

# SYRIA/IRAQ: COUNTRY ASSESSMENT 07 MAR 2018

## (1) TURKEY/IDLIB

Turkey is to set up refugee camps on the border with Idlib Province to accommodate internally displaced civilians from Afrin. 7 Mar 18.

## (2) RUSSIA/SYRIA

A Russian military plane crashed due to technical malfunction in Syria killing all 39 passengers at Hmeimim airbase, near Latakia. 6 Mar 18.

## (3) EASTERN GHOUTA

77 killed in bloodiest day since UN ceasefire proposed. 700 have been killed by Regime forces in the last fortnight. 5 Mar 18.

## (4) EASTERN GHOUTA

The UN, Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the International Committee for the Red Cross delivered aid for 27,000 of the 400,000 trapped civilians. 7 Mar 18.



## (5) NATO TROOPS

Jens Stoltenberg confirms NATO troops will remain in Iraq despite the Iraqi Parliament urging the Government to issue a timeline for their withdrawal. 7 Mar 18.

## (6) IRAQ/KURDISTAN

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi announced he will lift an international flight ban on the Kurdistan Region and deliver a portion of public salaries. 7 Mar 18.

## (7) UN/IRAQ

The Government of Iraq and the UN, with several international partners, have announced the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan. 7 Mar 18.

**ASSESSMENT:** (1) Following Op OLIVE BRANCH, Turkey has reasserted its humanitarian efforts in Syria, likely in a bid to balance the negative international attention associated with the targeting of Syrian Kurds in Afrin. (2) Russia asserts that the aircraft was not fired upon, given the permissive environment in Latakia it is unlikely enemy action caused the crash. (3) More than 5,600 civilians have been wounded in Eastern Ghouta since 19 Feb 18. (4) The convoy of 46 trucks delivered food to the enclave but were prevented from delivering key medical supplies, including surgical equipment, which will impede the humanitarian assistance provided to the increasing number of casualties. (5) NATO confirmed they will remain in Iraq and furthermore, that they intend to expand their train-and-advise mission. Shia militia's vocally oppose foreign forces, particularly US troops, in Iraq post-ISIS. (6) Following talks between Baghdad and Erbil, Abadi agreed to send an undisclosed sum to pay public salaries in the Kurdistan Region. A financial crisis has gripped Kurdistan since Iraq reduced and at times withheld public salaries since 2014, this was a major driver leading to the Sep 17 Independence Referendum. (7) For further details of the Humanitarian Response Plan, please see the Syria/Iraq In Depth section to follow.



