

Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

18 August 2014

Afghanistan

Security situation

At least three policemen died in an explosion of a booby trap in the eastern province of Laghman (Badpakh district) on 14 August 2014. In the south-eastern province of Paktika the head of police of Ahmadaba district was killed in a bombing. In the western province of Herat five Afghan Red Cross staff members were kidnapped on 14 August 2014 presumably by insurgents or a local armed group.

Last week fighting between the security forces and insurgents broke out in several provinces in the east and south-east (Kunar, Nangarhar, Ghazni, Paktika), in central Afghanistan (Maidan Wardak), and in the north-east (Kunduz). Also civilians were killed or injured in these fights. The insurgents attacked several police stations over the last days. A battle broke out between two warlords in the central province of Kapisa forcing many civilians to flee.

The provincial governments of the northern provinces of Jowzjan and Faryab bordering on Turkmenistan said that security there is deteriorating due to an increasing presence of (predominantly Pashtun) Taliban fighters who are joined by many ethnic Turkmens. As the state is hardly present in the area some villages and districts are said to have set up local militias under the leadership of former warlords.

Presidential candidates agree on a 'government of national unity'

Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, the two rivals in the run-off elections for president, agreed to form a joint government, irrespective of the pending results of the investigations of the election outcome. No details of this „government of national unity” are known as yet.

Pakistan

Security situation

On 15 August 2014 the Pakistani military fought off two insurgent attacks on air-force bases near the city of Quetta (capital of Baluchistan province).

Anti-government protests

During opposition protests the opposition politician Imran Khan was attacked in Gujranwala (eastern Pakistan) on 15 August 2014. He escaped unharmed. On 16 August 2014 ten thousands protested against the government in the capital Islamabad demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and new elections. This call for new elections is based on accusations against Sharif of having manipulated the last elections.

Iraq

Development of the situation

According to official announcements US fighter jets attacked four control posts of the Islamic State (IS) terror militia and some vehicles of the extremists near the Sinjar Mountains. The Department of Defense in Washington said that the attacks were successful, but did neither stop the IS militia, nor seriously weaken it.

Islamic State issued a press release on 11 August 2014 saying that after many weeks of fighting against Kurdish Peshmerga units the city of Jalawla (Jalaula/Jalula) about 115 km north-east of Baghdad had been conquered on 11 August 2014. The city had previously been held by the Kurdish Peshmerga. IS had also taken control of villages nearby, the release said.

It is reported that Peshmerga militia with US air support reconquered large parts of Mosul dam on 17 August 2014 and that the offensive is ongoing.

Yazidi in the Sinjar Mountains

Last week about 80,000 people, mainly Yazidi, could escape from the Sinjar Mountains to safe Kurdish areas. According to the UN only about 1,000 people remain currently trapped in the mountains. IS fighters are said to have killed about 300 Yazidi men in the region and to have abducted women and children.

Political development

Against the will of Prime Minister Maliki President Masoum charged the deputy speaker of parliament, Haider al-Abadi (Shiite), with the formation of government on 11 August 2014. On 15 August 2014 Maliki announced to refrain from seeking a third term in favour of al-Abadi.

Syria

Heavy fighting between government troops, rebel groups, and IS continues

According to statements of the Syrian Human Rights Observatory on 13 August 2014 the Islamic State (IS) is extending its influence towards the Turkish border and took a strategically important region in Aleppo province in the north. Reportedly these are six villages near the town of Asas. Also an important supply route of the Syrian opposition is said to be affected and at least 40 people have been killed. The Observatory said that the border area is controlled by moderate Islamist rebel groups who had driven the IS fighters from there a few months ago. IS is currently controlling extensive parts of the provinces of al-Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor.

The city of Aleppo, that has mostly been held by the Free Syrian Army (FSA) for about two years, is now targeted by the regime's military that took up positions in the city's west and by IS that is advancing from the north-east.

The Observatory announced that the government forces could gain control of most of the city of al-Mleha near Damascus that had been held by the rebels for two years. The rebels are launching their attacks on targets in Damascus from there.

At least 22 people were killed by a car bomb in front of a mosque in Daraa province on 15 August 2014.

On 16 August 2014 fighting over the city of Marea, about 25 km north of Aleppo, erupted between the Islamic Front and IS.

On 16 August 2014 the Syrian Human Rights Observatory said that in the last two weeks at least 700 members of the al-Shuaytat (or shaitat) tribe have been killed by IS fighters in several villages of Deir ez-Zor province, because they tried to resist IS.

