

## Group 22 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

# Briefing Notes

23 June 2014

### Afghanistan

#### Security situation

The Taliban launched an attack on NATO military vehicles at a parking area of a base at the Torkham checkpoint in the province of Nangarhar on 19.06.14. All three attackers were killed in the ensuing gun battle. The buildings are situated on an important NATO supply route.

Three US soldiers were killed when a bomb was detonated on a motorcycle in a Taliban attack in the district of Nad Ali, province of Helmand on 20.06.14.

#### Presidential elections – accusations of fraud

One week after the run-off in Afghanistan (cf. BN of 16.06.14), Abdullah Abdullah has raised serious allegations against Ashraf Ghani's campaign team, president Karsai and the Afghan election authorities and has called for the counting of votes to be stopped due to suspected election fraud. On 18.06.14 Abdullah suspended cooperation with the election commission until further notice and called for the United Nations to intervene. He said that if the counting of votes were to continue, the result would have no legitimacy. Not all of the votes cast have been counted as yet. According to initial figures from Abdullah's staff, Ashraf Ghani is almost one million votes ahead of Abdullah. Supporters of Abdullah protested against the alleged election rigging in Kabul and Herat at the weekend. The demonstrations remained peaceful. Concerns are growing of a crisis in the country's domestic politics.

### Pakistan

#### New major offensive against Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters

According to information from the army, at least 30 insurgents have been killed in air raids on tribal regions in north-west Pakistan. A spokesman for the Pakistani armed forces said that attack helicopters carried out raids in the regions of North Waziristan and Khyber on 21.06.14. He added that a further 20 insurgents were killed in attacks three hours later on three targets in North Waziristan. He pointed out that all the attacks took place in regions where there was no civilian population.

Up to 20 people were killed in an operation near Miranshah, provincial capital of North Waziristan, on 20.06.14.

On 15.06.14 the Pakistani armed forces launched a long expected major offensive against Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters whose retreats are located in the semi-autonomous tribal regions along the border with Afghanistan. Almost 280 insurgents have been killed since the beginning of the offensive. According to most recent reports, more than 200,000 people have fled the region.

### Iraq

#### Recent developments

The armed clashes continue. The situation is confused. According to a press report on 23.06.14, the terrorist organisation The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, ISIS (also: The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, ISIL) has allegedly taken control of several towns in western Iraq in recent days.

According to eye witnesses, ISIS fighters seized control of a large part of the town of Haditha (province of Anbar), some 260 kilometres west of Baghdad, on 22.06.14. They had reportedly previously captured the towns of Ana, Rawa and al-Qaim (province of Anbar) in the border region with Syria.

ISIS fighters reportedly executed 21 people in the towns of Rawa and Ana (province of Anbar) on 21. and 22.06.14. The victims are said to be representatives of the authorities which have held power to date, including tribal leaders.

### **Shiite parades**

Military parades by Shiite militias took place on 21.06.14 in Baghdad and the provinces of Maysan, Basra, Qadissiya, Karbala, Babil, Muthana, Dhi Qar, Najaf and Wasit. In Baghdad alone, thousands of supporters of Shiite preacher Moqtada al-Sadr are reported to have paraded. According to the Iraqi government, more than 2.5 million Shiites have since volunteered to fight ISIS.

## **Lebanon**

### **Deaths and injuries in suicide attack**

At least two people were killed in a suicide attack on 20.06.14. According to police information, the attacker blew himself up in his vehicle close to a security checkpoint in the east of the country. Red Cross staff have reported that 34 people were injured. In addition to the attacker, a member of the security forces also died. The attack occurred in the Bekaa region on the main road from the capital, Beirut, to Syria.

## **Turkey**

### **Constitutional court orders release of imprisoned military personnel**

On 19.06.14 the Turkish supreme court ordered the release of more than 230 military personnel who were imprisoned two years ago on charges of involvement in an attempted coup in the Balyoz (sledge-hammer) trial. The judges held that evidence had been falsified by the state prosecutor and serious procedural errors had been made. This means that the case can be reopened.

On 18.06.14 a court in Ankara convicted the leaders of the military coup in 1980. The coup's leader and later Turkish president, Kenan Evren, who is now 96 years old, and the 89 year-old ex-air force chief Tahsin Sahinkaya received life sentences. In view of their advanced age and poor state of health, they are unlikely to have to go to prison, however.

## **Israel/Syria**

### **Israeli air force bombs targets in Syria**

According to information released by the Israeli army on the night of 22.06.14, the Israeli air force attacked nine Syrian army positions in the Golan Heights in revenge for the death of an Israeli youth. In an initial reaction, Israeli tanks carried out revenge attacks on Syrian army positions across the border on 22.06.14. This was the first time that an Israeli had been killed by Syrian gunfire. The situation in the Golan Heights, which have been partly under Israeli occupation since the Six Day War in 1967, has been tense since the beginning of the civil war in Syria. In March, the Israeli air force fired on army positions in Syria in response to a bomb attack in the Golan Heights in which four Israeli soldiers were injured.

