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Briefing Notes

12 August 2013

Afghanistan

Security situation

On 05.08.13, German soldiers were attacked by insurgents in northern Kunduz province; five members of the Federal army were injured.

On 07.08.13, a German reconnaissance patrol was attacked again by insurgents; however, no German soldiers were injured. On the same day, three civilians including two children were killed in twin blasts on the same road in Wardak province (south of Kabul), nine other civilians were wounded. In eastern Ghazni province, the car of a female member of parliament was attacked; the politician and several of her family members were injured, her eight-year-old daughter and the driver of the vehicle lost their lives.

On 08.08.13, a landmine killed 14 women and children in a cemetery in eastern Nangarhar province. In the northeastern part of the country, a Belgian journalist was captured on 08.08.13; Afghan police managed to free him later.

On 11.08.13, three U.S. ISAF soldiers were killed in fights in eastern Afghanistan. In southern Uruzgan province, a roadside bomb killed three civilians, among them two children.

Taliban reject elections

The Afghan Taliban will not take part in next year's presidential elections and will wage war until all foreign troops leave the country. They have urged to overthrow the government and to drive out all foreign troops.

Flash floods claim more lives

On 11.08.13, flash floods killed a total of 20 people and damaged or destroyed numerous buildings in Shakardara district of Kabul province, north of the country's capital. Following the flash floods in Kabul, Wardak and Khost provinces in the beginning of August (see BN of 05.08.13), hundreds of people were forced to leave their homes.

Pakistan

Security situation

On 07.08.13, a bomb blast killed 11 people and wounded 24 at a soccer field in Karachi (Sindh province).

On 08.08.13, a suicide blast at the funeral of a murdered police officer killed at least 30 people and injured another 62 in Quetta (Balochistan province). The Taliban have claimed responsibility for the attack.

On 09.08.13, at least nine people were killed and 27 injured in an attack launched on a politician in Quetta.

Border incident in Kashmir

On 06.08.13, five Indian soldiers were killed in an ambush along the Pakistani-Indian border. India has blamed Pakistan for being behind the attack, warning that the incident will have consequences. The Pakistani government has rejected the accusations.

U.S. pulls staff from consulate in Lahore

On 09.08.13, the U.S. government ordered all non-essential staff to leave its consulate in Lahore (Punjab province) after receiving threats of attack.

Iraq

Security situation

On 05.08.13, at least 60 people were killed and more than 220 were apparently injured in a coordinated attack series across the country, launched mainly in the Shia-populated south and other regions where mostly Shia Muslims live. The press reports that in recent months, extremist Sunni Muslim groups like al-Qaida in Iraq have considerably increased their attacks as a protest against the Shia-led government.

The Iraqi armed forces claim to have killed six suspected al-Qaida members in an operation launched on 05.08.13. In another operation, ten extremists were detained.

On 06.08.13 a total of at least 57 people were killed and another 161 injured in a series of coordinated attacks. In and around Baghdad alone, apparently at least 35 people died and over 90 were injured. The attacks were targeted against markets and shopping centres. Other attacks were launched in various cities including Tuz Khurmato, Mosul, Fallujah, Muqdadiya, Baquba and Samarra.

On 07.08.13, at least 39 people died and 11 more were injured in attacks in Tikrit, Mosul, Mussayab, Ramadi, Kirkuk and Tuz Khurmato.

On 08.08.13, seven people lost their lives in Ramadi, Samarra, Balad and other places.

On 09.08.13, eleven people were killed in several cities including Tikrit, Baghdad and Baquba.

On 10.08.13, a coordinated series of attacks claimed the lives of more than 80 people (other sources report more than 90 fatalities); apparently, more than 370 people were wounded. In Baghdad alone, at least 57 were killed and 150 injured. The attacks targeted caf  s, markets and restaurants. Other affected cities included Tuz Khurmato, Nassiriya, Kerbala, Kirkuk and Mosul.

On 11.08.13, a total of 17 people were killed and another 45 injured.

According to press reports of 12.08.13, al-Qaida in Iraq has claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Syria

Clashes in northwestern parts of the country

Activists say that Syrian rebels have pushed into several Alawite villages; subsequently, members of the Republican Guards were sent to the coastal region to consolidate the situation. Also, an air base near Aleppo was seized by the rebels. On 06.08.13, the insurgents claimed that they have killed more than 200 enemies since the beginning of the offensive near the Turkish border on 04.08.13. Most of the fighters on the insurgents' side were Islamist brigades.

