

SYRIA/IRAQ: WEEKLY SITREP 15 NOV 2017

(1) AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty has accused the Syrian Regime, and to a lesser extent the opposition, of crimes against humanity 13 Nov 17.

(2) ALEPPO

53 killed during three airstrikes on Atareb Market 13 Nov 17 despite de-escalation zone.

(3) IRAN/SYRIA

Satellite imagery shows Iran building a permanent base in Syria 13 Nov 17.



(4) SYRIA/US

Regime officials react to US statements declaring intent to stay in-country post-ISIS. 13 Nov 17.

(5) IRAN/IRAQ

An earthquake on the Iran/Iraq border has caused more than 500 deaths 12 Nov 17.

(6) BAGHDAD/ERBIL

The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) asks for acceptance of court ruling, meanwhile Baghdad warns military action 14 Nov 17.

ASSESSMENT: (1) Investigations conducted in Ghouta revealed the Regime policy of “starve or surrender.” Up to 500,000 people remain under siege in Syria, often under aerial bombardment while the regime blocks aid and medical supplies. It is assessed the regime will continue these tactics post-ISIS to weaken and isolate opposition forces, in concert with the West’s reducing influence and a likely reduction in visibility. This creates a grave situation for opposition forces and activists. (2) The strikes were reportedly conducted by the Regime or Russian allies. The market was home to many internally displaced civilians and remained outside Regime control. The brutality of the Regime and our inability to secure the safety of the opposition and IDPs is illuminated by such incidents and serves as a stark warning of the future. (3) The base is 8km south of Damascus at El-Kiswah. Satellite imagery shows construction between Jan – Oct at the base, likely to irk regional rivals Israel and Saudi Arabia who strongly oppose growing Iranian influence in Syria. Israel will consider this base a significant threat given its proximity to the Golan Heights, likely to result in aerial strikes in the short term. (4) US Defense Secretary James Mattis claimed the US would not leave once ISIS had been defeated militarily. Regime sources declared this would be taken as an act of aggression against the sovereignty of Syria. The Regime aims to isolate the West from the restructuring of the country in favour of Iran and Russia. The implications for the opposition and Kurds are grave. The influence of Russia and Iran is likely to result in media interference, reduced visibility and regulation of Syrian actions. (5) The 7.3 magnitude earthquake struck the region killing 530 and injuring more than 7,160 people. International aid has poured into the region, including from Turkey who aims to feed more than 5,000 a day in Northern Iraq. While unclear if the aid has been diverted from elsewhere, it is likely to put strain on humanitarian efforts stemming from the Syria and Iraq conflicts. (6) Following the Supreme Federal Court’s ruling that succession was illegal, the KRG has urged acceptance of the decision in a move likely to be an effort to revive dialogue with Baghdad. Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi increased pressure on the KRG, warning military action will be taken if the border areas are not handed over to Iraqi Security. It is unlikely conflict will arise, the KRG will continue passive adherence in its pursuit of dialogue while Abadi seeks to appear strong prior to elections in 2018 capitalising on the unlikely event that Peshmerga would resist Iraqi Security Forces advances. Oil prices will continue to be the victim of instability, both Iraq and the KRG rely heavily on oil revenue and cannot restructure based on current figures. Dialogue is essential to stability and restructuring.

SYRIA/IRAQ CONTROL MAP: 15 NOV 2017

THE KURDISH REGIONAL GOVERNMENT AND IRAQ

Four weeks on from the almost unanimous Kurdish Independence Referendum, Iraq has applied mounting economic, political and military pressure on the KRG to abandon hopes of independence.

