

Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

17 August 2015

Afghanistan

Germans kidnapped in Kabul

According to press reports of the morning of 17 August 15 a German staff member of GIZ (German Society for International Cooperation) was kidnapped in Kabul by unknown persons.

Security situation

In Badakhshan province (north-east) the Taliban set up road blocks forcing travellers to surrender money or other objects.

Allegedly parts of Kunduz province, also in the north-east (Dashti-i-Archi district and others), are under Taliban control.

On 16 August 15 a policeman and his wife were murdered by unknown killers in Badakhshan.

Several people died as a result of internal conflicts among the Taliban in Shindand district in the western province of Herat on 15 August 15.

On 14 August 15 a hospital under construction was burnt down in Badakhshan.

On the same day a school principle was shot by the Taliban in Nangarhar (east). Also on 14 August 15 one policeman died and 23 were injured in an attack on the local police in Logar (centre).

On 13 August 15 the Taliban assassinated a staff member of the Afghan secret service in Badakhshan province. On the same day a leading tribal elder was killed, probably by Taliban, in Herat (west).

On 11 August 15 a suicide bomber killed at least five people and wounded 16 in front of Kabul airport. On the same day insurgents attacked a village in Ghor province, burnt down many houses and destroyed the harvest. Two people were injured and five kidnapped. Also on 11 August 15 militants killed four engineers they had previously kidnapped.

There were further armed clashes, some of which claimed civilian victims in Badghis, Farah (west), Helmand, Zabul (south), Ghazni, Paktika (south east), Jawzjan, Faryab (north), Nangarhar (east), Baghlan (north-east) and Maidan Wardak (centre).

The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) reported that the number of civilian victims has significantly increased in the north this year. Reportedly at least 44 people were killed and more than 600 wounded.

Iran/Afghanistan

Daily influx of refugees

Iranian Interior Minister Abdel Reza Rahmani Fazli stated that about 2,000 Afghans are crossing the border to Iran illegally every day, causing major problems for the country. At a meeting of the three Iranian ministers for health, welfare and the interior on 12 August 15 Fazli declared: this rate of influx of refugees makes it impossible to grant health insurance protection to all illegal immigrants. The minister added that Iran could not assume any responsibility for these people, while the same services as for Iranian nationals would be offered to all Afghans that entered legally, i.e. with a valid passport and holding a residence permit. The three ministers had met to deliberate about the refugee problem.

Punishment of eye amputation imposed

The Iranian press reported that a 27-year-old perpetrator had injured the eyes of another man in a fight four years ago. The perpetrator insisted in court that he only wanted to come to the assistance of his father and did not intend any injury. Nevertheless the court held that as punishment he must also lose his eyesight. The sentence was pronounced on 01 August 15. This is the second blinding in Iran this year. The Iranian judiciary refers to the Qisas punishment enshrined in the Sharia to justify the punishment of physical retaliation. Qisas means that the retaliation for certain crimes shall be in analogy to the original crime. Only the victims or their family can say whether they insist on retaliation in this form or will be content with the payment of damages (Diyeh or Dyat, so-called blood money; minimum amount around €31,500).

Iraq

Assaults

On 10 August 15 at least 58 people were killed and over 100 wounded in two attacks in Diyala province. One bomb exploded on the market place in Huwaidar, about four kilometres north of the provincial capital of Baquba, causing at least 51 deaths and wounding at least 80. In another explosion east of Baquba at least seven people were killed and 25 injured. IS claimed responsibility for both bombs.

On 13 August 15 a car bomb was detonated on a crowded market place in Baghdad in the Shiite district of Sadr City, claiming at least 60 lives and wounding at least 150, another press report mentioned about 200 wounded. It also said that IS claimed responsibility.

In a renewed series of bomb explosions in Baghdad at least 24 died on 15 August 15. A car bomb planted in the Shiite district of Habibiya claimed 15 casualties. Seven people were killed by explosions in shopping streets and on markets in the districts of Jisr Diyala, Madaen, and Iskan. Two people died in an attack in the north of Baghdad.

Reforms

On 11 August 15 the Iraqi parliament adopted a reform package introduced by Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi. Among other things the reforms shall fight the omnipresent corruption and abolish the religious quota system in government offices which would mean that also deputy positions would be scrapped. A second reform package was also adopted that among other things cuts down on the number of ministries.

Pakistan

Interior Minister of Punjab province assassinated

On 16 August 15 the interior minister of Punjab province was killed in a suicide attack in which at least 17 more persons also lost their lives and 20 were wounded. The assault happened north-west of the capital Islamabad. It is assumed that the banned Lashkar-i-Jhangvi (LeJ) is responsible for the attack. However, other groups as well, among them Lashkar-e-Islam and the Jamaat-ul-Ahrar fraction of the Pakistani Taliban (TTP), are claiming responsibility.

