

Group 62 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

29 July 2019

Afghanistan

Wave of attacks hit Kabul

On 25 July 2019 at least 11 people were killed and at least 45 were wounded in three attacks in the capital Kabul. The first was the suicide bombing of a bus driving employees of the mining ministry in the 16th police district. Shortly afterwards and only a few meters away there was a second suicide bombing as well as a car explosion in the 9th police district. IS claimed the first two attacks, the Taliban the third one which allegedly targeted a convoy of foreign armed forces. NATO, however, informed that a civilian vehicle was hit. Directly after the campaign for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019 was launched, the office of the vice-presidential candidate, Amrulla Saleh, was assaulted. The Afghan interior ministry updated the number of victims several times and it now stands at 24 dead and 50 wounded. Up to now no-one claimed responsibility for the attack.

Summary of the events registered by ACLED

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) reports that last week the Taliban and government forces engaged in fierce fighting again. The Taliban maintain that they took 41 checkpoints in the districts Qalat and Shah Joy in southern Zabul province. The main road from Kabul runs through this area. There were further suicide bombings in several cities, including Kabul and Kandahar. There are reports that the security forces are infiltrated by the Taliban. These people are targeting Afghan policemen and soldiers as well as US soldiers, the reports say.

Cameroon

Prison mutinies in Yaoundé and Buea

In the morning of 22 July 2019 hundreds of inmates of the Kondengui central prison in Yaoundé occupied part of the building. Many of the mutineers were opposition members or supporters of the separatist movement in the anglophone region. The videos filmed by the inmates and uploaded to Facebook also showed insurgents yelling „Ambazonia rising!“ and throwing debris at the security forces. The uprising was mainly caused by the poor prison conditions such as extreme overcrowding. Improved food rations were demanded as well. The inmates burnt down a library and a sewing workshop for female inmates. Security forces stormed the building in the evening and put down the uprising. According to official information of 23 July 2019 77 inmates were taken to police and gendarmerie units in Yaoundé for questioning in connection with the uprising. Kondengui prison was built in 1967 for 1,500 inmates and currently houses 9,500.

On 23 July 2019 prisoners revolted in the central prison of Buea (capital of the anglophone region south-east). Most of them are held there for secession, rebellion and terrorism. They burnt down the library, a food storage and an office. It is said that 48 inmates and two members of the security forces were wounded when the uprising was suppressed.

China

Hong Kong protests continue - police and demonstrators clash

Police and anti-government protesters seriously clashed again in the streets of Hong Kong. Riot police used tear gas, truncheons, rubber bullets and pepper spray against the protesters who had built barricades in several places after an unauthorized protest march. The authorities informed that 49 people had been arrested. There are also reports of up to 20 wounded persons.

For weeks numerous protest marches joined by hundreds of thousands have been held. The protests were triggered by a controversial bill for legislation on the extradition of suspects to China. But the protests were also directed against the police, accusing them of excessive violence during the demonstrations this summer. No end of the protests is in sight, more of them are planned for the next weeks already.

The Chinese leadership considers this the work of foreign forces, but has so far avoided to interfere in the conflict. However, an article in the party publication „China Daily“ of 29 July 2019 drew an analogy with the revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa and the local police was urged to take all necessary measures to restore public order.

Egypt

Egyptian expatriates threatened

During a meeting of Egyptian expatriates in Toronto on 23 July 2019 Egypt's Minister of Immigration Nabila Makram said that "anyone who says anything [negative] about Egypt abroad will be cut", making a throat slitting gesture. The video of the address was criticised on social media, both opponents and followers of the Egyptian government interpreted it as death threat against critics. The Ministry stated that it was surprised by the reaction as this was a commonly used idiom in the Egyptian dialect. Nabila Makram is well known for improvising her speeches.

Iraq

Security situation

Fighting between Iraqi security forces and IS fighters continues. Security sources informed on 19 July 2019 that the second phase of the military offensive „Will of Victory“ (see BN of 08 July 2019) was launched in Baghdad's north and in Diyala, Salahaddin and Anbar provinces.

