

# SYRIA/IRAQ: WEEKLY SITREP 18 OCT 2017

**(1) RAQQAQAH**  
Syrian Democratic Forces will defeat ISIS in Raqqa in 48 hours 16 Oct 17.

**(2) IDLIB/TURKEY**  
Turkey increased their military presence in Northern Idlib Province 16 Oct 17.

**(3) MAYADEEN**  
Regime forces recaptured Mayadeen South of Deir Azzor 15 Oct 17.

**(4) DAMASCUS**  
Israel conducts air strike on an anti-missile battery near Damascus 16 Oct 17.



**(5) TURKEY/KRG**  
Turkey's cabinet agreed to close airspace to the KRG and hand control of border areas to Baghdad 16 Oct 17

**(6) IRAQ/KRG KIRKUK CONFLICT**  
Reports suggest Iraqi Security Forces have seized areas of Kirkuk Province 16 Oct 17.

**(7) OIL PRICES SURGE**  
Oil prices jumped to \$58.47 dollars per barrel 16 Oct 17.

**(8) BASRA**  
The province announced it would declare itself an independent region.

**ASSESSMENT:** **(1)** The SDF will likely defeat ISIS in the coming 48 hours before the Kurdish-led SDF pushes South to Deir Azzor where Iranian and Russian backed Regime forces and US led proxies continue to clash in a battle for the oil-rich province. ISIS is likely to morph into an insurgency, changing the character of the war from the seizure of territory to holding territory against small groups of militants attacking remote posts at night to avoid air support. **(2)** Turkey aims to secure a Russian/Iranian backed de-escalation zone in Northern Idlib where Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (former al-Qaida affiliates) dominate. Secondly, Turkey will aim to stem the flow of Syrian refugees crossing into Turkey as airstrikes increase. Turkey is increasingly aligning with Russia and Iran, further alienating the West in the future restructuring of the country. **(3)** Recapturing the town of Mayadeen is part of shaping operations, reducing ISIS ability to resupply the resistance in Deir Azzor which remains the Regime's main effort. **(4)** The airstrike was a response to a Syrian anti-aircraft missile which targeted an Israeli aircraft conducting reconnaissance over Lebanon. Similar events occurred in April and September of this year as Israel continues a policy of retaliation for threats to its territory. With Lebanese Hezbollah prominent allies of Syria, and Iran continuing to monopolise Syrian restructuring, it is likely Israel will take an increasingly hard stance against any perceived threat on the Lebanese/Syrian border. **(5)** The Turkish Cabinet agreed the measures on Monday, also agreeing to extend the state of emergency imposed following the failed 2016 coup by another three months. The extension of the state of emergency may result in small scale protests likely to be met with swift response from Turkish security forces. **(6)** ISF seized control of a number of oil installations, including a North Oil Company site and the K-1 airbase with a number of deaths reported on each side during skirmishes. Baghdad continues to increase economic pressure against the KRG, with this move representing the first military action to secure Iraq's borders likely to cause civilians to relocate from Kirkuk in anticipation of violence. **(7)** The conflict between Baghdad and Erbil caused a surge in oil prices. It is likely that we will continue to see significant fluctuation as Baghdad seemingly commits further to its threat of enforcing control in Kirkuk. **(8)** Basra, unhappy with the fact it contributes 80% of the Government's revenue, made the threats to demand overdue payments from the Baghdad Government. Although unlikely to materialise, the threats will negatively impact on already unstable oil prices.



