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Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

20 July 2015

Afghanistan

Security situation

The fighting between insurgents and the security forces continued also last week. The most affected provinces were Kapisa, Wardak (centre), Paktia (south-east), Helmand, Nimroz, Uruzgan (south) and Laghman (east). Nangarhar (east) saw more violent confrontations between the Taliban and followers of IS. On 19 July 15 the Taliban attempted to conquer Khwaja Ghar district in Takhar province in the north. The situation is reported as being very tense in six other cities of the province. Led by Pakistani and Uzbek commanders the Taliban allegedly burnt down at least 40 houses in Almar district in the northern province of Faryab. The province is in danger of falling to the Taliban after almost all pro-government militias withdrew. The capital Maymana is also at risk. On 15 July 15 at least 24 persons were injured there in the explosion of a bomb in front of a branch of Kabul Bank. On 20 July 15 at least 14 Afghan soldiers died in an airstrike by US helicopters of an army checkpoint in Logar province (centre). The incident is still under investigation.

There also was a suicide bombing of a police control post in Helmand on 15 July 15 and a bomb attack of a police car in Kabul on 16 July 15 in which two civilians were wounded. On the same day several policemen were selectively killed in Kandahar (south) and the houses of tribal elders were attacked in Logar (centre). On 16 July 15 four children died in the explosion of a land mine in Maidan Wardak (centre). Also on 16 July 15 a policeman became the victim of a suicide bomber in Khost (south-east).

Iraq

Serious attack in Diyala province

In an IS attack on a crowded market square in Khan Bani Saad (Diyala province) at least 120 people died, over 130 were wounded, some seriously, on 17 July 15. A van loaded with explosives blew up in midst of a crowd of shoppers for the festivities of breaking the fast, Eid al-Fitr. Most victims are Shiites.

This assault in Khan Bani Saad is one of the most serious incidents in Iraq since Saddam Hussein was ousted in 2003.

Offensive in Anbar province

On 13 July 15 the Iraqi army initiated a large-scale offensive against IS in the west of the country to reconquer Anbar province. Reportedly the Shiite militia Hashid Shaabi, members of the security forces, and Sunni tribes are participating in the operation that involves about 10,000 men. This province has a predominantly Sunni population and is one of IS' major strongholds. In recent weeks the Iraqi army had several times announced the start of an offensive without succeeding in actually pushing back IS. Last year IS had taken control of several major cities, including Ramadi, in the region.

Turkey

Constitutional court repels law

On 14 July 15 the Turkish constitutional court repealed a law as unconstitutional that had aimed at outlawing private cramming schools (Dershane) after September 2015. Millions of students are attending such classes

to prepare for the entrance examinations of secondary schools and universities. The law had been adopted two years ago under the then Prime Minister Erdogan to abolish one of the main sources of income of the Gülen movement. The complaint had been filed by the opposition party CHP. Erdogan who was elected president last year, accuses the Islamic preacher Fethulla Gülen, who is living in the US, of intending to undermine the state organization with parallel structures and planning a coup.

Syria

Punishments

According to reports of the Syrian Human Rights Observatory IS crucified and flogged 94 people in Syria during the Ramadan fasting month for breaching the fast. They had been locked in iron cages in central roads and squares.

Prisoners pardoned

The media report that Syrian authorities pardoned and released several hundred prisoners on 18 July 15 on the occasion of the festivities for breaking the fast. It is said that most of them are members of the opposition or participants in the anti-government protests that had started in 2011.

Yemen

Fighting for Aden continues

The Yemeni government in exile announced on 17 July 15 that the southern province of Aden had been fully liberated from the occupation of the Shiite Houthi militia. Dozens of fighters of the Iran-supported Houthi militia had surrendered, it said. Yemeni sources had reported that several ministers had returned to the strategically important port city from exile in Saudi Arabia already on 16 July 15. But on 19 July 15 the Houthi rebels attacked Aden again, killing at least 57 civilians and injuring 215. Fighting for several districts of the city is ongoing.

The Houthi militia continues to control the capital Sanaa and large parts of the country. The alliance led by Saudi Arabia has been flying air raids against Houthi bases in Yemen for three months. A humanitarian crisis has resulted in Yemen since the conflict escalated at the end of March. More than 80% of the 26 million inhabitants are dependent on aid, so far over 3,200 people lost their lives in this conflict.

Egypt

Death sentences to be executed

Following a press report that is based on information on an Egyptian news portal the death sentences against Mohammad Badie, the supreme spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood and against his deputy Khairat Shatir are to be executed soon after the festivities of breaking the fast in an Alexandria prison.

Casualties during protest

In violent confrontations between protesting followers of the Muslim Brotherhood and the security forces six protesters died in Gizeh on 17 July 15.

IS attacks

Extremists of the Egyptian branch of IS killed at least five soldiers in an attack on a military post in northern Sinai near the village of Sheikh Suweid on 18 July 15. A patrol boat of the Egyptian military was set on fire off the shore by fighting between extremists and the military near the city of Rafah on 16 July 15.

