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Directorate 22 - Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

8 June 2015

Afghanistan

Citizens do not have much trust in Afghan judicial system

Surveys by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) in the provinces of Zabul (southern Afghanistan), Kunar and Nuristan (eastern Afghanistan) suggest that citizens do not have much trust in the Afghan judicial system. In particular, people who live in remote areas tend to turn to the Taliban rather than to the state authorities. They say that the state system is corrupt and understaffed and that getting access to the authorities is too difficult. The rule of law is not guaranteed in areas where security is poor. These results are in line with the findings of the Federal Office and can be extrapolated to the country as a whole.

Security situation

Fights between insurgents and Afghan security forces as well as attacks on security officials, government representatives and staff of foreign (aid) organisations occurred during the past week, too.

Rebels and security forces clashed in the provinces of Faryab (northern Afghanistan), Bamyan (central heights), Maidan Wardak, Logar (central Afghanistan), Paktika (south-eastern Afghanistan), Uruzgan (southern Afghanistan), Baghlan (north-eastern Afghanistan) and Badakhshan (north-eastern Afghanistan).

Skirmishes between Taliban and fighters who have joined IS once again took place in the eastern province of Nangarhar. On 3 June 2015, the homes of ten Taliban commanders were burned down in the district of Spinghar.

In addition, attacks took place in Sar-i-Pul (northern Afghanistan) and Helmand (southern Afghanistan); police officials as well as civilians were killed.

A UAV attack on the burial of a Taliban commander killed at least 34 persons, including several civilians, in the village of Bati Thanai (Khost) on 5 June 2015.

Unknown kidnappers abducted several mine clearance staff employed by the British non-profit organization Halo Trust in Pul-i-Alam (Logar).

Iraq

Attacks on Shia fighters and security officials

On 2 June, at least 32 people died in a suicide attack on Shia fighters in the village of Baiji, north of Baghdad.

At least 40 Iraqi soldiers were killed in a suicide attack on a police station near the city of Samarra in the province of Salahaddin on 1 June 2015. The security forces are attacked regularly, with IS often taking responsibility.

IS closes off dam

IS has closed the gates of the dam in the city of Ramadi in the province of Anbar and thus lowered the water level of the river Euphrates. This makes it easier for IS to attack. In addition, the eastern regions of Khaldiya and Habbaniya are cut off from water supplies. These are among the last regions still held by the Iraqi security forces and their allies. In addition, there are concerns that IS's decision might trigger a humanitarian catastrophe in these two regions and in the south.

Strategy meeting of the anti-IS coalition

On 2 June 2015, the anti-IS coalition met with the UN and the EU in Paris, and the US-led coalition promised to support Iraq in its efforts to recapture areas taken by IS. Iraqi prime minister Haider al-Abadi promised to ensure the military and political integration of the Sunnis. So far, the Shia-dominated government has mainly relied on Shia militia in its fight against IS. The Sunnis feel excluded and endangered by this.

Syria

IS temporarily driven back

After heavy fights the government army of president Assad drove IS back to about two kilometres from the city of al-Hassakeh in north-eastern Syria. During the past week, the extremists had captured a power station and a youth prison south of the city. The provincial capital is currently divided, with one part being held by Assad's army, the other by the Kurdish militia YPG (People's Protection Units, the armed branch of the Democratic Union Party (PYD)). Al-Hassakeh, a province in north-eastern Syria which is mainly inhabited by Kurds, is of importance to IS, as it is situated between areas controlled by the militia. The US-led international military alliance made four air strikes against IS in the night between 6 and 7 June 2015, thus lending support to non-Kurdish fighters against the Jihadists for the first time ever.