# SYRIA/IRAQ CONTROL MAP: 18 OCT 2017

## COMMENT:

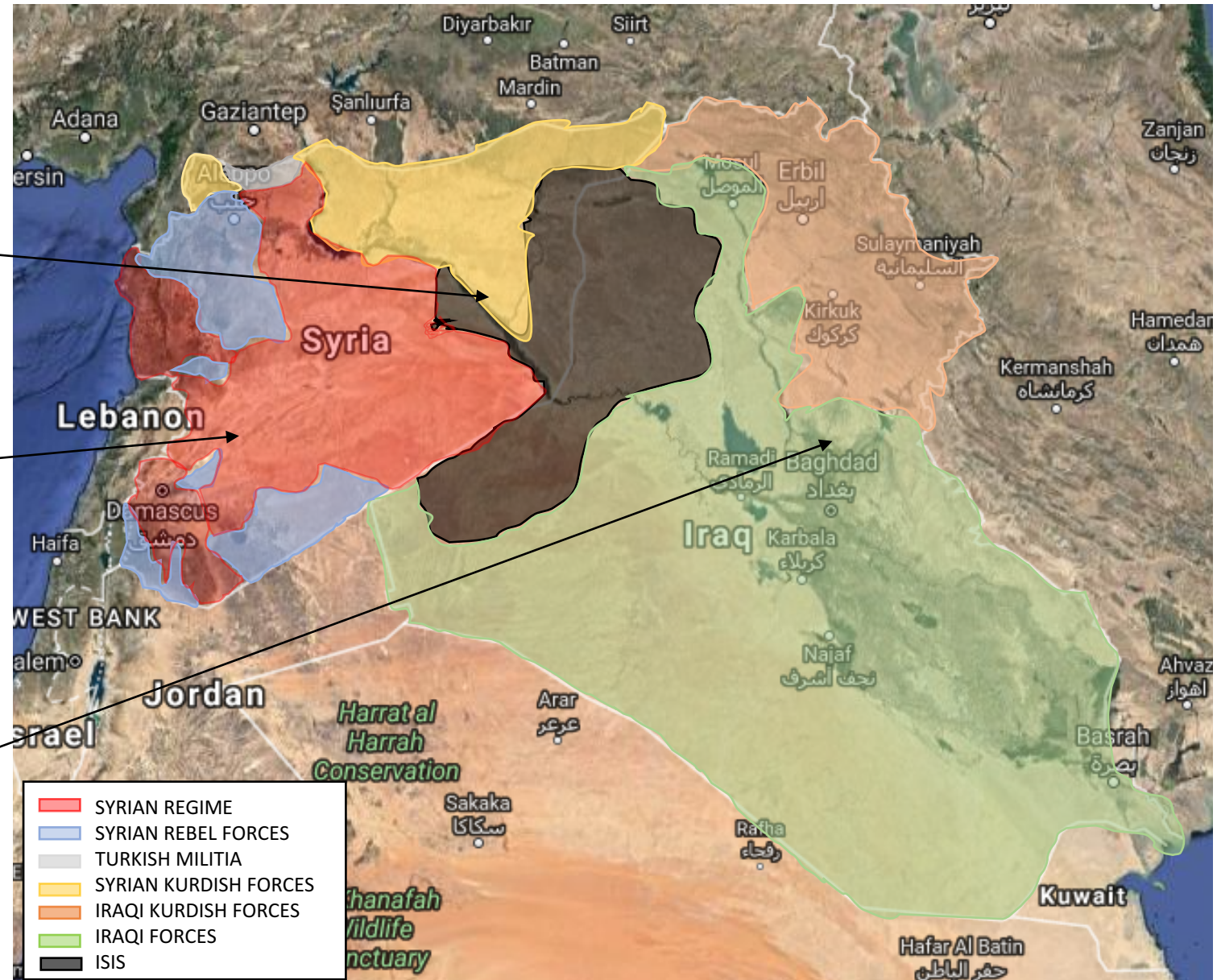
(1) Reports confirm that the Regime, supported by Russian and Iranian forces, have recaptured up to 85% of territory lost to ISIS since 2014. Reports of ISIS surrendering in significant numbers in Raqqah and Hawija indicates the group's ailing morale.

(2) ISIS is set to be defeated in Raqqah, the de facto capital of the Caliphate in the next 48 hours. The loss of Mosul, Raqqah, Hawija and the anticipated loss of Deir Azzor will render ISIS an insurgency and will require a change in military strategy from systematic seizing of ground to holding ground in a counter-insurgency. The increasing influence of Iran and Russia (joined by Turkey) strongly indicates that the West will not have a significant role in the counter-insurgency or restructuring of Syria given their alienation of Damascus since 2014, raising difficult questions about what will happen to US supported rebel factions post-ISIS.

## Kirkuk Standoff

ISF have seized control of K-1 Airbase and the North Oil Company facility on the outskirts of the city. The Peshmerga showed little resistance to the ISF, with reports of sporadic gunfire during the evening of 14 Oct 17.

