

Group 22 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

12 December 2016

Afghanistan

Armed clashes

Hostilities, raids and attacks, some involving fatalities or injuries among the civilian population, continue to occur. According to press reports, the following provinces were affected in recent weeks: Faryab, Sar-i-Pul, Jawzjan, Kunduz, Kandahar, Laghman, Herat, Nangarhar, Helmand, Kunar, Paktika, Ghazni, Paktia, Logar, Uruzgan, Zabul, Daikundi, Badghis and Parwan.



Targeted attacks

Two women died and two men were injured when a roadside bomb blew up in Paktika (South-East Afghanistan) on 05.12.16.

On 06.12.16 the Afghan police prevented an attack on the Indian consulate in Jalalabad, Nangarhar province (East Afghanistan). A suicide attacker died in Kunduz (North-East Afghanistan) when his suicide belt exploded prematurely.

A cleric was shot dead in the city of Herat (West Afghanistan) on 08.12.16.

On 10.12.16 the Taliban executed four civilians whom they claimed to be government spies in Parwan (Central Afghanistan).

Turkey

Attack

At least 38 people were killed, including 30 police officers and eight civilians, in a double bomb attack in Istanbul on 10.12.16. More than 150 people were injured. According to the Turkish government, the first bomb, which was a car bomb, was blown up near to the stadium of the Besiktas football club on Saturday evening. Initial investigations indicate that the attack was aimed at the special police forces. Directly after the first attack, a suicide attacker reportedly blew himself up in Macka Park next to the stadium. This attack is also alleged to have targeted the police who were providing security for the football match. The game had already been over for around one and a half hours when the first explosion occurred. The Kurdistan Freedom Fighters (TAK), a break-away group from the PKK, has claimed responsibility for the attacks. According to TAK, the attacks were intended to draw attention to the imprisonment of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan and the Turkish military operations particularly in the south-east of the country.

According to media reports, more than 118 representatives of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), including district chairpersons, have been arrested to date in nationwide raids carried out in the aftermath of the attacks. The Turkish government accuses them of having links to the PKK. Turkish military aircraft have additionally attacked twelve PKK positions in northern Iraq.

Amendments to the constitution

A draft motion for the contentious constitutional reform was tabled in parliament on 10.12.16. The ruling AKP wishes to introduce a presidential system along the lines of the French or US model. This is to entail the prime minister's most important powers being transferred to the president. This would enable president Erdogan to rule by decree, as he is currently able to do by virtue of the state of emergency which was imposed in mid-July. In future, it is also to be permissible for the president to belong to a party. As the AKP

together with its allies does not presently have the two-thirds majority in parliament which is required in order to pass the reform directly, the Turkish government intends to call on the electorate to vote on the new constitution in a referendum in the spring of 2017.

Leading Gülen supporters arrested

On 08.12.16 the police launched an operation against high-ranking supporters of the movement headed by preacher Fethullah Gülen. According to the state news agency, Anadolu, the objective is to arrest more than 50 leaders of the Gülen movement. The operation was spread over 16 provinces, with the city of Istanbul as the main focus. According to press reports, 51 academics from Istanbul University were arrested on 09.12.16, with a further 36 still on the wanted list.

Turkey/Syria

300 elite soldiers dispatched to Syria

According to media reports, in the face of the fierce resistance from the jihadists in the Syrian city of Al-Bab Turkey dispatched a further 300 elite soldiers to its neighbouring country last week. The Turkish military operation "Euphrates Shield" which was launched in September has begun to falter, following initial successes. The operation is intended to drive all armed groups back out of the border region.

Syria

Fighting over Aleppo

Russian and Syrian warplanes have been bombing eastern Aleppo for over two weeks now. According to media reports, ground forces from the Syrian army and Shiite militias from Lebanon and Iraq have managed to seize further areas in the eastern part of the city, leaving them in control of 90 % of the city's formerly rebel-held territory. Over 20,000 civilians in Aleppo have attempted to leave the few areas still controlled by the opposition militias and to escape into the western part of the city, which is loyal to the regime, as well as into the Kurdish districts and the south-east part of the city. According to the UN, hundreds of men and boys have disappeared. Efforts to secure a new ceasefire for Aleppo have so far failed.