In response the Syrian army is said to have killed at least 31 IS fighters in air strikes of their bases in al-Raqqa province on 17 August 2014 in which dozens were wounded. The Observatory also said that the government air-force struck in Deir ez-Zor province that has been hotly contested for months.

UN resolution against extremists

In response to IS' advance in Syria and Iraq the UN Security Council adopted a resolution on 15 August 2014 that included sanctions against six men considered to be backers and financial supporters of the Islamist extremists, such as a travel ban and freezing of accounts. Furthermore the Member States were requested to stop the funding and recruiting for terrorist organizations.

Lebanon

More than 40 jihadists court-martialled

On 14 August 2014 44 persons, including 33 fugitives, were indicted by Lebanese military courts. They are charged with having intended to set up an emirate in the country's east. If they are convicted they are facing the death penalty.

Bilateral talks with Jordan

On 13 August 2014 Lebanese Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil met with his Jordanian colleague Nasser Judeh in Amman. Both ministers demanded a speedy political solution to the Syrian conflict to avoid negative impacts on the neighbouring states. They also sharply criticized Israel's attacks of the Gaza Strip.

Palestinian Autonomous Areas/Israel

Truce lasts

Israel and the Palestinians agreed an extension of the truce in the Gaza Strip for another five days. This was announced by the head of the Palestinian delegation, Assam al-Ahmed on 13 August 2014 in Cairo and also confirmed by Egypt, Israel, and Hamas. Shortly before the negotiation breakthrough militant Palestinians again shelled Israel and thereby triggered another Israeli air strike.

No further violations of the ceasefire were reported thereafter.

Houses of suspected kidnappers demolished on the West Bank

The army stated that the houses of two men suspected of the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli students on the West Bank were demolished. The murder had again fuelled the conflict between Israel and Hamas which then led to the war in Gaza. On 18 August 2014 the military reported that the house of a third suspect had been sealed off. Already on 11 August 2014 the Israeli authorities had arrested one of the suspects in Hebron whose house has now been levelled. The other two suspects are fugitive.

Palestinians arrested

The Israeli police announced the arrest of 52 Palestinians on charges of breaking the peace in East Jerusalem on 14 August 2014. This brings the total of arrests since the beginning of July to about 600. Among those arrested in the Israeli occupied eastern part of Jerusalem are 175 minors. Palestinian protests repeatedly erupted since the murder of a Palestinian youth by Israeli rightists on 02 July 2014. The police said that most people were arrested because they attacked police patrols by throwing stones or petrol bombs.

Iran

Internal power struggle: Rohani provokes conservative forces

Dozens of parliamentarians signed a letter addressed to the speaker of parliament, Larijani, requesting President Hassan Rohani to immediately provide an explanation in parliament (Majlis). Previously Rohani had designated the ultra-conservative critics of his reformist policy as 'political cowards'. He was referring to the reservations many of his political opponents have against the current nuclear negotiations in which Iran is hoping to reach an agreement. Rohani's criticism was quite blunt: "As soon as we start to negotiate they get the jitters. Go to hell and try to find a warm place." This marks a new climax in the power struggle between moderate and conservative forces in the Islamic Republic. On 13 August 2014 all Iranian dailies commented the President's harsh choice of words. Observers assume that Rohani did not criticize his opponents without the consent of revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Others think that the criticism is part of Rohani's political strategy to demonstrate that he can stand up to the hardliners. Nor is the timing a coincidence, since the criticism comes a few weeks before the UN general assembly where he intends to meet US President Obama.

Yemen

15 Yemeni soldiers kidnapped and murdered

The army announced that extremists of the Al Qaeda terror network on the Arab Peninsula (AQAP) kidnapped and murdered 15 Yemeni soldiers. On 08 August 2014 an army spokesman stated that the men had been travelling by bus when they were ambushed by an Al Qaeda command. They had been abducted to the village of Huta in the south eastern province of Hadramaut and executed. In recent days the number of attacks of suspected AQAP terrorists had increased in the province.

Turkey

Diyarbakir accepts Kurdish Yazidi

On 13 August 2014 the press reported that up to 150 Iraqi Yazidi are fleeing from the IS forces to Turkey every day. They are housed in a cultural centre in Diyarbakir. All of the newcomers are members of the middle class and have passports. It is still unknown how long they will be permitted to stay in the Kurdish city of Diyarbakir. The refugees say that they want to move on to France and the Netherlands.

