

Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

14 July 2014

Syria

Staffan de Mistura is the new UN Envoy for Syria

The UN appointed the Italian-Swedish diplomat Staffan de Mistura as its new envoy for Syria and successor of Lakhdar Brahimi who resigned in May.

UN resolution to be adopted

On 14 July 2014 the Security Council plans to adopt a UN resolution providing Syrians with access to humanitarian aid. According to international diplomats this resolution would allow relief convoys to come to the rescue of people in need in Syria from Turkey, Jordan, and Iraq. Up to 1.9m people shall be supplied with food and medication.

Syria/Lebanon/Israel

Israeli army attacks targets in Lebanon and Syria

In the morning of 14 July 2014 the Israeli army shelled targets in Syria and in Lebanon in response to three rocket attacks that had been launched from southern Lebanon, the Hizbollah stronghold, since 11 July 2014. Hamas denied any involvement in attacks from Lebanon. For the first time a shell was fired at Israel from Syria and hit the occupied Golan Heights. According to reports Israel did not suffer any material damage or personal injuries. Israel fears that militant groups in Syria and Lebanon could open a second front.

Palestinian Autonomous Areas/Israel

Massive expansion of Gaza operation

Despite the mounting number of victims and international calls for peace no end of the bloodshed in the Gaza conflict is in sight. Almost one week after starting its offensive the Israeli army expanded its operations against militant Palestinians on 13 July 2014. For the first time elite troops entered the Gaza Strip from the Mediterranean. In response to persistent shelling the Israeli armed forces had been flying numerous air attacks on specific targets since 08 July 2014. The number of victims increased by the hour - the last count were 166 fatalities and 1,120 wounded.

Iraq

Evolution of the situation

Reports came in on 09 July 2014 that the extremist group Islamic State (IS) had taken control of a chemical weapons factory near Baghdad already in mid-June. One assumes that thousands of rockets filled with nervous gas are still stored in Muthanna. The US think that this is old material that is not fit for use anymore. Also on 9 July 2014 Iraqi police found the bodies of 53 men in Hilla (Babil province). The reasons for the

sleighting are unknown. The population of Hilla is predominantly Shiite while the surrounding area is mainly Sunni.

On 10 July 2014 it was reported that the Iraqi ambassador to the UN had warned that terrorists had gained access to nuclear material at locations not anymore under government control. He is probably referring to uranium compounds stored at Mosul University. Experts disagree about how hazardous these are.

Reportedly IS fighters destroyed century-old burial sites in Mosul on 11 July 2014.

The press reported that armed men stormed an apartment building in a predominantly Shiite district in the east of Baghdad and shot 28 women and two men on 12 July 2014. In the city's north and west government troops were fighting Sunni extremists.

On 13 July 2014 IS fighters allegedly advanced on Baghdad and took large parts of the city of Dhuluijah 80 km north of Baghdad. Reports speak of at least six casualties.

Mass executions in prisons

Human Rights Watch (HRW) accused Iraqi forces and allied Shiite militias of having executed at least 255 Sunni prisoners in six cities since 9 July 2014. HRW cites eye witnesses and information of force members for its documentation of five mass killings in the prisons in Mosul, Tal Afar, Baaquba, Jumarkhe, and Rawa between 9 and 12 July 2014. During its offensive IS had opened several prisons in the south and many Sunni prisoners had joined the group after their liberation, said HRW referring to local reports.

IS Caliphate

According to reports of the organisation „The Clarion Project“¹ that cite Arab media, IS demanded that Iraqi families hand over their unmarried daughters to IS to provide sexual support for the "Holy War". This demand had been posted in public places in the areas occupied by the group. Whoever refused would be punished according to the Sharia. IS fighters had gone from door to door in Mosul, killing the men and raping the women. Similar atrocities are reported from Tikrit.

Situation of the Christians

The Archbishop of Mosul announced that because of the IS advance all Christians had already left Mosul. The Chaldean-Catholic Archbishop of Erbil said on 9 July 2014 that the Kurdish government is giving refuge to Christians, while Muslims only get a temporary residence permit. The government provided advice for the refugees, but no material assistance.

Already on 27 June 2014 UNHCR had reported that over 10,000 Christians (according to other sources up to 40,000) who mostly fled from the dominantly Christian area Karakosh (North Iraq, about 30 km from Mosul) had been arriving in the Kurdish autonomous areas over the last days. On 29 June 2014 it was reported that the Christians were to return to Karakosh again. Currently there are no further news on the matter.

Formation of government

The parliamentary session that had originally been postponed until mid-August (see Briefing Notes of 07 July 2014) was advanced to 13 July 2014 following massive criticism of this delay. But the election of a speaker of parliament failed again. The session was adjourned until 15 July 2014. The formation of a government is considered the single most important prerequisite for terminating the political stalemate in Baghdad and stopping the advance of IS.