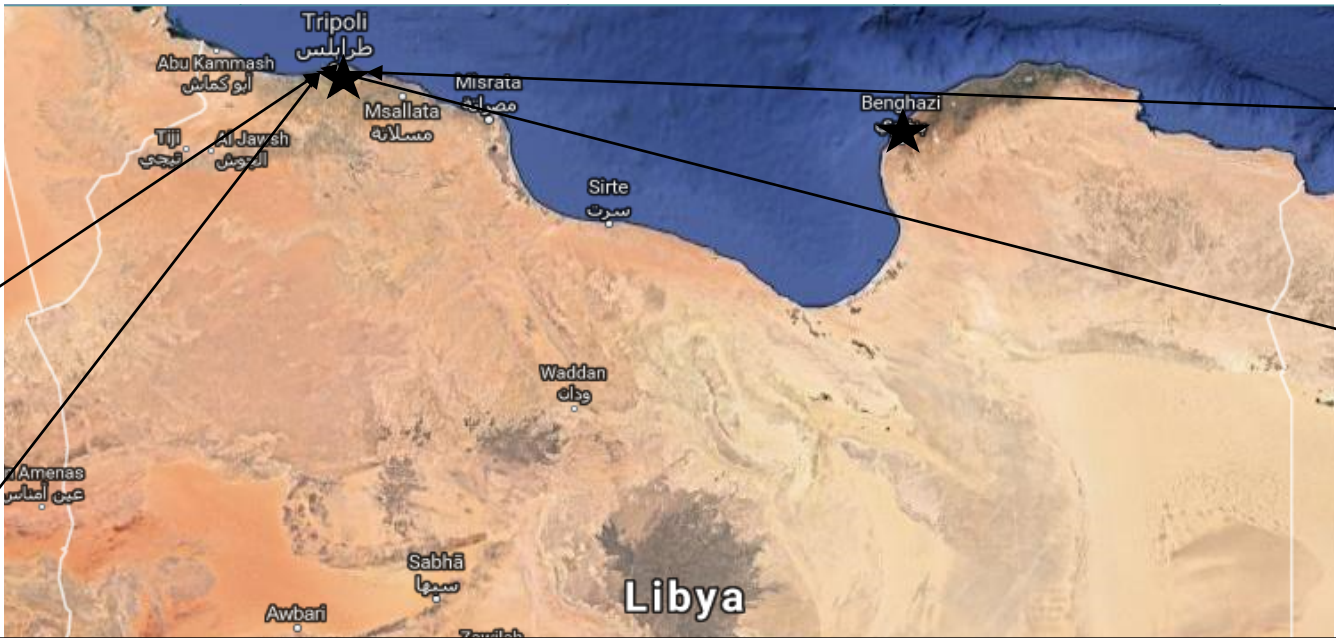
ISF are posturing to secure valuable assets in the Province in response to the 25 Sep Referendum. Kirkuk is predominantly Kurdish and a valuable economic asset which the KRG will not willingly relinquish. Baghdad is committing to a hard approach, likely spurred by upcoming elections, which may prove combustible in the medium term. In the short term, it is likely to result in reactively surging oil prices and social unrest in the Kurdish region.





# NORTH AFRICA: WEEKLY SITREP 18 OCT 2017

- (1) TUNISIA/LIBYA**  
Talks resumed this week to amend the Libyan Political Agreement under Ghassan Salame’s roadmap to elections 16 Oct 17.
- (2) MIGRANTS**  
The Tunisian Embassy has granted temporary passports to allow illegal migrants of Tunisian origin to return to Tunisia 16 Oct 17.
- (3) UNHCR/MIGRANTS**  
The UNHCR is providing urgent assistance to 14,500 migrants moved from Sabratha’s detention centres 14 Oct 17.



- (4) TRIPOLI**  
Libyan Special Deterrent Forces (SDF) arrested a Gaddafi loyalist amidst a plot to seize control of entrances to the city 16 Oct 17.
- (5) ZAWIYAH**  
Heads of key security and civilian organisations met to discuss the deteriorating security in neighbouring Sabratha 16 Oct 17.
- (6) GENERAL HAFTAR/ LNA**  
Haftar claims the Libyan National Army (LNA) control of most of Libya 15 Oct 17.

