

Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

3 August 2015

Afghanistan

Mullah Omar is dead

On 29 July 15 the Afghan government informed that Taliban leader Mullah Omar had died in Pakistan back in April 2013. The Taliban confirmed this information on 30 July 15 and announced that his deputy Akhtar Mohammad Mansur had been elected to succeed Mullah Omar.

As far as is known Mansur was born in the sixties in Maiwand district in Kandahar province. Already in the eighties he fought the Soviet occupation. He served as minister for civilian aviation in the Taliban government from 1996 to 2001. Until now he had been considered a moderate Islamist, but in an audio message he announced that the fight against the government would be continued. The second round of the peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government scheduled for 31 July 15 was postponed.

It seems that Mansur's election is not uncontroversial within the Taliban movement. Allegedly the hardliners are siding with the military commander Mullah Abdul Qayum Zakir who was deprived of power in 2014 and with Mullah Omar's eldest son, Mullah Mohammad Yaqub.

Drone attacks on IS

On 29 July 15 the governor of the eastern province of Nangarhar informed that 20 IS fighters had been killed in a drone attack on IS in Haska Mina district near the Pakistani border.

Iraq

Security situation

The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) reported 844 civilian casualties and 1,616 wounded (including the victims in Anbar province) for July 2015. Furthermore 488 members of the Iraqi army, Peshmerga fighters and other allies (excluding the victims caused by the Anbar operation) were killed and 492 were wounded.

Baghdad was most affected with 1,091 civilian victims (335 dead, 756 injured). The toll in Diyala province was 170 dead and 284 injured, in Salahaddin province 64 dead and 74 injured, in Ninive province 101 dead and 28 injured, and in Kirkuk province 26 dead and eleven injured.

Anbar province reported 600 civilian victims (147 dead and 453 wounded). UNAMI pointed out that these are the minimum figures, because the numbers of victims cannot be verified in the conflict areas.

Turkey

Turkey attacks IS and PKK positions/suicide attack

An IS member blew himself up on 20 July 15 in Suruc killing 32 leftist and Kurdish activists. The PKK who attributes part of the responsibility for this bombing to the Turkish government, terminated the ceasefire in force since 2013 and assassinated Turkish security forces. Turkey opened its air bases for US air force missions in Syria and also attacked IS positions in Syria since 24 July 15. The Syrian Kurdish militia YPG accused Turkey of repeatedly attacking its positions. YPG is cooperating with the US in its fight against IS and the US supports the Kurds in their efforts with airstrikes. But at the same time the Turkish air force also at-

tacked the banned Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) in north Iraq with which it had previously held peace talks. About 260 PKK fighters are said to have died in these air raids so far. On 01 August 15 the Turkish air force reportedly bombed a village in north Iraq and caused civilian casualties. In a suicide attack of Kurdish extremists (probably the PKK) two soldiers were killed and 24 others were injured in Agri province in the east on 02 August 15.

Syria

Fighting continues in Syria

On 1 August 15 the Syrian Human Rights Observatory reported that on one day at least 65 people died in fighting in Syria. Within the course of one day there were 20 pro-Syrian and 19 rebel casualties in the strategically important region of Sahl al-Ghab (Hama province, on the border to Lattakia province), it said. Another 25 persons lost their lives in the fighting for an army camp near Aleppo.

Saudi Arabia

In 2015 already 95 executions

Since the beginning of 2015 Saudi Arabia already executed 95 death sentences. A man convicted of drug smuggling was executed on 29 July 15. There were 83 executions in 2014 and almost 80 in 2013. Numerous crimes are punished by the death penalty, including murder, rape, drug dealing, and witchcraft. The convicted persons are publicly beheaded or shot.

Lebanon

Fighting in the Palestinian refugee camp of Ain al-Hilweh

In the evening of 28 July 15 members of the Islamist group Jund al-Sham and of the Fatah movement governing on the West Bank clashed in Lebanon's largest Palestinian refugee camp Ain al-Hilweh. The confrontation was triggered by the murder of a Fatah representative and head of a security body of Ain al-Hilweh, Talal al-Urdoni, in the camp by unknown assassins. There is a silent agreement in Lebanon that the Lebanese army does not enter the Palestinian refugee camps, rather the Palestinian groups must ensure security within the camps.

