

Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

25 August 2014

Afghanistan

Security situation

A candidate for the elections to the provincial council in the south-eastern province of Ghazni was shot on 25 August 2014. Nine Afghan soldiers died in a bomb explosion in Kabul on 24 August 2014. Five ISAF-soldiers were wounded in an insurgent attack near Jalalabad (capital of the eastern province of Nangarhar). When a police base was attacked in the northern province of Takhar eight attackers and one policeman were killed. A NATO soldier was stabbed by an unknown man during a road check in Kabul on 20 August 2014. On 23 August 2014 insurgents attacked a military post in the south-eastern province of Paktya killing four soldiers and losing over 20 of their fighters. On the same day in the northern province of Faryab fighting broke out between rivalling local militias. On 19 August 2014 a fierce battle ensued waged when about 700 Taliban fighters attacked the security forces in the central province of Logar. More fighting and attacks occurred in different provinces, such as in Kunduz in the north, Badghis in the west, and Logar in central Afghanistan where a drone killed three civilians.

Assaults on aid organisation staff

The five Afghan staff members of the Red Cross kidnapped on 14 August 2014 (see BN of 18 August 2014) were released. In 2014 at least 33 staff of aid organisations lost their lives in Afghanistan.

Pakistan

Security situation

On 23 August 2014 the border troops of Pakistan and India exchanged fire in Cashmere by which four civilians were killed and several seriously wounded. In Pakistan's north-west (Salarzai, Bajaur) at least six civilians died in the bombing of Taliban positions on 19 August 2014. At least two people lost their lives when a NATO convoy was attacked in the north-west on 21 August 2014. Also in the north-west, at least six people died when a school bus was bombed on 19 August 2014.

Iraq

Development of the situation

At least 73 people died in an attack on a Sunni mosque north-east of Baghdad on 22 August 2014. Reportedly it was attacked by a Shia militia. The public TV station, however, blamed Islamic State (IS). Also on 23 August 2014, two suicide bombers acted apparently in revenge in Baghdad and near Tikrit, taking at least 17 lives.

The press reported on 23 August 2014 that IS has been laying siege on the city of Amerli for almost two months and thus cut the supply routes for water and food. Amerli has a population of about 20,000 and is located roughly 170 km north of Baghdad and about 100 km south of Kirkuk.

Aid for displaced Iraqis

An UNHCR press release of 22 August 2014 announces the shipment of 2,410 tons of aid for displaced Iraqis within the next ten days. It also said that about 700,000 displaced persons are now staying in Iraq's Kurdistan region, most of which had arrived in June. Hundred thousands are currently living in very poor conditions, many of them had been housed in unfinished buildings, mosques, churches, parks, and schools. According to the release, local authorities are estimating that about half of all school buildings had been converted into emergency shelters.

Syria

IS takes Tabka military airfield

On 24 August 2014 it was reported that Islamic State (IS) has taken the al-Tabka military airfield near the northern Syrian province of ar-Raqqa after many weeks of heavy fighting that claimed an estimated death toll of over 500. The airfield is one of the most significant military installations in the region and holds squadrons of fighter jets, helicopters, tanks, artillery, and ammunition.

Kidnapped US journalist released in Syria/German national released by IS

US National Security Advisor Susan Rice confirmed on 24 August 2014 that the US journalist Peter Theo Curtis had been released on the same day. Curtis had been abducted by the al-Nusra Front near the Syrian-Turkish border in October 2012. A 27-year-old German who had been in Syria as humanitarian aid worker and was abducted in June 2013 is said to have been released already in June against a "substantial compensation".

Lebanon

Rockets on Israel

In the evening of 23 August 2014 two rockets were fired into the north of Israel from Lebanon. The Israeli military reported that they had hit one house in Galilee, in the north, where eight people had suffered shocks. Another five rockets were fired from Syria in the night of 24 August 2014.

Palestinian Autonomous Areas/Israel/

Three high-ranking Hamas military leaders killed in air strike

In its war against Hamas Israel is increasingly concentrating on dismantling its military leadership. Hamas announced that on 22 August 2014 three commanders had been killed in an air strike of a house in the city of Rafah, those killed were Muhammad Abu Jammala, Raed al-Attar, and Muhammad Barhum. Israel confirmed that the air strikes had targeted two of the men. Prime Minister Netanyahu said that these men had been planning attacks against Israeli soldiers. On 19 August 2014 the Israeli air force had also attacked the house of Hamas military leader Muhammad Deif in Gaza's north, killing his wife, daughter and seven-months-old son, while he himself escaped, according to Hamas.

