

# SYRIA/IRAQ: WEEKLY SITREP 22 NOV 2017

## (1) Syrian Opposition

Leader of the Syrian Opposition  
Riyad Hijab resigned 20 Oct 17.

## (2) SYRIA/RUSSIA

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad  
met with Russian President Vladimir  
Putin 21 Nov 17.

## (3) IRAN/IRAQ

Both nations declared that ISIS has  
been defeated militarily in Iraq and  
Syria 21 Nov 17.



## (4) IRANIAN PROXIES ISSUE THREAT TO WEST

Hashd al-Shaabi announced they  
would target US forces in Iraq if they  
did not leave the country 21 Nov 17.

## (5) TUZ KHURMATU

The town was targeting with a  
suicide bomb killing 20 on 21 Nov  
17.

## (6) BASRA/OIL

Oil exports from Southern Iraq rose  
by more than 150,000bpd to record  
highs 20 Nov 17.

**ASSESSMENT:** (1) The leader of the General Coordinator of the High Negotiations Committee resigned along with other 8 members, citing the unpalatable compromises expected with regards to President Assad remaining in power. It is increasingly unlikely there will significant regime change given the strong position of the Assad administration relative to the fractured, weak position of the opposition. (2) Assad met with Putin in Sochi to discuss the current situation in Syria where it has been announced that ISIS has been defeated. Russia and Iran view Assad as a long term ally, casting doubt on their willingness to insist on reform such as a power-sharing government or political restructure. The fractured opposition, lack of influence of the US and UK and the Russian and Iranian unwillingness to weaken a strategic ally makes it apparent that there will be no regime change in Syria raising significant concern for opposition forces and the vast numbers of displaced persons in country and elsewhere who may now not return. Assad has been accused of war crimes including the deaths of 26,000 children, Russia protects him from further accusations by vetoing UN Security Council investigation into chemical weapons stoking tension with the opposition. (3) The declarations are premature, while ISIS has lost much of its territory in both Iraq and Syria, it is not completely defeated. It is questionable whether ISIS could be defeated militarily or merely forced to morph into an insurgency posing a greater asymmetric threat to regional capitals, minority populations and the West. The declaration by Iran is significant in that it may be a signal to the West to leave Syria and Iraq. It is likely President Assad will reiterate his warning that US forces should leave Syria post-ISIS. (4) The Shia militia is an Iranian proxy likely to have reacted to the Iranian announcement that ISIS had been defeated in Iraq and Syria and the recent US categorisation of some Shia militias as terrorist groups. Foreign nationals operating in Iraq should be vigilant to yellow and green flashes, flags and emblems synonymous with Shia militias. (5) The area is home to a mixed Arab and Kurdish population. It is likely the attack was conducted by ISIS who may have exploited security weaknesses in an area contested between Iraqi and Kurdish security forces. ISIS has been expelled from much of its territory, yet may be hiding in pockets taking advantage of political instability in the early phases of the transition to insurgency. (6) Oil exports from the South reached over 3.5million bpd as Baghdad seeks to compensate for the short fall in production from Northern Iraq following the disruption caused in Oct 17 following the Kurdish Independence Referendum.



# SYRIA/IRAQ CONTROL MAP: 22 NOV 2017

## SHIA MILITIAS

Iran's announcement that ISIS has been defeated in Iraq and Syria is significant because it signals to Shia militias in both countries that the US role should now end.

Lebanese Hezbollah, Iran's powerful regional proxy, has issued numerous warnings to US forces in Iraq and Syria that once ISIS was defeated they must leave or risk being targeted by the organization that is "hungry for American blood." Most recently, Jaafar Hussein commander of Lebanese Hezbollah in Iraq claimed the US must now prepare to leave or be targeted.

Similarly, the US Congress declared a number of Shia militias in the region terrorist groups inciting aggressive responses from groups such as Saraya al-Shura in Iraq who have declared US troops targets.

In late October, Sheikh Qais al-Khazali the commander of the Popular Mobilization Forces warned the US that once ISIS was expelled, US forces must leave Iraq.

While Shia militias have long harbored hostility towards US forces, ISIS presented a more immediate enemy that diverted aggression, the Iranian declaration of ISIS defeat redirects hostility towards US presence in the region.

Foreign nationals should be vigilant to yellow and green flashes worn on militia uniforms, flags and emblems such as those shown below.



