

## Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

# Briefing Notes

12 June 2017

### **Afghanistan**

#### **Armed clashes**

Fights are continuing, with cleansing campaigns and raids carried out by the security forces as well as attacks and assaults by the insurgents, in which civilians are killed or wounded. According to press reports, the following provinces were affected during the last two weeks: Nangarhar (east), Farah (west), Faryab, Kunduz (north), Uruzgan, Helmand, Zabul, Kandahar (south), Logar, Kabul (centre), Paktia und Ghazni (southeast: in Ghazni, there were fights between Taliban and IS).

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has documented a total of 2,181 civilian casualties (715 dead and 1,466 injured) in the first quarter of 2017. This is a decrease by 4 percent compared to the same period of the previous year.

#### **Attacks in Kabul**

On 31 May 2017, a suicide bomber detonated a sewage tanker with an explosive device of 1,000 kg in Kabul's diplomatic quarter, leaving at least 160 people dead and more than 400 injured. The German embassy was heavily damaged. A first investigation report of the German security authorities suggests that the German embassy was the target of the attack. An Afghan security guard, who was killed in the blast, apparently prevented that the vehicle reached the embassy's forecourt. Among the victims of the attack were journalists, many government staff and children. A lot of casualties were from the Afghan telecommunications company Roshan whose offices are located near the targeted building.

The following days saw protest marches, sometimes violent, with demonstrators demanding more security. On 2 June, at least seven people were killed when police fired into the crowd to disperse the protesters. During the high-profile funeral of the son of the senate deputy speaker, who was killed during the protests, three suicide bombers detonated themselves, killing at least seven people and injuring another 119. So far, no one has claimed responsibility for the attacks.

#### **Other attacks and assaults**

On 30 May 2017, a suicide attack was launched on the chief of Khogyani district (eastern Nangarhar province). The politician survived, but at least six individuals were injured. In Kabul, two suicide bombers killed themselves incidentally when their explosive devices detonated while they were persecuted by police.

On 1 June, a suicide attack near the airport of Jalalabad (eastern Nangarhar province) left a security staff member dead and four other injured.

On 4 June, a total of six police officers were killed and nine others injured in two separate 'insider attacks' in southern Kandahar and Uruzgan provinces.

On 5 June, three bodyguards of the Baghlan governor were killed in Bala Baluk district of western Farah province.

On 6 June, a rocket fired by Taliban insurgents struck near the NATO headquarters in Kabul. No-one was injured in the attack.

Also on 6 June, a bomb explosion in front of the Great Mosque (Blue Mosque) in the western city of Herat killed at least seven people and injured at least another 16.

On 10 June, an Afghan soldier killed three US servicemen and injured another one in Achin district (Nangarhar province). The attacker was killed in the following fight. The Taliban insurgents have stated that the attacker was one of their members.

## **Algeria**

### **Soldiers killed in attack**

Local media say that two soldiers were killed and another four injured in an attack on an Algerian patrol unit. On 3 June 2017, El-Bilad newspaper reported that the incident took place in eastern Tebessa province near the Tunisian border, a region which is known for intense smuggling activities. This has been the second attack on Algerian security forces since the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan. On 31 May, four individuals were injured in an attack on the national guard, the defence ministry stated.

## **Azerbaijan/Georgia**

### **Journalist abducted**

On 29 May 2017, Azerbaijani journalist Afqan Mukhtarli was apparently abducted from Georgia's capital Tbilisi and forcibly taken to Azerbaijan. On 30 May, the Azerbaijani authorities stated that he was being held in custody in Baku for several offences including money smuggling. In 2015, Mukhtarli had escaped to Georgia because he feared for his safety over his investigations into alleged corruption in the Azerbaijani government. On 4 June, the EU called on Azerbaijan to immediately release all opponents from prison, without giving specific names. Apparently, this statement referred both to Mukhtarli and opposition politician Gozal Bayramli who was arrested on 25 May 2017.

## **China**

### **Xinjiang: Authorities ban Muslim and Uyghur first names**

As was reported in April 2017, the authorities have banned several Muslim and Uyghur first names deemed to overly express extremist attitudes, including Jihad, Imam, Hajj and Saddam. Any babies found to be registered under the listed names will be barred from the *hukou* household registration system, effectively denying them access to the social system including public healthcare and education. Recent reports say that the ban has now been extended to children up to the age of 16 years: a new order requires all Uyghur parents to change the names of their children if they are among those listed.

