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Group 22 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

30 June 2014

Afghanistan

Security situation

Eight soldiers were reportedly killed in an attack in the province of Zabul on 23.06.14. According to the police, six Taliban fighters were killed in the province of Kunduz. A police chief and his bodyguard were killed in a bomb attack in the province of Ghazni on 25.06.14. According to information from the chief of police in Faryab, four people died in an attack on a busy market in the north of the country. A NATO soldier has been killed in the south of the country.

The military offensive against the Taliban which has been underway in the province of Helmand for over a week now has claimed some 330 lives to date, including at least 50 civilians and at least 250 Taliban fighters. More than 800 fighters attacked positions of the security forces in four districts of the province on 20.06.14. The insurgents were largely pushed back in a counter-offensive. They are reportedly now holed up in two areas in the district of Sangin. The fighting continues. According to the provincial government spokesman, 3,200 families have fled the violence.

Presidential elections – accusations of fraud

On 22.06.14, Abdullah's election campaign team presented an audio recording which allegedly provides evidence of manipulation in Ghani's favour in the presidential run-off. In response to the reports of election fraud and claims of support for presidential candidate Ghani's camp (cf. BN of 23.06.14), the chairman of the Afghan election committee resigned on 23.06.14. Similarly to Ghani, he denies the accusations of fraud. Supporters of Abdullah nevertheless continued the demonstrations in Kabul against the suspected election fraud on 27.06.14. Abdullah led the demonstrators. He went into the run-off as favourite, but allegedly finished far behind Ghani after the votes had been counted.

New ISAF commander

John Campbell is to become the new commander of the US troops and the ISAF peace-keeping force. He will be in charge of the final phase of the operation – the orderly withdrawal. Campbell was commander of the 101st airborne brigade in eastern Afghanistan from 2010 to 2011. Joseph Dunford, who has held the commander's post to date, will lead the marine corps.

Pakistan

Attack on passenger plane/offensive continued

More than 200 suspects have been arrested after a passenger plane came under fire in north-west Pakistan on 24.06.14. The police announced on 25.06.14 that it was still searching for the culprits. Round-ups after attacks are no rare occurrence in Pakistan. Most suspects are generally released after a short time. No-one has claimed responsibility for the attack as yet. The radical Islamist Taliban are prime suspects.

Meanwhile, the army continued its offensive against the Taliban on 25.06.14. According to information from security circles, 15 suspected Taliban fighters were killed and seven injured in the attacks carried out by the airforce on Taliban positions in North Waziristan. Hundreds of thousands of people have fled the region since the military operation began eleven days ago.

Syria

Chemical weapons removed from the country

According to the inspectors from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the final stocks of chemical weapons were transported out of Syria on 23.06.14. President Bashar al-Assad consented to the chemical weapons being destroyed after the USA threatened air raids in response to the use of chemical weapons near Damascus in August 2013 (approx. 1,400 people were killed in an attack with the nerve gas Sarin). The OPCW has reported the recent "systematic use of chlorine gas", however. This chemical is not covered by the treaty, as it is also in widespread use in industry.

ISIS: Crucifixions/caliphate proclaimed

According to information released by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights on 29.06.14, the terrorist group The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, ISIS (also: The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, ISIL) has killed eight people who belonged to rival insurgent groups in Deir Hafir, in the east of the province of Aleppo. They were subsequently nailed to crosses in a central square. A ninth man, who was crucified for eight hours in al-Bab, close to the Turkish border, reportedly survived the punishment. Heavy fighting has taken place for the first time in the east of Damascus between the Islamic Army (a pillar of the Islamic Front, the largest rebel coalition which has been fighting ISIS for some months now) and ISIS fighters.

On 29.06.14 ISIS proclaimed a caliphate in the regions under its control in Iraq and Syria (see BN on Iraq for further details). ISIS is said to have renamed itself "Islamic State".

Iraq

Recent developments

The situation is currently confused. Armed clashes and attacks/assassinations are taking place in various regions.

According to a press announcement from the UN News Centre on 24.06.14, more than 1,000 people have reportedly been killed and at least 1,000 injured in the two weeks since the terrorist group "The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria/The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS/ISIL) and its allies began to expand in Iraq. According to the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), at least 757 civilians were killed and at least 599 civilians injured in the provinces of Nineve, Salahaddin (Salah al-Din), Diyala and to the north of Baghdad between 05. and 22.06.14 (including a number of verified executions and extra-legal killings of civilians, policemen and soldiers). According to the announcement, at least 318 people were killed and 590 injured over the same period in Baghdad and in regions in the south – many as a result of at least six separate car bomb attacks. Kidnappings are reported to be continuing in the northern provinces and Baghdad, in some cases leading to killings.