Use of barrel bombs

Human Rights Watch reported that there was evidence that the Syrian government dropped poison gas barrel bombs on the province of Idlib between 16 and 31 May 2015. Reportedly, six people were killed and more than 200 injured. In doing so Syria would have violated the chemical weapons agreement with the United Nations. Despite loud international protests, the Syrian air force again dropped barrel bombs filled with explosives and metal splinters on the villages of Hajjan and Deir Jamal in the province of Aleppo on 4 June 2015.

Iran

Performance by French flamenco band "Gypsy Kings" forbidden

A concert by the French flamenco band "Gypsy Kings" in Tehran has been forbidden. According to the news agency ISNA, the musicians were the first western band to have been granted a permit for a concert in Iran by the ministry of culture. However, the police revoked the permit, as the head of the music centre of the ministry of culture announced on 1 June 2015. The "Gypsy Kings" are very popular in Iran and are one of the few western bands whose CDs may be legally sold in the country. Shia preachers usually regard popular music as incompatible with and therefore forbidden under Muslim rules. However, the rules have been loosened somewhat, particularly since president Hassan Rohani came into office in August 2013. Nevertheless, there have been repeated clashes with the police at concerts.

Yemen

US citizen released

According to the US government, a US citizen held by the Houthi militia was released. The reports said that the man, who had been "officially arrested", had left the country together with another hostage from Singapore and was now in Oman. According to the news agency Reuters, the Houthi rebels are holding three other US citizens.

UN call for humanitarian ceasefire

On 2 June 2015, the 15 members of the UN Security Council signed a joint declaration in which they supported UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon's call for a humanitarian ceasefire to deliver urgently needed aid to the Yemeni people. In mid-May 2015, the Shia Houthi militia and their allies on the one hand and the Yemeni government and a military alliance led by Saudi-Arabia on the other agreed on a five-day ceasefire in order to enable aid deliveries. Despite international appeals, the ceasefire was not extended.

Exiled government and Houthi rebels now ready to attend UN peace talks

Both the exiled government and the Houthi rebels have agreed to participate in the planned UN peace talks in the Yemeni civil war. Daifallah al-Shami from the political wing of the Houthi rebels said on 4 June 2015 that the rebels would send delegates to Geneva and support the UN efforts without any preconditions. The exiled government had already agreed on 3 June 2015. The talks are to begin on 14 June 2015. It took UN Special Envoy Ismail Ould Sheikh Ahmed weeks of shuttle diplomacy to organise this meeting.

Israel/Palestinian autonomous areas

Clashes at protests of Ethiopian Jews

A demonstration by Ethiopian Jews against police brutality in Israel turned violent. The police said that ten protesters had been arrested on 3 June 2015. The demonstrations, which have been held for weeks now, were triggered by a video which shows a policeman beating up an Israeli soldier of Ethiopian origin. According to the Israeli statistical office, more than 135,000 Ethiopian Jews are living in Israel. Many of them complain about discrimination in their jobs and in everyday life as well as about police attacks.

Border to the Gaza Strip closed

Following another missile attack on the port of Ashkelon, Israel closed the border checkpoints to the Gaza Strip on 7 June 2015 until further notice. The Israeli army announced that, on the government's orders, both the pedestrian crossing at Erez and the truck crossing at Kerem Shalom would be closed as well. The army responded to the third attack from the Palestinian enclave within twelve days. All rockets hit uninhabited territory. The Israelis assume that the recent attacks were caused by rivalries between the radical Islamist Hamas and Salafi groups who are turning towards the jihadist IS militia. This is what statements claiming responsibility suggest, too. The Israeli is holding Hamas responsible for the attacks, as it has been controlling the area since 2007.

Somalia

Moderate islamists fighting against government troops

The Sufi militia Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a (ASWJ), which is regarded as moderately Islamist and has been fighting on the Somali government's side against the radical Islamist al-Shabaab since 2008, took the city of Dhusamareb (region of Galguduud) in central Somalia on 7 June 2015 after several hours of fights. Until now, the city had been under the Somali government's control. There are no reports about casualties so far. By now, the situation has reportedly calmed down. It seems that the fights were triggered by the fact that the government did not invite ASWJ to participate in negotiations about the creation of a regional administration for Galguduud.