Turkey

Coalition talks failed

Two months after the parliamentary elections the coalition talks between the governing party AKP and the opposition party CHP have failed. After his last meeting with CHP leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu on 13 August 15 AKP Chairman and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu stated that it had been impossible to find a basis for a partnership and that therefore new elections were likely to be held in November. The deadline for the formation of a government runs out on 23 August 15. AKP could continue to negotiate with the nationalist MHP, but its leader Devlet Bahaceli has so far rejected any possibility of entering into a coalition.

PKK conditions for reinstating the ceasefire

On 12 August 15 the PKK's political umbrella organisation, the Union of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK), announced that it is generally prepared to return to the ceasefire agreed in 2013. The reinstatement would be conditional on an independent monitoring of the new ceasefire and the release of political prisoners. Fur-

thermore the army would not be allowed to use the ceasefire to reinforce its presence in the Kurdish areas. Meanwhile the Turkish army responded to the previous attacks with air strikes on 17 PKK positions in the south-eastern province of Hakkari in the border area to Iraq and Iran. The PKK assumed the responsibility for the attacks in Sirnak on 10 August 15 and the leftist extremist DHKP-C that for the shooting at the US consulate in Istanbul. Last week there were more clashes between the PKK and the security forces that caused casualties and injuries on both sides, especially in the mainly Kurdish areas in south-eastern Turkey.

Syria

The fighting continues

In an air raid of the Syrian army on Douma (a rebel stronghold about thirteen kilometres north-east of Damascus in the East Ghouta region) on 16 August 15 at least 80 people were killed and over 200 wounded. Observers are accused the air force of continuing the shooting even after the rescue forces had arrived.

Radical Islamist rebels continue to advance in the direction of Lattakia province; in attacks in the coastal town of the same name at least two people died and 13 were wounded on 13 August 15. The rebel alliance Army of Islam (Jaysh al-Islam) announced that it had also fired at the province's presidential palace. So far Lattakia, which is considered the heartland of the Alevites, had been largely spared of the civil war.

On 12 August 15 rebels and Syrian government forces engaged in heavy fighting in Damascus and in the air raids on the rebel areas at least 31 people died.

The UN estimates that since the beginning of the civil war which is in its fifth year now, over 250,000 people were killed and over one million were injured.

Rebels and Hezbollah negotiate ceasefire

Ahrar al-Sham, local rebels and Hezbollah (in the background probably also representatives of Turkey and Iran) negotiated a ceasefire for several contested cities in Syria's north-west. It started on 12 August 15 but was terminated only three days later. The ceasefire covered the city of Sabadani, about 45 km north-west of Damascus and ten kilometres from the Lebanese border, as well as the villages of Fuaa and Kafraja in Idleb province. Hezbollah had started an offensive together with government troops to reconquer Sabadani in July 2015. The two villages of Fuaa and Kafraja are considered to be the last two positions still under the control of the Syrian government in the entire area. In response to the attacks on Sabadani they were besieged by the rebel alliance Jaysh (or Jaish al-Fatah).

Jabhat al-Nursa releases hostages

The radical Islamist group Jabhat al-Nursa (al-Nursa Front) released seven members of Division 30 who had been trained by the US, and whom they had kidnapped at the end of July 2015.

Amnesty International accuses government troops and rebel groups of war crimes

AI accused troops loyal to the government of having committed war crimes in East Ghouta close to the capital Damascus, because in the region they besieged 163,000 people were suffering from shortages of food and medication, and thus they were using hunger as a weapon in war. Furthermore arbitrary executions were practiced. Also the rebel group Army of Islam was accused by AI of stockpiling food and of being responsible for abductions and arbitrary arrests. East Ghouta has been under siege by pro-government forces for two years. Also several insiders of the Syrian leadership accused the President of war crimes: raping children in front of the eyes of their imprisoned fathers, torture in prisons, fake death certificates. They also allege that opponents of the regime were assassinated with chemical injections and the wrong type of blood transfusions in hospitals.

Accusation: Hiding chemicals for the production of weapons

The former head of the army's research centre for chemical weapons, Saher al-Saket, accused Syrian President Assad of hiding chemicals for the production of weapons from the international community. He said that he knew that there had been 3,000 tons of chemicals for the production of chemical weapons before the revolution started. However, in 2013 only 1,300 tons had been destroyed when Assad agreed to the terms of the UN resolution on the destruction of chemical weapons. According to him the chemicals have been hidden in several cities under the control of the regime.

Lebanon

Presidential elections failed yet again

On 12 August 15 the 27th attempt of the Lebanese parliament to elect a new president after the turn of office of Michel Suleiman ended on 25 May 2014, failed. The first vote on 23 April 14 for which a two thirds majority would have been required, was unsuccessful. Since then a simple majority will suffice to elect a new head of state in Lebanon. The Alliance of March 8 (the representatives of Hezbollah) have been boycotting the voting sessions because they could not place their candidate Michel Aoun, therefore a quorum cannot be reached and no vote can take place.

