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Directorate 22 - Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

29 June 2015

Afghanistan

Failed attack on parliament building

On 22 June 2015, security officials defended the parliament building in Kabul against a Taliban attack. A car bomb detonated in front of the building during the session to confirm the appointment of the new defence minister Masoom Staneksai. Afterwards, Taliban fighters tried to enter the compound. All seven attackers were killed.

Fights in the province of Kunduz

The governor of the province of Kunduz announced that Afghan security forces successfully recaptured the district of Chahar Dara on 22 June 2015. The district had been taken by rebels shortly before. Also on 22 June 2015, the insurgents reportedly captured Dashti Archi, another district in the same province.

Iraq

High-ranking IS member killed

The US army claims that a high-ranking IS member, Tunisian Tariq bin al-Tahar bin al-Falih al-‘Awni al-Harzi, was killed in an air strike in Mosul on 15 June 2015. They said that this killing degraded IS’s ability to integrate North African jihadists.

German army widens its area of activity

According to a press release dated 22 June 2015, the German army will begin to train Yazidis in Iraq. This operation is based on an initiative by Kurdish peshmerga fighters, which aims to show that all ethnic groups and religions in Iraq are jointly fighting against IS.

Internal displacement

According to the latest Displacement Tracking Matrix by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) dated 18 June 2015, the number of internal displacements due to the hostilities since January 2014 has risen to more than three million. Many of the recently displaced persons fled due to the fights between Iraqi security forces and armed groups in the provinces of Anbar and Salahaddin. In Salahaddin, more than 16,000 people were displaced from the districts of al Dujail, Balad, Samarra and al Haweja between 14 and 25 June 2015. Since the beginning of the fights in Ramadi (province of Anbar), more than 290,000 Iraqis have been displaced from the city and its outskirts between 8 April and 22 June 2015.

While most of the displaced persons live in private accommodation, for example in rented homes or with host families, more than 638,000 are living in unfinished or abandoned buildings, informal settlements or religious buildings.

Syria

Renewed IS attacks on Kobane and other towns

Kurdish fighters have recently allied themselves with FSA brigades and repeatedly defeated IS. They were supported by air strikes by the anti-IS alliance. Among other victories, important supply routes to the IS stronghold of Raqqa were cut off. In response, IS again attacked Kobane, a city on the border between Syria and Turkey, on 25 June 2015. On 27 June 2015, the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) brought the whole city back under their control. Reportedly, 240 people were killed in the fights, among them 174 civilians, 16 Kurdish fighters and 54 jihadists. The civilians were killed by missile or sniper fire or executed. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights stated on 28 June 2015 that IS had executed at least 3,027 people since the introduction of a caliphate in Syria a year ago. This number included 1,787 civilians, of which 74 were children. IS had been driven out of Kobane in January 2015 after months of heavy fighting with the Kurds. The village of Barkha Batan about 35 km south of Kobane was also attacked by IS. 20 people died, among them women and children. IS is reported to have captured parts of al-Hassakeh, a city in north-eastern Syria.

IS sells Yazidi women

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that, in the eastern province of Deir ez-Zor, IS sold 42 abducted Yazidi women to IS fighters in Syria for EUR 440 - 1,800. The women are treated as slaves and were reportedly abducted in the Iraqi region of Sinjar in 2014. The Yazidis are a religious minority who are regarded as "devil worshippers" by IS. Overall, more than 3,500 Yazidi women are said to be in the hands of the jihadists.

Yemen

Casualties after fights

Since 22 June 2015, about 40 people have been killed and dozens injured in serious clashes between the Houthi rebels and supporters of president Hadi in the southern Yemeni cities of Aden and Dhaleh. The head of the local health authority told the news agency AFP on 23 June 2015 that, within 24 hours, seven civilians died from Houthi artillery fire in the port city of Aden. Reportedly, several buildings were completely destroyed and 94 people injured. The Shia Houthi militia had attacked quarters held by the supporters of president Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, who has fled to Saudi-Arabia.

