

SYRIA/IRAQ: COUNTRY ASSESSMENT 31 JAN 2018

(1) SOCHI PEACE TALKS

Talks concluded with no results, deepening divisions. 30 Jan 18.

(2) TURKEY

51 civilians have been killed in 9 days of OP OLIVE BRANCH and significant damage to the ancient temple at Ain Dara. 30 Jan 18.

(3) IDLIB

Regime air strikes killed 16 in several towns in Idlib in an ongoing campaign to dislodge HTS. 31 Jan 18.

(4) EASTERN GHOUTA

OPCW matched chemical samples to Assad's stock piles. 31 Jan 18.



(5) TURKEY/IRAQ

Turkey conducted 8 strikes in Northern Iraq against 11 PKK targets. 30 Jan 18.

(6) KIRKUK OIL

60,000bpd to be exported from Kirkuk to Iran via overland tankers in exchange for refined oil. 30 Jan 18.

(7) US STRIKES

A US airstrike reportedly killed 6 Iraqi police officers and wounded a further 20. 28 Jan 18.

(8) BAGHDAD

Iraq has removed sanctions on KRG banks and paid a portion of public salaries. 30 Jan 18.

ASSESSMENT: (1) Russia hosted the talks between 1,600 delegates to foster negotiations for a political solution. International legitimacy was undermined by absences. Kurdish and Opposition factions boycotted talks. Kurds view Russia as complicit for failing to oppose Turkish action in Afrin while the Opposition protests against the event logo, a regime flag in isolation which is an indication of Russian intent.. (2) The Regime claims to aim to dislodge Islamic extremists Hayat Tahrir a-Sham (HTS), but will secondarily likely attempt to dislodge to wider opposition. With a Regime campaign in South and Central Idlib, and a Turkish assault in the North of the Province it is likely thousands of civilians will be displaced in 2018. (3) The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights asserts that 51 civilians have been killed during the assault staged by Turkish troops in conjunction with Syrian opposition groups. 60% of the temple has been damaged by fighting, adding to the destruction of many of Syria's heritage sites. (4) The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons findings support claims made by the Opposition of Regime chemical attacks including recent attacks in Eastern Ghouta. (5) Turkey targeted the area in May, Jun and Dec 17. The Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) has used camps in the area during the 30 year conflict with Turkey. (6) Oil exports from Kirkuk traditionally moved to Turkey via the Ceyhan pipeline. Since the Kurdish referendum, Iraq has increased oil ties with Iran likely to strengthen in the medium to long term which irks Turkey and Western partners who fear growing Iranian influence. (7) A misunderstanding between Iraqi Security Forces manifested in a mistakenly staged raid against a member of Iraqi police in Anbar, causing local police to respond. The raiding group called for air support against what they mistakenly believed to be ISIS dressed in police uniforms. The incident undermines Iraqi trust in US and ISF. (8) Baghdad has agreed to send \$210 million to Kurdistan for public salaries and has removed a number of sanctions of Kurdish Banks. The move is a considerable softening since 2014, yet anger remains that Kurdistan must seek permission from Baghdad before the budget can be spent. It is likely the transfer of control of Kirkuk oil from KRG to Iraq is a factor in the decision.

