

SYRIA/IRAQ: WEEKLY SITREP 08 NOV 2017

(1) UK/SYRIA

Air Commodore Johnny Stringer assesses ISIS will be defeated as a proto-state within months 3 Nov 27.

(2) ABU BAKR AL-BAGHDADI

Reports claim the ISIS leader fled Iraq to Syria by vehicle 6 Nov 17.

(3) ASTANA TALKS

The Syrian Opposition refuse to attend the next round of talks while Turkey excludes Kurds 2 Nov 17.

(4) HOMS

Syrian State media reports Israeli air strikes targeted sites in the vicinity of Homs 2 Nov 17.



(5) ERBIL

KRG rejects the proposed Iraq budget 2018, reducing the Kurdish share of the budget from 17% to 12.6%. 5 Nov 17.

(6) QAIM

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) recapture the border town from ISIS 3 Nov 17.

(7) BAGHDAD

The Supreme Federal Court declares secession attempts unconstitutional 6 Nov 17.

(8) BAGHDAD

Failed suicide bombers attempted to target Shi'ite pilgrims 7 Nov 17

ASSESSMENT: (1) The claim is realistic but does not mean the end of ISIS in Iraq and Syria. ISIS will morph into an insurgency, eroding ISF and regime control of the provinces ensuring a lengthy counter-insurgency. The underlying discontent that led to the revolution in Syria and the dispute between Baghdad and Erbil may provide fuel for an insurgency. Secondly, if ISIS is defeated in Syria we face the prospect of 850 British nationals returning from Jihad to Britain with experience in terrorist tactics. (2) It is impossible to verify using Open Source, although it is highly unlikely Baghdadi would travel by day in a vehicle through desert given the familiarity with coalition aerial targeting constraints. It is likely Baghdadi is alive as the Pentagon has verified the authenticity of an audio recording released by Baghdadi a number of weeks ago. (3) In a bid to undermine the UN led talks in Geneva, Russia is to hold a Congress on Syrian National Dialogue just 10 days before. Russia and Iran, in concert with Turkey have sought to dominate the future of Syria ensuring the US and UK influence is kept to a minimum and excluding the Opposition and Kurds where possible. Such an approach will lead to popular discontent likely to fuel an enduring multi-faceted insurgency which the West will have limited visibility over. Secondly, Iran will secure an ally and land bridge spanning to the Mediterranean in a move likely to unsettle regional neighbours Saudi Arabia and Israel. (4) Israel has conducted more than 100 air strikes against Lebanese Hezbollah in Syria. The reports coincide with a statement from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that he will not allow Iran to gain an enduring strategic presence in Syria. (5) Kurdish ministers condemned the decision made by Baghdad to reduce the KRG's share of the Federal Budget to 12.6% from 2018. Baghdad continues to impose financial sanctions on the KRG directly and indirectly in response to the independence vote. The measures will stoke tensions between ethnic Arabs and Kurds which may result in protests and localised clashes. (6) The loss of al-Qaim denies ISIS a key logistics node for weapons and fighters. The town also represented one of the last bastions of ISIS within their shrinking territory in Iraq and Syria. The operation to retake al-Qaim began last week and was concluded in "record time" according to Iraq Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi highlighting a significantly weakened ISIS. (7) The ruling is a political move designed to force the KRG into committing to remaining within the borders of Iraq. (8) ISIS continues to target Shi'ite communities during religious festivals stoking sectarian tensions in Baghdad.

SYRIA/IRAQ CONTROL MAP: 08 NOV 2017

LEBANESE CRISIS

Saudi Arabia (KSA) has declared that the actions of Hezbollah in Lebanon amount to a declaration of war. The declaration on 6 Nov 17 followed the resignation of Saudi-backed Lebanese Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri.