60 people arrested at protests in Babil

On 22 July 2019 at least 60 people were arrested at protests in Midhatiya in Babil province. According to the security forces the protest was not authorized. The protesters tried to storm the administrative building. Local media reported that this was the fifth demonstration that demanded improved basic supplies for Midhatiya.

Iran

Further action against Baha'i

The pro-Pasdaran Fars News Agency (FNA) published an article on 24 July 2019 entitled "Baha'i companies = spies in disguise" alleging that the Baha'i are working for the economic interests of the US to the detriment of Iran's economy. Such attacks by state media are quite frequent. As a consequence, Twitter caused the accounts of some pro-government media to be closed on 21 July 2019. Numbering more than 300,000 the Baha'i are the largest religious minority in Iran. Since the Islamic revolution in 1979 they have not only been excluded from university studies, but also from government jobs. Recently a court in the southern city of Bushehr sentenced seven members of this religious community to a total of 21 years imprisonment for "propaganda against the Islamic Republic". A relative of the convicts said in an interview that they had not been politically active and had only been punished for their faith.

Movie director given prison sentence again

Internationally reputed Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof was sentenced to one year in prison on 20 July 2019 for critically presenting Iran in his last three movies. The charges were "propaganda against the Islamic Republic". This is already his second conviction. In 2019 Rasoulof and his colleague Jafar Panahi were sentenced to six years imprisonment and a 20-year occupational ban. The ban was lifted and both were released against bond.

Iran plans to prohibit divorces on the wedding day of the first Shiite imam

According to the Isna news agency, the youth and justice ministers demanded that no divorces may take place on the wedding day of the first Shiite imam Ali; this is to be implemented as of 03 August 2019. Every third marriage is divorced in Iran. On 3 August, almost 1400 years ago, Ali ibn Abi Talib married Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad both of whom play a very important role in Shiite Islam. Therefore, many religious Iranians also want to get married on this day.

Kosovo

Prime minister returns

Kosovo's Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj who resigned on 19 July 2019 because of a summons to the Kosovo Special Court, resumed his office in government on 26 July 2019. The media reported that he pleaded his right to refuse to give evidence in a court hearing and that he was not aware of the exact charges. The cabinet said that it must review whether a resumption of his office as prime minister is in line with the constitution. President Hashim Thaci intends to consult with the parties represented in parliament about this matter in the course of the week. Previously local media had announced that the parliamentary elections will be held early on 08 September 2019.

Libya

Fighting for Tripoli

Fighting in Tripoli intensified at several front lines, such as in Ain Zara and Al-Nahr around 22 July 2019. Allegedly the air force of the Government of National Accord (GNA) flew several air strikes against Haftar's air force base in Jufra on 26 July 2019. In response Haftar's forces flew raids against Misrata, targeting also the air force academy located there.

Attack on a Tripoli hospital

The GNA announced that at least five members of the medical staff died in an air strike on a field hospital near the airport road in Tripoli; at least eight other people were wounded, it said. It is widely assumed that the forces of Khalifa Haftar were responsible.

Nigeria

Boko Haram kills at least 65

On 27 July 2019 suspected members of the terror organization Boko Haram shot between 21 and 23 (reports vary) people who were returning to their village of Badu Kuluwu (Borno State, Nganzai Local Government Area) after attending a memorial service in neighbouring Goni Abachari village. When Badu Kuluwu villagers rushed to help their neighbours, the terrorists killed over 40 villagers more. The state TV station announced that at least 65 civilians died in this incident. A representative of Nganzai Local Government Area (LGA) assumed that the attack was made in retaliation for repelling a Boko Haram attack two weeks ago when the villagers killed eleven of the terrorists.

Shiite sect IMN banned

On 27 July 2019 the Federal High Court in Abuja declared the Shiite sect Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN) to be a terrorist organisation and banned it, people and groups may not participate in any IMN activities. The ban must still be published in the government's official gazette to enter into force. IMN was

not represented in court and may still resort to legal remedies. IMN, the largest Shiite association in Nigeria, had staged many protest marches prior to the ban, demanding the release of their leader and founder Ibrahim El-Zakzaky who is held without a trial since December 2015. The marches caused many violent clashes with the security forces that resulted in casualties.