UN condemn Arab naval blockade

The UN have called on the Arab military coalition to end its naval blockade against the background of the humanitarian disaster in Yemen. A unanimously adopted declaration of the UN Security Council of 25 June 2015 says that, from a humanitarian standpoint, it is urgently necessary to ensure the supply of goods to the country. UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O'Brien said that more than 21 million people, i.e. 80% of the total population, need help. About 20 million Yemenites do not have access to clean water. Due to the lack of proper medical care, illnesses such as Dengue fever and malaria are spreading. The UN have provided USD 25 million (EUR 22.30 million) in additional emergency funding. The UN Security Council has asked the global community for further financial support. So far, only 10% of the USD 1.6 billion needed to cope with the humanitarian crisis have been provided so far.

Rebels shoot at ship with emergency aid goods

On 27 June 2015, Houthi rebels in Aden shot at a ship from Qatar, which brought aid goods from Djibouti, and forced it to return. The shooting caused a major fire in an oil refinery.

Iran

Segregation of the sexes in radio and TV stations

In the future, female and male employees are to be segregated in Iranian radio and TV stations. According to the news agency ILNA, the segregation, which is justified by religious rules, has already been implemented in some departments. The new rules will probably apply soon to the state TV stations of the country, which is ruled by Shia clerics. So far, there has been no official confirmation of the ILNA report of 21 June 2015. According to dpa, Iran has been trying for years to implement such a rule. Reform-oriented president Hassan

Rohani and his administration would like to lift sex-segregation rules. However, they have been unable to prevail against the influential arch-conservative camp. The most recent example is that of an international volleyball match in Tehran. The government initially wanted to permit women to attend a match of the male national side. However, following protests by an Islamist group, the ministry of sports had to back down. Women were not allowed to attend. Another newsworthy example is that of 25-year-old Ghoncheh Ghavami, who was arrested for wanting to watch the match of the Iranian national volleyball team against Italy.

Palestinian autonomous areas

Palestinians plan new unity government

The rivalling Palestinian organisations Fatah and Hamas plan on forming a new unity government. The Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) announced on 23 June 2015 that a committee is to start negotiations with the different Palestinian factions this week. This decision was taken at an extraordinary meeting of the executive committee. The talks focused on the future of prime minister Rami Hamdallah's government. About a week ago, there had been some uncertainty about whether Hamdallah might step down. He led a unity government formed by Hamas and Fatah a year ago. The PLO statement says that Hamas created particular stumbling blocks for the administration in the Gaza Strip, where it governs. New elections, which were to take place within six months, were never realised. Hamdallah is expected to remain the head of the new government.

Potential war crimes in summer 2014

The UN Human Rights Council accuses both Israel and the Palestinians of "possible war crimes" during the 50-days war between Israel and the armed Palestinian groups (Gaza war) in summer 2014. This applies to the Israeli attacks on the densely populated Gaza strip and the rocket fire directed by the Palestinians at Israeli territory. In addition, the committee condemned the extrajudicial executions of suspected "collaborators" by the Palestinians. Within 50 days, more than 2,200 Palestinians died, among them hundreds of civilians. 73 Israelis lost their lives.

Kuwait

Attack on mosque

The Kuwaiti ministry of the interior announced that at least 27 people were killed and 227 injured by an attack on a mosque in Kuwait on 26 June 2015. A suicide attacker blew himself up during the traditional Friday prayers at the Imam Sadiq mosque. The group "Najaf Province", the Saudi-Arabian branch of IS, took responsibility for the attack. A few weeks ago, the organisation had committed several attacks on mosques in Saudi-Arabia. Reportedly, several suspects have been arrested.

Egypt

Numerous disappearances

According to the Egyptian NGO "Freedom for the Brave" the security forces have abducted 163 people for political reasons within two months since the beginning of April. Another NGO puts the number of disappearances during the same period of time at about 400. Often, young activists for the democracy movement, students or Muslim Brotherhood members are arrested and detained without contact with the outside world. Several detainees who resurfaced after some time reported that they had been tortured. Some were found dead. Many have disappeared to this day. The ministry of the interior denied the charges.

Libya

First direct negotiations of the rivalling parliaments

On 28 June 2015, representatives of the two rivalling parliaments in Libya met for the first time in Skhirat (Morocco). The talks had been brokered by the UN with the aim of direct peace negotiations. However, no agreement on a government of national unity has been reached yet.

Tunisia

Attack on tourists

On 27 June 2015, a gunman killed at least 38 people and injured at least 40 in the tourist resort of Sousse. According to media reports, he targeted tourists on the beach before entering the Imperial Marhaba hotel and shooting at people in the swimming pool, the hotel lobby and the parking lot. He then fled and was shot by security forces in a side street. The Tunisian security authorities believe that he acted alone. The number of police officials in the tourist resorts was massively increased. Over the weekend, thousands of tourists left the country early.

