

Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

15 July 2013

Afghanistan

Security situation

On 25.06.13, several Taliban fighters attacked the presidential palace in Kabul. After explosions and gunfire erupted for more than an hour, the attackers were killed. On 01.07.13, an attack in northern Baghlan province claimed the lives of a district police chief and of three police officers. In the capital Kabul, members of the security forces killed a suicide bomber before he was able to detonate himself in front of the National Directorate of Security NDS. In western Badghis province, Taliban attacked three border checkpoints; twelve insurgents were killed and three police officers wounded. On 02.07.13, one week after the attack on the presidential palace, at least eleven people died when the Taliban attacked a civil logistics company contracted by ISAF in Kabul. Among the victims were four Nepalese and an Afghan guard and two Afghan truck drivers. On 04.07.13, a bomb blast killed four girls attending a wedding in southern Helmand province. The attack appears to have been targeted at government officials attending the wedding ceremony. On 04.07.13, one of the most high-profile female police officers in Afghanistan was shot dead by unidentified gunmen in southern Helmand province. On 05.07.13, a suicide attack in Tarin Kot, capital of southern Uruzgan province, claimed the lives of at least 12 police officers. In another suicide attack in neighbouring Kandahar province, a civilian and a police officer were killed. On 07./08.07.13, bomb attacks were launched on Afghan security forces in Helmand, Kandahar, Paktika, Kunar, Kabul, Logar, Zabul and Baghlan provinces, leaving at least 16 Afghan soldiers dead and three wounded. On 09.07.13, a lorry was struck by a roadside bomb in western Herat province, leaving 17 civilians dead and seven others injured. On 11.07.13, two roadside bombs killed three civilians and two policemen in southern Helmand province.

The Afghan interior ministry has released information that during the last Afghan calendar month (ending on 20.06.13), a total of 299 security officers were killed; this is an increase of 22 percent compared to the same time period of the previous year. Additionally, 618 soldiers and police officers were injured, the report went on. 753 Taliban militants were killed and 305 were arrested. Also, 180 civilians were killed. The website icasualties.org reported that 24 IAF soldiers were killed. Last year, roughly 3,400 Afghan police officers and soldiers had lost their lives (2011: around 1,950 fatalities), the Afghan government stated. This increase is most likely connected to the transfer of security responsibilities to the Afghan forces and the gradual withdrawal of international forces.

Security situation and medical supply

NGOs active in the health sector report that during the first four months of 2013, the treatment in medical facilities of injuries resulting from the war has increased by 42 percent compared to the same period of the previous year. In southern Helmand province, there was even a rise by 80 percent, it was reported. These figures correspond to the information provided by the Afghanistan NGO Safety Office (ANSO), which has noted an increase in attacks of insurgents by roughly 47 percent in the first quarter of 2013.

Pakistan/Afghanistan

Situation of Afghan refugees

According to information provided by UNHCR, the Pakistan government has agreed to extend the stay of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan by renewing the 'proof of registration (POR) cards' of more than 1.6 million Afghans which had expired on 30.06.13. This measure has put an end to insecurity about the legal status of these persons.

Pakistan

Presidential elections scheduled for August

With President Asif Ali Zardari's tenure ending on 08.09.13, the election of his successor must take place on 08.08.13, a spokesman of the Pakistan electoral committee stated. The official announcement of the election date would take place before 20.07.13, he added. This time schedule would be in accordance with Article 41 (4) of the Pakistani Constitution, the spokesman said. He also announced that Mr Zardari would not resign from office prior to the end of his term.

Tribal areas

As was reported on 13.07.13, the Pakistani Taliban have prohibited tight or see-through clothing for men in the tribal areas. The ban is addressed at sellers and tailors and was announced shortly before the beginning of the month of Ramadan. The reason given for the ban was that these clothes were un-Islamic and incompatible with the Pashtun culture. As a penalty for non-conformity, shops are threatened with a 'fine' of 5,000 Rupees and the closure for up to five days. At the same time, people were warned not to wear such clothing. Government authorities confirmed that the local militant groups had already put a ban on this kind of clothing for women.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

On 11.07.13, the first day of the month of Ramadan, a blast outside a mosque in Kacha Pakha, Kohat district, killed two people and wounded four.

On 08.07.13, a bomb planted in a motorbike parked by the road in Tora Warai area (Hangu district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) exploded when the vehicle of tribal elder Malik Ghazi Marjan drove past. Five people died, among them the tribal elder who was a known critic of the Taliban and other extremists. Eleven bystanders were injured.

