



Home Office

Home Office Response to IAGCI Review

Syria: security and humanitarian situation, December 2014

November 2015

Review Conclusions/ Recommendations		Response	Home Office Comments
1.	<p>Summary:</p> <p>'... the CIG for Syria generally provides a good overview of the situation in Syria.</p> <p>'There are however, tendencies in the report, to omit footnotes when reproducing text, and to leave in old evidence/information... It is important that the CIG is kept up to date and references to old material removed, unless the purpose of the old material is to provide an historical account.</p> <p>'Finally, when assessing source reliability, it is important to consider source accessibility to the territory of Syria, whether the sources are first, second or third-hand and any potential bias the author of the source may have before including a source in the report.'</p>	Accepted	<p>We will correct omissions / weed out older and no longer relevant in the updated CIG.</p> <p>As a general observation on the HO comments below in relation to the reviewer's recommendations of updated material, we will include these sources in the forthcoming CIG where they remain relevant and have not been superseded by more recent material.</p> <p>Our practice is to undertake a careful of assessment of sources before using material and go to the original source, rather than quote a secondary or tertiary source - the review is a useful reminder that we need to do this consistently.</p>

2.	<p>On four occasions text was quoted without quoting the relevant footnoted material that appeared in the original text. This prevents the reader from knowing the true source of the information. For the sake of transparency and to avoid round tripping and false corroboration, as mentioned above, here suggestions relating to three of the four examples (the fourth occasion relates to information on Chemical Weapons and therefore is dealt with below):</p> <p>2.3.5: Charles Lister at Brookings provides the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2011 (fn) and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (fn 27) as sources for his observations. This was not present in the CIG.</p> <p>The Military Balance publication produced by the International Institute for Strategic Studies is not open source so there is no way to check this reference. However, it is suggested that the report make it clear that this is where the information came from. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has been widely discredited. It is suggested that all material coming from this source that has not been corroborated be removed.</p>	Accepted	We will update in the next iteration
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3.	<p>Second example (above):</p> <p>2.3.11: Charles Lister provides the source for quantity of NDF personnel as the wall street journal (fn 29) and his information about Hezbollah as coming from an interview with Philip Smyth (fn 30).</p> <p>It is suggested that either the original sources missing from the text of the CIG be cited or this material be removed. The reason for the proposal to remove is two-fold: Firstly, this is not the Best Evidence, Charles Lister's speciality is on opposition groups and not on Government forces/ supporters of the Syrian Government. It is not plausible that he would have credible reports from both sides of this conflict. Secondly, it is hard to see which part of the Home Office Policy this COI supports.</p>	Not Accepted	<p>Para 2.3.11 is only about Hizbullah so we do not need to reflect the original source for the NDF.</p> <p>The information about Hezbollah is from an interview between Charles Lister and Phillip Smyth. We could more accurately reference this information and identify the source, but see no clear reason why this information should be removed – it appears consistent with other material cited.</p> <p>The observation that it is hard to see which part of HO policy the COI supports would appear to fall beyond the scope of the review, which is focus on the COI only. Regardless, it is simply provides information about the extent of the Hezbollah's involvement in the conflict as context to understanding the conflict and the actors involved – it doesn't have to directly support the policy position per se.</p>
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4.	<p>Third example (above):</p> <p>2.3.14: A paragraph from the Congressional Research Service has been quoted without specifying the primary resources they used and mentioned in their footnotes.</p> <p>The actual text refers to a video by the Christian Science Monitor, two references from the CTC (Combatting Terrorism Centre) Sentinel and a reference to the New York Times. It is recommended that the text in the CIG is transparent about the use of these sources.</p>	Accepted	We will update in the next iteration
5.	<p>On one occasion there appeared to be an example of selective quoting:</p> <p>2.3.3: The August 2014 Report from the UN Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic has been cited but without a key section in the middle. The part before and after the bit that has been left out speaks of military losses while the bit that has been left out speaks of military gains: "14. Military successes in Dara'a and Idlib governorates underscored some armed groups' ability to prevent the Government from regaining full control over the territory. In most of those victories, armed groups labelled as moderate continued to operate under ad hoc operation rooms, closely coordinating with extremist groups, including Al-Qaida affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra."</p> <p>Add the paragraph that has been left out to the CIG so as to give a complete picture.</p>	Accepted	We will update in the next iteration, should material remain relevant and has not been superseded by more recent material.