Draft anti-terrorism act amended

The controversial bill that included a minimum prison sentence of two years for journalists that deviated from the official information given on any extremist act of violence, is to be amended. The prison sentences are to be replaced by a high fine (when converted into euros between 23,000 and 58,000 euros).

Tunisia

Arrests

After the terrorist attack in Sousse about three weeks ago the Tunisian government has substantially stepped up its fight against extremists. According to information from the Interior Ministry the security forces arrested 74 suspected members of extremist organisations in 845 raids between 11 and 17 July 15. On 20 July 15 the EU foreign ministers will discuss possibilities to further support Tunisia.

Algeria

Casualties in attack on a military convoy

The Algerian Defence Ministry stated that at least nine soldiers died and two were injured when their convoy was attacked in the south-eastern province of Ain Defla (140 km from Algiers) on 17 July 15. On 18 July 15 a letter of Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) appeared on the internet in which it assumed responsibility for the attack and claimed that 14 soldiers had been killed.

Guinea

Camara charged

Charges for being responsible for the killing of more than 150 people in the Conakry stadium in 2009 have been brought against the former military dictator Camara on 09 July 15. In addition to him 13 further members of the former military government have been indicted and eight have already been sentenced. Camara announced that he will stand for the presidential elections in Guinea in October 2015.

Burundi

UN Special Rapporteurs call for action by UN Security Council

In a joint statement issued on 16 July 15 seven UN Special Rapporteurs urged the UN Security Council to prevent the imminent outbreak of violence caused by the upcoming presidential elections. The world is witnessing an escalating pattern of politically motivated violence they said and that the elections scheduled for 21 July 15 would most probably lead to more instability and confrontations in Burundi which may affect the entire region. The experts demanded the immediate disarmament of the pro-government militia Imbonerakure which was spreading violence among the population.

About 145,000 Burundians have already fled to neighbouring countries.

Somalia

Security situation

At least twelve Somali and AMISOM troops and ten al-Shabaab fighters died in a car bombing of a convoy of AMISOM and government units and the resulting firefight near the city of Manas in southern Somalia on 19 July 15.

Two al-Shabaab commanders were killed in a US drone attack in Bardheere (Gedo region) on 15 July 15. According to different information from Kenyan government sources 30 or 51 extremists were allegedly killed in operations by Kenyan units, also in the Gedo region. In a shoot-out between Kenyan soldiers and al-Shabaab fighters near the small town of Elade (Gedo region) seven al-Shabaab members died on 15 July 15. In an attack on a military base in the Middle Shabelle region al-Shabaab fighters killed at least four soldiers on 13 July 15.

Observers think that the current operations against al-Shabaab are related to President Obama's visit to Kenya for the Global Entrepreneurship Summit on 24 July 15.

Nigeria

Replacement of military leadership

On 13 July 15 President Buhari dismissed the supreme military command, the national security advisor, and the head of the military intelligence agency. Abayomi Gabriel Olonishakin became the new chief of staff. The supreme commanders of the three individual military services are T. Y. Buratai (army), Ibok-Ete Ekwe Ibas (navy), and Sadique Abubakar (air force). The new head of the army and the newly appointed national security advisor Monguno both come from Borno, the state most affected by the Boko Haram conflict. The replacements are Buhari's response to the wave of suicide and other bombings and several Boko Haram attacks on villages that claimed over 600 lives so far and that started after he took office.

Many casualties and suicide bombings by Boko Haram

The press reported on 14 July 15 that fighters of the terror organization Boko Haram attacked the three villages Kalwa, Misala and Gwollam in Monguno Local Government Area (Borno state) on 11 July 15. They killed 43 people, burnt down houses and stole food.

On 14 July 15 Boko Haram fighters ambushed the city of Damasak that is only a few kilometres from the border to Niger. Several people were killed and houses burnt down. The attack came only a few days after the withdrawal of soldiers from Chad and Niger who had been stationed in the city.

On 16 July 15 a double suicide attack occurred in the market place of the city of Gombe, the capital of the state with the same name. At first a female bomber blew herself up and a few minutes later a hidden bomb exploded, killing about 50 people and wounding around 70.

On 17 July 15 two female suicide bombers - an elderly woman and an about 10-year-old girl - detonated one bomb each at the entrance of an outdoor Muslim prayer site in the city of Damaturu, the capital of Yobe state. A total of eleven people died.

Cameroon

Double suicide bombing in Fotokol

On 12 July 15 a female suicide bomber blew herself up in a bar near a military base in the city of Fotokol (near the border to Nigeria, Extrême-Nord region) after sundown on 12 July 15. When soldiers approached the bar soon thereafter a second female assassin exploded another bomb. Including the attackers, at least 13 people died in the bombings, among them one soldier from Chad. The 17 wounded included four soldiers from Chad and three from Cameroon. Both women had been wearing burkas and therefore the region's governor banned the wearing of burkas and face veils on 15 July 15. Also assemblies of larger groups of Muslims without permission were banned.

