

Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

10 March 2014

Afghanistan

Security situation

On 6 March 2014, friendly fire by US drone missiles killed five Afghan soldiers in Logar province in eastern Afghanistan.

On 8 March 2014, a bomb attack killed the governor of Nasjan district in Jalalabad (capital of Nangarhar province in eastern Afghanistan) and his bodyguard. Several passersby were wounded. In the outskirts of the town of Mehtarlam (Laghman province), four Afghan soldiers and two policemen died when they deactivated a mine.

On 9 March 2014, the Taliban killed three teachers in Chaghcharan (capital of Ghor province in western Afghanistan) and kidnapped a fourth.

Pakistan

Talks with the Taliban resumed

Following the agreement of a ceasefire in north-west Pakistan (see BN dated 3 March 2014), the government has resumed the peace talks with the Taliban.

Further attacks

In spite of the ceasefire and the resumed talks, a NATO supply convoy was attacked on 4 March 2014 near the Afghan border in Jamrud district (tribal areas in north-west Pakistan). At least two people died in this attack. Nobody has taken responsibility for the attack so far. In general, the Taliban attack NATO convoys.

On 5 March 2014, a bomb attack in Hangu district in north-west Pakistan killed six soldiers and wounded eight.

Iraq

General situation

According to Iraq Body Count, 346 civilians were killed in March 2014 so far (as of 9 March 2014). According to this piece of information, 69 people died on 9 March 2014 in total, 47 died in Hilla alone (Babil province) through suicide bombers.

According to a press release of the UNHCR of 7 March 2014, the number of displaced persons is further increasing in Anbar province. According to this, the number of refugees in the town of Heet and the surrounding area has increased by 20,000 to 30,000 people. The town of Fallujah is reportedly still under fire, roads remain reportedly blocked and there are reports on shortages of petrol, food and basic supplies. In addition, the situation in Ramadi is still unsecure. Some parts of the town and the surrounding area are still under fire, there are still armed clashes and some inhabitants have reportedly fled in the direction of Heet.

On 5 March 2014, the authorities have reportedly issued a relief plan together with the UN in order to satisfy the direct needs of the people who are affected by the fighting.

Syria

Kidnapped nuns free again

According to reports of 10 March 2014, thirteen nuns have been freed who had been kidnapped in December 2013 by the Jabhat al-Nusra from a monastery in Maalula near Damascus. They have now reached the Syrian-Lebanese border. In exchange for the nuns, 153 women shall reportedly have been released from Syrian prisons, said the chief of the Lebanese security authority Mr Abbas Ibrahim. He had negotiated the agreement between the rebels and the Syrian government.

Poor health care services, in particular for the children in need

A report of the organisation "Save the Children" published on 10 March 2014 said that the health care services for children in need are disastrous. Since the beginning of the civil war three years ago reportedly 200,000 people (among them thousands of children) have died; this number is higher than the number of people who were killed in the hostilities (approx. 140,000). The reasons for this are reportedly the fact that chronic illnesses could not be treated, that the newborn would die in their incubators owing to power failures and that limbs must be amputated owing to the lack of equipment.

German Islamists in the civil war

According to the intelligence of the German Verfassungsschutz [*Federal German Agency for State Protection and Counterterrorism*], about 300 Islamists have travelled from Germany to Syria since the beginning of the civil war. Reportedly, they will be sent into the fighting without any training. It is assumed that 20 people have already died for the time being. The president of the Verfassungsschutz Mr Maaßen thinks that there is the danger of attacks carried out by these "Jihad tourists" after their return to Germany. They have then gained "experience in battles and have been radicalised". This would increase the danger of terrorist acts in Germany as well. However, definite plans for attacks have not yet been discovered.

Algeria

Presidential elections

On 3 March 2014, Algeria's President Mr Abdelaziz Bouteflika publicly announced his candidanship for the presidential elections which are planned for 17 April 2014 and handed it in to the constitutional council. Mr Bouteflika, in office since 1999, aims at a fourth term of office. A constitutional modification in 2012 abolished the provision that a president could just once be re-elected. The official press agency APS said that there are eleven other candidates in addition to Mr Bouteflika who have also handed in their applications. Approximately 100 people protested in front of the university in the city centre of Algiers against Mr Bouteflika's candidanship.

