

SYRIA/IRAQ: WEEKLY SITREP 20 SEP 2017

- (1) IDLIB**
Al-Qaeda linked Militias launched attacks against Regime targets in Hama and Idlib on 19 Sep 17.
- (2) RAQQA**
Syrian Democratic Forces liberate 90% of Raqqa from ISIS.
- (3) DEIR AZZOR**
Russian Media reports Regime forces crossing the de-confliction line across the Euphrates.
- (4) ZAQAF**
The US closed outpost of Zakaf on 19 Sep 17 as military operations with a New Syrian Army group fail.
- (5) EU FUNDING**
The EU is to increase funding to UNICEF to support the Syrian Crisis.



- (6) ERBIL**
The Kurdish Referendum is due to take place 25 Sep 17.
- (7) BAGHDAD/ERBIL**
Iraq Supreme Court has ordered the suspension of the Kurdish Referendum on 25 Sep 17.
- (8) HAWIJA**
Iraqi Air Force dropped anti ISIS leaflets prior to ground offensive.
- (9) ANBAR**
Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) launched an operation to remove ISIS from Ana, 90km from the Syrian Border.
- (10) Basra**
Oil Minister Jabbar al-Luiebi defended Iraq's OPEC compliance and hints at oil talks with Kurdistan.

COMMENT: (1) Hayat Tahrir al-Sham staged attacks which were met with heavy Regime airstrikes. The violence may derail the fragile Iranian, Turkish and Russian initiative to stabilize the area as a “de-escalation zone” amid fears for displaced civilians. (2) SDF have been fighting a three month urban operation to dislodge ISIS from Raqqa. The SDF intend to push South to Deir Azzor likely to cause conflict as the Regime and Shia proxies will come into close proximity. (3) The Regime crossed the agreed de-confliction line in the Euphrates River Valley (ERV) as Deir Azzor increasingly becomes a crowded battle space with proxy forces likely to clash at a tactical level and tensions to rise at a strategic level. Al-Omar Oilfield will likely become a contentious asset. (4) The decision to close the outpost is likely the result of failed operations with Maghawir al-Thawra to oust ISIS in Bukamal. Tanf, a larger outpost 45 miles from Zakaf ensures US presence in the area. (5) The EU Regional Trust Fund will provide €90M to UNICEF to support education for refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, bringing the total funding from the Trust to €200million. The renewed initiative coincides with the beginning of school for children around the world. (6)&(7) British Defence Secretary Michael Fallon announced he would attempt to dissuade Kurdish President Barzani from staging the referendum to protect the integrity of Iraq’s borders. Social media momentum indicates little intention to delay the vote. (8) Shaping operations indicate a ground offensive is likely within 7 – 10 days. (9) Following Ana, Rawa and al-Qaim will be the focus for ISF. (10) OPEC proposed a production cut of 1.8million barrels per day until March 2018 which has drawn criticism from observers as OPEC compliance was noted to be 70% in August, the lowest since January. Talks with Kurdistan are unlikely before the 25 Sep 17 Kurdish referendum.

SYRIA/IRAQ CONTROL MAP: 20 SEP 2017

COMMENT:

(1) Reports this week suggest the Regime, supported by Russian and Iranian forces, have recaptured up to 85% of territory lost to ISIS since 2014.

(2) Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continue the three month long urban operation to retake Raqqa from ISIS. Reports suggest up to 90% of the city have been liberated. The SDF will push South towards Deir Azzor where Regime forces and Kurdish Forces already operate as concerns mount for a crowded battlespace.

(3) It is likely ISIS will increasingly target Baghdad to undermine the nation's perception of Iraqi Government control in response to the reduction in ISIS held territory. ISF have focused on defeating ISIS in Hawija (Kirkuk Province) and Ana (Anbar Province). The reopening of Trebil Border Crossing Point and ISF operations in Anbar may facilitate the movement of IDPs from Jordan into Iraq.

(4) As ISF focus on the North and West of the country, Shi'ite Muslim Tribes continue to fight in the oil-rich South. While yet to impact on oil production, it undermines stability in the vital economic hub.

