

Group 41 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

7 January 2014

Afghanistan

Security situation

On 4 January 2014 there was a bomb attack in the capital Kabul in the vicinity of a US base. It is assumed that the attack was meant to hit an ISAF vehicle. It seems that nobody was injured. One NATO soldier was killed in an attack carried out on an army base in the province of Nangarhar (Ghani Khel district) in eastern Afghanistan. On 6 January 2014 a girl, aged eight to ten years, was prevented from executing a bomb attack onto a border post in the province of Helmand (Khanshin district) in southern Afghanistan. The authorities said that the child was forced by its brother, a Taliban commander, to carry out this attack with a suicide vest.

The Bundeswehr will no longer publish any statistics on attacks

In future, the Bundeswehr will no longer publish any data regarding security related incidents from its field of responsibility, as information given by the Afghan armed forces is too inaccurate and too late.

Iraq

Security situation

According to Iraq Body Count, the number of civilians killed in 2013 is at 9,475. This has been the highest death toll since 2008 when 10,130 civilians were killed. In contrast to 2012 (4,574 fatalities) the number of victims has more than doubled.

According to UNAMI (United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq), the number of civilians killed in 2013 was at 7,818. They say that the death toll was 6,787 in 2008.

According to information given by the Iraqi government 7,154 people were killed in 2013, in 2008 the death toll was 8,995.

Situation in Ramadi and Falluja

According to a press release of 2 January 2014, fighters of the organisation „The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria“ (ISIS) obtained control over several built-up areas in Anbar province. On 3 January 2014 there had been the heaviest battles in Falluja und Ramadi since years. In addition to Falluja the terror group also captured parts of the province capital Ramadi. Dpa news agency reported on 7 January 2014 that the situation in the cities of Ramadi and Falluja remains tense. On 7 January 2014 in Ramadi some tribesmen and policemen killed five members of the terror organisation „The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria“ (ISIS). Two members of this organisation were arrested. On 6 January 2014 after Falluja was captured, the Iraqi head of government Mr Nouri al-Maliki had called on the population and the tribes in Falluja to chase the terrorists away. He has now widened up this request. He requested from the tribes in Falluja to arrest the terrorists and hand them over to the public security forces.

In view of the regaining strength of al-Qaida in Iraq, Iran has offered its neighbouring country military support for fighting against this organisation, as the official Iranian news agency IRNA reported on 5 January 2014.

Syria/Iraq

Iraq and Syria want to exercise pressure on ISIS

As fighters of the Islamist terror organisation „The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)“ which is also called „The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)“ had been gaining ground since months in Syria and in Iraq, they have now proclaimed a theocracy in parts of Iraq and Syria. In doing so, ISIS concentrated in particular on sparsely populated desert areas in Syria and Iraq where the influence of the tribes is traditionally large. The Turkish journalist Bünyamin Aygün who had been displaced by ISIS terrorists, was released by a rebel group and freed from ISIS control; a special intervention unit of the Turkish secret service took him out of the country.

Syria

The opposition

In the past few months, the Syrian liberal opposition has lost some influence. President Assad's troops have been able to gain ground vis-à-vis the moderate rebels. At the same time, the radical and extremist Islamist groups have gained power.

In the night of 6 January 2014 the National Syrian Alliance, the opposition working from exile, confirmed its president Mr Ahmed al-Jarba in office who is also supported by Saudi Arabia. He came to office in July 2013.

The opposition alliance will discuss its strategy for the planned peace conference. It has not been clarified yet who will negotiate for the opposition party.

Disagreement on Syria peace conference

The USA is still refusing a direct participation of Iran in the planned Syria peace conference in Geneva from 22 January 2014 onwards. Iran so far has refused an indirect participation. And Russia as well voted against UN Secretary General's proposal to invite Iran. UN Secretary General Mr Ban Ki Moon and the Special Envoy to Syria Mr Lakhdar Brahimi wish to integrate Iran into the peace talks. The Iranian government is an important ally of Syrian President Mr Bashar al-Assad.

The foreign ministers of about twenty four countries will attend this peace conference. On 20 December 2013 the USA and Russia with representatives of the United Nations made a decision on the participants.

Pakistan

Security situation

On 6 January 2014 two people were killed in a suicide bombing next to a school in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Hangu district). Mainly Shiites live in this district. The radical Islamist Sunni organisation "Lashkar-e-Jhangvi" said that they were responsible for this attack.

Turkey

Corruption affair

After a number of arrests in connection with corruption investigations, three ministers declared their resignation on 25 December 2013: the Minister for Economic affairs, the Environment Minister and the Minister of the Interior. Owing to this, Mr Erdogan restructured his cabinet and appointed ten new ministers out of the 26 minister posts. According to Turkish media reports 350 policemen had reportedly been suspended from duty in the night of 7 January 2014. 80 of them had reportedly been employed in senior positions in the departments of financial crime, fight against smuggling and organised crime at the police authorities in Ankara. 250 new policemen have already been appointed so far. In connection with the corruption investigations and already prior to this action, many senior police officers had already been relocated by force as they reportedly had not informed the government in advance on the investigations and arrests.