Several hundred Syrian refugees transferred following protests

On 14 August 2014 the media reported that about 400 Syrian families from the border town of Gaziantep were bussed to a refugee camp near the town following violent protest of the citizens. The protests broke out after a Syrian was suspected of having stabbed his Turkish landlord.

Candidates for the office of prime minister

On 17 August 2014 AKP deputy leader Mehmet Ali Sahin announced that outgoing Turkish President Abdullah Gül could not become the head of government, because he was not a member of parliament. The Turkish media report that acting foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, an Erdogan confidant, will be appointed head of government and leader of the AKP on 21 August 2014.

Libya

Forced conscription of African migrants

On 13 August 2014 the press quoted the Italian aid organisation Habeshia saying that African migrants, in particular from Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, Mali, and Sudan, had been forced into service by Libyan militias. They had to transport ammunition and arms and were taken up to the front line. Habeshia urged in particular the US and the EU to open refugee routes to migrants in Libya.

Over 20 drown in refugee drama off the coast

On 12 August 2014 a refugee boat capsized about 100 km off the coast of Tripoli. The survivors said that about 150 passengers were on board. The Libyan navy reported 22 survivors and over 20 dead.

Parliament calls for international aid

Already in their first week in session the deputies of the newly elected parliament adopted two important new acts. On 13 August 2014 a large majority voted for a law to strengthen the government's call for foreign support. The law says that Libya is incapable of containing the repeated outbreaks of fighting by itself. The United Nations are requested to intervene in the escalating fighting to protect the citizens and institutions. In the second act the deputies resolved to immediately disband all militias and to stop all public support for former anti-Gaddafi revolutionaries. In the government's view the armed groups are the biggest obstacle to building reliable public security forces and institutions. It will probably not be viable to disband the militias, because the army is still in its initial stages of establishment. The militias are fighting each other especially in Tripoli and Benghazi, but violence is also frequent in smaller towns.

Egypt

Human Rights Watch: Serious human rights violations

The human rights organization Human Rights Watch (HRW) is accusing the government of serious human rights violations during the clearance of two protest camps of followers of ousted president Mursi in August

last year. At least 1,150 people had been killed by police brutality. Although some of the protesters had been armed they had only scarcely used firearms, the organization said. According to HRW the major personalities in the chain of command were interior minister Mohammed Ibrahim, then minister of defence and now president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, and the head of the special forces, Medhat Menshawi. If their involvement was proved they had to be called to account for their actions, HRW said.

The government for its part rejected all accusations and accused HRW of being biased saying that the first casualty had been a policeman who was shot. Furthermore the report did not mention the numerous victims for which the protesters were responsible.

Nigeria

85 Nigerian hostages liberated by Chadian soldiers

Nigerian human rights and security sources reported on 16 August 2014 that soldiers of Chad had stopped a bus convoy in a routine border check at a crossing between Nigeria and Lake Chad. The bus was controlled by six armed fighters of the Islamist terror organization Boko Haram. 63 male and 22 female hostages were freed who had been kidnapped near Lake Chad on 11 August 2014 in a Boko Haram attack on the village of Doron Baga (LGA Kukawa, north-eastern state of Borno) and taken to Chad in motor boats. 30 hostages taken in the attack on 11 August 2014, in which 28 villagers died, are still held by Boko Haram.

Since the beginning of the year about 400,000 displaced persons in the north-east

On 13 August 2014 the Nigerian Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) reported that in the first seven months of 2014 360,462 persons in Nigeria's north-east had been internally displaced as a result of the Boko Haram conflict. Of these 183,031 had found refuge in Borno state, 147,198 in Adamawa and 30,233 in Yobe. So far another 30,000 had been displaced in August.

Attempt to retake Gwoza has failed as yet

The Nigerian military has launched several unsuccessful attempts to retake the city of Gwoza in Borno state that Boko Haram had conquered on 06 August 2014. About 50 Boko Haram fighters and 30 soldiers are said to have died during these attempts. When Boko Haram took control over the city it reportedly killed about 100 civilians and soldiers. Several thousand people fled from the city.