More casualties during break-up of Shiite IMN sect protests

Around noontime on 22 July 2019 a protest march of hundreds (other sources say thousands) of followers of the Shiite Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN) started at NITEL junction in Abuja. The protesters, demanding the release of El-Zakzaky, marched to the complex of the Federal Government Secretariat where police stopped them. When the police broke up the march with the use of force at least six of the protesters, one policeman and a trainee journalist were killed. According to a different report by an IMN spokesman, eleven protesters were killed. Police report that 54 suspects were arrested in connection with the assassination of a high-ranking policeman and the wounding of three other policemen. On 23 July 2019 police disbursed IMN members gathering for another protest march in the Wuse 2 district of Abuja firing warning shots and using tear gas. Two IMN members were wounded. An IMN spokesman said on 26 July 2019 that security forces killed at least 20 IMN members in the course of this week. On 9 July 2019 two IMN members had been shot by police breaking up a demonstration in Abjua (see BN of 15 July 2019).

Pakistan

Arrests during opposition protests

On 25 July 2019 police arrested hundreds of protesters of the Pakistani Muslim League (PML-N) in Punjab province. In the major cities of Karachi, Peshawar, Lahore, Quetta and in the capital Islamabad the party of ex-prime minister Nawaz Sharif, who is serving a prison sentence for corruption, and the Islamist Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) party protested against the elections to the National Assembly in 2018. The governing party Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) had won these elections. PML-N also denounced that the governing party's investigations against its members for corruption are a mere pretext to weaken the political opposition.

Several soldiers killed

On 27 July 2019 rebels killed 10 Pakistani soldiers in two separate attacks. In the north-western North Waziristan district in the former tribal areas near the Afghan border six soldiers died in an exchange of fire and in the south-western Balochistan province four others lost their lives. The Pakistani Taliban Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP) claimed responsibility for the North Waziristan attack. Both incidents happened only a few days after Prime Minister Imran Khan had met US President Donald Trump at the White House. Their talks also covered Pakistan's role in mediating a political agreement to end the armed confrontations in Afghanistan and to resolve the conflict over Kashmir.

Palestinian Autonomous Areas/Iran/Israel

Hamas delegation visits Tehran

A delegation of Hamas from the Gaza Strip met with revolutionary leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and other high-ranking Iranian government officials in Iran. The delegation was headed by Saleh Arouri. He is the founder of Hamas' military wing, the Izzadin al-Qassam Brigades, and responsible for several bloody terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians and soldiers, including the abduction and murder of three Israeli youths on the West Bank in 2014. Last November the US State Department offered a USD 5m reward for information leading to Arouri's capture.

Palestinian Authority suspends agreements with Israel

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said in Ramallah that agreements on cooperation in security issues would be suspended. He said that the reason for the decision was the demolition of several Palestinian houses near East Jerusalem by the Israeli army. The Palestinians are accusing the Israeli government of trying to squeeze them out of the area near the barrier installations to the West Bank. The purpose of this was to build Israeli settlements and connecting roads there, he said. Israel justified the demolition saying that

these houses had been built too close to the barrier which seals Israel and East Jerusalem off from the occupied West Bank.

Russian Federation

More than 1,000 people arrested at Moscow protests

Police arrested over 1,000 protesters, sometimes with the use of force, at unauthorized protests in the Russian capital on 27 July 2019. The media report that several of the demonstrators were injured during their arrest. The rally was attended by approximately 3,500 people and had been triggered by the exclusion of independent candidates and opposition members from the upcoming local elections of 08 September 2019 (see BN of 22 July 2019).

On 24 July 2019, already ahead of the protests, prominent opposition activist Alexei Navalny had been sentenced to 30 days in prison for organising unauthorized protests. On 28 July 2019 Navalny was taken from prison to a hospital because of an acute allergic reaction. Doctors suspect that the activist came into contact with a toxic chemical substance. According to the media his life is not at risk.

