of Abdul Quader Molla, leader of Jamaat-e-Islami on 12 December 2013 for war crimes committed during the 1971 War of Independence. Supporters of Jamaat-e-Islami attacked government facilities and civil servants and set houses belonging to members of the ruling party Awami League on fire. Several people were killed in the riots.

China

Lives lost as violence erupts in Xinjiang

According to official reports issued on 16 December 2013, 16 persons were killed in a police offensive in a village near the city of Kashgar in the Uygur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang. In an attempt to arrest two persons, two policemen were killed; the police shot 14 persons who were holding explosives and wielding knives.

Conflict between Tibetans and authorities over demonstrations of loyalty

Conflict has been spiralling for several months in the Driru district (named Biru in Chinese) in the Autonomous Region Tibet between Tibetans and public authorities after Tibetans in several locations refused to demonstrate their loyalty to China and the Communist Party by placing the Chinese flag on their rooftops. According to reports from sources of Tibetans living in exile, security forces surrounded at least three Tibetan monasteries in the area; around 1,000 Tibetans have reportedly been detained since September and have been forced to undergo a conversion campaign. Security officers have shot at least four persons and have wounded dozens at several rallies against demonstrations of loyalty.

Myanmar

Amnesty for prisoners

On 11 December 2013, the government granted amnesty to 41 political prisoners and three other prisoners. According to the organisation Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) at least 44 political prisoners are still being detained, more than 200 activists are facing trial for leading various protests across the country and will face prison sentences if found guilty .