

# SYRIA/IRAQ: WEEKLY SITREP 27 SEP 2017

**(1) RAQQA**  
Human Rights observers confirm two US strikes in March 17 killed 84 civilians.

**(2) DEIR AZZOR**  
Russian Lt Gen Valery Asapov was killed by ISIS mortar fire.

**(3) DEIR AZZOR**  
Russian airstrikes target three positions held by US backed Syrian Democratic Forces. Video shows US military equipment at the sites.

**(4) DAMASCUS**  
Electricity minister Bassam Darwish announced increasing power output, doubling since last winter.



**(5) ERBIL**  
The Kurdish Referendum held on 25 Sep 17 resulted in a “yes” vote in favour of independence.

**(6) ERBIL**  
A French Paratrooper has been killed during anti-ISIS operations with Peshmerga forces.

**(7) RAMADI**  
ISIS staged coordinated attacks killing 7 ISF and injuring 16 with SVBIED and mortar fire.

**(8) Basra**  
A Christian monument was removed to help ease religious and tribal tensions in the city.

**ASSESSMENT:** (1) Claims suggest the strikes killed 84 civilians including children, which the coalition strongly denies. Coalition sources state since Aug 2014 685 civilians had been killed by airstrikes in Syria and Iraq. Observers put the figure much higher at 5,343. Afghanistan demonstrates civilian deaths provide recruitment for militants and undermine allied ground forces such as the SDF. **(2)&(3)** The highest ranking Russian officer to be killed in Syria. Moscow blames the “duplicity of US strategy”, reiterating claims that the US provides equipment to terrorists. Russian footage from airstrikes on “militants” with US equipment is likely the SDF positions in Deir Azzor. It is likely strategic tensions will escalate as Deir Azzor will increasingly host clashes between proxies as the strategic powers vie for control of this deciding province. **(4)** Russia, China and Iran have secured strategic infrastructure deals ensuring their influence in the restructuring of the country, it is unlikely the regime will undergo significant change due to a lack of Western input having isolated Damascus. Tehran is in a good position to secure land links with Lebanese Hezbollah, a key strategic aim. **(5)** President Barzani announced the result, stating it did not mean immediate action but dialogue with Baghdad. The result was met with threats of punitive action by Turkey, while Baghdad has threatened an air embargo. Baghdad conducted military exercises with Turkey 26 Sep 17 as a gesture to Erbil. Tensions will likely continue to escalate as ISF will strengthen numbers in disputed territories such as Kirkuk where Baghdad is keen to protect oil infrastructure. It would be difficult for Iraq to close the airspace given the need for strategic support to combat ISIS but they can significantly disrupt flights from Turkey which may effect military operations and the extractives sector. It is unlikely the tension will prove combustible but as ISIS loses territory, the issue of Iraq’s borders will re-emerge. **(7)** As previously assessed, ISIS will increase tactical tempo in Anbar Province following territorial losses in Northern Iraq with the advantage of being able to stage attacks into Baghdad. **(8)** Tribal and religious tensions continue to threaten localised disruption to oil production in effected areas.



# SYRIA/IRAQ CONTROL MAP: 27 SEP 2017

## COMMENT:

(1) Reports confirm that 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 has been liberated. The SDF have pushed South towards Deir Azzor, coming under Russian airstrike fire as the battlespace becomes crowded with opposing proxies.

(3) It is likely ISIS will increasingly stage attacks in Anbar Province as territorial losses continue in Northern Iraq and the Euphrates River Valley in Syria. Increased tension with Kurdistan is likely to mean the redeployment of troops to contested areas such as Kirkuk in the short term leaving Anbar and Baghdad vulnerable to small scale attacks from ISIS.