Al-Asir arrested

On 15 August 15 the Salafist leader Sheikh Ahmed al-Asir was arrested when he attempted to leave Egypt for Qatar using a forged ID. Asir, who had undergone facial surgery, was considered a critic of the Hezbollah militia and a supporter of the resistance against Bashar al-Assad. He has been on the run since June of 2013 when his base south of Beirut had been stormed by the Lebanese army which lost 18 soldiers in the operation. In 2014 al-Asir was convicted by a court martial for founding an armed group, for killing members of the army, and for inciting Sunni and Shiites, at the time the judge recommended the death penalty.

Yemen

850,000 children facing starvation

The UN and the ICRC are greatly concerned about the dramatic deterioration of the supply situation in Yemen. Most affected are around 850,000 children suffering of serious malnutrition. This was announced by the UN Commissioner for the Right to Food, Hilal Elver, on 11 August 15. Also ICRC head, Peter Maurer, spoke of a „disastrous“ humanitarian situation. He said that there was not a single family that was spared by the conflict. Maurer had spent the last days on a fact-finding mission in Yemen. The UN expects 1.2 million children to be affected by malnutrition in a few weeks' time, if the conflict continues as intensively as it is now. Hilal Elver criticised the Saudi-led military coalition for repeatedly hitting market places and supply transports with their massive air raids. Since mid-July the Shiite Houthi rebels have been on the defensive in their fight against pro-government Sunni troops which receive Saudi air support. They lost control of the important port city of Aden, of the southern province of Lahij and of one of the country's largest air bases. Hilal Elver said that the starvation of civilians can be classified as "war crimes or crimes against humanity". According to WHO estimates the fighting in Yemen has so far claimed over 4,300 lives, most of them civilians.

Libya

At least 100 casualties in fighting between IS and militias

IS violently suppressed an uprising initiated on 11 August 15 by local militias and a group of Salafists in the northern city of Sirte. Libyan authorities assume that there are at least 100 civilian casualties. The fighting started at the beginning of last week after IS had killed an influential imam. Reportedly insurgents had been crucified on metal scaffolding and executed bodies had been hung from bridges. 22 wounded persons were executed in a military hospital and the building was set on fire. The internationally recognized head of government al-Thani spoke of a massacre and called for a meeting of the Arab League which will convene in Cairo on 18 August 15. Al-Thani is seeking an intervention with fighter planes in Sirte by the Arab States .

Egypt

Assault on police forces

When a bomb detonated near a traffic police post in Cairo on 10 August 15 four people, including three policemen, were wounded. The Afnan Misr group, which is Salafist and militant, assumed responsibility for the

attack. Since the beginning of the year it has been active against the security forces in the Cairo metropolitan area.

Anti-terrorism act

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi signed a controversial anti-terrorism act into law as he had announced already after the assassination of Attorney General Hirsham Baraket at the end of June 2015. The law provides for stiff fines and a ban to exercise the profession for up to one year for journalists that deviate from the official version of a description of extremist attacks. Justice Minister Ahmed al-Sind said that these harsh provisions were the result of the reporting about the series of IS attacks on the army control posts on the Sinai peninsula on 01 July 15. The new law also permits setting up special courts for crimes against national security and grants policemen and soldiers impunity when they use violence „in their line of duty“. The law stipulates life imprisonment or the death penalty for forming and leading a terrorist association and up to ten years imprisonment for membership in such a group.

Appeal against death sentence

The defence counsels of former Egyptian president Mohammed Mursi have appealed his death sentence and another sentence for life imprisonment. The judges had found that it had been proved that he organized his escape from prison in 2011 together with the Palestinian Hamas and the Lebanese Hezbollah and that he had spied for Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran.

Burundi

Current situation

The former chief of staff of Burundi's army, Jean Bikomagu, was shot in Bujumbura on 15 August 15. The spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Ravina Shamdasani, warned of an escalation of violence in the country on 14 August 15. Since the violence broke out in April 2015 at least 96 people, mostly supporters of the opposition, had been killed, she said. About 600 people had been arrested; there had been at least 60 cases of torture and many others of abuse.

More than 200,000 people have by now fled to the neighbouring countries Tanzania (85,200), Ruanda (71,600), Uganda (28,300), DR Congo (14,322), and Kenya (7,000) as well as to southern Africa (3,000).

Nigeria

Three-months deadline to end Boko Haram terror

President Buhari solemnly swore in the military command that was newly appointed in mid-July on 13 August 15 and on that occasion he set a deadline of three months to defeat the terror organization. To comply with their task the military shall closely cooperate with the neighbouring countries Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Buhari stressed that in fighting the insurgents civilians had to be protected and the rights of enemy must be observed.

