



Supporting Sustainable
Peace in Syria

SYRIA BRIEF

25 October 2018

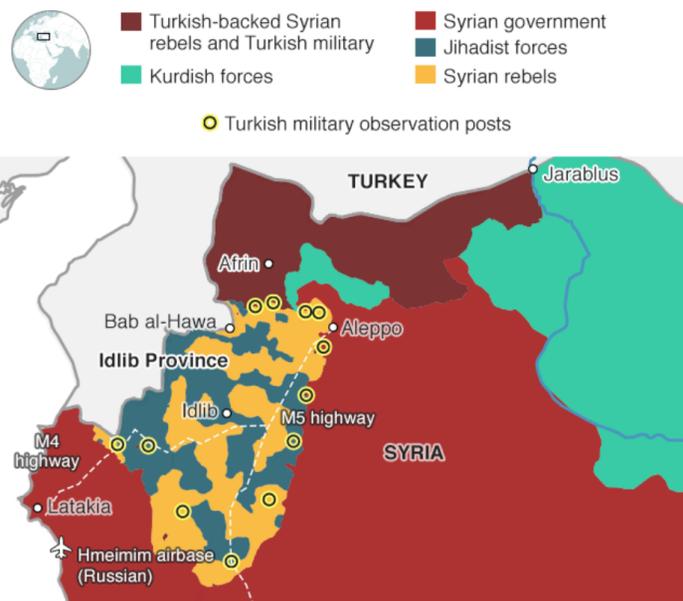
Photo Credit: Alexandro Auler

The Fortnight in Review

Deadline for Buffer Zone Passes; Rebels Remain

The deadline for a withdrawal by fighters from the proposed buffer zone has passed, leaving the Russian-Turkish agreement in jeopardy. Hay'et Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) said "We have not abandoned our choice of jihad and fighting towards implementing our blessed revolution." Mortar shells were fired from the buffer zone into regime territory last week, killing two soldiers. The Turkish-backed National Liberation Front controls about half of the region, with Hay'et Tahrir al-Sham controlling most of Idlib itself, and there are also more hardline fighters such as Hurras al-Deen and Ansar al-Islam. Most groups had withdrawn heavy weaponry from the buffer zone as required by the first part of the agreement, however fighters remain. The Turkish Think Tank Omran Centre has suggested that if HTS doesn't withdraw its fighters from the buffer zone then: either Turkey and the NLF launch military action against HTS, or Russia will seize the opportunity with the support of the regime and its allies to enter Idlib. Residents in Idlib reportedly received texts on Friday saying ""Get away from the fighters. Their fate is sealed and near," adding to rising fears of an attack, so far put off by the buffer-zone deal. HTS has arrested dozens of civilians in Idlib in the past weeks, consolidating its' power and arresting activists as well as "extremists" and those suspected of seeking to reconcile with Damascus.

Idlib province



Source: Conflict Monitor by IHS Markit, 8 Oct 2018



Peacebuilding Corner

"Learn to Live", a project by the UK's Department for International Development and War Child, enhances understanding by twinning schools in the UK with students around the world, including Syrian refugee children in Jordan. An all-too common story and consequence of the war is children leaving school in order to work for as little as 2.70 GBP a day, however children in the West are often unaware of these realities. So far 330 UK schools have signed up for the programme, which is part of Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning (CCGL), run by the British Council. The aim of Learn to Live is not only to increase empathy and understanding between pupils of all backgrounds, but also to let children whose lives have been devastated by war know they have not been forgotten. More than 60,000 teachers worldwide will get training, and the project aims to reach more than three million pupils in the UK and worldwide over the next three years.



The Fortnight in Review

Jordanian-Syrian Border Re-Opens

The Jordanian-Syrian border has re-opened for the first time in three years, following the re-taking of the border area by government forces. The development provides a boost to trade for both economies, who had suffered huge losses as a result of the closure. The Naseeb crossing, known as Jaber to Jordanians, previously saw hundreds of trucks pass through every day, linking Turkey and Lebanon with the Gulf. The re-opening of the Syrian-Jordan border is also vital for Lebanon, as its only other frontier is with Israel, with which it has no relation. Lebanon relies on overland access through Syria to reach other countries abroad. According to Lebanese caretaker economy minister Raed Khoury, Lebanese exports fell 35% since the beginning of the Syrian war.

