

SYRIA/IRAQ: WEEKLY SITREP 25 OCT 2017

(1) RAQQAH

Saudi Arabian officials visit Raqqah to discuss restructuring 19 Oct 17.

(2) DEIR AZZOR

Regime forces continue rapid expansion into Deir Azzor 20 Oct 17 while SDF recapture Omar Oilfield.

(3) UN NEGOTIATIONS

The UN has urged the reopening of negotiations in light of successes in Deir Azzor and Raqqah 20 Oct 17.

(4) ISRAEL/SYRIA

Israeli tanks hit targets in Syria 20 Oct 17.



(5) NINEVAH PLAINS

The Peshmerga handed over control of the Ninevah Plains to Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) 19 Oct 17.

(6) PUK/KIRKUK

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) has heavily criticized the ISF incursion into Kirkuk 19 Oct 17.

(8) BAGHDAD/ERBIL

Iraqi Courts ordered the arrest of KRG Vice President Kosrat Rasul for referring to ISF as occupying forces on 19 Oct 17.

ASSESSMENT: (1) Saudi Gulf Affairs Minister Thamer al-Sabhan was hosted by U.S Special Envoy Brett McGurk and the Raqqa Civil Council to discuss the reconstruction of Raqqa. It is likely the US will seek to ensure they are pivotal to the reconstruction of Raqqa to counter the influence of Russia and Iran in the restructuring of the country post-ISIS. Raqqa is a strategically important gateway to Eastern Syria and to the Kurdish territories that will afford the SDF a seat at the negotiating table. (2) The success of the Regime, Russian and Iranian forces is likely to limit the SDF and US ambitions following the capture of Raqqa. The Regime's success in the economically vital East mean they have the strongest hand at the negotiating table. Without Regime change, the divisions sparking unrest in 2014 may prove combustible once more, ensuring an artery of support for ISIS and extremist factions as US support must minimize. (3) The UN has urged the reopening of negotiations next month. The Regime is currently in a strong position to dominate talks, while the SDF's strength lies mainly in control of uninhabitable Raqqa and the recently recaptured Omar Oilfield, Syria's largest. It is likely the US backed rebels will be faced with the prospect of no Regime change, which in light of the likelihood of persecution, will be unpalatable. It is likely new conflicts will emerge post-ISIS as ambitions on the the ground and strategic rivalries combust. (4) The tank fire was in retaliation for alleged rocket attacks emanating in Syria on the Golan Heights. This incident comes days after Israeli air strikes against Syrian targets in the vicinity of Damascus. Israel will continue to pursue the policy of immediate military response to threats from Syria, particularly given the rising prominence of Iran which is likely to bolster the boldness of Lebanese Hezbollah. (5)&(6) It is possible internal Kurdish politics are at play in the withdrawal of Peshmerga from the Ninevah Plains and Kirkuk. The leading Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) may seek to undermine the PUK in light of the recent death of Jalal Talabani by publicly accusing the PUK for ordering the withdrawal of Peshmerga at Kirkuk. It is unclear what agreements have been made to facilitate the Peshmerga withdrawal from both Ninevah and Kirkuk, it is likely that Baghdad engaged with both parties with separate negotiations. Baghdad, aware of deep internal divisions, may attempt to exacerbate the lack of political coordination to ensure no steps to independence can be made. (8) The Court is unlikely to execute the warrant but rather send a message to the KRG that it will not tolerate media disobedience in light of the 25 Sep Referendum.