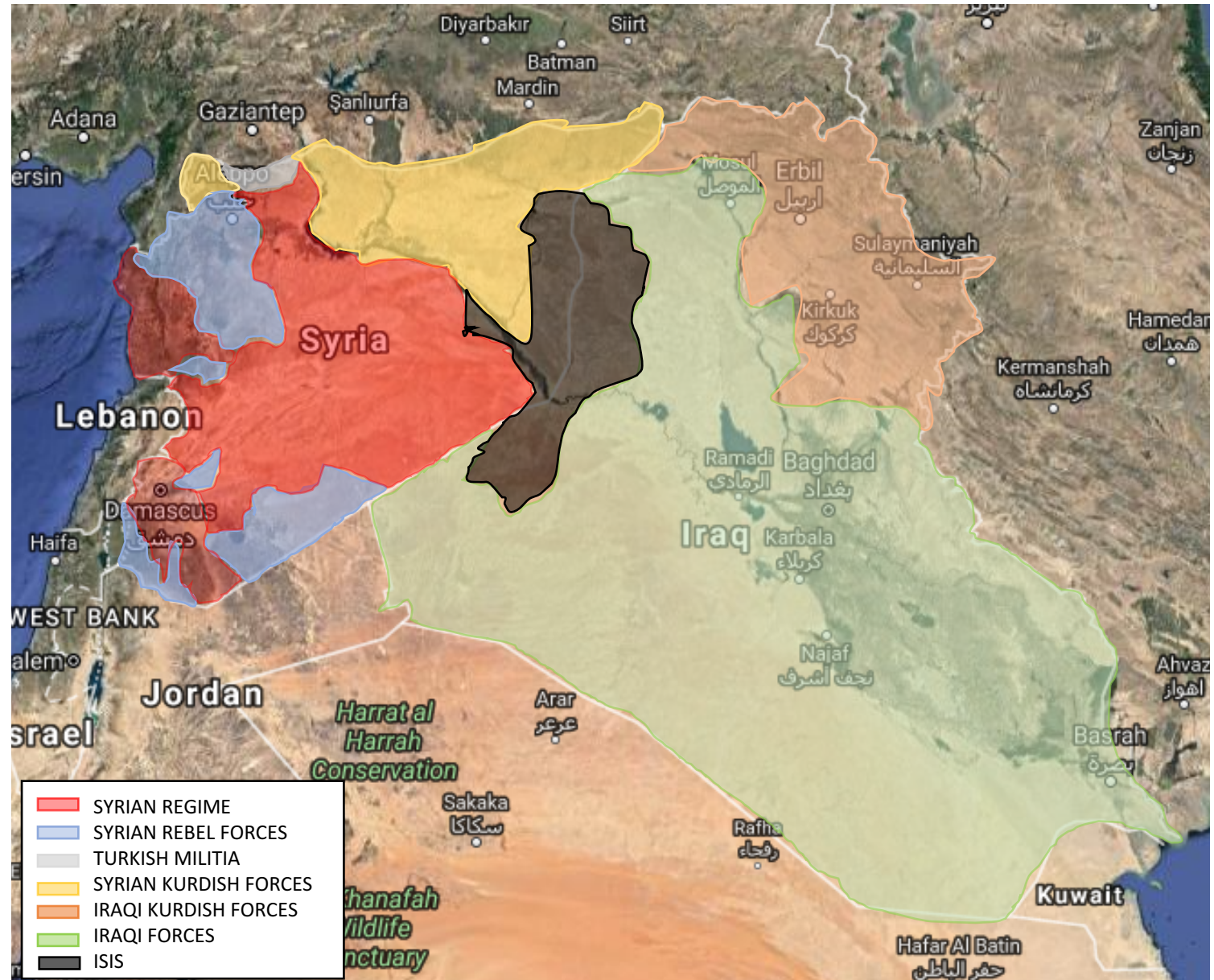
Baghdad closed the airspace to Erbil, squeezing the ailing economy and reversed the territorial gains made by the Peshmerga throughout the war with ISIS.

Kurdish politics also underwent critical shifts following the death of Jalal Talabani, leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the dramatic resignation of Masoud Barzani, President of the KRG and leader of the powerful Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP).

Despite the aggression from Baghdad, the KRG continues to urge acceptance in a bid to revive national dialogue. The reason may have been revealed by KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, who announced that oil revenue had reduced by 50% since 16 Oct 17. The KRG is heavily reliant on both international aid and oil revenues, making its bargaining position precarious at best without US support.

The KRG has declared it will hand over border posts, infrastructure and oil facilities to Baghdad, on the premise that it will be given a fair proportion of the national budget. It is likely Iraq, once in control of the promised territory will marginally increase the budget.

Worryingly, Iran has capitalized on the instability by securing oil deals with Baghdad regarding Kurdish oil in a move increasing Iran's growing influence in the region replacing Turkey and mounting pressure on Saudi Arabia and Israel to react.



NORTH AFRICA: WEEKLY SITREP 15 NOV 2017

(1) UN
The UN has declared the European Union's strategy for addressing migrants from Libya as "inhumane" 14 Nov 17.

(2) UN
The UN facilitated the return of vulnerable refugees to Niger 12 Nov 17 in its first operation of its kind in Libya.

(3) ICC/KHALIFA HAFTAR
Lawyers and humanitarian groups filed a suit against General Khalifa Haftar 14 Nov 17.



(4) LIBYAN OIL
Head of Libya's National Oil Corporation has been praised for dramatic oil recovery 14 Nov 17.

(5) BENGHAZI
1 killed during an armed attack against the convoy of the Deputy Interior Minister 11 Nov 17.

(6) BENGHAZI
3 killed during a rocket propelled grenade attack targeted the office of the Deputy Interior Minister 12 Nov 17.

