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Briefing Notes

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Afghanistan

Sharp rise in civilian casualties

On 31.07.13, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) released its latest Mid-Year Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Afghanistan. Compared to the same time period a year ago, the number of civilian casualties increased by 23 percent, with 1,319 documented civilian deaths and 2,533 injuries in the first six months of 2013. Last year, the number of civilian casualties had declined for the first time in years; however, a deterioration of the security situation was beginning to show again in the second half of 2012. As had been the case in the previous years, the major part of all casualties (74 percent) was attributed to actions taken by anti-government elements, with the majority of fatalities caused by improvised explosive devices. The second-highest number of civilian casualties was caused by the increase of ground engagements between Afghan security forces and anti-government elements.

Security situation

Also last week saw numerous fights and attacks claiming the lives of dozens of civilians. On 29.07.13 and 30.07.13, a total of 80 people (apparently most of them Taliban members) were reportedly killed in airstrikes launched in eastern Logar, Kunar and Paktia provinces.

On 01.08.13, Taliban members attacked a police station in Batikot district (eastern Nangahar province). Four policemen and several Taliban insurgents lost their lives in the fight.

On 02.08.13, 60 Taliban members and 22 police officers were killed in further fights in Shersad district (Nangarhar province), when the Taliban raided a convoy on its way back from an operation in which 16 Taliban had been killed.

Also on 02.08.13, at least seven members of a family died and three were injured in a bomb attack in southern Kandahar province. The family had been on their way to a wedding ceremony.

On 03.08.13, suicide bombers targeted the Indian consulate in Jalalabad (Nangarhar province), killing eight children and an adult civilian in a nearby mosque; 22 people were injured. The Taliban have denied responsibility for the attack. The Indian embassy in Kabul has been the target of several suicide attacks.

Floods leave dozens dead

On 03.08.13, at least 61 people were killed by flash floods in eastern Kabul, Wardak and Khost provinces.

Pakistan

New President

On 30.07.13, businessman Mamnoon Hussain was elected as the new President. He is a member of the ruling Muslim League party and is considered a close aide of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

Taliban jail raid frees hundreds of prisoners

On 30.07.13, Taliban gunmen stormed a jail in the city of Dera Ismail Khan (northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province) and escaped with more than 250 prisoners. At least 14 people lost their lives in the assault.

Iraq

July deadliest month in years

In the month of July 2013 alone, a total of 1,057 people were killed and 2,326 wounded in acts of violence, the UN reported. Among the victims were 129 security officers and 928 civilians, including 204 civilian police. Baghdad was the worst-affected governorate, followed by Salahuddin, Ninewa, Diyala and Kirkuk provinces.

Other security incidents

On 29.07.13, more than 86 people were killed in an attack series, with a total of 14 car bombs exploding in a quarter of Baghdad mainly inhabited by Shia Muslims and in the southern cities of Kut und Basra. Iraqi media report that the terror group 'Islamic State of Iraq and Syria' with close links to al-Qaida has claimed responsibility for the assaults. These multiple car bomb attacks marked the beginning of a new campaign dubbed Hasaad Al-Ajnad ('harvest of soldiers') which appears to be specifically targeting security forces.

On 30.07.13, attacks in various cities including Baghdad, Tuz Khurmato, Kut, Mosul, Kirkuk and Tikrit killed at least 33 people and injured another 73.

On 31.07.13, a total of 49 people lost their lives and 83 were wounded in attacks launched in Baghdad, Tuz Khurmato, Mosul, Hawija and Tikrit, among other places.

On 01.08.13, 21 people were killed and 30 wounded in attacks in Baghdad, Samarra, Fallujah and Muqdadiyah and in other cities.

On 02.08.13, at least 23 people died and over twelve were wounded.

On 03.08.13, attacks in various places including Adhaim, Baquba, Mosul, Tikrit and Baghdad claimed the lives of 58 people, 29 were injured.

On 04.08. at least 19 people died and more than 28 were wounded in attacks launched in Kirkuk, Baghdad, Mosul and Tikrit, among other places. The victims included a judge who was killed by a car bomb.

Escaped prisoners may have fled to Syria

Britain-based Iraqi newspaper Al-Sharq Al-Awsat reported that the most important al-Qaida figures who escaped in the jail outbreak on 19./20.07.13 have crossed the border to Syria (see BN of 29.07.13).