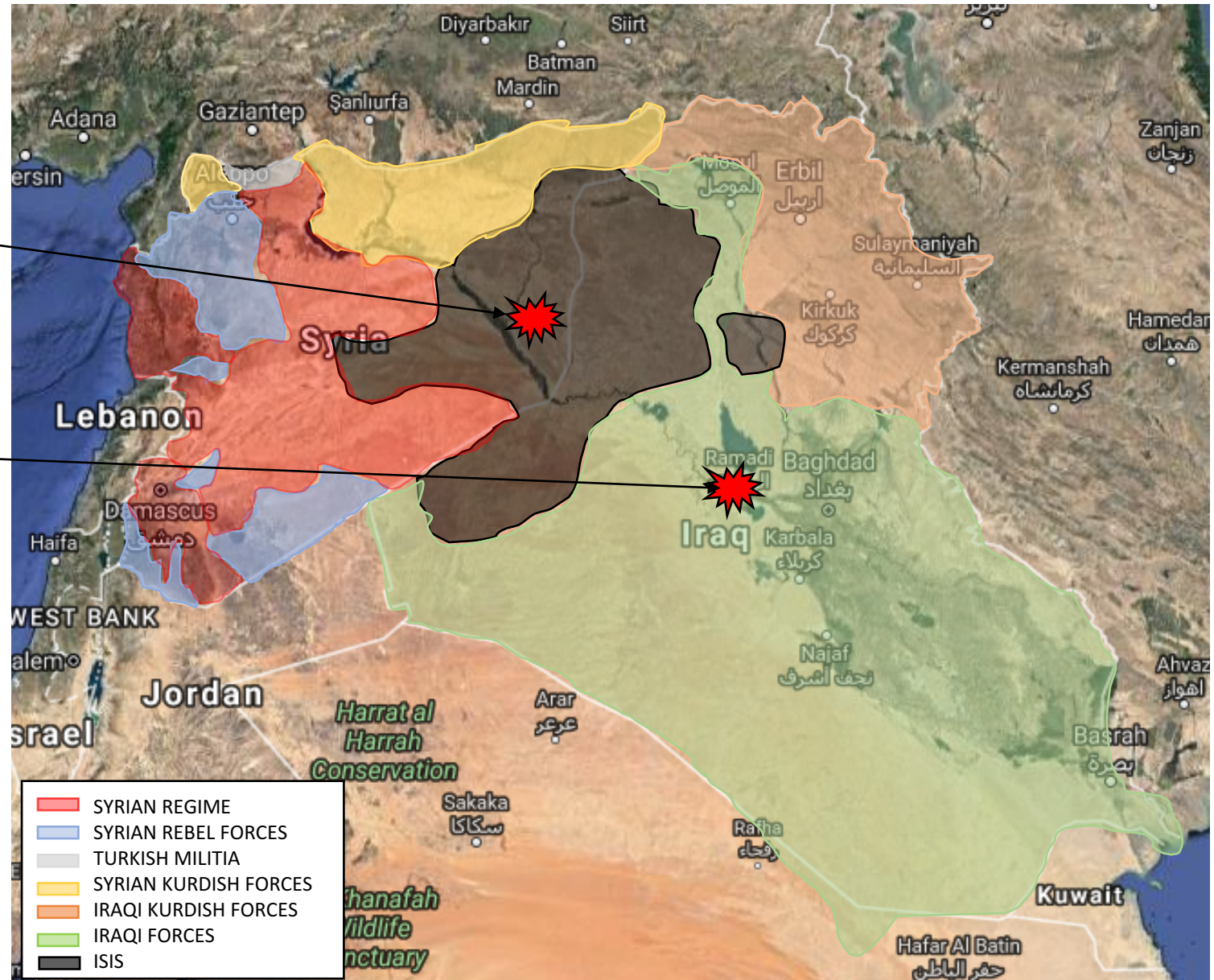
## The Kurdish Referendum

Kurdish leaders described the vote as a step towards self-determination as the “yes” result was announced 26 Sep 17.

To Turkey, the vote represents a potential catalyst for the reinvigoration of their brutal 30 year conflict with Kurds within Turkey’s borders.

Baghdad views the result as a direct threat to their borders, compounded by the potential loss of oil assets in Kirkuk.

The UN and US both labelled the vote as de-stabilizing.





# NORTH AFRICA: WEEKLY SITREP 27 SEP 2017

- (1) Human Rights**  
US attorneys have accused Gen Khalifa Haftar of committing war crimes in Libya.
- (2) TUNIS**  
The opposing Libyan factions of Tripoli and Tobruk met at a National Conference in Tunis 26 Sep 17 to discuss amendments to the LPA.
- (3) TRIPOLI**  
Thousands demonstrated in public squares to back former Prime Ministerial candidate Basit Igtet.



- (4) MIGRANTS**  
A Libyan coast guard vessel shot at and boarded a humanitarian ship on 26 Sep 17.
- (5) SIRTE**  
The US conducted 6 airstrikes against ISIS desert facilities 150 miles south of Sirte killing 17 militants.
- (6) OIL PRODUCTION**  
Forecasters predict Libyan oil production could reach 1.25 million barrels per day by the end of 2017.

