

Group 22 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

26 May 2014

Afghanistan

Security situation

Three children were killed in a rocket attack by the Taliban in the province of Helmand, southern Afghanistan, on 18.05.14. A rocket hit a house instead of an army checkpoint.

A bomb attack on Afghan security forces in the western Afghan province of Herat on 19.05.14 did not result in any casualties.

Taliban fighters attacked checkpoints of the Afghan security forces in the Yomgan district of the northern Afghan province of Badakhshan on 20.05.14, killing at least six policemen and taking 27 prisoner. 24 of the prisoners were released after negotiations between tribal elders and the Taliban on 25.05.14. According to official information, the district has been under the control of the Afghan security forces again since 23.05.14, following a successful military offensive. It was conceded that the Taliban still control parts of adjoining districts, however (Jurm and Keran Wa Manjan).

On 23.05.14 armed combatants attacked the Indian consulate in the western Afghan city of Herat. Security forces were able to repel the attack. No-one has claimed responsibility for the attack to date.

Pakistan

Attacks

A teacher and five members of his family were shot dead by unknown assailants in the Panjgur district of the province of Balochistan on 21.05.14. Separatist groups have been active in Balochistan since 2004. Teachers are frequently targeted by both the separatists and the security forces.

Three bomb attacks took place on 24.05.14: two in Islamabad and one in the Mohmand district of the tribal regions in western Pakistan. Six soldiers and one civilian were killed in the attacks.

Attacks on Taliban

According to military sources, at least 32 people were allegedly killed in attacks by the Pakistani air force in the area of the border with Afghanistan (north Waziristan) on 21.05.14. Initial press reports referred to 50 extremists killed and over 80 injured. There are also said to have been civilian casualties.

Interfractional fighting

Fighting has been ongoing within the Mehsud tribe since March 2014, as the different fractions attempt to gain control in southern Waziristan. Over 90 people are reported to have died in the fighting to date. The interfractional fighting is hampering the peace talks between the Taliban and the Pakistani government.

Iraq

Security situation

Attacks continue to take place on a daily basis. According to Iraq Body Count, 800 civilians have been killed in May to date (as at 25.05.14). The AFP news agency puts the death toll in May to date (as at 24.05.14) at 866, including 47 police officers, 96 soldiers, eleven members of the Sahwa and 425 extremists.

Result of the parliamentary election on 30.04.14

Die "Rule of Law Coalition" led by the incumbent Shiite prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, put in the strongest showing in the election, followed by the Shiite alliances Al-Ahrar, headed by Moqtada Al-Sadr and Al-Muwatin, headed by Ammar al-Hakim. Observers expect that forming a government will prove a difficult matter.

Syria

Army ends siege of central prison in Aleppo

The Syrian army has managed to end a siege by Islamist rebels around the central prison in Aleppo after 13 months, according to a report by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights on 22.05.14, citing prison inmates. More than 3,000 inmates are currently reported to be in the prison. Supplies for the prisoners had been severely disrupted since the beginning of the blockade, and dozens are reported to have died of malnutrition or due to a lack of medication. The rebels besieging the prison also included fighters from the Al-Nusra Front. As a result of the advance by Assad's troops, the rebels are losing an important supply route to the Turkish border.

Use of chemical weapons

According to reports from the opposition, an attack with chemical weapons again took place on 22.05.14. It is claimed that government troops dropped drums containing chlorine gas in the province of Hama. The attack is said to have centred on the town of Kafr Sita. The human rights organisation Human Rights Watch spoke of "strong evidence" of the use of chlorine gas in five cases in the north of Syria. The Syrian government denies the claims.

Security situation

At least 21 people are reported to have been killed, including 11 civilians, in an attack on an election campaign rally by supporters of Assad in the town of Dara'a on the evening of 22.05.14. 30 people were injured.

At least eight people were allegedly killed and 22 injured in a car bomb attack in a district of Homs with a predominantly Alawite population on 25.05.14.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the civil war has cost more than 160,000 lives to date.

Syrian initiative vetoed once again on the Security Council

Russia and China are thwarting a draft resolution on Syrian for the 4th time. In so doing, they are preventing the International Criminal Court from addressing the violence and the violations of human rights by government troops and militias loyal to the government as well as by armed non-government groups in the Syrian civil war.

Lebanon

Parliament fails once again to elect a president

The Lebanese parliament has failed in its fifth attempt to elect a new president of the country. Parliamentary speaker Nabih Berri announced that the number of MPs present on 22.05.14 was once again insufficient for a valid ballot. The block led by the Shiite Hezbollah boycotted the vote once again, as previously on 15.05.14. Only a Maronite Christian can become president in Lebanon. Neither the Hezbollah block nor the rival "14th of March" faction have been able to agree on a candidate. The underlying situation in the country is extremely tense on account of the Syrian civil war. The tenure of president Michel Suleiman ends on 25.05.14. Berri announced that the election session of parliament would be continued until then.

