

Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

08 April 2013

Afghanistan

NATO attack claims civilian victims

The provincial government of Kunar in eastern Afghanistan on the border to Pakistan reports the killing of eleven children and one woman as well as of eight Taliban fighters in a NATO air strike on 06 April 2013. NATO reported only of injured persons, though. On the same day a Taliban bomb attack in Qalat (provincial capital of Zabul in the south) claimed the lives of five Americans (three soldiers and two diplomats) and an Afghan doctor, in addition four Afghans and four US Department of State staff members were injured. An American civilian fell victim to another attack in eastern Afghanistan. In the morning of 08 April 2013 a bus hit a road bomb planted in Wardak province, southeast of Kabul, at least nine civilians were killed and 22 injured.

Pakistan

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province: Seventeen casualties, several people injured or kidnapped

The security forces took action against hideouts of the Islamist terror organization Lashkar-i-Islam in the remote area of Akka Khel in the Tirah valley (subdistrict of Bara, Khyber Agency, FATA) on 07 April 2013 that resulted in fighting between them and a militia called Tawheedul Islam on the one side against the members of Lashkar-i-Islam on the other. The offensive in which so far ten members of the terrorist organization were killed and four members of the security forces were injured, will continue.

On 02 April 2013 armed men attacked a power distribution plant in Peshawar in the Shaikh Mohammadi area, killing seven and kidnapping four persons. They also wounded several people, blew up parts of the installations and destroyed vehicles. As a result there was a power shortage in the provincial capital and the district bordering on the south.

Sindh province: Four rangers are killed and three injured in a bomb attack

On 3 April 2013 a bomb exploded in front of the offices of the Sindh Rangers in Korangi, a neighbourhood in the Karachi borough of Landhi. The general view is that the attack is related to an initiative to re-establish security in Karachi ordered by the Supreme Court in which the Rangers are actively involved.

Christian acquitted of blasphemy charges after more than seven years in prison

An appeal court in Lahore (Punjab) overturned a death sentence against a Christian called Younis Masih for alleged denigration of the Prophet Mohammed. Younis Masih had been denounced by an imam, but the actual reason had been a dispute between the two men. This false accusation had also caused the burning of the houses of about 100 Christian families in Masih's neighbourhood in September 2005 who then had to flee the area. According to his lawyers Younis Masih will voluntarily stay in prison until a safe place has been found for him in Pakistan.

A few weeks earlier another Christian had been acquitted of blasphemy charges, also in Punjab.

Last year the Supreme Court had rejected a case against a Christian girl named Rimsha Masih - Masih is a very common name among Christians in Pakistan – for desecration of the Koran, because an imam had manipulated evidence and testimony. He was arrested and investigations were initiated against him.

Iraq

General situation

The violence continues. On 05 April 2013 attacks in Baquba (Diyala province) and Hilla (Babil province) claimed at least seven victims were.

In an attack at an election campaign event in Baquba (Diyala province) at least 22 people were killed on 06 April 2013; another source speaks of 29 casualties and about 60 injured persons. The first elections since the withdrawal of US troops in 2011 are scheduled for 20 April 2013 in twelve of the 18 provinces. Since the beginning of the year eleven candidates, all of them Sunni, have been assassinated.

Four people died and seven were injured by car bombs in Mosul (Ninive province) on 07 April 2013.

Baghdad newspaper offices stormed

On 01 April 2013 armed men stormed four newspaper offices in Baghdad injuring several journalists. Reportedly all of these newspapers had voiced criticism of the Shiite clergyman Sarkhi.

Syria

Continued fighting/air strikes in Aleppo

The civil war continues unabated. Syrian opposition sources report that at least 15 people, including nine children, were killed in raids by the air force on residential housing in Aleppo on 06 April 2013. Rockets and mortar shells fell on Damascus and Aleppo on 06 and 07 April 2013. About 200 people are said to have died throughout the country over the weekend. Increasingly journalists are being targeted. Rebels that are allegedly close to Al Qaeda abducted four Italian journalists on 05 April 2013. In the week before a German journalist had been shot.

