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Supporting Sustainable
Peace in Syria

SYRIA BRIEF

20 September 2018



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The Fortnight in Review

Key Steps Taken to End Use of Child Soldiers in Syria

Important steps have been taken by the Syrian Democratic Forces in order to stop the use of underaged soldiers in their ranks. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) represents a coalition of forces that is controlling some parts in the northeast of Syria. They have issued a military order to ban the recruitment of anyone under 18 and ordered their military records office to verify the ages of those currently enrolled. In August, Human Rights Watch documented the recruitment of children by the SDF's largest constituent, the People's Protection Units (YPG), from three displacement camps in northeast Syria, including six girls who enlisted voluntarily but without permission from families. Families told HRW of their debilitating fear for their children, and few had any contact with their children after they enlisted. "We just want to know if she's alive or dead," the mother of a 17-year-old girl recruit said.

A report by the United Nations Secretary General found 224 cases of child recruitment by the YPG and its women's unit in 2017, an almost fivefold increase from the previous year. If the order banning child recruitment is implemented, these children should be demobilized and reunited with families or transferred to civilian authorities who should protect those at risk of domestic abuse if returned to their family.

The order calls for SDF commanders to transfer any member under 18 to the educational authorities in northeast Syria and to end salary payments. It makes military commanders responsible for appointing ombudspersons to receive complaints of child recruitment, and orders punitive measures against commanders who fail to comply with the ban on child recruitment. HRW and other groups, like Geneva Call, have called on the YPG to end child recruitment in Syria since 2014, but the abuse proliferated during heavy fighting last year. HRW calls the new SDF order "a welcome step towards protecting the children of Syria, many of whom have already had to flee their homes, and whose future remains so uncertain". Source: HRW

Turkey- Russia Deal for Demilitarised Zone

Turkey and Russia have signed a deal establishing a demilitarised zone between the Syrian military forces and armed opposition in Idlib, which would see the "elimination" of "terrorists" and protection of civilians. No civilians will be removed from Idlib province, according to the Turkish foreign minister. The borders of Idlib will be protected when the 15-20km wide zone is put in place by October 15th. Heavy weapons must be surrendered by opposition forces radical rebels will have to withdraw, and Turkish and Russian forces will patrol the borders of both sides.