According to the British non-governmental organisation Iraq Body Count (IBC), 3,211 civilians have been killed in June 2014 to date (as per: 25.06.2014) .

130 American military advisors are said to have arrived in Baghdad in the night of 24.06.14, with fifty more to follow at the weekend. They are tasked with assessing the security situation and setting up two operational bases with Iraqi armed forces – one in Baghdad and one in the north of the country. 23 people were killed in a suicide attack in the Baghdad district of al Kasimija in the evening.

According to a press report on 26.06.14, Iran placed troops at the border with Iraq on high alert on 25.06.14. in response to the latest advance by ISIS fighters.

Fighting between the Iraqi army and ISIS reportedly took place in several places on 27.06.14. There are contradictory reports on the outcome of this fighting.

According to information released by Human Rights Watch (HRW) on 27.06.14, ISIS fighters have killed at least 160 people in mass executions in northern Iraq. HRW states that further investigations are necessary in this connection. HRW cites photographs and satellite images from the city of Tikrit.

On 28./29.06.14 the Iraqi army launched a large-scale offensive in an attempt to recapture the city of Tikrit, which was seized by ISIS on 11.06.14. Heavy fighting has taken place between the army and ISIS. According to a report from the BBC, the government troops have retreated to a suburb of Tikrit. The Iraqi army itself claims to have captured large parts of the city. By recapturing the city, the Iraqi army is aiming to stop the advance on Baghdad. Tikrit is strategically important, as it lies on the main road linking the north of the country and Baghdad.

According to a press announcement, on 29.06.14 Iraqi soldiers entered the town of Bashir, south of Kirkuk with the support of the Kurdish Peshmerga. The town had also been overrun by ISIS.

ISIS proclaims caliphate

ISIS has proclaimed an Islamic caliphate in the regions under its control in Iraq and Syria. In a multi-lingual audio message published on the internet on 20.06.14, ISIS spokesman Mohammed al-Adani proclaimed the militia leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as the first caliph. He stated that the caliphate would extend from the Aleppo region in the north of Syria to the Dijala region in the east of Iraq. The group has reportedly also changed its name to "Islamic State". The authenticity of the announcement has yet to be verified.

A caliphate is a state based on Islamic laws in which secular and religious power is held by one and the same leadership. The word "caliph" means "successor". Baghdadi thus sees himself as the prophet Mohammed's successor at the head of the Islamic community. The caliphate had its heyday between the 7th and 16th centuries. The Turkish government abolished the last caliphate in 1924.

Formation of a government

Iraqi president al-Maliki rejects a government of "national unity", an alliance of Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds, and also declines to resign.

Turkey

Bill on the Kurdish conflict

Ahead of the presidential election in August, prime minister Erdogan is making overtures to the Kurdish population with a new bill. On 26.06.14 the government submitted a bill to parliament which is intended to place the peace talks between the government and imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan on a legal footing. In order to enable the legislative package to be passed as soon as possible, the beginning of the parliament's summer recess has been postponed until 25.07.14.

According to information from parliamentary circles the legislative package contains seven points, including improved conditions for the reintegration of Kurds who wish to leave the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and an immunity arrangement for those participating in the peace talks.

Deputy prime minister Basir Atalay, who is responsible for the Kurdish issue, stated in a television interview that the provisions were the "final steps" on the path to a peace treaty. "We are approaching a phase in which these problems are resolved, violence comes to an end and the people lay down their arms and come down from the mountains to return to a normal social life."

Israel/Syria

Protest camp of African refugees broken up

On 09.06.14 the Israeli used force to break up a protest camp comprising hundreds of African refugees on the border with Egypt. According to reports on Israeli television, the refugees, who resisted their eviction from the camp, were forced onto buses which took them back to the Cholut refugee camp in the Negev desert or to a prison. The refugees from Eritrea and Sudan had criticised "inhuman living conditions" at the

Cholot camp. While Israel is not deporting the roughly 50,000 refugees from Eritrea and Sudan to their countries of origin, on account of the serious violations of human rights perpetrated there, it nevertheless aims to prevent them from remaining permanently.

