

# SYRIA/IRAQ: COUNTRY ASSESSMENT 28 FEB 2018

## (1) NORTH KOREA/SYRIA

UN investigators allege North Korea has been providing material to the Syrian Regime to make chemical weapons. 27 Feb 18.

## (2) EASTERN GHOUTA

Fighting continued during UN brokered ceasefire, resulting in a pause in aid. 27 Feb 18.

## (3) HUMANITARIAN ABUSES

Allegations accuse aid agencies of sexual abuse against women and girls in exchange for aid in Syria. 28 Feb 18.

## (4) WOMEN SENTENCED TO DEATH

The women confessed to marrying ISIS fighters and providing assistance to the terrorist group, punishable by death in Iraq. 28 Feb 18.

## (6) OIL/SECURITY

The panned Iran-Iraq oil swap between Kirkuk and Kermanshah has been delayed due to security concerns. 26 Feb 18.

## (6) OIL/INVESTMENT

France's Total is interested in bidding for the construction of a 150,000bpd refinery at Nassiriya. 28 Feb 18.



**ASSESSMENT:** (1) The items include acid resistant tiles, valves and thermometers sent in 40 consignments between 2012 to 2017. If true, the US will react with strong rhetoric but ultimately will likely follow the pattern of inaction. (2) Despite the agreed ceasefire, Regime artillery pounded Eastern Ghouta killing 6 civilians. UN aid deliveries and evacuations were cancelled as a result. It is clear the ceasefires will be inconsistent and hazardous for the aid agencies attempting to assist the 393,000 trapped civilians. Until strategic powers can align to pressure both Regime and rebel forces towards the common aim of securing aid, the situation will remain critical. (3) The UN Population Fund issued a devastating report, named Voices From Syria 2018, alleging that agents working for the UN and other international organisations forced women and girls to exchange sexual acts for aid. The report echoes the findings of report released in 2015 in which 40% of female respondents said they had been abused trying to receive aid. (4) 15 women aged between 20 and 50 appeared in Baghdad Central Criminal Court, some with young children with them. It is thought that up to 1,000 women and children are detained in Iraq for links to ISIS, including foreign nationals. There remain serious concerns over the judicial process in Iraq, with concerns that the women may have been coerced into joining ISIS. (5) Iraq was due to truck 60,000bpd of oil from Kirkuk to Kermanshah in exchange for Iranian oil. An Iranian source attributed the delay to security concerns. It is likely Iran refers to both the recent instability in the area, consisting of small scale attacks targeting Iraqi Security Forces and Kurdish unrest. (6) Bids remain open for the construction contract with interest expressed from PetroChina and Russia's Lukoil. Since defeating ISIS militarily in Dev 17, Iraq has energised efforts to secure international investment in the petrochemical industries in Iraq to help rebuild the country after 17 years of conflict.