Yemen

Jihadist militia IS claims responsibility for attack

48 soldiers were killed and 29 injured in an attack on a barracks in the city of Aden (port in the south of Yemen) on 10.12.16. According to the authorities, a suicide bomber blew himself up in the middle of hundreds of soldiers who were waiting to be paid at the barracks. Islamic State has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Israel / Palestinian territories

Preparations to clear wildcat settlement

A tough confrontation over the illegally built Jewish settlement Amona is looming in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. While the Israeli government intends to legalise the so-called wildcat settlements, Amona is not included in its plans. Security forces are now preparing to clear the outpost near to Ramallah. The Haaretz newspaper reported on 09.12.16. that hundreds of police had already rehearsed the operation in the desert. The Supreme Court has ruled that the settlement with a population of around 280 must be cleared by 25.12.16, because it was built on private land belonging to Palestinians.

Morocco/Spain

Border fence in Ceuta stormed

On the morning of 09.12.16 some 400 migrants stormed and broke through the six metre-high border fence in Ceuta. The Spanish authorities report that the fence was breached at two points. Around 100 refugees and a number of border guards suffered minor injuries. Some of the migrants hid in the streets. By midday, only 20 % had been found by the Spanish authorities and taken to the local reception centre. The migrants reportedly originate primarily from the sub-Saharan region.

Libya

IS driven out of Sirte

According to a reporter from the Al Jazeera TV station, the military has stated that the IS fighters have been driven out of Sirte. A number of IS fighters reportedly gave themselves up, while others are presumed to have gone underground in the surrounding area or in the desert. The fighting between the Libyan militias loyal to the government and the IS lasted seven months. Since August, the militias had been supported by American air raids.

Egypt

Attack on church in Cairo

According to information from the Egyptian health minister, at least 25 people were killed and 49 injured in a bomb attack on the Coptic church of Saint Peter and Paul during Sunday service on 11.12.16. Most of the victims were reportedly women and children. The explosion apparently occurred in the women's section of the church. Further details have yet to emerge. There are reports that an explosive device was thrown into the church, for example. Other reports claim that a woman smuggled the explosives into the church. No-one has claimed responsibility for the attack as yet. The church belongs to the Saint Mark's Cathedral complex, the seat of Pope Tawadros II. Amid a sense of outrage there were calls for interior minister Magdi Abdel Ghaffar to resign in the wake of the attack. President Al-Sisi ordered three days of national mourning. The attack was the worst of its kind since the attack on a church in Alexandria on New Year's Even in 2010, in which 20 people died.

Attack on security forces

Six police officers died when a car bomb exploded at a road block in Gizeh on 09.12.16. A group calling itself the Hasm Movement has claimed responsibility for the attack. According to Egyptian security forces, the group allegedly has links with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Human rights lawyer arrested

According to press reports, a director of the Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance (CEWLA) was arrested on 07.12.16 on charges of having received illegal funds from abroad. Her bank accounts were frozen and she was prohibited from leaving the country while investigations are ongoing. Following the adoption of a law to regulate non-government organisations (cf. BN of 05.12.16) at the end of November, NGOs are prohibited from carrying out activities of a political character and financial support from abroad is subject to oversight.

Organ trafficking network crushed

On 06.12.16 Egyptian authorities announced that a globally operative network of organ dealers had been crushed. In all, 41 suspects are reported to have been arrested in raids. Among the suspects are doctors, nurses and university professors, including from the reputable faculty of medicine at the University of Cairo. Poor Egyptians have allegedly had kidneys removed under medically dubious conditions and their organs sold to foreign recipients. Numerous victims of these organ removals have reportedly died.

Somalia

Attacks

Fighters thought to be members of Al-Shabaab attacked a police station in Burhakabo (Bay region) with a booby trap on 05.12.16. Six people died and at least ten were injured. Nine people died in an attack on a police office outside of Mogadishu on 10.12.16. On 11.12.16 a suicide attacker killed at least 30 people and injured 48 in a car bomb attack on the customs offices at the port in Mogadishu.