Israel and Syria, together with the UN, have agreed to reopen the Golan crossing of Quneitra next week. This is in order to allow The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) to better carry out its peacekeeping mission, according to US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley. Syrian government forces retook the border area earlier this summer.

It is also being reported that Syrian and Iraqi foreign ministers are also in advanced discussions related to the reopening of the border between their countries.

Deaths at Al Rukban Camp

Two children, A five-day-old boy and a four-month-old girl, have died in the past two weeks at Al Rukban camp as starvation takes hold of the population. The camp, on the border between Syria and Jordan, has not received aid for nine months, and this month also saw the smuggling route cut off, leaving the population of 45,000 people isolated with no supplies. For food which is able to be smuggled in, prices have tripled, making it unaffordable for almost everyone in the camp. The border was closed in 2016 after an ISIS suicide attack that killed six Jordanian soldiers at the Rukban crossing. Some residents have left the camp and returned to areas under government control however there have been reports from some humanitarians working in the camp that armed militias are preventing residents from leaving in order to obtain aid.

ISIS Kidnaps Women & Children in Deir ez-Zor

Around 90 women and children have been kidnapped from an IDP camp in Deir ez-Zor province, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The al-Bahra camp, near the town of Hajin, was attacked last week and Kurish fighters forced to flee. The eastern banks of the Euphrates river is where around 15,000 people remain under ISIS control.

The US-led coalition and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) has been attacking the area for the past month, but around 5,000 hardened ISIS militant are holding out. This week, the US-led coalition hit a mosque in As Susah, reportedly killing 12 ISIS fighters. The coalition claimed that the mosque was being used as a command centre. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said air strikes killed 41 people, including 10 children, in eastern Syria on Thursday and Friday. Many were Iraqi relatives of Islamic State fighters

Al-Bahra was controlled by the SDF, and housed hundreds of IDPs, including families of Isis defectors and relatives of fighters who had been killed. Rami Abdulrahman, director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said they were in serious danger as Isis have been known to kill defectors and their relatives.

Over 30 women and children were kidnapped by ISIS from the Druze town of Sweida in southern Syria in July – to date negotiations for their release are ongoing but some have been executed. Six hostages were released last Saturday.

Japanese Journalist Freed

Japanese Journalist Mr Jumpei Yasuda, who has not been heard of since 2015 after disappearing in Syria, has reportedly been freed. He returned home amidst much media attention and home made rice-balls from his mother. He arrived in Syria in 2015 to report on his journalist friend Kenji Goto, who was taken hostage and killed by ISIS. The Japanese government has denied paying a ransom for his release. Mr Yasuda was reported to be gaunt and struggled to speak Japanese, as he left what he described as "hell".

UN Envoy De Mistura Steps Down

UN. Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura has announced that he will step down at the end of November for personal reasons. The Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has instructed him to verify whether a credible, balanced constitutional committee could be convened before he leaves office.

Participants at a Syrian peace conference in Russia in January had agreed to form a committee to rewrite the Syrian constitution. The committee will consist of 150 people: one third chosen by the government, one third by opposition groups and one third by the United Nations.

De Mistura said the Syrian government has expressed concerns over the UN list, and he hoped that next week their approval will give the go-ahead for the committee to begin work. However, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem told de Mistura that "The constitution and everything related to it is a purely sovereign matter that the Syrian people decide on without any foreign intervention through which some states seek to impose their will". Nine rounds of U.N.-based talks in Geneva have thus far failed to yield significant results.

France to Repatriate Jihadi's Children

France has announced that it will repatriate the children of suspected French jihadi fighters held by Syrian Kurdish forces, however their mothers will be left to face charges. Around 60 women, including 40 mothers with about 150 minors (most under the age of 6), have been reported in Syria by families in France. It is hoped that the children will return to France by the end of the year. There are estimated to be around 100 French fighters in the Idlib region, and dozens more in ISIS territory

Want to learn more about our work in Syria?
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