

Group 22 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

12 May 2014

Afghanistan

Security situation

A family of nine died on 06.05.14 when their vehicle drove over a concealed roadside bomb. The incident took place in the district of Shindand in the western Afghan province of Herat.

The radical Islamic Taliban announced their final "spring offensive" before the withdrawal of foreign troops in December. On 08.05.14 the Taliban stated on its website that it would be targeting US military bases, military convoys, foreign embassies and representatives of the Afghan government, as well as translators, politicians and judges. They also threatened to continue their attacks, if US units remain stationed in the country after the withdrawal of NATO troops. They are demanding "the unconditional withdrawal of all invasion forces".

According to information from the interior ministry in Kabul on 10.05.14, Afghan security forces killed at least 63 insurgents and injured more than 40 people in a military operation in the Gelan district (province of Ghasni).

On 11.05.14 a suicide attacker killed five civilians and injured numerous people close to a hospital in the district of Daman (province of Kandahar).

Pakistan

Security situation

On 05.05.14 two people were killed and several injured in an attack on a NATO convoy around 40 km from Peshawar.

Eight soldiers were killed and several injured, some severely, in a bomb attack on a military convoy on 08.05.14. The attack took place in Ghulamkhan in North Waziristan.

A suicide attacker killed four people and injured 15 in an attack on a mosque at a football stadium in the city of Peshawar on 11.05.14.

Situation of Afghan refugees

In the province of Khyber Pakhtunkwha, restrictions were imposed on the freedom of movement of Afghan refugees who do not possess any legal residence documents. They are not permitted to enter marketplaces, for example. The refugees are accused of being responsible for an increase in crime in the province.

Some 1.6 million registered Afghan refugees are currently living in Pakistan. The Pakistani police assumes that roughly the same number of illegal refugees are in the country.

Iraq

Security situation

Attacks continue to take place on a daily basis in Iraq. According to Iraq Body Count, 281 civilians have been killed in May to date (as at 10.05.14). The AFP news agency puts the death toll in May to date (as at 10.05.14) at 232, including seven police officers, 41 soldiers, two members of the Sahwa and 72 extremists.

Soldiers and members of a militia killed

According to a press report on 11.05.14, 20 soldiers were abducted and killed in Mosul. Another press report alleges that the bodies of 15 of the 20 abducted soldiers have been found. The area around Mosul is one of the strongholds of the terrorist group The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS).

Three members of a local militia were killed by extremists in Al-Yussifiya, south of Baghdad.

Accusations of election fraud

Growing numbers of complaints are being raised concerning errors in counting the votes, according to a dpa report on 05.05.14, which mentions complaints from various parties from the province of Wasit and the city of Kirkuk, for example.

WHO warns of danger of polio spreading

The World Health Organisation has warned of a danger of the spread of polio, noting that the polio virus has already been introduced into three countries this year. Infected people have brought the disease from Pakistan to Afghanistan, from Syria to Iraq and from Cameroon to Equatorial New Guinea, the organisation said.

Syria

Explosions in the city of Aleppo and the province of Idleb

On 05.05.14 Islamist fighters deposited explosives in an underground tunnel which was in use by government soldiers in the north-western province of Idleb (Idlib). Between 30 and 40 soldiers were killed in the resultant explosion.

On 08.05.14 Islamist rebels set off a bomb under the Carlton hotel in the city of Aleppo, which was being used by government troops. Dozens of soldiers and fighters belonging to militias loyal to the regime are reported to have died in the explosion.

People leave old quarter of Homs

From 07.05.14 to 09.05.14, a total of around 2,000 people, including 1,800 combatants, left the previously besieged old quarter of Homs in accordance with an agreement between the rebels and the Syrian regime. In return for safe conduct, hostages who had been held by Islamist insurgents in Aleppo were freed on 08.05.14, including 40 women and children belonging to the Alawite minority, one Iranian woman and 30 Syrian soldiers. Thousands of people returned to their old homes in Homs.