Hostilities

On 07.12.16 Puntland security forces drove fighters of Abdiqadir Mumin's militia, which is allied with IS, out of the town of Qandala (Bari region). 33 Islamists are reported to have been killed, while further IS fighters fled in the direction of the town of Galgala (Bari region). On 07.12.16 Al-Shabaab fighters attacked Somali army positions outside of the town of Jowhar (Middle Shabelle region), killing three soldiers according to their own account. Three people were also reportedly killed in another attack on an army position near the town of Warhaman (Lower Shabelle region) on 07.12.16. Al-Shabaab fighters attacked security forces of the South West Interim Administration in the town of Goof Gaduud (Bari region) on 08.12.16, killing four people according to their own account. Al-Shabaab fighters attacked an AMISOM convoy with a booby trap near Bulo Mareer (Lower Shabelle region) on 08.12.16, killing four AMISOM soldiers according to their own account. Unidentified aircraft attacked Al-Shabaab training camps near Tororo (Lower Shabelle region) and Kubarera (Middle Juba region) on 06.12.16.

Elections

28.12.16 has been announced as the new date for the presidential elections.

Nigeria

Boko Haram: Two suicide attacks claim lives

On 11.12.16 two women blew themselves up near the Monday market at two neighbouring locations in Maiduguri (capital of the federal state of Borno). One person died, 18 were suffered injuries.

On 09.12.16 two female suicide bombers blew themselves up at the market in the town of Madagali (federal state of Adamawa). According to a member of the local citizens' militia, the suicide bombers were seven or eight year-old girls. The chairman of the Madagali Local Government Area put the number of fatalities at 56, with 57 seriously injured and 120 slightly injured.

The Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram is being blamed for the attack.

Cameroon

People killed in opposition demonstrations

An opposition demonstration took place in Bamenda (city of the North-West region) on the morning of 08.12.16 with the aim of preventing the assembly of the ruling CPDM party which was planned for the same day. Violent clashes ensued between demonstrators, some of whom were armed with rocks, sticks and machetes, and the security forces. Between two and four demonstrators were shot dead by the security forces.

Eight of Cameroon's ten regions are French-speaking and two are English-speaking. The demonstrators are protesting at discrimination against the English-speaking population. In October 2016, lawyers in the anglophone regions, in which English civil law applies, called a strike to protest against the appointment of French-speaking judges. On 21.11.16 teachers in the English-speaking regions went on strike to protest against the secondment of French-speaking teachers. At least 100 people were arrested in protests in the English-speaking regions at the end of November 2016.

Gambia

Jammeh unwilling to acknowledge election result after all

A week after accepting his defeat in the presidential elections, long-standing head of state Yahya Jammeh announced shortly before expiry of the period for filing objections that he would be disputing the result of the election on account of “unacceptable errors” by the election commission. It was announced in a statement broadcast on state-run television on 09.12.16 that the APRC (Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction) would be challenging the decision by the responsible commission in a petition to the Supreme Court. The election commission has actually since acknowledged that an error occurred in counting the votes, with opposition candidate Adama Barrow (United Democratic Party/UDP) having been attributed too many votes in one constituency. Correcting this error only shortened Barrow’s lead from nine to four per cent, however. According to the commission’s final result, Barrow still has a clear lead ahead of the incumbent president, with 43.4 % of the vote as against 39.6 %. The UN Security Council has called on Jammeh to accept his election defeat. Similar appeals have come from the African Union and the Ecowas Economic Community of West African States. Following celebrations of the despot’s end in the capital, Banjul and in the city of Serrekunda, his announcement led to a drastic change of mood. Soldiers were on patrol in Banjul at the weekend.

FYR Macedonia

Parliamentary elections: Narrow victory for former ruling party

With 90 % of the votes cast in the early parliamentary elections on 11.12.16 counted, the conservative VMRO-DPMNE party of former prime minister Nikola Gruevski has a narrow lead over the social democratic opposition party (SDSM) led by Zoran Zaev, having polled 37.5 % of the votes so far, as compared to the SDSM’s approx. 36 % share. Forming a government will be difficult and will depend on the small Albanian parties. A grand coalition is out of the question, as the two parties are hostile to one another. The parties only managed to agree on new elections following difficult mediation by the USA and the EU. The SDSM accused the government of large-scale corruption and criminality. Gruevski is alleged to have embezzled millions, manipulated the judiciary and wire-tapped thousand of people during his time in office. A special public prosecution department corroborated a number of these allegations shortly before the election.

The twice postponed election was actually intended to put an end to the crisis which has been simmering for over two years. In view of the narrow result it is feared that the situation may even become more serious, however. The SDSM also sees itself as the winner of the elections.