

Group 22 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

2 June 2014

Afghanistan

Security situation

A suicide bomber blew himself up near an army bus in Kabul on 26.05.14, killing two people and injuring nine. The Taliban have claimed responsibility for the attack.

On 28.05.14 an unknown attacker fired a bazooka at a vehicle belonging to the US consulate in Herat, western Afghanistan, injuring at least two foreign security guards.

At least twelve people were killed when a roadside booby-trap exploded in the district of Giro in the eastern Afghan province of Ghazni on 31.05.14. So-called IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices) are responsible for most civilian casualties. The UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan) recorded 312 civilians killed and 695 injured by IEDs between 01.01.14 and 22.05.14.

Pakistan

Fighting in border region with Afghanistan

On 31.05.14 insurgents attacked a post of the Pakistani armed forces close to the border with Afghanistan in Bajaur (tribal regions, north-west Pakistan). One soldier was reportedly killed and two injured. According to information from the military, at least 16 attackers were killed. The attack is said to have been carried out by more than 200 Taliban fighters.

"Honour killing" in Lahore

On 27.05.14 a pregnant 25 year-old woman was stoned to death by members of her family with bricks from a nearby building site outside a court in Lahore. The woman had married against her father's wishes. So-called honour killings are a frequent occurrence in Pakistan. What sets this incident apart is the fact that it took place in public in Pakistan's second-largest city.

Iraq

Security situation

Attacks continue to take place on a daily basis. According to Iraq Body Count, 1,027 civilians were killed in May. The AFP news agency puts the death toll in May at 1,075, including 66 police officers, 123 soldiers, 14 members of the Sahwa, one member of the Kurdish security forces and 471 extremists.

According to the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), 603 civilians died in May and 1,108 suffered injuries. In addition, 196 members of the Iraqi security forces were killed and 301 injured. The most severely affected city was Baghdad (315 killed, 617 injured), followed by Nineveh (113 killed, 247 injured), Salahaddin (94 killed, 146 injured), Kirkuk (22 killed, 60 injured) and Diyala (38 killed, 28 injured). The figures do not include victims from the province of Anbar. According to the health authority of the province of Anbar, 195 civilians were killed and 499 injured up to 30 May, including 95 killed and 222 injured in Ramadi and 100 killed and 277 injured in Fallujah.

Accusation of use of barrel bombs

Human Rights Watch (HRW) is accusing the Iraqi government of having used so-called barrel bombs in the province of Anbar, in particular in Fallujah, in its fight against insurgents. It is claimed that the targets include a hospital in Fallujah, which has been attacked several times. The attacks are reported to have been stepped up in May. The Iraqi air force has allegedly been dropping barrel bombs on residential areas of the city since the beginning of May. The attacks are said to be aimed at terrorists close to Al Qaeda, to which the group The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) also belongs. HRW is citing reports from witnesses. The Iraqi government denies any use of barrel bombs.

Syria

Attack on chemical weapons inspectors

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has denied reports by the Syrian government that rebels have abducted chemical weapons inspectors. An attack on a team of weapons experts on 27.05.14 has been confirmed, however. The experts were looking for traces of chlorine gas in the province of Hama.

Security situation

According to reports by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 15 Kurds, including children, were killed in the village of Ras al-Ain in an attack by the group The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) on three Kurdish villages in the north on 29.05.14. ISIS militia are also reported to have abducted almost 200 Kurds aged between 17 and 70 from the town of Qabasin in the region of Aleppo.

On 30.05.14 at least 20 Syrian soldiers and allied militia men died in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo when a bomb attack caused a tunnel under an army position to collapse. The Islamic Front rebel alliance has claimed responsibility for the attack.

According to reports by Iranian media on 31.05.14 a commander of the Iranian revolutionary guard, Abdullah Eskandari, was killed defending a "sacred Shiite site" in Syria. There has been no official confirmation.

