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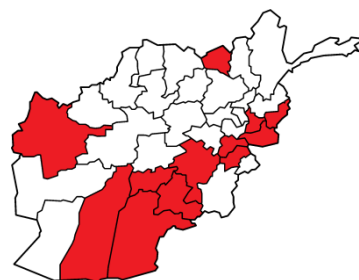
Briefing Notes

22 May 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 week: Zabul, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Helmand (south), Nangarhar, Laghman, Kunar (east), Kunduz (northeast; here, government forces apparently succeeded in retaking Qala-e-Zal district), Logar (central), Ghazni, Paktia (southeast) and Herat (west).



Attacks and assaults

On 16 May 2017, a bomb attack on a police station in the city of Kandahar left at least one civilian dead.

On 17 May, IS insurgents attacked the state broadcasting building in Nangarhar province; three of the attackers lost their lives.

On 18 May, insurgents attacked an Afghan army bus in western Herat city, killing at least one individual and wounding another two.

On 19 May, a police officer killed five of his comrades in an insider attack in eastern Nangarhar. In Mohammad Agha district of central Logar province, at least eleven civilians lost their lives in an attack.

On 20 May, several Taliban fighters attacked a Kabul Bank branch in the city of Gardez (southeastern Paktia province), killing two police officers and one civilian.

On the same day, a German female aid worker and an Afghan guard were killed and a Finnish woman was kidnapped after unknown gunmen stormed the guesthouse of the charity organisation 'Operation Mercy' in Kabul.

Albania

Opposition boycott ended

The opposition's boycott of parliament ended last week when Prime Minister Edi Rama of the governing Socialist Party and opposition leader Luzlim Basha (Democratic Party) agreed on a compromise on 18. May 2017. The agreement deal includes an all-party coalition government, with the office of deputy prime minister and four key ministries allocated to the opposition. Additionally, the parliamentary elections originally scheduled for mid-June are to be postponed in order to establish the preconditions for a free and fair voting.

For several months, the opposition had blocked progress in parliament, refusing to participate in the regular parliamentary elections scheduled for 18 June 2017. They accused the government of being involved in organised crime. Prime Minister Rama, in turn, claimed that the opposition was trying to prevent the planned reform of the judicial system because of their close ties to corrupt judges and prosecutors (see BN of 8 and 15 May 2017). The agreement was reached with EU and U.S. mediation.

Central African Republic

Rebel attacks leave dozens of dead

On 17 May 2017, the national Red Cross reported that 115 dead bodies have been recovered after rebel fighters attacked the town Bangassou (see also BN of 15 May 2017). Initially, a toll of 30 dead was given. About 7,500 people have fled to neighbouring DR Congo.

On 16 May 2017, the UN stated that up to 100 people were killed in fights lasting from 7 May to 9 May between anti-Balaka groups and Séléka rebels in Alindao town (west of Bangassou). A different source reports a death toll of at least 37.

More fighting erupted on 16 May in the central town of Bria, about 200 kilometres northwest of Bangassou. At least 17 individuals died, about 15,000 people were displaced.

China

Tibet: self-immolation

In the Tibetan autonomous prefecture of Haibei (according to other sources: Huangnan prefecture) in the province of Qinghai, a Tibetan monk set himself on fire on 18 or 19 May 2017 and died from his injuries. This has been the 150th case of self-immolation in China since 2009, Radio Free Asia reports.

Côte d'Ivoire

Mutiny of soldiers ended

The mutineers announced to return to their barracks after their demands over back pay and bonuses were met. They were promised an immediate payment of about 7,600 euros and an additional 3,000 euros each by the end of June 2017.

Since 12 May, around 8,400 soldiers had refused service and blocked main roads in several cities.

Most of the mutineers are former rebels who had supported President Alassane Ouattara who took over power in 2011 during post-election violence when the country was on the brink of a civil war. After the integration of many rebels into the regular government forces, intra-army conflicts and brief revolts have repeatedly taken place.

DR Congo

Ebola

On 21 May 2017, the WHO confirmed a total of 37 suspected cases of Ebola in Likati health district in northeastern Bas-Uélé province. Meanwhile, four individuals have died of the disease.

Jail break incident: 4,000 escape from Makala prison

In the early morning of 17 May 2017, around 50 suspected followers of the Bundu Dia Mayala party (BDM) attacked the central Makala prison in Kinshasa and freed their leader Ne Muanda Nsemi, who is a member of parliament. Apparently, around 4,000 of a total of 7,000-8,000 inmates escaped during the operation.