Government opponents claim to have launched attack on Bashar al-Assad

According to reports provided by anti-government media outlets, an attack was launched on President Assad on 08.08.13. However, the statements are not congruent: one source mentions a rocket attack, while the other ones speak of grenades being fired. One source reports that members of Assad's convoy lost their lives, while another says that no-one was killed. Twelve blasts have been reported by inhabitants of the quarter located between the President's house and the mosque he was heading to on that morning. Government sources have denied the rebel claims of an attack launched on the President.

Reports allege killings of 450 Kurdish civilians

According to the Iranian television channel Press TV, 450 Kurdish civilians were massacred on 05.08.13, allegedly by terrorists of the al-Nusra Front who fight against the Syrian government and have connections to al-Qaida. The report said that 330 women and elderly people and 120 children were killed in Tal Abyad district (Raqqa province).

Lebanon

Two Turkish pilots kidnapped

On 09.08.13, two Turkish pilots working for Turkish Airlines were abducted in Beirut by armed men of the previously unknown group Zuwar al-Imam Reda. The group has demanded the release of nine Lebanese Shia pilgrims kidnapped in Syria by Syrian rebels.

Iran

Female lawyer appointed as Vice President

President Hassan Rouhani has appointed a female legal expert as his deputy. 49-year old Elham Aminzadeh, former member of parliament and professor for legal studies, earned her Ph.D. from the University of Glasgow, as did Mr Rouhani. For many years, Ms Aminzadeh has actively advocated women's rights in Iran. She is the first woman in Mr Rouhani's cabinet.

Israel/West Bank

Government announces new settlement plans

On 11.08.13, Israel's housing minister announced tenders for the construction of 1,187 new homes in east Jerusalem and several places in the West Bank. Most of the planned construction sites are located in areas that Israel wants to retain in any final status agreement with the Palestinians. The Palestinians, however, want to build an independent state covering the whole territory of the West Bank and Gaza, with the Arab eastern part of Jerusalem as their new capital.

Government approves release of Palestinian long-term prisoners

Israel has approved the release of the first group of a total of 104 Palestinian long-term prisoners. On 11.08.13, the competent ministerial committee agreed to a list of 26 Palestinians to be released within the frame of the new peace talks. Some of the prisoners to be released have spent more than 20 years in jail. The earliest date of release will be 48 hours after the announcement, which gives time to the relatives of terror victims to lodge an appeal in court. It is, however, deemed unlikely that a respective complaint would be sustained by the court.

Tunisia

Tunisian opposition plans to set up a shadow government

The Tunisian opposition plans to form a shadow government to lead the country out of crisis. On 10.08.13, a high-ranking member of the opposition alliance announced the presentation of the cabinet by end of next week. The candidate for the post of Prime Minister may be appointed already at the beginning of the week. After the assassination of two prominent opposition leaders in the last six months, the secular opposition forces are striving to remove the government led by the moderate Islamist Ennahda party from office.

Egypt

Mediation has failed to resolve crisis

On 07.08.13, the office of acting transitional President Adly Mansour stated that the international efforts to resolve the political crisis which followed the ousting of President Morsi have failed. The presidency held the Muslim Brotherhood responsible for the failure of the efforts.

According to a decision of the transitional government taken on 11.08.13, the two Islamist protest sit-in sites in Cairo are to be cleared as of 12.08.13. To avoid bloodshed, security forces will move forward in a step-by-step approach, blocking first the entries, interrupting the food supply and ultimately including the use of tear gas and water cannons. The implementation of the decision to clear the camps may take up to three months. Meanwhile, the Islamists have set up new barriers around their camp at Rabaa-al-Adawiya mosque and called for further protest rallies.

Grand Imam Ahmed al-Tayyebb of Al-Azhar University in Cairo wants to act as an intermediary and has already made calls to hold reconciliation meetings. On 12.08.13, he wants to start negotiations with representatives of both factions.

Extremists killed in Sinai

According to press reports of 09.08.13, the Israeli airforce has attacked a suspected Jihadist site in the North of Egypt's Sinai peninsula, which is deemed a stronghold and retreat area of Islamist extremists. Five people lost their lives and several others were wounded. Allegedly, the Islamists were preparing rockets to be

launched at Israeli territory. The air raid may have been carried out with the consent of the Egyptian government. The Egyptian armed forces have been trying for months to bring the situation under control. In the last weeks, militant Islamists have repeatedly attacked positions of the security forces.

