

SYRIA/IRAQ: WEEKLY SITREP 11 OCT 2017

(1) TURKEY/SYRIA

Turkish troops entered Syria in the hours of darkness on 9 Oct 17.

(2) HAMA

ISIS seized 12 villages in the vicinity of Hama from Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham 10 Oct 17.

(3) RUSSIA/SYRIA

A Russian SU24 fighter jet crashed on take-off at Hemeimeem air base 10 Oct 17.

(4) RAQQAH

Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) prepare for the final push to retake Raqqah 10 Oct 17.



(5) IRAQ/KRG

Baghdad is to reopen an oil pipeline to Turkey which will by-pass KRG 10 Oct 17.

(6) IRAN/IRAQ

Iran and Iraq exploit Saudi Arabia's reduction in oil exports to increase market share in China and India.

(7) BAGHDAD/ERBIL

The ban on international flights remains as Baghdad increases pressure on KRG.

(8) KIRKUK

Hundreds of ISIS fighters surrendered to Peshmerga forces following loss of Hawija 11 Oct 17.

ASSESSMENT: (1) Ankara confirmed an unspecified number of Turkish troops deployed to Northern Idlib to enforce the internationally brokered de-escalation zone. Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), an extremist umbrella group for former al-Qaeda affiliates such as Al Nusra Front, are dominant in the area and have likely been significantly weakened by the Russian airstrike injuring HTS chief Mohamad al-Golani last week. Turkish troops will likely target the weakened HTS with airstrikes and ground operations in the next 7 to 10 days, bolstering the Free Syrian Army presence. (2) ISIS have also sought to exploit a weakened HTS by seizing territory near Hama, although it is unlikely they can hold the ground given distance from Deir Azzor. (3) The accident was caused by technical malfunction and resulted in two deaths. (4) The Kurdish-led SDF have retaken 80% of the city in 3 months. The US provided 75 airstrikes in 48 hours and it is likely that the city will be liberated within 7 to 10 days. SDF will push South to Deir Azzor where tensions are mounting between Russian and US proxies. (4) Iraq's Oil Minister Jabar al-Luaibi urged the reopening of the Kirkuk-Ceyhan oil pipeline, by-passing the KRG. The move is a means of increasing economic pressure on the KRG following the 25 Sep 17 Referendum. With Iraqi Security Forces positioned in Kirkuk, it is likely to become a political flashpoint but unlikely a military flashpoint for now. With ISIS on an irreversible downward trajectory, regional focus will return to geo-political ambitions amplified by a looming election in Baghdad and the death of moderate Jalal Talabani. (6) Saudi Arabia (KSA) reduced crude oil sales to re-balance the global market allowing Iraq to increase exports to the US and also becoming the biggest supplier of crude oil to India. Iran has also exploited the KSA reduction in supply to China. Iranian growth may facilitate investment in Syrian infrastructure and Hezbollah. (7) Baghdad threatened legal action against the "organisers" of the vote and investigations into the finances of KRG officials responsible for selling oil to foreign nations. The threats are unlikely to result in significant action as they lack substance, particularly detail on who would face legal action and what that action might be. (8) It is likely a significant number of the men are former ISIS fighters among civilians, indicating fading morale despite al-Baghdadi's recent audio last week. ISIS in Iraq have failed to display the counteroffensive capability of ISIS in Syria.