Sindh

On 10.07.13, a suicide bomber killed President Zardari's top security official Bilal Sheikh along with his driver and a fruit vendor on 10.07.13 in Mufti Ahmedur Rehman Road near Guru Mandir (Karachi, Sindh), while he was on his way home. Twelve people were injured in the attack, among them innocent bystanders and five police officers protecting the security chief. The President himself was not on site.

Balochistan

On 11.07.13, a bomb was detonated close to the Pakistan-Afghan border near the city of Chaman (Balochistan). The device was hidden in a refrigerator a teenager was carrying on a wheelbarrow from neighbouring Afghanistan. When the border guards inspected the merchandise at Friendship Gate border crossing point, the bomb exploded, killing two people and injuring four Frontier Corps members and five civilians.

Pakistani Taliban announce support for Islamists in Syria

The Pakistani Taliban are claiming to have set up training bases for fighters to support the Syrian Islamists in their struggle against the Syrian government and the Shia Muslims. They have already sent hundreds of fighters to Syria, the Taliban stated.

Iraq

Security situation

The rising violence in Iraq could spark a civil war, UN officials have warned. In the month of June alone, 761 people died, July has so far seen more than 300 fatalities. The last series of attacks occurred on 12. and 13.07.13, claiming the lives of more than 60 people. The attacks were launched in Kirkuk, in the central city of Kut and in southern port city Basrah.

Syria

Fierce fighting in Homs and in Damascus suburbs

On 14.07.13, the two neighbouring districts of Jobar and Quaboun on the outskirts of Damascus saw heavy fights between government troops and rebels, with 200 civilian trapped inside a mosque. Also in Homs, clashes are continuing, with Hezbollah militias supporting the government forces in their fight against the insurgents. According to both the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay, up to 2,500 civilians are being trapped in the city.

Violent clashes between opponents of President Assad

On 12. and 13.07.13, violent clashes occurred between moderate rebels and Jihadists coming mainly from abroad. On 12.07.13, members of al-Qaida spinoff 'Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant' killed the commander of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), Kamal Hamami. On 13.07.13, FSA rebels and al-Qaida supporters engaged in heavy fights over a main checkpoint in the city of Aleppo.

Baath Party leaders replaced

On 08.07.13, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad replaced his top leadership. In an address to the party's central committee, he criticised the lack of communication between party cadres and the party's grassroots and demanded that more attention be paid to the interests of workers, peasants and craftsmen. Sunni Muslim Vice President Farouk a-Sharaa was also removed from the party command; however, he kept his office as the second man in the state. He had been Syria's foreign minister for 22 years and was regarded as a possible successor to President Assad by the Arab League and the United Nations.

Opposition Prime Minister resigns

On 08.07.13, the Prime Minister of the opposition interim government, Ghassan Hitto, announced his resignation. He had been appointed in March 2013 to administer the areas controlled by the rebels. However, he has not succeeded in installing a functioning government.

Lebanon

Bomb attack in Beirut

On 09.07.13, a car bomb exploded in the Bir al-Abed neighbourhood, a Shia Muslim dominated quarter of Beirut, on a parking lot near a shopping centre, killing at least 2 people and wounding dozens. According to first information provided, a religious centre of 'God's Party' (Hezbollah) appears to have been the target of the attack. Due to the ongoing civil war in neighbouring Syria, tensions have increased also in Lebanon, with Hezbollah members supporting the Syrian regime and Sunni Muslims fighting on the side of the Syrian rebels.

Turkey

PKK reshuffle

Turkish news agencies report that the PKK leadership launched a major reshuffle last week, replacing Murat Karayilan as party leader and head of the party's executive council, by Cemil Bayik, one of the founding members of the party. Mr Bayik is considered to be a close confidant of detained Kurdish leader Öcalan.

Now, Mr Bayık is to lead the organisation together with prominent female figure Besê Hozat. Mr Karayilan, who had negotiated the withdrawal of the PKK military fighters from Turkey with the government, will remain head of the PKK military wing.

Internal political influence of Turkish army to be curtailed

The Turkish parliament has decided to reduce the domestic influence of the army. On 12.07.13, the members of parliament voted in favour of a change in legislation limiting the power of the armed forces to the defence of the Turkish citizens against external threats and dangers. The amendment proposed by the ruling Islamic conservative AKP party refers to Article 35 of the Turkish Armed Forces Internal Service Code, which had been introduced after the military coup d'état in 1960. The army had justified the two coups in 1971 and 1980 with the wording 'maintenance and protection of the Turkish Republic'. The change in legislation was supported by the opposition parties; only the nationalist MHP voted against the amendment, arguing that a change of Article 35 would impede the struggle against the Kurdish rebels. Since the beginning of its term of office in 2002, the AKP led by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been striving to curtail the military's political influence.