Syria

Homs

On 01.08.13, an explosion in an ammunition depot of pro-government militias southeast of Homs (Al-Nosha quarter) killed at least 40 people and injured 120. Before, the depot located in the pro-regime Wadi al-Zahab district, had been attacked with rockets, apparently by rebels. The neighbourhood is mainly inhabited by Alawites.

On 29.07.13, state media reported that the Syrian army had advanced in the strategically important Khalidiya district of Homs.

On 30.07.13, mortar shelling killed at least 12 civilians and wounded more than 30 people in the Dablan neighbourhood of Homs.

Syrian Kurdish political leader killed

A car bomb attack in the Syrian-Turkish border area killed Isa Huso, prominent member of the Supreme Kurdish Council, which is an umbrella organisation of Kurdish parties in Syria.

Syrian air raid in Lebanon

On 03.08.12, the Syrian airforce launched an attack near the Lebanese city of Arsaal in the border region, killing at least nine people. This has been the deadliest Syrian military operation in Lebanon since unrest erupted two and a half years ago. The Lebanese state news agency NNA reported that the victims were Syrian refugees.

Syrian opposition plans new government in August

The Syrian opposition is planning to form a transitional government in the second half of August. Apparently, there are several candidates for the prime minister post. One will be chosen by consensus or

through elections, the president of the Syrian National Coalition Ahmad a-Jarba said in Doha on 30.07.13. Since the beginning of the civil war, the opponents of President Bashar al-Assad have been trying in vain to form a united political front. The latest attempt to form a transitional government has failed only recently after four months of negotiations.

Turkey blocks crossing of border

On 30.07.13, Turkish soldiers fired warning shots and tear gas on hundreds of people from Syria trying to cross the border near the Turkish city of Ogulpinar. The Turkish military said that many of the people refused entry were smugglers.

Syria allows UN chemical weapons investigation

The United Nations and the Syrian government have agreed to an inspection of the suspected use of chemical weapons. The mission would travel to Syria 'as soon as possible', once the remaining legal and logistical details were finalised, a UN spokesperson announced on 01.08.13. Visits are scheduled for Khan al-Assal as well as Atajbah and Homs, where chemical weapons were allegedly used. The UN says it has received a total of 13 reports of alleged use of sarin and other chemicals for combat.

Iran

New President Hassan Rouhani sworn in

On 04.08.13, moderate cleric Hassan Rouhani was sworn in as the new Iranian President. It was the first time since Iran's Islamic Revolution that foreign visitors participated in the ceremony held in the Iranian parliament. As the first act of his presidency, Mr Rouhani appointed Mohammad Javad Zarif as his foreign minister. 53-year-old Zarif had been ambassador to the United Nations in New York from 2002 to 2007; before that, he had worked as the deputy foreign minister for ten years. Mr Zarif is considered a moderate technocrat. One of the new President's main aims is to open dialogue with the U.S. after 34 years of frozen diplomatic relations. Mr Rouhani announced to care for the daily needs of the Iranian people, to increase the international reputation of his country and to work towards easing the UN sanctions against Iran.

Israel/West Bank

Israel to release Palestinian prisoners

Before the next round of negotiations with the Palestinians, Israel will set free 26 Palestinians, the first of several groups of a total of 104 long-term prisoners, Israeli broadcast media reported on 04.08.13. This concession is designed to pave the way for the first peace negotiations in nearly three years. The release is scheduled to take place before Israeli negotiator Tzipi Livni and Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat will meet for the first negotiations in about ten days, the report went on. The two negotiators had met in Washington on 30.07.13 for first talks. Their aim is to reach an agreement on a two-state solution within nine months. The negotiations are to incorporate all core problems of the Middle East conflict including border delimitation, the future status of Jerusalem, the fate of 5.3 million registered Palestinian refugees and security guarantees for Israel.

