

Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

27 July 2015

Afghanistan

Security situation

The situation remains unchanged. The fighting between insurgents and government troops continues and civilians frequently get caught in the middle. Three children died in mortar fire in the north-eastern province of Kunduz on 21 July 15. In Logar province (centre) several civilians lost their lives or were injured in a mine explosion on 22 July 15. On 24 July 15 four children were killed in another mine explosion in Ghor (west). There was a civilian casualty in the fighting in Zabul (south) on 25 July 15.

Heavy fighting continues in Faryab province (north), especially in Almar district (see BN of 20 July 15). In a suicide bombing on a market place in Almar district at least 20 people were killed and 34 wounded on 22 July 15.

Armed conflicts between rivalling clans resulted in several deaths in the north-eastern province of Badakhshan on 22 July 15. In Baghlan (north-east) Taliban took control of parts of Baghlan-i-Markazi district on 23 July 15. At least six people were injured in Logar (centre) in violent clashes over land between Kuchi nomads and the villagers on 25 July 15. In Zabul (south) and Nangarhar (east) Taliban and Islamic State (IS) followers engaged in heavy fighting. On 26 July 15 the Taliban conquered a police base in Badakhshan (north). Allegedly the local police commander joined the Taliban. On 27 July 15 part of Kohistanat district in the northern province of Sur-i-Pul fell to the Taliban after a commander of the Afghan Local Police defected to the Taliban with his men.

There was more fighting in Ghazni (south-east), Balkh (north), Helmand (south) and Herat (west).

Also state representatives and (suspected) opponents of the Taliban continue to be targeted by Taliban attacks. On 21 July 15 a member of the High Peace Council of Maidan Wardak province was shot by unknown gunmen in Paghman district (Kabul province). A tribal elder was kidnapped and hung by Taliban in Uruzgan (south) on 22 July 15. One policeman died and six others were injured in a bombing in Nangarhar (east) on 25 July 15. In Logar (centre) the head administrator of a district was assaulted on 25 July 15. A former chairman of the provincial council was assassinated in Kunar (east).

Attacks claim many casualties

In two IS suicide attacks against Iraqi government forces at least 23 people were killed in Anbar on 24 July 15, of these 21 were army soldiers and fighters of Shiite militias, 24 people were injured. Reportedly the assassins blew themselves up with two vehicles in two barracks near the village of Tharthar north-east of the city of Falluja.

At least twelve people died in the suicide bombing of an outdoor pool in the town on Tuz Khurmatu about 175 km north of Baghdad on 24 July 15. When rescue forces were trying to take wounded people away a second assassin reportedly blew himself up with his motorcycle at the pool's exit. This explosion is said to have injured at least 45 people. So far no-one claimed responsibility for the attack.

In bomb attacks in Baghdad at least 21 were killed on 22 July 15, 16 of them died in a car bomb explosion in a predominantly Shiite district, four others in another attack of a road block at the access point to the Al-Shaab district. According to reports of the police and the interior ministry two suicide bombers blew themselves up. In addition, several dozens were wounded in an attack on a shopping street in Bajaa district.

Turkey

Serious attack

In a suicide bombing in Suruc near the border to Syria at least 32, mostly young, people, died and more than a hundred were wounded. Although nobody has as yet claimed responsibility the Turkish government is blaming the attack on IS. The media reported that a 20-year-old Turk from Adiyaman province detonated a bomb in a crowd of young people. The assassin is said to have travelled to Syria illegally last year.

The victims came from Istanbul, Izmir and Adana and were followers of a socialist organization (Federation of Socialist Youth Associations - SGDF). They had planned to go to Syria to help with the reconstruction of Kobane. The Amara Cultural Centre where the blast happened is operated by the Kurdish local administration and had been a contact point for thousands of refugees fleeing from the fighting in close-by Kobane in Syria to Suruc in September 2014.

Protests

In the evening after the attack thousands of pro-Kurdish protesters took to the streets in Istanbul, Ankara and other cities accusing the government of inaction. They also accused the government of being partly responsible for the attack, because it had supported IS in its fight against the Kurds in Syria. Security forces advanced against the protesters with tear gas and water cannons and dispelled the protest. In the subsequent nights there were more confrontations between the police and protesters during which at least eleven people were arrested on 22 July 15. Protests, some of them violent, erupted in several districts of Istanbul, in Ankara and in the predominantly Kurdish cities in the south-east.