Kurds plan to go for independence

The Kurdish government is preparing a referendum on independence. The tone between the governments in Erbil and Baghdad is becoming increasingly harsher. The press reported Prime Minister al-Maliki as saying that he would "fight a fateful battle" to safeguard Iraq's unity. He accused the Kurds of cooperating with IS and granting refuge to its fighters. On 11 July 2014 Kurdish Peshmerga took over two strategically important oil fields near Kirkuk. The Baghdad Oil Ministry condemned the take-over as anti-constitutional.

¹ „The Clarion Project“ - a non-profit organisation headquartered in New York critical of Islam (founded in 2006).

Turkey

Erdogan can remain in office as head of government

The election committee resolved that Prime Minister Erdogan may remain in office although he is standing as a presidential candidate. The news agency Anadolu reported that the committee had rejected the opposition's demand that Erdogan step down prior to the presidential elections on 12 July 2014. The opposition is afraid that the head of government will divert public resources for his presidential campaign. Erdogan is the clear favourite in this election in which the people will for the first time elect the president directly.

Yemen

Huthi rebels conquer the provincial capital of Amran

The Shiite al-Huthi rebels announced that they had conquered the provincial capital of Amran in north Yemen after heavy fighting. In recent days al-Huthi rebels had engaged in heavy fighting with the Yemeni soldiers and fighters of the Islah Party in Amran province. A rebel spokesman said that the fighters of the Sunni Islah party had fled the town. The army said that the rebels had surrounded a military base and fired at the soldiers from the surrounding buildings. The rebels had started an uprising in 2004. They are fighting for the independence of their tribal areas in the north of the country.

Libya

Fighting for Tripoli airport

According to a health ministry spokesman at least six people died and 25 were wounded in heavy fighting between armed rival militias around Tripoli airport on 13 July 2014. Airport authorities said that the followers of the Sintan Brigades who are in control of the airport and other groups trying to displace them were fighting each other.

Airport traffic was suspended for the time being.

Egypt

Eight casualties on the Sinai Peninsula

In the night to 14 July 2014 an Egyptian army base in the city of Al-Arish in the north of the Sinai Peninsula was shelled by what were assumed to be militant Islamists. The shells hit a residential area near the army base killing seven civilians and one soldier.

Nigeria

Boko Haram claims responsibility for Lagos attack

Abubakar Shekau, leader of the Islamist terror group Boko Haram, accepted the responsibility for several attacks in Nigeria in a video published on 13 June 2014. Among them the bombing of the "Emab Plaza" shopping mall in Abuja on 25 June 2014 in which over 20 people died and the explosions near a petrol warehouse in the Lagos port area of Apapa on the same day. In the Apapa bombing two people died, according to other sources there were five casualties. In an official statement the explosions were described as an accident caused by a gas leakage. Reuters and AFP news agencies, however reported, relying also on three high-ranking sources in the security sector, that the explosions were probably caused by a female suicide bomber. It remained unclear, however, whether the attack had been executed by Boko Haram itself or by another Islamist group inspired by Boko Haram. This would mark the first attack of Boko Haram in Nigeria's southern economic metropolis of Lagos. In the newly released video message Shekau called Abu Bakr al-Bagdadi, leader of the radical Sunni group Islamist State (IS), one of his „brothers“ and solicited the help of Allah to protect him, Al-Qaeda leader Aiman al-Sawahiri, and Taliban leader Mullah Omar.

Ethiopia

Opposition member extradited

Andargachew Tsige, secretary general of Ginbot 7, an organization classified as a terrorist organization in Ethiopia, was extradited by Yemen to Ethiopia in June as was reported at the beginning of July 2014. He is a British citizen and was sentenced to death in absentia in Ethiopia in 2009 and 2012 on charges of terrorism. On 09 July 2014 Ethiopian authorities confirmed his arrest.

In 2013 at least eight death sentences were pronounced, the last execution was performed in 2007.

Central African Republic

Suspects responsible for human rights violations named

In a report published on 10 July 2014 Amnesty International names several persons who are probably responsible for the human rights violations committed in the country. The high-ranking members of Séléka, Anti-Balaka and some of their allies named include former presidents François Bozizé and Michel Djotodia, Levy Yakété (Anti-Balaka), and Nouredine Adam (Séléka). Most of those named are at liberty in the country, some are living in Chad or in France.

On 07 July 2014 over 20 people died in an attack on a camp for internal refugees on the premises of Saint Joseph Catholic Church in Bambari, the camp is housing up to 6,000 people.