**ASSESSMENT:** (1) Human Rights observers and 2 US attorneys claim video evidence shows Gen Haftar issuing unlawful orders to kill hostages. The allegations coincide with the recent arrest warrant issued by the ICC for a member of the LNA, Mustafa Busayf al-Warfaeli, putting the ICC in a difficult position. Having found enough evidence to secure a warrant against a close ally of Gen Haftar it is difficult to justify turning a blind eye to the leader's orders. It is highly unlikely given the tentative steps to peace that the ICC would take action against Gen Haftar on these allegations. (2) The talks represent the initial stages of UN Libyan Envoy Ghassan Salame's 3 phase plan to pave the way for a General Election in 2018. The Libyan Political Agreement is viewed as a flawed but essential basis for the peaceful road to elections. The Elections are likely to be highly contentious because of the likely inclusion of Gen Haftar, unpalatable to many within the rival Government of National Accord. (3) Thousands demonstrated in public squares to back former Prime Ministerial candidate Basit Igtet as he called for reform, denouncing Prime Minister Sarraj and Gen Haftar. Protests were tense but remained peaceful but provide a strong indicator of the deep seated opposition to these contentious leaders likely to result in volatile demonstrations in the run up to the General Election. Secondly, it is difficult to police and secure such demonstrations when the armed forces are themselves deeply polarised and should be a consideration for Egypt in leading the restructuring of the Libyan National Army. (4) The second incident of Libyan Coastguards threatening humanitarian vessels with gunfire, showing the increasingly heavy handed approach taken by the Libyan Coastguard. Tripoli continues to face criticism for heavy handed treatment of migrants and appalling conditions in detention facilities. (5) The strikes represent the first US strikes in Libya since 19 Jan 2017 and confirm previous assessments that ISIS activity in the desert areas surrounding Sirte is increasing. Given the vast area, freedom of movement and transit of foreign fighters it is unlikely the airstrikes will have a significant impact on ISIS activity in Sirte. (6) While the projections seem positive, they are dependant on the fragile peace talks in Tunis. Given that 3 oil facilities have been closed in recent weeks due to lack of security, the prediction is optimistic. ISIS and militias will continue to cause disruption, particularly if steps are agreed to stabilise the political deadlock in an effort to undermine political progress which threatens their freedom of movement and supply chain.

# AF/PAK: WEEKLY SITREP 20 SEP 2017

## (1) Op FREEDOM'S SENTINEL & RESOLUTE SUPPORT MISSION

US Defence Secretary James Mattis and NATO Secretary General Jans Stoltenberg visited Kabul 26 Sep 17.

## (4) KUNDUZ

3 members of the Haqqani network were killed when an IED prematurely detonated.

## (3) FARAH

42 Taliban fighters were killed during an operation to clear the Balabulok district of Farah Province on 26 Sep 17.



## (4) KABUL

A number of rockets were fired at Hamid Karzai International Airport on 26 Sep 17. No casualties reported.

## (5) PAKISTAN

Pakistani Finance Minister Ishaq Dar issued a not guilty plea on 27 Sep 17 to allegations of corruption.

## (6) PAKISTAN/INDIA

The Indian Border Security Force (BSF) launched Op Arjun, targeting suspected Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) farms and residencies along the border.

## (7) PAKISTAN

Chief of Army Staff Gen Qamar Javed to visit Kabul within 5 days.

**COMMENT:** (1) US Defence Secretary James Mattis reaffirmed US resolve to stay in Afghanistan to ensure it could not become a safe haven for terrorists. UN Chief Jans Stoltenberg reflected Mattis' message, claiming NATO would not quit "when the going was tough." (2) Chahardar district of Kunduz Province continues to be one of the least secure areas in the North as the Taliban and Haqqani networks continue to clash with Afghan National Army (ANA) and Police (ANP) highlighting the difficulty the ANA and ANP have in maintaining control in rural areas, particularly so far from Kabul. (3) Whilst headlines indicate that operations to clear the Taliban from districts in Farah and Heart Province are resulting in Taliban deaths, it is crucial to note that significant numbers of ANA and ANP are being killed despite support from both the Afghan Air Force and US Air Force. The Taliban have increased insurgent activity since the beginning of the fighting season as they continue to capitalise on their rural advantage. The Long War Journal reports that the Taliban control 41 districts and contests an additional 118, equating to around 45% significant Taliban control. The continued Afghan strategy of securing urban areas will ensure the longevity of the Taliban in a country with a 74% majority rural population. (4) The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attacks and stated US Defence Secretary James Mattis and NATO Secretary General Jans Stoltenberg were the targets despite having left hours before the attacks took place. (5) Dar is accused of corruption while acting as accountant to former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Dar was credited with guiding Pakistan's economy towards stability in 2013, however the current deficit has reportedly doubled to \$12.1bn. Pakistan is unlikely to weaken the rupee given that a General Election is due in 2018; it may have to seek a bail out from the IMF if current trends continue. (6) Tensions between India and Pakistan have escalated beyond rhetoric with the launch of Op Arjun. India claims the Op was launched in response to Pakistani sniper fire targeting BSDF and civilians IVO the border. It is likely this will prove to be the climax of the tensions, returning to threats and rhetoric in the coming 7-10 days.