Libya

Benghazi: Reinforcement of security measures, new attacks

With the beginning of the month of Ramadan on 10.07.13, security measures have been boosted with the army's support.

On 08.07.13, a car bomb killed Hamed Buruki, former officer of the internal security services under Gaddafi, in the Quarsah neighbourhood of the city.

Hamid Al-Hassi, head of the controversial Cyrenaica Transitional Council (CTC), was injured in an attack on 04.07.13; two of his guards died in the incident. The CTC strives for autonomy of the eastern parts of the country within the frame of a federation with other Libyan regions. Already in November 2012, Mr Al-Hassi had been targeted in an attack; at that time, a guard died and two were injured.

Tripoli

On 10.07.13, Libyan authorities regained control of the Tripoli interior ministry building which had been seized on 02.07.13 by militants demanding the dissolution of the Supreme Security Committee, which is in charge of police activities and consists of militia members. On the previous days, the occupants set free five persons who had been detained during the seizure of the building: three photographers on 09.07.13 and two suspected civil activists on 06.07.13. The end of the occupation was negotiated by electricity minister Muhairig and some of his cabinet colleagues who were appointed to form a ministerial committee tasked to dissolve the militias. There is no information on whether concessions were made during the negotiations.

Before, the Libyan General National Congress (parliament) had passed Law No 27 stipulating that all armed military groups (militias) must disband and leave the capital. According to the electricity minister, the implementation of this law may take several months.

On 10.07.13, unidentified gunmen attacked Said Amer Guji, member of the Libyan army general staff and prominent revolutionary leader, when he was leaving a military supply depot. Mr Guji returned the fire and succeeded in warding off the attackers. He was injured at his head and hands.

Tunisia

State of emergency extended

After consultations with security experts, the Prime Minister and the president of the parliament, President Moncef Marzouki extended the state of emergency in place for two-and-a-half years for another three months on 09.07.13. The state of emergency entered retroactively in force on 03.07.13. It had been initially declared on 14.1.11 after the ouster of former head of state Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali and was lastly extended for one month on 03.05.13.

Egypt

Transitional ‘road map’ announced

In a decree released on 08.07.13, interim leader Adli Mansour presented a detailed road map for the transitional period scheduled to last six months. Within 15 days, a constitutional committee is to be formed which will be tasked to draft a new constitution within a deadline of two months. This draft will then be put to a referendum within one month. Subsequently, parliamentary elections will be held within two months. After this, a date will be set for presidential elections.

New Prime Minister appointed

On 09.07.13, interim President Adli Mansour appointed 76 year-old economist Hazem al-Beblawi to be the transitional Prime Minister. Mr al-Beblawi had served as finance minister from July to December 2011 and was a founding member of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party after the ousting of President Mubarak. Nobel Peace Laureate Mohammed el-Baradei was sworn in as Vice President for foreign relations.

The Salafist an-Nour-Party confirmed their support of al-Beblawi. The Muslim Brotherhood, in contrast, is not only rejecting Mr al-Beblawi, but the whole roadmap for the transitional period.

Prime Minister al-Beblawi has already begun work on forming a new cabinet. For example, the Christian Hany Kadri is to be offered the finance minister’s post. The Muslim Brotherhood has rejected Mr al-Beblawi’s offer to participate in the formation of the new cabinet.

Islamist protest marches

On 12.07.13, roughly 100,000 supporters of ousted President Morsi protested in Cairo, demanding his release and reinstatement as President. At the same time, the protests were directed against General Abdul Fatah al-Sisi. The Islamists announced further country-wide protest marches to be staged on 15.07.13.

Russian Federation

Critical journalist murdered in Dagestan

In the morning of 09.07.13, unidentified assailants shot dead Akhmednabi Akhmednabiyev, vice editor-in-chief of the independent weekly ‘Novoye Delo’ (‘new business’), opening fire on his car in his hometown Semender. Mr Akhmednabiyev also worked as a correspondent for the Internet news site ‘Caucasian Knot’ founded by the Moscow-based human rights organisation Memorial in 2001. The journalist was known for his research on alleged human rights violations committed by the security forces. He has been the 17th journalist who died in Dagestan in suspicious circumstances since 1993. According to Memorial, it appears that attempts are made to prevent any reliable news coverage from Dagestan.