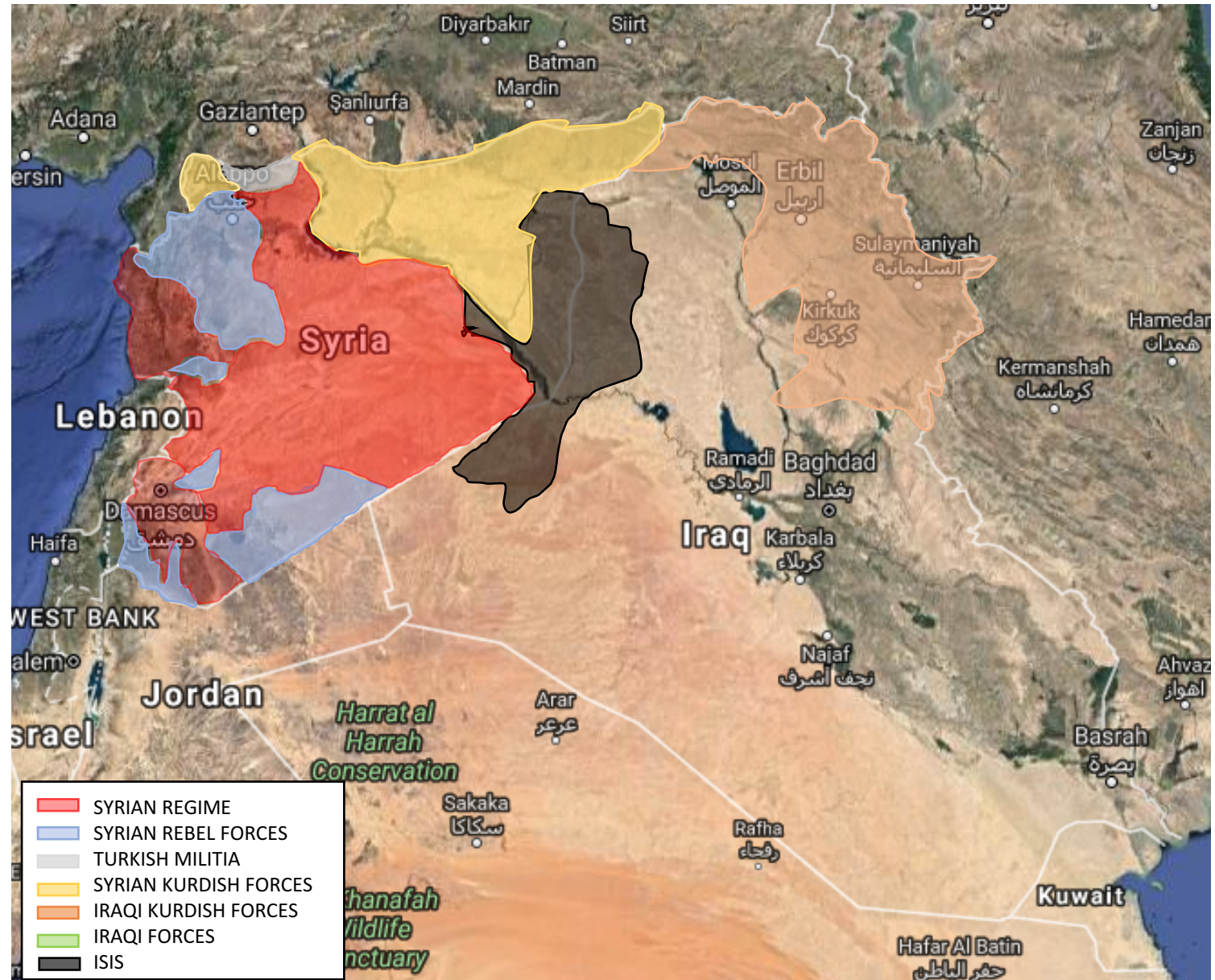
KSA criticized the inability of the Hariri led administration to tackle the growing influence of the Iranian backed Hezbollah, who are widely regarded as stronger than the official Lebanese Army.

KSA did not specify what action it would take against Lebanese Hezbollah, who are unlikely to change their strategy in Syria despite the unspecified threat.

The effect of the announcement is likely to be economic for the struggling state as investors react to the political and regional instability.

KSA may take a harder stance against Hezbollah by ensuring a Saudi-allied political figure takes the reigns. Iran's influence in neighbouring Syria may encourage greater Saudi participation in the country. Elsewhere, it seems Israel has already begun to increase pressure on Hezbollah in Syria as it becomes clear Iran is closer than ever to securing a land bridge to the Mediterranean and its proxy, Hezbollah.

Lebanon has found itself caught between the regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran which has escalated markedly since the beginning of the conflict in Syria and Iraq. Lebanon remains a weak administration, recovering from the civil war of the 1975 - 1990 and the effects of the Syria war. One in four people in Lebanon are Syrian refugees.



NORTH AFRICA: WEEKLY SITREP 08 NOV 2017

(1) TRIPOLI
A delegation from the European Union will resume working on Libya from Tripoli 2 Nov 17.

(3) UBARI
3 Turkish workers and 1 German working for a Turkish company have been kidnapped 3 Nov 17.

(2) SHARARA OILFIELD
A security breach at the oil facility caused temporary disruption to output 5 Nov 17.



(4) TURKISH CONSULATE
Four Turkish workers were kidnapped .

(5) SARA OILFIELD
Protests against a German Oil Company, Wintershall, stalled production at Sara Oilfield 3 Nov 17.

(6) MIGRANT DEATHS
Libyan Coastguard accused of causing 5 migrant deaths 6 Nov 17.

(7) MIGRANT NUMBERS
Migrant numbers have increased since Oct 17 according to latest figures.