6.	Charles Lister has extremely good evidence on opposition groups, he would not be the best source to cite when measuring elements of government capacity or control. On that basis, it is recommended that the information quoted from Brookings in paragraph 2.3.1 is removed.	Not accepted	<p>Para 2.3.1 provides a useful overview of the situation in Syria. While Charles Lister might not be the only or best source on this, the reviewer does not suggest this scene-setting information is incorrect or misrepresentative.</p> <p>But if there is a better source, we'd welcome alternative sources.</p>
7.	<p>On three occasions the information provided was out-dated; here are the examples and suggestions:</p> <p>1.3.7: The CIG states that "UNHCR identifies among its risk profiles..."</p> <p>Since that time and before this report was published UNHCR superseded its advice.</p> <p>It is suggested the above quote is replaced with suggested text from page 15 of Update III</p>	Accepted	<p>We will update in the next iteration with the most recent material.</p>

8.	<p>Second example (above)</p> <p>2.4.4: This paragraph refers to the UNHCR Protection considerations as published in October 2013. As noted elsewhere in the CIG, these guidelines had since been updated. The information provided that “frontlines are reported to be heavily static overall” was out of date at the time of the report. The latest guidelines at the time of the CIG report indicate, “frontlines keep shifting and formerly safe areas become embroiled in conflict”</p> <p>Update the information with the text found in UNHCR: International Protection Considerations with regard to people fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic, Update III, October 2014 at paragraph 5.</p>	Accepted	We will update in the next iteration
9.	<p>Third example (above)</p> <p>2.4.5: This paragraph references the Commission of Inquiry report submitted in February 2014. The two paragraphs quoted represent material that is no longer pertinent in December 2014, when the CIG was updated as it refers to a time when ceasefires were being brokered prior to the Geneva II conference. More up to date information can be found in the conclusion section of the subsequent Commission of Inquiry report submitted in August 2014 and referenced elsewhere in the CIG.</p> <p>It is recommended that paragraph 2.4.5 be removed, and if necessary replaced.</p>	Accepted	We will update in the next iteration
10.	<p>Paragraphs 2.3.13 and 2.3.14 refer to the Iraqi Shia group Liwa Abu Fadl al-Abbas (LAFA), then it moves to the Suqur al Sahara (Desert Falcons) at paragraph 2.3.15 and then reverts back to Liwa Abu al Fadhal al Abbas (LAFA) at paragraph 2.3.16. It is suggested the two separated sections on LAFA are merged.</p>	Accepted	We will update in the next iteration

11.	<p>3.2 Paragraphs 1.3.15, 2.4.1, 2.5.1, 2.5.2, 2.5.3 and 2.5.5 all provide a different version of the statistics; the statistics being the number of people displaced, in need, reached, besieged etc. This is because some sources are older than others or are simply inconsistent. It is recommended that the CIG provide one set of figures and refrain from quotes that are inconsistent with the one chosen.</p> <p>Within the context of Syria, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) publishes the official figures that all of the United Nations is supposed to use. It is on the basis of the figures calculated by OCHA that appeals to governments for funding or raising awareness on the humanitarian situation is made. However, as OCHA is the organisation responsible for the coordination of humanitarian assistance inside Syria as well as information management the most reliable figures available must come from them. It is therefore advised that statements made by Valerie Amos, the Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, statements made in documents requesting funding (such as the yearly Syrian Humanitarian Response Plan) and statements made by OCHA themselves are taken as the most authoritative on the humanitarian figures. The situation in Syria changes rapidly so these figures should be double checked at the time of drafting.</p>	Partially Accepted	<p>Thank you for this observation.</p> <p>We will continue to use UNOCHA data, however other sources may still be able to provide reliable and up to date data which, after assessing their methods, we may make use of.</p>
12.	<p>Reports coming from the UN Special Representative to the Secretary General on children and armed conflict (henceforth SRSG on children and armed conflict) were surprisingly missing from this analysis. The SRSG on Children and Armed Conflict published two reports before the CIG was issued. This is primarily [reliable] because the SRSG on Children and Armed Conflict actually visited Syria herself on two occasions.</p>	Accepted	<p>Thank you for the suggestion; we will update in the next iteration</p>