In the night of 25 August 2014 the Israeli air force renewed its attacks on targets along the Mediterranean coast. An army spokesperson in Tel Aviv said that 65 targets had been shelled within 24 hours.

Iran

Human Rights Watch criticizes illegal detentions

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has accused Iran of illegally detaining dozens of people because they exercised their fundamental rights. In a report published on 19 August 2014 HRW cited the cases of 189 detainees in the northern city of Karaj (near Tehran). According to HRW 63 of them had been convicted solely because they "exercised their fundamental rights such as the right of freedom of opinion or freedom of assembly or association". In 35 cases the detainees had been sentenced to death for alleged terrorist crimes. In this context one had to suspect serious violations of the rule of law and due process. HRW demanded that moderate President Hassan Rohani and his cabinet should work harder for the release of political prisoners, in particu-

lar, because he had raised hopes that there would be releases during his election campaign. HRW also pointed out that dozens of members of the religious minority of the Bahai and two Christian priests as well as two Christian converts were imprisoned in Iran. Furthermore nine journalists and bloggers as well as seven human rights lawyers were in prison. UN human rights experts had repeatedly voiced their concern about the continuing precarious situation of the political prisoners. Although Rohani came into office one year ago, a new wave of arrests, death sentences, and executions has swept the country in recent months.

Open power struggle between Rohani and ultra-conservatives

President Rohani must do without one of his most important supporters when pursuing his planned course of reform. On 20 August 2014 the parliament (Majlis) announced the dismissal of science minister Reza Faraji Dana. Dana was one of Rohani's most important ministers. The motive for the parliament's decision is an open power struggle between Rohani and ultra-conservative MPs. The ultra-conservatives accuse the reformist Dana of having re-employed university professors who had been dismissed for political reasons, when he took office one year ago. Allegedly he also promoted the return of students who are critical of the regime. Because of such measures Dana is accused of trying to provoke unrest at the universities. It is assumed that the parliament's decision was triggered by Rohani's provocation of his critics last week, when he said that they 'should go to hell'. Observers in Tehran say that Dana's dismissal will not have any major impact. Rohani is expected to appoint another reformist as science minister quickly - he will, however, have to be confirmed by parliament.

Film director Jafar Panahi still banned from working

Iranian director and Sacharov laureate Jafar Panahi is still not allowed to make any further films because of his criticism of the government. The bans on exercising the profession, giving interviews or travelling as well as his house arrest remain in force. In this way Iran is duping the European Parliament which repeatedly called for the artist's rehabilitation. In December 2012 the European Parliament had bestowed its Sacharov Human Rights Award to Panahi together with the lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, who was in prison at the time. Furthermore Panahi is a member of the jury of the "Berlinale" film festival. Since he has been banned from travelling his seat on that body is kept empty ostentatiously.

Three years imprisonment and flogging for probable death by torture of a government critic

After an Iranian blogger died, probably of torture, a policeman in Tehran was sentenced to three years imprisonment and 74 lashes. The media reported the Tehran prosecution as saying that the death of the opposition member Sattar Beheshti in the autumn of 2012 had probably been caused by "a shock after beating or by extreme mental stress". The 35-year-old Beheshti had been arrested in October 2012, because he had voiced criticism of the government on the internet. On 03 November 2012 he was found dead in his prison cell. The coroner stated that Beheshti had died from shock or fear. Opposition groups, however, maintained that he died as a consequence of torture. Beheshti's family voiced its disappointment with the sentence. If journalists critical of the government were sentenced to six years in prison, a three-year sentence for murder was surprisingly mild, they said.

Yemen

30,000 al-Houthi rebels enter Sanaa

Over 10,000 followers of the Shia al-Houthi rebels are marching on the capital Sanaa. The Yemeni news site „Al-Mashhad al-Yemeni“ reported that on 21 August 2014 already 30,000 rebels were in town and at least 10,000 of them were armed. It is also reported that the al-Houthi set up a reception camp north of Sanaa. The rebels demand the independence of their tribal areas in the north from the government. For years they have frequently engaged in heavy fighting with the army. As recently as at the beginning of August al-Houthi fighters had taken control of the provincial capital Amran (about 50 km north of Sanaa). The rebels are now threatening to overthrow the government, if their demands are not met. According to reports of the "Saba" news agency, Yemeni interim president Mansour Hadi called upon the western industrial states and the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf to support him in opposing "the threat posed by the Houthi group". On 24 August 2014 a spokesman of President Hadi's negotiation team announced that the negotiations of the Yemeni government with the al-Houthi rebels had failed. The rebels had rejected all proposals submitted to them, he said.