Israel / Palestinian territories

Rami Hamdallah appointed head of the Palestinian unity government

On 29.05.14 Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas appointed the West Bank's incumbent prime minister, Rami Hamdallah, as the head of the new unity government, which is also to administrate the Gaza Strip. There is a delay in announcing the cabinet list, however, because Hamas and Fatah have yet to reach agreement on who is to become foreign minister. According to press reports, it is planned to announce the cabinet list on 02.06.14.

Yemen

Torture of migrants

African migrants, the majority of whom are passing through Yemen on their way from countries in the Horn of Africa to work in Saudi Arabia, for example, are being held in detention camps by Yemeni people traffickers. They are reportedly being tortured at these camps in order to extort ransom money from their dependents. Human Rights Watch (HRW) claims in a report published on 25.05.14 that this is taking place with the support of local officials. HRW has called on the Yemeni government to carry out comprehensive investigations into people traffickers and security personnel. In Yemen, which is one of the poorest countries in the Near East, a great deal of money can be made by blackmailing the families of detained migrants in this way. Migrants report that members of the families and friends have paid ransoms ranging from € 150 to more than € 700 for their release. One smuggler who negotiates the ransoms with families has reported that he has often managed to extort as much as € 950 per migrant.

AQAP announces execution of four people involved in target reconnaissance for drone attacks in Yemen

The radical Islamist group AQAP (Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula) has reported that it has executed four people who carried out target reconnaissance for US drone attacks. In a video published on 01.06.14 it states that four spies have been killed, claiming that they had fitted transmitters on the vehicles of jihadists who died in drone attacks around two years ago. The USA is the only country which deploys drones in Yemen. The Yemeni government approves of their use. In mid-April, some 60 suspected jihadists were killed in a wave of drone attacks on AQAP bases and training camps.

Turkey

Anniversary of the Gezi protests

Over 25,000 police and 50 water canons were deployed to enforce the ban on demonstrations at Istanbul's Taksim Square on the anniversary of the Gezi Park protests. Violent clashes between security forces and several hundred demonstrators occurred on 31.05.14. According to press reports, approx. 13 people were injured in the clashes and over 120 were temporarily detained. Clashes on a smaller scale were also reported in Ankara and several other cities.

At the end of May last year, demonstrations against the felling of trees and construction measures in Gezi Park evolved within a matter of weeks into nationwide mass protests against the government. Numerous demonstrators are still on trial on charges of vandalism or participation in illegal demonstrations.

Constitutional court orders lifting of ban on YouTube

The Turkish government banned the YouTube video portal in March 2014, following the publication of recordings of confidential discussions between members of the government. On 29.05.14 the constitutional court in Ankara ruled that the ban on the portal must be lifted, finding that the ban was unlawful and breached rights of individual liberty. A ban on twitter was lifted by the constitutional court back at the beginning of April 2014.

Iran

Execution due to links with MEK

Despite all the appeals from human rights activists, a man has been executed due to his links to the exile opposition group "Mujahedin-e Khalq-e Iran" (MEK). According to reports by the Irna new agency, Gholamresa Chosrawi Sawaddjani was hanged on 01.06.14 on the charge of "enmity with God" (Mohareb). The hanged man is alleged to have supplied sensitive documents to the MEK and to have provided the organisation with financial support. According to the Iranian judiciary, papers and photographs of military bases which were forwarded to the exile group were discovered when he was arrested in 1997.

For Iran the MEK are not only terrorists but traitors to the fatherland, because they supported neighbouring Iraq in the war against Iran between 1980 and 1988.

Long prison sentences for criticising the government on Facebook

According to opposition sources, eight opponents of the government have been handed prison terms of up to 20 years for posting critical comments on Facebook. The opposition website "Kaleme" reported on 30.05.14 that the sentences had been passed the week before. According to the report, the charges ranged from "insulting the revolutionary leader" (Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei) through anti-government activities to the "dissemination of lies". The Iranian government is making great efforts to restrict the free use of social networks. Activists nevertheless repeatedly manage to use the internet as a means of airing criticism.

