

SYRIA/IRAQ: WEEKLY SITREP 01 NOV 2017

(1) US/SYRIA

An Army Commander revealed US troop numbers in Syria have reached 4,000 on 31 Oct 17.

(2) IRAN/SYRIA

Russian President Putin is to visit Iran for talks on Syria 1 Nov 17.

(3) ASTANA TALKS

Key figures in the Syrian War met in Astana, Kazakhstan to implement ceasefire 30 Oct 17.

(4) DAMASCUS

Government shelling killed 4 school children in Eastern Ghouta 31 Oct 17.



(5) PRESIDENT BARZANI RESIGNS

The Kurdish President said he would not seek a new term 29 Oct 17.

(6) ERBIL POLITICAL PROTESTS

Protestors stormed the Erbil Assembly as President Barzani resigns 29 Oct 17.

(7) BAGHDAD

3 separate bomb blasts in Baghdad kill 1 and wound 9 on 29 Oct 17.

(8) BAGHDAD

A bomb wounds 5 in Shi'ite Hayy al-Shurta district 30 Oct 17.

ASSESSMENT: (1) Army Maj. Gen. James Jarrod stated during a satellite interview from Baghdad that the US has deployed more than 4,000 troops to Syria, a figure far exceeding the 503 troops claimed by the Trump Administration. It is likely the actual figure does exceed 503 given the strategic importance and imminent climax of the conflict which will require additional Special Operations troops and air support personnel for example, but it is likely 4,000 was simply a mistake. (2) The talks form part of a trilateral economic agreement between Russia, Iran and Azerbaijan to discuss the completion of a rail link between Iran, Azerbaijan, India and Russia. The spotlight is on the bilateral relationship between Russia and Iran who appear to be the dominant forces for economic and political restructuring in Syria post-ISIS. For Iran, securing a strategic ally with the global influence of Russia is invaluable. The partnership also ensures the forces can dominate the Astana talks to shape Syria. (3) The talks were brokered by Iran, Russia and Turkey and aimed to establish four de-escalation zones to include Idlib, Aleppo, Latakia, Homs, Deraa, East Ghouta and al-Quneitra. The UN and Jordan also attended the talks which have succeeded in reducing violence in the associated zones. It remains a concern that Iran, Russia and Turkey control both the talks and the de-escalation zones, ensuring the Rebels and in particular the Kurdish factions, have a limited presence at future negotiations. If Rebels become disillusioned, it is likely many will turn to more extreme groups such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham who clash directly with Turkish and Russian forces on the ground. (4) The shelling occurred during the second day of the Astana Talks, likely inflaming the concern that Assad's allies control the peace talks yet continue to shell Rebel held areas supposedly within the de-escalation zones. The 350,000 residents of Rebel held Eastern Ghouta have come under increasing shelling with limited aid as the UN reported on 30 Oct 17 it had reached residents for the first time in over 4 weeks. (5)&(6) The resignation comes 5 weeks after the ill-fated 25 Sep 17 Independence Referendum which failed to result in anything more than a reduction in Kurdish held territory. The resignation of Barzani of the KDP and the death of Jalal Talibani of the PUK end an era of Kurdish Politics driven by these charismatic characters, protests are likely to ensue as figures scabble to secure power and ultimately, independence. (7)&(8) Suicide bombs are almost a daily occurrence in Baghdad since 2016, Shi'ite areas particularly targeted during hours of prayer or during religious festivals.

SYRIA/IRAQ CONTROL MAP: 01 NOV 2017

ASTANA TALKS

The talks held on 30-31 Oct 17 mark the 7th round of the Astana Talks in Kazakhstan, aiming to achieve peace and secure four de-escalation zones. Secondly, the talks discuss humanitarian aid and the exchange of detainees. Representation included the guarantor states Iran, Russia, and Turkey as well as the Syrian Regime, Syrian Opposition, the United Nations, Jordan and the United States.