Israel/Palestinian Autonomous Areas

International criticism of housing construction for settlers

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced the construction of 300 housing units in settlements in the occupied West Bank and in East Jerusalem. The US as well as the UN and the EU sharply criticised this decision, as the expansion of the settlements endangered a two-state solution providing for an Israeli and a Palestinian state. They jointly called upon the Israeli government to abandon any plans that would undermine the viability of a two-state solution. Also a PLO representative accused Israel of sabotaging efforts to initiate a peace process. Israel distinguishes "legal" and "illegal" construction of settlements, depending on whether the construction had been authorized by the government in advance or not. Currently about 400,000 Israeli settlers are living in the occupied West Bank and another almost 200,000 in East Jerusalem. The international community considers all Jewish settlements in Palestinian areas to be illegal.

Israel intends to take action against radical settlers

After an attack on a Palestinian family and the death of a small child on 31 July 15, followed by a knife attack on a gay parade in Jerusalem by an ultra-orthodox Jew in which a 16-year-old girl died and others were injured, the Israeli government announced that it will take action against Jewish extremists. After the child's death Palestinians and Jewish settlers clashed in the West Bank on 01 August 15.

Yemen

Half of the population affected by starvation

According to the assessment of the aid organization Oxfam¹ half of Yemen's population is suffering from hunger four months after the conflict with the Shiite Houthi rebels escalated and the air raids of the Saudi coalition began. There had been serious food scarcity anyway and the number of people affected increased by another 25,000 every day since the Saudi air raids on the Houthi rebels began at the end of March, Oxfam stated on 28 July 15. By now the number of people living in hunger had risen to 13 million, half of the country's total population. According to Oxfam one in two of these could starve, if the food supply did not improve drastically. Yemen depends on imports for 80% of its food, however, since March only 20% have arrived. Oxfam continued to say that the food shortage has caused prices to skyrocket by up to 274% making them altogether unaffordable. At the same time many Yemenis have not had any income for several months. On 31 July 15 the US International Development Agency announced that the US shipped 35,800 tons of wheat worth 21 million USD to Yemen.

Pro-government troops take Houthi positions near Aden

Pro-government troops took control of positions of the Houthi rebels near the port city of Aden. On 30 July 15 local authorities reported that their forces took control of Muthalath al-Ilm with the support of air strikes by the Saudi-led military alliance. They also said that the Shiite Houthi rebels had fired missiles on Aden from this town east of Aden. Also a number of villages north of Aden had been reconquered by the militias calling themselves „Southern Popular Resistance". Militias supporting President Abd-Rabbou Mansour Hadi who had fled into exile, had regained control of Aden itself in mid-June ousting the Houthis.

Libya

Death sentences for Gaddafi followers

On 28 July 15 a Tripoli court pronounced death sentences by firing squad for nine persons close to Gaddafi, among them his son Saif al-Islam (in absentia), former prime minister Baghdadi al-Mahmudi, and the former head of the secret service Abdullah Senussi for their crimes during the uprising against Gaddafi in 2011. Another eight of the total of 37 defendants received lifelong prison sentences. International criticism was voiced about the verdicts, claiming that the defence had been obstructed and the defendants' guilt had not been established (according to the UN Human Rights Council). Previously the International Criminal Court (ICC) had in vain demanded the extradition of Abdullah Senussi and Saif al-Islam, because the ICC had issued warrants of arrest against both of them for crimes against humanity committed during the uprising against Gaddafi.

Tunisia

State of emergency extended by two months

The state of emergency initially pronounced for one month on 04 July 15 in response to the attack in Sousse (see BN of 29 June 15) was extended for another two months starting from 03 August 15. The president's spokesman said that the causes for declaring the state of emergency continued to apply as before. During this time the security forces are vested with far-reaching rights. Freedom of assembly is restricted and the government may take all measures required to control the press and publications of any kind.

Burundi

Masked men kill intelligence chief

Intelligence chief General Adolphe Nshimirimana was assassinated in Burundi. The police informed that masked men shot at Nshimirimana's car in the centre of the capital Bujumbura with machine guns and rock-

¹ Oxfam is an independent association of various aid and development organizations working for more justice in a world without poverty

ets. Three of his body guards died along with the high-ranking officer. He was considered a close aide to President Pierre Nkurunziza and the unofficial number two in the government. Nshimirimana allegedly was instrumental in averting the attempted coup by parts of the army against President Nkurunziza in mid-May.