ASSESSMENT: (1) A number of Embassies in recent weeks have announced their intention to reopen offices in Tripoli demonstrating the international perception of improving security in the capital in light of political progress and a wider recovery of Libya. The Delegation of the European Union will likely bring investment opportunities which may improve conditions in Tripoli further. (2) Unknown militants attacked the site, stealing cars and phones from employees. The site has been the subject of numerous attacks by Brigade 30 that have caused significant disruption including a two day closure in October. The incidents demonstrate the instability in the South of the country as tribal clashes and militias target oil facilities and employees. Despite the attack the oilfield has stabilized output at 300,000BPD. (3) The four workers were kidnapped while working on a gas pipeline in the remote town of Ubari. It is not known who is responsible for the kidnap or why the men were targeted. The incident demonstrates that while security improves in the urban centres, tribal clashes and militias still pose a significant threat in the rest of the country. (4) Turkey is to open a consulate in Benghazi, despite the kidnapping of 3 of its citizens on Friday. The consulate is in addition to the Turkish Embassy in Tripoli and indicates Turkey's growing presence in Libya, likely to bring investment. As Libya edges closer to recovery, it is likely international competition will mount to secure investment in the oil rich nation which could translate to rivalries between various supported administrations and militias. (5) The protests were staged against German firm Wintershall, responsible for operating the site, following a contractual dispute between the NOC and Wintershall regarding reduced production. Production at the site has been reduced by 50,000BPD while talks continue. (6) The German NGO, Sea Watch, blamed the 5 deaths which included a young child, on the heavy handed and reckless tactics used by the Libyan Coastguard. Reports suggest the organisation used violence against the migrants on a sinking vessel, before attempting to move while migrants were attempting to board the patrol vessel. An Italian Navy helicopter intervened to diffuse the situation. The incident shows the tension mounting between NGO vessels and Libyan patrol vessels, the latter often accuses the NGO ships of causing confusion as migrants view them as more likely to take them to Europe and resist rescue by Libyans. The Libyan Coastguard, which receives European backing, continues to face fierce criticism for the harsh tactics used against migrants attempting the dangerous sea journey to Europe. The strategy adopted by the Libyan authorities has been credited with dramatically reducing the number of migrants reaching Europe; it is likely Europe will be forced to curtail the heavy handed tactics used by the Libyan Coastguard which would have little effect on migrant numbers.

AF/PAK: WEEKLY SITREP 08 NOV 2017

(1) Op FREEDOM'S SENTINEL & RESOLUTE SUPPORT MISSION
NATO has pledged a further 3,000 troops to Afghanistan 7 Nov 17 boosting the overall total to 16,000.

(2) HUMANITARIAN UPDATE
318,295 people have been internally displaced as of 5 Nov 17, an increase of 22,000 since last week.

(3) INCREASE IN RELIGIOUS ATTACKS
850 casualties and 273 fatalities in 2 years have resulted from 50 attacks against religious sites 8 Nov 17.



(4) NANGARHAR
A Pakistani staff member of the Pakistani Consulate in Jalalabad has been killed 6 Nov 17.

(5) KABUL
Two killed and 20 wounded during ISIS attack on Shamshad TV station on 7 Oct 17.

(6) SYRIA/IRAQ
Aerial strikes in Syria and Iraq have reduced by 60% as ISIS continue to lose territory 8 Nov 17.

COMMENT: (1) NATO confirmed the troops will be non-combat troops engaged in training Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). The troops are expected to be deployed in early 2018. The troop surge compliments President Trump's foreign policy strategy in Afghanistan, to bolster national security forces and encourage regional partnerships to tackle the Afghan conflict. It is expected troop numbers could swell to 20,000 by 2018 as the US pledges a further 3,000 troops. Ultimately, a troop surge is the result of the Taliban effectively taking control of almost half of the country and ISIS' growth in Northern Afghanistan is causing concern amongst NATO allies. Trade deals with India are promising but have little impact on the insurgency while Pakistan continues to face accusations of harboring the Taliban. (2) Relief Web reports the increase in Internally Displaced People (IDPs) is the result of violent clashes particularly effecting the regions of Nangarhar, Kunduz, Baghdis and Baghlan. Increasing numbers of IDPs presents a particular challenge during the winter months as NGOs begin their winter campaigns in difficult weather and security conditions. The increase in attacks against NGO workers has caused some groups such as the Red Cross to dramatically reduce operations, exasperating the deteriorating situation. (3) Violence between Sunni and Shi'ite communities in Afghanistan was relatively rare until the emergence of ISIS in 2015. It is likely ISIS contribute significantly to the number of attacks, particular those in Kabul and Northern Afghanistan which represent the majority of the incidents recorded. The trend means foreign workers should be particularly cautious during Shi'ite religious festivals or more generally their proximity to Shi'ite religious sites during hours of prayer when operating in these areas. (4) The staff member was killed whilst shopping without a security detail on 6 Nov 17. The Pakistani government has condemned the attack and demanded action is taken against the assailants. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack. The Khyber Pass border crossing point was closed on 8 Nov 17 to facilitate the movement of the Pakistani citizen's body. (5) The attack was conducted by two militants wearing Afghan police uniforms who stormed the building following the detonation of explosives to breach a perimeter fence. Journalists in Afghanistan are frequently targeted by the Taliban and increasingly, ISIS. 16 journalists were killed in 2016, more recently 6 were killed during a similar attack in Jalalabad in May 2017. ISIS demonstrates it can project attacks outside its relatively small territory in Northern Afghanistan, undermining security in the capita. (6) It is likely the reduction in aerial strikes in Syria and Iraq will result in increased aerial support in Afghanistan as troop numbers swell and the ANSF continue to cede ground.