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Briefing Notes

28. October 2013

Afghanistan

Security situation

Near Lashkar Gah, the capital of the southern province of Helmand, the beheaded bodies of two lovers were found on 23 Oct 2013. The authorities assume that the couple had fled from their village, had been stopped by the Taliban and beheaded.

Also on 23 Oct 2013 three civilians died in a Taliban missile attack in the district of Hesarak in the eastern province of Nangarhar.

On 26 Oct 2013 an Afghan soldier was shot after attacking international soldiers in a military camp south west of the capital Kabul. No ISAF soldiers were reportedly killed in this fifth so-called insider attack (also known as "green-on-blue") since the end of September. ISAF fears a mounting number of such attacks for the period until the presidential elections in April 2014.

Three missiles were fired on a political event in the eastern province of Ghazni on 26 Oct 2013, no-one was injured to the extent known.

On 27 Oct 2013 18 people died when their van hit a roadside bomb in Andar district in the province of Ghazni. On the same day a civilian was killed when a bomb was exploded next to a military van that also injured six soldiers of the Afghan air-force. In the western province of Herat an Afghan soldier was blown up by a bomb on 27 Oct 2013.

Pakistan/Afghanistan

Afghan refugees' expired PoR cards remain valid

In an exchange with the UNHCR the Pakistani minister responsible for the border areas stated that the proof-of-registration cards issued to Afghan refugees by the National Database and Registration Authority (NA-DRA) which had expired on 31/12/12 will remain valid. The technical and financial issues related to their extension would be settled soon, he said. The talks had been held in response to reports that the police were arresting an increasing number of Afghan refugees.

Iraq

Security situation

No day is passing without attacks. Iraq Body Count reports 976 civilian victims for the month of October (status: 27 Oct 2013). Since the beginning of the year over 7,000 casualties have been recorded.

According to the count of AFP news agency over 620 people died since the beginning of October (Status: 27 Oct 2013), and more than 5,300 this year to date.

According to various reports between 23 and 47 people were killed and at least 97 injured in bombings on 22 Oct 2013.

On 23 Oct 2013 at least 74 people were killed and more than 50 injured in attacks in Baghdad, Mosul, Ramadi, Mussayab and other places.

According to different reports there were between 14 and 24 casualties in Baghdad, Mosul, and Kirkuk on 24 Oct 2013.

On 25 Oct 2013 bomb attacks in Baquba, Yusifiyah, and Baghdad claimed at least 32 victims.

On 26 Oct 2013 a total of 30 people died in various attacks that occurred mainly in Bagdad and the provinces of Ninive, Salahaddin, and Anbar.

In Baghdad alone at least 30 people were killed by car bombs exploding in several dominantly Shiite neighbourhoods on 27 Oct 2013. Over 90 people were wounded. The second most affected city was Mosul.

Syria

Islamists destroy Armenian church

Members of the Islamist rebel group „Islamist State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)“ allegedly burnt down an Armenian church in Tal Abyad – province al-Raqqa (al-Rakka) in the north east near the border to Turkey – in the night of 27./28 Oct 2013 .

Car bomb explodes in front of a mosque near Damascus

At least 40 people died in a car bomb explosion in front of a mosque in the town of Suk Wadi Barada, about 40 km north west of Damascus, on 25 Oct 2013. The town is controlled by the rebels and besieged by government troops. Both sides blame each other for the attack.

19 rebel groups intend to boycott Syria peace talks

On 26 Oct 2013 the head of Sukur al-Sham (Suqour al-Sham/Syria Falcons), Ahmed Issa al-Sheikh, acted as spokesman for 19 Islamist rebel groups, declaring that they will boycott the Syria peace conference scheduled for 23 Nov 13. The Syrian National Coalition will announce its decision on a potential participation in early November.

UN Emergency Relief Coordinator demands access for humanitarian aid

UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos appealed to the UN Security Council to exert „sustained pressure“ on the civil war parties to allow the urgently needed relief to enter the country. Many routes of transport were impassable for the relief workers because of the fighting between government troops and the up to 2,000 armed groups which were also fighting among themselves. Only 15 international relief agencies are allowed to work in Syria and even these had problems to obtain visas, she said. In addition aid workers or relief transport trucks were being kidnapped.