Lebanon

Third attempt to elect new president fails

The third attempt to elect a new Lebanese president failed because dozens of MPs failed to appear and the 73 out of 128 MPs in attendance fell short of the necessary quorum. The MPs belonging to the Hezbollah-led alliance were particularly conspicuous by their absence. The parliamentary speaker deferred the session until 15.05.14. The politicians have so far been unable to agree on a compromise candidate. The tenure of the current head of state, Michel Suleiman, ends on 25.05.14.

Yemen

Violence

The Yemeni army is carrying out a new offensive in the south against the Al Qaeda terrorist network.

Members of Al Qaeda killed at least five soldiers in a gun battle close to the presidential palace in the capital, Sanaa, on 09.05.14.

The Yemeni defence minister, Nasir Ahmad, survived an attempted assassination unharmed. He was travelling with several high-ranking security officials in the province of Shabwa when armed assailants attacked his convoy.

Turkey

Trial of government critics gets underway

The trial of 255 people in connection with their alleged involvement in protests against the government in June 2013 began in Istanbul on 06.05.14. The protests against a construction project in Istanbul's Gezi Park sparked nationwide unrest last year, in the course of which six people died. The public prosecutor's office called for prison terms of up to twelve years, while the defence described the accusations as vague and contrived.

Iran

Woman becomes director of Teheran's largest theatre complex

For the first time in the Islamic Republic of Iran's 35-year history, a woman, the 43 year-old theatre director Parisa Moghtadi, has been appointed director of the municipal theatre in Teheran, according to a report by the Mehr News Agency on 05.05.14.

Thousands of demonstrators call for strict compliance with rules on clothing

According to the state news agency, IRNA, approx. 4,000 women and men protested on 07.05.14 against the increasing softening of the strict rules on clothing for women. Under Islamic law, which has been in force since the 1979 revolution, women are required to wear wide robes and a veil which covers their head and hair. There are members of the Iranian police who are responsible for monitoring compliance with the rules on clothing. President Hassan Rohani, who is considered a moderate, called on the "morality police" to show more restraint and tolerance in 2013.

Egypt

Presidential candidate announces intention to banish all Muslim Brothers

Abdel Fattah al-Sissi, former chief of Egypt's army and presidential candidate, announced in a television address on 05.05.14 that if he were to be elected president, this would signal the end of the Muslim Brotherhood. According to a communiqué on 09.05.14, the state prosecutor's office has charged a further 200 suspected members of the Ansar Beit al-Makdis Islamist group with fatal attacks on security forces and is accusing them of terrorism. It stated that around half of the 200 accused were in custody.

Libya

Boat accident claims many lives

At least 36 migrants died on their way from Africa to Europe on 11.05.14. Their boat capsized to the east of the Libyan capital, Tripoli, as they were attempting to reach Europe by sea. According to press reports, at least 42 refugees are missing and 52 have been rescued. Following an accident off the coast of Greece which claimed at least 22 lives, this was the second such incident in the space of a few days.

Algeria

Counter-terrorism operation

Algerian security forces killed nine armed Islamists in a counter-terrorism operation in the region around Taoundert on the border with Mali (province of Tamanrasset) on 05.05.14. Automatic weapons, rocket launchers, technical equipment and large stocks of ammunition were seized.

Nigeria

Shekau claims responsibility for abducting the schoolgirls from Chibok

In a video released on 05.05.14 Abubakar Shekau, leader of the Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram, claimed responsibility for the abduction of over 270 (or over 220 according to other sources) missing schoolgirls aged between 16 and 18 from a school in Chibok (north-eastern state of Borno) on the night of 14.04.14. He announced that he intended to sell the girls as slaves, and to marry off girls aged nine and over. He also threatened to seize more people with the aim of enslaving them and to destroy the oil refineries in the south of Nigeria. He said was waging a war against Christians and democracy, claiming that they had been instructed by Allah to soak Nigeria's soil with the blood of Christians and so-called Muslims who were against Islam. He said that he used the term "Christian" to refer to all unbelievers.