Fights with PKK

The media reported the killing of two policemen in the city of Ceylanpinar on the border to Syria on 22 July 15. It is said that the two members of the riot police were found in their apartment with gunshot wounds in their heads. The banned Kurdish Workers Party PKK took responsibility for the murders saying that this was revenge for the Suruc attack, because these policemen had cooperated with IS. On 24 July 15 and on the next day Turkish fighter airplanes attacked PKK bases in northern Iraq. This means the de facto end of the ceasefire with the PKK that had meanwhile become quite fragile anyway. On 25 July 15 a car bomb blew up an army transport lorry, killing two soldiers, in Diyarbakir. Also the city's police station was attacked. It is assumed that the PKK is behind both of these violent acts. This was preceded by protests and violent clashes with the security forces in several cities.

Attack on IS positions

In the night of 23 July 15 the Turkish air-force for the first time bombed IS targets in Syria. According to official Turkish statements the air strikes were directed against three posts close to the village of Havar near the Turkish border town Kilis.

On 23 July 15 IS fighters reportedly fired from Syria at a Turkish army post in Kilis killing one soldier and then the military returned the fire.

In the evening of 23 July 15 Ankara for the first time permitted the US Army to use of the Turkish airbase Incirlik to attack IS. Up to now Turkey had not directly participated in the military operation against IS.

Raids

The Turkish government announced the arrest of over 800 terror suspects throughout the country since 24 July 15. In simultaneous raids in over 20 provinces action had been taken against IS followers and also against leftist DHKP-C extremists and the PKK, it said. In a shoot-out in Istanbul a female follower of the group died, according to this announcement. Thereafter violent clashes erupted between protesters and the security forces during protests against her death in Istanbul's Gazi district over the weekend.

Syria

Assad's army is short of manpower/Assad grants general amnesty

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said on 26 July 15 that because the Syrian army lacked manpower it was retreating from certain areas in order to hold strategically vital positions. Assad's troops lately lost most of the north-western province of Idlib and territory along Syria's southern border. But he also said that the army still was "capable". According to Assad the rebel groups received more foreign support (meaning Saudi Arabia and Turkey). Already on 25 July 15 Assad had pronounced a general amnesty for army deserters and conscientious objectors. Soldiers who fled abroad are to report back within two months, deserters staying in the country within one month in order to benefit from the amnesty. He did not announce a term for the conscientious objectors. The amnesty does not apply to soldiers who participated in fighting against the government or had "blood on their hands". Since the conflict broke out in Syria in March 2011 over 80,000 soldiers and members of allied militias have been killed. Because of the high number casualties even pro-government Syrians do not want to serve in the military; the Syrian Human Rights Observatory reports that 70,000 Syrian have been dodging the military service.

Iran

Iran drastically increases number of executions

According to figures of Amnesty International 693 people were executed in the Islamic Republic between 01 January 15 and 15 July 15. Which would mean that even the already extraordinarily high figure of 743 executions in 2014 could be exceeded. Even during the Islamic month of fasting Ramadan four people had been executed. The organization criticized that the death sentences were pronounced by courts which were neither independent nor unbiased. The reasons for the increase in the number of executions are unknown. Most convicts were executed for drug-related crimes. Critics, however, say that members of the opposition are often sentenced for alleged drug crimes to silence them.

National minorities

Since 26 July 15 President Rohani has been visiting Sanandaj, the capital of the Iranian province of Kordestān. The agenda calls for meetings with citizens, clerics and disabled veterans, attending a „conference on development and investment", a meeting of disabled veterans and of a session of the provincial administrative council.

Iran/Yemen

Attacks on civilians

Sources from Yemen report that intensive bombing by the Saudi Arabian air-force left 70 people dead and dozens wounded in Taiz province on 25 July 15. Most of the victims were women and children. The spokesperson of Iran's Foreign Ministry Marzieh Afkham criticized the Saudi air strikes against residential areas in south Yemen in which 130 people were killed or wounded. Afkham said that the Saudi attacks violated all international human rights laws and standards. It was expected that international bodies would promptly take steps to stop these attacks. She also called upon the UN to do its utmost to ensure security for civilians and in particular children in Yemen. Continuing these attacks and isolating the country would not lead to anything but a strengthening of extremism and increase the activities of the different terror groups such as al-Qaeda.