SYRIA/IRAQ CONTROL MAP: 31 JAN 2018

Syria Humanitarian Review

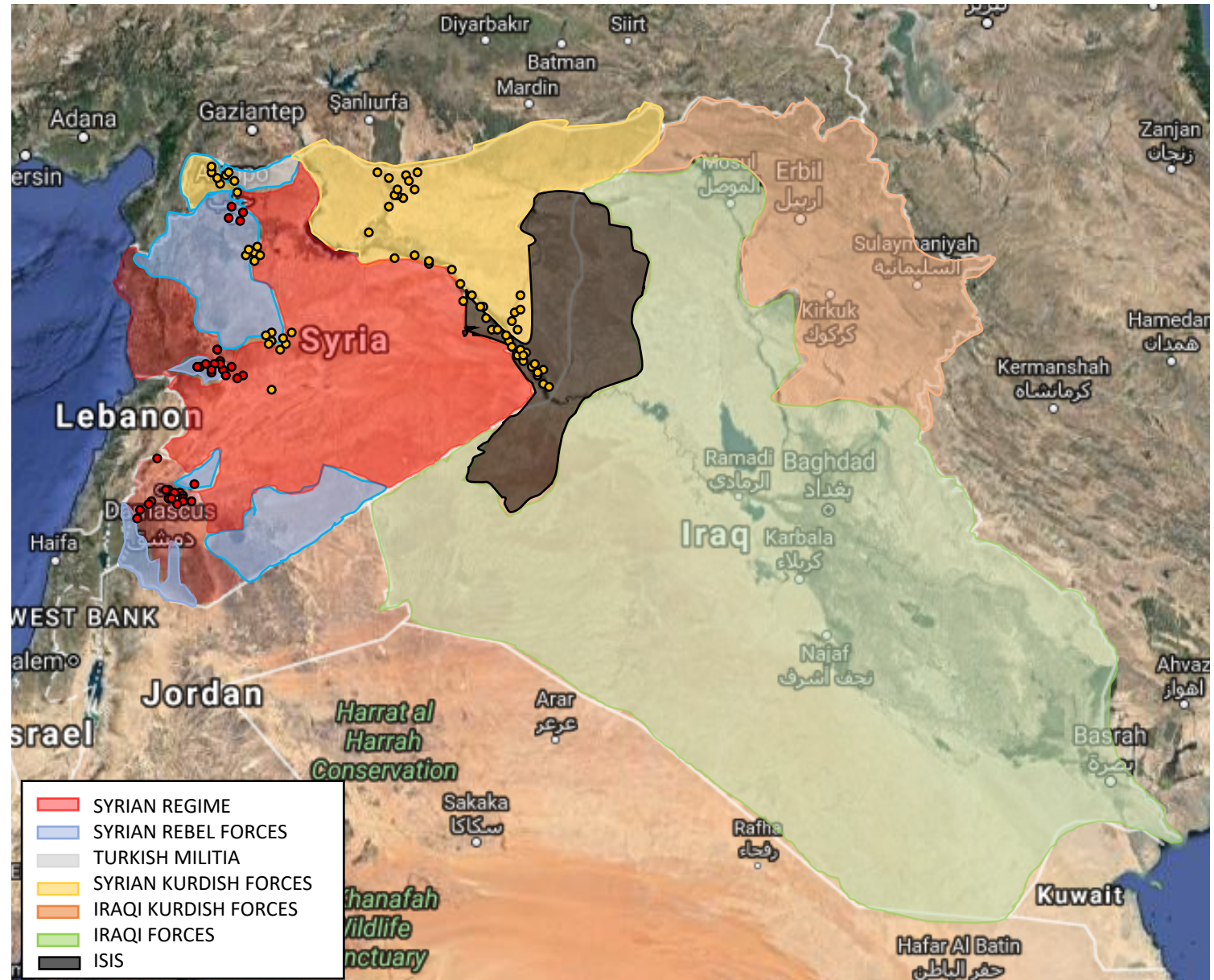
The conflict in Syria continues to fuel the world's largest refugee crisis as more than 5.5 million refugees flee the region. 92% of refugees living in surrounding countries in the region are subjected to poor living conditions leading to socio-economic issues such as forced marriage and human trafficking. In total, 13.1 million civilians require assistance, of which 5.3 million are children. It is estimated that some 6.1 million civilians have been internally displaced, their future uncertain as the conflict migrates from East to West.

48% of recorded refugees are children, fueling concern for a "lost Generation." Child recruitment is an increasing issue, spurring the UNICEF "No Lost Generation" campaign. The UN reported more than 2,900 "grave violations" against children as a direct result of the ongoing conflict including the targeting of schools and hospitals.

Despite brokered de-escalation zones backed by Turkey and Russia, violence continued within the designated areas which host civilian populations. Most notably Idlib Province and Eastern Ghouta have witnessed serious and frequent breaches of the terms of the de-escalation zones.

Inflated food and fuel prices, lack of shelter, power cuts, lack of clean water and medical care among the displaced population have created a humanitarian crisis but the limited access for humanitarian groups across the country remains a challenge. The emergence of extremist factions in Idlib is a particular issue for 2018. Rural Damascus and Idlib represent "catastrophic" areas according to a Relief Web report in early 2018.

- Severe Humanitarian Crisis
- Catastrophic Humanitarian Crisis.



NORTH AFRICA: COUNTRY ASSESSMENT 31 JAN 2018



(1) MIGRANTS

Italy reports a rise in migrants arriving from Libya in January, rising to 2,749. 31 Jan 18.

(2) MIGRANTS

13,000 migrants have been repatriated since Dec 17, short of the African Union goal of 20,000. 31 Jan 18.

(3) ELECTIONS 2018

UN Special Envoy to Libya, Ghassan Salame, met with African Union leaders in Ethiopia to garner support for Libyan Elections. 30 Jan 18.

(4) BENGHAZI

UN condemns retaliatory attacks in Eastern Libya. 8 bodies reported in Benghazi, 5 further bodies in Derna attributed to retaliatory killings. 30 Jan 18.

(5) HUMANITARIAN

378,000 children are in need of urgent assistance in Libya according to UNICEF.

(6) OIL

Chairman of the National Oil Corporation warned that Libya's oil production is hindered by constraints on its oil budget. 31 Jan 18.

