

Directorate 22 - Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

22 June 2015

Afghanistan

Security situation

On 20 June 2015, the Taliban captured much of the Chahar Dara district in the north of the province of Kunduz. The Afghan army started a counteroffensive on 21 June 2015, and according to the police chief of the province of Kunduz, three soldiers and 17 Taliban were killed in this operation. The Taliban claimed that 24 police officers and soldiers had lost their lives.

The Afghan army successfully retook the district of Yamgan in the province of Badakshan, which had been captured by the Taliban on 6 June 2015. According to the province's police chief, one soldier was killed and four were injured in the operation. Reportedly, more than a hundred Taliban fighters were killed.

On 20 June 2015, 19 people, among them nine children and eight women, died in a roadside bomb explosion in the province of Helmand. The victims had tried to escape fighting in the district of Marjah.

Woman appointed as Supreme Court judge

As part of his efforts to bring more women into leadership positions, president Ashraf Ghani has appointed Anisa Rassuli as a Supreme Court judge. Parliament will need to confirm the appointment. The president's decision was criticised by clerics, who said that the appointment of a woman was a decision against Islam.

Taliban establish hotline for potential defectors

The Taliban have reportedly established a 24/7 hotline to make it easier for government employees to defect. Allegedly, more than 20 persons have already used it. The Taliban are currently trying to recruit new fighters, as they seem to have lost many supporters to IS in the last few months.

Iraq

German army extends training mission

German minister of defence Ursula von der Leyen has announced that the German army will train Yazidis in northern Iraq for fighting against the terrorist IS militia. The Kurdish peshmerga fighters had prepared the ground for this operation in order to show that all ethnic groups and religions in Iraq are jointly fighting against IS.

Pakistan

Executions suspended during Ramadan

On 18 June 2015, the Pakistani government announced that the death penalty would be suspended during Ramadan, which started in Pakistan on 19 June 2015. Only a few days before, on 16 June 2015, nine murderers sentenced to death were hanged in the province of Punjab in east Pakistan. Following a Taliban attack on a school in December 2014, the government had lifted a roughly six-year moratorium on executions. Since 19 December 2014, more than 170 death row inmates have been hanged. According to official information, about 8,500 prisoners are still awaiting execution.

Syria

Kurds recapture Tal Abyad

On 16 June 2015, Kurdish fighters belonging to the People's Protection Units (YPG) retook the city of Tal Abyad after days of fighting against IS. Tal Abyad is situated near the Turkish border, about 85 km north of the IS stronghold ar-Raqqa, and is thought to be an important point of entry for foreign fighters who wanted to join IS. Now, IS only controls border crossings in the province of Aleppo, which means that its supply routes have lengthened by hundreds of kilometres. Thousands of civilians fled to Turkey due to the fights. Since the beginning of June alone, roughly 23,000 have left the area.

IS has reportedly planted mines in the Palmyra ruins

The London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported on 21 June 2015 that IS had planted explosives in the historical ruins of Palmyra. It is unclear whether IS wants to blow up the World Heritage site or prevent government troops from starting a counteroffensive.

Yemen

Government against ceasefire in civil war

Yemen's government has refused to agree to a ceasefire, despite pressure from the international community. Speaking in Cairo, Yemeni vice-president Khaled Bahah emphasised on 18 June 2015 that the Houthi rebels had taken advantage of the ceasefire in May to bring more areas under their control. Meanwhile, Yemen continues to be racked by violence. On 18 June 2015, air strikes on Sanaa were resumed. On 17 June 2015, a series of blasts in the capital killed two people and injured 60. The terrorist IS militia claimed responsibility for the attack.

Israel/Palestinian autonomous areas

Call for better protection of Palestinian children

Looking back at the war in Gaza during the past summer, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon has called on Israel to ensure better protection of Palestinian children. He emphasised this issue in his opening speech to the open debate of the UN Security Council on the situation of children in armed conflicts on 18 June 2015. He urged Israel to review its policies and take immediate steps to prevent the killing or maiming of children. More than 500 children were killed during the weeks of fighting between the Israeli army and the Palestinian Hamas movement.

Palestinian autonomous areas

Unity government steps down

On 17 June 2015, the Palestinian unity government resigned. The crisis was triggered by the fact that the West Bank, which is governed by Palestinian president Abbas's Fatah party, and the Gaza Strip, which is controlled by Hamas, are drifting apart. After having met Abbas, French foreign minister Laurent Fabius stated that Abbas had said only Palestinians who recognise Israel should be members of the new government.

Egypt

Death sentence against Mursi confirmed

On 16 June 2015, a Cairo court upheld the death sentence against Mohammed Mursi pronounced by the court of first instance on 16 June 2015 (see BN of 18 June 2015). The death sentences against five other Muslim Brotherhood members, among them leader Mohammed Badie, were confirmed as well. The decision of 16 June 2015 will automatically be subject to an appeal.

Somalia

Attacks by al-Shabaab

As Ramadan began on 18 June 2015, al-Shabaab announced that it would step up its attacks.

On 18 June 2015, at least four islamists were killed in the city of Adaado (region of Galguduud) in central Somalia. They had attacked the conference hall where representatives of the Somali government and local clans are negotiating about the creation of a transitional government for the central Somali regions.