In his New Year Address the Turkish President Mr Abdullah Gül dissociated himself from Prime Minister Erdogan. He declared that all his fellow countrymen must respect law and order as well as the independence of the judicial system. No institution could claim any power beyond the provisions of the constitution. He said that it would be wise to stay calm and to carry out investigation of the corruption allegations to the fullest extent.

Prior to this, Mr Erdogan had accused the judicial system of conspiracy against his government and said that the investigations were an “attempted murder of the people’s will“.

Egypt

People killed in clashes between the Muslim Brothers and the police

In spite of impending severe punishment, the followers of former President Mr Mursi continued their protests. On 3 January 2014 17 people had been killed across the country in the heaviest clashes with security forces since months, ten of them in Kairo, others in Alexandria, Ismailia, Fajum and in the province of Minia.

Tunesia

Decision taken on important articles of the Constitution

At the weekend the Tunesian National Assembly voted with large majority on an article of the Constitution regarding equality of men and women. “All male and female nationals have the same rights and obligations. They are equal before the law, without any discrimination“, this is the wording of article 20 of the constitutional draft which the National Assembly adopted, which at the same time is the Constitutional Assembly. The vote on article 45 which expressly guarantees women’s rights and equality of opportunities for both sexes must still be made. The vote on the Constitution had begun on 3 January 2014 after a long time of delay. It is planned to vote on all 146 articles of the Constitution and approximately 250 amendments by 14 January 2014 (3rd anniversary of the discharge of the longterm ruler Mr Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali). In addition, an electoral law for presidential and parliamentary elections shall be finalised.

In addition, on 4 January 2014 the National Assembly decided with 146 of the 149 votes cast that the Koran shall not be made the main source of legislation. The first two articles of the new Constitution expressly lay down a „civil republic“: “Tunesia is a free, independent and sovereign state. Its religion is the Islam, Arabic is its language and its form of government is the republic. This article cannot be modified“. This is the contents of the first article.

South Sudan

Negotiations between the parties to the conflict

Due to pressure from the international community and after preparations for several days, negotiations between the government of South Sudan and the rebels around Riek Machar are to start on 8 January 2014 in Addis Abeba in order to reach a peaceful solution to the conflict. A short preliminary talk was already held on 6 January 2014.

The main request put forward by the rebels will be the release of eleven politicians who were arrested in December due to alleged participation in a coup. So far, the government has refused this request. Kiir already excluded another opposition request, namely a distribution of power between President Kiir and Riek Machar.

Fighting continues

Fighting continues mainly in the region around Bor, capital of the federal state of Jonglei in spite of the forthcoming negotiations. There are also clashes around the town Yei in the federal state of Central Equatoria state. Units of the South Sudanese army have reportedly passed to the rebels. Uganda supports the government. Since 5 January 2014 Ugandan troops have reportedly passed the border to South Sudan. Prior to this, Uganda’s President Mr Yoweri Museveni has already supported Kiir in public. So far, the conflict

has caused according to estimates a death toll of several thousands and 200,000 people have been made refugees.

Sudanese President visits South Sudan

On 6 January 2014 the Sudanese President Mr al-Bashir paid a short visit to his counterpart Kiir. According to reports, Mr Al-Bashir and Mr Kiir think about common troops in order to protect the oil fields. A fall of the government in Juba would endanger the oil production and would also mean severe economic damage for Khartoum. The only pipeline for the export of South Sudanese oil leads through Sudanese territory. South Sudan pays considerable fees to Sudan for the transportation of oil.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Approximately 100 people killed in attempted coup

In the morning of 30 December 2013 several hundred armed followers of the self-proclaimed prophet Paul Joseph Mukungubila attacked in Congo's capital Kinshasa the headquarters of the public TV station RTNC, the international airport Ndjili, the military base "Camp Tshatshi" (military headquarters) as well as the President's office "Palais de Marbre". In addition, they occupied in Kindu, capital of the eastern province of Maniema, the airport for a short period of time. There was also some fighting between Mukungubila's followers and the security forces in the vicinity of his residency in Lubumbashi, the capital of the southern province of Katanga. After a few hours the security forces had put an end to the uprising. According to government information 150 aggressors were arrested and 92 killed (52 in Kinshasa, 40 in Lubumbashi). Their own losses have been reportedly below ten people.

According to information given on 31 December 2013 by Mr Mukungubila who is on the run, the uprising of his followers had been triggered off by the fact that soldiers had attacked his residency in Lubumbashi after he had criticised President Kabila. The government disputes this statement. The attacks carried out in Kinshasa at the same time and in a very coordinated way, contradict Mukungubila's statement.

Mr Mukungubila, born in 1947, calls himself "Prophet of Eternity" and is the president of an evangelical church called "Ministry of Restoration"; he obtained 0.35 percent of the votes in the last but one presidential elections in 2006. Since many years Mr Mukungubila has led a campaign against the Congolese President Joseph Kabila who grew up in exile in Tanzania and Uganda and whom he calls a "Rwandan".