Morocco

Massive run on Spanish exclave

On 4 March 2014, Moroccan security forces prevented approximately 1,500 migrants from crossing the border to the Spanish exclave Ceuta in North Africa. This has been the largest number of people for months who have tried to cross the border. In October 2013, about 400 people had tried to get from Morocco to the town of Ceuta which is located on the coast of the Mediterranean in North Africa. One month ago, 15 refugees were drowned in the sea when they had tried to reach Ceuta in swimming. According to the Spanish newspaper "El País", reportedly more than 30,000 people are still waiting in the exclaves Ceuta and Melilla for an opportunity to reach Spanish territory.

Tunisia

State of emergency lifted

On 6 March 2014, the Tunisian Presidential office declared that the Head of state and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces Mr Moncef Marzouki had lifted the state of emergency on 5 March 2014, earlier than planned. The emergency law had been valid since the overthrow of former president Mr Zine el Abidine Ben Ali at the beginning of 2011 and since then, it has been renewed always again by a few months. It is still not clear, however, to which extent the extensive powers of the police and the armed forces on the basis of the state of emergency will be cancelled. The Presidential office also explained that the abolition of the law will not “limit the powers of the security forces which are a central item of the law” and that the armed forces may be mobilised if required.

Egypt

Electoral law enacted

Interim president Mr Adli Mansur enacted a law for the presidential elections. The electoral commission will presumably in the next few days determine a polling day. As the issuing of the law has considerably been delayed, the election can presumably not take place as planned at the end of April. Chief of the armed forces Mr Abdel Fattah a-Sisi seems to be the most probable candidate; he has already said that he is willing to run for president, however, he has not yet confirmed it officially.

Three people died during protests

On 7 March 2014 during a protest in favour of the restoration of former president Mr Morsi in Cairo, at least three people died in clashes between supporters of Mr Morsi and security forces and at least 23 were wounded, as the ministry of health said. At least five people were wounded in protests in other cities.

Egypt / Palestinian Autonomous Areas

Egyptian court bans Hamas

On 4 March 2014, a court in the capital of Cairo declared that all activities of the militant Islamist Palestinian Hamas in the country are illegal, reported the newspaper al-Ahram. A judge not wanting to be mentioned by name confirmed this piece of information vis-à-vis the news agency Reuters. The Hamas which dominates the Gaza strip has its roots in the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood has been classified as a terrorist organisation following the overthrow of the Islamist Egyptian president Mr Muhammad Morsi by the armed forces in 2013. The Hamas condemned the court ruling as an attack on the Palestinian case.

Israel / Palestinian Autonomous Areas

Palestinian president Mr Abbas urges for settlement freeze

Mr Mahmoud Abbas will only then agree to a renewal of the direct negotiations with Israel – something which was proposed by the USA – when the settlement policy stops and additional prisoners be released from prison where they have been detained without judgment (in particular women, children and prisoners from the authorities). This was announced on 4 March 2014 through a leading member of Mr Abbas’ Fatah party. During the direct negotiations taken up at the end of July, Israel has agreed to the release of 104 long-term prisoners of whom the last 26 should come free at the end of this month. According to unconfirmed reports of Israeli and Palestinian media, US secretary of state Mr Kerry has proposed an Israeli building freeze in the West Bank outside of the large settlement areas in order to induce Mr Abbas to a renewal of the negotiation period. The Israelis denied this. In the meantime, Israel’s head of government Mr Benjamin Netanyahu has not excluded that “some” settlements could be given up in the occupied West Bank in the framework of a peace agreement with the Palestinians. He will, however, commit himself that the number of settlements to be given up remains “as small as possible”, said the newspaper “Haaretz” in citing him.