According to reports, eight policemen and numerous al-Shabaab fighters were killed in an attack on a police station south of Mogadishu on 20 June 2015.

On 21 June 2015, al-Shabaab fighters attacked a building used by the Somali intelligence service in Mogadishu. They first exploded a car bomb to enter the compound. The government stated that the security forces beat back the attackers and that three islamists were killed.

Nigeria

Suicide bombings and attack by Boko Haram in the federal state of Yobe

On 15 June 2015, a suicide bomber blew himself up in the Dorowa quarter of the city of Potiskum after having been handed over to a citizens' militia as a suspected thief. Eight people, most of them militia members, died. On the same day, two people died in a suicide attack in front of a drinks booth in Potiskum.

In the early morning of 14 June 2015 Boko Haram fighters attacked the city of Babbangida, the administrative centre of the Tarmuwa Local Government Area. They used women and children as human shields during the fight with army soldiers. Ten people died.

Chad

Suicide bombings

Twin attacks on a police station and the police academy in N'Djamena, Chad's capital, killed more than 35 people on 15 June 2015. At least a hundred were injured. So far, no group has taken responsibility. The Chadian minister of information holds the Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram responsible. In response, prime minister Kalzeube Pahimi Deubet banned wearing burqas throughout the country with immediate effect. Using cars with tinted windows was prohibited as well. Security concerns were given as reasons for the bans, seeing that terrorists, for example, might hide under a burqa. This was the first such attack on Chadian territory in years. The Chadian army took on a leading role in a military alliance to fight Boko Haram in February. It announced that it had conducted several air strikes on Boko Haram positions in Nigeria in response.

Niger

Boko Haram attack

The ministry of the interior of Niger stated on 18 June 2015 that at least 38 people were killed and more than 100 homes burned down in a Boko Haram attack on two villages (Lamana and Ngoumao) in the region of Diffa in southern Niger. This was the most serious attack on civilians in Niger since the country joined the alliance to fight Boko Haram at the beginning of February 2015.

Ivory Coast

Thousands protest against Ivorian president in Abidjan

On 20 June 2015, thousands of protesters demonstrated against Ivorian head of state Alassane Ouattara in Abidjan. Former head of government Charles Konan Banny, who is a member of the National Coalition for Change, an alliance of about 20 opposition politicians, said that Ouattara had not done anything during the five years of his presidency. Between 3,000 and 5,000 protesters also demanded the release of former president Laurent Gbagbo, who is being tried by the International Criminal Court in The Hague on charges of

crimes against humanity. He is accused of being responsible for the violence after the most recent elections in November 2010. Back then, about 3,000 people died in street fights between his and Ouattara's supporters. The country was at the brink of civil war.

Eritrea

Opposition reports a wave of arrests in Eritrea

The opposition group Arbi Harnet (Freedom Friday) reports that several students were arrested in and near Asmara, the capital, in the last few days. They assume that the arrests are connected to the release of the report of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea, which has accused the regime of president Isaias Afewerki of serious human rights violations (see BN of 15 June 2015). It is quite impossible to get independent confirmations of these reports, as human rights organisations have not been allowed to enter Eritrea for years.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Easier transit for migrants into EU

As a response to the strong migrant influx, the Macedonian parliament amended the asylum law on 18 June 2015. The new rules, which will enter into force after eight days, provide that migrants can get registered at the border or at the nearest police station. They then have 72 hours in which they may either apply for asylum in Macedonia or leave the country. Registered migrants may use buses and trains for free for transit through Macedonia. In most cases they travel to Serbia. According to the minister of the interior, about 2,000 to 3,000 illegal migrants are currently sent back to Greece every day.

Ukraine

Situation in the east of the country

According to the Ukrainian army, mortar shelling by pro-Russian separatists killed at least two soldiers and injured 20 others in the conflict area on 15 June 2015. Military leaders claimed that separatists fired at the government army positions more than a hundred times. The fighting focused on the area north of the Donetsk airport and on the suburbs of Marinka and Krasnohorivka west of the city. In return, the rebels accused the government troops of having shelled a residential area in the west of Donetsk. The separatists also claimed that the February ceasefire was violated in the area around Luhansk.

Protesters in Donetsk in eastern Ukraine criticised the politics of the pro-Russian separatists unusually openly. More than 200 people met on 15 June 2015 in front of the headquarters of the leaders of the self-proclaimed people's republic of Donetsk and demanded a stop to the fights with the Ukrainian army, which have recently flared up again. In the framework of the protests, which took place near the Donetsk airport, demonstrators accused the separatists of having made their city quarter a target by storing weapons there. Other demonstrators, however, called for more decisive action against the Ukrainian army.

Ukraine tightens Donbass blockade

The Ukrainian government has tightened the controversial blockade of the Donbass war area. Deliveries of food, medicine and medical goods to the area, which is controlled by the separatists, are only allowed to a limited extent. An exception is made for humanitarian help. The Ukrainian intelligence service has also restricted the free movement of persons in the Donbass area. Only refugees and children may leave the separatist region for the Ukrainian heartland. All travellers need special permits, and people have repeatedly complained that they had to wait for a long time for the necessary documents and later on at the control checkpoints.