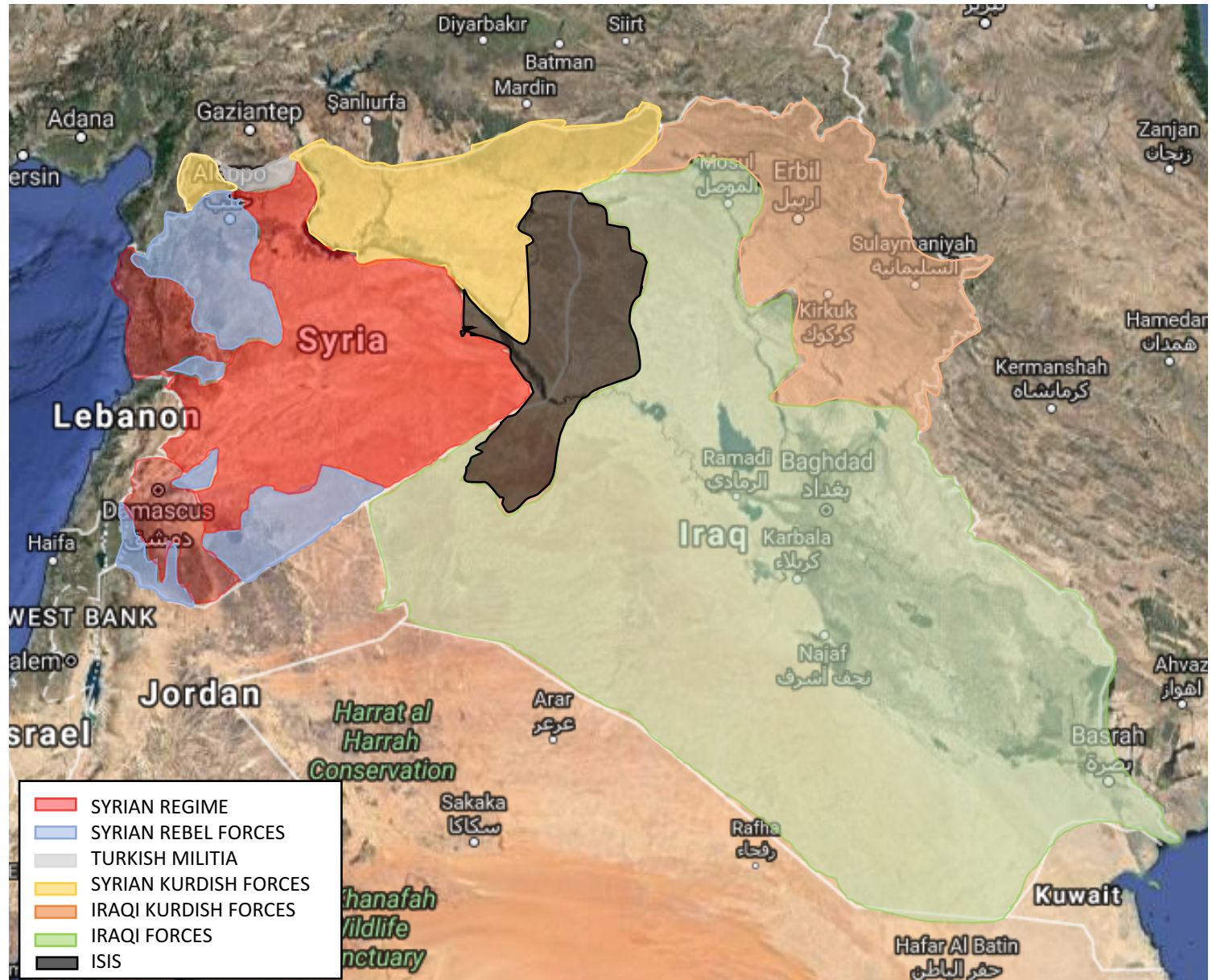
Hezbollah



Saraya Ashura



Hezbollah al Iraq





# NORTH AFRICA: WEEKLY SITREP 22 NOV 2017

## (1) US AIR STRIKES

The US conducted two airstrikes targeting ISIS in Fuqaha South of Sirte 21 Nov 17.

## (2) UN/LIBYA

The UN accused Libya of auctioning migrants as slaves drawing international condemnation 21 Nov 17.

## (3) LIBYA ROAD MAP

Libya's Parliament voted in favour of the new UN Road Map 21 Nov 17.

## (4) LIBYAN ECONOMY

Inflation rose to 33% 20 Nov 17.



## (5) NEW BENGHAZI SECURITY DIRECTORATE

Colonel Rafea Bsaikri was appointed as the 8<sup>th</sup> Security Director in 2 years 18 Nov 17.

## (6) TRIOPILI/TOBRUK

Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thinni ordered a halt to all flights between Tripoli and Tobruk 20 Nov 17.

## (7) SIRTE

Another mass grave discovered near a school by the Libyan Red Crescent in Sirte 21 Nov 17.