## SYRIA/IRAQ INDEPTH: 07 MAR 2018

### Iraq : The Humanitarian Response Plan 2018

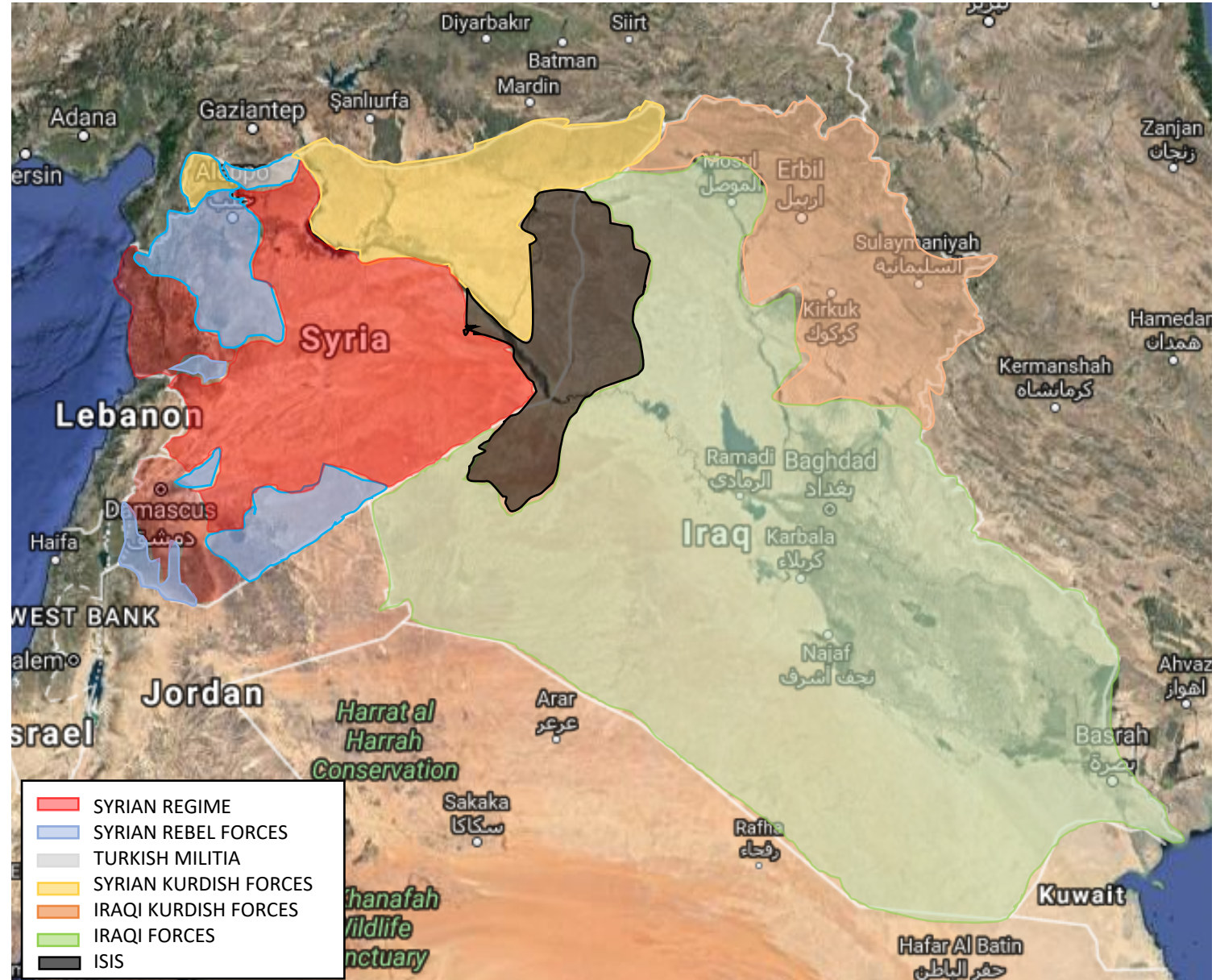
On 6 Mar 18, the Government of Iraq (GoI) and international partners, including the UN, announced the launch of the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan.

Some 8.7 million people, almost half of whom are children, require humanitarian assistance. The plan aims to strengthen the legal protection afforded to IDPs as well as ensuring their safe return. The plan provides for emergency cash payments, shelter and basic supplies. IDP camps will continue to service those communities while liberated areas are subject to stabilisation projects.

With victory over ISIS announced in Dec 17, the nature of humanitarian operations in Iraq have significantly shifted strategic focus. During 2018, up to 2.6 million internally displaced peoples (IDPs) are expected to return to their areas of origin.

The focus for humanitarian operations must be ensuring their timely, safe and dignified return to their homes. The threat from unexploded ordnance, collapsed infrastructure and lack of food and medical supplies are anticipated to become the greatest issues faced by IDPs during 2018 as large volumes of returnees pressure existing assistance.

Iraq is to hold elections in 2018 which have caused the GoI and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to launch initiatives to apply pressure to IDPs to return. The KRG have warned Arab language schools in Kurdistan, primarily used by IDP children, will be closed as soon as May forcing families to leave impacted areas. Returnees are likely to be forced to move to areas which are ill-prepared for inhabitation and not conducive to safety, dignity or welfare of IDPs.





# NORTH AFRICA: COUNTRY ASSESSMENT 07 MAR 2018



**(1) MIGRANTS**  
23 migrants are likely to have drowned attempting to sea journey from Libya to Italy. Overall migrant death tolls continue to decline. 7 Mar 18.

**(2) UN/LIBYA CORRUPTION**  
The UN Mission in Libya has reported claims of widespread corruption involving smuggling of goods and fuel, facilitated by political instability. 7 Mar 18.

**(3) SABHA**  
Libya’s National Human Rights Commission has condemned the ongoing tribal clashes in Sabha which caused the deaths of 3 civilians and wounded 12 on 6 Mar 18.