Turkey

New prime minister

After Tayyip Erdogan's election as Turkish head of state the leadership of the Islamic conservative governing party AKP appointed current foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu as his successor in the office of prime minister on 21 August 2014. At the extraordinary party congress on 27 August 2014 he shall also be elected as party chairman. On the following day Erdogan will be sworn in as president and in this capacity he may not belong to any political party. Outgoing president Abdullah Gül intends to join AKP again. In an address given after his appointment Davutoglu confirmed that will continue to pursue Erdogan's policies and stressed the unity of the party which had been strongly focussed on its outgoing chairman.

Libya

Islamist militias seize Tripoli airport

Militias of the command Fajr Libya (Libyan Dawn) announced on 24 August 2014 that they had taken full control of the international airport of Tripoli. The battle for the airport had been waged for six weeks between the Islamists and a nationalist secular militia from the city of Al-Sintan. The airport was largely destroyed during the fighting. Also unidentified aircraft participated in the fighting by bombing the Fajr Libya militia's positions. Egypt called a conference of the neighbouring countries in Cairo for 25 August 2014. For President Abdel Fattah as-Sisi the fighting in Libya represents a threat to Egypt's national security.

Nigeria

Boko Haram proclaims "Islamic Caliphate" in Gwoza

In a video message published on 24 August 2014 the leader of the Islamist terror organization Boko Haram, Abubakar Shekau, announced the seizure of the city of Gwoza (former population 50,000) in the north-eastern state of Borno and declared it to be part of an Islamic Caliphate. The Nigerian defence headquarters rejected the formation of the Caliphate on 24 August 2014, saying that Nigeria's sovereignty and territorial integrity continued intact. Boko Haram has been occupying Gwoza and its closer surroundings already since 6 August 2014 and all attempts by the military to win Gwoza back have failed so far.

Boko Haram occupies more cities

In the morning of 23 August 2014 hundreds of Boko Haram fighters seized the city of Madagali (about 20 km from Gwoza, seat of the Madagali Local Government Area – LGA- administration) after driving out the soldiers from the local military base.

The city of Buni Yadi (seat of the Gujba LGA administration in the north-eastern state of Yobe) has been under Boko Haram's control at least since 20 August 2014. It is not quite clear whether Boko Haram has been holding the city continuously since seizing it on 30 July 2014 or whether it had withdrawn once since then.

Boko Haram seizes the police academy near Gwoza

In the early evening of 20 a great number of Boko Haram fighters with several vehicles attacked the police academy in the town of Liman Kara (about 15 km from Gwoza). After an extensive exchange of fire the terrorists succeeded in conquering the academy which is one of only two in Nigeria where special riot police forces are trained. The police stated on 23 August 2014 that 35 policemen have been missing since then.

Soldiers refuse fighting against Boko Haram

The Nigerian Daily Trust reported that on 19 August 2014 dozens of soldiers of the Maimalari barracks in Maiduguri (capital of the north-eastern state of Borno) refused to follow orders to relocate to the area of Damboa or to the city of Gwoza which has been under Boko Haram's control since 06 August 2014, in order to fight the terrorists. They stopped their vehicles in the outskirts of Maiduguri and refused to move, because they lacked adequate arms for this type of fight. Already on 09 and 11/12 August 2014 between 100 and 300

wives of soldiers staying in Giwa barracks in Maiduguri protested against the deployment of their husbands to fight Boko Haram and set fire to tyres in front of the access roads to the barracks to prevent their men from leaving. The women complained that the soldiers' equipment was inferior to that of the enemy and that this combat mission would be life-threatening for them.

Sudan

Tribal fighting in Darfur

In fighting between the Arab tribes of the Rizeigat and the Maaliya in Um Rakuba district in eastern Darfur at least 30 Rizeigat and at least 40 Maaliya were killed on 20 August 2014, eyewitnesses reported. The Maaliya are living in this region. The Khartoum interior ministry announced to deploy police units with helicopters to the area to dispel any assemblies of armed tribal members.

In front of the presidential palace in Khartoum dozens of Maaliya protested against the actions of the Rizeigat which they called genocide.

Confrontations between the two tribes are frequent over cattle theft and rights to land and grazing. According to the UN only in August 2013 these clashes had claimed 190 lives. Several hundred people died in similar conflicts between Arab tribes in Darfur last year.

South Sudan

Ugandan military to stay in South Sudan

A spokesman of the Ugandan government said on 22 August 2014 that the rebels associated with Riek Machar had consented to the stationing of the neighbouring country's troops on the territory of South Sudan until the arrival of the peace force of the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD). Uganda supports the Juba government against the rebels who had always demanded the withdrawal of the Ugandan units until now.

Since December 2013 at least 10,000 casualties resulted from the fighting between the Dinka-dominated government and the Machar's Nuer rebels.