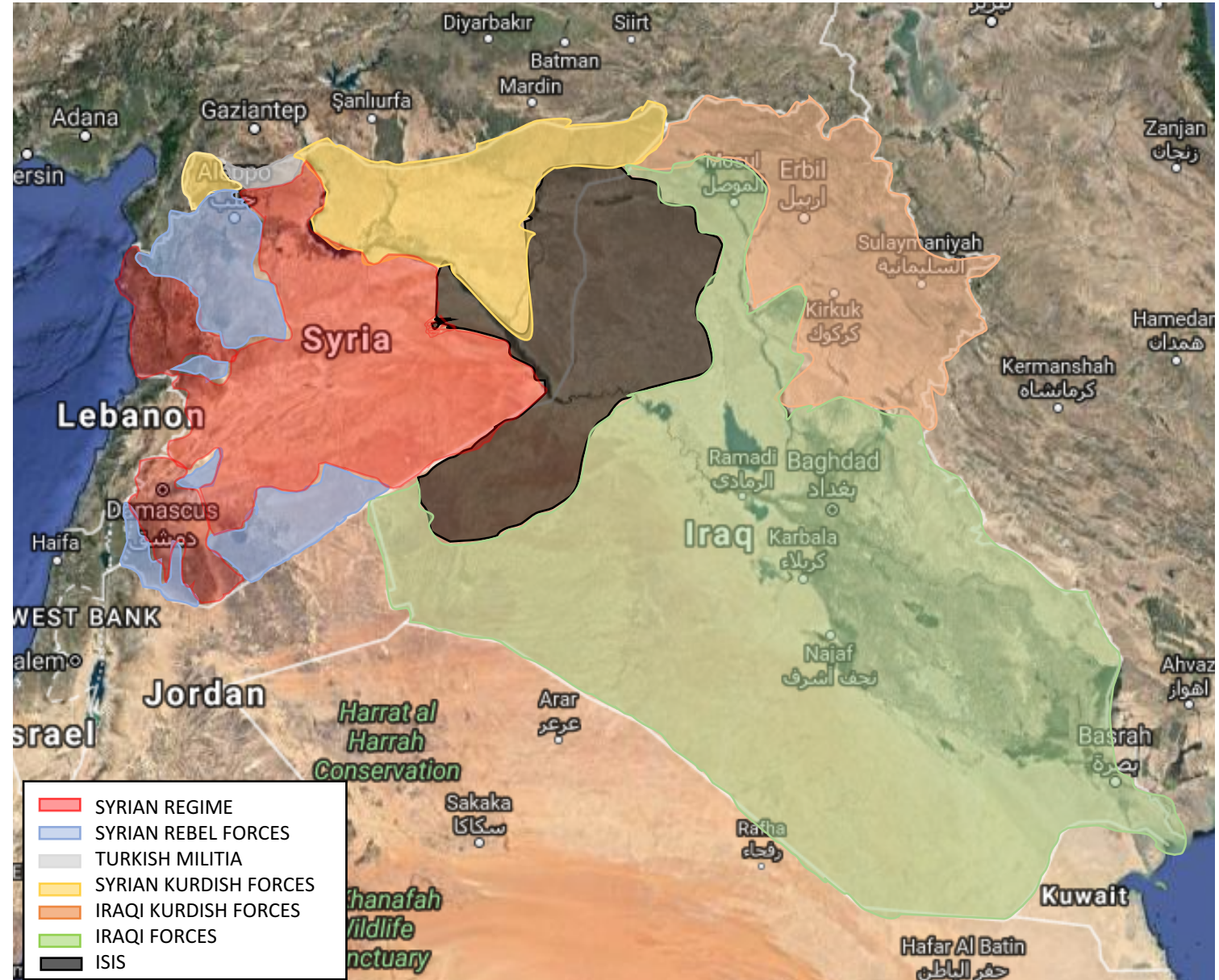
The meeting failed to achieve an agreement and will be reconvened in Dec 17. The talks are unlikely to provide hope for the US backed rebels who fought for regime change. Iran and Russia, dominant in the talks, will ensure their strategic ally Assad remains powerful.

RESIGNATION OF PRESIDENT BARZANI

Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) President Masood Barzani announced his “refusal” to continue as President, urging lawmakers not to extend his term beyond 1 Nov 17 in a letter read on 29 Oct 17. Barzani has been President since 2005 but increasingly the KRG has been torn by internal politics. The announcement was met with protests and violence as rivals clashed over who should now take the President’s powers.

The resignation comes 5 weeks after the controversial Independence Referendum which seems to have paved the way for the fall of Barzani from Champion of an Independent state to fallen statesman.

While Barzani will no longer be President, he will remain a powerful force within Kurdish politics as a prominent leader within the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP). The Barzani family will remain powerful with Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani a contender for the Presidential power.



NORTH AFRICA: WEEKLY SITREP 01 NOV 2017

- (1) US**
The US captured a suspect in the 11 Sep 12 Benghazi attack on a US compound 30 Oct 17.
- (2) TRIPOLI MIGRANTS**
300 migrants have been intercepted in the Mediterranean Sea East of Tripoli 30 Oct 17.
- (3) TRIPOLI WATER ISSUES**
Residents desperately drilled for water in pavements as living conditions continue to deteriorate in the capital 30 Oct 17.



- (4) DERN AIRSTRIKE**
An airstrike killed 17 civilians 30 Oct 17.
- (5) BENGHAZI**
The bodies of 36 suspected jihadists have been discovered outside Benghazi 30 Oct 17.
- (6) CORRUPTION**
UK media outlets report corruption among the Libyan National Coastguard taking bribes from migrants desperate to reach Europe 30 Oct 17.