## **Iran**

### **Twin attacks in Tehran**

On 7 June 2017, the Iranian capital was struck by two terror attacks. The intelligence ministry stated that the terrorists attacked the parliamentary building and the tomb of Islamic revolution leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Official reports say that 17 people (including five attackers) were killed and dozens injured. One of the terrorists was arrested. IS claimed responsibility for the double attacks on the same day; official sources have confirmed IS responsibility. This is the first attack of Sunni Muslim extremists against the Shia-dominated Iran. Reza Seifollahi, deputy secretary of Iran's supreme national security council, stated that the perpetrators were Iranian nationals. Government sources say that the mastermind behind the Tehran attacks was killed by security forces on 10 June. Also, several individuals have been arrested by the authorities.

### **Background**

Shiite Iran is an arch-foe of the Sunni IS terror group. The perpetrators may have come from Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan province near the borders to Pakistan and Afghanistan. There, Sunni Muslim Jundulla militias ('Soldiers of God') are fighting against the revolutionary guard corps (Pasdaran).

## **Iraq**

### **Nineveh province**

On 6 June 2017, the first large wave of refugees (at least 500 families) reached the Kurdish Peshmerga positions, escaping from the town of Tal Afar (west of Mosul). The town is a Shiite enclave populated by ethnic Turkmen in Nineveh province bordering Syria.

Presently, booby traps and mines left by the IS insurgents are being cleared by Iraqi and British special forces. They are a persistent danger in all areas vacated by IS militants, the specialists say. Wherever IS insurgents occupied a place for some time, they have mined houses, flats, and even everyday objects with booby traps and other complex ignition mechanisms, causing serious injuries and deaths.

### **Sinjar**

Apparently, units of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) have peacefully retaken several villages in the Sinjar region from groups linked to the PKK. Apparently, many Yazidi fighters, who have so far been allied to the PKK, are now joining the Shiite-dominated PMF.

### **Mosul**

Meanwhile, people trying to escape from the districts still under IS control are being held up by improvised booby traps. Since the beginning of June, there have been more than 160 documented cases of civilians killed while attempting to escape. The number of unreported cases is assumed to be considerably higher. Also, IS insurgents have started to put explosives on dead bodies, thus aggravating hygienic conditions because corpses are left abandoned for a long time even in liberated areas.

### **Kirkuk**

Apparently, IS militants have set up a large hospital in their stronghold town of Hawija (Kirkuk province), to treat wounded members.

On 7 June 2017, Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar Abadi stated that he would welcome a law changing the name of the province of Kirkuk/Taamin back to its historical name of Kirkuk. At present, different institutions are using different names for the province, with 'Kirkuk' clearly dominating in the province itself. The proposed law would also change the name of the province of Qadisiya back to Diwaniya. As yet, the proposal has not been tabled for parliamentary approval.

## **Kosovo**

### **Parliamentary elections**

On 11 June 2017, snap parliamentary elections were held, triggered by a motion of no confidence on 10 May against the economically liberal coalition government of the Democratic Party of Kosovo PDK and the Democratic League of Kosovo LDK (see also BN of 15 May 2017). A total of 19 political parties competed for 120 parliamentary seats.

Voter turnout was low. First reports dated 12 June said that a new coalition made up of PDK, AAK (Alliance for the Future of Kosovo) and the Initiative for Kosovo has won roughly 35 percent of votes. The final results are expected later this week.

## **Libya**

### **Tripoli**

UNSMIL has requested the Serraj government to take over control of all detention facilities. Many prisons, also in Tripoli, are presently under control of irregular militias; the conditions are described as inhumane. In the wake of the crisis in the Gulf area (see above), the Tobruk government has cut off diplomatic relations with Qatar.

### **Gaddafi supporters released**

Under an amnesty enacted by the Tobruk government, a militia in the western town of Zintan (which supports the Tobruk government located in the east) has released Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, second son of the late Libyan leader Muammar al-Gaddafi. Shortly afterwards, the Tripoli revolutionary brigade released around 30 of Gaddafi's close associates. The background to this move remains unclear. Rumour has it that Saif al-Islam Gaddafi has declared himself in favour of the Tobruk government. In the domain of the Serraj government, however, the death sentence is still levied against him. Also, he is sought by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity.

## **Mali**

### **Peacekeepers killed**

On 8 May 2017, three peacekeepers were killed and three others wounded in an attack on the UN Mission to Mali MINUSMA. The incident took place outside their base in the northern town of Kidal. Shortly before, the UN base was attacked with mortars or rockets, leaving five soldiers injured, it was reported.