Does Abubakar Shekau still lead Boko Haram?

Abubakar Shekau, the former leader of the Nigerian terrorist organization Boko Haram, published an eight minute audio message on 16 August 15 saying that he was alive and still leading the group. This message that was addressed to Islamic State leader Abubakr Al-Baghdadi was Shekau's reaction to a statement by Chad's President Idriss Deby who had announced on 12 August 15 that Shekau had been injured and replaced by Mahamat Daoud as the new leader of the terrorists. According to Deby Daoud would be prepared to negotiate with the Nigerian government. Shekau had been last seen in a video message in February 2015 and had been last heard in an audio message in March 2015.

Attacks and assaults by Boko Haram

In the morning of 15 August 15 a suicide bomber blew himself up at the access to a market place when he was checked. This happened in the village of Ramirgo, about 160 km south of the capital of Borno state, Maiduguri. Two other people died in the explosion with him.

Boko Haram fighters assaulted the village of Bale Mamman in Jere Local Government Area (LGA) near Maiduguri on 11 August 15, killing eight people and abducting four women. On the weekly market in the city Sabon Gari, Damboa LGA, Borno state, a bomb exploded on 11 August 15. There were at least 47 casualties; another 52 people were wounded.

Cameroon

Casualties in Boko Haram assault

In the night of 12 to 13 August 15 Boko Haram fighters attacked the village of Blamé in the region Extrême-Nord and cut the throats of six villagers. In a subsequent exchange of fire with the military twelve of the terrorists and one soldier were killed.

Democratic Republic of Congo

34 charged with genocide in Katanga

The Attorney General of the south-eastern province of Katanga preferred charges for genocide and crimes against humanity against 34 persons. The defendants belong to the Bantu ethnic group of the Luba and the Twa, a group of pygmies. The two ethnic groups have been engaged in violent confrontations in Katanga since May 2013. The Twa complain of a lack of land and basic services. The charges are for the first time in the Democratic Republic of Congo based on a law that entered into force in 2013 and gives jurisdiction to civil courts to prosecute cases of genocide and crimes against humanity.

Ukraine

Most intensive fighting for months

Last week Ukraine saw the most intensive fighting since the agreement of the last ceasefire. Pro-Russian rebels report casualties and wounded persons in fighting around the airport of Donetsk. The Ukrainian side reports at least two casualties and ten wounded persons within 24 hours. It is said that mortar grenades, tanks and missile launchers were used, all of which are weapons that should have been withdrawn a long time ago. Heavy fighting is also reported from around the port city of Mariupol. Both the separatists and the Ukrainian government accuse each other of preparing for major attacks.

Sri Lanka

Parliamentary elections

Parliamentary elections started in Sri Lanka on 17 August 15. These show interesting features. Eight months after his surprising dismissal as president Mahinda Rajapaksa now stands for the office of prime minister. He is supported by the followers of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, whose chairman, however, is President Maithripala Sirisena, who won over Rajapaksa in January with the support of the opposition party, United National Party. During Rajapaksa's government the fight against the separatist Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) could be victoriously concluded in May 2009; he is now accusing his opponent of treason. Sirisena is now hoping that his own party will do poorly in the elections so that the UNP can continue to provide the prime minister who currently is Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Myanmar

Head of government loses power

On 13 August 15 Shwe Mann, chairman of the governing party Union of Solidarity and Development (USDP), was ousted from office because of differences with President Thein Sein. According to a report of Shwe Mann's son, Toe Naing Mann, the police had occupied the USDP headquarters on 13 August 15. Parliamentary elections are scheduled for 8 November 15 and in these not only the USDP will run, but also the

long suppressed party of Aung San Suu Kyi. Shwe Mann campaigns for cutting back the extensive powers of the military.

Heavy flooding

The country is suffering from the most serious flooding for many years. In combination with the cyclone "Komen" the heavy monsoon rains, that started at the end of June, caused flooding and landslides in twelve of the fourteen states. About one third of the roughly one million people affected by the flood come from the Irrawaddy delta in Myanmar's south.

Malaysia

Prime minister charged

The daughter of the imprisoned opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim accused Prime Minister Najib Razak of violating the laws on campaign financing and announced that the opposition had filed charges. At the end of July 2015 Attorney General Adul Gani Patail and several members of the government, including Deputy Prime Minister Mahyiddin, had been dismissed because of the corruption scandal.

China

State action against civil rights lawyers

The authorities seem to continue their recent operations against civil rights lawyers (see BN of 10 August 15). The Organisation Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD) reported on 10 August 15 that by now at least 323 lawyers and persons related to them have been targeted by the state action. 23 of them are still held in custody by the authorities.