**ASSESSMENT:** (1) US Africa Command confirmed it had conducted two strikes, on 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Nov in Fuqaha targeting ISIS militants. As the number of air strikes reduces in Syria and Iraq, the US will increase strikes in Libya and Afghanistan where ISIS continue to capitalize on instability. The US claims the strikes were coordinated with consent from the Government of National Accord (GNA). (2) The UN received video evidence of slave auctions, primarily trading African migrants. The UN called upon the international community to address the migrant crisis in Libya where more than 700,000 migrants remain at risk. The report spurred protests outside the Libyan Embassy in Paris and outrage from other African nations, including Niger who have summoned the Libyan Ambassador in Niamey to discuss the matter. Libyan authorities have announced an investigation but without effective security presence or intelligence coverage in the desert regions of Southern and Central Libya it is difficult to see how the GNA will address the issue. (3) The Road Map, proposed by UN Envoy to Libya, Ghassan Salame, aims to pave the way for elections and a new constitution for Libya. Article 8 regarding the Presidential Council retaining control of the army remains divisive. (4) Inflation rose to 33% due to instability likely to further reduce living conditions. Poor quality of life has led to a number of protests throughout Libya which will increase if the Dinar continues to weaken. Oil generates up to 98% of Libya's GDP but the sector urgently needs investment and improved security conditions. Libya's financial crisis is becoming increasingly acute. (5) The number of Directors to hold this post in the last two years evidences the lack of effectiveness of those who have taken the post. Instilling security in the city which has been plagued by violence and corruption since the fall of Gaddafi is an impossible task. (6) Prime Minister al-Thinni ordered a stop to all flights between Tripoli and Tobruk following Tobruk Airports refusal to allow a UN aircraft carrying 29 House of Representatives to land for unknown security reasons. The House of Representatives members were due to vote on decisions taken at the Tunisia-based talks. Tobruk is becoming increasingly isolated, last month General Khalifa Haftar ordered the closure of Tobruk Port to all but local trade. Both air and sea traffic has been directed to Benghazi. (7) The Libyan Red Crescent announced the discovery of a further mass burial site. The number of bodies has yet to be released but initial reports suggest the grave is a remnant of the time the city was ISIS stronghold in Libya.

# AF/PAK: WEEKLY SITREP 22 NOV 2017

**(1) Op FREEDOM'S SENTINEL & RESOLUTE SUPPORT MISSION**  
US strikes target heroin production sites killing 44. 20 Nov 17.

**(2) ICC REQUESTS INQUIRY**  
ICC Prosecutor requests inquiry to be opened into Afghanistan 20 Nov 17.

**(3) NOWZAD**  
ANSF liberate Taliban Prison in Nowzad 19 Nov 17.

**(4) FARAH**  
Taliban attacks against Police checkpoints kill 6 officers 20 Nov 17.



**(5) POVERTY**  
Poor rainfall has led to a 14% reduction in wheat production likely to exacerbate hunger 21 Nov 17.

**(6) PAKISTAN/TERRORISM**  
Lashkar-e Tayyaba leader, Hafiz Muhammad Saeed has been freed by Pakistani authorities 21 Nov 17.

**(7) PAKISTAN/US**  
Pakistan has welcomed an offer from the US to stop militant movement and attacks across the border from Afghanistan 21 Nov 17.

**COMMENT:** (1) The strikes targeted 7 drug labs (of the Taliban's estimated 400-500 labs) and one command node. OP RESOLUTE SUPPORT announced a renewed campaign to target the sources of Taliban funding while the UN reported that Afghanistan produced over 900,000 tons of opium in 2017 so far. The Taliban use opium to fund the insurgency and have in recent months improved the way in which it is refined to allow greater volumes to be smuggled, directly resulting in improved equipment reported by Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). Increased targeting of narcotics sites will harm the Taliban's revenue streams but increases the likelihood of civilian casualties. The US has dropped more than 3,554 bombs in 2017 alone. (2) A 3 member panel of judges will now decide if the Court can step in to address some of the reports of the most serious abuses committed. Importantly, the investigation is not limited to abuses conducted by the Taliban but stretches to accusations of abuse against the US and the Afghan National Security Forces. (3) The raid conducted by ANSF rescued 30 locals, the arrest of Taliban fighters and the denial of IED making equipment. Crucially, the operation was heavily supported by US forces suggesting while this raid was a success, it would not be possible without US support. (4) The Taliban continue to harass the ANSF in rural areas with night raids in an ongoing battle of attrition for control. The increase in opium production has ensured the Taliban outgun the ANSF and the introduction of NVGs demonstrates a tactical advantage gained through increased funds. (5) Relief Web reports the poor rainfall coupled with the ongoing conflict will increase the need for international assistance throughout the country. The most acutely effected areas are in the North, where ISIS kidnappings have halted international assistance programs. The shortage of food will further increase the number of farmers forced to grow poppies, supplying funding to the Taliban and reducing government control. Since 2016, more than 950,000 people have been internally displaced and will be the most severely effected by the food crisis. (6) Lashkar-e Tayyaba (LeT) was responsible for the 2011 Mumbai attack killing 160. Its founder, Saeed, is due to be released from house arrest 23 Nov 17 following the release of 4 of his comrades last month in a move likely to irk regional rival India. Pakistan continues to allow a suspected LeT front run by Saeed to operate in country. The US has placed a \$10million bounty for his arrest. (7) The offer is as an effort to reduce the indiscriminate firing from Pakistan into Afghanistan that results in civilian deaths, as seen last week in Kunar Province. The welcome coordination may improve border security and ease tensions between the US and its controversial regional partner, Pakistan.