ASSESSMENT: **(1)** US forces captured Mustafa al-Imam at an undisclosed location in Libya on 30 Oct 17 as part of the investigation into the 11 Sep 12 attack on a US compound in Benghazi that resulted in the death of US Ambassador Christopher Stephens and another, and two former US Navy Seals in associated attacks. Mr. Imam is in transit to the US to face charges of murder, providing materials to terrorists and discharging a firearm. **(2)** Reports suggest that the migrants were African, countering the misconception that Syria and Iraq drive the bulk of migrants. Issues such as conscription, environmental stress, violent conflict and poverty remain predominant drivers of migration. The UN reports that 149,00 migrants have entered Europe by sea in 2017, less than half the figure reported in 2016 demonstrating the effectiveness of the Italian method and the Libyan Coastguard. It is likely the figure will remain steady until spring 2018 when improving weather conditions encourage greater numbers. **(3)** Residents took desperate measures as taps ran dry in the capital. Neglect caused sections of the system to be shut off for maintenance work. The maintenance teams and exposed pipes were then targeted by militants causing the water to remain shut off. The water issues highlight the impact the lack of security has on civilians in what was once one of the wealthiest African nations. **(4)** The airstrike has not been attributed to a faction as yet but is more than likely to have been carried out by forces loyal to General Khalifa Haftar who have besieged the city since 2016. The Mujahedeen Shura Council has been in control of the city since seizing control from ISIS in 2015 and remains one of the few areas of the East not controlled by Haftar. The Internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) criticised the strike as a war crime and urged the UN to investigate. Incidents such as these widen the gulf between the rival administrations casting doubt over the potential success of the Tripoli peace talks as Haftar remains increasingly unpallatable to most. **(5)** The discovery of 36 bodies of jihadists, including 19 suspected foreign fighters, has induced fierce condemnation from the UN who “condemns in the strongest sense the heinous crime resulting in the death of 36 people.” The discovery is likely to raise questions of continued Libyan National Army and associated militia tactics of summarily executing detainees, as is the crux of the charges against LNA Officer Mahmoud Mustafa Busayf al-Werfalli. **(6)** The reports originate from a Human Rights Watch survey of migrants in which testimonies were taken reporting bribes in exchange for transit. It is likely instances of corruption take place but broadly speaking, the figures reflect that the Libyan Coastguard is effectively reducing the number of migrants leaving for the dangerous voyage to Europe.

AF/PAK: WEEKLY SITREP 01 NOV 2017

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

A US helicopter crashed in Logar Province killing 1 and injuring 6 on 27 Oct 17.

(2) US HOSTAGE SERIOUSLY ILL

US Hostage Kevin King is reportedly seriously ill according to Taliban captures 30 Oct 17.

(3) OPIUM PROCESSING TREND

US forces report increasing discoveries of opium processing facilities in worrying trend 30 Oct 17.



(4) BALKH

1 killed as suicide bomber targets the car of a district police commander 1 Nov 17.

(5) KABUL

A suicide bomber detonated killing 5 near the US Embassy 30 Oct 17.

(6) AFGHANISTAN/INDIA

Indian wheat consignment bypasses Pakistan prohibition of exports to Afghanistan via Pakistan by opening a trade route via Iran 30 Oct 17.

COMMENT: (1) The US Department of Defense has confirmed the incident and named the US fatality as Chief Warrant Officer of Jacob Sims (36) of 4th Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment. The crash was not the result of enemy action. **(2)** The Afghan Taliban released information that US Professor Kevin King, abducted from the American University of Kabul in August 2016, is seriously ill and in need of urgent medical treatment. The Taliban report they have made efforts to provide treatment for a undisclosed heart condition but have been unable to provide adequate medicine. King and colleague, Australian Tim Weeks, are suspected to be held captive by the Haqqani Network who are also responsible for the kidnapping of Caitlin Coleman and Joshua Boyle in 2012 and Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl. It is likely the insurgents released the information to encourage negotiations for his release should he die of his illness he is of limited value to them. The US is likely to again heavily criticize Pakistan for their limited action against the Haqqani Network who operate across the Pakistani border into Afghanistan making targeting for US forces particularly difficult. **(3)** Opium was traditionally smuggled out of the country in a thick syrup form, the worrying indication is that Taliban insurgents are processing the products for ease of transport and allowing them to fetch greater prices. The products represent 60% of Taliban income as they provide up to 85% of the world's heroin supply **(4)** District Police Commander Nabi Gechi and nine others were wounded during the attack. Gechi is a prominent anti-Taliban police commander, historically prominent in neighboring Kunduz. No-one claimed responsibility for the attack but the area and history of the target indicate the Taliban as the most likely perpetrators as the Afghan National Security Forces continue to be targeted in a bloody campaign. **(5)** ISIL claimed responsibility for the attack conducted on foot 500 meters from the US Embassy which killed 5 and wounded 20. No foreign nationals were involved. The attack demonstrates insurgents can penetrate what is one of the most secure areas of the country, seriously undermining the perception of security and posing a significant threat to foreign nationals. **(7)** India has opened a new trade route to Afghanistan via Iran, bypassing rival Pakistan in a move likely to irk Islamabad who prohibited the transit of Indian products to Afghanistan via Pakistan. The consignment of wheat travelled via the Iranian Port of Chabahar with future consignments planned. India has also opened an air freight connection with Afghanistan as the countries increase economic cooperation likely to provide income to tackle the insurgency and humanitarian crisis.