**ASSESSMENT:** **(1)** The committee set a new agenda for future sessions and prioritised selecting the Presidential Council, a relatively benign issue. The talks continue at a slow pace with underlying pessimism of sufficient measures to overcome the deep divisions between the rival administrations in Tobruk and Benghazi. Unrest will likely occur during the selection and election phases of the pathway to peace which have been earmarked for 2019. **(2)** The Tunisian Embassy will facilitate the movement of the migrants from detention centres in Sabratha to Tunisia with the assistance of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). **(3)** The UNHCR is providing assistance to 14,500 migrants moved from locations around Sabratha at a hangar in the Dahman area. The UNHCR warns a further 6,000 are still being held captive by smugglers and in need of urgent assistance. The instability of Libya continues to fuel the migrant situation as a lack of coordinated security allows smugglers to continue the trafficking of migrants for money towards the Libyan Coast. It is likely the militias of Sabratha will be encouraged to meet to re-establish a localised agreement to counter the migrant issue, ultimately improving the situation locally by redirecting the migrants elsewhere. With ISIS facing military defeat in Syria, it is a concern that fighters may attempt to use the smugglers to travel to Europe. **(4)** Al-Mobrouk Ehnish of the pro-Gaddafi Popular Front for the Liberation of Libya planned to use 120 Sudanese fighters to seize control of the entrances to Tripoli before linking up with smaller armed groups within the city to undermine Government security. **(5)** The meeting included the Municipal Council, the Council of Elders, the Petroleum Facilities Guard and Intelligence agencies. The groups discussed the clashes in Sabratha which led to the anti-ISIS Operations Room seizing control of the port. Following the meeting, several militias surrendered arms demonstrating the value of local tactical agreements to de-escalate tension. The difficulty with such deals is their limited geographic scope and independence from the internationally recognised government in Tobruk, weaving a complex system of deals based on personality and money that make centralised administration difficult. **(6)** Haftar made the claims to LNA commanders in Benghazi making it likely the claims are inflated to inspire morale. Haftar hinted at distrust in the Tunisia dialogue, claiming that an “alternative” must be in place and suggesting the LNA would be prepared to liberate Tripoli. Gen Haftar will continue to posture himself as the only viable option for Libyan leadership, likely to inflame tensions with the Tobruk administration, stifling the progress of talks.

## AF/PAK: WEEKLY SITREP 18 OCT 2017

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

US strike kills 14 ISIS militants in Kunar Province 12 Oct 17.

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

Two further strikes kill 20 Taliban militants on the Pakistani border 16 Oct 17.

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

Two further strikes kill 11 suspected Haqqani militants on the Pakistani border 17 Oct 17.



### (4) PAKISTAN/US

Canadian-American couple held captive since 2012 rescued 12 Oct 17.

### (5) KABUL

Police thwart suicide vehicle borne IED attack 15 Oct 17 .

### (6) GARDEZ

The Taliban staged a suicide attack against a police facility killing 12 staff 17 Oct 17.

### (7) ANDAR

The Taliban conducted a suicide attack against a police HQ killing 30 17 Oct 17.

**COMMENT:** (1) US Strikes in Afghanistan have significantly increased since September 2017 as President Trump reaffirms his hardline stance in the country. The strikes targeted an ISIS meeting in the Eastern Province of Kunar on 12 Oct 17, killing 14. Kabul exerts little control over the Province where ISIS are increasingly prominent. The US estimated there are between 600 – 800 ISIS fighters in Afghanistan. (2)&(3) The strikes come in the days following the release of the Canadian-American couple held captive by the Haqqani Network, marking a positive turn in the US-Pakistan relationship. (4) Joshua Boyle, Caitlan Coleman and their three children were rescued by Pakistani soldiers acting on US intelligence when the vehicle they were travelling in crossed from Afghanistan into Pakistan. The family had been held captive for 5 years after backpacking in Afghanistan. Questions have been raised as to the couple's motive for travelling to the war-torn country with speculation circling around Boyle's previous marriage to the daughter of a Canadian suspected of links to al-Qaida. The rescue indicates a thaw in US/Pakistan relations which are at the worst since the undeclared US raid on Osama Bin Laden's Pakistani compound in 2011. (5) Police in the capital shot a suicide bomber with a truck carrying 3 tonnes of explosives. The failed attack mirrors the 31 May 17 attack which killed 150 and wounded 400. The Haqqani Network are likely responsible for both unclaimed attacks, renowned for a series of spectacular attacks throughout Afghanistan since the US war. It is likely that as the US increases strikes against the Haqqani network they will retaliate with large scale attacks in the capital. (6) The Taliban attack resulted in 12 fatalities, including the local Police Chief and a further 70 wounded as a suicide vehicle borne IED detonated at a police training centre before a further small arms attack at the facility. The attack represents one of three reported throughout the 7 day reporting period. (7) The Taliban staged a further coordinated attack against a police target and surrounding checkpoints in Andar, killing 30 security personnel. Attacks such as these seriously undermine not only the morale of the security forces but the perception of the security provided by Kabul. Ultimately, these attacks demonstrate the Taliban can overwhelm security infrastructure in rural Provinces, limiting the extent to which Kabul can administrate. Airstrikes alone cannot support the army and police on the ground, in the short to medium term the Taliban will increase territorial gains by expelling security forces from rural areas with little meaningful resistance from the US.