Protests against Bedouin resettlement plan

The Israeli government's plan to demolish 40 villages and to resettle tens of thousands of Bedouins living in the Negev Desert to 'recognised settlements' was met with sharp protests. On 01.08.13, hundreds of demonstrators, among them both Arab and Jewish Israelis, gathered at a highway junction near the town of Beersheba, which is considered the 'capital of the Negev Desert'. The resettlement plan is based on the so-called Praver-Begin Bill, stipulating the relocation of 30,000-40,000 Bedouins and the confiscation of 70,000 hectares of land. The bill was approved by the Israeli government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in January and by parliament in a first reading in June. Two more votes are expected until the plan can be implemented. UN Human Rights Commissioner Navi Pillay slammed the bill last week, urging the Israeli government to reconsider its plan because it would lead to the destruction of entire Bedouin communities. There are roughly 260,000 Bedouins living in Israel, half of them in dire conditions in unregistered villages without canalisation systems or sanitary services.

Tunisia

Pro and anti-government protests

In the night to 04.08.13, tens of thousands of supporters and opponents of the Tunisian government took to the streets. In Tunis, supporters of the ruling Islamist Ennahda party held a mass rally on Kasbah Square next to the Prime Minister's office. According to an AFP correspondent, the rally was peaceful. It has been the largest protest rally organised by the Ennahda party since the beginning of the political crisis. Not far away from Kasbah Square, thousands of government opponents met for a protest rally, demanding the dissolution of the parliament and the resignation of the government. The unrest was stirred by the assassination of opposition politician Muhammad Brahmi (see BN of 29.07.13). In order to lead the country out of crisis, the cabinet has decided to hold new elections on 17.12.13. At the same time, Prime Minister Ali Larayedh has rejected calls for the government's resignation.

Egypt

Deadly clashes following protests

In the night to 03.08.13, more than 20 protesters were injured in clashes between supporters of ousted President Morsi and security forces in Cairo.

On 03.08.13, the transitional government demanded that two protest camps set up in July by Morsi supporters be cleared within 48 hours, otherwise the security forces would step in. Observers were concerned about new violent outbursts in case of the forced closure of the camps.

After both sides had talked to U.S. Deputy Secretary of State William Burns, signs of de-escalation were beginning to show on 04.08.13, with Morsi supporters signalling a compromise and agreeing to negotiations with the National Salvation Front, Egypt's biggest secular coalition. They also agreed to stop demanding Mr Morsi's reinstatement as President. However, they demanded that the constitution be reinstated and that army chief al-Sisi be excluded from the negotiations. The interim government, in turn, has renounced the forced clearance of the protest camps, but still intends to block them. Protesters willing to leave the camps were offered safe passage.

In a message released on the internet on 03.08.13, al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri urged the Islamists of Egypt to give up on democracy and to establish a government based on Sharia law.

Russian Federation

Attacks on clerics in Dagestan

On 03.08.13, the car of Muslim cleric Ilyas Ilyasov was attacked by two unidentified gunmen in Makhachkala, capital of the Russian Caucasian republic of Dagestan. The Imam himself was killed in the attack, his driver was severely injured. Representing moderate Islam, the Imam was in opposition to the Salafists who have been gaining more and more supporters for several years now.

The shooting of Mr Ilyasov has been the third attack on a cleric this year: In the night of 25.07.13, the Rabbi of the synagogue of the city of Derbent was shot at by unidentified gunmen when leaving his car; he suffered a gunshot wound. On 03.03.13 an Imam was shot dead in his home in the village of Gubden. In 2012, eight Muslim clerics died in attacks, including the most influential Sufi Sheikh Said Afandi.

Nigeria

Bomb blasts in Kano

At around 9 p.m. on 29.07.13, several explosive devices detonated in a popular nightlife district of Sabon Gari area, a mainly Christian-populated quarter of Kano, the second largest city of Nigeria (northern Kano State). According to the security forces, 12 persons were killed in the incident; a spokesperson of a hospital indicated 24 victims, and the socio-cultural organisation 'Ohanaeze Ndigbo' representing the Christian ethnic group of Igbo stated 45 fatalities. The Islamist terror organisation Boko Haram is held responsible for the attack.

DR Congo

North Kivu: MONUSCO issues ultimatum to rebels in Goma-Sake area

On 30.07.13, the UN peacekeeping mission in the DR Congo (MONUSCO) issued a 48-hours ultimatum until 01.08.13 to all armed persons in Goma (capital of eastern North Kivu province) and in the area north of the city (up to and including the city of Sake, about 25 km west-northwest of Goma). By then, these persons were to consign their arms at a MONUSCO camp and join the disarmament and demobilisation process. After expiry of the deadline, all persons carrying weapons who are not soldiers are considered to be rebels. Subsequently, MONUSCO (including the newly set up intervention brigade) will take all necessary measures for disarmament, which also includes the use of force. The establishment of the new security zone is MONUSCO's response to the attacks against positions of the DRC government army that M23 rebels have launched since May (lastly on 14.07.13).

