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Briefing Notes

08 July 2019

Afghanistan

Details on the Kabul attack

Late on 1 July 2019 the Taliban claimed responsibility for the major attack consisting in an explosion that shook Afghanistan's capital Kabul in the early hours of the morning (see BN of 01 July 2019). A car bomb had been detonated near the defence ministry in the eastern part of town and subsequently several attackers entered a building. Eleven hours later the authorities announced that the attack was over. The Taliban said that the attack targeted a logistics centre of the army. The car bomb blew up right next to the Afghan TV channel Shamshad which had to go off the air for about 20 minutes. When it was back on air again the announcer reported a second explosion and gunfire. The premises of the Afghan football association were likewise affected by the explosion. Staff members are reported to have been wounded. International media report at least 16 casualties and over 100 injured.

Taliban conquer district in northern Afghanistan

On 02 July 2019 the Taliban conquered Qush Tepa district in the northern province of Jawzjan, despite the ongoing peace talks in Qatar (see BN of 01 July 2019). The conquest succeeded after hours of fire-fighting that killed at least three members of the security forces and wounded a dozen of them, another 100 policemen and soldiers were taken prisoners by the Taliban.

Attacks ahead of the “inter-Afghan peace talks”

According to the provincial governor of Ghazni at least six people, including two security forces and four civilians, were killed in a car bomb explosion in the provincial capital Ghazni on 07 July 2019. Other sources cite at least twelve casualties and more than 50 (one source says 179) injured people. They say that the bomb detonated near the Afghan internal intelligence agency NDS. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack. According to official statements at least two people were killed and 20 wounded in an IS attack on a Shiite mosque in Ghazni already on 05 July 2019. Other reports spoke of three dead and 36 wounded. These attacks occurred only a few hours, respectively days before 'intra-Afghan peace talks' arranged by Germany and Qatar were scheduled to start in Doha. The two-day meeting is attended by representatives of the Afghan government and of the Taliban as well as of civil society and the media. Next to the ceasefire terms also the rights of women and minorities shall be addressed.

Algeria

Mass protests continue

05 July 2019 was the 57th anniversary of the country's independence and again people took to the streets in large numbers protesting against the old power elite and demanding democratic change as well as social and economic reforms.

Since 20 February 2019 regular protests have been held after the Friday prayers and most of them were peaceful, therefore the population dubbed them the “revolution of smiles”. Non-governmental organisations report that up to now 41 people have been arrested during the protests for showing the flag of the Berber minority. They are charged with endangering Algeria's unity.

Burundi

Commission of inquiry: human rights violations continue

On 02 July 2019 a UN commission of inquiry appointed to investigate the human rights violations that have been committed in Burundi since 2015, reported that abuses continue and that the situation still gives grounds for concern. The report also says that since the constitutional referendum in May 2018 and possibly against the background of the presidential elections upcoming in 2020 the violations included executions, arbitrary arrests/detentions, torture, abuse and sexual violence. Most victims are real or perceived opponents of the government or the governing party (Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie/Forces de Défense de la Démocratie – CNDD/FDD). Most affected are the members of the opposition party of Agathon Rwasa that was admitted in February 2019. People are forced to either join the governing party or the youth militia Imbonerakure. People that fled abroad and returned since 2018 under an agreement for voluntary returns are likewise targeted and abused. People are still fleeing Burundi (3,080 people between early January and end of May 2019). In 2019 1.7 million of the population of roughly eleven million in Burundi might experience food insecurity, the report finds.

China

Hong Kong: Protests

According to the police 56,000 people protested again on 08 July 2019 against the disputed extradition law, the organizers put the number of participants at 230,000. During the protest one group of protesters clashed with the police and six people were arrested.

On the anniversary of Hong Kong's transfer to the People's Republic of China (01 July 1997) hundreds of thousands rallied against the government and the extradition bill. Several hundred protesters forced their way into the parliament building. Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam called it an action of "extremists" on 02 July 2019 and announced harsh criminal prosecution. According to an official statement of 03 July 2019 more than 20 people were arrested. This brings the number of those arrested in connection with the protests to over 50.