**(4) UN/BENGHAZI**  
The UN is to reopen an office in Benghazi according to a briefing from the UN envoy Ghassan Salame. Tribal elders in the East of Libya welcomed the announcement. 6 Mar 18.

**(5) EL SHARARA OILFIELD**  
The oilfield was forced to shut down on 4 Mar 18 due to a localised protest at pollution emanating from the site. The site is responsible for almost a quarter of Libya’s national output. 6 Mar 18.

**(6) LIBYA/ UN EMBARGO**  
UN reports that Egypt and UAE have violated embargoes by continuing arms trade with Khalifa Haftar. 7 Mar 18.

**ASSESSMENT:** (1) The death toll from Libya to Europe has reduced since the same period last year, but authorities warn sea routes in other areas of North Africa have recorded an increase in deaths likely as a result of migrants selection alternative routes due to the effectiveness of the Libyan Coastguard. (2) Political instability has resulted in a lack of monitoring and auditing facilities that has incubated a culture of smuggling and embezzlement among armed groups and local authorities. (3) The Awlad Sulaiman and Tabu tribes continue to clash around the city of Sabha. Living conditions have continued to deteriorate as a result of the violence, which frequently results in civilian casualties and has caused a shortage of medical supplies in the city. (4) The office was closed in 2014 as the security situation deteriorated due to armed clashes, a reopening demonstrates an improvement in the security conditions and partial inclusion of the East of the country. (5) El Sharara reopened after a prolonged blockade in 2016 but continues to suffer disruption. Disruptions such as these will continue to deter foreign investment and undermine upcoming elections anticipated in 2018. (6) The UN’s Libya Sanctions Committee reports breaches on the ban from selling arms to Libyan armed factions. Egypt and the UAE are accused of violating the ban, proving arms to Eastern Libyan National Army commander Haftar who opposes the internationally recognised Government of National Accord. Egypt is accused of conducting airstrikes within Libya in support of Haftar. Haftar remains the focus of several human rights violations accusations, including summary executions.



## AF/PAK: COUNTRY ASSESSMENT 07 MAR 2018

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

US airstrikes targeted IS-K targets in Kunar and Nangarhar Provinces between 3 – 4 Mar 18. 13 insurgents were reportedly killed during the wave of strikes. 7 Mar 18.

### (2) AFGHANISTAN/SWITZERLAND

The two nations signed a bilateral development framework agreement including technical, financial and humanitarian cooperation. 6 Mar 18.

### (3) KANDAHAR

The Taliban staged several attacks against Afghan police units near Kandahar, killing 6 and kidnapping a further 30. 2 Mar 18.



### (4) KABUL

22 civilians have been wounded following a suicide car bomb which targeted a vehicle belonging to foreign workers in the East of the city. 2 Australians were among the casualties 2 Mar 18.

### (5) AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN

Two Pakistani nationals have been detained for attempting to provide suicide vests to insurgents in Nangarhar. 2 Mar 18.

### (6) PAKISTAN/INDIA

The Pakistani Army claims it has shot down an Indian drone in Kashmir when it crossed the Line of Control into Pakistani airspace.

**COMMENT:** (1) Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K) primarily operate in Southern Nangarhar, Kunar and Jowzjan. (2) Switzerland has been active in Afghanistan since the 1970's, this agreement puts their assistance on a legal footing and will likely focus on the civilian sector including agriculture, education and healthcare. (3) The Taliban have yet to respond to the Afghan Government's offer of recognition of their political status, but incidents such as these strongly indicate that the group will continue to attack security forces undeterred. A total of 2,531 Afghan security personnel have been killed and 4,238 injured in the first quarter of 2018 demonstrating the Taliban's tactical effectiveness. (4) Local reports indicate a 12 year old boy may have died from his injuries. The incident has yet to be attributed to the Taliban or Islamic State, but if associated with the Taliban this flies in the face of President Ashraf Ghani's recent offer to recognise the Taliban as a political party. (5) Nangarhar has proved to be a particularly deadly province for coalition forces and humanitarian agencies, the arrest is a demonstration of security forces efforts to intercept and reduce the threat from the Taliban. Pakistan is likely to draw criticism for its inability to curtail the support for terrorisms which emanates from within its borders. (6) Tensions between Pakistan and India continue to simmer, it is likely the incident will initiate rhetoric between the nations but given that no loss of life incurred it is unlikely to escalate beyond statements of threat.