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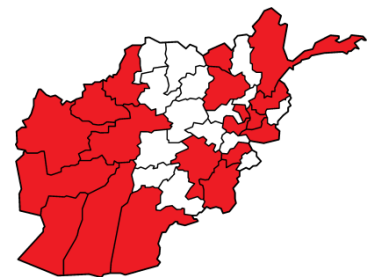
Briefing Notes

31 July 2017

Afghanistan

Armed confrontations

The fighting, purges, raids, air and drone strikes by the security forces continue as well as the ambushes and attacks of the insurgents and in some of these also civilians are killed or injured. According to media reports the following provinces were affected in the last two weeks: Nangarhar, Lagham, Nuristan (east), Paktya, Paktika, Ghazni (southeast), Faryab (north), Helmand (south; 117 civilians were killed or injured by fighting within one month in that province), Kandahar, Nimroz (south), Farah, Ghor, Badghis, Herat (west), Kabul, Kapisa (centre), Badakhshan, and Baghlan (northeast).



Reportedly the military withdrew from ten villages near the provincial capital of Kunduz (northeast) permitting the Taliban to reconquer them.

Assaults and attacks

The Taliban reported that the attack in Kabul on 24 July 2017 that left 35 dead and 42 injured (see Briefing Notes of 24 July 2017) was aimed at officers of the Afghan intelligence services. The Afghan interior ministry informed that the bus hit by a car bomb was carrying staff of the mining ministry.

On 25 July 2017 IS fighters shot a tribal elder in the Qush Tapa district of Jawzjan province (north). Also the Taliban repeatedly assassinate tribal elders who stand up to them, especially when they are trying to recruit new fighters (see below).

The head of Sheb Koh district in Farah province (west) was killed in a bombing together with his son and six body guards on 26 July 2017. Three children suffered injuries from mine explosions in Paktika province (southeast). Two senior officials of the health authorities were abducted in Jawzjan province. Security forces in Kabul succeeded in intercepting a lorry loaded with explosives for an attack.

On 29 July 2017 a tribal elder was shot by the Taliban in Batikot district of Nangarhar province (east). The Taliban blew up a traditional water dam (Karez) in Khorabak district in Kandahar province (south). The farmers in the area are now worried that their fields will run dry.

A bomb killed a tribal elder and injured two persons in Khogyani district in Nangarhar province (east) on 30 July 2017.

A bomb exploded in the Shahr-e-Naw district of the capital Kabul in the morning of 31 July 2017. According to first reports it was a suicide bombing near the Iraqi embassy.

Egypt/China

Uyghur students threatened by deportation

Since 04 July 2017 more than 200 Uyghur students have been arrested in Egypt, probably following a request by Chinese authorities. They had ignored a Chinese call on Uyghur students abroad in January 2017 to return to their home country (see BN of 15 May 2017). Some of those arrested were taken to the Chinese embassy and questioned by Chinese security personnel about their contacts to the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) which is considered a terrorist organization. Human rights activists are concerned that

those deported could become victims of arbitrary detention and torture. At the beginning of 2017 about 8,000 Uyghur students were staying in Egypt, some of them returned, others went underground. China is blaming the violent clashes in the Xinjiang autonomous region on Uyghur terrorists controlled from abroad. Critics see the violence as a response to the restrictive policy towards the Muslim ethnic minority.

Algeria

IS leader arrested

Security forces discovered a cell of the IS terror militia in the village of Tipaz, 50 kilometres west of the capital Algiers. The leader, Mohamed Yacine Aknouche, was arrested. It is said that he used to be an Al Qaeda commander.

China

Followers of a Christian sect arrested

The state media reported that 18 members of the outlawed sect Church of Almighty God (Eastern Lightning) were arrested in Changxing (Zhejiang province).

Democratic Republic of Congo

Warlord Sheka surrenders to UN troops

On 26 July 2017 militia commander Ntabo Ntaberi Sheka surrendered to the UN soldiers of the MONUSCO peace mission in the town of Mutongo (Walikale territory in the eastern province of North Kivu). He was taken to North Kivu's provincial capital Goma and will be handed over to the Congolese authorities. Sheka is the leader of the Nduma Defense of Congo militia, also known as Mai Mai Sheka. He has been wanted by the Congolese authorities for crimes against humanity since 2011. According to UN information Sheka's fighters and two other armed groups raped at least 387 civilians in 13 villages in the Walikale territory between 30 July and 02 August 2010. Since the warrant of arrest had been issued for him Human Rights Watch has documented the murder of 70 civilians and the rape of more women and girls by members of Sheka's militia.