Xinjiang: Children of Muslim minorities forcefully assimilated

An inquiry published on 04 July 2019 indicates that along with the internment of hundreds of thousands of members of Muslim minorities also their children are housed in state institutions on a large scale and systematically, either during the day, for weeks or even longer. In these institutions they are compulsorily assimilated to the culture of the majority of the Han Chinese. For his report social scientist Adrian Zenz evaluated regulations of the Chinese government, official and media reports and public tenders for construction projects. These indications are supported by 60 interviews the BBC did in Turkey with Uyghur parents and relatives of children that remained behind in Xinjiang. Accordingly children of parents one or both of which are held by the state are housed in orphanages or (more frequently) in boarding schools. For this the authorities had built or refurbished suitable institutions with security features similar to those of the camps within a short period of time.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Risk of Ebola spreading

The most recent Ebola epidemic that started in August 2018 in eastern Congo has not yet been controlled. On 30 June 2019 a woman was found to be infected by Ebola in the city of Ariwara (Ituri province) about 70 km from the border to the republic of South Sudan. She had been travelling to Ariwara from the Beni area (North Kivu province) affected by the epidemic that is about 500km to the north. Already in mid-June a child and his grandmother died of Ebola in Uganda after having visited the Democratic Republic of Congo.

A total of 2,382 people (as on 03 July 2019) have been infected during the recent Ebola outbreak (2,288 cases are confirmed and 94 are suspected), 1,606 people died (of these 1,512 confirmed and 94 suspected).

Egypt

Subsidies for petrol and natural gas cut

On 05 July 2019 the currently last phase of cuts of subsidies for petrol and gas became effective. Traditionally high subsidies have been drastically cut in five phases starting from 2014 to relief the national budget and at the same time avoid steep price increases.

Eritrea

UNHCR urges Eritrea not to close refugee camp

The United Nations' Refugee organisation, UNHCR, appealed to the Eritrean government not to close the Umkulu refugee camp near Massawa. The camp is the only one of its kind in the entire country and most of the inmates are Somali refugees. After the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in July of 2018 an increasing number of the originally 2,500 refugees have left the camp for Ethiopia. The Eritrean government has not yet officially responded to the appeal.

Georgia

Anti-government protests continue

Regularly about 1,000 protesters in Tbilisi continue to demonstrate against the government and the alleged growing Russian influence on Georgia. This was preceded by opposition rallies in Tbilisi on 20 June 2019. They were initially directed against the appearance of the Russian politician Sergei Gavrilov. He had chaired a parliamentary meeting in the house of representatives in Russian sitting in the speaker's chair. The police responded harshly to the subsequent demonstrations on 21 June 2019 and over 240 people were injured and about 300 temporarily arrested. This triggered more protests on a daily basis. The central demand is the resignation of Georgia's interior minister Giorgi Gakharia who was allegedly responsible for the police operation on 21 June 2019. Among the concessions the protesters have meanwhile won is the promise of a reform of election law for the upcoming parliamentary elections in 2020. This might contain the dominant role of the ruling party Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia.

Iran

Public execution of a homosexual

According to the Iranian Students' News Agency (ISNA) a 31-year-old Iranian was convicted of violations of „Lavat-e be Onf“ (ban on sexual relations between two men) and charges of kidnapping and publicly hung in the south-western city of Kazeroon on 10 January 2019.

More executions in 2019 than publicly announced

According to the Iranian human rights organisation Iran Human Rights (IHR) in the first six months of 2019 at least 110 individuals have been executed, while the judicial authorities had only announced 37 executions. In the same period last year 98 offenders had been executed. IHR says that the death penalty was imposed for murder in 83 cases, in 13 for rape, in nine for drug-related crimes, four times for armed robbery and once for espionage. Eight of these executions were public and also children were present. An AI report of April 2019 says that there were a total of 253 executions in Iran in 2018.