Yemen

Alleged al-Qaida leader dies in US drone missile attack

According to reports of the internet portal “News Yemen” a drone missile attack in al-Khabi district in the province of al-Jawf in the north of the country on 5 March 2014 killed a local leader of the terror network of “al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula” (AQAP) and two of his companions. Reportedly, the three men were hit by a guided rocket when they were driving in their car.

30 fatalities in fighting between rivalling groups

Fighting between Shiite rebels and Sunni tribes in the north-west killed at least 30 people as the authorities said. A ceasefire could have reportedly been reached between the rivalling Muslim groups under government mediation, said the governor of Al-Jawf province, Mr Muhammad bin Aboud on 9 March 2014. The government is also under pressure in the south of the country. In this part of the country the armed forces are fighting against Separatists and against Islamists who are associated with one of the most active branches of the al-Qaida, namely the “al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula”, AQAP.

Somalia

Al-Shabaab driven away from several built-up areas

According to information of the AMISOM of 8 March 2014, the Somali army (SNA) and AMISOM units have successfully captured five strategically important built-up areas in the south-west of the country in the past few days. These are reportedly among others Hudur (capital of the Bakool region), Rabduhre, Wajid as well as Ted (also Bakool). A press release of 9 March 2014 said that the SNA and AMISOM have also captured the town of Burdhubo in Gedo region after two days of fighting. In this context, at least nine al-Shabaab fighters have reportedly been killed.

Nigeria

Four men whipped in Bauchi owing to “crimes” of gay sex

On 6 March 2014, four men were sentenced to 15 strokes and a fine of 20,000 naira (approx. 90 euros) in the town of Bauchi (capital of the federal state of the same name in northern Nigeria) by the “Upper Sharia Court” in the suburb of Unguwar Jaki owing to homosexual acts. This physical punishment was immediately executed within the court after pronouncement of the judgment. The judge explained in his reasoning that they could not impose capital punishment as the accused had not been arrested the moment they were having homosexual intercourse. Capital punishment has also not been an option for two of the accused who had confessed that they had had homosexual intercourse four years ago. They have since changed their ways so that imposing capital punishment after the event could not be justified.

The hearings were made in secret as in January 2014 during the hearings a crowd had tried to stone the accused men outside the court and demanded the judge pass the death sentence. Only with the use of teargas had the police been able to put an end to the riots.

Attack of the Boko Haram onto two villages in Borno

Presumed members of the militant Islamist organisation Boko Haram attacked in the evening of 3 March 2014 the village of Jakana in the north-east federal state of Borno (Kaga Local Government Area, approximately 35 km of its capital of Maiduguri). Eleven villagers – other sources say at least 40 people – were killed. The attackers fled when they became aware of the soldiers, said senator Mr Ahmed Zannah of Borno Central.

In the evening of 2 March 2014 already, attackers of the Boko Haram had attacked the village of Mafa in Borno (approximately 50 km east of Maiduguri). They reportedly shot onto people fleeing and they threw explosive devices into houses. The attack killed approximately 30 civilians. Two policemen were killed the next day when their car drove onto a bomb in Mafa. The Boko Haram had announced the attack several days earlier in leaflets. In answer to this, additional military forces had been located in the village however the soldiers reportedly fled in view of the superiority of the attackers, said senator Zannah.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

International criminal court convicts ex-rebel leader Katanga

On 7 March 2014, the International criminal court in Den Haag found the former Congolese warlord Mr Germain Katanga guilty of charges including complicity of crimes against humanity (murder) and of four war crimes (murder, attack on civilian population, destruction of property and plundering). He is reportedly co-responsible for an attack of his militiamen called "The Front for Patriotic Resistance of Ituri" (FRPI) carried out on 24 February 2003 onto the village of Bogoro (Ituri district, Orientale province in the north-east) in which at least two hundred people were killed. He was acquitted of the charges of using child soldiers, of rape and of sexual slavery. There was no evidence that he at that time had in fact the absolute military authority over the militia. Mr Katanga will be sentenced after a separate hearing. Appeals against the convictions can be handed in within 30 days.

