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## IRAQ/SYRIA

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This week has been one of mixed fortunes for the Islamic State (IS) terrorist group. There appears to have been no effort to retake ground lost to the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in Tikrit last week. On the other hand, the Iraqi and Shi'a militia forces have had difficulty consolidating the recent gains. A bit of strategic and diplomatic confusion complicates the issue, as the United States-led Air Coalition has become a factor. The United States is determined to provide Air Support, when possible, for the ISF during their current offensive, but Iranian representatives/advisors with the ISF and the Shi'a militia refuse to fight with assistance from the Air Coalition. With the recent diplomatic mini-rapprochement between the United States and Iran, which has resulted in serious face-to-face negotiations vis-à-vis the issue of Iran and nuclear energy, many expected that the Iranians in place with the ISF wouldn't object as strongly as usual to American involvement. But the issue here goes beyond the U.S. Air Force. The Obama Air Coalition includes the Air Forces of Kuwait, Qatar, the U.A.E., and Saudi Arabia, most of whom are bitter opponents of Iran. The objection may have everything to do with fighting alongside the Saudis

and nothing to do with the U.S. Air Force. Whatever the case, TFG is concerned that an opportunity to overwhelm the IS in the strategic area around Tikrit may be lost. At the moment, it does not appear the IS is able or willing to put up serious opposition to losing complete control of Tikrit. The remaining IS forces in Tikrit are hold-up in areas that are heavily booby-trapped; the IS may be prepared to lose Tikrit, but they have designed a departure statement that intends to inflict heavy casualties. From a wider perspective, the total control of Tikrit will allow the ISF and the militia to extend the current offensive operation in all directions, giving relief to a number of isolated military garrisons including Baiji. TFG believes that the key to achieving a very decisive victory is not letting up on the gas. The offensive must continue while the ISF has the resources and the initiative, and the IS appears to have neither. But we've learned that the IS, like cockroaches, will replenish quickly if not exterminated when the opportunity exists. Media reports indicate that the IS has recently received a noticeable increase in volunteers and financing. The ISF must push the IS as far out of Iraq as possible, while the odds are in their favor.



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SAUDI ARABIA/IRAN/YEMEN

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The recent bombing of Houthi positions in Yemen by the Saudi Royal Air Force indicates that the Saudis are indeed unhappy about recent developments in Sana. Foreign military units have begun to evacuate their nationals from Aden, as concern grows of a Houthi offensive in that direction. The Indians, Pakistanis and the Chinese have evacuated nationals from Aden in the last two weeks. Actually, Aden is feeling pressure from two directions, as Al-Qaeda has been targeting the southern city for many months, especially when the former Yemeni government in Sana was still a legitimate presence. Whoever is in charge of Aden at the moment is a bit of a mystery. No doubt the Houthis are on their way, and Al-Qaeda has been digging itself into the hills of southwestern Yemen for years. The former Sunni government, which is still recognized and supported by Saudi Arabia, has a pretense of authority, but today the name of the game in Aden is “sit and wait for the Houthis”. The Houthis were reportedly moving military resources toward the Saudi border, but for what purpose remains a mystery. Up to this point, the Saudis appear content to express themselves through the Royal Saudi Air Force, as mobilizing armor for a ground thrust into Yemen would require positioning on the opposite side of the Rub al-Khali. Certainly

roads exist, and the Saudis, if pressed, could move armor to the border with Yemen. But it would be an enterprise that would be impossible to keep discreet from the international media. It is possible that the Saudis are going to wait until the eventual full-on confrontation between Al-Qaeda and the Iranian-supported Houthis has occurred. Once the Houthis are in control of both Sana and Aden, no doubt they will move to root out Al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda has been hiding out in this part of Yemen for decades, and the real estate has proven to be very useful over the years. What is the wild card here? Is it Saudi Arabia? Oman, maybe?

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IRAN/USA

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For the moment, the Obama Administration and the Iranian government of Hassan Rouhani in Tehran (as opposed to the Iranian government of Prime Minister Ayatollah Ali Khamenei that sits in Qom) have concluded negotiations aimed at resolving the issue of controversial Iranian nuclear research. A deadline was set, which has been passed, with no concrete agreement in place. Interestingly enough, the parties concerned both expressed cautious optimism regarding the overall progress of the discussions. Even the European observers commented that the differences did not appear insurmountable. For Israel and persons



concerned with this effort on behalf of the Obama Administration, a real issue seems to be the question of inspections. In the past, both North Korea and Iraq were able to delay, confuse and ultimately thwart the efforts of United Nations Inspectors. Iran would prefer that the Inspectors include representatives from Russia and China, which highlights the political and flawed nature of an Inspections regime. It all boils down to, who gets to decide what? If the Inspections teams rotate, can there be any question that the Russians and the Chinese would be reliable? TFG is convinced that if the negotiations are allowed to continue, that an agreement of some measure will be signed. The Obama Administration is putting tremendous pressure on Secretary of State John Kerry to pull a rabbit out of his hat, and Easter Surprise, if you will, that will provide a bit of a cushion for the Obama Legacy.

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#### SPAIN/FRANCE

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Evidence continues to be collected by French authorities regarding last week's crash of a Germanwings Airbus 320 in the French Alps. The German, French and Spanish government have all gone on record as identifying the German Co-Pilot Anton Lubitz, as being responsible for the disaster which took the lives of all 150 persons on board.

Questions regarding the actions taken, or lack thereof, regarding Lufthansa and Lubitz, continue to cause headaches for the German Flag-Carrier. Lufthansa has already announced a company-wide review of policy, to ensure that a similar situation never occurs. For the survivors of victims, there will always be questions as to why Lubitz was allowed into the cockpit on that day, given the ample warnings provided by his physicians and therapists.

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#### NIGERIA

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On March 28, 2015, the people of Nigeria elected former General and Junta leader All Progressive Congress (APC) candidate Muhammadu Buhari as President. The expensive and widely-observed election proved to be a surprisingly easy victory for Buhari, over the incumbent Jonathan Goodluck of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Last week, in contrast to most international media sources and pollsters, TFG followed the guidance of our extensive source network in Nigeria and predicted a comfortable Buhari victory. Although most analysts considered the race too close to call, TFG believed that Buhari is in position to win comfortably. Buhari, a northerner and a Muslim, has recently made inroads in traditionally PDP territory, including



Lagos. Although the PDP has made less-than-discreet efforts to turn the election into a referendum on the problems in the Muslim north, the high-unemployment and the government's almost comical inability to combat Boko Haram received more media attention. Surprisingly, the election results were accepted across the nation with very few reports of unrest. Credit must be given to outgoing President Jonathan Goodluck for his gracious and encouraging responses to the election. With the recent positive military operations against Boko Haram as a backdrop, TFG believes this election can provide Nigeria the impetus it needs to become a giant in job creation, and overtake South Africa as the economic powerhouse of the continent (sure, the petroleum

helps, but no one ever claimed unfair advantage for South Africa's metal and mineral resources).



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## DISCLOSURES

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