Equal compensation for male and female crime victims

On 2 July 2019 Iran's Supreme Court ruled that in future the same compensation (so-called "blood money"/"Diya") shall be paid for crimes irrespective of the victim's gender. Murder remains excepted. According to the Iranian constitution the rulings of the Supreme Court are law. Diya payments are damages for crime victims or their surviving relatives for the physical or mental injuries they suffered. Diya is paid from funds financed by public money, including from third party liability insurances. Following Iran's criminal code, that is based on the Sharia, only half as much in Diya used to be paid for female victims in case of physical injury than for male victims.

Terror cells in Africa

The Daily Telegraph reports that Iran is supporting and spreading terrorism in west African countries to damage assets of the US and western countries in retaliation for the sanctions against Tehran. Con Coughlin, a journalist specialising in defence and security matters, says in an article that the "new network of terror" was established on orders of Qassem Suleimani, the Pasdaran commander who also has responsibility for overseas operations. The US government classifies Iran's regime as the leading international state sponsor of terrorism. The Telegraph writes that it is the aim of the new terror cell to target US and other Western military bases on the continent of Africa, as well as embassies and officials. Details about the existence of such terror cells came to light after a number of arrests were made in Chad in April 2019.

Iraq

Military operation against IS

On 06 July 2019 Iraqi security forces launched a large-scale operation against IS. Lieutenant General Abdul Amir Rasheed Yarallah said the operation „Will of Victory“ covered the province of Anbar and the central and northern regions of Salahaddin and Ninive. The focus is on the provinces on the Syrian border. The operation will last several days, he said.

Israel

Many injured during Ethiopian Jews' mass protest

On 02 July 2019 protesters and the Israeli police clashed, sometimes violently, 111 policemen were injured and 136 presumably violent protesters were arrested. The protests of many members of the minority of Ethiopian descent and their supporters in the general population was the fatal end of a dispute on 01 July 2019, when 18-year-old Solomon Teka was shot by a policeman off duty.

When the protests escalated the victim's family asked for restraint and patience during the seven-day period of mourning (Shiwa). On 03 July 2019 the protests had mostly calmed down, but the dead youth's family announced that it would resume protests in the following week, however, peacefully and without disrupting public order to denounce discrimination and police violence against black Jews in Israel.

Solomon Teka had come to Israel from Ethiopia six years ago. In the nineteen eighties and early nineties Israel experienced major waves of Jewish immigrants from Ethiopia. Although integration has made some progress, many of the 150,000 members of the Ethiopian-Israeli community are still destitute, lack development opportunities and experience daily racism.

Kenya

Long prison sentences for Islamist terror attack

On 01 July 2019 a Nairobi court sentenced a man to life imprisonment for an Islamist terror attack on the university in Garissa in 2015. Two other defendants received prison sentences of 41 years each. 148 people died in an attack of Somalia's terrorist militia al-Shabaab in northern Kenya. The killers specifically targeted Christian students.

Al-Shabaab militias repeatedly stage attacks in Kenya. According to their own statements they want to force Kenya's army to terminate its operations against Islamists in Somalia in this way. Al-Shabaab can easily find followers in Kenya's coastal region, because the mostly Muslim local population feels discriminated against by the central government.

Libya

Attack on detention camp

On 02 July 2019 a camp in Tajoura (southern Tripoli) that houses intercepted migrants, mostly from West Africa, was hit by an air raid that killed at least 44 people and injured about twice as many. Apparently, the air raid had been flown by an aircraft of the LNA (Libyan National Army). Then on 04 July 2019 the interior ministry reported that there are considerations to close down the detention camps and release the migrants, because their security could not be warranted in case of further air strikes. Some of these facilities are within the installations of different militias and therefore right next to military targets.