Yemen

Suspected AQAP members arrested

Security forces have arrested 40 suspected members of "Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula" (AQAP) who were allegedly preparing attacks on members of the security forces. Citing the interior ministry, the "News Yemen" news portal announced on 22.05.14 that the search was on for 20 other members of AQAP. There have been numerous attacks on foreigners in Sanaa in recent months, including diplomats. Fighting the AQAP is not the only challenge for the weak security forces at present. Thousands of supporters of a separatist movement demonstrated for secession of the south in the port of Aden on 21.05.14. They were commemorating South Yemen's declaration of independence on 21.05.94 This led to a civil war which was won by the troops from the north.

Turkey

Two die in protests

Violent clashes between demonstrators and police at protests in connection with the Soma mining disaster claimed the life of a man who was shot in the head on 22.05.14. Deputy prime minister Bülent Arinc said that the 30 year-old man had been hit by a stray bullet while attending a funeral near to a demonstration. He said that the police had used tear gas against the demonstrators and fired warning shots. He added that investigations were underway and the weapons of 20 members of the security forces had been seized to determine who fired the fatal shot. One day later, a second man died of his injuries in Istanbul. According to official information, he was hit by a fragmentation grenade during night-time rioting, and at least eight people, including police officers, were allegedly injured. The protests were a reaction to a fatality on the day before.

Iran

Arrests in connection with a dance video

Six young Iranians were briefly detained for posting a version of Pharell Williams' hit video "Happy" on the internet. The clip shows three young men and three unveiled young women dancing and singing to the song. Under the law which has been in force since the Shiite revolution of 1979, women are required to conceal themselves from head to toe in public. A dedicated "morality police" unit keeps tabs on compliance with the regulations. The internet is additionally under close scrutiny by a "Cyber Police" unit.

Court bans Instagram photo service

Following the blocking of Facebook, Twitter and Youtube, a Teheran court has now also ordered a ban on the "Instagram" photo service. It justified its ruling with concerns that users' privacy was not adequately protected.

Iranian businessman executed

A businessman convicted of embezzlement was executed in Teheran on 24.05.14. The official news agency, Irna, reported that Mahafarid Amir Chosrawi, also known as Amir Mansour Aria, had been hanged at the infamous Evin prison in Teheran. Chosrawi was alleged to be at the centre of a scam in which forged documents were used to obtain loans from one of Iran's largest banks. The culprits are alleged to have bought up capital assets and property with the funds, including important state-owned companies. The amount involved in the fraud was equivalent to 1.9 billion euros. Chosrawi owned more than 35 companies.

Egypt

Convictions and acquittals for Muslim Brothers

On 19.05.14 a court in Alexandria sentenced a supporter of president Morsi to death and 18 to life in prison for murder and acts of violence at a demonstration in July 2013. The remainder of the total of 62 defendants received prison terms of between ten and fifteen years.

Also on 19.05.14, a court in Cairo acquitted 169 supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood of charges of illegal assembly in connection with a violent demonstration in August 2013.

Attack on security forces

Three police officers were killed and eleven people were injured in an attack on security forces outside Al-Azhar University in Cairo. Armed attackers opened fire on a checkpoint outside of the university.

Mubarak sentenced to three years' imprisonment

On 21.05.14 a court in Cairo sentenced former president Mubarak to three years' imprisonment for embezzling public funds amounting to the equivalent of 13.5 million euros. His sons Alaa and Gamal each received a four-year prison term. Mubarak and his sons used funds which were intended for the renovation and maintenance of the presidential palaces for private residences.

A trial is pending against Mubarak relating to the deaths of more than 800 demonstrators during the protests which led to his removal from office. He faces the death penalty.

Terrorist leader killed

The leader of "Ansar Beit al-Makdis", Schadi al-Menai, is reported to have been shot dead on the Sinai peninsula. Three high-ranking members of the Islamist organisation close to Al Qaeda were allegedly also killed. The circumstances surrounding al-Menai's death are unclear. According to reports from among the security forces, he was shot ahead of an attack planned by the terrorist organisation on a gas pipeline. According to other sources, Bedouins killed al-Menai in revenge for an Ansar operation against their tribe. The terrorist organisation itself denies that al-Menai is dead.

The USA placed Ansar Beit al-Makdis on the list of foreign terrorist organisations in April 2014. Since president Morsi was removed from power, Ansar has carried out numerous attacks on the security forces above all in the north of the peninsula.