Central African Republic

Forced conversions of Muslims to Christianity

According to an Amnesty International report published on 31 July 15 Christian militias forced Muslims to abandon their faith or to even convert to Christianity. The report says that Muslims who returned to their homes in the country's west, that is now controlled by Christians, are often not permitted to practice their religion in public. In some cases there had been death threats. Almost no UN peace forces are present in the areas concerned to protect the population.

Somalia

Suicide bomber said to have lived in Germany

Referencing German intelligence sources the press reported that the terrorist responsible for the suicide attack on the Jazeera Palace Hotel in Mogadishu on 26 June 15 (see BN of 27 July 15) was a member of a group of radical Somalis and had lived in Bonn for some time. The report says that he held both Somali and Libyan nationality. Already in 2008 he attempted to leave Germany to join the jihad, but was arrested. After a short while in custody he was released and then succeeded in reaching Somalia via Egypt in 2011. At least six further Islamists from Germany are said to fight for al-Shabaab in Somalia.

Elections postponed

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud declared it impossible to hold the elections due next year because of the security situation. Opposition groups accuse him of using the security situation as a pretext to extent his government's mandate beyond 2016.

Nigeria

Attacks and suicide bombing by Boko Haram

On 02 August 15 Boko Haram fighters attacked the village of Malari, located about 20 km south of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state. They accused the villagers of having betrayed a terrorist hideout to the soldiers and according to the inhabitants they killed 13 persons; 27 were wounded.

On 31 July 15 a female suicide bomber blew herself up on the Gamboru market in the city of Maiduguri killing at least five people.

On 27 July 15 Boko Haram fighters attacked the predominantly Christian city of Dille and neighbouring villages (Askira/Uba LGA) in the north-eastern state of Borno killing at least 25 villagers.

About 250 hostages liberated

On 02 August 15 the Nigerian military announced the liberation of 178 hostages (101 children, 67 women, 10 men) from captivity by Boko Haram and the destruction of several terrorist camps. This happened in the course of a military offensive around the town of Alauri about 70 km south of Maiduguri. Already on 22 July 15 they had succeeded in liberating 59 hostages (29 women, 25 children and five elderly men) when taking two Boko Haram camps located in Konduga LGA in Borno state. Another twelve women and girls had been liberated on the day before.

Cameroon

More than 2,000 Nigerians expelled

As part of further security measures to fight Boko Haram between 2,000 and 2,500 Nigerians staying illegally in Cameroon were expelled and deported to Nigeria on lorries from the city of Kousseri on the border

to Chad on 30 July 15. A local non-governmental organization stated that most of them had fled across the border to Cameroon from Boko Haram violence.

Balkans

Almost 50% of young people want to emigrate

According to a representative study of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (Jugendliche in Südosteuropa, July 2015) almost half of the youths and young adults from eight Balkan countries (ALB, B-H, KOS, MC, SLO, KRO, BU, RO) want to emigrate. The favourite destinations are Germany, the UK, Switzerland and the US. A good third of the respondents is dissatisfied with the condition of the democracies in their countries. Only 17% are content. The largest disenchantment was registered in Macedonia where just about 6% are satisfied with the political system and 44% are dissatisfied. The most pressing concerns throughout south-eastern Europe are unemployment and poverty. 45.5% of all respondents want to leave their countries „most probably“ or “probably”. The most dramatic figures are reported from Albania where 66.7% intent to emigrate, from Kosovo with 55.1% and in Macedonia with 52.8%.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

IS training camp discovered

The British paper The Mirror reported that an IS training camp is located in Osve, a remote village in central Bosnia (about 120 km north of Sarajevo). The report says that IS followers and prominent fighters had bought land there. The village is positioned advantageously on a hill to which no-one can advance without being seen. At least twelve fighters have been trained there and sent to Syria, the report goes on. The Bosnian authorities have been observing the village since May 2015.