After a three-week standoff between Nsemi's armed followers and police, in which his residence was nearly completely destroyed, Nsemi had been arrested on 3 March 2017 in Kinshasa for having insulted the head of state, formed an armed group, incited racial hatred, carried out kidnappings and held weapons illegally. Already in January and February 2017, violent clashes had erupted between police and BDM supporters, claiming the lives of several individuals. Nsemi is a self-styled prophet and leads the religious sect 'Bundu Dia Kongo (BDK)', which had been banned in 2008 and whose political wing is the BDM party founded by him in 2009. Nsemi's supporters strive for the revival of the pre-colonial Kingdom of Kongo which had consisted of what is now DR Congo's province of Kongo-Central as well as parts of Angola, Gabon and of the Republic of the Congo.

Egypt

IS suspects referred to military court over church bombings

The Egyptian public prosecutor has referred 48 people to the country's military judiciary for suspected IS membership and involvement in the attacks on Christian Coptic churches in December 2016 and on Palm Sunday 2017. The suspects are also held responsible for the killing of eight police officers in a security checkpoint near Kharga city in Egypt's New Valley province in January 2017. Of the 48 suspects, 31 are in custody, while the others still at large, the public prosecutor's office said. In total, more than 70 people were killed in the attacks in Cairo, Alexandria and Tanta.

FYR Macedonia

President mandates Zaev to form government

Macedonian President Gjorge Ivanov has officially asked Social Democrat leader Zoran Zaev to form a government.

Since the beginning of February, Ivanov had refused government formation despite the fact that Zaev had secured a clear majority in the Macedonian parliament in coalition with three ethnic Albanian parties. Ivanov opposed the government programme, arguing that it would endanger the country's unity. For weeks, supporters of the former governing party VMRO-DPMNE had taken to the streets, with protests degenerating into riots in parliament in Skopje at the end of April (see BN of 8 May 2017).

The breakthrough came as pressure mounted from both EU and US. Government formation is to be completed by the end of June.

Iran

Presidential elections: Rouhani wins re-election by a wide margin

According to the official final results, 68-year old President Hassan Rouhani secured 57 percent of the vote in the elections held on 19 May 2017, thus claiming a decisive win over his hardliner rival Ebrahim Raisi who gained 38 percent. According to the ministry of the interior, voter turnout was over 73 percent. To deal with the long queues, the polling stations (in total more than 63,000) extended the voting by several hours. Now, the Iranian Guardian Council has three days to examine possible irregularities or objections from the candidates. Already on the election day, defeated candidate Raisi complained of election violations by Rouhani's political camp. Supporters of Rouhani, in turn, have brought allegations of unlawful interference in favour of Raisi.

Rouhani's major challenge will be to modernize the country's economic system and to generate jobs for the young generation. Economic policy is the President's core competency, with 80 percent of all economic activities being controlled, directly or indirectly, by the state. Nearly ten million people are working in the public sector.

Rouhani's plans to move toward a more open society, presumably a central factor for many of his voters, will meet fierce opposition from the conservative camp. Foreign and security policy will remain in the hands of Pasdaran and the country's supreme leader Khamenei who are more than likely to prevent closer relations with the West.

Municipal elections in Tehran

On 19 May 2017, candidates backing moderate reforms swept council elections in Tehran, with the conservatives losing power in the capital for the first time in 14 years.

Iraq

Ongoing battle for Mosul

There are increasing reports from human rights organisations that members of the Popular Mobilization Forces are arbitrarily detaining and torturing Sunni Muslim men in Mosul.

Intense fighting is ongoing in Mosul; more districts and villages around the city have been liberated. Mosul's Tamuz-17 district was an area of particular intense fighting last week; the district is now largely controlled by government forces.

Gorran party leader passed away

On 19 May 2017 Nawshirwan Mustafa, founder of the Kurdish Gorran party, passed away at the age of 73. Political implications for Kurdistan's future remain to be seen. Two days prior to his death, Gorran and announced to withdraw from Kurdistan's coalition government. Gorran is the second largest party in the Kurdish parliament.

Israel/Palestinian Autonomous Areas

Israel's security cabinet approves economic relief measures for Palestinians

Ahead of US President Donald Trump's visit, Israel's security cabinet approved a package of economic measures on 20 May 2017 meant to ease the situation of Palestinians. The package includes the construction of new housing units in West Bank settlements which are under Israeli security administration, the approval of two industrial zones and the 24 hours opening of the Allenby Bridge crossing that connects the West Bank and Jordan.