Presidential elections

The presidential elections will take place under strict security measures on 26. and 27.05.14. Former army chief Abdul Fattah al-Sisi is regarded as the favourite candidate. His sole opponent is the left-wing nationalist politician Hamdin Sabahi. The Muslim Brotherhood has called for an election boycott. The result is to be announced on 05.06.14.

Libya

Support for Haftar

Last week witnessed further fighting between the troops of ex-general Chalifa Haftar and Islamist militias. There were reports of shots and explosions in Tripoli on 21.05.14. According to the "Al-Wasat" news portal, border guards also exchanged fire with a battalion of Haftar's militia from southern Libya in the eastern town of Tobruk. Libyan culture secretary Habib Lamin is said to be supporting 71 year-old retired general Haftar, as is the supreme commander of the air force, al-Abani.

On 21.05.14 Haftar called on the government to cede power to the Supreme Judicial Council, which is considered independent. Parliamentary speaker Sahmain ordered the arrest of all members of the military who had joined Haftar; this order has had no consequences to date. He also assigned a militia from Misrata which is close to the Muslim Brotherhood to protect parliament. This was heavily criticised by the parliamentarians on 22.05.14. The recently elected new interim head of government, Ahmed Maitiq, stated on 21.05.14 that it remained his firm intention to form a new government and that a new parliament was to be elected on 25 June.

Following an escalation in violence, the USA is considering evacuating its embassy in Tripoli. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates took the precaution of closing their diplomatic missions in Tripoli on 19.05.14. The German embassy remains open.

Morocco

Extension of fortifications at the Moroccan-Spanish border

According to reports in the Spanish media, Morocco has begun excavating a three metre-deep and three metre-wide trench close to the exclave of Melilla and is installing a fence with razor barb wire parallel to the Spanish border fence. Since the disaster on the beach of El Tarajal on 06.02.14, when hundreds of people from countries south of the Sahara attempted to swim to Ceuta and 14 died under fire from Moroccan security forces, Morocco and Spain have been seeking to make the borders at Ceuta and Melilla more secure.

Woman missing after boat accident

A boat coming from the Moroccan coast sunk off the Isla del Perejil (Parsley Island) on 24.05.14. Seven of the eight people on board from countries south of the Sahara managed to swim to the island, while one woman is missing. A Spanish maritime rescue helicopter took the seven people from the island to the port of Tarifa (Spain).

Guinea-Bissau

Run-off for presidential office

José Mário Vaz of the governing party "African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde" (PAIGC) won the run-off for the presidential office on 18.05.14, taking 61.9 per cent of the vote ahead of independent candidate Nuno Gomes Nabiam (38.1 per cent). The run-off was necessary because none of the 13 candidates in the first ballot on 13.04.14 achieved an absolute majority (cf. BN of 22.04.14).

Nigeria

Bomb attacks in Jos

A suicide attacker, presumably a member of the Islamist organisation Boko Haram, blew up his vehicle after being asked to park it elsewhere at around 9.30 p.m. on 24.05.14 in the city of Jos (capital of the central Nigerian federal state of Plateau). The intended target was presumably a public viewing event close to the scene of the explosion, at which some 1,700 people were watching the TV broadcast of the Champions League football final.

On 22.05.14 a car bomb exploded at around 2.30 p.m. at the main market, known as the "Terminus Market". A second car bomb exploded half an hour later, first and foremost killing rescuers who had come to the aid of those injured in the first explosion. In all, at least 122 people were killed in the attack, which is thought to be the work of the Islamist organisation Boko Haram.

Mali

Ceasefire agreed

On the evening of 23.05.14 the Mali government and the Tuareg rebel groups united in the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad signed a ceasefire agreement brokered by the African Union (AU). According to different sources, the agreement is to apply with immediate effect or from 24.05.14.

Up to the signing of the ceasefire agreement, the rebels in the north had gained control of Kidal as well as other towns such as Mènaka, Tessalit and Anefis, imposing a heavy toll of casualties on the army. On 25.05.14, the defence minister said that 50 soldiers had died in the most recent fighting.

Kenya

Hundreds of Somali deported

Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported on 20.05.14 that Kenyan authorities have deported a total of 359 Somali, including at least three registered refugees, since the beginning of "Operation Usalama Watch" to identify people living illegally in the country (cf. BN of 14.04.14). According to HRW, 98 people were deported to Mogadishu on 20.05.14. According to official information, 442 people were deported up to 13.05.14, including 310 Somali, who were in the country illegally, did not possess adequate documentation, had banned weapons or were accused of other offences.