## **Syria**

### **ISIS captures border crossing to Iraq**

According to media reports, the Sunni ISIS terrorist group seized control of the strategically important al-Walid border crossing between Iraq and Syria on 21.06.14. The crossing is one of three official border crossing points between Iraq and Syria. The border guards allegedly fled from the advancing ISIS fighters. The Syrian rebels from the Al-Nusra Front and the Free Syrian Army had reportedly withdrawn from the

crossing point beforehand. The Syrian rebels are now using the border crossing to enter Iraq and to fight against the army there.

### **Dozens killed in attack**

More than 30 people were killed and over fifty injured when a lorry packed with explosives blew up in the village of Al-Hurra in the western province of Hama last week. The Islamic Front claimed responsibility for the attack in a YouTube video, stating that it was part of its battle against the Assad regime. Government troops had reportedly had the village largely under their control prior to the explosion.

## **Egypt**

### **Government sworn in**

The new government was sworn in by president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on 17.06.14. Prime minister Ibrahim Mahlab and 34 members of the cabinet swore the oath of office. Mahlab has already led the interim government since 25.02.14. Numerous members of the new government already belonged to the interim cabinet, while new ministers were appointed to 13 posts. The former ambassador in Washington, Sameh Shukri, is the new foreign minister, while Mohammed Ibrahim remains interior minister. Sedki Sobhi continues to be in charge of the ministry of defence.

### **Ministry of information abolished**

In accordance with the constitution, the media are to be regulated in future by an independent institution, whose remit is to be stipulated by law.

### **Death sentences imposed on Islamists**

According to information from the judicial authority of the Egyptian city of Minya on 21.06.14, in appeal proceedings the court has affirmed at least 183 death sentences against Islamists, including Mohammed Badie, head of the Muslim Brotherhood. Some 500 cases were dismissed. The state prosecutor had charged the defendants with participation in the riots of August 2013 (see BN of 19.08. and 26.08.13). The judgements have yet to be confirmed by the supreme Islamic jurist in Egypt.

## **Libya**

### **Mastermind behind Bengasi attack arrested**

A suspected mastermind behind the attack on the American consulate in Bengasi on 11.09.12 was arrested by US special units near Bengasi on 15.06.14. US ambassador Christopher Stevens and three guards were killed in the attack. According to US information, the suspect concerned is Ahmed Abu Chattala, the founder and leader of Libyan Islamist terrorist group Ansar al-Scharia. He is reportedly now in US custody on a ship and is to face charges before an American court.

## **Nigeria**

### **Attacks by Boko Haram on villages**

Suspected fighters of the Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram wearing army uniforms attacked the villages of Chuha A, Chuha B and Korongilim (Chibok LGA) in the north-eastern federal state of Borno on the morning of 21.06.14. They reportedly killed more than 40 people.

At around 11 a.m. on 15.06.14, Boko Haram attacked the market in the village of Daku, Askira Uba LGA in the federal state of Borno. Up to 25 people were killed, and market stalls were pillaged and set on fire.

### **Attack on World Cup public viewing event**

In an attack believed to be the work of Boko Haram, a bomb was detonated outside the "Jamilu Cross Fire" football viewing centre in the Tsamiyar Lilo district of Damaturu (capital of the north-eastern federal state of Yobe) on the evening of 17.06.14. The explosion occurred shortly after the kick-off of the World Cup match between Brazil and Mexico at 8 p.m. At least 21 people died.

There have been three attacks on spectators of football matches since March 2014. Boko Haram considers such events to be un-Islamic.

## **Kenya**

### **Renewed attack in coastal region**

Following an attack on the town of Mpeketoni on 15.06.14 (cf. BN of 16.06.14) in which at least 48 people were killed, an attack on the neighbouring village of Poromoko on the night of 16.06.14 claimed at least 15 lives. In both attacks the attackers are reported to have specifically killed men who were unable to recite verses of the Koran. Security forces shot dead five suspects on 19.06.14. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack on Mpeketoni on 16.06.14. A spokesman for the group declared the coastal region a war zone and warned foreigners against coming to Kenya on holiday. Meanwhile, president Uhuru Kenyatta blamed local political networks and suggested an ethnic motive, pointing out that many of those killed belonged to the Kikuyu.