Kosovo

Islamism on the rise

The German federal government is concerned about a rise in Islamist fundamentalism in Kosovo sponsored by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. This is evident from the answer to a parliamentary inquiry (BT-Dr 18/11962). According to the report, missionary organisations from Saudi Arabia are active in Kosovo. Also, the German government notes growing influence from Turkey.

Initially, Islamization began as a silent process after the end of the Kosovo war, with Saudi-Arabia, Kuwait and other Islamic countries investing huge sums in the reconstruction of mosques, sending clerics and supporting people in need. Today, the country has 742 mosques plus other Muslim buildings like Koranic schools. Triggered by poverty and unemployment, the spread of radical Islamist tendencies has been registered also in secular Kosovo. Experts say that there are around 50,000 supporters of conservative Islam in Kosovo. From 2012 until the end of 2016, a total of 316 of them have apparently left the country in order to join the IS, among them also women and children.

The Kosovo says that investigations have been initiated against about 240 people for organisation of and participation in terrorist acts within and outside Kosovo, and for recruiting, supporting and financing of terrorism. Around 130 of the suspected have been arrested since 2013.

Libya

On 17 May 2017, unidentified gunmen attacked a government building in Tripoli; all staff was evacuated. The Nawasi Brigade, who is co-operating with the UN-backed forces of the unity government, was able to thwart the attack.

On 16 May, the day marking the third anniversary of the 'Operation Dignity' which led to the liberation of Benghazi from Islamist control, renegade General Khalifa Haftar, commander of the operation, announced his readiness to lead his troops in a similar operation against Tripoli, which he said was a "safe haven" for terrorists. Haftar's remarks were in sharp contrast to last week's negotiations between him and representatives of the unity government.

Mali

UN concerned about increasing number of extremist attacks in the country's central part

In view of the increasing number of attacks launched by extremists, the United Nations are considering an extension of their military mission in the region. "We are awaiting the upcoming deployment in the centre

(of Mali) of a rapid intervention force to deal with the situation of insecurity”, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, under secretary-general for UN peacekeeping operations said. The troops will be provided by Senegal, he said during a visit to the country on 17 May 2017. The terrorist organisation al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and other extremist groups are mainly active in Mali’s north. However, they are increasingly also targeting the central part. At present, the ‘blue helmet’ operation in Mali is the most dangerous UN mission, with than 15,000 UN soldiers and policemen striving to stabilise the situation. The UN contingent includes nearly 800 German soldiers deployed in the northeastern city of Gao.

Niger

Meningitis epidemic

According to a UN memorandum dated 17 May 2017, the authorities of Niger have reported more than 3,000 cases of meningitis since January, causing 180 deaths. Thus, the fatality rate is 5.9 percent; about half of the victims are children aged 5 to 14. According to the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the number of new infections has decreased since the ministry of health started a vaccination campaign in the beginning of April.

Nigeria

Boko Haram: suicide attacks in Maiduguri

On 18 May 2017, three male suicide assassins tried to storm a dormitory for female students of the University of Maiduguri (capital of north-eastern Borno state). When they were detected by security officers, one of them triggered his explosives belt. The assassin died, three security officers were injured. The other terrorists escaped and blew themselves up near the department of veterinary medicine.

Boko Haram: farmers killed

On 13 May, several farmers from the village of Amrawa (about 16 kilometres from Maiduguri) working on their fields were attacked with machetes by suspected Boko Haram fighters; six of them were killed. A subsequent attack at a neighbouring village ended in four of the Islamists being killed by a vigilante group.

Somalia

Attacks

On 17 May 2017, a car bomb exploded in Mogadishu’s Wadajir district killing three Somali policemen, two Somali intelligence officials and a United Nations explosives expert. Before, security forces had forbidden the vehicle’s driver to park his car in front of the police station and arrested him. Al-Shabaab fighters triggered the bomb with a remote detonator while security forces were trying to defuse it.

On the same day, a booby trap exploding in Qansahdhere town (Bay region) injured the deputy district commissioner and several soldiers.

Al-Shabaab has intensified attacks in the Bay, Bakool and Hiraaan regions as retaliation for the increasing pressure which the Kenyan military is exerting along the Kenyan-Somali border in the last months.

Fighting

On 17 May, al-Shabaab fighters attacked an Ethiopian AMISOM base in Halgan town (Hiraaan region) and took control of parts of the town.

Uganda increases AMISOM contingent

On 15 May 2017, Uganda’s President Yoweri Museveni announced to double his country’s AMISOM contingent. Currently, about 2,700 Ugandan soldiers are deployed in Somalia.