Egypt

Victory for al-Sisi

According to provisional figures, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi won the presidential election from 26.05. to 28.05.14, taking more than 90 % of the vote. His sole opponent, left-wing politician Hamdin Sabahi, received 3.7 %.

Due to the initially very low turn-out, the National Election Commission extended the voting period by a further day. According to independent election monitors, this was legitimate. Official figures put the ultimate turn-out at 45 % of the electorate comprising some 54 million. The Muslim Brotherhood, which had called for a boycott of the election, casts doubt on this figure, putting the turn-out at only around 12 %.

The defeated candidate, Hamdin Sabahi, filed a complaint with the election commission over the course of the election. Among other demands, he has called for all votes cast on the third day of the election to be declared null and void. The election commission rejected the complaint without explanation on 01.06.14. It announced that the official final result would be released on 03.06.14.

Sierra-Leone

First case of death from Ebola

On 26.05.14 the Sierra Leone health ministry confirmed the first case of death resulting from the Ebola virus in the province of Koindu (border region with Guinea). Ten other persons from Koindu showed symptoms of an Ebola infection, four of whom have already died. In the neighbouring country of Guinea the WHO confirmed eight new cases of infection on 24.05.14 (in Gueckedou, Macenta and Telimele), including three deaths in Macenta. This raises the number of confirmed cases in Guinea to 174, including 95 deaths.

Nigeria

President declares "full-out war" on Boko Haram

In a television address marking the 15th anniversary of Nigeria's return to democracy, president Jonathan declared "full-out war" on the Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram. He said the security forces had been instructed to launch a large-scale offensive so that the terrorists would not go unpunished. At the same time, he promised their fighters who denounced terrorism "dialogue and reconciliation".

Situation regarding the Chibok girls

On 26.05.14 Alex Badeh, chief of staff of the Nigerian armed forces, announced that the whereabouts were known of the more than 200 schoolgirls whom Boko Haram had abducted from a school in Chibok (north-eastern federal state of Borno) on 14.04.14. He said that the location would not be disclosed, however, in order to avoid putting the girls at risk. He added that for the same reason there would be no attempt to free them by force. According to information from the US State Department on 27.05.14, Badeh's information on the girls' whereabouts cannot be corroborated. The USA has deployed 80 soldiers to Nigeria's neighbouring country of Chad, in order to assist in the search for the girls with reconnaissance planes and drones.

Attacks presumed to be the work of Boko Haram

A bomb exploded at around 6 p.m. on 31.05.14 in a bar in which a football match was being shown on television in the Gavan (Kaban) district of the town of Mubi (north-eastern federal state of Adamawa). At least 14 people were killed; some reports put the death toll at 40. The attack is assumed to have been carried out by members of the Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram.

On the morning of 31.05.14 suspected members of Boko Haram on trucks with assault weapons, petrol bombs and explosives attacked three villages (Kanari, Wazarde and Gula, according to other sources Wondula, Annari and Warshale) in Gamboru LGA (north-eastern federal state of Borno) on the border with Cameroon. They killed at least 42 people.

At around 9 a.m. on 30.05.14 suspected members of Boko Haram attacked the convoy of traditional Muslim leader Mustapha Idris Timta, emir of Gwoza, in the town of Tashan Alade (southern part of the federal state of Borno). The emir was in a vehicle en route to a funeral in Gombe together with the emirs of Uba and Askira. The emir of Gwoza was killed in the attack, while those accompanying him remained uninjured.

On 27. or 28.05.14 suspected members of Boko Haram attacked the village of Gurmushi (federal state of Borno, Marte LGA). They killed up to 42 people and burned the village down.

On the evening of 26.05.14 Boko Haram fighters attacked a military base and a neighbouring police barracks in the town of Buni Yadi (north-eastern federal state of Yobe). They killed up to 24 soldiers and 21 policemen.

