

Group 22 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

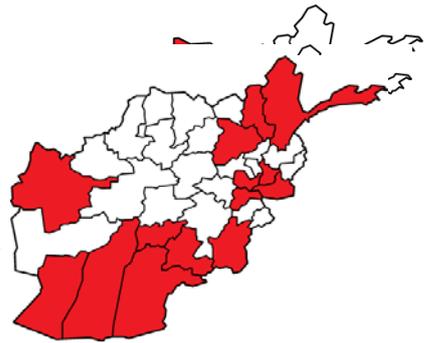
Briefing Notes

30 January 2017

Afghanistan

Armed conflicts

Armed conflicts, attacks and bombings in which civilians are also being killed or wounded continue unabated. According to press reports, the following provinces were affected in the past week: Zabul, Uruzgan, Helmand, Kandahar (southern Afghanistan), Baghlan (north-eastern Afghanistan), Jawzjan, Faryab (northern Afghanistan), Nangarhar (eastern Afghanistan), Paktia (south-eastern Afghanistan), Farah and Herat (western Afghanistan).



Suicide bombings and attacks

On 26 January 2017, one civilian was killed and two were wounded in a suicide bombing in Ghazni. Suspected members of the Taliban set fire to a clinic in Helmand (southern Afghanistan). In Kandahar province (southern Afghanistan), gunfire broke out between Afghan and Pakistani border guards along the border with Pakistan when militants were crossing the border.

On 29 January 2017, the Taliban beheaded a 19-year-old youth and cut off his hands in Logar province (central Afghanistan). In Zabul (southern Afghanistan), two children were killed when a dud bomb exploded.

Iraq

Kurdistan

On 24 January 2017, the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) announced it was setting up a Yezidi unit.

Salah ad-Din province

Thirty one persons were executed in Salah ad-Din for their alleged role in mass killings in 2014 in which 1,700 cadets of the Iraqi army were killed. Observers assume that the confessions were extracted under torture and that the trials did not meet standards applicable under the rule of law.

Diyala province

After a landmine left over from the Iraqi-Iranian war in the 1980s exploded, killing a herd of sheep in Diyala, the Ministry of Defence says it is considering stepping up endeavours to remove landmines.

Operation by allied forces against ISIS

ISIS has reportedly withdrawn from its alternative headquarters near Tel Afar, destroying comprehensive archive material.

On 26 January 2017, Iraq's Ministry of the Interior raised the estimated number of persons displaced by hostilities and expected to arrive in western Mosul to 250,000.

Turkey

Access to the online medium "Özgürüz" blocked

According to media reports, access to the new bilingual German-Turkish website "Özgürüz" (<https://ozguruz.org/de/ozguruz-de/>) was blocked just two days after being launched. Reporting was due to commence on 27 January 2017. According to Editor-in-chief, Can Dündar, the portal wanted to convey all news that was being withheld from the Turkish people, or that had been censored or banned. The German-Turkish medium in exile that is based in Berlin is supported by "Correctiv," an investigative non-profit organisation.

No extradition to Turkey

Greece's Supreme Court ruled on 26 January 2017 that the eight Turkish soldiers who had applied for asylum in Greece will not be extradited to Turkey; the decision is irreversible. The court said it was most unlikely that they would receive a fair trial in Turkey. Furthermore, it said their extradition would contravene the European Convention on Human Rights.

The two majors, four captains and two non-commissioned officers had fled to northern Greece in a Turkish Army helicopter in mid-July 2016 during the attempted coup in Turkey. The Turkish government has since demanded that they be extradited. It is accusing them of being involved in the coup, an allegation the soldiers deny.

Syria

Peace talks

The two-day peace talks on Syria ended in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, on 24 January 2017 without achieving any breakthrough. According to the final document, Russia, Turkey and Iran want to install a mechanism to monitor and stabilise the ceasefire. The three countries also said they would support the willingness of the armed opposition to take part in the next round of peace talks in Geneva.

Drinking water supply for Damascus

Last week, the Syrian army announced that it has regained control over the Wadi Baradi region which had been occupied since 2012, thereby restoring the water supply for the city of Damascus. The water supply had been cut off in late December 2016 because of fighting in the region.

Lebanon

On 26 January 2017, Human Rights Watch (HRW) published a statement against the practice of military courts passing sentence on civilians, and sometimes minors, for clashing with security forces. Several hundred cases were documented in 2016. HRW says this is incompatible with the rule of law.

Proposals for an electoral law are currently being discussed by politicians within the country. The last parliamentary elections were held in 2009. The aim is to hold elections in May 2017.

Yemen

Airstrikes against Al-Qaeda claim fatalities

Local officials say 41 suspected Al-Qaeda militants, as well as 16 women and children, were killed in the US airstrikes in Baida province. Vast parts of the province are under the control of Shia Houthi rebels who are fighting against the troops of Sunni President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi. Al-Qaeda reportedly has at least two training camps in this inaccessible mountainous region.