Efforts to free the abducted Chibok schoolgirls

Since 30.04.14 there have been protests against the government and the military on an almost daily basis in the capital, Abuja, as well as in other cities, over their failure to take action to free the abducted schoolgirls. On 06.05.14 president Jonathan officially accepted US president Obama's offer to give Nigeria all the support it needed to rescue the abducted girls and put an end to Boko Haram's terrorism. On 07.05.14 the Nigerian police offered a reward of 50 million naira (around 215,000 euros) for information leading to the freeing of the girls. On 08.05.14 US secretary of state Kerry announced that a US team, including FBI and military specialists, was taking up its work in Nigeria. France, Great Britain, China and other countries have also promised Nigeria help.

More girls abducted in Borno

Eleven girls aged between twelve and fifteen were abducted in an attack attributed to Boko Haram on the village of Warabe (Gwozo LGA, federal state of Borno) on the evening of 04. and 05.05.14.

Boko Haram attack in Borno claims many lives

On the night of 05.05.14, suspected fighters of the Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram attacked the town of Gamboru Ngala (administrative seat of the Ngala Local Government Area) on the border with Cameroon. According to police information, at least 100 to 150 people were killed in the attack (residents put the number at over 300). 16 policemen are reported to be among those killed.

Attack on village, strategically important bridge destroyed

Suspected members of Boko Haram blew up a strategically important bridge linking the federal states of Borno and Adamawa on 10.05.14. They had earlier laid the village of Limankara (Borno) to waste. Members of a policeman's family are reported to have been abducted and 3,000 people are said to have fled. It is not yet known whether there were any fatalities. The destruction of the bridge may be intended to hamper the search for the girls abducted from Chibok, who some believe to be in the Sambisa Forest. According to unconfirmed reports, however, around 50 of the abducted girls have allegedly been seen accompanied by armed men in Birao in the north of the Central African Republic.

DR Congo

Two government soldiers convicted of rapes in Minova

On 05.05.14 a military court in Goma (capital of the eastern Congolese province of North Kivu) passed sentence on 39 soldiers in the largest trial of government soldiers charged with rape to date. They were charged with having committed 190 rapes, one murder and 825 incidents of looting in the town of Minova (around 50 km west of Goma) in November 2012. A lieutenant-colonel and a non-commissioned officer were convicted of rape, with the latter also being found guilty of murder. A further 24 soldiers and NCOs received prison terms of between ten and twenty years for looting and failure obey the command not to leave the camp near Minova. 13 officers were acquitted because there was no evidence that they were responsible for the crimes committed by the soldiers under their command. According to the spokesperson of the UN Human Rights Office in Geneva, the sentences fall short of the numerous rape victims' expectations and

confirm the deficits in the Congolese justice system. According to a report published in May 2013 on investigations conducted by the UN Human Rights Office, at least 102 women and 33 girls were the victims of rape or other acts of sexual violence by government soldiers in Minova in November 2012.

Uganda

State prosecutor seeking to put two homosexuals on trial

The state prosecutor's office is seeking to institute proceedings against Kim Mukisa and Jackson Mukasa, citing witnesses. The two men's lawyer stated that they would be pleading not guilty.

Central African Republic

Heavy fighting

Heavy fighting broke out in the Central African Republic on 05.05.14. According to a military spokesperson, members of an international peace-keeping force were attacked by around 40 unknown fighters. Several armed attackers were killed. Thousands of French and African troops have been tasked with stopping the clashes between different groups in the Central African Republic. The German army is also involved in the operation. Meanwhile, in the face of the ever-deteriorating security situation, interim president Cathrine Samba-Panza has announced a cabinet reshuffle, stating that the cabinet needs to address the country's problems and represent the various groups more effectively.

According to information from experts, some one million people are currently on the run and thousands have died. From September, the UN will be attempting to resolve the ethno-religious conflict with a 12,000-strong peace-keeping force.