Central African Republic

Country at risk of division

The Central African Republic still has no government. In a press release the Séléka rebel groups proclaimed their own state called Dar El Kouti. The group is already in control of the country's north and does not recognize the new prime minister, although he is Muslim. A government spokesman said that this new state would never exist. Despite its show of strength the Séléka are no uniform group, it is made up of numerous splinter groups and ethnic elements.

Deaths in mining accident

25 died when a gold mine collapsed near the city of Bambari. The mine is mainly controlled by Séléka rebels.

Uganda

President signs law against HIV positive persons

President Yoweri Museveni signed into law a bill sanctioning "knowingly transferring HIV" with up to ten years imprisonment. There will be no prosecution, if condoms were used or if the partner was aware of the HIV infection and intercourse was consensual. An attempted transfer carries a maximum prison sentence of five years. Aids activists warn that the law might make HIV prevention and access to medication more difficult. About 7.3 percent of Uganda's population are HIV positive.

Somalia

Death sentences for al-Shabaab members

On 20 August 2014 a Mogadishu military tribunal sentenced seven men to death for membership in al-Shabaab and for the murder of a government official. Six defendants received life sentences for hiding al-Shabaab members and aiding and abetting attacks of the Islamists.

Last week the court martial had imposed capital punishment on at least five other al-Shabaab members.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Ebola outbreak confirmed

The Congolese minister of health informed on 24 August 2014 that tests confirmed the infection of two persons with the Ebola virus in the north-western province of Equateur. Authorities had previously spoken of 13 deaths of an unknown fever occurring within ten days in a remote area of Equateur. Reportedly the Congo Ebola virus is of another strain than that in West Africa. The Ebola virus had first been discovered in Equateur in 1976. This is the seventh Ebola outbreak in the territory of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Ukraine/Russia

Captive soldiers paraded by separatists in Donetsk

On 24 August 2014, Ukraine's Independence Day, pro-Russian separatists publicly presented dozens of captured Ukrainian soldiers in the major city of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine that is still hotly contested. They were paraded through the streets and taken to central Lenin square where citizens insulted them with calls of "Fascists! Fascists!"

Aid convoy crosses border

The Russian aid convoy of over 280 lorries that had been halted at the Ukrainian border for about one week, crossed into Ukraine on 22 August 2014 without permission from the Ukrainian government and without being accompanied by the Red Cross and unloaded the aid in Luhansk; Russia had justified the unauthorized border crossing by saying that the population suffering in the contested areas of Eastern Ukraine could not wait any longer. The head of the OSCE observer mission at the Russian border post of Donetsk reported that the convoy returned to Russia on 23 August 2014. The EU Commission told Moscow that this constituted a "clear violation of the Ukrainian border".

Putin and Poroshenko to meet in Minsk

While heavy fighting is raging in eastern Ukraine, Russian President Putin and his Ukrainian counterpart Poroshenko agreed to meet in the Belarusian capital of Minsk on 26 August 2014. Poroshenko announced that the main point of the talks will be the "stabilization of the situation" in eastern Ukraine. He would demand the withdrawal of its Pro-Russian fighters from Ukraine from Moscow. Kiev accuses the Russian government of supporting the pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine's east by providing fighters and military equipment. Russia denies these accusations.

China

Executions in Xinjiang

The state media reported on 23 August 2014 that eight people have been executed in Xinjiang. Three of them had been convicted because of an attack on Tiananmen Square in October 2013 (see BN of 04 November 2013), the others for other crimes against state security.

Tibet: more casualties after protest

According to initial reports of two casualties resulting from the violent dispersion of a protest in the Shiqu district of the Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Sichuan province) on 12 August 2014 (see BN of 18

August 2014). Last week it became known that another three of the wounded whose gunshot wounds had not been treated after their arrest, have died.

Authorities interfere with referendum in Macau

On 24 August 2014 civil rights groups initiated a one-week unofficial referendum on the introduction of universal suffrage in Macau by 2019. The population is also asked whether it has confidence in Macau's acting head of government, Chui Sai On. He is the only candidate in the 31 August 2014 elections of the head of government by an election committee composed of government loyalists. Police temporarily arrested five helpers, including the referendum's organizer, Jason Chao, and prevented people in several places from casting their vote.

The former Portuguese colony of Macau that has been returned to China in 1999 is a special administrative region, similar to Hong Kong, and as such enjoys certain freedoms e.g. in the areas of the media and the economy. It has the world's strongest gambling industry. A similar referendum had been held in Hong Kong in June 2014. In the view of observers the democracy movement of Macau (population about 600,000) is rather weak compared to that in Hong Kong.