ASSESSMENT: (1) Italy reported a 15% rise in the number of migrants arriving from Libya in January 18 to 2,749. It is likely in the wake of political elections in March, in which migration is a key issue, the Italian Government will seek to limit any further increase through support to the Libyan coast guard and have already deployed forces to Libya's Southern borders to intercept smuggling routes. 621,706 migrants have been identified in Libya. (2) The repatriation effort is a collaboration between the African Union, United Nations and EU. The programme was welcomed following reports of inhumane conditions in filthy detention centers, migrant deaths at sea, sexual violence and slave auctions in Libya. However, a parallel effort to address the drivers of migration has yet to be proposed. 57% of Libya's migrants originate in Egypt, Nigeria, Chad and Sudan. (3) The African Union leadership noted concern that Libya was rushing into Elections in 2018 at the behest of the UN, failing to properly acknowledge the political and security complexities. Salame successfully secured support from the African Union, who have agreed to assist the UN in paving the way for elections. (4) Following twin car bombs at a mosque in Benghazi last week, forces loyal to General Haftar have conducted a number of retaliatory attacks. Videos shared on social media purport to show LNA Commander Muhammad al-Werfalli committing summary executions in Benghazi. Werfalli is subject to an ICC issued arrest warrant for human rights abuses including summary executions. The bodies in Derna are reportedly those of LNA members, demonstrating tit for tat killings between forces loyal to Haftar and Islamist extremist groups. (5) A UNICEF projection for 2018 indicates 170,000 Libyans have been internally displaced as a result of the conflict, an estimated 54% of which are children. Few humanitarian agencies operate in Libya due to the security situation, those who do report that they do not have unhindered access and often criticize Libyan and EU efforts to curb migration. (6) Mustafa Sanallah, speaking at a Chatham House conference in London, revealed that the NOC received less than 50% of the planned annual state budget allocated to the NOC. NOC employs 60,000 people and provides a vital economic lifeline to the country, particularly while it remains exempt from OPEC production limits. It is likely Sanallah is attempting to garner international investment prior to 2018 elections.

AF/PAK: COUNTRY ASSESSMENT 31 JAN 2018

(1) TALIBAN CONTROL

A BBC report claims the Taliban openly operate in 70% of Afghanistan. IS presence is growing. 31 Jan 18.

(2) KABUL

Taliban attack near a military academy in Kabul killed 100 and wounded 234. 28 Jan 18.

(3) KABUL

IS staged a deadly attack against a security checkpoint near to Marshal Fahim Military Academy, killing 11. 29 Jan 18.



(4) EARTHQUAKE

An earthquake of magnitude 6.1 in the Hindu Kush region of Afghanistan. 31 Jan 18.

(5) PAKISTAN/AFGHANISTAN

The deadline for the validity of Afghan refugees residing in Pakistan is due to expire. 31 Jan 18.

(6) PAKISTAN/INDIA

Fragile peace along border is increasingly challenged. Pakistan accuses India of more than 1,900 ceasefire breaches in 2017. 31 Jan 18.

COMMENT: (1) The report states that the Taliban has full control of 14 districts and has an open presence in a further 263. While the Taliban controlled areas largely remain within Helmand Province, the Taliban have expanded in Eastern and Central districts. IS has expanded in Northern Afghanistan and Nangarhar Province in the East. In 2018, it is likely the ground truth will remain largely consistent with this report as Afghan forces maintain an inability to hold ground and government administration struggles to take root beyond provincial capitals. **(2)** The Taliban claimed responsibility for two spectacular attacks in the capital in Jan 18, beginning with a coordinated attack at the luxury Intercontinental Hotel killing 22 on 22 Jan 18. The second attack consisted of an ambulance laden with explosives detonating at a security checkpoint. The attack demonstrates the ability to use blue forces equipment and vehicles to bypass security in an area frequented by foreign workers and military staff. **(3)** IS claimed responsibility for the latest attack to strike Kabul. Gunmen killed 11 soldiers and wounded a further 16. IS also claimed responsibility for the devastating attack on the offices of Save the Children in Nangarhar 24 Jan 18. **(4)** Tremors were reported in Afghanistan and Pakistan, a child has reportedly been killed but no major infrastructure damage has been reported. The region has witnessed numerous earthquakes in recent years, including an earthquake registering 7.1 which killed 300 people in Oct 15. **(5)** The deadline set by the Pakistan Government expires 31 Jan 18, casting doubt on the status of more than 2.3 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. The decision not to extend the validity of the refugees is likely to have been a reaction to the US' decision to curtail funding to Pakistan in a bid to encourage greater pressure on terrorists using Pakistan to stage attacks. Pakistan has responded by claiming Afghan refugees are an economic burden and a security threat. With the security situation in Afghanistan deteriorating and humanitarian operations limited in many areas, returning refugees face a difficult situation during winter months. **(6)** Both sides claim unprovoked attacks weekly, raising tensions between the uneasy neighbors in the Kashmir region. India accuses Pakistan of facilitating militants across the border into India to conduct attacks. Pakistan has made attempts to de-escalate the tensions by political means but efforts have been rebuffed by India. Skirmishes have increased in Jan 18, but the neighbors who have fought 3 wars against one another are likely to maintain a status quo of skirmishes without escalating into wider conflict.