On the night of 15.05.14 suspected members of Boko Haram attacked three villages in the north-eastern federal state of Borno, including Moforo (Marte LGA) and Kimba (Biu LGA). They killed around 25 men in Moforo and eight in Kimba, accusing them all of belonging to a militia opposed to Boko Haram. According to a report by the Reuters news agency on 27.05.14, Boko Haram has allegedly killed more than 470 civilians since the abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls.

UN sanctions against Boko Haram

The UN Security Council officially classified the Islamist group Boko Haram as a terrorist organisation on 22.05.14 and imposed sanctions against the group. Boko Haram was placed on the list of organisations with links to the Al Qaeda terrorist organisation, resulting in an arms embargo for the group and the freezing of its bank accounts, for example. According to the head of the responsible sanctions panel, Gary Quinlan, there is clear evidence that members of Boko Haram have completed joint training with Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb, focusing in particular on the use of self-made explosives.

DR Congo

Militia leader convicted

On 23.05.14 the International Criminal Court in The Hague sentenced former Congolese militia leader Germain Katanga to twelve years in prison for aiding and abetting a massacre which claimed at least two hundred lives in the village of Bogoro (district of Ituri in the north-eastern province of Orientale) in February 2003. The more than six years in which he was remanded in custody are to be deducted from the prison term. The verdict is not final, as Katanga and the prosecuting counsels have lodged appeals.

Djibouti

Al-Shabaab claims responsibility for suicide attack

Al Sabaab has claimed responsibility for a suicide attack on a popular restaurant in the capital, Djibouti, on 24.05.14 in which three people died and at least 15 – including three German members of an EU mission – were injured. Its spokesman, Ali Mohamed Rage, stated that Al-Shabaab had targeted the restaurant in Djibouti because government staff from France and other western countries were frequent visitors. By way of justification for the attack he referred to the violence against Muslims in the Central African Republic and the Djibouti government's break with Islam.

Djibouti serves as a naval base in the international operation against Somali pirates. In addition, Djibouti soldiers are fighting against Al-Shabaab as part of AMISOM.

Mali

Defence minister steps down/armistice holds

Following the army's failure to retake the city of Kidal from the rebels on 21.05.14, defence minister Soumeylou Boybeye Maiga resigned on 27.05.14. The Mali army's operations on 21.05.14 reportedly cost 20 lives and injured 30 people.

The armistice agreed on the evening of 23.05.14 between the Mali government and the three rebel groups allied in the MNLA is holding.

Cameroon

Abducted foreigners free

Two Italian priests and a Canadian nun who were abducted in the northern district of Maroua on 05.04.14 were released on 01.06.14. No-one has admitted responsibility for the abductions. The Nigerian Boko Haram is under suspicion.

Central African Republic

Attack on church

On 28.05.14 unknown men attacked the Notre Dame de Fatima church in the capital, Bangui, on whose grounds some 9,000 internally displaced persons have sought refuge. According to the UNHCR, at least 17 people were killed and at least 27 were abducted by the attackers. In response to the attack, on 30.05.14 thousands of people gathered in Bangui to call for the resignation of president Catherine Samba-Panza and the withdrawal of the military contingent from Burundi, which the population sees as being opposed to Christians. This contingent is part of the African Union's International Support Mission for CAR (MISCA). Two demonstrators were killed when the protests were broken up by security forces.

Somalia

Children face starvation

According to Unicef, up to 200,000 children aged five will be threatened with starvation if the United Nations do not receive any additional funds. Unicef states that USD 150 million is necessary in order to ensure a minimum standard of healthcare for more than three million women and children. It says that only USD 15 million have been received to date.

Sudan

Air raids in the Nuba Mountains

According to the SPLM-N (Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North), the Sudanese air force dropped more than 53 bombs on the town of Kauda in the Nuba Mountains in the federal state of South Kordofan over a three-day period beginning on 27.05.14. Buildings were destroyed and several people were injured. Kauda is believed to be a base of the SPLM-N.

The SPLM-N is the Sudanese branch of the South Sudanese SPLM. It is rebelling against the government in Khartoum.

