

SYRIA/IRAQ: WEEKLY SITREP 13 DEC 2017

(1) RUSSIA DECLARES MISSION COMPLETE

Russia announced majority of troops in Syria can return home. 11 Dec 17.

(2) US ALLOWS ASSAD TO REMAIN

US reportedly conceded that Assad can remain until 2021. 12 Dec 17.

(3) RUSSIAN/REGIME STRIKES

Air strikes targeted opposition in Southern Aleppo Province and areas surrounding Damascus. 13 Dec 17.

(4) EASTERN GHOUTA

UN reports 137 children in urgent need of assistance. 11 Dec 17.



(5) IRAQ ANNOUNCES ISIS DEFEAT

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) recaptured the final ISIS territories along the Syrian border, 10 Dec 17.

(6) BAGHDAD

Baghdad is to host the 3rd International Conference to Counter Daesh Media and Ideology 13 Dec 17.

(7) WATER SHORTAGES

A shortage of water has negatively impacted crops and led to demonstrations in Southern Iraq. 12 Dec 17.

ASSESSMENT: (1) Putin made the announcement while at Khmeimim Airbase (Latakia, Syria) 11 Dec 17. A similar announcement was made in 2016 but actually resulted in further troops deployed to Syria. A complete military withdrawal is highly unlikely, Russia will likely maintain military bases at Khmeimim and Tartus with their strategic access to the Mediterranean. The announcement is likely to be a message to the US to leave the country. (2) Despite spending more than \$14bn since 2014 and repeatedly committing to regime change, the US has reportedly conceded that Assad can remain until 2021. While unconfirmed, the US has little choice without a strong and unified opposition. Assad, whose family has ruled for 50 years, is the only viable option for leadership in a country in urgent need of stability. The US may use a concession to justify an ongoing presence post-ISIS, an astute move that will bolster the ineffectual opposition. (3) Activist groups report civilian casualties at the targeted sites in Homs, Hama and Eastern Ghouta. Both the regime and Russia are accused of high numbers of civilian deaths and casualties during strikes which will likely increase post-ISIS as targeting attention returns to rebels. Regime use of chemical weapons may also resurface as attention has returned to the original civil war and the possibility Assad will remain in power despite siege tactics and chemical weapons deployment against civilians. (4) 137 children in the rebel stronghold require urgent medical care. The area has been besieged by the regime since 2013 where 12% of children suffer malnutrition. The regime has demonstrated siege and starve tactics likely to intensify post-ISIS. (5) The announcement by Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi marked the end of operations to clear ISIS from the border with Syria. While ISIS has been defeated militarily, it still operates as an insurgency capable of projecting attacks into the capital and key cities. Similarly, taking pressure off ISIS could allow a resurgence as the Taliban did in Afghanistan. (6) 120 representatives from 42 countries are expected at the 2 day event aimed at countering ISIS ideology and media outputs. The conference compliments the conclusion of military operations by staging a soft war against ISIS ability to recruit and promote. (7) Iraq's Water Minister Janabi announced that water shortages were becoming an acute problem in Iraq. The budget allowance for water is substantially below what is needed to repair conflict damaged water infrastructure likely to worsen the humanitarian situation this winter as crops and drinking water become scarce in areas as IDPs attempt to return post-ISIS.