Background

Since the war in Bosnia (1992-95) the number of followers of Wahabism has increased. During the war thousands of Mujahedin from North Africa and the Near and Middle East joined the Bosnian Muslims in their battles, many of them later received Bosnian citizenship. The networks from these years are still intact. Today Bosnia is considered to be one of the major places for the recruitment of fighters for IS. Between 2013 and 2014 a total of more than 200 fighters are thought to have left for Syria. 50 returnees from Syria shall continue IS' work in Europe.

The town of Gornja Maoca near Brcko has been known as a radical Islamists centre for some time already. Just as the villages Dubnica and Bosanska Bojna where the IS flags are flying and women are fully veiled. Another stronghold of the Wahabi community is the King Fahd Mosque in Sarajevo, where the largest mosque in south-eastern Europe was built in 2000 with funds from Saudi Arabia. There are reports that the women receive about 500 euros a month for wearing a veil and the men for wearing a beard. In April 2015 there was an attack in Zvornik in the east that is believed to have been committed by Islamists. A policeman was killed and two others were wounded. In June IS published a recruiting video entitled "Honor is in Jihad, a Message to the Balkans“ that is directed especially at young people from Bosnia and Kosovo (see BN of 20 July 15).

A law was adopted in April 2014 that provides for a prison sentence of up to ten years for membership in a terrorist group or for recruiting for such a group. In fall of 2014 several places around Gornja Maoca were raided and many people were arrested. Special units were searching the village again in early February 2015 (see BN of 16 March 15).

Serbia

Baden-Württemberg Higher Administrative Court Classification of Serbia as safe country of origin is constitutional

In its judgment of 24 June 15 (case ref. A6S 1259/14) the Baden-Wurttemberg Higher Administrative Court has found that the classification of Serbia as a safe country of origin is objectionable neither under constitutional nor under EU law. The same applies to Roma people from Serbia. With this ruling the Higher Admin-

Administrative Court set aside a judgment of the Stuttgart Administrative Court of 25 March 14 (case ref: A 11 K 2917/13) which had held that Roma are persecuted for political reasons in Serbia.

FYR Macedonia

Overwhelmed by the onslaught of refugees

The country is on the so-called Western Balkans route from Greece via Macedonia and Serbia to Hungary along which refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and other crisis-ridden countries try to make their escape. According to estimates their numbers have tripled in the current year. On some days in June the authorities registered more than 2,000 people. Some forecasts say that the number will increase up to 10,000 people a day in September.

According to the new asylum law adopted by the parliament on 18 June 15 every new arrival must officially apply for asylum with the police within 72 hours or leave the country. The new law permits refugees in transit to use buses and railways free of charge and so they travel on to Hungary via Serbia.

Aid organizations say that the refugees and migrants are suffering a humanitarian state of emergency during this transit, also because of the fierce heat. The situation was especially precarious for the children and older people, they said.

Albania

Federal government campaign against poverty immigration

The federal government is using newspaper advertisements to try to deter people from travelling to Germany. On two days in sequence large sized advertisements were published simultaneously in the six most read Albanian newspapers that read: „Ne Gjermani nuk ka Azil ekonomik“ (no economic asylum in Germany). These ads are meant as the beginning of an information campaign that is to include other Western Balkan countries as well.

Ukraine

Constitutional court approves reform package for separatist areas

On 31 July 15 the Ukrainian constitutional court held that the project of reforms for more autonomy of the separatist areas in Eastern Ukraine is constitutional and that it will not violate the rights and freedoms of the Ukrainian people, when the regions now controlled by pro-Russian rebels will hold their own elections or have their own police force. Members of the parliament in Kiev had turned to the court in mid-July to decide whether such constitutional changes were legitimate. Many MPs has been worried by the concept of a limited self-determination for the rebel areas in the east. The reforms do not provide for a partial autonomy, but grant more rights to all regions of Ukraine. A partial autonomy would require a special law and its duration would be limited to three years. A Kiev MP stated that the second of a total of three votes on the reform project shall be held in the parliament by end of August and will require a two-thirds majority.

OSCE observers under fire

Observers of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Eastern Ukraine came under fire several times last week. The organization informed that one OSCE observer was slightly injured and suffered a concussion when targeted by gunshots during a mission in Shirokine. Earlier another OSCE team had come under fire in the Donetsk region and bullets hit near an OSCE vehicle in the Luhansk region. There were no injuries in either case.