More rockets fired at Israel from the Gaza Strip

The situation in the Palestinian Gaza Strip continues to escalate. According to police spokesman Mickey Rosenfeld, militant Palestinians fired more than ten small rockets at Israel on the morning of 30.06.14 alone. There were also rocket attacks in the night. Tension in the region bordering on the Gaza Strip has risen severely since 12.06.14, when three Israeli teenagers were kidnapped in the West Bank. A total of 23 rockets have been fired at Israel from the Palestinian territory in the past two weeks. The Israeli army responds every night with air raids.

Lebanon

Car bomb attack in Beirut

At least twelve people were injured in a car bomb attack in the south of Beirut on the early morning of 24.06.14 close to an army checkpoint and a café in which a World Cup football match was being shown. This was the second attack in the space of 84 hours. Prime minister Salam said the attack was an attempt to crush Lebanon's "national unity". He added that the authorities were still investigating whether ISIS members or the al-Nusra Front were responsible for the attack. ISIS's claim to control the region from the Tigris to the Mediterranean also includes Lebanon.

Yemen

Attack on airport/further fighting

Suspected fighters belonging to AQAP (Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula) attacked the airport of the Yemeni city of Seiyun on 26.06.14. Three soldiers were killed. Official representatives announced that AQAP fighters had seized parts of the airport, including the control tower. In the course of the army operation to recapture the airport, at least six insurgents were killed and hostages were freed. Seiyun is the second-largest city in the province of Hadramaut in south-east Yemen and is situated in the Hadramaut Valley, which is an AQAP stronghold. President Mansour Hadi announced a nationwide state of alert. The army has been pursuing operations against the Islamist AQAP in South Yemen since the end of 2014. According to official figures, more than 500 insurgents and 40 soldiers have been killed so far in the offensive, which aims to drive the insurgents out of the provinces of Shabwa and Abyan.

According to information from the military, two soldiers and four extremists were killed in another AQAP attack on a Yemeni military post.

Three soldiers were injured in a battle lasting around an hour in the province of Hadramaut on 28.06.14.

Egypt

Attacks on underground in Cairo

At least four people were injured in several explosions on the underground in Cairo on 25.06.14. The bombs were reportedly detonated at roughly the same time at three underground stations during the morning rush hour. According to other sources, bombs exploded at two underground railway stations and outside a court building, injuring at least six people.

Journalists convicted

On 23.06.14 a court in Cairo sentenced an Australian and a Canadian-Egyptian journalist working for the Al-Jazeera International channel each to seven years' imprisonment. An Egyptian producer from the channel also received a seven-year prison term, plus an additional three years for possession of a single bullet. The defendants were charged with supporting a terrorist organisation and disseminating lies. The Egyptian government described international protests against the sentences as interference in the country's internal

affairs. Al-Jazeera is owned by Qatar's ruling dynasty. Qatar supports toppled president Morsi and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.

Tunisia

Election dates

On 15.06.14 parliament agreed on the dates for the parliamentary and presidential elections. The elections to parliament are to take place on 26.10.14 and the first round of the presidential elections is to be held on 23.11.14. Should a second ballot be necessary, this is scheduled for 28.12.14. This puts an end to the row which has been going on for months now between Islamists and the opposition over whether the two elections should be held together or separately. At the same time, the MPs are complying with the requirement set out in the new constitution which was adopted at the end of January to hold elections by the end of a third interim year.

Libya

Low turn-out for parliamentary elections

The parliamentary elections on 25.06.14 attracted a markedly lower turn-out than the first free election two years ago. Only around 630,000 people reportedly cast their votes. Of a total electorate of 3.4 million, 1.5 million had registered for the election. More than 1,600 candidates ran for the 200 parliamentary mandates. 32 seats are reserved for women. The initial election results are expected in the coming days. The new parliament is to replace the National Congress, whose authority has been largely eroded by internal turf wars and its tolerance of Islamic militias.

On the day of the election, the lawyer and human rights activist Salwa Bugaighis, who took part in the uprising against Gaddafi in 2011, was killed at her house in Bengasi and her husband, Issam, is believed to have been abducted. The sole witness to the events, a guard, was admitted to hospital with signs of torture on 28.06.14, where he subsequently died.

Four people also died in Bengasi in fighting between Islamists and government troops.

Nigeria

Boko Haram kills churchgoers

On the morning of 29.06.14, suspected fighters of the Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram shot at people attending service in five churches in the village of Kwada (federal state of Borno, around 10 km from Chibok) and burned the churches down. They then moved on to the neighbouring village of Kautikari, where they killed villagers and set houses on fire. More than 50 people are reported to have been killed.