SYRIA/IRAQ CONTROL MAP: 13 DEC 2017

THE WITHDRAWAL AND BEYOND

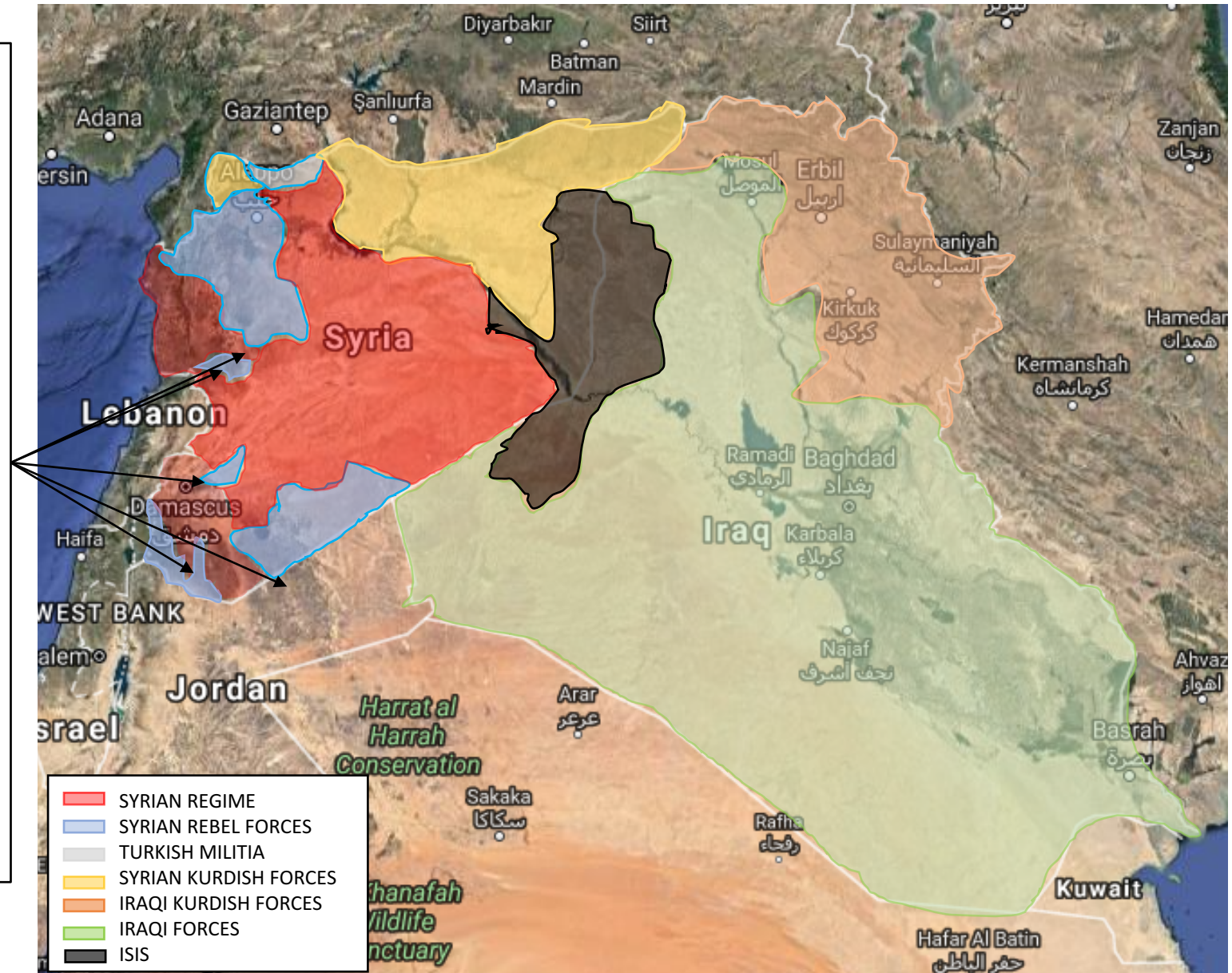
During the first visit to Syria of a Russian Head of State since 2010, Vladimir Putin announced a partial withdrawal of the estimated 3,000- 6,000 troops in Syria following the defeat of ISIS. The statement echoes speeches made in 2016 declaring the withdrawal of troops which failed to materialize.

Russia is highly unlikely to withdraw before a reduction in US forces, a prospect strongly rebutted by US Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis who claims the US “will not walk away”. The US declared 900 troops in Syria in April 2017, in November there were 2,000 troops in a clear message that the US will remain in Syria post-ISIS.