## **Uganda**

### **USA imposes sanctions in response to law against homosexuality**

In response to a law stipulating drastic punishment for homosexuality which entered into force in February 2014, the USA announced in a statement on 19.06.14 that it was imposing sanctions on Uganda. Ugandan nationals who are held responsible for serious human rights violations in connection with homosexuality will not be permitted to enter the USA. It was not known initially who specifically would be affected by this ban. The announcement also stated that US-funded programmes for Uganda's police and the health ministry had been discontinued and a military exercise in Uganda cancelled.

## **Somalia**

### **Security situation**

According to eye witnesses, the journalist Yusuf Ahmed Abukar was killed in a car bomb attack in Mogadishu on 21.06.14. Abukar was well known for his reporting on the radical Islamic al-Shabaab militia and his criticism of the government. He worked for a radio station in Mogadishu and in Nairobi. Abukar is the second journalist to have been killed in Somalia in 2014.

## **Ukraine**

### **Poroshenko presents peace plan**

Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko presented a 15-point peace plan for the east of the country on 18.06.14. The plan envisages an armistice by 27.06.14, the disarming of militias and a decentralisation of power in the country. In addition, pro-Russian separatists who have not committed any "serious crimes" are to be exempt from prosecution. The pro-Russian separatists have rejected implementation of the peace plan. Meanwhile, Russia has welcomed the unilateral ceasefire in the Ukrainian conflict. Putin called for dialogue between Kiev and the insurgents in the east of the country. Despite the imposed ceasefire, attacks on Ukrainian bases continued. At least 360 people have been killed in the conflict to date. Some 35,000 people have fled the fighting.

### **Russian military "fully ready for combat"**

Notwithstanding the appeals for de-escalation from western countries, Putin has ordered his contingent of 65,000 troops in central Russia to be "fully ready for combat". Russia's forces on the border with Ukraine were reinforced beforehand by several thousand military personnel.

## **Sri Lanka**

### **Outbreak of violence against Muslims**

At least four Muslims have been killed, over 80 injured, and dozens of houses, shops and a number of mosques have been set on fire in violent clashes between Buddhists and Muslims in the coastal towns of Alutgama and Beruwala in the south-west of the country. Local Muslims accused the police of failing to intervene in good time when they were attacked by members of the radical Buddhist organisation Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) for the first time on 15.06.14. Only two days later did the government deploy army units to bring the situation under control.

According to a 2011 census, 70.2 % of the country's total population of some 20 million are Buddhist Sinhalese, 12.5 % are predominantly Tamil Hindus, 7.9 % Muslim and 7.4 % Christians. The spotlight was formerly on the Tamil minority, because its militant arm, the Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE), was involved in a struggle for a separate state before finally being crushed by the army after 27 years in May 2009. Violence against Muslims has been on the rise for around two years now.

## **China**

### **Situation in Xinjiang**

According to reports on 21.06.14, unidentified attackers rammed a vehicle packed with explosives into the police building of the district of Yecheng (prefecture of Kashgar). The police killed at least 13 attackers. Five police officers were killed by unknown assailants in an attack on a checkpoint in the district of Moyu (prefecture of Hotan) on 20.06.14. According to human rights associations, more than 300 people have died in clashes between Uyghurs and security forces in Xinjiang since the beginning of 2013.

### **Prison terms for activists**

A court in the city of Xinyu (province of Jiangxi) sentenced three members of the "New Citizens" movement to prison terms on 19.06.14. Liu Ping and Wei Zhongping each received prison terms of six and a half years for agitation and – in connection with their support of Falun Gong – for "using an evil cult to obstruct justice". Li Sihua received a three-year prison sentence for agitation. The activists were arrested in April 2013 after putting up posters calling on high-ranking officials to disclose their financial circumstances in connection with their fight against corruption. The total number of the movement's members to have received prison sentences now stands at ten.

### **Hong Kong: contentious referendum**

Hundreds of thousands took part in an unofficial referendum at the weekend on procedures for the free election of Hong Kong's prime minister in 2017. There is a choice of three proposals, all of which envisage the direct nomination of candidates. Peking described the referendum as "illegal and invalid". To date, the prime minister has been appointed by an election committee under the influence of Peking. Hong Kong's constitution provides for the direct election of a prime minister in 2017. The interpretation of this provision is a contentious issue, however. Peking apparently only intends to allow the citizens to vote from a shortlist of candidates nominated beforehand by an election committee. The referendum was initiated by activists belonging to a group established in 2013 which calls itself "Occupy Central", in reference to the Occupy movement. They are threatening to bring the centre of Hong Kong to a standstill by staging demonstrations, should the envisaged process of democratisation fail to materialise. Following hacker attacks on the computer system for the referendum, which began on 20.06.14 (online and at 15 polling stations), it has been extended until 29.06.14.

The former British colony has belonged to the People's Republic of China since 1997 and broadly enjoys freedom of speech and freedom of assembly according to the principle of "one country, two systems". Journalists complain of increasing interference from Peking, however.