Explosion in brothel in Bauchi

A bomb exploded in a brothel in the red light district of Bayan Gari in the town of Bauchi (capital of the federal state of the same name in the north of the country) at around 10 p.m. on 27.06.14. According to information from the police, ten people died and 14 were injured. Boko Haram is thought to be responsible for the attack.

Terrorists killed

On 26.06.14 the Nigerian defence ministry revealed that a battle with terrorists had taken place near Miyanti and Bulungu in the federal state of Borno. According to the ministry, over 50 terrorists were killed when the security forces attacked their camp. 53 terrorists and two soldiers reportedly died in an attack by the "Multinational Joint Task Force" on another terrorist camp near Duguri, close to the border with the Republic of Niger.

Bomb attack on shopping centre in Abuja

A bomb exploded at around 4 p.m. on 25.06.14 at the entrance to the "Emab Plaza" shopping centre in the Wuse 2 district of the capital, Abuja. According to information from the police, 21 people were killed and 17 injured, some seriously. One of the attackers was reportedly shot dead while trying to escape and another attacker was arrested. Boko Haram is being held responsible for the attack.

More than 60 women and children abducted

According to press reports on 24.06.14, relying in part on information from the leader of a local citizens' militia ("Civil Joint Task Force"), suspected Boko Haram fighters attacked the villages of Kumanza (Kumugza), Yaga and Dagu (Damboa LGA) in the federal state of Borno during the period from 19. the 21.06.14. They reportedly abducted around 60 women, girls and infants. There are also reports that 31 young men were abducted. The federal government and the governor of Borno have disputed the reported abductions.

Soldiers killed by Boko Haram

According to a surviving soldier, suspected Boko Haram fighters travelling in more than 30 vehicles stormed an army post in the village of Bulabulin-Ngaura (around 35 km north of the town of Damboa, federal state of Borno) on the night of 24.06.14. Some 21 soldiers and five villagers were killed.

Attack on educational establishment

On the afternoon of 23.06.14, a suicide attacker blew up a bomb on the grounds of the school for hygiene technology in Bayero University Kano Road, Kano (capital of the northern federal state of the same name). According to information from the police, the attackers, who is presumed to have belonged to Boko Haram, died along with seven students.

Eritrea

UN investigating human rights violations

The UN Human Rights Council has set up a commission to investigate large-scale human rights violations in Eritrea. The Council passed a corresponding resolution submitted by France and Somalia on 27.06.14. After Syria and North Korea, this is the third conflict region for which the UN body in Geneva is establishing a commission. It is to draw up its first report by March 2015.

The UN Human Rights Council condemned the sustained and systematic violations of human rights by the Eritrean authorities. Arbitrary and extra-judicial executions, torture and unacceptable prison conditions were singled out for particular criticism. The Council called for an end to the practice of imposing unlimited military service and firing shots at the border with the aim of deterring Eritreans from escaping. According to the UN, almost 4,000 people have fled the country every month since the beginning of the year.

Central African Republic

Break-out of violence

According to UN information released on 27.06.14, violent clashes occurred on the days before in and around the town of Bambari (around 380 kilometres north-east of the capital, Banui). At least 45 people are reported to have been killed in an attack by unidentified persons on a camp occupied by Muslim Peul (also: Fulbe, Fulani) on 23.06.14 and in revenge attacks. Thousands are said to have fled to camps for internally displaced persons in the Bambari region to escape the violence.

Mali

EUTM training mission and Minusma support extended.

On 25.06.14 the Bundestag resolved to extend the German armed forces' deployment as part of the Minusma UN stabilisation mission by a further year until mid-2015.

On 26.06.14 the UN Security Council unanimously approved the continuation of the EUTM training mission. The German armed forces are also involved in this mission to train Malian soldiers.

Somalia

Attacks at the beginning of Ramadan

Following al-Shabaabs announcement that it would be stepping up its attacks at the beginning of the fasting month, suspected Islamists shot dead two traffic policemen from a moving car in the centre of Mogadishu. A soldier was killed in a similar attack in the north of the city.

Attack on hotel in Buulobarde

On 26.06.14 al-Shabaab fighters stormed a hotel in the town of Buulobarde in the central Somalian region of Hiiran. At least three people died in the attack. Members of AMISOM and native soldiers are regular guests at the hotel. AMISOM re-captured Buulobarde from al-Shabaab in March 2014, since when armed clashes have been a frequent occurrence.