13.	<p>Paragraph 2.4.6 refers to Chemical Weapons. There have been a lot of rumours around this area with little in the way of concrete facts. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FC) report refers to reports drafted by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). It therefore makes sense to cite OPCW rather than the FCO, especially as this is whom the FCO is quoting and because OPCW reports provide more relevant detail. For example; with regards to Chemical Weapons in Syria, the fact finding mission found ““compelling information” that a toxic chemical was used “systematically and repeatedly” as a weapon in villages in northern Syria earlier this year. [...] The report says chlorine was used in attacks on the villages of Talmanes, Al Tamanah and Kafr Zeta, all located in northern Syria”. For a full list of OPCW reports and briefings visit the OPCW website.</p>	Accepted	We will update in the next iteration
14.	<p>At paragraph 2.1.1 the BBC website is cited for background information. However, when one clicks on these links it is clear that the wording is slightly different; it probably has been changed since it was last accessed in 2014. It is suggested that a more fixed form of country information such as a report rather than online news be used to source the background information as websites are constantly updated.</p>	Not Accepted	<p>While this is a sensible point, we think there is continuing value in using the BBC which is recognisable and accessible source. Links for more ‘fixed’ sources can change as well. That said, if the reviewer is able to provide a stable alternative source, we’d welcome this.</p> <p>We will check <i>all</i> links upon review to ensure that they are the most up-to-date.</p>
15.	<p>Paragraph 2.4.3 refers to a Human Rights Watch Report in April of 2013 that referred to the regime’s “deliberate and indiscriminate” bombing of civilians. The actual HRW report is: Human Rights Watch, Death from The Skies: Deliberate and Indiscriminate Air Strikes on Civilians, 10 April 2013, ISBN: 978-1-62313-0039, available at: http://www.refworld.org/docid/5178e03f4.html [accessed 10 November 2015]. It is suggested that this reference is directly cited.</p>	Accepted	We will update in the next iteration, if the source has not been superseded.

16.	<p>At paragraph 2.4.6 reference is made to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office report that in reference to the use of chlorine gas states that “On 29 May the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) announced a fact-finding mission to Syria to establish the facts around these alleged attacks”. Reference to the original report makes it clear that this announcement was in-fact made on 29 April. The same paragraph goes on to refer to an interim report prepared by OPCW. As the FCO report does not provide citations, it is difficult to know to which interim report they refer. Statements in the rest of this paragraph such as:</p> <p>“we cannot say for certain who is responsible, but we know that Syria lied about the existence of their chemical programme for many years and used chemical weapons on a significant scale in 2013”</p> <p>and in the following one:</p> <p>“we remain deeply concerned about the gaps and discrepancies in Syria’s declarations to the OPCW. The regime’s history of lies...”</p> <p>These are opinions of the FCO and not something OPCW would have ever said, especially with staff still inside Syria. All states do not agree with these opinions. It may be a matter of policy for the Home Office to put it in, however it is suggested that the report makes it clear, whose opinions these are. A less detailed reading of these paragraphs may lead one to believe that these are the opinions of OPCW. This is not the case.</p>	Accepted	This may be a matter of interpretation, but we will make this clearer in the next iteration of the CIG.
17.	Paragraph 2.4.7: There is a small typo, and _ where a “ should be.	Accepted	We will update in the next iteration
18.	<p>Paragraph 2.6.1 does not show where the quotes begin or end. It should say:</p> <p>“The US State Department report covering 2013 noted that “[r]elative freedom....women.”</p>	Accepted	We will update in the next iteration

19.	At paragraph 2.6.2, where the FCO report is cited as stating that “Road networks have been blocked without warning. Several major highways including Tartous-Latakia, Tartous Homs, Latakia-Aleppo, Homs- Hama, Homs-Damascus and Damascus-Jordan have been temporarily closed....”. This paragraph no longer appears on the website. It is also noting that the situation on the roads changes rapidly. It is suggested that this is removed from the CIG.	Accepted	We will update in the next iteration
20.	Additional sources suggested	Accepted	Thank you for the helpful and authoritative suggestions; we will consult these ahead of the next iteration