Mali

37 casualties in fighting between rival rebel groups

On 11 July 2014 fighting broke out between the MNLA (Mouvement national pour la libération de l'Azawad) and the MAA (Mouvement arabe de l'Azawad) in northern Mali. It is said that 37 fighters were killed in the battles about 100 km south of Kidal, a MNLA-controlled area.

France officially announced the termination of its military operations in Mali. Operation „Serval“, launched by France in Mali in the spring of 2013, will in a few days be replaced by operation „Barkhane“ consisting of 3,000 soldiers whose mandate is to continue the fight against Islamist groups in five African countries (Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Chad, and Burkina Faso).

Somalia

Presidential palace attacked

Shortly after a security conference of members of the government and the parliament had ended, al-Shabaab fighters used force to enter the premises of the presidential residence Villa Somalia on 9 July 2014. The security forces and AMISOM units managed to drive the attackers out only after a heavy firefight. Eyewitnesses reported that nine people died, including several suicide bombers who exploded themselves. During this time President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was not present at Villa Somalia. He said that there had only been four attackers, three of which had already been shot in the parking lot and the fourth one had been arrested. Al-Shabaab announced that it killed 14 soldiers.

In response to the previous day's attack President Hassan dismissed Sheikh Mohamud as head of the police and the secret service on 10 July 2014. Former secret service head Khalif Ahmed Ereg was appointed as the new Minister for National Security. Mohammed Sheikh Hassan will serve as chief of the police and Mohammed Abdulahi Hassan as head of the secret service.

Ex-member of parliament assassinated

Unknown assassins shot a former member of parliament in Mogadishu's Wadajir district on 08 July 2014.

South Sudan

EU sanctions against high-ranking military officers

On 10 July 2014 the EU resolved to ban two high-ranking South Sudanese military officers from entering the EU and to freeze their assets. They are accused of committing atrocities and jeopardizing the peace process in South Sudan by violating the agreed ceasefire. Their names have not yet been disclosed.

Ukraine

Military offensive against the separatists in the country's east continues

On 12 and 13 July 2014 the Ukrainian military forcefully attacked the rebels in the country's east. It reported that the air-force alone had already killed dozens of pro-Russian separatists. The fighting still continues. Already on 11 July 2014 the Ukrainian military had claimed to have killed about one thousand rebels in air attacks on the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The city administration of Donetsk now informed that twelve people had died and several had been injured in fighting in two of the city's districts on 12 July 2014. For the district of Marjinka they reported six civilian casualties, while the separatists had previously announced 30 casualties.

70,000 people flee from attacks

Last weekend's bloody offensive sent thousands of people fleeing from the remaining rebel strongholds in eastern Ukraine. Alexander Borodai, the self-proclaimed rebel leader, said that over 70,000 inhabitants had left Donetsk.

There was a Russian announcement that for the first time one person had died and two had been seriously injured by shelling of Russian territory from Ukraine. This is reported by the Russian news agencies Interfax and Itar-Tass which are citing information from the security forces, an official confirmation is still outstanding. If this incident is confirmed the situation will probably become even more dangerous. Moscow had warned Ukraine of consequences in case of renewed provocations.

Amnesty International report denounces human rights violations in eastern Ukraine

Both the armed separatists and some government soldiers have committed „serious human rights violations“ in eastern Ukraine, Amnesty International says. Activists, protesters, and hostages that had been captured by either of the parties to the conflict had reported that they had been treated in an "appalling" manner, AI's report says.

Particularly the separatists took numerous hostages who were 'most brutally beaten and tortured'. However, also on the side of the forces loyal to the government human rights violations had been documented. In recent weeks an Amnesty team had looked into allegations of torture against both sides and cooperated with several local human rights groups. Although no exact figures were available, it must be assumed that hundreds of kidnappings occurred in Eastern Ukraine, the report said. Very often the victims were civilians. The armed separatists exercised violence not only against their political opponents, but also used it to "terrify the civilian population", the report went on. Another motive was the extortion of ransom. Amnesty stated "frequently there is a vacuum of security and authority". People were permanently in fear of repression, kidnapping, and torture.

Myanmar

Long prison sentences for journalists

On 10 July 2014 the Pakokku District Court (Magway region) sentenced five journalists to ten years imprisonment each for jeopardizing national security. At the end of January 2014 they had reported about what is suspected to be a factory for chemical weapons in Myanmar in an article published by the paper Unity and had been arrested in February 2014 because of this.

According to official statements chemical weapons have never been manufactured in the factory.

China

Xinjiang: fatal attack on Han Chinese

In the district of Wushi (Aksu prefecture) several people, who probably were Uighurs, stabbed six Han Chinese to death. The police shot one of the attackers, three were arrested, and the rest managed to escape. No reasons for the stabbing have been announced so far.

The Uighurs are complaining that the many incoming Han Chinese are the major beneficiaries of the sizable economic subsidies the central government is channelling to Xinjiang.