Nigeria

Life sentences for Boko Haram members

On 09.07.13, the Federal High Court in the capital Abuja imposed sentences of life imprisonment on four suspected members of the Islamist terror organisation Boko Haram. They were found guilty for having plotted and carried out two terrorist bomb attacks: the first one (08.04.11) had been aimed at an office of the election commission in the city of Suleja, Niger State and had left 16 dead; the second one (23.05.11) in the village of Dakna, Niger State, had claimed three lives. A fifth defendant was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment for the same offence, a sixth was acquitted. The sentences imposed have so far been the heaviest penalties against members of Boko Haram. According to the authorities, hundreds of militants were arrested, but only few of them have been put on trial. The last conviction of an alleged Boko Haram member appears to have occurred in December 2011.

DR Congo

North Kivu: ADF attack on Kamango leads to exodus of refugees

On 11.07.13, fighters of the Ugandan Islamist rebel group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) attacked the Congolese town of Kamango (North-Kivu province, approx. 10 km from the border to Uganda), looting administration buildings and the hospital. The Congolese government troops succeeded in regaining control of the town, where no more fights have taken place since 13.07.13, the Ugandan military stated. The Ugandan Red Cross reports that by 14.07.13, around 66,000 Congolese people crossed the border seeking refuge in the Ugandan district of Bundibugyo. The high number of refugees gives rise to warnings about a humanitarian crisis.

The ADF had been founded in 1996 in the Rwenzori Mountains in Western Uganda and fought against the Ugandan central government. Following an offensive of the Ugandan army, the group withdrew to the district of Ituri in the Congolese province of North Kivu. During the last years, the Congolese government troops have not succeeded in crushing the ADF, who, in turn, was able to increase their number of fighters to approx. 1,300 men.

Guinea

Parliamentary elections postponed again

The parliamentary elections originally planned for 30.06.13 have now been scheduled to take place at the end of September, following an agreement between the government and the opposition parties. The United Nations Peacebuilding Commission has welcomed the agreement, which was signed in Conakry on 03.07.13.

Somalia

Suicide attack claims five lives

According to eye-witnesses, at least five civilians were killed in a suicide attack aimed at African Union (AU) soldiers in armoured vehicles on their way to the airport in Mogadishu on 12.07.13. Two AU soldiers were wounded. Al-Shabaab have claimed responsibility for the attack.

On 09.07.13, four policemen were wounded in a grenade attack on their vehicle in Mogadishu's Bakkara market. So far, nobody has claimed responsibility.

'Madobe' gains control over Kismayo

After heavy fighting with dozens of dead, Sheikh Ahmed Mohamed Islam 'Madobe' appears to have gained control of the southern port city. On 15.03.13, he had been elected as president of the autonomous 'Jubaland State' state by the Ogaden Darod Clan in a conference in Kismayo organised for the founding of the autonomous state. His leadership was subsequently challenged not only by militia leader and former defence minister of the former Somali transitional government Barre Hiirale from the Marehan Darod Clan, but also by Ifti Hassan Basto from the Warsangali Darod Clan (see BN of 20.05.13 and of 10.06.13).

Togo

Parliamentary elections postponed/opposition politicians released

After several talks between government and opposition representatives held in mid-June and beginning of July, the parliamentary elections originally scheduled for 21.07.13 have been postponed to 25.07.13.

On 11.07.13, opposition politicians Gerard Adja, Jean Eklou and Alphonse Kpogo were provisionally released. They had been arrested in connection with the fires that gutted the markets in Lomé and in Kara.

Bhutan

Change of government

On 13.07.13, the oppositional People's Democratic Party (PDP) won the parliamentary elections, gaining 32 of the 47 seats, the election commission stated. The previously ruling Peace and Prosperity Party (DPT) secured 15 mandates. These polls have been the second democratic elections ever in Bhutan. Five years ago, the citizens had been called to the ballot boxes for the first time, when the royal House handed over absolute power to a constitutional monarchy. At that time, the DPT had won 45 out of the 47 seats in the National Assembly.

The election campaign was affected by Bhutan's disputes with neighbouring India. Early this month, India massively reduced the oil and gas subsidies granted to Bhutan, probably in reaction to the incumbent head of government Jigme Thinley's first talks with China. The PDP took office with the promise to improve relations with Delhi.

Refugees stuck in camps

There is no solution in sight for tens of thousands of refugees from Bhutan, who are still living in camps in neighbouring Nepal. Most of them are the descendants of Nepali citizens who had come to Bhutan in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the 1980ies, the government retroactively had withdrawn their citizenship. When protests erupted against this discriminatory measure, the Bhutanese authorities reacted with violence. Subsequently, more than 100,000 people took refuge in Nepal.