Sudan

Rebel leader killed in Darfur

According to information from the governor of North Darfur, the rebel leader Ali Karbino was killed in a battle with government troops on 28.06.14, together with twelve fighters from his organisation. Karbino commanded a rebel group by the name of Sudan Liberation Movement for Justice (SLMJ), which split from the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) under Abdel Wahid Mohammed al-Nur in 2009. Karbino's fighting force is estimated at between 60 and 80 men. According to information from the UN, Karbino was responsible for some of the most serious recent attacks on government troops.

Christian woman who was sentenced to death now in US embassy

On 27.06.14 the Christian woman who was sentenced to death and 100 whiplashes for apostasy and fornication in May 2014 and subsequently acquitted by a court of appeal in Khartoum was refused permission to leave the country by the Sudanese authorities. Members of the secret service prevented her from boarding an airplane. She is currently staying at the United States embassy in Khartoum.

West Afrika

Ebola epidemic spreading

The Ebola epidemic which has been prevalent in parts of west Africa since February is spreading. According to WHO figures released on 26.06.14, 635 people are currently registered as being infected in Guinea, the worst-hit country, and in Sierra Leone and Liberia; 399 people have died since the beginning of the epidemic. The WHO convened a conference of west Africa's eleven health ministers in Accra/Ghana for 02. and 03.07.14. It is calling for drastic measures.

Doctors and helpers are accusing first and foremost the Guinean government of being responsible for the spread of the disease, alleging that it had done everything possible to play down the situation so as to avoid scaring off investors. Virtually no funds had been provided to inform the population, they said.

The government of Sierra Leone announced that it would press criminal charges against anyone who hid persons infected with Ebola or who buried victims who had died of the disease.

Mauritania

Presidential election

The incumbent Azis won the presidential election on 22.06.14, claiming 80 % of the vote. Some 1.3 million people were called on to choose between five candidates, including one woman. The turnout stood at 56 %. Parts of the opposition boycotted the election.

Ukraine

Ceasefire in eastern Ukraine set to expire

The ceasefire which has been in force for several days in the east of Ukraine ends on the evening of 30.06.14. Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko promised to observe the ceasefire until it expired at 10 p.m. local time. International pressure is growing on him to extend the ceasefire once again. At the same time, at demonstrations in Kiev last weekend thousands of people urged him to allow another military offensive against the pro-Russian separatists. Many Ukrainians accuse the newly elected president of failing to reap any benefits from the ceasefire which came into effect on 20.06.14.

It was broken several times last weekend. Troops loyal to the government and the separatists blamed each other. In a telephone conversation with Poroshenko and Russian president Vladimir Putin, German chancellor Merkel and French president Hollande argued all the more vehemently for an extension to the ceasefire. They emphasized the EU's call for Russia to support a mechanism to monitor the ceasefire. They also called on the Russian side to initiate "substantial negotiations" on Poroshenko's peace plan. Putin spoke in favour of a substantial extension to the ceasefire this time. In the telephone conversation, Putin and Poroshenko agreed to begin talks with the separatists very soon. The separatists of the self-proclaimed "People's Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk" are demanding that all government troops be withdrawn from eastern Ukraine as a precondition for entering into a peace dialogue. The release on 27.06 and 28.06.14 of two OSCE teams comprising OSCE monitors each after being held for several weeks by the pro-Russian separatists may be seen as a positive sign.



Albania

Candidate status for accession to the EU

The General Affairs Council officially granted Albania candidate status for accession to the EU on 24.06.14. The Council's ministers acknowledged the country's efforts to date, while stressing the need for further reforms. Before actual accession negotiations can begin, the country with a population of just under four million must meet a number of conditions. The EU states are calling for a judicial reform, the protection of minorities and greater efforts in fighting corruption and organised crime, for example. This means that it may take some years before the country is admitted into the EU.

China

Xinjiang: Counter-terrorism campaign

On 23.06.14 the authorities released an interim assessment of the counter-terrorism campaign which has been underway for a month in Xinjiang. According to the interim report, 380 suspects have been arrested and 80 gangs crushed. 264 bombs and 3.15 tonnes of explosives have been seized. 315 people have been convicted in connection with terrorism, religious extremism or the production of weapons and bombs. The state media reported on 30.06.14 that in the week before two courts in Kashgar had convicted a total of 113 people on charges of terrorist activities or other related crimes, with some receiving long prison terms. Four people received life sentences.

Referendum in Hong Kong

Almost 800,000 people took part in the unofficial referendum on procedures for the free election of Hong Kong's prime minister in 2017, which officially ended on 29.06.14 (cf. BN of 23.06.14). Almost 3.5 million of Hong Kong's total population of over seven million were eligible to vote.