West Africa

West African Ebola outbreak more dangerous than assumed

Meanwhile also Nigeria (on 08 August 2014) and Guinea (on 12 August 2014) followed WHO's appeal to the four West African countries hit by Ebola to declare an emergency. On 13 August 2014 the German Foreign Office requested all German citizens to leave Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria, as the options for leaving the country might be restricted even further. A number of airlines have already cancelled their service to the countries affected. The Foreign Office's appeal expressly excludes health workers. The German embassies will remain open as well, the Foreign Office said. While the US is calling back its staff from its embassy in Sierra Leone.

Kenya has issued an entry ban for persons from the Ebola-hit countries effective as of 19 August 2014. 17 Ebola patients fled from a quarantine ward in Liberia. The newspaper „Front Page Africa" reported that they had left the hospital in a slum of the capital Monrovia with the assistance of outraged citizens on 16 August 2014. Meanwhile more and more doctors and nurses are fleeing from hospitals in Nigeria for fear of being infected by the virus. The paper "Punch" reported on 16 August 2014 that mainly the Yaba Mainland Hospital in Lagos is affected where several infected persons are staying in the quarantine ward. The situation is aggravated by a doctors' strike that has lasted for over seven weeks.

WHO announced (status of the data 15 August 2014) that since the virus outbreak and until 13 August 2014 a total of 2,127 Ebola cases and 1,145 casualties had been notified.

South Sudan

Peace negotiations stalled

A UN envoy said on 13 August 2014 that no progress had been made in the peace negotiations between the government led by President Salva Kiir Mayardit and his former vice-president, rebel leader Riek Machar, that have been going on since January 2014 with some interruptions. He said that there was no hope for any agreement to be reached fast.

Fighting in Nasir

Heavy fighting on 10 August 2014 is again reported from the city of Nasir, a rebel stronghold (see BN of 21 July 2014). The government and the rebels are blaming each other for the outbreak.

Mali

Suicide bombing in the north claims casualties

On 16 August 2014 a car loaded with explosives drove into a UN military camp 60 km north-east of Timbuktu killing two UN soldiers from Burkina Faso. Reports vary on the number of persons wounded, which could be up to nine, two of the seriously wounded were flown to Senegal. It is not yet known who is behind the suicide attack.

Resumption of peace talks delayed

The peace talks between the Mali government and six rebel groups initiated on 16 July 2014 in Algiers were concluded for the time being by the signature of a document "to cease all hostilities" on 24 July 2014. It had been agreed to resume the talks in mid-August. But the resumption has now been delayed to 01 September 2014 to give the parties more time for preparations.

Central African Republic

Muslim named new prime minister

On 11 August 2014 Mahamat Kamoun became the first Muslim in the history of the Central African Republic to be named prime minister of the interim government that has been in office since February 2014.

Kamoun intends to initially pursue the same political objectives as his predecessor. The government's priorities had been agreed with the international community, it was said. Based on a Four Point Plan the new prime minister wants first of all to bring about peace and security, secondly provide humanitarian aid for the internally displaced persons, thirdly get the administrative structures and the economy to work, and finally prepare the presidential elections.

More fighting

A representative of the African peace force said that at least 34 villagers in the north had been killed by ex-Séléka rebels between 13 and 15 August 2014. Villagers who had escaped reported that the attackers had intentionally driven their victims into the bush by firing shots. People had been hanged, beaten or tortured to death. The escapees said that the attackers had shot at anybody who crossed their path and proclaimed that they would "clean" eight more villages before a UN peace force would arrive in mid-September.

In early August there were reports of heavy fighting between French soldiers and some of the Séléka rebels in Batangafo (in the north). The fire exchange lasted for several hours and was so intense that the French called in fighter jet support. The attackers belong to a Séléka group calling itself „Séléka Birao“ that is composed mainly of Sudanese and Chadian mercenaries. They always retreat to the north-east.

After lengthy negotiations the parties to the conflict signed a ceasefire agreement in the Congolese capital of Brazzaville. This represents no more than a minimum agreement; it does not provide for any specifics on disarming the militias nor is there a political roadmap.

Somalia

Tension between Puntland and Mogadishu

On 12 August 2014 the press reported that Puntland's government had broken off its relations to the Somali government. The reason behind this move is that Mogadishu had welcomed an agreement between the representatives of the local administrations of Galmudug, Ximan, Xeeb, and Ahlu Sunna wal-Jama'a to create a semi-autonomous federal partial state in central Somalia (see BN of 04 August 2014). Some parts of the federal state to be created are claimed by Puntland.