Al Qaeda demands an Islamic state

In a message disseminated on an Islamic website on 07 April 2013 the head of the terrorist network al-Qaeda and successor of Osama bin Laden after his death in May 2011, Aiman al-Sawahiri, called on the insurgents to establish an Islamic state in Syria.

Syria's President warns of the region's destabilization

In an interview with Turkish TV which Syrian President Assad's government posted on the internet on 06 April 2013, he warned that the region might destabilize for decades, if the rebels won the civil war.

Syria as the „focus“ for German Islamists

The President of the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, Maassen, said on 06 April 2013 that more and more Islamists from Germany were travelling to Syria to fight on the side of the radicals. The security agencies assume that currently "two to three dozen" Islamists from Germany went to Syria, some of them entering via Egypt. 500 to 700 Islamists from Europe are thought to be fighting in Syria, thus accounting for about 10% of the 5,000- 6,000 foreign fighters - most of whom are radical Islamists and come from the neighbouring Arab countries such as Iraq, Libya or Tunisia.

Lebanon

Salam mandated with the formation of government

On 06 April 2013 Lebanese President Michel Suleiman asked the Sunni opposition representative Tammam Salam to form a new government after the dismissal of Prime Minister Najib Mikati two weeks ago. Mikati had failed to agree with Hezbollah on the appointment of a monitoring committee for the elections on 09 June 2013 and on the extension of the tenure of the head of the secret service, Rifi. Salam is a compromise candidate who is close to the anti-Syrian opposition, but he can count on the support of the West, Saudi Arabia, Hezbollah, the Druze leader Joubblatt and the majority of the opposition. He will "work to bridge the the country's deep divisions" and to shield it from the dangers of neighbouring Syria's civil war. He is considered to be against the Syrian regime, but has so far refrained from attacking the Syrian President.

Palestinian Autonomous Areas

Protests rock West Bank and Gaza Strip

The Fatah member and former Major General of the Palestinian police, Abu Hamdijeh, who has been serving a life sentence since 2002, died of cancer in an Israeli prison on 02 April 2013. His death triggered protests during which two 17-year-old Palestinians who seemingly attacked an Israeli military post were shot by the Israeli soldiers near Tulkarem (West Bank) in the evening of 03 April 2013. Further unrest broke out during Hamdijeh's funeral on the West Bank that was attended by several thousand people on 04 April 2013.

On 02 and 03 April 2013 militant Palestinians fired several missiles and shells on Israel from the Gaza Strip. In response Israel bombed targets in the Gaza Strip in the night of 03 April 2013. According to unconfirmed information the Hamas that is governing the Gaza Strip arrested several members of a Salafist grouping that admitted to have shelled Israel.

UN temporarily suspends the distribution of food in the Gaza Strip

On 04 April 2013 dozens of demonstrators stormed an UNRWA office and demanded the reinstatement of the monthly payments for poor families which had been cancelled on 01 April 2013 for lack of funds. As a consequence of the deterioration of security the UN suspended the distribution of food in the Gaza Strip in the evening of 04 April 2013 until further notice. About 800,000 Palestinians, i.e. two thirds of the population, depend on UNRWA's food donations.

Turkey

Asylum law adopted by the parliament

The parliament in Ankara adopted a Turkish asylum law on 04 April 2013 under which refugees and asylum-seekers are for the first time granted a legal status in Turkey that goes the beyond the toleration as 'guests' that had been applied until now. In particular this applies to the many Syrian refugees in Turkey.

Turkey acceded to the Geneva Convention with a regional reservation that is also maintained in the new law, i.e. the Convention - granting full protection – is only applied to European asylum-seekers. With regard to Non-Europeans Turkey merely accepts the international law principle of non-refoulement which prohibits the forceful expulsion or return of a person to a country in which his/her life or liberty would be at risk by reason of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political conviction. Turkey had committed to abolish the regional reservation for the Geneva Convention during the negotiations of the EU accession partnership.

The new law now establishes clearly that people who enter Turkey in an emergency situation and cannot return home will have a right to stay temporarily. In the long term this provides refugees like the Syrians on the south eastern border with the prospect of receiving work permits. Furthermore foreigners who have been staying legally in the country for more than eight years are to receive a residence permit for an indefinite stay.