Government candidate wins by-election in Chernihiv

The candidate of the president's party won the by-elections marred by gross violations in the northern Ukrainian metropolis Chernihiv. After counting almost all of the votes cast 31-year-old Sergey Borisenko received 36 % of the votes. 45-year-old millionaire Gennadi Korban came in second with almost 15 %. During the campaign there had been a lot of controversy about reports of alleged buying of votes by the candi-

dates. The parliamentary seat had to be assigned again after the former MP Valeriy Kulich had been appointed governor of the Chernihiv area at the end of March.

Russian Federation/North Caucasus

Security forces kill eight extremists

In the North Caucasus republic of Ingushetia Russian soldiers killed eight suspected members of the IS terror militia in the night of 02 August 15. On 02 August 15 the Russian anti-terror committee announced that also the cell's leader, Adam Tagilov, had been among the dead. Tagilov is considered to be responsible for an attack in the Chechen capital Grosny in December 2014 in which 25 people had died. The committee also said that Tagilov and his group were responsible for a number of other attacks on security forces and had recently vowed allegiance to IS.

Azerbaijan

Flood of trials against dissidents

The trial against the investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova started on 24 July 15. She has been in pre-trial detention since 05 December 14 on charges of tax evasion and fraud. The original accusation of having driven a colleague to commit suicide had been dropped after this colleague had withdrawn his notification with the police. She could receive a prison sentence of 12 years. Ismayilova researched and reported among other things about the corruption in which the governing family is involved.

On 27 July 15 the trial against the human rights activist Leyla Yunus and her husband Arif Yunus began. They are charged with fraud and treason and may also be sentenced to 12 years in prison. Leyla Yunus is the founder of the Institute of Peace and Democracy and together with her husband Arif Yunus she is working, among other things, for reconciliation in the conflict in Berg-Karabach.

On 30 July 15 a high-ranking member of the Peoples' Front Party, Asif Yusufli, was sentenced to seven and a half years imprisonment. He was charged with fraud and forgery. He mainly worked for democracy and for veterans of the conflict in Berg-Karabach.

His co-defendant, Rafiq Huseynov, was sentenced to twelve and a half years on the same charges.

Already on 22 April 15 the human rights lawyer Intigam Aliyev had been sentenced to seven years imprisonment in a labour camp.

India

India executed one of those responsible for the Mumbai attacks of 1993

More than 22 years after the bomb attacks of Mumbai one of those responsible for them has been executed. According to official statements Yakub Memon was hanged in a prison in Maharashtra state on 30 July 15. Memon had been convicted for planning and funding the assaults on the stock exchange, hotels, and market places in March 1993. In these explosions a total of 257 people died and more than 700 were injured. These had been the deadliest attacks that India ever experienced. About one hundred people had been sentenced in relation with these attacks in total. Eleven received the death penalty, ten of which were commuted to life imprisonment.

About 400 people are on death row in India, hardly any of the death sentences are executed, though. This was the third execution in India in ten years. All of those who were executed had been convicted of terrorism.

Peru

Army liberates hostages of the Sendero Luminoso guerrilla group

During military operations in recent days the Peruvian army freed a total of 54 hostages, including 33 children, that had been held in captivity by the leftist Sendero Luminoso guerrilla group. Most of the adults are women, some of which had been held by the rebels for 25 years. Some of the children aged between one and fourteen, allegedly were conceived as a result of rapes by the kidnappers, others had been abducted from

villages in the vicinity. At the age of 13 or 14 the children were integrated into the lines of the Sendero fighters. More than 120 soldiers and four helicopters were involved in the liberation operation in a mountainous region with dense forests in Pangoa province in the south-east of Peru. A hostage that had managed to escape one month ago had led the security forces to the hostages' hideout.

Between 1980 and 2000 almost 70,000 people had been killed in the confrontations between the Maoist Sendero Luminoso and the state security forces. Already in the mid-nineties the organization had mostly disbanded. Its founder and leader Abimael Guzmán is serving a life prison sentence. The former rebels are now mostly involved in drug dealing. It is estimated that they are still holding more than 100 captives.