Soldiers’ protests

On 18 May, soldiers of the Somali army protested against the missing payment of their salaries. Dozens of men from the 12th division occupied the defence ministry and blocked the surrounding streets. During his election campaign, President Mohamed Farmajo had promised the soldiers regular payment of their salaries.

South Sudan

Report on human rights violations in Yei town

A UN report dated 19 May 2017 documents numerous human rights violations committed in and around Yei town (Central Equatoria state) by both parties to the conflict in the time period July 2016 to January 2017. The abuses were committed against people because of their ethnicity and/or their alleged support of the other side. Government forces apparently killed 114 people. It is unclear how many killings were committed by the armed opposition forces because it is difficult to access their operational areas. The charges made against them include indiscriminate shelling of civilians, targeted killings, looting, arson and sexual violence against women and girls.

The situation in Yei, a multi-ethnic town with 200,000 to 300,000 inhabitants, had been relatively stable for a long time despite the civil war that has been raging in the country since 2013. When rebel leader and former vice president Riek Machar and a small group of his supporters had fled to the Democratic Republic of Congo and was followed by government forces, fighting erupted along their escape route. The town of Yei was particularly affected by the clashes, and more than half of the inhabitants were forced to flee their homes.

Syria

Homs back under full government control

Media reports say that since 21 May 2017, the city of Homs has been back under full government control for the first time in five years. With approx.. 50 busses and 30 trucks, rebels and their families were evacuated on Sunday from al Waer district, a former rebel stronghold. The insurgents from Homs were guaranteed safe conduct to other areas controlled by opposition forces..

Pro-government militia fighters killed in US attack

On 18 May, US-led troops shelled pro-government militias who had advanced to the military base in Al-Tanf, where also US soldiers are deployed, in spite of warning shots and other measures. The Syrian Observatory for Human rights reported eight dead.

Tunisia

Protests against amnesty bill

During the last weeks, thousands took to the streets of the country's capital in protest against an amnesty to businessmen who are charged with corruption. The bill proposed by President Béji Caid Essebsi provides that corruption investigations be stopped if the suspects (corrupt businessmen and officials from the times of former dictator Ben Ali) pay a fine and reimburse their illegal gains. This 'economic reconciliation law' aims at pumping money into the economy. Analysts and many Tunisians, however, consider it a step backward in the democratisation process.

State of emergency extended again

On 16 May 2017, President Essebsi decreed that the state of emergency be extended by another 30 days. The emergency had been imposed in November 2015 after a terror attack at the Presidential guard and was extended several times because of a continuing terrorist threat.

Turkey

Amnesty International criticises mass dismissals

Media report that in a new study, which Amnesty International intends to present today in Istanbul, the organisation criticises Turkey's political leaders. The organisation lists several human rights violations by the dismissal of more than 100,000 state employees since the state of emergency was imposed. Many of the dismissals of policemen, judges, teachers, journalists and others were evidently arbitrary, unjust and/or politically motivated, AI says, infringing also the human right of due process and the principle of non-discrimination. The dismissals were ordered in the framework of emergency decrees issued by President

Erdogan and by the government. For the study, AI interviewed 33 dismissed employees who, with one exception, had not been informed of the reasons for their dismissal. Since the dismissed do not find a new job, they and their families are deprived of their livelihood, the study says. Moreover, they are not allowed to leave the country. In many cases, the passports were invalidated.

To challenge the dismissals in a court seems impossible at least in the moment, the study continues. A commission set up for this purpose in January 2017 is not yet operational.

Erdogan re-elected as ruling AKP party leader

After the successful constitutional referendum, President Erdogan has resumed his role as chairman of the governing AKP party. Unsurprisingly, he was re-elected as party leader by the delegates on a special party convention held on 21 May, and replaced Prime Minister Yildirim in office. Being the only candidate, Erdogan gained more than 96 percent of the delegates' votes. Under the old constitution, Erdogan had to give up his party membership in order to be elected President, since the head of state had to be neutral and independent of parties. This principle was abandoned by the constitutional referendum held in April 2017.

Yemen

Thousands protest against Saudi-Arabia and the USA

On 22. May 2017, protests erupted in Sanaa against the US-backed Saudi Arabian intervention, with protesters shouting "No to American terror on Yemen". The protesters called on the Saudis to stop their aggression. The protest rally had been initiated by the Shia Muslim Houthi rebels who are controlling the country's capital.

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