Egypt

Violence between Christians and Muslims

Four Christians and a Muslim were shot during violent clashes between Copts and Muslims in the city of Chusus near Cairo on 05 April 2013. It is not yet known what caused the outbreak; one rumour is that Copts or Coptic children painted a cross on a mosque. Another that young Muslims painted "inciting symbols" on an Islamic institution and a mosque, whereupon an argument started between Christians and Muslims that were nearby. According to another version an argument between a Christian and a Muslim family escalated.

After the service for the four Christian victims in St. Mark's Cathedral in Cairo violence erupted again between the mourners and Muslims on 07 April 2013. Many people were injured and one died. President Mursi ordered an investigation.

Violence during demonstration against President Mursi

On 06 April 2013 several people were injured in Cairo when protests against President Mursi turned violent. The police used tear gas against the demonstrators who attempted to take the building of the Attorney General and the Supreme Court. Reportedly the protesters were mainly followers of the youth movement of 06 April. The opposition had called for a four day protest against the government. Further demonstrations took place in Alexandria, the industrial town of Mahalla al-Kubra and in Sagasig, the President's home district.

Libya

Prime Minister's advisor kidnapped

On 01 April 2013 Ali Ghatas, Chief of Staff and advisor to Prime Minister Ali Zidan, was abducted by armed men posing as security forces on his way from Misrata to Tripoli. The Prime Minister stated that shortly before the government had received death threats. Some observers assume that the kidnapping may be related to the delay in the adoption of the so-called "Political Isolation Law" which concerns the exclusion of former members of the ousted Gaddafi-regime from public service and government office.

Tripoli: Two patients killed in hospital

In the afternoon of 05 April 2013 armed men burst into Bu-Sleem hospital in Tripoli and killed two of the patients. The men had been injured and arrested during an armed confrontation in which one young man was killed. The killers are said to have been relatives and friends of the victim.

Bayda: Bomb explosion in front of a public building

On 05 April 2013 a bomb exploded in front of an official building in al-Bayda, a city east of Benghazi injuring a guard and damaging a second building. The perpetrators are unknown.

Suspect liberated from police custody

On 04 April 2013 seven armed men liberated a suspect on a transport from the Bab-Ben-Gashir police station (Tripoli) to the nearby prosecutor's office. He had been arrested under the suspicion of having assassinated several revolutionaries during the revolution and currently heads a militia that is probably among those that Justice Minister Salah al -Marghani had called illegal on the day before. He had been arrested in the neighbourhood of Bu Sleem and the local police station where he had been held in custody and interrogated was attacked.

Serbia/Kosovo

EU negotiations to solve Kosovo conflict failed

Also the last round of negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo held under the auspices of the EU ended without a result. The dialogue initiated in October 2012 sought to determine the future status of northern Kosovo where the majority of the population is Serbian. As a reward for a compromise in this matter the EU had promised Serbia the possible initiation of accession negotiations and therefore great hopes were attached to a successful completion of the talks. Agreement had already been reached on the formation of a "community of Serbian municipalities" exercising self-administration. No agreement could, however, be reached on the decisive issue which executive rights should be granted to the Serbian minority. Serbia had the concept that the community should have its own legislative powers in the areas of justice, law enforcement, and education. Kosovo, on the other hand, is only prepared to grant advisory powers to the planned community of Serbian municipalities and wants to station its own security forces there. A state within a state, which would be the result of a comprehensive autonomy, is also rejected by the EU.

The EU High Foreign Affairs Representative Ashton declared the formal end of the negotiations, but also said that "there are still several proposals on the table" which both delegations would have to discuss in their respective countries first. On 09 April 2013 Serbia intends to announce its official position.

Somalia

Road from Mogadishu to Baidoa is open

After extensive fighting with al-Shabaab the Somali army and the African Union succeeded in gaining control of the last section of the strategically important road that links Mogadishu and Baidoa on 01 April 2013. This is expected to greatly facilitate the supply of humanitarian aid to Baidoa.