Iraq

Kirkuk

On 27 July 2017 IS followers disguised as Peshmerga stormed a village in the Kirkuk region killing several followers of the Kaka'i faith. It is generally true that IS activities in Kirkuk province are increasing, after Mosul's fall Hawija has become IS' most important base in Iraq. It is from there that it controls extensive territory in the west of Kirkuk province and parts of Salah ad-Din province

Mosul

Reports from the surroundings of Mosul about abuse and revenge on family members of IS fighters and inhabitants abound. Human Rights Watch (HRW) is accusing members of the 16th Iraqi division of executing dozens of suspected IS fighters without trial. Currently a news embargo applies for Mosul's old town. More and more anonymous statements of members of the Iraqi military are surfacing saying that they had been ordered to advance ruthlessly and sometimes also not to take anyone prisoner during the reconquest.

Meanwhile there are several camps in the surroundings where these members are interned irrespective of their age.

Many bodies still need to be recovered in Mosul and the risks resulting from the mining is still high. The United Nations Mines Action Service informed that since explosive ordnance clearance began in October 2016 more than 1,700 people have been injured or killed by mines.

Of the 54 urban districts of Mosul 15 are currently considered to be completely destroyed, 23 are badly damaged and 16 slightly damaged. The residential areas that have been completely destroyed or badly damaged are mostly in the city's western part.

Ninawa

The fighting east of Mosul continues. It included air strikes at the Syrian-Iraqi border. The reports about an attack on IS units on Syrian territory by the Iraqi air force were denied.

Two families attempting to return to Qaraqosh died when their cars hit a land mine.

Israel/Palestinian Autonomous Areas

Temple Mount: Tensions eased

On 27 July 2017 the Muslim leadership in Jerusalem invited the faithful back to the al-Aqsa mosque. The announcement came after the Israeli authorities had relaxed the controls on the Temple Mount which is a holy site both for Jews and Muslims. This marked the end of an almost two-week boycott and relaxed tensions, even though the Palestinians threw bottles and stones and set fire to barricades on the day of the Friday prayers (28 July 2017). After a fatal attack of Arab assassins on policemen on 14 July 2017 Israel had ordered checks with metal detectors. The Palestinians protested against this, because they considered these checks as an attempt by Israel to gain more control of the holy sites.

Libya

Ceasefire agreement

On 25 July 2017 the first agreement was made between Ferraz Al-Serraj, the head of the Presidential Council (PC), and Khalifa Haftar, the head of the Libyan National Army (LNA), in Paris. The agreement provides for a political dialogue and parliamentary and presidential elections as soon as possible. Further, the militias are to be demobilised and their fighters shall be integrated into the regular Libyan armed forces. Whether this agreement will be implemented remains to be seen. The ceasefire shall not apply to fighting terrorist groups, therefore there are concerns that anyone who is considered an obstacle by either of the contracting parties will simply be called a terrorist in future.

Tripoli

On 25 July 2017 the PC government announced that no unauthorised weapons will be tolerated in Tripoli after 30 July 2017. It is not clear whether this announcement had been coordinated with the allied militias and whether it can be implemented.

Libyan National Army

On 24 July 2017 a video became known that shows a LNA officer and some of his followers executing 20 alleged IS fighters without trial. The video's staging and imagery strongly reminds of a 2016 IS propaganda video showing the murder of 13 Copts.

On 30 July 2017 fighters allied with the LNA are said to have attacked and ousted Islamists from the city of Sabratha (west).

Humanitarian situation

On 26 July 2017 the World Food Programme announced that Italy is supporting its efforts to supply the internally displaced persons in Libya with USD 1.6 million. Japan had pledged USD 700,000 in March. According to the WFP at least USD 9.5m are required for 2017.

Lebanon

After several days of heavy fighting between the Shia Hezbollah and the Sunni Jabhat Fatah ash-Sham (former Nusra Front, which had occupied part of the Lebanese territory from Syria) a ceasefire was agreed. Jabhat ash-Sham will abandon the region, its fighters and their families will move to Idlib province in Syria.

Morocco/Spain

Border police attacked

A man lightly injured a border guard with a knife at the border crossing of Beni Enzar between the Spanish exclave Melilla and Morocco. The attacker was arrested.

Amnesty

Moroccan king Mohammed VI granted an amnesty to celebrate his 18th jubilee. 1,178 prisoners were pardoned, including several activists of the protest movement in Al Hoceima. It is not known whether the amnesty also applied to the leader of the Hirak movement, Nasser Zefsafi.

Act on judicial independence

On 24 July 2017 parliament approved a law stipulating that prosecutors' offices will in future only be reporting to the courts. With this act Morocco has taken a step towards creating an independent judiciary.