HUMANITARIAN HEADLINES

(1) UNHCR National Call for Expressions of Interest

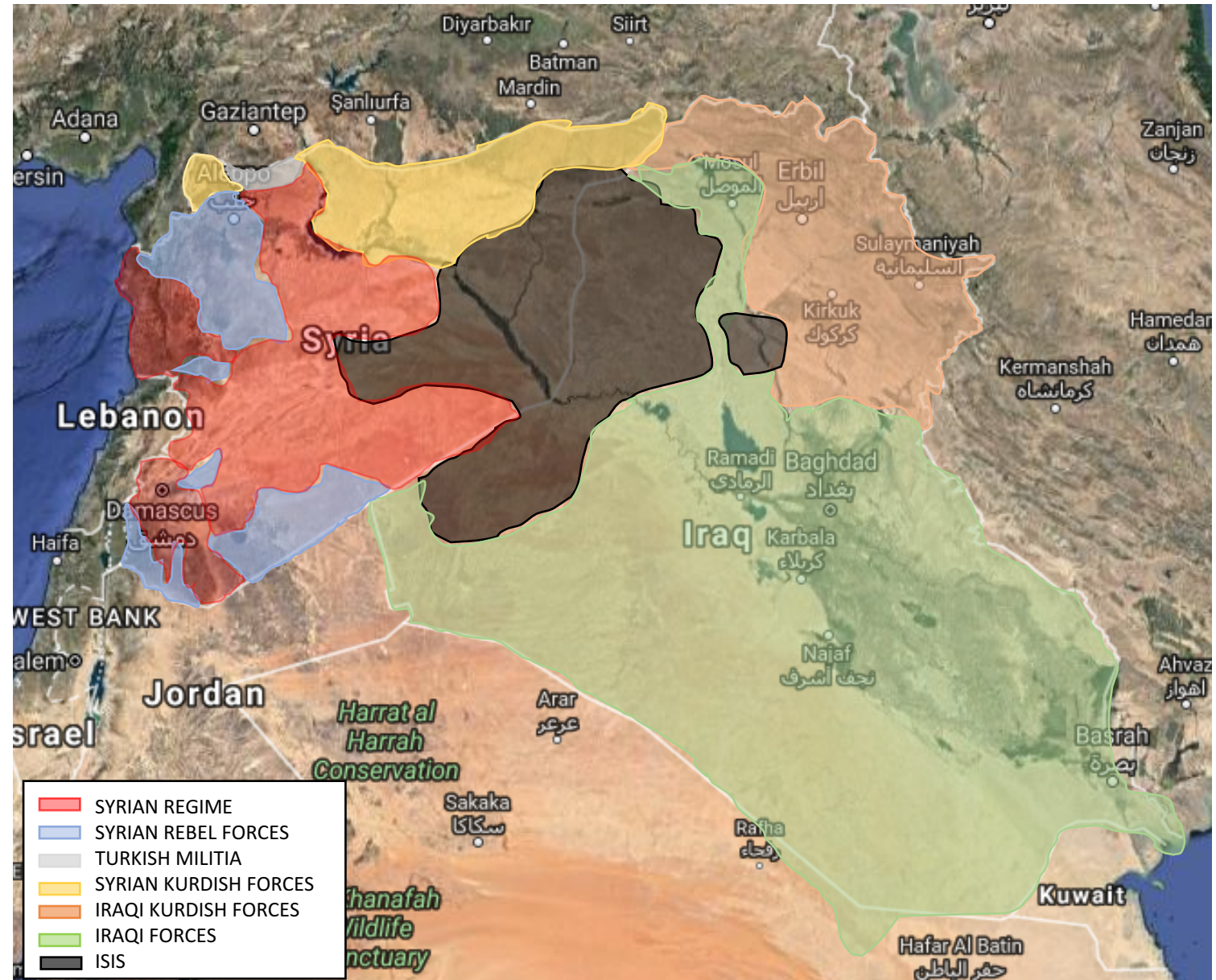
UNHCR invites NGOs to express interest to support 2018 operations.

(2) EU Regional Trust Fund Strengthens Syria Crisis Response with Additional Funding to UNICEF

As the new school year begins, the EU has pledged a further €90 million to UNICEF to provide education to refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

(3) Fears of Retribution for 1,300 Women and Children of ISIS Fighters Under Iraqi Forces Control

The group have been moved from a camp North of Mosul in Iraqi Government controlled territory. Humanitarian groups have raised concern.



NORTH AFRICA: WEEKLY SITREP 20 SEP 2017

(1) TUNISIAN BORDER
Libya closed Ras Jedir border crossing point in response to protests at increased security.

(2) MIGRANTS
5,000 migrants were rescued attempting to reach Europe last week. Sabratha and Zawiya prominent nodes.

(3) SABRATHA
Fighting intensifies in Sabratha between militias as negotiations fail.

(4) TRIPOLI
Fuel shortages caused by militias closing fuel pipelines to the city.



(5) UN
The UN attempts to garner support for a renewed effort to break the political deadlock in Libya.

(6) EGYPT/LIBYA
Egypt announced on 19 Sep 17 that it would lead the reorganization of the Libyan Army.

(7) SIRTE
ISIS continues to conduct attacks against the LNA near Sirte.

(8) AL GHANI OILFIELD
Foreign oil workers abducted from Al Ghani Oilfield in March 2015 had been killed by ISIS.