A few days ago the World Health Organization (WHO) reported an outbreak of polio in Deir al-Zor (Deir al-Sor) province.

Iran

Executions in response to attack

On 26 Oct 2013 16 imprisoned drug smugglers were hanged in revenge for the death of 17 border soldiers on 25 Oct 2013. Although these men did not participate in the armed assault on the border post in the region of Sarawan in south-eastern Iran, Iranian sources maintain that they had been members of the group Jaish-Al-Adl that was responsible for the attack. Prosecutor Mohammed Marsieh said that Iran would take consistent action against criminals and murderers. The border region with Pakistan is the main drug smuggling route to Iran used by Pakistani and Afghan drug dealers and often sees armed clashes with many casualties.

Turkey

Accession talks continue

At a their meeting in Luxembourg on 22 Oct 2013 the EU Foreign and European Affairs Ministers voted to open a new chapter in the accession negotiations with the Ankara government for the first time in three years. Chapter 22 on regional policy shall be officially opened at a governmental conference on 05 Nov 2013. Although the EU Ministers had agreed to open this chapter already in June, the initiation of negotia-

tions had been suspended because of the violent suppression of the protests on Taksim Square and in Gezi Park in Istanbul. The accession talks with Turkey started in October 2005.

Syrian refugees

According to reports of the Turkish emergency relief forces of 21 Oct 2013 more than 600,000 Syrian refugees have meanwhile come to Turkey. 200,000 of them are currently housed in 21 tent or container camps most of which were set up near towns along the Turkish-Syrian border. Two thirds of the refugees do not live in the camps and try to manage for themselves. Some have been taken in by relatives, others are renting their own housing. Turkish border towns are also suffering from the conflict that has been going on for almost three years now.

Military service time shortened

On 21 Oct. 2013 the Turkish Council of Ministers adopted the bill to shorten the military service time from 15 to 12 months. The new rules will enter into force on 01 Jan 2014 and shall also apply for soldiers who have by then served for one year.

Palestinian Autonomous Areas

Israel plans to release more Palestinian prisoners

After several days of fighting within the Israeli coalition government 26 Palestinian long-term prisoners are to be released on 29 Oct 2013. Another 26 had been allowed to leave the prisons already in August; all in all 104 Palestinians are to be released from prison. The releases form part of the trust-building measures that had been agreed as prerequisites for resuming the peace talks. In return the Palestinians will refrain from applying for membership in UN agencies while the talks last.

Saudi Arabia

Arrests after protests against driving ban

The law enforcement authorities arrested fourteen women that had followed the call of the "Women2Drive" campaign to videotape themselves while driving and upload the clips on the internet on 26 Oct. 2013. Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world that bans women from driving. Already prior to the protest „Driving on 26 October“ the authorities had announced harsh punishment not only for the driving, but also for the publication of such video clips on the internet. As a result the campaign organizers had called off the protest against the driving ban, but some women drove their cars anyway.

Tunisia

Violent clashes

In the region of Sidi Bouzid in Central Tunisia fighting broke out between the security forces and Salafist extremists on 23 Oct. 2013, in which at least eight policemen and two radical Islamists were killed. For several months the security forces have stepped up their action against radical Islamist groups. At the same time thousands took to the streets in the capital of Tunis demanding the resignation of the government under the leadership of the moderate Islamists of the governing party Ennahdha. The government had consented to resign already a few weeks ago. Within three weeks a new interim government of experts without party adherence is to be formed that shall govern the country until new elections will have been held.

Libya

Former rebels run riot in parliament

A group of disabled veterans from the Libyan civil war stormed the parliament building in Tripoli and destroyed some of the installations and furniture, without causing any injuries, though. These former rebels demanded the continuation of their medical treatment abroad.

In the last two years former fighters had attempted several times to intimidate politicians at gunpoint. Most recently the head of government, Ali Seidan, had been kidnapped by so-called revolutionaries on 10 Oct. 2013 and liberated a few hours later by another armed group.