Apparently Yemen ceasefire is in force

A ceasefire announced by the Saudi-led military alliance has started in Yemen. The coalition will refrain from air strikes against the Houthi rebels until the evening of 31 July 15. Observers see this as an attempt by the military alliance to distract attention from their bombing raids that caused at least 141 casualties. At the same time eye-witnesses reported that the Houthi launched a new attack in the south of the country. The ceasefire seems to hold in the capital Sanaa and in the country's north and centre. UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon urged the parties to observe the ceasefire. The Houthi stated that they had not been consulted about the ceasefire.

Egypt

Attacks on Sinai

On 26 July 15 18 policemen were wounded in an attack on their bus by a remote controlled bomb near the city of al-Arish in the north of the Sinai peninsula.

Four soldiers died in a bomb explosion near the city of Rafah on 23 July 15. The Egyptian branch of IS claimed responsibility for the attack.

Tunisia

Anti-terrorism acts

In response to the terrorist attack in Sousse in June 2015 (see BN of 29 June 15) the Tunisian parliament adopted new anti-terrorism acts on 24 July 15. Among other things these acts widen the authority of the security forces for the observation of terror suspects and provide for prison sentences for the incitement to support terrorist activities. Furthermore it includes the death penalty for terrorist offences. Human rights organizations (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch) voiced their criticism of the law: the definition of terrorist offences is insufficient and the rights of the suspects are not adequately protected; suspects can be held without court order and without access to a lawyer for up to 15 days (until now: six days); furthermore the citizen's fundamental rights are undermined, specifically the freedom of opinion and the freedom of the press.

No death sentences have been executed in Tunisia since 1992.

Libya

Ethnic unrest

Ethnic confrontations between members of the Tuareg and the Toubou in the oasis town of Sabha (750 km south of Tripoli) from 17 July 15 to 21 July 15 claimed at least 37 lives and dozens of wounded. In this major southern town conflicts between these two ethnic groups have recently flared up several times. The regional government appealed to the army to restore public order.

Burundi

Nkurunziza wins presidential elections

Head of state Pierre Nkurunziza achieved a clear victory in the presidential elections. The Election Committee announced that 69 percent of the ballots were cast in favour of the incumbent. Thus the 51-year-old, who has been in power since 2005, is starting his third term in office, although the constitution only permits two. The opposition had boycotted the elections in protest against Nkurunziza. The election observer mission of the East African Community informed that the "principles and requirements to have free, transparent and credible elections" had not been observed. The voter turnout allegedly was more than 73 percent.

Rioting erupted in the capital Bujumbura shortly before the start of the election and claimed three lives, according to the police. Eye-witnesses reported explosions and shelling. There had been repeated bloody protests by outraged government opponents already since the end of April and the election had therefore been delayed several times. In mid-May a coup against the president by parts of the army failed. Since the outbreak of the unrest more than 80 people died and about 170,000 fled to neighbouring countries. Observers fear that the situation might escalate further.

Somalia

Several attacks in Mogadishu

Twelve people were killed in a car bombing of the Jazeera Palace Hotel in Mogadishu that is frequented by diplomats, representatives of aid organizations and members of the government on 26 July 15. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the terror attack. On 25 July 15 a member of parliament and a representative of the

government were assassinated in two drive-by shootings. Four other people died who reportedly were civilians and policemen.

Al-Shabaab loses Baardheere

Somali government and AMISOM units conquered the city of Baardheere (Bay region) in the south-west on 22 July 15. On 23 July 15 al-Shabaab was driven out of the nearby town of Diinsoor.

AU-soldiers allegedly killed civilians

According to reports AMISOM soldiers arbitrarily shot eight civilians in revenge for the shelling of one of their lorries in the southern port of Merka on 21 July 15. The AMISOM command denies these allegations, saying that all the victims had been al-Shabaab fighters.

South Sudan

Human Rights Watch (HRW) accuses the government of crimes

In a report by HRW accuses the government of South Sudan and the militia of the ethnic tribe of the Bul Nuer, which is allied to the government, of having arbitrarily killed and raped civilians during the offensive for reconquering the federal state of Unity between April and June 2015. HRW documented 60 cases saying that these represented only a fraction of all the crimes committed.

Nigeria

Many casualties and suicide bombings caused by Boko Haram

On 26 July 15 a female suicide bomber aged about ten blew herself up at the entrance controls to a crowded market place in the city of Damaturu, capital of Yobe state, killing at least 19 people and wounding 47. As recently as 20 July 15 another assassin had detonated a bomb at a control post in the city outskirts and killed three policemen.