Nigeria

Boko Haram: Convoy ambushed

On 25 July 2017 the Islamist terror organization Boko Haram assaulted a convoy of an oil exploration team of Maiduguri University which was escorted by security forces and returning to Maiduguri (capital of northeastern state of Borno) from the Lake Chad basin. The geologists were on a mission on behalf of the state oil company NNPC. The terrorists succeeded in overwhelming the security forces and were able to kidnap several of the geologists. The military attempted to liberate them, but after fighting with the terrorists it returned on 27 July 2017 without the hostages. According to reports 19 soldiers were killed during the fighting as well as 33 members of a civilian vigilant group and 17 civilians (including two lecturers, two technicians and a driver of the university).

The Boko Haram group led by Abu Musab al-Barnawi published a video on 28 July 2017 showing the three geologists of Maiduguri University urging the university president to comply with the kidnappers' demands for their release.

Boko Haram: Several suicide bombings

The disaster protection agency SEMA reported that on 28 July 2017 a female suicide bomber blew herself up in a building in the city of Dikwa (Borno state) killing at least 14 people and wounding 24.

On 24 July 2017 a suicide bomber blew himself up in the refugee camp for internally displaced persons Dalori 1 (Dalori city, on the outskirts of Maiduguri). Three refugees were killed and 17 wounded.

After having been discovered by the security guards a second female suicide bomber exploded her belt in front of the camp Dalori 2.

Another suicide bomber blew himself up, probably accidentally, when trying to access the premises of Maiduguri University.

Pakistan

Prime minister resigns

The Pakistani Supreme Court held on 28 July 2017 that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is unfit to hold public office. Nawaz Sharif is accused of tax evasion, corruption and money laundering, allegedly his family is involved in with fishy and dubious financial transactions (Panama Papers). The court said that he had lied to parliament and the court. Nawaz Sharif resigned shortly after the pronouncement of the judgment and dissolved the cabinet. Parliament must now elect a new prime minister. It is expected that Nawaz Sharif's successor will again be provided by the majority party in parliament, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). The party seems to favour Shabaz Sharif, the resigned prime minister's brother and governor of Punjab province. However, first a bye-election must be held so he can become a member of parliament. Therefore Shahid Khaqan Abbasi (Minister for Petroleum and Natural Resources) will probably be elected as interim prime minister on 01 August 2017. The next regular parliamentary elections will take place in 2018.

Serious attack in Lahore

In a bombing in Lahore (Punjab) on 24 July 2014 at least 25 people were killed and several dozens wounded on 24 July 2017. The Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility.

Senegal

Parliamentary elections

Hundreds of the 6.2 million eligible voters could not cast their votes in the parliamentary elections on 30 July 2017 among other reasons because of delays in issuing identification cards.

Three politicians dominated the election campaign: President Macky Sall (Alliance des Forces du Progrès, APR), his predecessor, 91-year-old Abdoulaye Wade (Parti Démocratique Sénégalais, PDS), and Dakar mayor Khalifa Sall (Parti Socialiste, PS), who is serving a prison sentence for embezzlement of funds. The election campaign was marred by violence. Police had detained dozens of supporters of the president and of Dakar's mayor during clashes in the days preceding the elections. The first election results are expected for 31 July 2017.

Somalia

Attacks

On 25 July 2017 al-Shabaab assassinated a Somali army commander in the Wadajir district of Mogadishu.

On 30 July 2017 at least five people died and 13 were injured by the explosion of a car bomb near a police station in Mogadishu. The explosion occurred in a traffic jam while soldiers were searching cars at a nearby intersection.

Fighting

Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for attacks on AMISOM bases of Ethiopian and Djibouti troops in the villages Jalalaqsi and Halgan (Hiiran region) on 24 July 2017. On 25 July 2017 al-Shabaab fighters attacked Somali units in the village of Yantooy (Lower Juba region). Al-Shabaab reported booby trapping a convoy of the Somali army near Kismayo (Lower Juba region) on 26 July 2017 killing US and AMISON soldiers.

On 26 July 2017 Kenyan aircraft bombed an al-Shabaab training camp in the village of Lagta near Kolbio (Lower Juba region). Kenya's security forces are intensifying their operations against al-Shabaab in the Kenyan-Somali border region because of the upcoming elections in Kenya.

On 26 July 2017 al-Shabaab exploded a booby trap aimed at an AMISOM convoy in the strategically important town of Afgoi (about 30 km northwest of Mogadishu, Lower Shabelle region). **On 27 July 2017** the extremists attacked Somali army barracks in Afgoi.