SYRIA/IRAQ CONTROL MAP: 11 OCT 2017

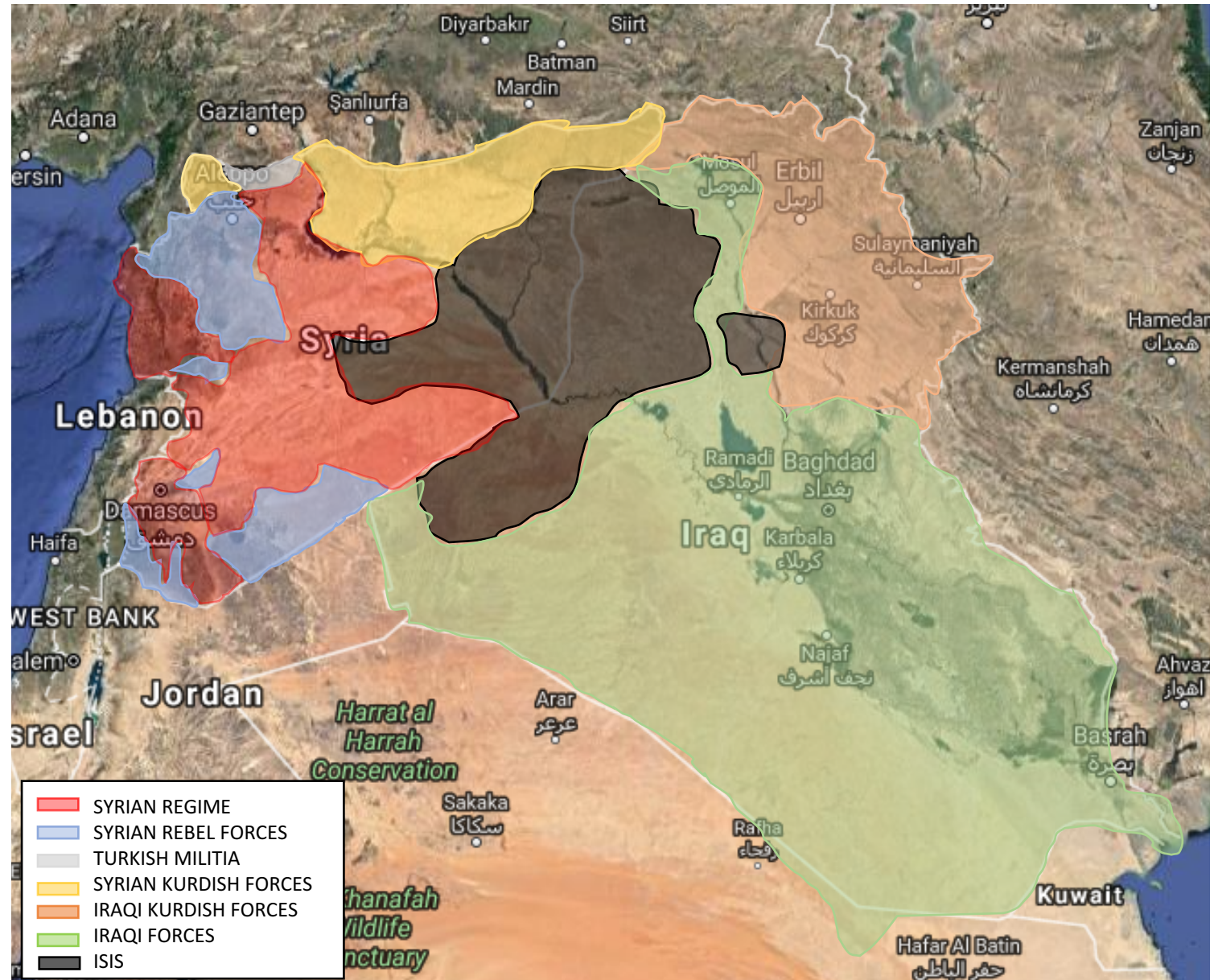
COMMENT:

(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) US/ Russian media wrangling continues with further accusations from Russia regarding US support to ISIS in Syria. With Turkey entering Northern Syria in support of anti-Regime forces and the Kurdish-led SDF likely to move South from Raqqah in the coming days, the battlespace is becoming increasingly crowded with Proxy forces aligned with these competing super-powers. Iran has invested in Syria's infrastructure, with Dier Azzor representing the largest oil fields in the country it is likely significant Regime forces will bolster the area undermining the US geopolitical aims.

(3) With ISIS retreating in areas of Iraq, notably Hawija, it is likely that morale is fading despite al-Baghdadi's message last week. Unable to recruit and retain fighters, it is likely ISIS are on an irreversible downward trajectory in Iraq. In Syria, ISIS continue to lose territory but have demonstrated the ability to temporarily capitalize on changes on the ground such as the weakening of HTS in Northern Idlib.

(4) The ban on international flights to Erbil remains in place, with further threats from Baghdad occurring almost daily. As ISIS continues to lose ground and the threat reduces, it is likely Erbil and Baghdad will pursue the protection of their relative borders, infrastructure and populations. Kirkuk is likely to be a political flashpoint in the medium term, as the diverse population and rich oil infrastructure provides tinder for a combustible situation. With both President Barzani and Prime Minister Abadi under pressure to achieve opposing ends, it is difficult to envision a political solution.