Son of Gaddafi indicted

Saif al-Islam, son of the former dictator Muammar al-Gaddafi and another 36 representatives of the former regime were indicted by a criminal court in Tripoli on 23 Oct 2013. They are charged with having violently suppressed the uprising against Muammar al-Gaddafi in 2011. The charges are for genocide and incitement to rape. Another charge is that they established armed militias to kill civilians during the uprising. No date for the initiation of the trial has as yet been set. Further criminal proceedings are pending against Saif al-Islam, who is held in a prison in the western Libyan city of Sitan. The International Criminal Court in The Hague had previously ruled that the defendants should be tried in Libya.

Egypt

Criminal proceedings against Muslim Brotherhood

Since 20 Oct 2013 the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood, including the organization's head, Mohammed Badie, must stand trial. Former President Mursi is threatened by several proceedings. The first trial is to start on 04 Nov 2013 on charges of using violence against demonstrators during the mass protests in December 2012. More than 2,000 followers of the Muslim Brotherhood are said to be in prison at the moment. They are charged with crimes such as incitement to violence, illegal possession of arms, corruption, incitement to murder or treason. Observers expect at least a dozen trials and a number of defendants in the three digit range. Many might be threatened by the death penalty.

The Muslim Brotherhood is planning to establish a new organization

According to a press report of 21 Oct 2013 some parts of the Muslim Brotherhood, that has been banned since the end of September this year, applied for recognition as a charity with the Egyptian Ministry of Social Affairs. The new organization will not be politically active. Its followers accuse the former leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood of being responsible for the violence between the security forces and the followers of ousted President Mursi.

State of emergency will be lifted in November

According to an Egyptian daily the government does not intend to extend the state of emergency that had been imposed in August 2013, beyond the date of 14 Nov 2013. The security forces will, however, remain vested with some special powers as part of the anti-terror law currently under debate.

Somalia

Journalist assassinated

A journalist of the Somali TV station Universal TV, who had been shot down in a Mogadishu street in plain daylight on 22 Oct 2013, died of his injuries four days later. Although as yet no organization has claimed responsibility for the assault, it is assumed that this is the making of al-Shabaab.

In the year to date six journalists have been murdered in Somalia.

Sudan/South Sudan

Unauthorized referendum in Abyei

On 27 Oct 2013 the ethnic group of the Ngok Dinka in the oil-rich region of Abyei contested by Sudan and South Sudan started to hold a three day referendum to vote on where the region should belong in the future. The results are expected for 31 Oct 2013. Reportedly about 100,000 Ngok Dinka came to Abyei from South Sudan for the vote. The Sudanese government called the referendum illegal and refuses to accept its results, as does the government of South Sudan. The Arab Misseriya tribes, whose flocks pasture in Abyei and who are close to the Khartoum government, strongly reject the referendum.

Where Abyei belongs has been a contested issue between the two Sudanese states that remains unsolved since the comprehensive peace agreement of 2005. While a referendum had been provided for in the peace settlement, it had not yet been held.

Mali

Attacks in the north

On 23 Oct 2013 two UN soldiers and a child were killed by a suicide bombing of Islamist rebels in northern Mali, three soldiers were injured. Six UN soldiers and three civilians were injured by a car bomb explosion near the Algerian border on the same day.

Nigeria

Boko Haram attacks in Damaturu

The army reported on 25 Oct 2013 that in the outskirts of Damaturu (capital of the north-eastern federal state of Yobe) a large number of alleged members of the Islamist Boko Haram attacked a military check point on the Damaturu-Maiduguri road around 17.30 on 24 Oct. 2013. At this and several other points of the city several hours of fighting ensued between the attackers and the security forces during which 21 of the attackers and several civilians and members of the security forces were killed. An all-day curfew was imposed for the entire state for 24 and 25 Oct 2013.

