

Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

3 June 2013

Afghanistan

Security situation

A spokesman of the German Federal Army announced on 29 May 2013 that previous data on the security situation in the Federal Army's area of responsibility in northern Afghanistan need to be corrected. The number of security-related incidents (attacks, assaults on the military, police, civilians) had amounted to 1,228 in 2012 which represented a 25% increase against the previous year (31,182 incidents were recorded nationwide last year), the Federal Army said. The correction was the result of much delayed reporting of incidents by the Afghan security forces to ISAF. About 250 incidents had been recorded in the first quarter of the current year. Due to the weather, the period from January to March/April is considered a rather calm period, thus a similar development is expected for 2013 as in 2012.

Also last week saw various attacks. Five soldiers were killed in an assault by insurgents in the northern province of Badakhshan on 27 May 2013. Two others lost their lives in a bomb explosion in Kandahar in the south on 28 May 2013. On the same day two former policemen who had defected to join the Taliban killed seven Afghan policemen in an attack in Kandahar province. On 29 May 2013 attackers clad in police uniforms took the office of the provincial governor of Bazarak (Panjshir province, north-eastern Afghanistan), the attackers and one policeman died. Panjshir province has been considered as one of the most stable provinces. On the same day several gunmen attacked the International Red Cross' building in the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad (Nangarhar province). One Afghan guard is reported as fatality of the fighting. In further incidents in the south and the east three NATO soldiers and an Afghan civilian NATO staff member were killed on 01 June 2013. On 02 June 2013 at least four civilians were killed in a bomb attack and eight were injured in the southern province of Uruzgan.

Mounting number of attacks on journalists

Voice of America reported 36 incidents of violence against journalists since January which is a 40% increase against last year. While the media have become more diverse in recent years and as a result there are now 75 TV channels, 175 radio stations and hundreds of papers and magazines, the number of attacks on journalists is increasing, both from state and non-state actors.

Iraq

Security situation

Violence is on the rise. UNAMI (UN Assistance Mission for Iraq) reported 1,045 fatalities and 2,397 wounded persons as a result of attacks in May 2013. The organization says that the number of victims was highest in Baghdad, followed by the provinces of Salahaddin, Ninive, Anbar, Diyala, and Kirkuk. This is the highest death toll for any month since June 2008. Iraqi ministries reported that the number of deaths exceeded 600.

The Iraqi government announced that a cell of the Al Qaeda in Iraq terrorist network that intended to manufacture Sarin and mustard gas, had been destroyed. The gas had been destined for attacks in Iraq, Europe and North America.

Syria

Russia prevents US declaration

According to diplomatic sources, Russia prevented a declaration on the fighting in the rebel stronghold Qusair in the UN Security Council. The sources say that on 01 June 2013 Russia turned down a British draft text in which the Security Council expressed its great concern about the situation in Qusair and its civilian population. The battle over the besieged rebel stronghold is continuing. One opposition group reports that insurgents and government troops are engaged in fighting in the centre of town and in the surrounding villages. The government troops and the Lebanese Hezbollah militia supporting them have cut the city off from links to the outside. The insurgents called for military support and medical assistance for the hundreds of wounded people trapped in the city near the Lebanese border. UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon appealed to the warring parties to allow the civilian population to flee. For the rebels the battle for Qusair also is a battle to secure their supply routes. For the government controlling this city means direct access from Damascus to the settlements of the Alawite sect.

UN lists the rebel group Al-Nusra as terrorist organization

The UN Security Council followed the US in classifying the rebel group Jabhat al-Nusra as a terror organization. US diplomats said that all 15 members of the Security Council supported the decision. Jabhat al-Nusra is linked to Al Qaeda and claimed responsibility for several terrorist acts in Syria, such as the attack on the Damascus TV centre and the assassinations of a number of Syrian journalists.

Iran

Presidential elections: Outrage at Rafsanjani's exclusion from candidature continues

Even one week after the Guardian Council's decision to exclude former president and chairman of the Expediency Council, Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, from running in the presidential elections on 14 June 2013, the outrage at his exclusion has not abated. Several opposition media report that the powerful Shia clergy in the holy city of Ghom is highly dissatisfied. Allegedly the grandson of the founder of the republic, Ruhollah Khomeini, Hassan Khomeini, personally went to see the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei to ask him to admit Rafsanjani who is considered to be close to pro-reform forces. This makes Hassan Khomeini the second important member of the Khomeini family to support Rafsanjani in public. The republic founder's daughter Zahra Mostafavi had harshly criticized Rafsanjani's exclusion in a letter to Khamenei last week and warned that „dictatorship must be prevented from taking grip in Iran."

Publishing ban for the pro-Ahmadinejad daily „Iran“

On 02 June 2013 an Iranian court pronounced a six week publishing ban for the daily „Iran". The paper belongs to the pro-government IRNA news agency and is close to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Iranian news agency ISNA reported that the daily had printed false reports.

The FARS news agency quoted court sources as saying that the ban would not be enforced immediately, but could still be appealed.

Turkey

Anti-government protests

For one week thousands have been protesting against the Prime Minister Erdogan's government. The protests were triggered by a contested urban development project in Istanbul's Gezi Park and the violent clearance of a camp of protesters against the construction project. The manifestations turned into general protests against police violence and the prime minister's style of leadership which is criticized as autocratic and arrogant by many. More than 1,000 people were injured when police used force against protesters in Istanbul, in Ankara there were several hundred arrests.