After the attack on a police station in the provincial capital of Al-Arish, the Egyptian armed forces fired on houses of suspected terrorists in a desert town north of the provincial capital on 11.08.13. No information has been released about victims.

Russian Federation

Measures against undocumented immigrants

In late July/early August, 900 Moscow police officers launched a crackdown on suspected illegal immigrants. People of non-Slavic appearance had to present their identification papers. Those without valid papers were arrested. All in all, there were about 3,000 arrests of migrants, the authorities stated. A tent city was set up to accommodate all these person; presently, approx. 600 people appear to be housed there. The tent city is enclosed by a high wall, and nobody is allowed to leave the premises without authorisation.

Russian nationalists have organised raids of their own against migrants from the Caucasus region and from Central Asia. The immigration question has become a key issue of the election campaign for Moscow Mayor. The 'large number of immigrants from the former southern Soviet Republics and from the Northern Caucasus' is viewed as a problem by 55 percent of the Muscovites. President Vladimir Putin has called for decisive action.

Nigeria

Party merger approved

On 07.08.13, Nigeria's electoral commission approved the request of the three major opposition parties 'Action Congress of Nigeria' (ACN), 'All Nigeria People's Party' (ANPP) and 'Congress of Progressive Change' (CPC) to merge into the new party 'All Progressive Congress' (APC). The new party's interim president is Chief Bisi Akande. The major figures in the APC are the former military ruler Mohammadu Buhari from north Nigeria, who ran for presidency several times, and Bola Tinubu, former governor of Lagos State. The new Party is deemed to be a serious competitor of the Democratic Party (PDP) which has been governing Nigeria since the country's return to democracy in 1999. Since then, the President has always come from the PDP, which at the moment has a majority in both houses of the National Assembly and controls about two thirds of the 36 federal states. The elections for the governor's office in southern Anambra State, scheduled for November 2013, are deemed to be a first test for APC's chances of success.

Military encounters leave many dead

On 04.08.13, suspected fighters of the Islamic terror organisation Boko Haram attacked a police station in Bama village (Bama Local Government Area – LGA), Borno State, near Nigeria's north-eastern border with Cameroon, and also a military camp in the town of Malam Fatori (Abadam LGA). The security forces say that 32 of the assailants were killed in the incident. On 10.08.13, Major General Jah Ewansiah, commander of the military joint task force fighting against the insurgents in northeastern Nigeria, stated that 12 soldiers and seven police officers were killed in the attack; before, a much smaller number of losses had been given.

Sudan

Tribal conflicts claim about 100 lives in Darfur

On 09.08.13 and 10.08.13, fights between the Arab ethnicities of Rizeigat and Maaliya in Adila (southeast Darfur) appear to have claimed the lives of about 70 Maaliya und 30 Rizeigat. A representative of the Maaliya stated that the Rizeigat burnt down villages. Land disputes appear to have caused the clashes.

Given the frequent violent clashes between different Arab tribes in Darfur, observers assume that the Sudanese government is no longer able to control the tribes it used as "Janjaweed" to quell the rebellion of the black African population.

Ethiopia

Muslim protests cause fatalities

Nationwide protests of the Muslim population have been staged for several days now, with repeated clashes between protesters and security forces. Reports say that there have also been fatalities. The background of the incidents is still unclear. According to a state news agency, 'Muslim extremists' opened fire at the security forces in Addis Ababa, killing three policemen. However, eyewitnesses and local human rights groups claim that police shot dead at least 16 people in Kofele district alone (southwest part of Oromia Region).

The protesters demand the release of several religious leaders and activists. Currently, 29 religious leaders are the subject of court proceedings for alleged terrorist activities. Amnesty International presumes that their indictment is based solely on their political commitment and that there is a policy of oppression against Muslims in Ethiopia. The government, however, sees itself involved in a fight against the growing influence of radical Salafists. Although being a minority in mostly Christian Ethiopia, Muslims have been firmly rooted in the country for more than thousand years, accounting for a third of the population.

Central African Republic

Chaotic situation in CAR

According to the UN, the situation in the Central African Republic is characterised by a breakdown of law and order after the rebels' power seizure in March. The organisation Médecins Sans Frontières says that the national health system has collapsed.