Secondarily, Russia is unlikely to relinquish military bases at Khmeimim and Tartus which provide access to a warm water port and a strategic air base in the region, a thorn in the West’s side.

The announcement is a message to the US to withdraw from Syria. The Syrian Regime and Iran will also increase similar strategic messaging. Interestingly, Russia may also intend Iran to heed the message to withdraw post-ISIS to alleviate the regional tension with Israel and Saudi Arabia.

As focus returns to ending the civil war it is likely Russia and the Regime will increasingly target rebels in Aleppo, Idlib and the countryside around Damascus to quell the opposition. The US cannot publicly concede to Assad remaining in power, although this seems an obvious eventuality, or risk undermining its presence in Syria. An ISIS insurgency will serve to justify the presence of US, Russia and Iran. Meanwhile, the spotlight will return to the dire humanitarian situation and increased calls for accountability for alleged war crimes.



NORTH AFRICA: WEEKLY SITREP 13 DEC 2017



(1) AMNESTY CONDEMNS EU

Amnesty International has condemned the EU for complicity in the Libyan migrant crisis. 12 Dec 17.

(2) SLAVERY PROTESTS

Video footage from CNN showing slave auctions has spurred frequent demonstrations in the US with more planned in London 12 Dec 17.

(3) 900 MIGRANTS RESCUED

900 migrants rescued in the Mediterranean arrived in Italy 12 Dec 17.

(4) OPEC EXEMPTIONS

Despite OPEC's decision to extend production cuts, exempt Libya intends production increase. 12 Dec 17.

(5) HAFTAR LOYALISTS

Forces loyal to General Khalifa Haftar reportedly attacked vote registration centers in eastern Libya 10 Dec 17.

(6) LIBYAN POLITICAL AGREEMENT

The agreement signed in 2015 in Skhirat expires 17 Dec 17 likely to spur public unrest in the East. 13 Dec 17.

ASSESSMENT: (1) Amnesty has criticized the EU's deals with the Libyan Coast Guard who have been accused of violence against migrants, including sexual violence and bribery. The EU is accused of turning a blind eye to abuses during interceptions at sea and at detention centers, where conditions were labelled inhumane, to pursue a policy of self preservation. 20,000 migrants are reportedly held in "appalling conditions" in Libya where reported slave auctions have garnered international condemnation. (2) Demonstrations have already taken place in the US with further protests planned in Washington and Los Angeles, while they have been without significant incident thus far the potential for violence is significant should they coincide with a police incident as occurred in Ferguson. The demonstrations in London are scheduled for 18th Dec 17 at Parliament Square. The protests may cause disruption to traffic, currently there is no indication that far right movements plan to disrupt the march. (3) The rescued migrants reported abuses at the hands of Libyan detention centers and abuses in their countries of origin that led to their decision to make the perilous journey by sea to Europe. 164,000 migrants made it to Europe in 2017, half of the 348,000 reported in 2016 demonstrating the controversial tactics adopted by the EU and Libyan Coast Guards are succeeded in limiting the flow but failing in maintaining standards of care and protection afforded to those stranded in Libya. (4) Two weeks after the decision to extend oil production caps, the Libyan Government of National Accord met with the Libyan National Oil Corporation to discuss coordination to increase Libya's oil output, likely to take the form of an increase in national budget allocations to the sector. OPEC Members are increasingly urging the organisation to extend output caps to Libya and Nigeria in light of their recovering oil industries. (5) Haftar loyalists reportedly countered efforts in Eastern Libya to register citizens to vote in upcoming general elections, claiming Haftar was the only true leader of Libya. In a contradiction, Haftar declared his support to elections during talks with the Italian Foreign Minister Angelino Alfano. (6) The LPA is a crucial agreement between its signatories, offering legality to the Government of National Accord (GNA). Haftar, the GNA's political rival in the East of Libya, has stated the end of the LPA on 17 Dec 17 marks the end of the GNA's rule. Haftar loyalists have increasingly demonstrated in Eastern Libya holding banners declaring Haftar Libya's President post-17 December 17 which are a stark contrast to the efforts of UN Special Envoy to Libya Ghassan Salame's to launch voter registration in preparation for Presidential and Parliamentary elections next year. The 17 Dec 17 could be a significant step backwards for Libya if the LPA expires.