Côte d'Ivoire [Ivory Coast]

Gbagbo party regains strength

Now, as the former president of Côte d'Ivoires, Mr Laurent Gbagbo is sitting in a Dutch prison in Scheveningen and is awaiting his hearings in the International criminal court (ICC), his party, namely the Ivorian Popular Front (Front Populaire Ivoirien, FPI) is developing to become a serious political force. Its aim is to return to power in the presidential elections which are planned for October 2015. In the past, the party had lost its importance as it has boycotted all elections since 2012.

In connection with the riots during the 2010 elections, Gbagbo was accused of crimes against humanity. More than 3,000 Ivoirians died after Gbagbo refused to hand over power to its elected successor Mr Alassane Ouattara. The country is still separated into two political camps. Supporters of Gbagbo accuse the government of victor's justice. Some leading personalities of the FPI who are in prison are still waiting for their release.

Eritrea

Chief of Staff died

On 8 March 2014, the Eritrean ministry of information confirmed the death of the Chief of the General Staff of the armed forces, Major General Gerezgheri Andemariam alias "Wuchu". Reportedly, the Chief of the General Staff had for some time now been under medical treatment. "Wuchu" is a veteran of the fight for independence against Ethiopia (1961 - 1993) and he had been highly recognised across the country as a "living legend".

When in summer 2002 Eritrea was separated into military operation zones (MOZ) and the civilian administration was placed under the responsibility of the commanders of the respective zones, "Wuchu" took over zone number 5 (centre) with its headquarters in Barentu.

South Sudan

Gun battle in barracks

There was reportedly a gun battle in the largest barracks of Jubas on 5 March 2014 owing to unpaid service pays which took the lives of several dozens of people. A general of the president's guards was reportedly the origin of the gun battle in order to stress the requests for service pays.

Deadlock in peace negotiations

The peace negotiations in Addis Ababa were put forward to 20 March 2014. In spite of a ceasefire agreement in January, there has always again been fighting between the rebels around former Vice-President Riek Machar and the armed forces.

Ukraine

The time before the referendum for the annexion to Russia

One week prior to the controversial referendum on the annexion of Crimea to the Russian Federation, the political leaders of the peninsula have announced a rapid accession. The president of the pro Russian regional parliament, Mr Vladimir Konstantinov said that although the process of transition to a new legislation is “complicated”, however, this “will all be finalized with success in March”. He promised the teachers, doctors, soldiers, policemen and other officers on Crimea that their incomes will on average quadruple. At present, the Crimea leadership is however to a large extent insolvent because the interim government in Kiev has blocked the Autonomous Republic’s access to the financial means. This is the reason why the current business dealings can no longer be financed, said Crimea’s deputy prime minister Mr Rustam Temirgaliyev. They have reportedly already asked Moscow about the possibilities to open bank accounts at Russian banks. Anyway, the peninsula will reportedly introduce the Russian rouble if the majority of Crimea’s population votes for an accession. It is probable that there will be a majority for this.

The peninsula which has been Russian over several centuries belongs to Ukraine in accordance with international law. The government in Kiev and the West accuse Russia of having occupied the peninsula in violation of the international law approximately a week ago. Prior to the referendum planned for 16 March 2014 on the annexion of Crimea to Russia, there have also been requests for such a vote in several large cities in the south and east of Ukraine.

The West thinks that the preparation of the Crimea referendum which is demonstratively supported by Moscow is an escalation of the crisis. Russia is provoking stricter EU sanctions with its rigid attitude, said Federal German minister of foreign affairs Mr Steinmeier. These sanctions have so far been planned in form of travel restrictions and the blocking of bank accounts for certain people responsible for the conflict in Ukraine.

India

Parliamentary elections to last for more than one month

As the electoral commission announced on 5 March 2014, the 16th parliamentary elections will last for five weeks. The vote shall begin on 7 April 2014 and continue by 12 May 2014. 814 million voters, more than the whole population of Europe are eligible to cast ballots in staggered phases in a total of nine days in the Union states and the Union territories. Never before has a parliamentary election been made over such a long period of time.