Mali

Tuareg rebels announce they will sign peace agreement

The largest and most important Tuareg rebel group has promised to sign a peace agreement with the Malian government. On 5 June 2015, during negotiations with UN representatives in Algiers, a spokesman for the group "Coordination Movement for Azawad" (CMA) announced that the group would sign the agreement on 20 June 2015. The Malian government and several other rebel groups had already signed the agreement in mid-May. Among other things, the agreement provides for a reform of the security sector and a comprehensive decentralisation of the country's administration.

South Sudan

Rising refugee numbers

According to the UNHCR, more than 100,000 South Sudanese have fled from the federal states of Unity and Upper Nile during the past two months. Another 650,000 are cut off from aid. Since the beginning of 2015, about 60,000 South Sudanese have crossed the borders to the neighbouring countries, with 30,000 going to Sudan and 15,000 to either Ethiopia or Uganda, respectively. Since the beginning of the clashes in December 2013 a total of about 555,000 South Sudanese have left the country. About 1.5 million were displaced within the country. People flee due to the fights between the rebels supporting former vice president Riek Machar and the government and due to increasing food shortages. More than 3.8 million people (about one-third of the total population) are affected.

Ethiopia/Somalia

70 killed in fights in the border area between Somalia and Ethiopia

Dozens of people were killed along the border between the two countries in heavy fights between Somali clans and units of the Ethiopian paramilitary special police Liyu. The special unit was formed in 2007 in order to fight the separatist rebels of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) in the Ethiopian region of Ogaden. This crisis region is mainly inhabited by ethnic Somalis. It has been part of Ethiopia since the end of the 19th century, but has been repeatedly claimed by Somalia.

DR of the Congo

On 2 June 2015, members of a Mai-Mai militia attacked a storehouse on the airport of Goma, the capital of the province of North Kivu in eastern Congo. Soldiers of the Republican Guard repelled the attack. At least four soldiers and three attackers were killed. Several attackers were arrested.

Nigeria

Amnesty International accuses Nigerian army of war crimes in the fight against Boko Haram

In a report published on 3 June 2015, the human rights organisation Amnesty International (AI) accuses the Nigerian army leaders of having committed war crimes and possibly crimes against humanity in the fight against the islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram. AI claims that more than 7,000 young men and children have died in military prisons since March 2011. More than 1,200 people have been killed in extrajudicial executions since February 2012. At least 20,000 persons, most of them young men and children, have been arbitrarily arrested. Responsibility for these crimes along the chain of command goes right up to the top military ranks.

Suicide attack in Yola kills 45

On 4 June 2015, a suicide bomber blew herself up on the main market of the new city of Yola (Yola-Jimeta), the capital of the north-eastern state of Adamawa. 40 people died and another 40 were injured .

Boko Haram attacks in the federal state of Borno

Since president Buhari took office on 29 May 2015, about a hundred people have been killed in several attacks laid at the door of Boko Haram.

Russian Federation / North Caucasus

Human rights office in Chechnya attacked

On the morning of 3 June 2015, masked attackers destroyed the office of a human rights organisation in Grozny, the capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, and forced the activists to flee. According to reports, the staff of the "Committee Against Torture" had to jump out of the window to save themselves. The police arrested 30 attackers.

A member of the Committee Against Torture accused the Grozny police of having stood by. He claimed that the organisation had tried and failed for about an hour to phone the police and the ministry of the interior.

The group is thought to be one of the last remaining human rights organisations in Chechnya, a former war area. Its Grozny office was completely destroyed by fire only in December 2014. Human rights activists have repeatedly been the targets of brutal attacks in northern Caucasus.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Agreement on early elections

Following several rounds of negotiations, the EU has successfully achieved a breakthrough in its efforts to find a solution to the persistent political crisis in Macedonia (see BN of 11 May 2015 and 18 May 2015). The government and the opposition have agreed to hold early parliamentary elections in April 2016. The next meeting of the leading politicians is to take place in Brussels in the 24th calendar week.