Uganda

New bill restricts freedom of assembly

On 06.08.13, a bill was passed by the Ugandan Parliament which severely restricts the freedom of assembly. Under the Public Order Management Bill, police authorisation is necessary for three or more people to assemble and to openly discuss political issues. Now, meetings are only allowed between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.. The bill was harshly criticised by human rights activists. The opposition intends to challenge the bill before the Constitutional Court. President Yoweri Museveni has yet to sign the bill into law.

China

Border river secured by fence

China has constructed a border fence along the river Tumen, marking the eastern part of the border with North Korea, as was reported by Radio Free Asia referring to Japanese news agency Asia Press on 05.08.13. The construction of the fence began two or three years ago. Meanwhile, the refugee influx to China from North Korea has decreased significantly, Asia Press reported. The news agency had no information as to possible plans for a fence along the river Yalu, which marks the western border to North Korea.

Violent outburst in Xinjiang

On 07.08.13, police killed at least three persons and injured 20 more in a violent clash with an angry crowd in Aykol (Aksu prefecture, Uyghur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang). The policemen opened fire at the crowd when they were attacked trying to apprehend several individuals wanted for 'illegal religious activities'.

India

Kashmir: India blames Pakistan for deadly attack

The Indian government holds the Pakistani army responsible for the deaths of five Indian soldiers in the disputed region of Kashmir. On 06.08.13, the soldiers were killed in an armed raid on the Indian side of the

ceasefire line. Also in the following days, there were shootings along the ceasefire line, injuring soldiers of both countries. Pakistan has rejected the accusations.

Background

Violent clashes have erupted in Kashmir following the announcement of newly elected Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to restart the peace process with India, which had been halted by the devastating Pakistani terror attacks in Mumbai in 2008. Political observers compare the escalation of violence to the situation at the end of the 1990ies, when Nawaz Sharif had also been Prime Minister and seeking a peaceful settlement of the conflict. At the time, the Pakistani army occupied Indian positions in the high mountain ranges of Kargil, leading to a local war lasting for several weeks which the Pakistani army finally lost. Shortly afterwards, Pakistani army chief Pervez Musharraf toppled the Pakistani government in a coup.

Continuing unrest in southeast India

For more than a week, the Indian State of Andhra Pradesh has been the site of partly violent protest rallies, apparently with more than thousand people arrested by the police. The protests are being waged against the decision by the ruling Congress Party to create a new Indian state named Telangana by dividing the State of Andhra Pradesh and adding ten of its districts to the new State. Hyderabad, the fourth largest city of the country and its technology centre, would serve as the common capital of both States for a transitory period of ten years, after which it would become entirely Telangana. The campaign for the foundation of Telangana State has been going on for decades. The government justified the measure saying that smaller States would be in a better position to handle the problem of dozens of ethnic groups and hundreds of languages and dialects, referring to the economic development in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand und Uttaranchal, which had also been separated from larger States in 2000. The protesters, however, are fearing a considerable economic downturn for the remaining part of Andhra Pradesh.



Sri Lanka

Colombo mosque attacked

On 10.08.13, more than 100 people, among them Buddhist monks, attacked a mosque in Sri Lanka's capital Colombo, injuring seven persons. Security forces were deployed in order to prevent acts of revenge. Muslim organisations are blaming the police for neither having prevented the attack nor detained the perpetrators despite their presence on site.

This year has seen already several attacks on both Muslim and Christian institutions. A group named Bodu Bala Sena which is led by Buddhist monks is suspected to be behind the violent acts. They describe themselves as 'patriotic forces' representing the interests of the Buddhist majority in the country. Around 70 percent of Sri Lanka's population identify themselves as Buddhists, compared to around 9 percent Muslims.

Cambodia

Army units deployed to Cambodian capital

Nearly two weeks after the disputed parliamentary elections, armed units have been deployed to the capital Phnom Penh. According to military officials, this measure is aimed at preventing violent eruptions during protests. A government spokesperson said the deployment was a temporary security measure until the formation of a new government. In the parliamentary elections held on 28.07.13, the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) of long-serving Prime Minister Hun Sen claims to have won 68 out of 123 parliamentary seats. The opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) gained 55 seats, but is accusing the government of fraud. CNRP leader Sam Rainsy has announced to stage protest rallies until the United Nations would monitor the election investigation.