Mali

Peace accord signed

The Tuareg rebel group “Coordination Movement for Azawad” (CMA) signed the peace agreement with the Malian government on 20 June 2015, as announced. The agreement offers the Tuareg increased decentralisation (democratic elections of provincial councils in Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal) and the integration of rebel fighters into the regular army to create a regional security force in the north-east. In return, the Tuareg formally recognise the territorial unity of the country.

Nevertheless, 13 people were killed in attacks on 27 June 2015, among them several soldiers and rebels. The attacks by suspected islamists took place near the border to Mauritania.

Ethiopia

Government coalition wins all seats in parliament

As expected, the governing EPRDF (Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front) and its allies won all 547 seats in parliament at the recent elections. During the preceding legislative period there was one opposition MP. According to official reports, voter participation amounted to more than 90%. In addition, the coalition won all but 21 of the 1,987 seats in regional parliaments; the regional elections were held on 24 May 2015, too. The EPRDF has been governing the country since the stalinist Mengistu regime was toppled in May 1991.

Somalia

Attack on AMISOM soldiers

According to a spokesman for the army, at least 50 soldiers from Burundi were killed on 26 June 2015 in an al-Shabaab attack on an African Union base in the village of Leego (region of Lower Shabelle in southern Somalia).

Attack on ambassador

A suicide attack by al-Shabaab on the convoy of the ambassador of the United Arab Emirates in Mogadishu on 24 June 2015 killed at least ten people. The ambassador was unhurt.

Nigeria

Suicide attacks by Boko Haram in north-eastern Nigeria

On 27 June 2015, a suicide attacker blew himself up in front of the control checkpoint at the entry to the Molai lepra hospital on the outskirts of the city of Maiduguri in the federal state of Borno. Five people died and another ten were injured in the attack. Two companions of the attacker fled.

On 23 June 2015, a roughly 12-year-old girl conducted a suicide attack on the weekly market of the remote village of Wagir, Gujba Local Government Area (LGA), province of Yobe. The attack killed ten people and injured about 30.

On 22 June 2015, a young suicide attacker blew herself up on the Baga fish market in the city of Maiduguri near a group of Muslims doing their afternoon prayers. More than 30 people died. Shortly afterwards, a second woman blew herself up outside the market on the Baga road, only a few hundred metres from the place of the first attack. She only killed herself.

Boko Haram attacks

On 22 June 2015 and on 23 June 2015, Boko Haram fighters attacked the villages Debiro Biu (Biu LGA) and Debiro Hawul (Hawul LGA) in the federal state of Borno. They killed about 40 inhabitants, pillaged stores and burned down buildings.

Death penalty for blasphemy

On 25 June 2015, a Sharia court in the city of Kano sentenced nine people to death on charges of blasphemy. Three other defendants in the same case were acquitted. Muslim cleric Abdul Inyass, a member of the Sufi sect of Tijaniyya, and eleven other persons were arrested at the beginning of May 2015 for blasphemous statements about the prophet Muhammad. The defendants were charged with having said that Niasse, the founder of their sect, was “bigger than the prophet” at a gathering in Niasse’s honour. This is the first death sentence for blasphemy handed out in northern Nigeria so far. The defendants may appeal the sentence.

Burundi

Persistent domestic crisis

On 25 June 2015, second vice president Gervais Rufyikiri was reported as having fled to Belgium, as he felt unable to support president Pierre Nkurunziza in his bid for a third term in office, which “violates the constitution” according to Rufyikiri. On 25 June 2015, dozens of students sought refuge from the police in the US embassy in Bujumbura. A grenade attack in the city of Ngozi killed four people on 21 June 2015; other grenade attacks on 25 June 2015 and 28 June 2015 killed and injured several people in Bujumbura.

The opposition called for a boycott of the parliamentary elections on 29 June 2015 and demanded, like the UN and the EU, that the elections be postponed. Presidential elections are scheduled for 15 July 2015. In the night between 28 and 29 June 2015, grenade attacks on polling stations took place in Bujumbura and several provinces.