US news magazine TIME nominated religious leaders from the Central African Republic among the "ten most influential Africans in 2013". These include the archbishop of Bangui, Dieudonné Nzapalainga, and the leading representatives of Muslims and Protestant Christians in the country, imam Omar Kobine Layama and pastor Nicolas Guérékoyame Gbangou. The two have been campaigning for peace between the rival groups and factions in Central Africa for some months now, making joint appearances in the country and abroad.

Ethiopia

NGO: Around 80 students and school pupils killed during crushing of demonstrations

The Society for Threatened Peoples (GfbV) has called on the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, to dispatch an investigative commission to Ethiopia to gather information on the bloody crushing of demonstrations staged by the Oromo ethnic group. According to GfbV information, at least 80 students and school pupils have been shot dead by security forces at protests in nine Ethiopian university cities since the beginning of April. People are also reported to have been injured and more than 2,000 arbitrary arrests have allegedly been carried out. Government authorities dispute this account, speaking of eight killed in Ambo as a result of violent rioting and attempts to destabilise the country. The demonstrators are opposed to a reorganisation of local government which would extend the boundaries of the capital, Addis Ababa by up to 120 kilometres. Ten of thousands of farmers – for the most part Oromo – are afraid they will be driven off their land.

The Oromo are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia. They have been complaining about discrimination in business and society and serious human rights violations for some decades.

Sudan

Student protests

Student protests escalated into rioting in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, on 05.05.14 as a result of government cuts in further education and the government's increasing influence over the syllabus and teaching. Supporters and opponents of president Bashir clashed outside the university. The police fired tear

gas. One student was killed in similar protests in March and teaching was subsequently banned until the end of April.

South Sudan

Armistice already at risk once again

On 05.05.14 the leaders of the parties to the conflict in South Sudan, president Kiir and rebel leader Machar, agreed on an armistice from 07.05.14 to 07.06.14. By 11.05.14, the parties were already accusing each other of repeated violations of the armistice agreement. According to the rebel spokesperson, artillery fire and attacks by ground troops were reported from the northern states of Unity and Upper Nile. Fighting is alleged to have taken place above all around the oil town of Bentiu. An armistice agreement from 24.01.14 only held for several days. President Kiir and his former deputy, Machar, unexpectedly signed a peace treaty in Addis Ababa on 09.05.14. The treaty provides for an end to hostilities, the formation of an interim government and access to humanitarian aid for around one million displaced people. Details are to be negotiated by delegations from the two sides.

Senegal

Rebels declare ceasefire

Following negotiations with the Senegalese government in Italy in 30.04.14, the leader of the Casamance rebels, Sadio, has declared a unilateral ceasefire in support of the peace process initiated by president Sall. The rebels of the Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC) have been fighting for independence for this region of Senegal since 1982.

Somalia

Humanitarian situation

22 international organisations and the UN have ascertained that 50,000 children are severely undernourished in Somalia. A "humanitarian crisis" has been diagnosed for 2.9 million Somalis. 1.1 million people are reported to be refugees in their own country. Only 30 per cent have access to clean drinking water. The figures are seen as a slight improvement on the previous year, the famine disaster of 2011 having taught people not to overlook the signs auguring such a disaster.

Kosovo

Fresh elections following dissolution of parliament due to row over Kosovo army

Parliament resolved its dissolution on 07.05.14, clearing the way for early elections on 08.06.14.

Underlying factors include the row over the build-up of national armed forces (planned: 5,000 active soldiers, 3,000 reservists) from 2019. The MPs representing the Serbian minority reject the plans and are boycotting the vote. There is a latent fear among the Serbs that the army could be deployed against their compatriots in North Kosovo. A further factor is that Serbia's government cannot tacitly accept the build-up of a new army in a region which it officially still considers part of its own territory.