British citizens should leave the country

In its travel information updated on 06 April 2013 the British Foreign Office requests all British citizens living in Somalia to leave the country. The Foreign Office assumes that the terrorists are in the final planning stage for further attacks in Mogadishu. At the same time London warned against travelling to any other parts of Somalia including Somaliland.

Nigeria

Presidential committee considers amnesty for Boko Haram

After the 04 April 2013 meeting of the National Security Council President Jonathan formed a committee that has the mandate to submit, in cooperation with the office of the National Security Advisor, a report on the feasibility of an amnesty for the Islamist terror organization Boko Haram. In recent weeks Jonathan's rejection of an amnesty had been criticized by political and religious leaders in northern Nigeria - among them the highest Muslim dignitary the Sultan of Sokoto. Meanwhile Boko Haram's largest fraction announced through its leader Abubakar Ibn Shekau that as the group's highest decision-making body, the Shura Council, would decide on whether or not to accept an amnesty.

MEND claims responsibility for attack on police boat

The police informed that on 05 April 2013 armed men attacked a police boat sailing in the Niger Delta near the village of Azuzuama (Southern Ijaw Local Government Area, Bayelsa State). In an e-mail of its spokesman Jomo Gbomo the militant MEND („Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta“) group claimed responsibility for the attack on 07 April 2013. According to MEND the attack occurred on 06 April 2013 around 5pm resulting in a 40 minute fire-fight in which 15 policemen and two MEND members were killed. The police had so far spoken of 12 casualties among the policemen. According to MEND this attack was meant to teach the security forces a lesson after they had vowed to suppress any uprising in the Niger Delta following threats from MEND published on 03 April 2013 to start continuous attacks code-named "Hurricane Exodus" after 05 April 2013. MEND said that it was striking out, because an alleged threatening letter by MEND which, however, had been fabricated by the Nigerian and South African governments, had been used as evidence in the trial against former MEND leader Henry Okah in South Africa in which he had been sentenced to 24 years of imprisonment on 26 March 2013.

Assassinations in Adamawa

In the early morning of 06 April 2013 armed men attacked the village of Mildlu (Adamawa State in the north east, Madagali Local Government Area) assassinating eleven villagers. The house of Adamawa's deputy governor that was guarded by two men is located in this village and the two guards were killed. No one has as yet claimed responsibility for the ambush.

Uganda

Bounty for rebel leader Joseph Kony

The search for Ugandan rebel leader Joseph Kony was abandoned unsuccessfully on 03 April 2013, because his traces were lost in the Central African Republic. The International Criminal Court wants Kony for intentional attacks on the civilian population, enslavement and recruiting of child soldiers. The US has posted a bounty of five million US-Dollars for information about Kony's whereabouts.

Central African Republic

Number of refugees rising; situation remains unstable

The coup in the Central African Republic swelled the number of refugees. People are mainly fleeing the capital Bangui, but also other cities like Bangassou, Rifaï, and Zemio in the country's south east on the border to the Democratic Republic of Congo. Most refugees move to the north of the Democratic Republic of Congo, to Chad, and to Cameroon. The situation in the country remains unstable.

North Korea

North Korean conflict

A general staff spokesman of the North Korean people's army announced that the military had officially given the go-ahead for an attack on the US which entails the consent to the use of nuclear arms. The missile could be launched on 15 April 2013, the birthday of the country's founder Kim Il Sung. The US are taking this threat seriously and are already planning their response. Recently the Pyongyang regime had denied access to the common special economic zone of Kaesong to commuters from South Korea which in effect meant cutting the last link with South Korea. The South Korean news agency Yonhap reported that North Korea already moved a second intermediate range ballistic missile to the east coast. These IRBM could hit the two US allies South Korea and Japan or the US military base in Guam in the western Pacific. The South Korean government reported that there are indications that North Korea is about to run a second nuclear test. North Korea called upon all foreign embassies to withdraw their personnel until 10 April 2013. which none of the governments has done so far. China voiced unusually strong criticism of the North Korean leadership, warning it against further escalating tensions. Chinese President Xi Jinping said that no country should be allowed to throw a region and even the whole world into chaos for selfish gain.