# SYRIA/IRAQ INDEPTH: 28 FEB 2018

## The Humanitarian Crisis: Aid and Abuse

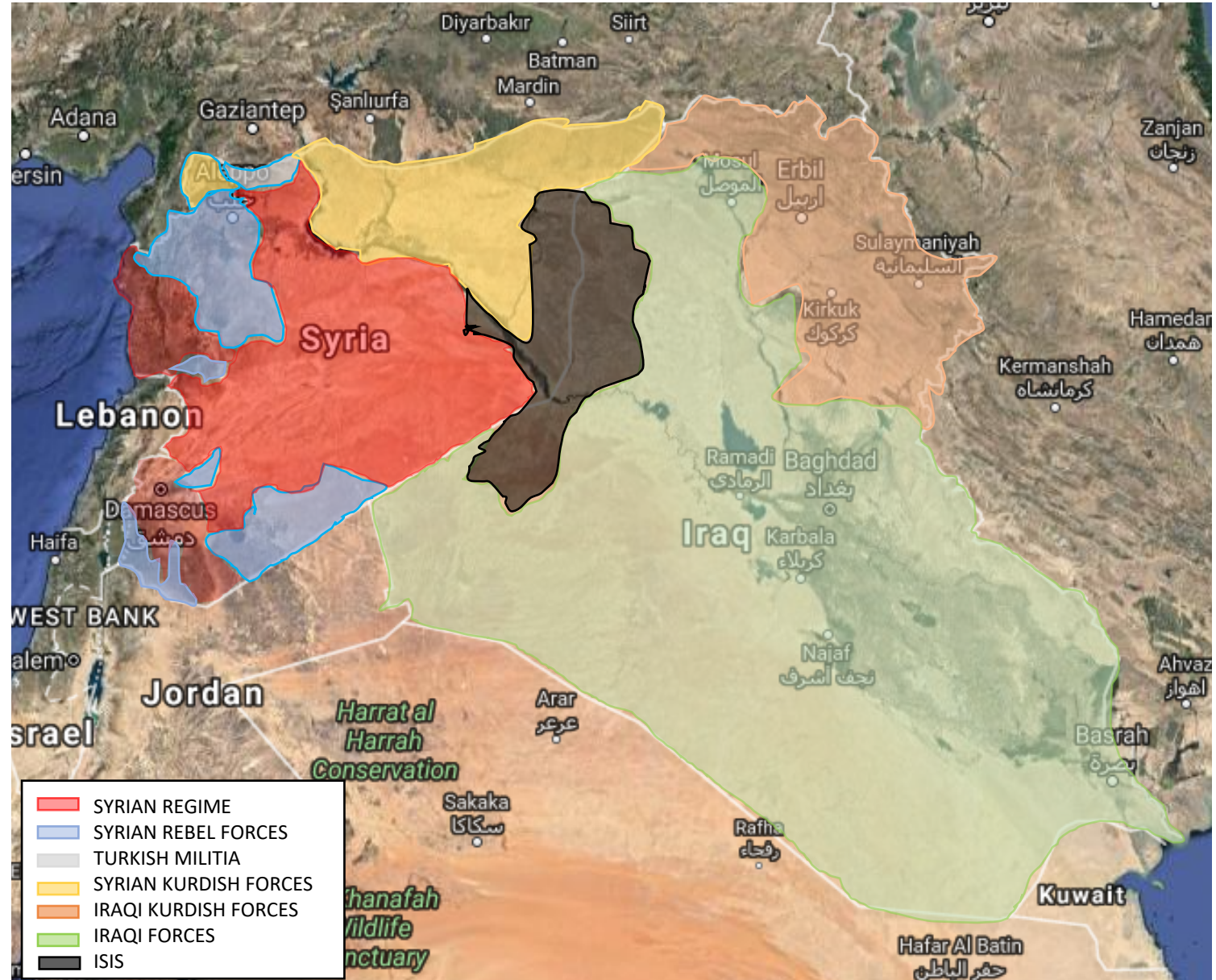
A UN report alleges that men working for the UN and other international humanitarian organisations have abused vulnerable women and girls in exchange for aid. Aid workers confirmed the allegations in international media releases, claiming their male counterparts withheld aid until vulnerable female refugees performed sexual acts.

It appears that the allegations are largely confined to local officials employed by the agencies, acting as third parties to distribute the aid in hostile areas. Idlib and Southern Syria have been highlighted as areas of particular concern.

The allegations first surfaced more than 3 years ago when a focus group based on the experiences of Syrian refugees residing in Jordan revealed the abuse taking place in Syria. The UN was made aware of the allegations in Jul 15 and responded by “tightening regulations” yet it seems the practice continues.

The UK responded to claims by assuring that UK aid was not involved in the allegations. OXFAM, the UN and several other international agencies denied the use of local officials as implementing partners for aid. UNICEF admitted it used such third parties but stressed it had no record of any allegations of abuse made against third parties under its control.

The protection of vulnerable women and children in Syria must remain a priority. Often without male protection and in desperate situations, the reliance on aid creates an opportunity for abuse that must be regulated.



# NORTH AFRICA: COUNTRY ASSESSMENT 28 FEB 2018

## (1) US/LIBYA

A US citizen has been arrested in Tunisia attempting to join ISIS in Libya. 28 Feb 18.

## (2) US/LIBYA

The US has issued sanctions against oil smugglers in Libya, focusing around a Maltese smuggling ring. 28 Feb 18.

## (3) ELECTION PESSIMISM

Despite a drive for voter registration, the country is not ready for Presidential and Legislative Elections scheduled for late 2018 . 25 Fe 18.



## (4) LIBYA MIGRATION WORKING GROUP

The LMWG convened for the second time in Tripoli to coordinate policy and assistance targeting migration. 26 Feb 18.