COMMENT: (1) Protests in the Tunisian town of Ben Guerdane were in response to Libya’s increased border customs to curb smuggling. The closure is an immediate response and will likely re-open in the short term. (2) Despite a significant reduction in migrant numbers, the recent figures (the highest since July) indicate the route is very much still active with Zawiya and Sabratha highlighted as nodes of trafficking. (3) The fighting between the “Fighting ISIS Operations Room” and Anas Dabbashi Brigade (ADB) continues as locally brokered ceasefires fail. The fighting erupted as the militias clashed at a checkpoint. ISIS could capitalize on unrest such as this by offering support to loosely affiliated factions. Notably, trafficking flows from areas of unrest making Zawiya and Sabratha likely to remain nodes driving the migrant crisis. (4) Armed militias forced workers to cease pumping fuel at Zawiya Oil Storage Depot. Fuel supply is regularly disrupted in the city causing deteriorating living conditions and price escalations for commodities. (5) The GNA, despite having UN support and international recognition, failed to establish itself which has resulted in competing governments in the East led by Khalifa Haftar. Haftar remains a contentious figure with powerful military influence who has largely been unpalatable to many in the GNA in Tripoli, stifling peace talks. Haftar, supported by the UAE and Egypt and the GNA with UN support agreed in July to take steps towards cooperation. (6) Egypt is to lead the reorganization of the Libyan Army in an effort to unify the various fighting units splintered across Libya as part of the aforementioned cooperation pact of July 2017.. Egypt has supported Haftar in his opposition against the GNA, but following agreements from the rival leaders it appears steps are being taken to create an inclusive army, likely to be a long term ambition. (7) As military action reduces ISIS territory in Syria and Iraq, Libya’s instability presents an opportunity to establish a stronghold outside of the Levant. The LNA is likely to quell any significant ISIS growth in Sirte but cannot protect the surrounding area. (8) The Derna Shura Council confirmed the 9 foreign workers abducted by ISIS from Al Ghani Oilfield in March 2015 were killed by ISIS according to information from ISIS laptops. Kidnappings and disruption to oil assets is the most likely TTP for ISIS given their small numbers in Libya and military strength of the LNA and opposition militias in Eastern Libya.

AF/PAK: WEEKLY SITREP 20 SEP 2017

Op FREEDOM'S SENTINEL & RESOLUTE SUPPORT MISSION

Air assets increase in theatre with the addition of more F-16 Falcons (18 total) and air refueling tankers.

(1) US

US to send an extra 3,000 troops to Afghanistan .

(2) AFGHAN AIR FORCE (AAF)

US AFCENT reports that the AAF will more than double their fleet of aircraft in the next 7 years.

(3) HERAT

The bodies of the workers abducted 3 weeks ago by the Taliban were found on 18 Sep 17 near Islam Qalah, Herat.



(4) AFGHANISTAN/INDIA

Russia's Special Envoy to Afghanistan has encouraged collaboration with India to bring stability to Afghanistan.

(5) KABUL

The US is planning to extend the Green Zone to improve safety for Foreign Embassies and NGOs.

(6) US/KABUL

The US Senate nominated John Bass as the new US Ambassador to Afghanistan.

(7) MUHARRAM

Civilians encouraged to carry weapons during the Shi'ite religious month of Muharram.

COMMENT: (1) US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis announced 18 Sep 17 that the US will send more than 3,000 extra troops to Afghanistan as the Taliban gain ground against the Kabul administration. The President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani praised President Trump's strategy. (2) AFCENT's Resolute Support Mission reports the arrival of UH-60 Blackhawks this week, future introduction of AC-208 aircraft, A-29 MD-530 attack aircraft. The AAF is a vital operational partner but has been attributed to numerous incidents involving civilian deaths which are often mistakenly attributed to US forces which may promote Taliban messaging in effected areas. (3) Kidnapping for ransom incidents are increasing in Herat and serve as a stark warning to NGOs and media that the Taliban and ISIS pose a tangible threat given the lack of Government control. (4) The announcement of this collaboration coincides with President Ashraf Ghani's praise of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline. Russia postures to counterbalance the US influence in strategy in the country, as the US continues to claim Russian supply of weapons to the Taliban. Traditionally, Russia has focused on stemming ISIS control in Afghanistan above the Taliban. (5) The extended area of 1.86 miles is intended to incorporate all Western Embassies, NATO and US military installations and will be overseen by a recently appointed US Brigadier General. The measure is a stark reminder that even the most fortified zones of the capital are vulnerable to Taliban attacks such as those witnessed in May 17. (6) John Bass is a veteran diplomat, having served as US Ambassador to Turkey and Georgia. Crucially, Bass has vowed to improve relations with Pakistan which have experienced turbulence following President Trump's accusations against Islamabad. (7) The recent targeting of Shi'ite Mosques by ISIS in Northern Afghanistan indicates the likelihood that religious sites will be targeted with suicide attacks and small arms fire during Muharram and highlights a lack of Government control.