On 24 July 15 Boko Haram fighters attacked the villages Kopa, Maikadire, and Yaffa near Sambisa forest in the north-eastern state of Borno and killed at least 25 villagers.

On 22 July 15 a suicide bomber detonated his bomb near a mosque on the Dadin Kowa parking lot in the city of Gombe, capital of the state of the same name. Shortly thereafter two more explosions occurred at the entrance to the Duku bus station. 37 people died in these attacks and 105 were wounded.

It is assumed that these attacks were committed by the terror organization Boko Haram.

Cameroon

Several suicide bombings in Maroua

In the evening of 25 July 15 a 13-year-old girl in the Pont Vert district of the city of Maroua, capital of the northern region Extrême-Nord, blew herself up in front of bar, killing 20 people and wounding around 80.

Only three days earlier (22 July 15) two girls had detonated explosives at the central market in Maroua and in a neighbouring district, in which at least 13 people died and 32 were wounded.

It is assumed that these attacks were committed by the terror organization Boko Haram.

Closure of mosques and Islamic schools

In response to the suicide bombings of young girls in the Extrême-Nord region the region's governor ordered the closure of mosques and Islamic schools on 26 July 15. Also the begging of children in the streets was prohibited.

Ukraine

Election in Chernihiv

On 26 July 15 by-elections for a parliamentary seat started in Chernihiv in northern Ukraine. 31-year-old

Sergey Borisenko of the president's party Petro Poroshenko Bloc and the 45-year-old millionaire Gennadi Korban are considered the two favourites among the 91 candidates standing for election. The election became necessary after the former MP Valeriy Kulich was appointed governor of the Chernihiv area at the end of March. The candidates are accused of grossly violating democratic standards. On the day before the by-election copies of the Election Commission's stamps were discovered in one car and in other cars envelopes with money, voter lists and arms were found and confiscated. Some contestants had tried to win favours with the voters by distributing food packages, concert tickets and stays at vacation camps for children.

New governor for the Luhansk separatist area

On 22 July 15 Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko appointed 51-year-old Georgi Tuka as governor for the Luhansk area that is controlled by pro-Russian separatists. Tuka recently mostly worked on stopping smuggling into the separatist areas and will govern the break-away region from the government-controlled city of Severodonetsk. Tuka is succeeding the former regional leader Gennadi Moskal who is considered a hardliner and was given the task to head the administration in the Trans-Carpathian region in the west and to establish law and order there following a shoot-out with several casualties.

Ukraine signs agreement on demilitarized zone

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko agreed to create a 30 km demilitarized zone in the Donbass war area. All tanks and artillery are to be withdrawn from this buffer zone.

Joint manoeuvres

On 20 July 15 the Ukrainian army started a large-scale manoeuvre with strong US participation in the country's western region. The almost two week long exercise named „Rapid Trident" near the Polish border involved about 1,800 soldiers from 18 countries, including Germany. The manoeuvre is to show strong support for Ukraine in its struggle for freedom and sovereignty and prove the countries' ability to cooperate. On Monday the Russian government voiced strong criticism against the manoeuvres in western Ukraine saying that this could destroy the progress achieved in the peace process and have explosive consequences.

Russian Federation/North Caucasus

Security forces kill six extremists in Kabardino-Balkaria

In an anti-terrorist operation in North Caucasus Russian security forces discovered six armed extremists and killed them in a shoot-out in the night of 23 July 15. They said that there were no civilian or military victims. The anti-terrorist committee informed that the suspects had barricaded themselves in an apartment in a high-rise building in Nalchik, the capital of the Russian North Caucasus Republic Kabardino-Balkaria and fought the security forces with machine guns and shells. After the clash explosive experts confiscated numerous firearms and ammunition as well as explosives in this apartment. They also found a laboratory for manufacturing bombs. The authorities informed that the six men killed were members of an international Islamist organization that allegedly committed several attacks in Kabardino-Balkaria between 2013 and 2015.

India

Casualties in attack on police station

At least five people lost their lives in an attack on a police station in the north of India near the Pakistani border on 27 July 15. The police informed that the armed attacker shot two policemen and three civilians in the city of Gurdaspur in the north of Punjab state. The Ministry of the Interior said that security measures at the border to Pakistan had been tightened. It is as yet unclear who is behind the attack.

While police stations are more frequently attacked in the Kashmir border region, this is very rare in neighbouring Punjab.