Somalia

People killed in attack in Mogadishu

On 1 January 2014 two car bombs exploded in front of a hotel in Mogadishu and killed eleven people, 18 people were injured. On 2 January 2014 the Al Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack. According to Mr Ali Rage, the Islamist's spokesperson, the attack was meant to hit a meeting of high-ranking intelligence officers.

Russian Federation

Putin allows demonstrations in Sochi under strict conditions

Five weeks before the start of the Winter Olympics in Sochi the Russian President Wladimir Putin has cancelled the general demonstration ban during the games. On 4 January 2014 Putin signed a decree which allows demonstrations and protest marches during the sports event in a special area of the town on the Black Sea, however, only after approval by the authorities. In doing so, the head of state gave in to the pressure exercised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). According to the decree any protests must be applied for at the municipal authorities. They decide then on venue or the route of the protests as well as on the admitted number of participants.

Lebanon

Attacks in Beirut

On 2 January 2014 at least six people were killed and more than 70 injured in a car bomb attack in the south of Beirut in about 200 metres distance from Hezbollah's headquarters in the southern district of Harat (Haret) Hreik. The UN Security Council condemned the attack. UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon said that the incident is evidence for an increasing and alarming escalation of violence in Lebanon. Already on 27 December 2013 five people had been killed through a car bomb, among them the Sunni politician and former Minister of Finance Mr Mohammed Schattah, and approximately 50 were injured. Nobody has claimed responsibility for the attack; the Sunni community, however, think that Hezbollah is responsible.

Alleged backer of the attack on the Iranian Embassy arrested and dead

On 1 January 2014 the Lebanese Minister of Defence Mr Fajes Ghosn said that the Lebanese security forces had arrested an alleged backer of the suicide attack onto the Iranian Embassy of 19 November 2013 (see BN dated 25 November 2013), the so-called Emir of the Abdullah-Azzam Brigades, Majid al-Majid. On 4 January 2014 he reportedly died in hospital owing to kidney failure.

Israel/Palestinian Autonomous Areas

US Secretary of State requests return of a limited number of Palestinian refugees

The Israeli newspaper "Maariv" reported on 6 January 2014 in its online edition that US Secretary of State Mr Kerry allegedly pressed the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in the context of the latest intermediation efforts to grant a limited number of Palestinian refugees the right of return to Israel. In return, Mr Kerry would engage in efforts for a Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state. During the First Arab-Israeli War of 1948 approximately 700,000 Palestinians had fled or were displaced. According to UN information this group has today a size of about five million people including their offspring. Israel is against their return because this would endanger the Jewish majority.

Hamas offers Fatah members return into the Gaza Strip

The radical Islamic Hamas which dominates the Gaza Strip seems to seek reconciliation with the liberal al-Fatah organisation and therefore allows their members to return into the Gaza Strip. This is valid for all members of the al-Fatah without any condition who have left the Gaza Strip since Hamas' coming into office in 2007, said Hamas Prime Minister Mr Ismail Haniyeh on 6 January 2014. Only those persons are excluded against whom proceedings are pending owing to the killing of members of the Hamas. In June 2007 after fightings with the al-Fatah, Hamas took over the control in the Gaza Strip. Hundreds of Fatah security forces fled to Egypt at that time. In the past few years several efforts of solving the internal Palestinian conflict have been without results.

Thousands of African refugees demonstrate in front of the embassies in Tel Aviv

Thousands of African refugees – many of them from Eritrea and Sudan – demonstrated on 6 and 7 January 2014 in Tel Aviv in front of foreign embassies in order to request the right for asylum in Israel. Among others, the protest is directed against their accommodation in a new centre on the border to Egypt. The representative of the UNHCR in Israel said that she is "particularly concerned" regarding the internment of the refugees in the new centre. Further actions are planned for 8 January 2014. Israel classifies the African refugees - whose number is estimated to approximately 60,000 - as illegal immigrants. The right-wing government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu intends to stop the influx of refugees completely, if possible and intends to return illegal immigrants who already live in the country.

Bangladesh

Awami League wins parliamentary elections

According to preliminary results of the election committee the governing Awami League of Prime Minister Ms Sheikh Hasina won more than two thirds of all seats. The voter turnout rate was reportedly very poor. It is estimated to less than 20%. The most important opposition party BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) had boycotted the elections. There were numerous acts of violence prior to the elections and during the elections.

On 5 January 2014 alone 18 people were killed, more than 130 polling stations were set on fire or attacked. In hundreds of polling stations voting was suspended owing to this violence. International observers assume that these elections have not been fair ones.

China

People killed in attack onto police station in Xinjiang

According to an official information on 30 December 2013 a group of “terrorists“ attacked a police station in Shache in the vicinity of Kashgar in the Uyghur Autonomous Region Xinjiang. The police shot eight attackers dead.

Standing Committee of the [National] People’s Congress adopts reforms

On 28 December 2013 the Standing Committee of the People’s Congress adopted a resolution with which the liberalisation in the family planning policy and the abolition of the re-education camps (see BN dated 18 November 2013) will come into force. As the authorities had previously announced, they will implement the new provisions regarding the one-child policy gradually. Critics accuse the government that some re-education camps have only changed their names in the course of the reform process and would continue to operate according to their old methods now as “Rehabilitation institutions for drug addicts“.