ASSESSMENT: (1) The EU supports Libyan authorities in rescuing migrants and returning them to Libya to be held in detention facilities. The UN reports an increase from 7,000 to 20,000 detainees in 3 months, in filthy and inhumane conditions while reports of violence and bribery follow the Libyan Coastguard. The strategy also includes payments to tribes and militias to stem the flow of migrants travelling overland to the ports, reportedly causing clashes as groups seek to monopolize the payments. **(2)** The refugees were flown from Tripoli to Niger, who agreed to host them whilst their claims to be relocated could be processed. The move is an interim solution to the refugee crisis which has been exasperated by the lack of functioning embassies in Libya. The International Organization for Migration continues to conduct the vast majority of repatriation work within Libya but some 43,000 registered refugees remain in Libya with many more unregistered. Sexual violence, malnutrition and exploitation are widely reported problems faced by vulnerable migrants in war-torn Libya. The EU is unlikely to change strategy given the success to date, but has increased funding to address migrant conditions in country. **(3)** Haftar is reportedly responsible for summary executions during his campaign to rid Libya of extremists. Officials from within his Libyan National Army have outstanding ICC arrest warrants. An international arrest warrant against Haftar is likely to deeply divide the tentative Tripoli peace talks. Although Haftar is a divisive character in Libyan politics, the power he wields in Eastern Libya cannot be underestimated and his removal would create a power vacuum likely to be exploited by ISIS and Islamic extremists. **(4)** Mustafa Sanalla was praised by the world's biggest oil producers prior to a meeting in Vienna scheduled later this month. Libya's oil production reached over 1mn BPD for the first time since 2013. Despite the ongoing instability and violence, Sanalla is credited with turning the oil industry around producing a fourfold increase in output. The figures make Libya an attractive investment opportunity for the future as Libya remains exempt from oil caps to facilitate recovery post-Gaddafi. Crucially, Sanalla urged criminal action to be taken against the militias who continue to plague the oil infrastructure with attacks and kidnappings. **(5)&(6)** Outspoken Eg'em demanded that General Khalifa Haftar step down as commander of the Libyan National Army. The attacks, reportedly conducted by men loyal to Haftar, was a characteristically aggressive reaction to the statement made on local TV stations. The Government of National Accord condemned the attack that has fuelled escalating tensions in the city, but the institution remains relatively toothless in the East of the country where Haftar exerts significant control. The UN has been significantly undermined by the incident in a country where personalities play a dominant role in politics.

AF/PAK: WEEKLY SITREP 15 NOV 2017

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

Confirmation from NATO that troop numbers will rise from 13,000 to 16,000.

(2) WAVE OF TALIBAN ATTACKS

The Taliban conducted a wave of attacks against Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) 12 Nov 17.

(3) OPIUM PRODUCTION

Opium production has reportedly doubled compared to 2016. 14 Nov 17.



(4) FARAH

The Taliban staged several attacks against police checkpoints in Farah province killing 5. 12 Nov 17.

(5) KANDAHAR

22 police officers killed during Taliban attacks on 15 police security posts in 3 separate areas in the vicinity of Kandahar 12 Nov 17.

(6) KABUL/INDIA

Kabul announced it no longer relied on Pakistan for trade since the opening of Chabahar. 15 Nov 17..

COMMENT: (1) NATO also confirmed it will continue to provide funding to train and equip ANSF until 2020. (2) The attacks revealed increasing efficiency in night time raids. The attackers used night vision goggles and weapons with laser pointers improving targeting. ANSF are notoriously poorly equipped in rural areas and fear the Taliban have better equipment further reducing their chance of holding ground against the rapidly expanding insurgent group. (3) The increase in production has been attributed to an increase in ground used for cultivation, particularly in Southern Afghanistan. It is likely the growth is in correlation with the increase in areas controlled by the Taliban, who are heavily involved in the opium trade. It was reported earlier this month that refinement methods have improved allowing the drug traffickers to smuggle opium in powder form rather than traditional paste, allowing greater volumes to be moved more readily. It is likely the increase in production has facilitated the improvement in Taliban equipment. (4)&(5) The poorly equipped police continue to face sustained Taliban attacks and heavy casualties. The police are vulnerable to night time raids conducted by the Taliban that ensure police are fixed to checkpoints and cede rural territory. The Taliban is likely capitalizing on the reduction in security presence in rural areas by increasing poppy cultivation activity facilitating a greater number of attacks against ANSF in a vicious cycle unlikely to be overcome by US training in the short to medium term. (6) Afghan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah remarked that his country would no longer rely on one transit route through Karachi to support its international trade since the economic deal with India opened the Chabahar route bypassing Pakistan. The new route will facilitate a sharp rise in trade between India, Iran and Afghanistan that will provide an economic injection into the war-torn country likely to filter towards the counter-insurgency waged against the Taliban. The economic boost is unlikely to reverse the territorial losses suffered by ANSF in rural Afghanistan or the worrying growth of ISIS in the North of the country. The vulnerabilities of the ANSF, training, equipment and medical supplies require long term strategy that requires time and freedom of resource that Afghanistan does not have the luxury of. The Afghan administration counts the fact that no provincial capitals have fallen to Taliban control as a measure of success and a recent survey which concluded that 56% of the population believed the Government was doing a good job. It is difficult to perceive how optimistic Kabul can be about these questionable "successes" given the rapid expansion both in terms of territory and economy enjoyed by the Taliban resulting in almost half of the country under the control of insurgents.