The survivors of the air strike are demanding to be evacuated. Hundreds of migrants and refugees from Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and other countries are sleeping in front of the camp and are reluctant to return inside for fear of another air strike.

Fighting in Tripoli

The fighting continues to concentrate around the closed down international airport and the south of Tripoli. On 03 July 2019 the LNA air force flew a raid on Mitiga airport and as a consequence flights were suspended.

Mali

More than 30 casualties in attacks on Malian villages

In the night of 01 July 2019 23 civilians were killed in attacks on the villages of Bidi, Sankoro and Sarn in central Mali. This was reported by the mayor of the neighbouring town of Ounkor to AFP. The number of casualties was confirmed by the Malian security forces.

In another attack near the city of Koro (Mopti region) on the border to Burkina Faso at least eleven people were killed by a bomb explosion, local authorities report.

Mauritania

Constitutional court confirms the victory of Mohamed Ould Ghazouani in the presidential elections

The Mauritanian constitutional court proclaimed the government candidate Mohamed Ould Ghazouani as the winner of the presidential elections of 22 June on 01 July 2019. The court said that he had won already in the first round by capturing 52% of the vote. Four opposition candidates had challenged the result at the constitutional court alleging election fraud.

After the official recognition of Mohamed Ould Ghazouani's victory in the presidential elections the authorities released several followers of the opposition who had been arrested for demonstrating against the election result.

Myanmar

ICC prosecutor requests investigations against Myanmar

On 04 July 2019 the International Criminal Court in The Hague informed that the prosecution had requested authorisation to investigate the persecution of the Muslim Rohingya in Myanmar. Although Myanmar has not signed the court's statutes, its neighbouring country Bangladesh has. This is where hundreds of thousands of Rohingya fled from the abuses of Myanmar's security forces after 2017. For this reason the ICC decided in 2018 that it holds jurisdiction.

Niger

18 Soldiers die in suicide bombing of military camp

Suicide bombers in cars and fighters on motorcycles attacked a military camp near Inates in western Niger near the border to Mali on 01 July 2019 killing at least 18 soldiers. The defence ministry reports that four soldiers have been missing since the incident. The West African off-shoot of Islamic State (Islamic State in West Africa Province - ISWAP) claimed responsibility for the attack, the Site Intelligence Group reported on 03 July 2019. The Site Intelligence Group specializes in the observation of extremist groups. ISWAP has broken away from the Nigerian terrorist militia Boko Haram.

Nigeria

13 civilians killed by mistake in an air strike on Islamists

The military announced that in the early evening of 02 July 2019 ISWAP fighters attacked a military base near the village of Gajiganna (50 km from Maiduguri, Borno State). The inhabitants fleeing the village from the fighting were mistakenly attacked by a military plane that was supposed to support the soldiers. Based on information from villagers AFP reports that at least 13 civilians died in the air strike.

Pakistan

US classify BLA as terror organization

On 02 July 2019 the US classified the separatist Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) as a terrorist organization. The BLA is fighting for more autonomy for Balochistan province and the containment of China's influence in the region. Pakistan's anti-terrorism agency has rated the BLA as terrorist already in 2006. In the recent past the group had drew attention with assaults on Chinese engineers in August 2018 and on the Chinese consulate in Karachi in November 2018.

Russian Federation/Chechnya

Attack on police station in Chechnya

An unknown perpetrator hurled a grenade into a police station in the Chechnyan province of Achkhoy-Martan in the west of the North Caucasus republic on 01 July 2019. He then fatally injured a policeman with a knife. Later the attacker was shot by police. The terror organisation Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the assault. President Ramsan Kadyrov condemned the crime and promised to step-up the fight against terrorism. Already on 23 June 2019 two security officer were reportedly wounded in a knife attack by a presumed IS follower.

Background

The number of victims in North Caucasus has dropped drastically since 2012. One reason being that many Islamist terrorists departed for Syria and Iraq to fight for IS. They must be expected to return to the North Caucasus again. In the first quarter of 2019 two members of the security forces and 14 Islamist terrorists were killed in North Caucasus.