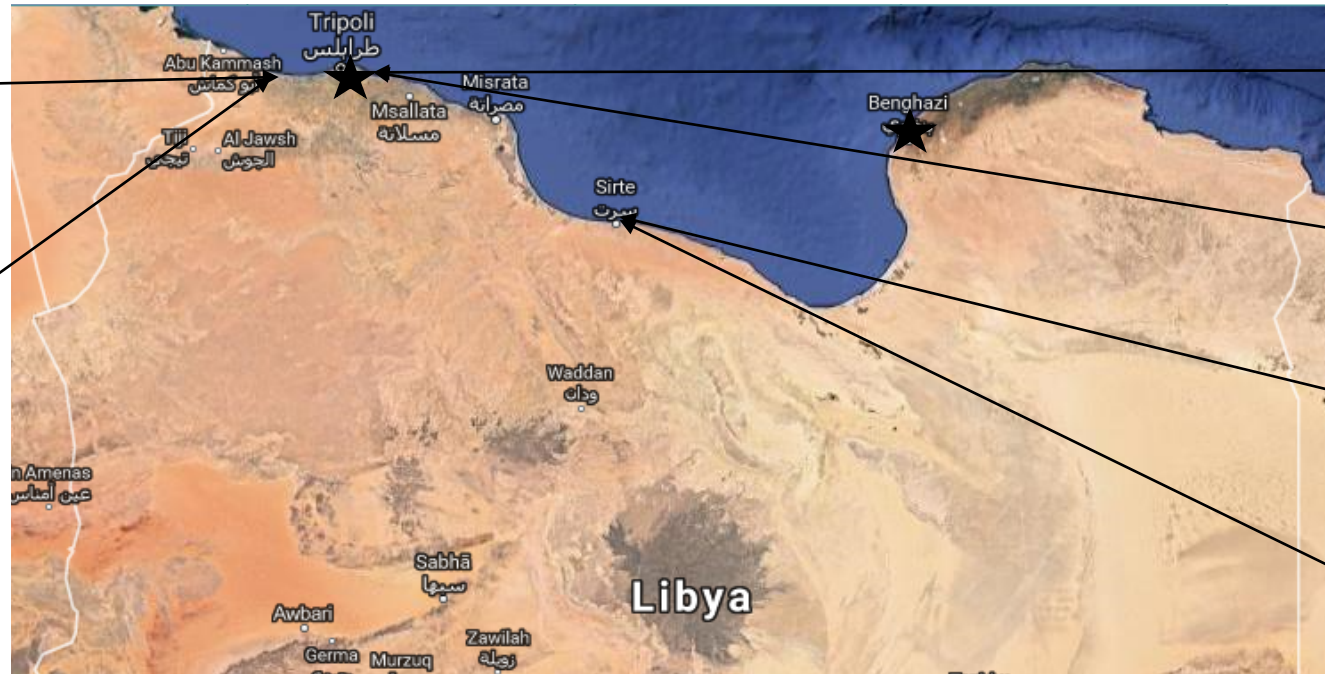


NORTH AFRICA: WEEKLY SITREP 11 OCT 2017

(1) SABRATHA
The Anti-ISIS Operations Room has taken control of Mellitah Oil and Gas Terminal in Sabratha.

(2) HUMANITARIAN CRISIS
The UN reports that 4,000 migrants held in detention centres in Sabratha have been transferred to a new site within the city.

(3) TOBRUK
Protesters temporarily blocked a Parliamentary session 9 Oct 17 before negotiations de-escalated tensions.



(4) TURKEY/LIBYA
Turkey's Special Envoy to Libya visited Tripoli 9 Oct 17 to meet with Prime Minister Fayez Serraj.

(5) TRIPOLI
EU is to reopen its Embassy in Tripoli if security conditions improve.

(6) SIRTE
The Red Cross and UNICEF have pledged aid to families in Sirte 9 Oct 17.

(7) SIRTE
The bodies of 21 Egyptian Christians executed by ISIS have been found 11 Oct 17.