The Albanians in Kosovo wish to underpin their independence with their own armed forces. Following the Serbs' resistance, the other parties agreed to early parliamentary elections. Kosovo currently disposes of a lightly armed security corps (TMK). The roughly 2,500 men are under the command of the KFOR international peace-keeping force, however.

Ukraine

Referendum in eastern Ukraine – separatists celebrate victory

According to the pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine, the turn-out for the independence referendum in the regions of Donetsk and Lugansk on 11.05.14 was overwhelming. The separatists claim that a large majority of the electorate voted for the independence of the self-proclaimed people's republics, with around 75 % of the electorate having turned out in Donetsk alone and 90 % having voted for separation from Ukraine.

In Lugansk, the separatists claim that almost 96 % voted for independence from Kiev, with a turn-out of 81 % in the Lugansk region. The provisional final result is to be published on 12.05.14. The voting was not overseen by international election monitors. There were also numerous reports of chaotic conditions at the polling stations and manipulation.

Many of those who took part in the referendum were keen above all to take a clear stand against the interim government in Kiev. Claims were frequently to be heard along the lines that the eastern Ukrainian regions were surrounded by fascists, and that the people's rights there had to be defended. With its military operations against the separatists, Kiev was said to be waging war against the population, as well. Voices were also commonly to be heard among voters criticising that the west was interfering excessively in the Ukraine's domestic issues by positioning itself clearly behind the interim government. Separatist leader Denis Puschilin remained guarded on the issue of annexation of the "People's Republic of Donetsk" to Russia. As the next step, he announced that government and military structures would be established in the self-proclaimed people's republics. The "people's governor" of Donetsk, Pavel Gubarev, said that the referendum meant everything to the separatists. He added that the creation of a national entity was only the first step on the way towards establishing a country by the name of "New Russia" on the territory of south-eastern Ukraine.

The interim government in Kiev described the referendum as a criminal farce. The European Union and the USA are not intending to recognise the referendum. Russia's president Putin declined to comment on the referendum. His spokesman, Dimitri Peskov, said that the Kremlin chief wanted to analyse the result first. Peskov showed understanding for the separatists' decision to go ahead with the referendum, despite Putin's request for a postponement, however, stating that they had no other option in the face of the Ukrainian military operation against the separatists.

China

Clampdown by the authorities ahead of the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre

04.06.14 will mark the 25th anniversary of the violent crushing of the democracy movement at Peking's Tiananmen Square. Ahead of the anniversary, government forces are taking tough action against activists and critics of the government.

70 year-old author Gao Yu was arrested for breach of secrecy on 08.05.14. She was presented on state TV, where she made a confession regretting her wrongdoing. She is alleged to have passed on a confidential document to a foreign website in June 2013. According to observers, this could be "Document no. 9", which details threats to the Communist party and calls for a tough ideological line. It has been established that Gao was detained on 24.04.14, since when her whereabouts have been unknown.

A court in Shenzhen sentenced Hong Kong publisher Yao Wentian who, according to different sources, is 73 or 79 years old, to ten years' imprisonment for smuggling on 07.05.14. Yao, who is also known as Yiu Mantin, was reportedly lured to Shenzhen from Hong Kong in October 2013 and arrested. He had previously received threats because of his work on the book "Godfather of China Xi Jinping" by civil rights activist Yu Jie, who lives in the USA. He was now planning to publish a critical book about head of state and party leader Xi Jinping. In contrast to China, to which Hong Kong has belonged with a special status since 1997, there is virtually no press censorship in Hong Kong.

The prominent human rights lawyer Pu Zhiqiang and four other activists were arrested on 04.05.14 after attending a meeting in Peking on 03.05.14 commemorating the democracy movement of 1989.

Knife attack

Another knife attack has occurred at a railway station. Six people were injured on the forecourt of Guangzhou railway station on 06.05.14. The police shot the apparently lone attacker. No further details are known at present.

Terrorist attacks

According to an official report published on 06.05.14 there were ten "terrorist incidents" in China last year, claiming more than 30 lives in total.