The attack was the first large-scale airstrike to be carried by the US Air Force in Yemen since US President Donald Trump took office.

Libya

Several US airstrikes were carried out against ISIS camps near Sirte last week. According to an announcement made on 24 January 2017, allies of the perpetrator of the terrorist attack carried out in Berlin, Anis Amri, were staying in the camps.

The "3rd Brigade" that is accused of blocking petrol and gas supplies to southern Libya denied the allegation publicly, accusing the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by Khalifa Haftar.

The LNA announced on 25 January 2017 that it had recaptured the Ganfouda district in Benghazi from Islamists. On 27 January 2017, the last remaining Islamists in Ganfouda hoisted white flags.

Town of Tawergha (38 km south of the coastal city of Misrata): the NGO "Justice First" (Adala Auwwalan) has made initial arrangement for the repatriation of Libyan refugees who had been forced to leave Tawergha. The convoy totalling 65 persons from 16 families reached Tobruk on 25 January 2017. The refugees who lost most of their possessions during the ethnic cleansing of Tawergha were promised housing and a monthly allowance of LD 1,000 (around EUR 250) per family for one year as a start-up aid. Adala Auwwalan has announced additional repatriations. However, capacities and resources are very limited.

Morocco

Terrorist cell dismantled

Security forces raided an apartment in El-Jadida (port city on the Atlantic coast, which has a population of around 200,000, it is the administrative capital of El-Jadida province) and arrested seven members of a terrorist cell that has links with ISIS. The group was reportedly planning attacks in Morocco. The weapons cache found at the apartment included explosive belts, a machine gun, ammunition and chemicals used to build bombs.

Burundi

Amnesty

An amnesty for around 2,500 prisoners began with the release of several hundred prisoners from Mpimba prison in the capital Bujumbura on 23 January 2017. Those released included 58 members of the opposition party Mouvement pour la solidarité et la démocratie (MSD) who had taken part in a prohibited demonstration in 2014.

Nigeria

Boko Haram: several bombings in the North-East

On 28 January 2017, suspected militants of the Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram attacked a convoy escorted by troops on the road connecting Maiduguri, Damboa and Biu. According to police sources, one person was killed, other sources claim seven persons were killed.

On 25 January 2017, the military shot a suicide bomber on the outskirts the capital of Borno, Maiduguri, at a checkpoint in the area of Usmati, Mafa Local Government Area (LGA). During the early hours of the morning of the same day, two suicide bombers, a man and a woman, tried to enter a mosque during morning prayer in Kaleri district, (also Mafa LGA). When members of the Civilian Joint Task Force (JTF) approached them, they blew themselves up, also killing a member of the JTF.

On 23 January 2017, suspected Boko Haram militants raided (N)dagu village (Askira-Uba Local Government Area). According to police reports, they killed three villagers and abducted seven women. They burnt down houses in the village.

Cameroon

Tensions rise in the South-West Region and North-West Region owing to language dispute

On 17 January 2017, the activities of the Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC) and the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (CACSC) were banned. The SCNC propagates the secession of both English-speaking regions in the south and south-west of the country, whereas the CACSC support a federal state of Cameroon. The ban covers all activities initiated or supported by these groups. The President of the CACSC, Nkongho Felix Agbor-Balla, and his General-Secretary, Fontem Aforteka'a Neba, were arrested. The government also restricted Internet access in the two English-speaking South Region and South-West Region. Shortly beforehand, a text message was sent to all mobile phones informing people that the dissemination of false information in social networks would be punishable with high fines. On 6 December 2016, the CNC suspended 18 newspapers, one radio programme and 27 newspaper publishers for between six months and one year in most cases for defamation of the government. Two newspapers were closed permanently, whose publishers are now banned for life from working as journalists. These government measures were taken against the backdrop of a strike launched by English-speak teachers and lawyers in October/November 2016 in the two English-speaking South-West Region and North-West Region following the growing preference being given to French as the official language in court and in schools. Violent clashes erupted with security forces at a number of anti-government demonstrations and protests supported by the SCNC and CACSC. A number of protestors were killed or wounded. A large number of protestors were arrested.

Gambia

New President returns from exile

Gambia's new President, Adama Barrow, returned to his native country on 26 January 2017 having taken the oath of office in neighbouring Senegal. He was greeted by thousands of joyous people amidst a strong military presence in the capital of Banjul. After Yahya Jammeh stepped down, the Gambian Parliament lifted the state of emergency imposed by him on 24 January 2017. At present, around 2,500 troops of the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) remain in Gambia to maintain security. They will remain in the country for another six months at the new President's request. According to an advisor of Adama Barrow, no amnesty will be granted, as demanded by Jammeh. Some members of the former President Jammeh also went into exile. The Minister of Health, Omar Sey, has reportedly filed an application for asylum in Switzerland. Charges have been filed against ex-Minister of the Interior Ousaman Sonko, who is also residing in Switzerland, for crimes against humanity.