Macedonia is experiencing one of the most severe crises since its independence in 1991. The opposition, who has been boycotting parliamentary debates for more than a year on claims of electoral fraud, has been releasing recordings of illegal phone tapings since February in order to prove that the government is deeply mired in corruption and criminal activities. In May, there were serious clashes in the city of Kumanovo, which cost more than 20 people their lives; the reasons are still unclear. Several ministers have stepped down. Thousands have been protesting against the government.

Ukraine

Situation in the east of the country

On 3 June 2015, fighting in the east of Ukraine resumed. Both sides blamed each other. The Donbass conflict area has recently seen the fiercest clashes in months. The Ukrainian army claimed that pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine had launched a major offensive against the military. The fighting took place in the small city of Maryinka, about 20 km west of the rebel stronghold Donetsk. The rebels denied that they had launched an attack, but confirmed the clashes. On one single day, at least 24 people died. Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko defended the use of heavy artillery. He said that 14 Russian combat formations and a total of more than 9,000 Russian soldiers were fighting on the side of the rebels in Donbass. Poroshenko also claimed that more than 50,000 Ukrainian soldiers had been deployed. By the end of the year, the army's size is to rise to a total of 250,000 soldiers as young men are drafted into military service.

The Ukrainian army reported that two soldiers were injured when a boat of the Ukrainian coastguard exploded on 7 June 2015 near the disputed port of Mariupol. The fate of five other soldiers who were on board is still unclear. The reason for the explosion is still unknown. Mariupol is a strategically important port on the Sea of Azov. It is the last large city controlled by the Ukrainian government in the country's eastern areas claimed by the separatists. The city is situated along the route to the Crimean peninsula in the Black Sea, which was occupied by Russia in March 2014. Fights have repeatedly flared up near the village of Shyrokyne, about 10 km from Mariupol.

Turkey

AKP loses absolute majority/pro-Kurdish HDP enters parliament

After the parliamentary elections of 7 June 2015, the goal of a presidential system is now far out of reach for Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. His conservative Muslim party AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi/Justice and Development Party/conservative-democratic) lost its absolute majority after twelve years in power. According to the official final result, the AKP gained only 40.7% of the vote and will therefore need to find a coalition partner. The pro-Kurdish HDP (Halkların Demokratik Partisi/Peoples' Democratic Party; supports minority rights, in particular those of the Turkish-Kurdish minority) gained 13% of the vote and entered parliament. After 99.9% of the vote had been counted, the AKP had 258 seats in the new parliament, i.e. 18 less than would have been necessary to continue governing alone. In 2011, the AKP got almost 50% of the vote and 328 seats. The pro-Kurdish HDP crossed the 10% threshold and will send 79 MPs to Ankara.

India

20 soldiers killed in rebel attack in the north-east of the country

A militant group attacked a troop convoy in the north-east of India (federal state of Manipur) on 4 June 2015 and killed at least 20 soldiers. Another twelve were severely injured. This was one of the most serious attacks in years. It took place in a remote area in the district of Chandel, about 120 km south-west of Imphal, the state capital. There are about 20 militant groups in Manipur which are demanding greater autonomy.

Pakistan

Suspected Malala attackers free

In April 2015, the Pakistani judicial authorities announced that ten Taliban who were accused of an attack on children's rights activist Malala Yousafzai had been sentenced to life imprisonment. Now, the British newspaper "Daily Mirror" reported that eight of them had not been sentenced at all, but secretly acquitted. The suspected leader of the crime is one of those eight. The Pakistani embassy in the United Kingdom reportedly confirmed that the Taliban were acquitted due to insufficient evidence.