Zimbabwe

Mugabe wins presidential elections

According to the results of the presidential elections of 01.08.13 published by the election commission on 03.08.13, 89-year-old Robert Mugabe who has been governing Zimbabwe for 33 years now, won 61 percent of the votes cast. His challenger Morgan Tsvangirai secured 34 percent.

The parliamentary elections held on the same day gave a two-thirds majority (158 seats) to Mugabe's ZANU-PF party ('Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front'), while Tsvangirai's MDC ('Movement for Democratic Change') gained 49 seats. With its two-thirds parliamentary majority, ZANU-PF will be able to make constitutional changes from now on. On 03.08.13, MDC declared that it would not recognize the election results. Meanwhile, Mr Tsvangirai has announced to challenge the results in court. Official electoral observers of both the African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) described the elections as 'free and peaceful'. The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), which deployed 7,000 observers to the constituencies, criticized problems with the voter registration process, leading to the result that up to one million people had not been able to cast their votes, mainly in urban areas, which are the strongholds of Morgan Tsvangirai. U.S. Secretary of State Kerry called the election results the 'culmination of a deeply flawed process'.

Sudan

More than 100 killed in tribal clashes in Darfur

A leader of the ethnic Misseriya stated on 30.08.13 that some 130 people have been killed in clashes between the rivalling Arab Misseriya and Salamat tribes in western Darfur.

In the first five months of this year alone, an estimated 300,000 people have been displaced by tribal clashes in Darfur. According to the joint UN-AU Peacekeeping Mission in Darfur UNAMID, this is more than in the past two years combined.

Eritrea

Dozens of alleged deserters killed by security forces

Members of Eritrean National Security apparently killed 80 Eritrean navy members attempting to escape on speed boats to neighbouring Yemen, as was reported by the Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSADO), an Eritrean rebel organisation operating from Ethiopia. The incident occurred near Bardoli (southern part of Northern Red Sea region), the report said. Apparently, all the victims were members of the ethnic Afar minority. Since Afars have repeatedly claimed to be victims of state persecution, RSADO is accusing the security forces of a 'politically motivated mass murder'.

This is not the first time that Eritrean marine soldiers have attempted to escape to Yemen. The Eritrean government tries to prevent desertion by all means. Several human rights organisation say that this includes executions ('shoot-to kill' orders).

Mali

Runoff election for presidency

In the presidential elections held on 28.07.13, none of the candidates was able to secure absolute majority, with most votes cast for former Prime Minister Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (39.2 percent). Former finance minister Soumailia Cissé gained 19.4 percent of the votes. Apparently, the electoral turnout was 51.5 percent. Observers reported a peaceful election process. A run-off between the top two candidates is scheduled for 11.08.13.

Uganda

LRA rebels weakened

As was reported, Ugandan rebel organisation 'Lord's Resistance Army' (LRA) has been considerably weakened by defections. In May 2013, the group had no more than 250 fighters, among them up to 200 Ugandan nationals. The majority of the LRA members was forcefully recruited and apparently wants to leave the group whose camps lie in several secret locations in the Central African Republic, the DR Congo and in Kafia Kingi enclave (administered by South Sudan, but also claimed by Sudan).

Bangladesh

Deaths in violence

On 01.08.13, Human Rights Watch released a report on the unrest in connection with the war crimes trial covering the period of the war of independence in 1971. Over the past six months, a total of 150 people protesters have been killed in street demonstrations and extrajudicial killings, with police forces cracking down relentlessly on protesters, the report said. Numerous leading figures of Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami party have been indicted; several sentences were already handed down. Deputy Jamaat leader Delwar Hossain Sayedee was sentenced to death in February.

Jamaat-e-Islami disqualified from elections

On 01.08.13, Bangladesh's Supreme Court excluded Jamaat-e-Islami from taking part in the next general elections. The panel ruled that the party was rejecting the country's independence and violating the constitutional provision of secularism by wanting to introduce Islamic Sharia law.