## **Montenegro**

### **NATO membership**

On 5 June 2017, Montenegro officially became the 29<sup>th</sup> member of NATO. The Montenegrin parliament had approved accession to the alliance at the end of April. The country's population does not support the decision unanimously. While the government in Podgorica is pro-western oriented, estimates say that half of the country's population consists of pro-Russian ethnic Serbs.

## **Morocco**

### **Clashes during protests in the north**

Clashes between demonstrators and police have erupted during protests in the Rif region, which has a largely ethnic Berber population. In the night of 10 June 2017, police cordoned off the city centre of Imzouren. Apparently, youth protesters threw stones at the police who responded with tear gas. In Al-Hoceima, the hotbed of protest, up to 2,000 people held a peaceful demonstration on 9 June.

Demonstrations in the region began when government forces arrested the 39-year old protest leader Nasser Zefzafi on 29 May. He had become the face of the protest movement rallying against unemployment, poor healthcare and corruption in the Rif region.

## **Nigeria**

### **Boko Haram: major attack at Maiduguri**

On 7 June 2017, fighters of the Boko Haram terror group apparently launched a coordinated attack at the surroundings of Maiduguri (capital of northwestern Borno state). Police say that the terrorists attacked the village of Alidari with air defence guns and other weapons and set several houses on fire. At the same time, several suicide attacks were committed at mosques located around the headquarters of the Chad Basin development authority. It was the fiercest attack in the last 18 months, leaving 17 people dead (including three of the attackers) and 24 more hurt, reports say. In a video message, Boko Haram led by Abubakar Shekau claims responsibility for the attack.

## **Philippines**

### **Marawi: ongoing conflict**

In the city of Marawi, security forces are still fighting against more than 200 Islamist rebels, among them individuals from Indonesia, Malaysia and Arab states. The US government has sent special forces to support the Philippine military. Most inhabitants have fled the city. The Islamists still control several districts apparently encircling up to 1,000 people and using some of them as human shields. On 9 June 2017, fights against the insurgents left 13 soldiers dead. The military reports that so far, at least 138 Islamists, 58 soldiers and 20 civilians have been killed.

### **Manila: Attack on a casino claims dozens of lives**

On 2 June, a gambling casino in the capital Manila was assaulted by a single perpetrator, official sources say. At least 36 people suffocated after the attacker set fire to the gaming tables. Apparently, there is no terrorist background to the incident, although IS has claimed responsibility for the attack. The perpetrator committed suicide.

## **Qatar**

On 5 June 2017, Saudi-Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt cut all diplomatic relations with the emirate of Qatar. On 6 June, Jordan also joined the isolation of Qatar. Moreover, various sanctions regarding trade and traffic were put in place. This is the most severe diplomatic crisis for years in the Gulf region. The countries who broke off relations are accusing Qatar of supporting terror organisations and of their good relations to Shiite Iran, an arch-foe of Saudi Arabia.

With an area of roughly 11,700 square kilometres (about half as much as the German state of Hesse), the peninsula of Qatar is among the richest countries of the world by GDP per capita. On 6 June, Qatar's digital service *Doha News* reported panic buying among consumers. Apparently, oil and gas markets have not yet been affected; for now, the impact on oil and gas prices remains limited. Meanwhile, Qatar has signalled willingness to keep the doors open for dialogue, saying that nationals from countries that cut ties will not be expelled.

## **Qatar/Turkey/Iran**

### **Turkey: Deployment of troops to Qatar**

In a session called at short notice on 7 June 2017, the Turkish parliament ratified two agreements with Qatar allowing Turkish troops to be deployed in the country.

### **Iran: Food aid for Qatar**

After several Arab countries have imposed a de facto blockade against Qatar, Iran has send planes filled with 90 tons of food (mainly fruit and vegetable) to the country. Other aid supplies will be available on request.

### **Turkey/Iran: Talks about Qatar**

On 7 June 2017, Iranian foreign minister Javad Zarif arrived in Ankara for talks to defuse the crisis.

## **Somalia**

### **Al-Shabaab fighters killed by US airstrike**

The US military has stated that several members of the al-Shabaab terrorist militia were killed during an air raid. Apparently, the attack took place on 11 June 2017 some 300 kilometres southwest of Mogadishu. According to first findings, eight al-Shabaab fighters lost their lives in the attack, the military said.