Turkey's Interior Minister Güler said that 235 manifestations in 67 cities were recorded last week during which a total of 1,700 people had been arrested and mostly released again after a short check of their papers and an interrogation.

Subsequent protests at Taksim square in Istanbul remained peaceful after the police had pulled out. Several rallies were held in Germany in solidarity with the protesters. Further protests formed in Istanbul in the night of 2 to 3 June 2013 and in the following morning and in some instances resulted in violent clashes between the security forces and protesters.

Criticism has been voiced internationally of the harshness with which the police proceeded. On the weekend Turkish President Abdullah Gül called upon all parties to remain calm. Istanbul Mayor Kadir Topbas admitted mistakes and the interior ministry announced to take legal action against policemen who had "acted inadequately". Prime Minister Erdogan also admitted mistakes in the police operations, but rejected any criticism of his autocratic style of government and the policies of the Islamic Conservative Party AKP. He accused the opposition of having masterminded the protests.

Lebanon

Parliamentary elections postponed for one year

On 31 May 2013 the Lebanese parliament resolved to postpone the parliamentary elections scheduled for June by more than one year until November 2014. This is the first time since the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) that the parliament extended its own legislative period. The reason for the postponement is the fear that the civil war may spread from neighbouring Syria to Lebanon, a country deeply divided along religious and political lines. In recent days armed confrontations between supporters and opponents of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Tripoli during which four people were killed and 35 were injured. The Shiite Hezbollah, that is represented by several ministers in the Lebanese government, is increasingly interfering in the Syrian civil war on Assad's side. In view of the fighting, Prime Minister Tamam Salam had urged to preserve the country's unity "at all cost" on 31 May 2013.

Several Syrian rockets hit Lebanon

Lebanese security bodies reported on 02 June 2013 that at least 20 rockets from Syria have struck Lebanon. The police said that most of the rockets came down in the eastern mountain region near the village Al-Shaara close to the border. Some struck near the Hezbollah stronghold Baalbeck in the Bekaa valley. Since the Hezbollah has officially admitted to be fighting on the side of Bashar al-Assad's military one week ago, Lebanon has been experiencing an increasing number of incidents.

West Bank

University president Hamdallah asked to form new government

According to a government representative Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas asked the President of Al-Najah University in Nablus, Rami Hamdallah, to form a new government.

The university president and secretary general of the Central Election Commission succeeds the internationally respected Salam Fayyad as head of government, who had resigned in April after falling out with Abbas. At Abbas' request Fayyad continued to head the interim government that had a five-week mandate which ended on Sunday night.

Nigeria

Parliament adopts law on prison sentences for homosexual couples

On 30 May 2013 the Lower House of the Nigerian parliament unanimously adopted the „Same Marriage [Prohibition] Bill, 2013“ that provides for a maximum prison sentence of 14 years for marriages and civil law partnerships between male or female homosexuals. Anybody attending such a ceremony or supporting it is risking a prison sentence of up to ten years. Likewise anybody directly or indirectly showing affection for a same-sex partner in public may receive a ten year prison sentence. The same penalty applies for the formation of clubs, organizations or other institutions for gay men or women.

Already in November 2011 the Upper House had adopted a similar law. The law will only enter into force after the two text versions of the bills have been adjusted and President Jonathan signed it.

Reuters news agency reports that this is the first time that an anti-homosexual bill has been adopted in the parliament's Lower House after two previous attempts made since 2006 had failed.

Human rights lawyer Jiti Ogunye told AFP news agency that the law was „a waste of time“ and most of all legislative showmanship. Never had two men or women attempted to get married in Nigeria. Obviously Nigerian politicians were mainly seeking to defy mounting Western pressure over gay rights, he said. British Prime Minister David Cameron had warned that his country will withhold aid from countries that do not recognize gay rights.

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and deeply religious, the discrimination of gays is a regular feature of the country's daily life.

Myanmar

Violence between Buddhists and Muslims in Shan State

The renewed outbreak of violence between Muslims and Buddhists claimed at least one victim in Shan State. On 28 May 2013 a Muslim drenched a Buddhist woman with petrol and set fire to her in the town of Lashio. The woman suffered light injuries and the man was arrested. This incident triggered rioting that continued until the next day and left at least one person dead and several wounded. Residential houses, a mosque and a Muslim orphanage were burnt down, shops looted and destroyed. The police announced that 35 persons had been arrested. About 1,400 Muslims found refuge in a Buddhist temple complex that was protected by soldiers. A curfew was imposed on Lashio.

Vietnam

Dissident blogger arrested

On 26 May 2013 Truong Duy Naht one of the best known bloggers critical of the government was arrested in his hometown Danang in central Vietnam and taken to the capital Hanoi. The law enforcement authorities accuse him of "abusing democratic freedoms". If he is found guilty he may receive a prison sentence of up to seven years. Naht used to be a journalist for a state newspaper. Since 2010 he had frequently criticised the government dominated by the Communist Party in his blog „A Different Point of View“, including by calling for the Prime Minister's resignation.

Arrests during anti-Chinese protests

Police arrested at least 20 people, among them two Vietnamese journalists working for foreign media, during anti-Chinese protests over the territorial dispute in the South China Sea that were held near Hoan Kiem Lake in Hanoi on 01 June 2013.