Somalia

Attacks

At least 18 persons were killed in a coordinated gun-and-bomb attack carried out at the popular Dayah Hotel in Waberi district in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, on 25 January 2017. The suicide bomber and five other insurgents were among the dead. Around 40 persons were wounded. The assault began when attackers rammed an explosives-packed car into the gate of Dayah Hotel. Attackers then stormed the building. A second car bomb detonated in front of the building. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack. Four or five persons were reportedly killed in two attacks launched by al-Shabaab against Somali troops in the town of Afgoy (Lower Shabelle Region) on 24 January 2017. On 23 January 2017, al-Shabaab militants killed five Somali troops in Burkhaba district (Bay Region).

Clashes

A large number of persons were killed in heavy fighting that broke out between Kenyan AMISOM troops and al-Shabaab militants after extremists attacked a military base in Kolbiyov (Lower Juba Region, close to the border with Kenya) on 27 January 2017. The exact death toll is not yet known. Kenyan troops say 70 Islamists were killed, al-Shabaab militants claim they killed 57 Kenyan troops. The Kenyan troops managed to repel the attack. One civilian died, and eight civilians were wounded in indiscriminate shelling by Somali units on suspected al-Shabaab bases in a residential area near Bulo-Marer district in Lower Shabelle Region on 26 January 2017. On 24 January 2017, security forces seized the autonomous interim-administration of Jubaland and AMISOM troops won the coastal city of Badhaadhe (Lower Juba Region) back from al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab recaptured the city a few hours later after the security forces withdrew. AMISOM units

and Somali troops attacked al-Shabaab strongholds near Hudur (Bakol Region) on 24 January 2017, killing two Islamists and two Somali troops.

Alleged spies executed

Al-Shabaab executed three men it had accused of spying on behalf of the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and other intelligence agencies in Kenya and Somalia in Yaaq Baraw (Bay Region) on 26 January 2017. Three men had been executed on 10 January 2017 in Buale (Middle Region) Juba also on charges of espionage.

No withdrawal of Burundi Troops

After reaching agreement with the African Union on 20 January 2017, the Burundi government dropped its threat to withdraw its troops from AMISOM. According to the agreement, the EU will pay bonuses for Burundian troops through the African Union which will then pay them to the soldiers through Burundian commercial banks (cf. BN of 23 January 2017).

Elections

Somalia's Electoral Commission announced on 25 January 2017 that presidential elections will be held on 8 February 2017. Having been postponed several times, the election was to be held on 24 January 2017 before it was deferred again.

Russian Federation

Parliament approves milder sentences for crimes involving domestic

On 27 January 2017, the Russian Parliament (Duma) backed a controversial bill almost unanimously, reducing the punishment for some forms of domestic violence offenders in a crucial third reading, so as long as it is a first offence and does not cause serious injury or rape. Violence against a family member that does not cause serious physical injury will no longer be defined as a criminal offence but as an administrative offence. As the bill is expected to go before the upper house and then to President Vladimir Putin for a final signature, a family member who is a first-time offender will only receive a fine or a prison sentence of 15 days in future. Up to now, crimes involving domestic violence were punishable by up to two years in jail. This would practically decriminalise domestic violence in some respects. Critics consider the bill to be a step backward for Russian society.

According to NGOs and the UN, tens of thousand of women are beaten by their husbands and children are beaten by their parents each day and between 9,000 and 14,000 women die as a result of domestic violence each year. The Russian Federation is one of four members of the Council of Europe that has not signed the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

Ukraine

Ukraine conflict: heavy fighting in Avdiylvka

According to Ukrainian army sources, pro-Russian rebels tried to regain control of the industrial area in the strategically important city of Avdiylvka (near Donetsk) held by government troops on 29 January 2017 using artillery. Four troops were reportedly killed (three government troops/one of the rebels) and two were wounded (one government soldier/one rebel). The fighting was one of the deadliest fights to erupt in several weeks and constitutes a serious breach of the ceasefire agreed between the government and rebels on 24 December 2016.

Vietnam

Activists arrested

On 21 January 2017, Tran Thi Nga (also known as Thuy Nga) was arrested in Ha Nah province in northern Vietnam for allegedly distributing video clips and documents on the Internet with her "propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam" which can result in a sentence of between three and 20 years in prison.

She is an activist for the rights of migrant workers and land owners whose property has been expropriated. Her husband Phan Van Phong was also arrested. According to Human Rights Watch, at least a dozen bloggers and activists have been arrested in the past five months; at least 112 bloggers and activists are currently serving prison sentences.

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