Suspect arrested in case of murdered LGBTI activist

On 25 July 2019 Russian police announced the arrest of a suspect in case of the murdered LGBTI and human rights activist Yelena Grigoryeva. Investigators in St. Petersburg said that Grigoryeva had been stabbed in the night of 20 July 2019 after an argument with a friend. The authorities denied that there was any indication that it was a hate crime. Another LGBTI activist said that Grigoryeva regularly received death threats on which the police did not act at all. Grigoryeva's name figured on a death list published on the internet. The list gives the names of LGBTI individuals, LGBTI activists and journalists advocating LGBTI rights in Russia and encourages people to hunt down all of those listed.

Somalia

Dozens die in attack near the airport

On 22 July 2019 an al-Shabaab suicide bomber drove into a security checkpoint in front of the Afrik hotel near Aden Adde International Airport in Mogadishu. About 20 people were killed and about 30 wounded by the assault.

Mogadishu's mayor injured in attack

Several people were killed and wounded when a female suicide bomber blew herself up in a government building in Mogadishu on 24 July 2019. Among the injured is Mogadishu's mayor Abdirahman Omar Osman. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack saying that the actual target had been James Swan, UN Special Envoy for Somalia, who had met the mayor in this building on the same day.

Land mine kills civilians

On 23 July 2019 eight civilians died when a land mine exploded in Doonka village outside of Afgoye city in Lower Shabelle region.

Fighting

There are reports that the forces of the Somali National Army (SNA) killed three al-Shabaab fighters in an operation near Awdiinle Town, Bay region on 19 July 2019.

Reportedly al-Shabaab killed ten African Union (AU) soldiers from Burundi when attacking their convoy between Bad'ad and Galoley in Middle Shabelle region on 27 July 2019.

South Sudan

32 boys released

UNICEF announced that an armed opposition group had released 32 boys aged between 13 and 17 in Leer County (Unity/Western Upper Nile State) on 23 July 2019. Many of them had been kidnapped or forcefully

recruited to be deployed as child soldiers. Some of them have not seen their parents since 2016. The boys will now undergo a three-year reintegration programme that is supported by UNICEF.

UN Report: Violence continues despite peace agreement

Officially a peace agreement has been in force in South Sudan since September 2018. A UN report published on 03 July 2019 documents that the violence continues in some parts of the country. In Central Equatoria state at least 104 civilians have been killed, the report says. About 100 women and girls became victims of sexual violence between September 2018 and April 2019.

Syria

Casualties during air strikes

Since April 2019 the Syrian government has stepped up its attacks against the remaining rebels in Idlib. The pro-opposition Syrian Human Rights Observatory reported that on 27 July 2019 at least eleven people, including many children, were killed by an air strike on a market in Ariha city in Idlib province. They said that three aid workers were killed in the neighbouring province of Hama when their vehicle was hit by an air strike.

Activists reported that another market in the city of Maarat al-Numan had been hit by an air strike already on 22 July 2019, at least 41 people were killed and more than one hundred wounded.

The United Nations voiced harsh criticism of the recent air raids, because several of them had been directed against elementary infrastructure facilities.

The UN announced that more than 400,000 people fled the region in Syria's north-west since April 2019, many of them heading for the already overcrowded camps on the Turkish border.

IS attack

Media reported that IS claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing of government troops in Daraa province in southern Syria, that killed six soldiers on 27 July 2019. An IS fighter had first fired at the soldiers with a machine gun and then detonated his explosives vest.

Tunisia

Tunisian President Essebsi died

Tunisian President Beji Caïd Essebsi died in a military hospital in Tunis on 25 July 2019 aged 92. The president had been in office since 2014 and had renounced another candidature for this year's presidential elections in April. After his death the elections have been advanced and will probably take place on 15 September 2019. The speaker of the Tunisian parliament, Mohamed Ennaceur, was sworn as interim president on Thursday and on Saturday he described the late head of state as the architect of national reconciliation. Caïd Essebsi was the first Tunisian president to receive a state funeral since the country's independence in 1956; it took place last Saturday. The government decreed seven days of official mourning after his death.