Somalia

Fighting

There are reports that AMISOM and Somali soldiers conquered the two cities El Salin and Koban in Lower Shabelle region on 24 June 2019 which had previously been controlled by al-Shabaab.

On 24 and 25 June 2019 two al-Shabaab fighters were killed by air strikes of the United States Africa Command (US AFRICOM) near Jilib or Qunyo Barrow (Middle Juba region). Reportedly there were no civilian victims, although al-Shabaab claims the opposite.

Al-Shabaab assumed responsibility for a bombing in Af-Urur village, Galgala Mountains in Puntland, killing four members of the local security forces and a civilian on 25 June 2019.

On 26 June 2019 al-Shabaab fighters attacked a Somali National Army (SNA) base in Bullo Marer village (Lower Shabelle region). Reports say that two soldiers and three al-Shabaab fighters died.

Violence among clans

There are reports that several people were killed when fighting broke out between different clans over grazing rights and land in Mataban district, Hiiran region on 27 June 2019.

Public executions

There is information that at least ten people were publicly executed by al-Shabaab fighters in the southern part of the country last week. Five of them were suspected of spying for Kenyan, Somali and US intelligence services.

Sudan

Military and opposition agree on division of power

After months of violent confrontations the governing military council and the protest movement in Sudan came to an agreement on 04 July 2019. They decided on a roughly three-year long transition period during which they want to share power until democratic elections will be held. A council is to be formed in which five members of each side are to be represented. The council is to be chaired at first by a representative of the military, during the second half of the period by a member of the opposition alliance. Both sides want to form a government of experts and jointly investigate the violence that took place in recent weeks. After an interruption of several weeks the negotiations had only recently been resumed following mediation by the African Union. Thousands of people celebrated the agreement after weeks of violence.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lankan court bans resumption of executions of the death penalty for the time being

Sri Lanka's Supreme Court temporarily blocked the plans of President Maithripala Sirisena to execute the death penalty again after a moratorium of 43 years (see BN of 01 July 2019). On 05 July 2019 the court banned all executions until it has heard a petition to examine the constitutionality of executions by hanging. The court will start to hear the petition at the end of October, it is said.

Syria

19 civilians die in air strikes on Idlib

19 people, including children, are said to have been killed by air raids on rebel territory in Idlib province on 5 July 2019.

Idlib region is the last rebel stronghold and some of it is still dominated by the militia Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) that is close to al-Qaeda. Since end of April the Syrian government and its ally Russia are flying air raids on Idlib time and again. Reportedly at least 570 people have been killed by these air strikes, including 145 children. 2,117 people are said to have been wounded. More than 300,000 persons have been displaced. Syrian civil rights sources allege that the Russian-Syrian offensives are deliberately targeting civilians.

Israeli air strikes allegedly killed civilians

On 01 July 2019 Syrian state media reported attacks by Israeli fighter jets in the larger Damascus area in Homs province in which four civilians were killed and 21 more injured. The pro-opposition Syrian Human Rights Observatory reported 15 casualties (soldiers and civilians). The attacks were aimed at several targets, including the headquarters of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Damascus' south, a science research centre in a suburb and several Hezbollah bases in the mountains near the border to Lebanon. Attempting to fend off the Israeli attack, a Syrian anti-aircraft missile was fired that then landed 200km away in Northern Cyprus, it is said. The missile hit outside of a village near Nikosia, but no-one was injured.

Three casualties in an attack in Suweida

On 03 July 2019 three people were killed and seven more wounded, when an explosive was detonated in a busy street of the city of Suweida. At first no-one claimed responsibility for the attack in the provincial capital that is fully under the control of Assad's forces.

In his comment on the incident the governor stressed that the situation in the province would remain stable and that life could continue normally. Most of the population of Suweida are members of the Druze minority. The province of the same name had mostly been spared fighting until IS staged a series of attacks on 25 July 2018 that claimed more than 200 lives.