Ukraine

Separatists announce withdrawal of heavy weapons

On 19 July 15 the pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine announced the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the front line on the same day. In agreement with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) 100 calibre weapons are to be withdrawn at least three kilometres from the front. The separatists underlined that they did not want to provoke any new outbreaks of violence and would make a unilateral contribution to peace.

Debate on constitutional reform to grant Eastern Ukraine a special status

The Ukrainian parliament initiated a debate on a constitutional reform on 16 July 15. The reform provides for a special law on local administration in the areas that broke off from Kiev. Especially the nationalist deputies oppose any concessions to the separatist areas. A constitutional reform aiming at decentralization was discussed in the first reading. The draft constitution grants more authority to the rebellious areas in Eastern Ukraine. However, in contrast to the separatist's demand the areas they control shall not be granted semi-autonomy. The constitutional reform on decentralization is considered an important contribution to the peace process in Eastern Ukraine and to bringing an end to the armed conflict there. If approved in the voting, a

second reading shall take place in fall. Thereafter the constitutional reform must be adopted with a two-thirds majority.

Eight soldiers die in Eastern Ukraine

In fighting with pro-Russian separatists eight soldiers were killed and 16 wounded within 24 hours as reported by the Ukrainian Security and Defence Council on 15 July 15. This is the highest number of victims in the last five weeks. The Ukrainian government accused the separatists of using artillery which is outlawed under the Minsk Agreement.

Russian Federation/Northern Caucasus

Terror organization vows allegiance to IS

The Islamist terror organization Caucasian Emirate has been around for about eight years. It claims North Caucasus as its territory, an area of the Russian Federation that also includes the republics Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia. While the organization is not controlling the area it regularly commits terror attacks to attract attention. A short while ago the Islamist group made the headlines in the Russian media again. It had posted a message on the internet stating that it was joining IS. And it received a prompt response: IS spokesman Abu Muhammad Al-Adnani declared the self-appointed jihadists to be members of IS and proclaimed a new governorate in North Caucasus. Experts on Caucasus fear that this will increase instability in that region. It is quite possible that the new jihadists will engage in a series of terror attacks to demonstrate their strength and power. Furthermore they did not ask IS only for arms supplies, but also for additional fighters. The CIS Anti-Terrorism Centre had so far assumed that about 5,000 Russian citizens had gone to Iraq and Syria to join the IS terror organization.

FYR Macedonia

Government crisis resolved

After several attempts and with EU mediation the government and the opposition agreed on early parliamentary elections on 24 April 15 (see BN of 15 June 15; 26 May 15). The opposition will end its boycott of the parliament by 01 September 15 and appoint a new interior minister. By 15 January 16 Prime Minister Gruevsky shall step down in favour of an interim government.

Background

The conflict between the opposition and the government started after the last elections when the losing social democrats (SDSM) accused the governing party (VMRO-DPMNE) of election fraud and boycotted the parliament ever since then. A phone tapping scandal, mass protests and an as yet mysterious police operation with several casualties in Kumanovo (see BN of 18 May 15; 11 May 15; 27 April 15) escalated the situation to such a point that the EU had to interfere.

Kosovo

Anti-radicalism strategy adopted

In its fight against Islamist terror Kosovo's government plans to adopt a new anti-radicalism strategy in August. A law outlawing fighting in foreign armies had been adopted in March. Also the head of the Muslim community, Mufti Naim Ternava, spoke out publicly against IS calling it an „enemy of Islam“, he urged the citizens not to follow the terrorists.

A KFOR general said that the country was not threatened by the terrorists more than any other country. The Kosovo police was doing a great job both in prevention and prosecution.

Background

Security experts have repeatedly reported recruiting attempts that are fuelled by the country's dire poverty and widespread unemployment. According to official statements over 200 Kosovars are actively fighting in Iraq and Syria.

For years the influence of Wahhabi tendencies has been growing. In early June a video entitled „Honour is in jihad, a message to the Balkans“ was published that cites Muslim history on the Balkans and in which IS fighters from the Balkans call on their compatriots to go to Iraq and Syria for IS. Those who could not go should fight the „dictators“ on the Balkans: „Put explosives below their cars, in their houses, if you can. Take poison and put it in their drinks, if you can“, is said in the video.

On 11 July 15 the Kosovo police arrested five suspected IS supporters who allegedly planned an attack on the drinking water supply.

North Korea

Local elections in North Korea

According to official announcements the voter turnout in North Korea's first local elections since Kim Jong Un took power was 99.97 %. In these elections the Communist regime had the people elect representatives at provincial, municipal and district levels. These four-yearly local elections, just like those for the North Korean parliament, are a mere matter of form, because the voters may only vote 'yes' or 'no' for one candidate selected by the Workers' Party per community.

Experts think that elections help the North Korean regime to control the population. It was said: „Now that many North Koreans also cross the border into China these elections are at the same time a kind of census“.