SYRIA/IRAQ CONTROL MAP: 25 OCT 2017

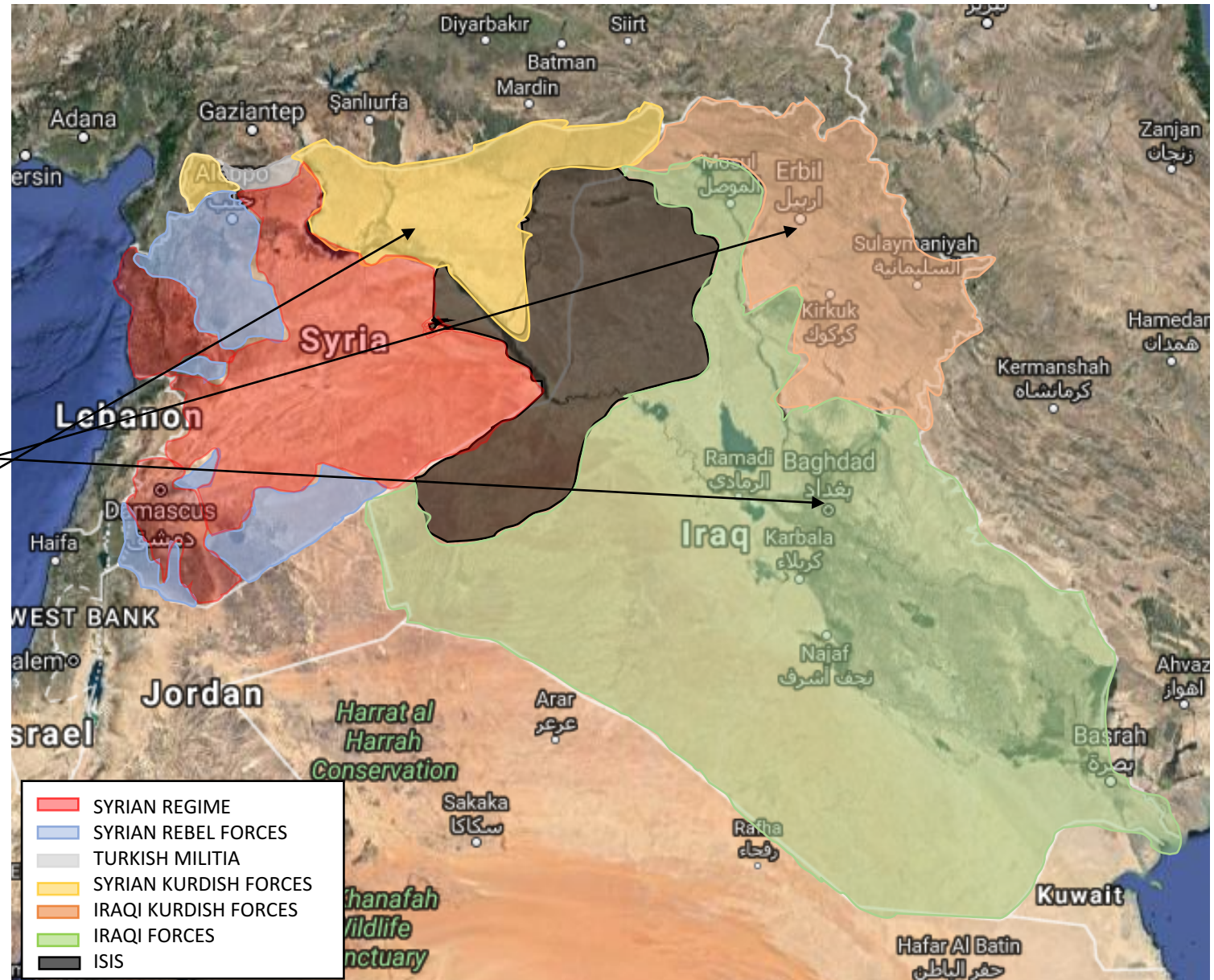
COMMENT:

(1) The success of the Regime, back by Russian and Iranian forces is likely to limit the territorial ambitions of the Syrian Democratic Forces in Raqqa. Crucially, the ground truth means the Regime has the strongest position at negotiations due to reopen next month under the UN. It is highly likely the Regime will remain in place, with Russian and Iranian influence assured in the country. The Regime and the implied longevity of Lebanese Hezbollah in the country is likely to be unpalatable to US backed rebels and regional neighbour Israel.

US backed SDF successfully seized Syria's largest Oil Facility from ISIS, likely to irritate Damascus who prize economic assets to facilitate the restructuring of the country.

(2) The Kurdish Iraqi leaders have offered to freeze the outcome of the 25th September Referendum to de-escalate the rising tension with Baghdad that has resulted in both economic and military action. The UN has offered to broker negotiations as both sides agree to engage in dialogue.

Since last week Iraqi Security Forces have retaken most of the territory gained by the Peshmerga since 2014, resulting in 31 deaths. Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has enjoyed a political boost by retaking the territory with minimal resistance.



NORTH AFRICA: WEEKLY SITREP 25 OCT 2017

- (1) NEW FOREIGN EMBASSIES**
South Korea and Hungary have opened new Foreign Embassies in Tripoli 19 Oct 17.
- (2) EU/ITALY**
The EU has pledged more funds to help Italy stem the flow of migrants from Libya 19 Oct 17.
- (3) TOBRUK PORT CLOSED**
Maritime news outlets report Tobruk port has been closed to non-oil imports and exports 19 Oct 17.



- (4) LIBYAN GRAND MUFTI**
The Grand Mufti of Libya Sheikh Sadiq al-Gharyani praised the peace efforts in Tunisia and condemned dissenting voices 19 Oct 17.
- (5) SAIF AL-ISLAM GHADDAFI**
Muammar Ghaddafi's son has vowed to return to Libyan politics 20 Oct 17.
- (6) EGYPT/LIBYA**
Egypt claims to have destroyed 8 vehicles carrying weapons from Libya into Egypt 23 Oct 17.