Somalia

Attack on parliament claims many lives

At least 24 people, including four attackers and four guards, died in an attack on the seat of parliament in Mogadishu on 24.05.14. A car bomb first of all exploded outside the building, which was then stormed by armed attackers. Several hours of fighting ensued. According to prime minister Abdiweli Shaikh Ahmed, all members of parliament were taken to safety. Interior minister Abdikarim Hussein Guled handed in his resignation. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack.

South Sudan

Aid money committed

Donor states promised aid totalling USD 600 million for the country threatened by famine in Oslo on 20.05.14. This raises the total sum committed to USD 1.2 billion. According to the United Nations, USD 1.8 billion is required for 2014 in order to prevent a famine. The "World Food Programme" stated on 23.05.14 that the ceasefire agreed between the government and rebels on 09.05.14 had failed to facilitate access to remote areas in any way.

Fighting in Upper Nile

Renewed fighting which broke out in the federal state of Upper Nile on 22.05.14 has displaced more than 2,000 people. Most of them sought refuge in Ethiopia. Government and rebels accused each other of breaching the ceasefire. According to the US special envoy for Sudan and South Sudan, the intensity of fighting has reduced since the signing of the ceasefire agreement in May. On 23.05.14 he called on troops from countries in the region to be deployed as a matter of urgency, in order to protect teams of observers who are monitoring the fragile ceasefire.

Ukraine

Poroshenko elected new president

Billionaire Petro Poroshenko was elected as the new president on 25.05.14. According to the provisional result, he took around 56 per cent of the vote, thus winning the contest in the first ballot. Ex-prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko took around 13 per cent. Populist Oleg Lyashko from the Radical Party claimed around nine per cent of the vote to take third place. According to initial figures, the turn-out stood at between 60 and 70 per cent of the total electorate of 35 million.

Poroshenko declared victory on the evening of the election and called for a parliamentary election before the year is out. He promised to integrate his country in Europe, but noted that his first trip would take him to the Donbas region with its heavy Russian influence. In a comment aimed at Russia, he said that the "occupation of Crimea" would never be accepted. Poroshenko added that he would only be prepared to negotiate with the pro-Russian rebels once they had laid down their weapons. When casting his vote on election day, Poroshenko announced that he aimed to provide for stability. "We must first of all bring peace to all the people of Ukraine," said the billionaire in Kiev. "The armed men must disappear from the streets of the towns and villages." Oligarch Poroshenko is one of Ukraine's richest men and owns chocolate manufacturer Roshen, among other assets.

No orderly election in eastern regions

Pro-Russian separatists prevented voting at many polling stations in the eastern regions of Donetsk and Lugansk. Only a fraction of polling stations even opened. In Donetsk, several thousand people demonstrated against the presidential election.

Columbia

Presidential elections

None of the five candidates was able to secure an absolute majority in the presidential elections on 25.05.14, which went off without any incidents. The two front runners, incumbent president Juan Manuel Santos and Óscar Iván Zuluaga, took 29.3 and 25.7 per cent of the vote respectively. A run-off between the two, both of whom belong to the conservative camp, will take place on 15.06.14.

While president Santos spoke in the election campaign in favour of a continuation of the peace talks with the "Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia" (FARC) guerrilla group, which have been in progress since 2012, Zuluaga intends to continue negotiating with the rebels only after they have laid down their weapons. The FARC and the rebel group "Ejército de Liberación Nacional" (ELN) had declared a unilateral ceasefire for the elections from 20.05. to 28.05.14.

China

Attack in Xinjiang; security measures

An attack in Ürümqi, capital of the Uighur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang, on 22.05.14 claimed 39 lives and injured around 90 people. Four attackers were also killed and one was arrested. They threw explosives from an off-road vehicle onto a vegetable market in a district with a predominantly Chinese population. Then one of the two cars exploded. No information on the attackers has come to light as yet. This was the most serious attack in Xinjiang since the unrest in Ürümqi in 2009, in the course of which almost 200 people died. In the face of the attacks in recent months, security measures have been stepped up nationwide. A one-year anti-terrorism campaign began in Xinjiang on 23.05.14. According to state media, more than 200 suspects were arrested in Xinjiang in May and 23 "terrorist and extremist religious groups" crushed.

Police shoot at demonstrating Uyghurs

Hundreds of Uyghurs demonstrated in the prefecture of Aksu in Xinjiang on 20.05.14, calling for up to 25 women and girls to be released. The women and girls concerned had been arrested for wearing headscarves which partially covered their faces. The police shot at the demonstrators. Two people are reported to have been killed. More than 100 demonstrators were arrested. According to reports from among the local population, in the days prior to the demonstration the authorities had launched a concerted campaign, arresting men with beards and women and girls wearing headscarves and veils.