Saeed Soroush, 2019

Bi-Weekly Insights From the Middle East

01/04/2019 - 12/04/2019

Events in Iran rotated mainly around the damages caused by the floods and the US decision to label Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organization. In Syria, the Sochi Deal is constantly violated as the government forces and militants are still engaged in tit-for-tat battles. Although four months passed since the Stockholm Agreement, Yemen is still shaped by unrest with a clear absence for progress.

Iran

Two major developments hit Iran news headlines. Firstly, since the end of March 2019, continuous flood is drowning all over Iran. It started in its Northern region, in the province of Golestan and gradually speared all over the country. Currently, the flood is damaging one of the most important provinces in Iran, Khozestan, bordering Iraq and the Arabian Gulf[1].

In South Iran, dozens of villages and towns have been evacuated as authorities issued warnings for a fresh round of flooding in the regions bordering Iraq, home to a number of rivers and dams. So far, these continuous floods have claimed 70 lives, destroyed infrastructures and displaced thousands of people across Iran.

The Crisis Management Organization announced that the total financial loss due to the flood until 7 April is 1 billion USD[2]. To understand the extent to which this figure has impacted the Iranian economy, this amount represents 14% of Iran`s oil revenue (before sanctions), 5% of the general government budget and about half of the total health budget[3].

Another current development that occurred in the region pertained to the US Department of State announcement that Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), including its Qods Force, is a Foreign Terrorist Organization[4]. According to the US Department of State, the IRGC is the Iranian government's primary means of directing and implementing its global terrorist campaign[5]. In a reaction to this decision, the Iranian parliament passed a `double-urgency motion` to strengthen its military capabilities. Out of 198 MPs present in the session, 189 voted in favor of this motion, supporting and reinforcing IRGC`s measures against the U.S. In addition, the Iranian parliament responded by branding the American forces based in West Asia as a "terrorist" entity[6].

[1] (Iraninternational Persian) https://iranintl.com/ایران/افزایش-خسارات-سیل-در-سراسر-ایران؛-خوزستان-همچنان-بحران
[2] (BBC Persian) http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-features-47856068
[3] Ibid.
[4] https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-designation-islamic-revolutionary-guard-corps-foreign-terrorist-organization/
[5] Ibid.
[6] (Radio Farda) https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-s-parliament-votes-to-designate-u-s-military-as-terrorist-/29871263.html

Syria

Idlib's de-escalation zone is constantly violated as the government forces and militants are still engaged in what appears to be tit-for-tat battles with no end in sight[7]. Territorial changes and human loses remain unclear; nonetheless, local reporters suggest that more than 160,000 people evacuated to surrounding areas in their struggle to find a peace haven[8]. Internationally, Russian President Vladimir Putin hosted his Turkish counterpart Erdogan in Moscow where both leaders reiterated their discomfort towards the terrorists presence in Idlib[9]. Despite the absence of a clear agenda between the two powers on Idlib, President Erdogan expressed their determination to 'dismantle' terrorism that poses a threat on the national security of Syria and Turkey[10].

Eight people were killed following a bomb explosion in Raqqa, Northern Syria[11]. Raqqa previously served as the Caliphate's capital before the Syrian Democratic Forces captured the city in late 2017. The attack, which took the lives of four civilians and four SDF fighters, was claimed by Daesh through its Amaq news agency[12]. This is not the first attack of such nature in the SDF-held areas where Daesh is now adopting similiar guerella tactics. It is worth mentioning that the SDF has warned that Daesh militants will intensify their insurgent activities after loosing the Caliphate's final enclave in Eastern Syria[13].

SANA News reported that 'new batches' of Syrian refugees in Lebanon are returning to Syria[14]. Several buses carrying Syrians entered via Jdeidet Yabous broder crossing from Lebanon. The report did not mention the exact number of returnees; however, the government appears to organize their transportation to their home towns that 'were liberated from terrorism'[15].

[7] (SANA News) https://sana.sy/en/?p=162876
[8] (DailySabah) https://www.dailysabah.com/syrian-crisis/2019/04/11/2-civilians-killed-by-assad-regime-attacks-in-syrias-idlib
[9] (Hurriyet News) http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/erdogan-and-putin-praise-bilateral-relations-142515
[10] Ibid.
[11] (JPost) https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Bomb-explosion-in-Syria-kills-eight-people-wounds-three-586268
[12] (Reuters) https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-security-raqqa/bomb-kills-8-in-syrian-city-of-raqqa-idUSKCN1RL1S7
[13] Ibid.
[14] (SANA) https://sana.sy/en/?p=162802
[15] Ibid.

Yemen

Four futile months have passed since the agreements in Stockholm and the country is still shaped by unrest and the peace prospects are in turmoil. An explosion at a warehouse in Yemen's capital Sana'a took the lives of 13 people, including 7 children, and injured more than 100[16]. The Houthis accused the Saudi-led coalition of targeting the warehouse; however, the coalition repudiated the allegations claiming that it did not conduct any attacks in the area[17]. On the other side, the Yemeni government (currently based in Aden) stated that Houthis used the warehouse for storing weapons[18].

Internationally, both chambers of US Congress passed the vote to end the United States involvement in the Yemeni War[19]. Uncretainty still looms over how President Trump will respond to the Yemen resolution; however, reports are suggesting that a Trump veto will be the plausible reaction[20].
Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates pledged a $200 million in aid for the Yemenis in the holy month of Ramadan[21]. Both countries aim to work with humanitarian groups to deliver the aid both to the Houthi-held areas and to the areas controlled by Hadi's government, according to UAE Minister of State for International Cooperation Reem al-Hashimy[22].

[16] (NYtimes) https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/07/world/middleeast/yemen-explosion-warehouse.html
[17] Ibid.
[18] (TheState) https://www.thestate.com/news/article228944489.html
[19] (WPost) https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/house-passes-resolution-ending-participation-in-yemens-war-setting-up-trumps-second-veto/2019/04/04/9225dad0-56e2-11e9-8ef3-fbd41a2ce4d5_story.html?utm_term=.187a5a08f884
[20] (TheGuardian) https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/04/yemen-saudi-arabia-war-us-military-assistance-vote-congress-trump-veto-latest
[21] (MiddleEastMonitor) https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190408-saudi-arabia-uae-give-yemen-200-million-in-aid-for-ramadan/
[22] Ibid.

BRUSSELS INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The BIC-RHR is a research organization based in the capital of Europe that works to produce valuable insights into policy debates and political actions taking place in the MENA region and its effects on individuals.

We base our activities in three spheres of work: Social Outreach, Insights and Democratic Development. Combined, they provide a global perspective with actions focused on influencing the individual.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Middle East Team
Mohammed Sami
Elisa Cherry
Mona Salavi

/BICBrussels @bicrh @bicrhr

Avenue Louise, 89 - 1050 Brussels - Belgium

Tel: +32 02 725 84 66

www.bic-rhr.com

info@bic-rhr.com

BRUSSELS INTERNATIONAL CENTER