Several soldiers were killed in an attack on an AMISOM convoy near Bullo Marer (Lower Shabelle region) on 30 July 2017. A Somali officer reported that there were eight casualties; al-Shabaab had announced the killing of 39 soldiers.

Head of al-Shabaab's intelligence service arrested

On 24 July 2017 Puntland security forces arrested the head of al-Shabaab's intelligence service (Amniyat), Abdirazak Hussein Tahlil, in Galkayo (Mudug region) in a joint operation of the regional administration of Galmudug and the Somali intelligence service. He is suspected of being responsible for a series of terror attacks in the course of two months in Galkayo in which 25 members of the security forces and businessmen were murdered. Tahlil had already been arrested and sentenced to death for the possession of explosives in Puntland in 2013, but later he had been pardoned in 2014.

Aid workers released

On 24 July 2017 al-Shabaab released seven aid workers it had kidnapped on 15 July 2017 against a ransom payment of USD 30,000.

Government vows to take action against blackmail

The director of the Somali intelligence service announced that the government intended to take action like the seizure of assets against companies that pay ransom to al-Shabaab. He said that the extremists are extorting about USD 150m every year.

Food situation not improved

The United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) stated that it is improbable that the food situation in Somalia will improve until the end of the year.

Syria

Raqqa

Fighting in Raqqa continues with unabated intensity. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have liberated further city districts from IS control. There are reports stating that the SDF fighters treat everybody remaining in Raqqa generally as an IS follower.

Fighting

In several parts of the country intensive air and ground combats flared up again. The focus seems to be on the regions of east Ghouta and Homs province. In both of these regions opposition forces are controlling major enclaves. Most local ceasefires are observed. This made it possible to deliver UN humanitarian aid to Al Nashabiye (Ghouta region) for the first time in the five years the town has been besieged.

Turkey/Syria

IS critics assassinated

The Syrian journalist and film director Naji Jerf was assassinated in Turkey on 30 July 2017. This was the third murder of a Syrian journalist within a short time. All of the victims were reporting about IS in a critical manner.

Turkey

Several Cumhuriyet journalists released

On 28 July 2017 the court ordered the conditional provisional release of seven indicted staff members of the paper Cumhuriyet. The journalists are charged with supporting the Gülen movement (FETÖ), the PKK and the extreme left party DHKP-C (see BN of 24 July 2017). However, the four most prominent defendants, including the publisher and the editor-in-chief, were not released. The next trial hearing will be held on 11 September 2017. If convicted, the defendants could be sentenced to a maximum of 43 years in prison. From the very first day protests accompanied this trial. Former president Abdullah Gül criticized the journalists' detention publicly and demanded that they should all be released during the trial.

Protests against a reform of parliamentary procedural rules

On 27 July 2017 opposition politicians staged a sit-in in parliament to protest any potential restrictions of their freedom of opinion. This is related to the planned reform of parliamentary procedural rules. The reform includes the limitation of speaking time during debates on bills and provides for punishment of members of parliament who make illegal references to Turkish regions in the debate, such as the terms „Kurdistan“ and „Kurdish provinces“.

Dozens of protesters arrested

According to a media report 61 people were detained in a solidarity rally for two prisoners, a female professor and a primary school teacher, on 23 July 2017 in Ankara. Both of them had been arrested about two months ago because they had gone on hunger strike to protest against their dismissal or suspension and that of over 100,000 employees of public services, the judiciary, police, and military. Their arrest had been justified by saying that a banned grouping of the extreme left was behind their hunger strike.

Tunisia

Law to protect women adopted

The Tunisian parliament passed a law to protect women against violence, be it physical, mental or sexual violence. This offers protection for the first time also for victims of domestic violence. The victims shall receive legal and psychological assistance. Cases of rape shall be investigated, even if the victim revokes her report to the police or if the rapist of a minor girl marries her later. Girls will now reach the age of sexual consent at 16 and not at the age of 13 anymore.

Vietnam

Activist sentenced

On 25 July 2017 a court in Ha Nam province sentenced the human rights activist Tran Thi Nga to nine years imprisonment and five years of house arrest for „propaganda against the state“. She had protested against corruption and arbitrariness and stood up for victims of the judicial system, worker rights and environmental protection. She had been arrested in January 2017 after sharing articles and videos about environmental crises and corruption online.

Activists arrested

The activist Le Dinh Luon was arrested in Nghe An province on 24 July 2017. The authorities are accusing him among other things of membership in the Viet Tan organisation that is classified as terrorist in Vietnam. Another four persons from Hanoi, Ho-Chi-Minh City, and Thanh Hoa province were arrested on 30 July 2017 for attempted subversive activities.

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