Number of returnees increasing

According to the UNHCR more than 35,500 Syrians returned of their own accord in the first months of 2019. In the last three years about 173,000 of the total of 5.6million refugees had returned, UNHCR said.

In view of the security situation the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) is currently not supporting voluntary returns to Syria and has suspended the relevant programmes. In Germany Syrian refugees still get financial assistance when they return. Over the last two and a half years 792 voluntary returns have been funded. About 780,000 Syrians took refuge in Germany.

Togo

Governing party wins local elections

According to the preliminary results published on 05 July 2019 the governing party Union pour la République (UNIR) won 895 of the 1,490 seats in municipal and local government councils in the local elections of 30 June 2019 (ANC: 134, C14: 131, UFC: 44). For technical reasons no election took place in three villages. The voter turnout was 52.5 per cent. All major opposition parties participated in the election with the exception of the Parti national panafricain (PNP). The last local elections were held in 1987, thereafter they were postponed time and again. The government appointed the leaders of local governments after the elected officials' terms ended. Holding local elections has long been one of the demands the opposition and the international community had made on the government.

Tunisia

Suspect dies during apprehension in Tunis

On 27 June 2019 two bombs exploded at short intervals in down-town Tunis. One assassin and a policeman died, eight people were injured. The terror militia Islamic State has claimed responsibility for the attacks. The Tunisian interior ministry informed that a suspect had been killed while police were trying to arrest him

on 02 July 2019. The ministry said that security forces pursued him in a residential area when he detonated an explosive vest to escape arrest. There were no other victims.

Niqab banned

One week after the bomb explosions in Tunis Prime Minister Youssef Chahed issued a decree banning Niqabs in authorities' offices and public buildings. Security concerns in fighting terrorism are cited as reason for the ban. It said that the security forces must be able to identify anyone entering a public building.

Turkey

Presumed bomb attack in border town to Syria

Three people lost their lives in what is presumed to be a bomb attack in Reyhanli city, Hatay province on 05 July 2019. The city of Reyhanli is close to the Syrian border. Reports say that around noon-time three Syrians were sitting in a parked car that blew up and killed them. The incident happened about 750m from the seat of the administration. President Erdogan made it clear that there could be no doubt that it was a terror attack. The three Syrians had been officially registered in Turkey. Already in 2013, a double attack had happened in Reyhanli that left 52 people dead.

Venezuela

UN report on extra-judicial killings

On 05 July 2019 a new report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, was published. For 2018 alone it lists about 5,300 killings during operations by the special forces FAES. When presenting the report Bachelet said that these killings had most probably to be considered "extra-judicial executions by the special forces". The report goes on to document a large number of other human rights violations.

Yemen

Fighting

On 28 June 2019 the Saudi-led military alliance attacked targets of the Iran-supported Houthi rebels in the port town of Hodeida, as announced by Saudi Arabian state media. They also reported that the attacks were the response to missiles fired on a power plant in southern Saudi Arabia on the day before. The retaliation attack had targeted ships that were stacked with explosives by the rebels to be used for terror attacks and to threaten international navigation, state media said.

Special task force might have arrested IS top man in Yemen

The media report that the head of the Yemeni branch of Islamic State (IS) has been captured by a task force of Saudi Arabian and Yemeni special forces. Reportedly Abu Osama al-Muhadshir had been arrested already at the beginning of June together with other high-ranking IS representatives - including the head of finance - in Mahfad district (Abyan Gouvernement). Hardly any activities were reported of this group lately, it had been established in 2014.

Attacks on Saudi Arabian airports

A presumed drone attack by Houthi rebels on Abha airport on 01 July 2019 injured nine people. It is said that this was the third attack in three weeks. It is reported that the Houthi rebels also fired drones on fighter jet hangars and other military installations at Jizan airport in the country's south on 06 July 2019. Saudi Arabia has not yet published any statement.