More than 100 Boko Haram fighters killed

According to as yet unconfirmed information from the military of 25 Oct. 2013, 74 suspected members of Boko Haram have been killed in a military ground-air assault of two Boko Haram camps in the villages of Galangi and Lawanti, Kaga Local Government, in the northeastern state of Borno on 24 Oct. 2013. Another 37 Islamists had already been killed in a similar attack last week in a remote region of Borno.

Democratic Republic of Congo

M23 rebels retreating

The heaviest fighting between the government army FARDC and the M23 rebels in three weeks broke out near the city of Kibumba (about 25 km north of Goma, capital of the province North Kivu in eastern Congo) on 25 Oct. 2013. By taking Kibumba (south of the rebel's territory) on 26 Oct 2013 the army succeeded in conquering the last town in the Goma area that had still been held by M23. Kiwanja (population about 200,000, suburb of the district capital Rutshuru) in the north of the rebel territory came under the control of the FARDC in the morning of 27 Oct 2013. According to as yet unconfirmed reports from the army also Rutshuru (about 70 km north of Goma) had been reconquered by government soldiers on the same day. Should the rebels withdraw into the mountains near the borders to Uganda and Rwanda they will be holding about the same positions they held at the outset of their revolt in the spring of 2012.

A few days before the renewed fighting both the Congolese government and M23 had announced on 21 Oct. 2013 that the peace talks between them in Kampala/Uganda, that had been resumed after a UN intervention force's successful offensive against M23, had broken down yet again. During these talks M23 had already consented to be disbanded. However, no agreement could be reached on the amnesty for the M23 leadership that the M23 delegation had insisted upon.

Ethiopia

Government stops labour emigration

The Ethiopian government has prohibited the emigration in the search of employment for its citizens for the time being.

On 25 Oct 2013 a spokesman of the Foreign Ministry explained that the reason was that innumerable Ethiopian citizens had lost their lives or suffered physical or mental traumata because of illegal human trafficking.

This decision had been taken to protect the citizens' safety. The emigration ban would remain in force until a long-term solution had been found. Only in the year 2012 about 200,000 women had left the country, mostly to work as household maids in the Middle East where they often found poor working conditions, discrimination and were sexually abused.

Russian Federation

Suicide bombing claims dead and wounded

In a suicide bombing in Volgograd between and six and ten people died - depending on the media report -, more than 30 were wounded, some seriously. According to the investigator's first findings a 30-year-old "Black Widow" from the northern Caucasus republic of Dagestan exploded a hand grenade in a bus. A police spokesman said that she was the wife of the Islamist gang leader Sokolov who has been killed.

Until now the one-million city of Volgograd, formerly Stalingrad, had not been considered a target for attacks, as it is located about 900 km southeast of the capital and several hundreds of kilometres from the Caucasus.

Georgia

Georgi Margvelashvili wins presidential elections

On 27 Oct. 2013 presidential elections were held in Georgia in which the 44-year-old candidate of the government coalition "Georgia's Dream", Georgi Margvelashvili secured an absolute majority (about 62 %) of the vote for himself already in the first round. His strongest opponent David Bakradse received 21 percent. The voter turnout was about 47 per cent. Former president Saakashvili, who was not allowed to stand again after two terms in office, admitted the defeat of his party "United National Movement" and its candidate, the former speaker of the parliament David Bakradse.

A total of 23 candidates had been running in the presidential elections which were mostly fair and without major incidents. The new president will mainly have representative duties, because all major powers were transferred to the office of the head of government by a constitutional amendment that entered into force at the time of the election.

The "Georgian Dream" coalition had already won the majority in parliament in last year's elections. The coalition is headed by Georgia's wealthiest man, the billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, the current Prime Minister. He announced that he will resign at the end of the year and withdraw from public office. He thinks that his most important task - bringing about a peaceful transfer of power in Georgia - has been accomplished.

Bangladesh

Casualties in anti-government protests

Incidents occurred in several parts of the country during anti-government protests last week. The opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Islamic parties allied with it, had called for protests and strikes, demanding the dismissal of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and early elections. In the city Cox's Bazaar in Chandpur district and in the city Jaldhaka at least six people were killed in the protests and clashes with the police. Many others were wounded. More than 150 people have already died in political protests and unrest this year.