Fatalities in fighting between enemy tribes

Heavy fighting between two clans belonging to the Arab Misseriya tribe over the ownership of land in the federal state of West Kordofan on 29.05.14 claimed at least 43 lives among both clans and injured 37. Following intervention by local leaders, the fighting was ended.

South Sudan

No control over rebels

Shortly before the resumption of peace talks with the South Sudanese government in Addis Ababa, Riek Machar has stated in an interview that he does not have full control over the rebels. He admitted that his fighters also include volunteers who had joined the rebellion. He said that it would take some time to train them and to establish a control and command structure.

The civil war in South Sudan has claimed thousands of lives since December 2013. Some 1.3 million people have been displaced. Around 75,000 people have sought refuge from ethnic violence at UN bases.

Ukraine

Fighting continues in eastern Ukraine

The situation in eastern Ukraine is growing increasingly confused. Ukrainian government troops have been laying siege for some days now to the rebel strongholds of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk, where pro-Russian separatists are occupying important positions. Consistent media reports refer to several dead on both sides. Figures differ with regard to the precise death toll. The identity of the separatists remains unclear. For some

weeks now there have been indications of foreign mercenaries fighting on the side of the pro-Russian separatists.

German foreign Minister Steinmeier and US secretary of state John Kerry expressed concern at reports of trained fighters, including Chechens, entering into eastern Ukraine via Russia in order to fight on the side of the pro-Russian separatists.

The head of the Russian Caucasus republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, has denied having sent militiamen to fight in the eastern Ukraine, but is unable to rule out the possibility of such fighters having gone there of their own accord.

Georgia

Abkhazia's president Ankwab resigns

Opposition supporters stormed the presidential palace in Suchumi at the Black Sea on 27.05.14, forcing president Ankwab to flee. They hold him responsible for the economic and social crisis in the region of Abkhazia, which seeks independence from Georgia. At a parliamentary session on 29.05.14, 20 of the 21 members present from a total of 35 MPs called on Ankwab to resign. On 31.05.14 they appointed the parliamentary speaker, Valeri Bganba, as the new interim president and set 24.08.14 as the date for an early presidential election. Ankwab had initially refused to resign in protest at the armed putsch attempt, but subsequently stepped down on 01.06.14. In an address to the nation he said that his resignation was intended to help bring stability to the country. The similarly disempowered Abkhazian prime minister, Leonid Lakerbaia, still refuses to hand in his resignation.

Kremlin advisor Vladislav Surkov, who was dispatched to Abkhazia on 28.05.14, stated on 01.06.14 that Russia would work actively together with the new Abkhazian president, his government and the parliament.

Background

Ankwab was elected president of Abkhazia in August 2011. In August 2008, Russia and Georgia fought a five-day war over Abkhazia and the similarly separatist province of South Ossetia. Russia recognised the two Caucasus provinces as independent states. Thousands of Russian soldiers are stationed in the region. Georgia considers this an illegal occupation of its territory.

Myanmar

Political prisoners

The organisation Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) announced on 27.05.14 that at least 59 political prisoners are in custody in Myanmar. It stated that charges also continue to be brought against political activists, with a total of 85 charged in 2014 to date.

China

Situation in Xinjiang

On 28.05.14 the police shot dead two young men in Kashgar who allegedly carried out a knife attack in which two persons suffered injuries.

In a public trial conducted at a sports stadium in the city of Yining on 28.05.14 in front of some 7,000 spectators, 55 people, for the most part Uyghurs, received severe sentences for murder, separatism and membership of a terrorist organisation. Three of them were sentenced to death. On 21.05.14, 39 suspected extremists were sentenced to prison terms of up to 15 years in a trial before a court in Ürümqi.

According to an official announcement, the police raided a suspected terrorist cell on 27.05.14, arresting five people and seizing 1.8 tonnes of material suitable for use in bomb-making.

It was reported last week that a bomb exploded outside the police station in Shache (prefecture of Kashgar) on 23.05.14. Four bombs were defused.