Peacebuilding Corner

UNDP Peacebuilding Supplement

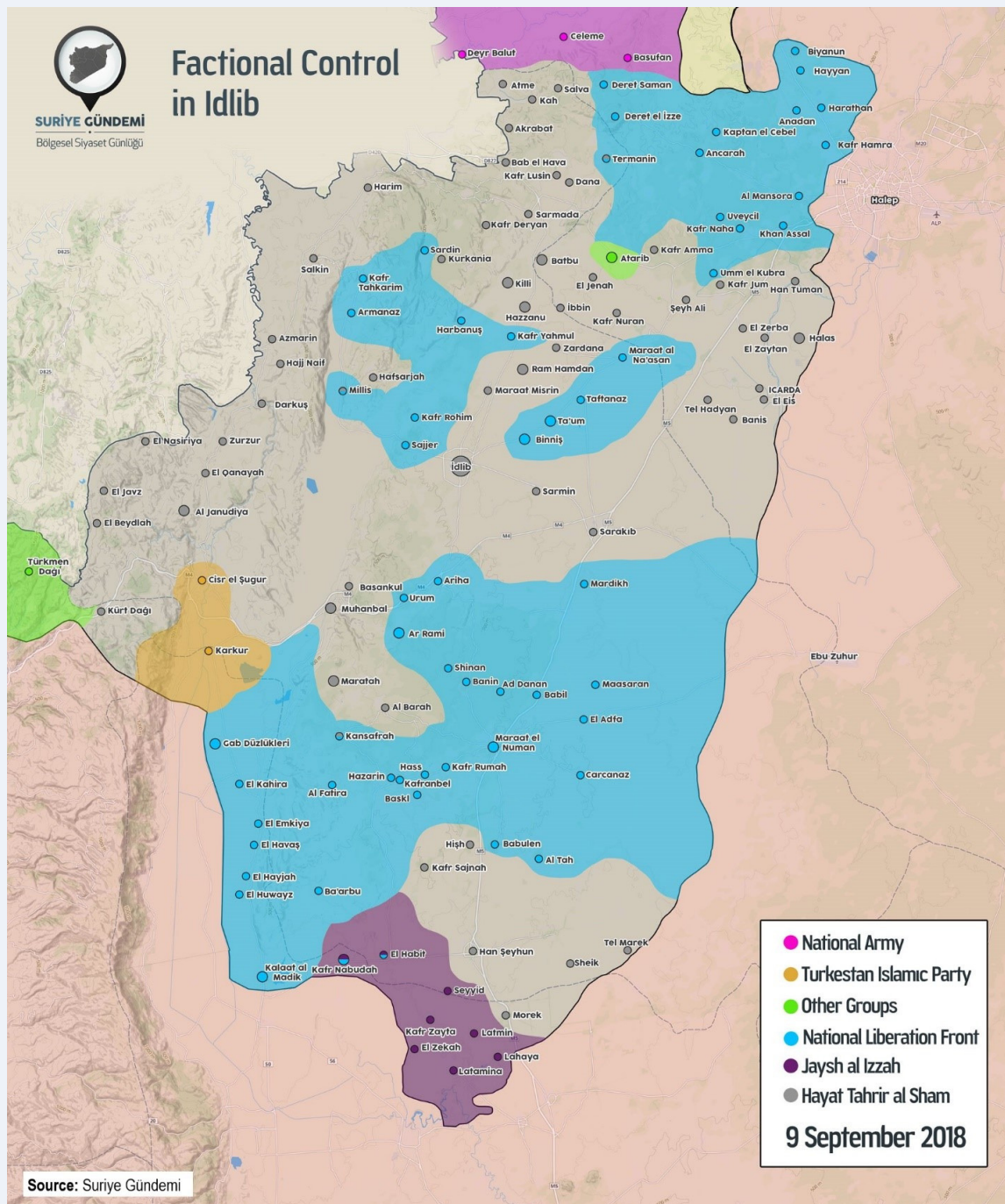
The UNDP "Peace Building in Lebanon" News Supplement is published in Arabic with Annahar, in French with L'Orient-Le Jour and in English with The Daily Star newspapers. The supplement contains articles by writers, journalists, media professionals, researchers and artists residing in Lebanon.

Topics covered relate to current dynamics and their impact on civil peace, the participation of women, youth, refugee camps and issues, and the impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon and the relations between Lebanese and Syrians, "employing objective approaches that are free of hatred and misconceptions".

The most recent edition is available for download here: <http://www.lb.undp.org/pbsupplement>

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Idlib assault postponed after initial barrel bomb attacks

The Turkey-Russia deal has put on hold the much anticipated assault on Idlib, Syria's last major rebel stronghold. Syrian and Russian air forces initially attacked several targets in the Syrian province of Idlib. It is said that Russian fighter planes bombed at least 14 positions in the Hama region and in the south of Idlib. According to rebels, Russian planes focused on targets in the towns of Latamne and Kafr Seit. Eyewitnesses and rescue workers reported that the army of the Syrian government used barrel bombs (containers filled with explosives and metal parts). Barrel bombs are in contravention of international law, as they not only indiscriminately kill and mutilate targets, but also make whole areas uninhabitable because of the danger of delayed explosions. The use of barrel bombs was confirmed by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The organization said that at least 25 such bombs were dropped by Syrian helicopters over rebel areas, and AFP reported 60 case bombs. The number of victims is not yet confirmed. The Syrian armed forces deny the use of barrel bombs. Overall, the Russian and Syrian army undertook 150 bombing during the weekend of 7th-9th September, according to Die Zeit. The Syrian government describes the goal of their offensive as a fight against "terrorists". The United Nations assumes that there are around 10,000 members of Islamist militias in Idlib, many belonging to militia Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, formerly known as the Al Nusra Front, linked to Al Qaeda.

Though the assault on Idlib is on hold for the moment, civilians are nevertheless continuing to prepare for the worst, with people digging caves and preparing for any possible chemical attacks by making gas masks from paper cups, charcoal, cotton wool, medical gauze and plastic bags. Chlorine and sarin nerve gas have both been reported as used as weapons of war in Syria's continuing battle.

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