ASSESSMENT: (1) Following three years of closure due to security concerns, South Korea and Hungary have reopened their embassies in Tripoli. The Netherlands has also opened a diplomatic office in Tripoli. The reopening of diplomatic offices is a welcome sign of improving security in the capital, and a significant recognition of the Government of National Accord (GNA) as the internationally recognized administration of Libya. (2) The EU has pledged a further 225 million Euros to curb migration from Africa to Europe. Italy claims the number of migrants travelling to Italy from Libya has fallen by 20% in 2017. Pledging more money to Italy may provide further funds to improve the situation in Sabratha where rival militias have disregarded the agreements during violent clashes with negative consequences for migrants trapped in the area. Ultimately, the EU recognizes that the reasons for migration must be addressed and has pledged greater funds to countries such as Turkey who receive refugees from Syria and provide infrastructure to eventually return those refugees. Issues of conscription in African nations remains one of the key drivers of migration and must be addressed. (3) The Ports at Tobruk, Sirte and Derna remain closed to imports and exports. The US maintains its warning that the Libyan Authorities do not exercise effective anti-terrorism measures and extreme caution should be taken when using Libyan maritime infrastructure particularly in Eastern Libya. (4) The Grand Mufti praised the ongoing talks in Tunisia and the reconciliation efforts between militias in Zawiyah last week. The Grand Mufti condemned the pessimism of General Khalifa Haftar who last week claimed he would be willing to stage military action in Western Libya if necessary as an alternative to the talks. Al-Gharyani's comments are in character for the controversial character who has been accused of supporting extremist militias in Libya, the militias that General Haftar wishes to rid the country of. The comments made on al-Gharyani's popular television show are unlikely to impact on public opinion, reflecting the more extreme schools of thought as opposed to the majority of Libyans. (5) The return of Saif al-Islam Ghaddafi to Libyan politics following the execution of his father and his captivity in Zintan following the revolution is likely to polarise the country in the wake of elections due to be held in 2018. Zaif's lawyers confirmed he remains in Libya at an undisclosed location. The International Criminal Court issued a call for his arrest to face charges in the Netherlands. (6) Egypt conducted airstrikes destroying the convoy, which it contends is a growing issue due to Libya's instability. While no specific militant groups were named, the area is strongly associated with ISIS activity since the fall of Sirte.

AF/PAK: WEEKLY SITREP 25 OCT 2017

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

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson made an unannounced visit to Kabul and Pakistan 23 Oct 17.

(2) GHOR

A suicide attack on a Shia Mosque killed 10 on 20 Oct 17.

(3) KABUL

A suicide bomber opened fire on a Shia Mosque before detonating killing 30 and wounding 45 20 Oct 17.



(4) ISIS/TALIBAN

Afghan National Police (ANP) report ISIS and the Taliban have clashed over territory in Jowzjan Province 21 Oct 17.

(5) KABUL

A suicide attack targeting a bus carrying trainees from a military facility has killed 15 on 21 Sep 17.

(6) EU FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The EU has increased the assistance package offered to Afghanistan as the security situation deteriorates 25 Oct 17.

COMMENT: (1) Secretary of State Rex Tillerson made an unexpected visit to Bagram Airbase which was announced after his departure for security reasons. The secrecy surrounding the visit of the US official highlights the deteriorating security situation in the country. The Taliban successfully targeting Kabul Airport on the same day US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis visited on 27 Sep 17. The Secretary of State then visited Pakistan where he reiterated Pakistan's role in combatting the Taliban in Afghanistan in line with President Trump's hard stance on the regional neighbour who he accuses of "harboring terrorism." (2)&(3) No one has claimed responsibility for the attacks against the Shia Mosques killing more than 40 people. It is likely ISIS conducted the attacks which strongly resembled the previous attacks on Shia Mosques primarily in Kabul. (4) ANP report up to 42 Taliban and 6 ISIS fighters have been killed during 3 days of fighting in Qosh Tapa. Of note, this Province represents a significant inroad into Northern Afghanistan for ISIS who have primarily been focused in the Eastern Provinces. ISIS continue to grow in Afghanistan, US estimates suggest there are currently 600 fighters. (5) A suicide bomber on foot has killed 15 men who were moving by bus from Marhsal Fahim Military Academy. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack via social media and email announcement. The Taliban is likely feeling emboldened by territorial gains in the last 12 months amounting to 41% control of the country. The Afghan National Security Forces have been unable to control the significant increase in attacks across the country, and in particular in the capital as both the Taliban and ISIS target military facilities and the Shi'ite minority. As Taliban territory expands, their freedom of movement increases allowing them to project attacks into Kabul. (6) As the number of Internally displaced people and IED casualties increases, the EU has pledged an additional 5 million Euros of urgently needed humanitarian assistance aimed to reach 750,000 people. The total EU assistance for 2017 has now reached 30.5 million Euros but comes at a time when international charities such as the Red Cross have reduced their presence due to continued attacks by the Taliban and ISIS. More than 1.7 million civilians have been internally displaced in Afghanistan as violence has worsened since the withdrawal of Coalition forces in 2014.