ASSESSMENT: (1) Mellitah was previously controlled by the Dabbashi Brigade, who had been stemming the flow of migrants leaving the port under an Italian brokered deal credited with reducing migrant flow by 80% this summer. Following weeks of fighting between the rival groups, the Anti-ISIS Operations Room have seized control of the Port. While both groups are anti-ISIS and aligned with the Government of National Accord, it remains unclear how effectively the Anti-ISIS Operations Room will control the flow of migrants. It is likely ISIS will gain sympathy from tribes who continue to lose revenue from the trafficking of migrants towards Sabratha. (2) The UN report comes amid intensifying violence in the city of Sabratha as rival groups the Anti-ISIS Operations Room and the Dabbashi Brigade vie for control of infrastructure, notably the ports. It is likely the violence and the deteriorating conditions of the detention camps which have garnered international criticism spurred the UN action, which ultimately treats a symptom but will not stop the flow of migrants to Sabratha. (3) Parliament was due to meet for the first time since the appointment of UN Envoy for Libya, Ghassan Salame, but was delayed by a crowd of young men demanding unpaid salaries. The meeting is crucial to resolving the ongoing dispute regarding control of the armed forces and is expected to take place in the next 24 hours. It is unlikely agreement will be reached on the controversial agreement which keeps control of the armed forces with Parliament rather than Prime Minister Fayez Serraj. (4) The visit is likely in order to discuss Salame's roadmap to peace and the ongoing talks in Tunisia between the rival administrations. (5) The EU is expected to announce plans to reopen its Embassy in Tripoli if security conditions improve. By no means imminent, this move does indicate international optimism that progress is being made amid ongoing talks in Tunisia. (6) The Red Cross has delivered aid to more than 700 families in the Sirte area. UNICEF is set to refurbish a number of schools in Sirte and Benghazi. (7) The 21 bodies were found wearing the distinctive orange suits present in the video of the executions released by ISIS in Feb 2015. Libyan authorities claim to have obtained the information leading to the discovery following the questioning of a former ISIS commander. As ISIS loses territory in Iraq and Syria, it is likely they will return to tactics such as executions and lone wolf attacks in an effort to remain relevant despite the loss of the Caliphate.

AF/PAK: WEEKLY SITREP 11 OCT 2017

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

The US conducted 751 airstrikes in Afghanistan, a 50% increase on the number in August 17.

(2) RED CROSS

The International Community of the Red Cross (ICRC) is dramatically reducing its presence in the country 10 Oct 17.

(3) MOSCOW

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is to hold a meeting on Afghanistan 11 Oct 17 in Moscow.



(4) KABUL/ISLAMABAD

Kabul suspended the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Coordination Authority meeting with Pakistan 10 Oct 17.

(5) KABUL/ISLAMABAD

A prisoner exchange deal agreed last month involving 5 senior Taliban commanders held in Islamabad is to go ahead on an unspecified date.

(6) ISLAMABAD

Former Prime Minister Sharif to be indicted for corruption 13 Oct 17.

COMMENT: (1) Under President Trump's reinvigorated Foreign Policy in Afghanistan, a record number of airstrikes were conducted since the height of the Afghanistan War in 2010. The effect of the strikes in concert with the relaxing of the Rule of Engagement will likely result in a reduction of Taliban held territory from the current 41%. The results however will survive only the length of the campaign unless organic security infrastructure is improved to ensure ground secured can be held against. (2) Following a string of attacks resulting in the death of 7 and kidnapping of 3 workers, the IRCR has decided to reduce its presence until security conditions are improved. The reduction will mainly effect the North of the country where the ICRC provided clinics and educational facilities in Kunduz, Faryab and Balkh Provinces. The decision by the charity reflects the decline of security conditions during the fighting season and targeting of foreign nationals by ISIS in particular, the move indicates the need for NGOs to reduce risk inline with significantly increased threat. (3) The contact group, having been revived by President Vladimir Putin, will meet to discuss the security and economic situation of the country. India has been invited to participate for the first time, signaling recognition from both the US and Russia in India's stake in Afghanistan and follows on from US backed Indo-Afghan trade deals. India plans 116 projects across the country that aim to train the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). The Indo-Afghan relationship is likely to irritate regional neighbor Pakistan as relations continue to decline. (4) The suspended Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Coordination Authority was set up to address declining trade between the nations, which have dropped by 27% in the last 12 months. Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have been bruised as the US delivered harsh criticism and Kabul increasingly moves towards India, Pakistan's regional rival. Kabul and the US must maintain a strong relationship with Pakistan to ensure the border does not become more of a safe haven for terrorists projecting into Afghanistan. (5) The prisoners comprise 5 senior Taliban commanders which Kabul hopes to use to open dialogue with the Taliban, and secondarily to thaw relations with Pakistan. It is unlikely the move will achieve either of its aims. (7) Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, his daughter Maryam Sharif and her husband Muhammad Safdar are to be indicted on corruption charges at a hearing on 13 Oct 17. It is likely the news will be met with small scale protests staged by pro-Nawaz groups in key cities such as Islamabad.