AF/PAK: WEEKLY SITREP 13 DEC 2017

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

A US Soldier has died in a vehicle incident, two other US troops injured 11 Dec 17.

(2) SOUTH ASIA STRATEGY

US Air Force Brigadier Gen. Lance Bunch reports serious blows the Taliban and ISIS as a result of The South Asia Strategy. 12 Dec 17.

(3) ISIS/IRAN

Iran warns ISIS may seek to move their failed caliphate to Afghanistan 11 Dec 17.



(4) PAKISTANI ECONOMY

The Pakistani rupee has fallen by more than 5% against the US Dollar as the Finance Ministry addresses current deficit. 12 Dec 17.

(5) INDIA/PAKISTAN

India and Pakistan dispute regarding alleged Indian spy Kulbhushan Jadhav continues as Pakistan responds to the International Court of Justice 10 Dec 17.

(6) CPEC

China halts 3 major infrastructure projects in Pakistan in \$60bn project package. 10 Dec 17.

COMMENT: (1) US Officials released a statement 12 Dec 17 confirming the incident was not a result of enemy action. 14 US Soldiers have died in Afghanistan in 2017. (2) The strategy implemented a conditions based commitment which means the insurgency cannot “wait out” for a coalition withdrawal, the coalition is mandated until insurgents are defeated. The shift in tactics has also allowed a sustained air campaign against Taliban funding revenues, primarily drugs labs which provide \$200mn per year to the Taliban. The destruction of 25 narcotics sites has denied the Taliban \$80mn already, likely to impact on Taliban operations in 2018. The US is to deploy a security assistance force early next year to work directly with Afghan units providing training and operational advice likely to improve the units ability to hold ground against the Taliban. If the Taliban is significantly weakened in Northern Afghanistan, it may unintentionally facilitate ISIS expansion. (3) During a speech at Tehran’s Terrorism, Extremism and Regional Security seminar, Iranian Intelligence Minister Mahmoud Alavi warned that ISIS may relocate forces to Afghanistan and Pakistan to capitalize on instability. ISIS has gained a foothold in Northern Afghanistan resulting in the suspension of Humanitarian operations in the area but growth has been limited. ISIS has staged several suicide attacks targeting Shia minorities in Afghanistan and continues to clash with the Taliban for control of ground leading Afghan officials to look to Iran for support. As the US reduces strikes in Syria and Iraq it is likely Afghanistan will increasingly benefit from increased US resource to curb ISIS growth which may complicate the battlespace if Iran increases support to the country. (4) As well as a weakening of the rupee, Pakistan’s KSE100 index dropped 27% to an 18 month low with spectators citing security, political uncertainty and faltering economic policies as the reason. While the initial reaction was negative, economists have confirmed the weakening of the currency is an intentional measure much needed to encourage foreign investment and urged further reductions. Since the public corruption allegations against the former Prime Minister, foreign investment reduced by \$585mn. (5) Jadhav was arrested by Pakistani forces on 3 Mar 16 in Balochistan when he entered Pakistan from Iran. He is accused of spying on behalf of the Indian Government. Pakistan has sentenced Jadhav to death which India is contesting at the ICJ. If the ICJ proceeds with the case it is likely the hearing will take place in Apr 18, allowing Jadhav to avoid the death penalty until at least then. (6) It is likely the pause comes amid political infighting over the project and security concerns. China has been criticised for unilateral management of infrastructure projects and punitive pauses such as this.