Turkey

First meeting of parliament

On 23 June 2015, the newly elected Turkish parliament met for the first time. The AKP has 258 seats, the CHP 132, the MHP 80 and the HDP also 80. 98 MPs are women. On 30 June 2015 a new speaker is to be elected. The coalition negotiations for the new government have not been finished yet. President Erdogan has asked the parties again to form a coalition; if they fail, new elections must be held.

Gay Pride parade dissolved

On 28 June 2015, Turkish security forces used violence to disperse a demonstration for the rights of homosexuals in Istanbul. They used water cannons, tear gas and rubber bullets and chased away thousands of Gay Pride participants who tried to meet peacefully on the central Taksim square. The media reported that, according to official reasoning, the demonstration was banned at short notice because it took place during the holy month of Ramadan. However, in the last few years the Gay Pride parade took place in Istanbul in Ramadan, too, without any problems.

Ukraine

Situation in the east of the country

According to a spokesman for the Ukrainian army, at least one soldier was killed and three were injured in renewed skirmishes between the Ukrainian army and pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. Moreover, there were dozens of violations of the four-month-old ceasefire in the area of Donetsk, particularly near the suburb of Marinka and near the destroyed airport of the separatist stronghold. In turn, the separatists spoke of attacks by the Ukrainian army. The Ukrainian intelligence service and the separatists accused each other of having shot at an aid transport by the Red Cross in the area around Donetsk. Nobody was injured.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) reported that the situation in the war-torn area of eastern Ukraine has been deteriorating steadily since the end of April. This has led to higher numbers of casualties (injuries and killings) among the civilians and an increase in the number of killed fighters on both sides. More heavy weaponry is being used, and infrastructure has been destroyed.

International peace troops possible

Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko has signed a law adopted by parliament at the beginning of June which allows international peacekeeping troops into the country. However, a mandate by the European Union or the United Nations are still required.

Armenia

Protests in Yerevan continue

Following intensive protests against an electricity price hike, president Serzh Sargsyan suspended the controversial measure on 27 June 2015. He said the government would review whether the price increase was justified and what it meant for the country's economy. If, however, the review came to the conclusion that the hike was justified, consumers would have to pay the new price.

Since 22 June 2015, up to 10,000 people have been demonstrating in Yerevan, Armenia's capital, after an electricity price increase by about 16% from 1 August 2015 was announced. In the evening of 23 June 2015 the demonstrators clashed with the police. Several people were injured and more than 200 protesters arrested. Even though the security forces used water cannons and the president promised that the price hike would be suspended for now, people continue to protest.

Background

Parts of the Armenian population have been dissatisfied with the government for some time now. For years, Armenia's dependence from Russia has been increasing. Russia is not only Armenia's main energy supplier, but also its most important trading partner. A Russian electricity producer has control over the electricity distribution. The economic crisis in Russia, which was triggered, among other factors, by low oil prices and western sanctions after the Krim annexation, has hit the Armenian economy, too. Some Armenian MPs suspect that the demonstrations have been engineered by western powers. However, the protesters deny any such links.

For some time now, president Sargsyan has also been criticised for his plans to amend the constitution. He aims to introduce a parliamentary government system which would massively reduce the president's power. This would allow the 60-year-old politician to retain power once he was elected as prime minister, as he may not run again for president once his current, second term of office is over.

Myanmar

No constitutional amendments

On 25 June 2015, parliamentary speaker Shwe Man announced that a law which would have reduced the military's power did not get the necessary majority. This means that the constitutional amendments have failed and that opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi may not run for the presidency. Under the current constitution, Aung San Suu Kyi is banned from the presidential elections because, pursuant to section 59f of the constitution, the head of state of Myanmar may not have a foreign spouse or children who have a foreign

nationality. Suu Kyi's husband, who died in 1999, was British. According to general Tin San Naing, the time is not yet right for constitutional amendments, as Myanmar is still in a "democratic transition period".

China

Xinjiang: Numerous casualties from attack on police

Policemen, attackers and passers-by were killed in an armed attack on a police checkpoint in the city of Kashgar on 22 June 2015. Depending on the source, the number of casualties varies between 18 and 28.

Xinjiang: Restrictions of religious life during Ramadan

People in several districts of the region of Xinjiang have been asked to do without religious traditions during Ramadan. Party members and civil servants are not allowed to fast. For example, schools often offer meals for free during the day in which pupils have to participate. The authorities use such measures to try and counteract religious fervour amongst the Uighurs.