Al-Shabaab attacks in Puntland

On 12 August 2014 al-Shabaab fighters attacked a Puntland military base near Bosasso (Bari region). Puntland's security forces announced that they had beaten back the Islamists. Nothing is known about the number of casualties.

Shots fired at protesters

On 11 August 2014 AMISOM soldiers opened fire on protesters in Merka (Lower Shabelle region) who had taken to the streets after the arrest of civilians during an AMISOM security operation in the city. Six persons were wounded in the incident. The governor of Lower Shabelle justified the soldiers' actions by saying that the protesters had been al-Shabaab followers.

Fighting in Mogadishu

On 15 August 2014 government troops and soldiers of the African Union (AU) were engaged in heavy fighting with militias in Mogadishu in which between seven and 14 people were reportedly killed. It was an operation for the disarmament of militia leader Ahmed Dai who managed to escape.

After the operation the directors and 19 other staff members of Radio Shabelle and SKY FM were arrested for reporting negatively about the military operation, 16 persons are said to have been released again on 17 August 2014.

Kosovo

EU investigator intends to charge former Kosovo rebel leaders for war crimes

The EU-appointed US special investigator Clint Williamson submitted his report on the crimes of the Kosovo Liberation Movement (UCK) in Brussels at the end of July. The starting point for the latest investigations had been the 2010 report of the Swiss Council of Europe deputy Dick Marty. The investigator concludes that several high-ranking UCK members should stand trial in an international court for committing crimes against humanity and trading in human organs, however, without mentioning any names. As soon as it would be possible to hold an independent and transparent trial and to provide absolute witness protection, charges could be brought, the report said. The EU and Kosovo still have to agree on the establishment of a special tribunal. The tribunal could possibly be held in Kosovo, while witnesses could be heard in the Netherlands. It is planned to establish the tribunal by 2015.

Background

In 2010 Dick Marty had raised serious accusations against UCK. In 1998 and 1999 the liberation army had tortured and murdered prisoners and engaged in the illegal trading of human organs. Also current politicians (including Prime Minister Hashim Thaci) had been involved, the report said. At the end of the nineties the UCK had waged a war attempting to separate Kosovo from Serbia. In response thereto Serbian units had displaced about 800,000 Albanians. More than 13,000 people were murdered, most of them Kosovo Albanians. 2,000 of the victims were Serbs, Romany, or members of other minorities.

Ukraine/Russia

Fighting in the east continues despite crisis talks

While the foreign ministers of France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine were searching for a solution to bring peace over the weekend in Berlin without arriving at any tangible results, heavy fighting for the separatist

strongholds Donetsk and Luhansk continued. The civil war parties reported several dozen casualties. Pro-Russian separatists shot down a Ukrainian fighter jet near Luhansk. At the same time the government troops are reporting successes.

For weeks Ukrainian government forces have been attempting to conquer the rebel strongholds in the contested region while the pro-Russian separatists are fighting back fiercely. Luhansk is experiencing a difficult humanitarian situation, because there has been neither electricity nor water for two weeks and food and fuel are scarce.

Agreement on Russian aid convoy

As the latest development in the dispute about humanitarian aid for eastern Ukraine the Kyiv leadership has now officially accepted the Russian convoy of 280 lorries that has been arriving over the last days, as a supply of aid. The International Red Cross Committee announced that both sides agreed on an inspection of the lorries and Kyiv only had to give green light for the border crossing.

China

Hong Kong: Protests against democracy movement

On 17 August 2014 followers of the Chinese leadership protested against the Occupy Central movement and its plans to shut down the city's financial centre. With this operation the movement intends to underscore its demand for the free election of the Hong Kong governor in 2017 (see BN of 23 June 2014). According to the police 110,000 people gathered for the protest, observers from Hong Kong University estimated up to 88,000.

About 800,000 people had participated in the Occupy Movement's referendum in June 2014. The Alliance for Peace and Democracy that organized the counter protest, held a referendum against Occupy Central last week in which allegedly 1.3 million people participated.

Tibet: demonstration disbanded with the use of force

When the police disbanded a protest in Sichuan province on 12 August 2014 using tear gas and live ammunition about ten people were injured. Several people were arrested. The incident occurred in the district of Shiqu in Ganzi prefecture in the Tibet Autonomous Region when Tibetans protested against the arrest of their village elder on the day before. Citing Tibetan exile sources Radio Free Asia reported on 18 August 2014 that one of those injured had committed suicide in prison and another one died of his injuries there.