### **Al-Shabaab attack at military base leaves several dead**

On 8 June, an assault of al-Shabaab militants at a military base in northeast Somalia killed at least 25 people, including 15 al-Shabaab fighters and 10 members of the security forces. Al-Shabaab, however, put the number of killed soldiers at 61. The incident took place in the town of Af-Urur west of Bosaso port city in Somalia's semi-autonomous Puntland region.

## **Syria**

### **Deir al-Zour**

In the context of the offensives against Mosul and Raqqa, the anti-IS coalition has significantly increased the number of air strikes.

### **Raqqa**

The operation *Wrath of Euphrates*, conducted by units of the Kurdish-led SDF coalition and backed by French, British and US special units, has succeeded in encircling the city of Raqqa in the north, the west and the east. On 6 June 2017, first units reached the city's outskirts. In the south, the Euphrates river marks the limit of the city. Its bridges were destroyed a long time ago.

### **Fights in the provinces**

Fights between rebels, IS and government troops have been reported from Daraa, Hama, Homs, Idlib, Deir al-Zour, Raqqa and Aleppo governorates.

Near At-Tanf (bordering Jordan and Iraq), coalition forces have attacked a unit of fighters loyal to President Assad who apparently had crossed a neutral zone and refused to withdraw. The details of the attack are still unclear.

### **Casualty figures for month of May**

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reports a total of 2,311 confirmed deaths in May, among them 840 civilians (including 131 children). The figures are provisional.

## **Turkey**

### **Judicial proceedings against journalists continued**

On 8 June 2017, the trial against Erol Önderoğlu, *Reporters Without Borders*' representative in Turkey, was continued in Istanbul. Sebnem Korur Fincancı, president of Turkey's *Human Rights Foundation*, and *Cumhuriyet* journalist Ahmet Nesin were also put on trial. Because of their participation in a solidarity action on behalf of the pro-Kurdish newspaper *Özgür Gündem*, the defendants are accused of propaganda for a terrorist organisation. In June 2016, they had been kept in pre-trial detention for 10 days. Now they are facing prison terms of up to 14 and a half years.

*Reporters Without Borders* says that a total of 56 journalists, human rights activists and intellectuals are facing trial for having symbolically taken over for one day each the chief editorship of the paper (which meanwhile has been closed by decree) in May and August 2016. Apparently, about a dozen of the defendants have already received suspended sentences.

### **Chair of Amnesty-International Turkey detained**

On 6 June 2017, the head of the human rights organisation in Turkey, Taner Kılıç, and 22 lawyers were arrested in Izmir. They are accused of links to Fethullah-Gülen's movement. Amnesty International says that the arrest of Kılıç is neither related to his work for AI nor directed against the organisation. It is unclear why Kılıç is suspected of links to Gülen's movement, AI said.

### **AKP party members arrested**

On 3 June 2017, Birol Erdem, chief adviser to prime minister Binali Yıldırım, was arrested along with his wife for having helped accelerate the career of judges with suspected links to Gülen's movement, Turkish media report.

On 5 June, the son-in-law of deputy head of government Bülent Arinc was apparently arrested on suspicion of being a follower of Gülen.

### **Opposition politicians face deprivation of citizenship**

On 5 June, the Turkish interior ministry published a list of 130 individuals who are residing abroad and are accused of grave offences. Those who do not turn to face justice in Turkey within three months will be deprived of their citizenships. Apart from Gülen himself, the list contains the names of the pro-Kurdish opposition HDP members of parliament Faysal Sariyıldız and Tugba Hezer Öztürk.

## **Ukraine**

### **Visa-free travel to the European Union**

On 11 June 2017, the visa-free travel regime for Ukrainian nationals, which had been approved by a large majority of the European Parliament in the beginning of April, entered into force for most member states (excluding Ireland and the United Kingdom). The Schengen member states Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein have also joined the EU's policy of visa-freedom for a stay of 90 days during a period of 180 days. To enter the EU, Ukrainian citizens need a biometric passport with fingerprints stored in the chip. Around 3.5 million out of the total of 42m Ukrainians are in possession of this type of passport. The regulation is applicable to business and tourism trips, as well as for family visits. The visa does not entitle to

work. The Ukrainian border police stated that during the first hours after the abolition of the visa obligation, approx. 600 Ukrainian citizens in possession of a biometric passport have travelled to the EU.

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ivs-anfragen@bamf.bund.de