Prime minister Mr Manmohan Singh of the governing Congress party will not run for office again after two terms of office. New top candidate is the youngest family member of the Gandhi dynasty, namely 43 year old Mr Rahul Gandhi. Poll surveys say however that another victory of the Congress party is improbable. The highest chance has reportedly the Hindu Nationalist Indian People’s Party (BJP). BJP candidate is Mr Narendra Modi. Although he has won the highest esteem as prime minister of the federal state of Gujarat due to his successful economic policy, he is regarded as somewhat controversial owing to his role in the bloody clashes against Muslims in 2002.

Vietnam

Blogger jailed due to criticising the regime

On 4 March 2014 the well-known blogger Mr Truong Duy Nhat was jailed for two years in prison in accordance with article 258 of the Vietnamese criminal law, owing to “abusing democratic freedoms to infringe on the interests of the state“. Shortly prior to his arrest on 26 May 2013, he had requested on his blog that the Prime minister and the Secretary General of the communist party should resign. From 1987 to 2011 Mr Truong had been working as a journalist for two publicly authorised newspapers. In 2011, he founded the blog “A different view“. According to Human Rights Watch, at least 63 people were sentenced in 2013 in Vietnam owing to uttering critical opinions. 35 bloggers were arrested in July 2013, as “Journalists without borders” say.

Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea)

Parliamentary elections

The parliamentary elections on 9 March 2014 have been the first elections since the end of 2011 when Mr Kim Jong Un came to power. The Supreme people's assembly (687 seats) is elected every five years. Only candidates of the Democratic Front for the Reunification of the Fatherland, the so-called "United Front" could be elected. In addition to the Workers' Party of Korea, two bloc parties belong to the front. There was only one candidate for each constituency; Mr Kim Jong Un himself was also a candidate. The election in the country with compulsory voting was reportedly only a formality. There is no opposition in the country. According to an official statement of 10 March 2014, all voters in Mr Kim Jong Un's constituency participated in the vote; Mr Kim Jong Un reportedly won 100 per cent of the cast votes. Other results have for the time being not been published.

The parliament which is the country's nominal highest institution of power assembles just once or twice per year, mainly in order to confirm the country's budget and decisions of the Workers' Party.

China

People responsible for the attack in Kunming arrested

As the state media announced on 3 March 2014, the police arrested the people responsible for the attack in Kunming (also see BN dated 3 March 2014). The attackers, six men and two women, were reportedly under the leadership of Abdurehim Kurban. The name points to Uighur descent. As Radio Free Asia reported on 3 March 2014 under reference to Uighur sources, the attackers possibly wanted to flee to neighbouring Laos via Yunnan province after violent clashes in Hotan (Uighur Autonomous Region Xinjiang). When however border crossing seemed impossible, they have reportedly decided in favour of the attack.

Slow implementation of modified family planning policies

The modifications in the family planning policies decided upon in November (also see BN dated 18 November 2013) according to which couples may now have two children when one of the partners has no brothers or sisters, is only slowly being implemented. As the minister for family planning Ms Li Bin said on 6 March 2014, the new provisions have been implemented in eight of the 22 provinces, in five autonomous regions and in four Chinese cities under direct government rule. There is reportedly no time schedule for the implementation. Experts expect an additional one to two million births per year due to this new regulation.

Colombia

Government coalition wins parliamentary elections

The centre coalition of Head of state Mr Juan Manuel Santos won the parliamentary elections of 9 March 2014. After 98 per cent of the votes had been counted, it received 91 of the 167 seats in parliament and 47 of the 102 seats in the senate. The right-wing opposition parties around former Head of state Mr Álvaro Uribe received 39 seats in parliament and 38 seats in the senate. The left-wing opposition parties obtained nine seats in parliament and ten in the senate. The turnout was at 43 per cent. The elections had been under the supervision of 3,800 election observers who registered more than 1,000 complaints about electoral offences. More than 400,000 soldiers and policemen secured the elections. The number of violent events was by 86 per cent lower than in the last parliamentary elections in 2010.