## (5) TAWERGHA

UNHCR concerned for migrant families prevented from returning home by militias. 28 Feb 18.

## (6) SABHA

Clashes continue between forces loyal to Gen Haftar and Brigade 6. 24 Feb 18.

**ASSESSMENT:** (1) Bernard Raymond Augustine, 20 was arrested in Tunisia while trying to cross the border into Libya to join ISIS. He has been returned to the US to face terrorism charges. The incident demonstrates ISIS retains the ability to recruit foreign fighters from Western countries, posing a significant threat to homeland security. Despite the loss of the so-called “Caliphate” in Syria, the group will likely increase recruitment in alternative host nations such as Libya, Yemen and the Philippines. (2) The US issued sanctions against 6 individuals, 24 companies and 7 merchant vessels accused of earning \$30million in black market fuel from Libya in 2016. The western port city of Zuwara was used to smuggle oil and continues to host criminal activity including human trafficking to Europe. (3) The UN and EU continue to drive for Libyan elections in late 2018, yet it seems clear the country is not ready to host elections as concerns mount regarding security, access and legitimacy of the vote. Libyan National Army (LNA) strong man Khalifa Haftar, a powerful voice in the East, has issued threats that his forces may disregard the outcome if unfavorable and forcefully take control. Without functioning institutions to implement, support and uphold a vote the 2018 deadline is doubtful. (4) The group consists of the Libyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and several international migration aid agencies, including the UN Migration Agency. (5) Several hundred migrant families remain unable to return to their homes in Tawergha, trapped in sub-standard facilities since 2011. (6) Sabha continues to be rocked by clashes between forces loyal to Haftar and those loyal to the Presidential Council. The armed groups staging attacks against resident Brigade 6 forces are comprised for foreign forces, particularly Chadian gunmen. Sabha may be indicative of the divisions likely to follow the anticipated elections in late 2018.

# AF/PAK: COUNTRY ASSESSMENT 28 FEB 2018

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

In the wake of Taliban and ISIS attacks in Kabul, RESOLUTE SUPPORT has reinvigorated efforts to improve security in the city. 28 Feb 18.

## (2) FARAH

18 Afghan soldiers killed in Bala Boluk, Western Farah during a Taliban attack on a checkpoint. 24 Feb 18

## (3) HELMAND

2 Afghan soldiers killed during 2 Taliban suicide car bomb attacks. 25 Feb 18.



## (4) KABUL

ISIS conducted a suicide attack near the diplomatic area of Kabul, killing 3 people. 24 Feb 18.

## (5) KABUL/TALIBAN

The Government is willing to recognize the Taliban as a political party. 28 Feb 18.

## (6) PAKISTAN/QUETTA

Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan kill 2 guards during attack on senior police officer. 28 Feb 18.

## (7) PAKISTAN/INDIA

Pakistani Navy launched a major exercise, a show of power against Indian naval presence. 24 Feb 18.

**COMMENT:** (1) US forces have visited checkpoints and security facilities throughout the city with Afghan counterparts to identify areas of improvement. ISIS successfully targeted an area close to the Green Zone on 24 Feb 18, demonstrating improvement is needed to ensure the situation does not deteriorate to levels seen in Jan 18. (2) There has been a significant upsurge in Afghan forces in Farah Province following recent Taliban attacks against security facilities and government officials. The greater volume of troops presents a larger target for Taliban attacks likely to result in Afghan troop fatalities as they battle to regain control of checkpoints. (3) The attacks took place at Nad Ali and Lashkar Gah, targeting security sites demonstrating the Taliban's ability to project attacks into population centers. (4) The attacker targeted an area near to the Green Zone, close to the NATO HQ and US Embassy demonstrating the tangible threat to foreign nationals working in the city. (5) President Ashraf Ghani is willing to recognize the Taliban as a political party in order to progress a political ceasefire. The Taliban has yet to respond, it is unlikely they will accept the conditions such as women representing themselves in politics. (6) The target was a senior policeman transporting detained militants to prison. The target survived but two of his guards were killed during the attack. It is likely the group aimed to free detained members of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan. (7) Exercise RIBAT is a show of force, combining naval and air force assets to extend its range into the Arabian Sea. It culminates on 6 Mar 18 with a live-fire demonstration.