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Related Categories: Afghanistan; Middle East; Turkey

ISIS IMPOSES FUEL BLOCKADE

ISIS is blocking oil sales to northern Syria, an action that could significantly impair the ability of anti-ISIS rebels to fight against the so-called "caliphate." The blockade underscores the rebels' dependency on ISIS-produced crude. U.S.-led coalition airstrikes against ISIS have had a limited effect on its oil profits, as they are reluctant to hit the actual wells and have mostly targeted refineries. "[ISIS] is sitting on top of this oil and Americans won't bomb it...Everyone would starve to death because it's the only source of wealth in Syria and Iraq," explains Syria expert Joshua Landis. Some analysts say northern Syria will last less than two weeks without fuel. According to Wissam Mohammed, a member of the Euphrates Army, "The fighters are doing OK still...[b]ut if it goes on, I don't know what will happen...[ISIS] would cut the air and water if it could." (*Financial Times* June 18, 2015)

BAHRAIN SEIZES EXPLOSIVES BOUND FOR SAUDI ARABIA

Last week, Bahrain police stated that they had confiscated explosives and bomb ingredients heading towards Saudi Arabia and that the manufacturing of the materials was similar to those used by "proxy groups of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)." Such a charge is typical of Bahrain, which often accuses Iran of trying to undermine the small Gulf monarchy. According to police chief Major-General Tariq al-Hasan, the seized materials included "powerful explosive C4, commercial detonators, advanced circuitry, chemicals and mobile phones." Hasan stated that the most concerning aspect of the incident "is the fact that these sophisticated bomb-making materials were destined for Saudi Arabia, a sign that extremists are increasingly using Bahrain's borders as a launch pad...to carry out attacks elsewhere in the region." (*Al-Arabiya* June 18, 2015)

LIBYA'S TRIPOLI FORCES HIT ISIS

Fighters allied with ISIS have been gaining ground in Libya, which is suffering from a security vacuum caused by fighting between two rival governments: one based in Misurata, the other in the country's east. However, according to officials and witnesses Libya's self-declared government in Tripoli conducted airstrikes on ISIS militant positions in Sirte, a city east of the capital, earlier this week. Officials could not immediately confirm casualty counts. The *Daily Star* reports threat of ISIS still looms as "Libya [slides] deeper into internecine fighting." (*The Daily Star* June 22, 2015)

TURKEY WARNS U.S. ABOUT KURDISH ADVANCES IN SYRIA

Turkey has warned the U.S., NATO, and the United Nations Security Council of its "red lines" in regards to the Kurdish military's advances against Islamic extremists in northern Syria. According to a policy document reportedly approved by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, "There should be no demographic changes or population shifts on the Syrian side of the border as a result of Kurdish military offensives against Islamic State." With the support of U.S.-led coalition airstrikes, "the Kurds have united two cantons along the border, establishing a contiguous Kurdish region stretching from Kobani in the west to Hasakah Province in the east." Syria's Democratic Union Party (PYD), one of two main Kurdish parties, has denied that Kurdish fighters are "trying to engineer population shifts along the border" or create a "Kurdish corridor." (*Voice of America* June 22, 2015)

YEMENI REBELS PERSIST

Houthi rebels are continuing to resist a fierce Saudi-led bombing campaign, even threatening to extend the war beyond the country's borders, despite the fact that much of their seized territory has been destroyed. According to Houthi fighters and foreign analysts, beginning in early May the rebels "launched near-daily attacks over the mountainous frontier into Saudi Arabia, even firing a Scud missile." The Saudis had hoped their airstrikes and air and naval blockade of Yemen would force the Houthis to retreat to the north; however, according to Christopher Davidson, such objectives have not been achieved. "For the Houthis to win, all they have to do is hold their positions." In addition, the Saudi airstrikes appear to have led Yemenis living in heavily targeted villages in the north of the country to "rally around the Houthis." (*Washington Post* June 21, 2015)