Turkey

Crack-down on unregistered refugees

Turkey steps up official pressure on refugees, the search for illegal immigrants was intensified, especially in Istanbul. According to media reports about 6,000 individuals without valid documents were arrested in Istanbul in the last two weeks. Allegedly some were deported, including 3,000 Afghans to Iran. Others had been taken to camps in other provinces. Undocumented Syrians are said to have been taken to a camp in Hatay province. The responsible governor issued a decree that all Syrian refugees who are not registered in Istanbul must have left the city by 20 August 2019. A total of 547,000 Syrian refugees are registered in Istanbul. But in reality, many more seem to have taken residence in the city, although they are registered elsewhere. Estimates cover a range from 30,000 to 300,000.

There are unconfirmed reports from a Syrian umbrella organisation that more than 600 Syrians were expelled to Syria last week although they had valid documents for another Turkish province. Reportedly they were forced to sign a declaration that they wanted to leave voluntarily. Interior minister Soylu justified the measures announced for Istanbul saying that no Syrian would be sent back against his or her will, but Turkey supported Syrians willing to return.

Since the outbreak of the civil war in Syria in 2012 Turkey has taken in about 3.6 million Syrian refugees. It now becomes apparent that a large share of these people does not want to return at this time, although most of the fighting in Syria has ended, because their livelihoods have been destroyed.

Constitutional Court rules on freedom of opinion

In the evening of 27 July 2019, the Turkish Constitutional Court ruled with a slim majority that nine academics who had signed an appeal for peace in 2016 had been sentenced unlawfully on charges of terrorist propaganda for the PKK. Within the scope of the freedom of opinion this appeal had been legal, the Court held. The Constitutional Court also made clear that scientists employed by state universities may give their opinion on controversial topics as part of their freedom of opinion. Thus the Court allowed their appeal and ordered another trial at the competent courts and a symbolic restitution of about €1,500. The Constitutional Court also announced that a copy of the judgement will be sent to all lower courts to ensure that no violations of the law would take place in future.

The appeal for peace had been signed by more than 2,000 academic employees in 2016 to criticize the war-like conditions in the country's south-east and as a result almost all of them lost their jobs. Since then more than 200 of the signatories received prison sentences, more than 500 cases are still pending in the courts.

Ukraine

Ceasefire in Eastern Ukraine

Another unlimited ceasefire between Ukrainian government troops and pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine to become effective on 21 July 2019, was mediated by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in the Belarusian capital Minsk. Also the repair and use of a bridge in Stanyzia Luhanska was agreed. The bridge is the only passage between the territories of the government and that of the separatists. Several ceasefires had been agreed since the conflict began in 2014, but none of them was observed.

Venezuela

Another large-scale blackout

Another large-scale blackout hit the entire country in the early evening of 22 July 2019. At least 16 provinces were almost completely without power and other provinces also experienced massive effects. Power supply was re-established only very sluggishly. This is the fourth nationwide blackout since March.

Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance

The opposition dominated, but largely disempowered parliament, resolved on 23 July 2019 to re-join the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR) from which Venezuela had resigned under the Chávez government in 2013. On 26 July 2019 the Constitutional Court staffed by Maduro followers, annulled this resolution. At a military parade on 27 July 2019 Maduro repeated his threats to have opposition members arrested who planned a foreign intervention.

The background to this is that Maduro's followers are afraid that an accession to the TIAR would provide a legal basis for a US military intervention, which the parliament-appointed interim president Guaido has not ruled out.

Yemen

Fighting in al-Dhali and Hodeida

On 24 July 2019 Houthi rebels and pro-government forces clashed in al-Dhali Gouvernement. Pro-government forces claim to have killed 30 of the rebel fighters. On 27 July 2019 Houthi rebels attacked a food factory and a residential area in Hodeida killing at least one person and injuring several others.

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