

# Middle East and North Africa

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## Eastern Mediterranean

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➔ **Israel-Palestine** **Supreme Court offered deal to Sheikh Jarrah residents, Gaza factions fired rockets at Israel, and Israel exchanged retaliatory attacks with Hizbollah for first time in years.** Israel's Supreme Court 2 Aug offered compromise deal to Palestinian families under threat of expulsion from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood, East Jerusalem, that would allow residents to remain in homes as tenants providing they pay annual fee to settler organisation; both residents and settlers rejected deal. In West Bank, Israel 11 Aug issued initial approval to begin construction of 863 housing units for Palestinians in villages in Area C (under full Israeli civil and military control) for first time in years, and pushed plans for 2,000 settlement homes. Elsewhere in West Bank, Palestinians in Beita town near Nablus city 6 Aug clashed with Israeli forces, leaving Palestinian man dead and dozens injured. Undercover Israeli forces 16 Aug killed four Palestinians in Jenin refugee camp during arrest raid of individual suspected of ties to Gaza-based militant factions. During raid on Balata refugee camp near Nablus, Israeli forces 24 Aug killed 15-year-old boy; Israeli forces have shot and killed over 40 Palestinians in West Bank since May. Israeli Defence Minister Gantz and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas 29 Aug held first high-level meeting in decade to discuss security and economic cooperation. In Gaza, ceasefire between Israel and Hamas grew increasingly fragile after rockets fired from Gaza at Israel for first time since May; factions 16 Aug fired two rockets at Israel. Hundreds of Palestinians 21 Aug marked 52nd anniversary of burning of Al-Aqsa mosque along border wall, where Israeli forces fired tear gas and live ammunition, injuring over 40 Palestinians. Israel same day launched air raids on four Hamas targets, wounding 11 Palestinians. Separately, Hizbollah claimed responsibility for salvo of rockets fired from Lebanon 6 Aug at disputed Shebaa farms area, triggering retaliatory attacks with Israel, including first Israeli air force strikes in Lebanon since 2013/2014 (see Lebanon). PM Bennett 27 Aug met U.S. President Biden, reportedly presenting "Plan B" strategy on Iran comprising small military and diplomatic actions.

↓ **Lebanon** **Central Bank's cut of subsidies dramatically worsened fuel crisis and sparked unrest; Hizbollah and Israel exchanged fire.** On economic front, worsening fuel crisis led to drastic shortages. Central Bank governor Riyadh Salameh 11 Aug halted provision of heavily subsidised exchange rates to energy importers, citing foreign currency reserves reaching lowest legal limit; decision would have forced importers to impose five-fold increase on prices for gasoline, but ministry of energy refrained from adjusting tariffs, leading to severe supply and distribution disruption. Resulting shortages caused generator operators to cut further service hours, hospitals to issue warnings about inability to care for intensive-care patients and kilometres-long queues at gas stations, where gunfire caused several casualties during month. Notably, security forces 14 Aug raided fuel storage to prevent hoarding or smuggling of fuel to Syria, causing gas explosion that killed more than 30 civilians and soldiers and injured dozens more. In response, President Aoun, govt and Central Bank 21 Aug agreed to extend fuel subsidies until end Sept at lower level, limiting price increases. Reports late month indicated violent incidents related

to shortages of gas and other goods continued, including in Maghdouche and Anqoun southern towns. Meanwhile, PM-designate Najib Mikati 5 Aug reported gradual progress toward formation of new cabinet and called meeting same day with Aoun “positive step forward”; Mikati and Aoun during month engaged in frequent direct negotiations on govt composition. By end of month, however, no breakthrough had been reached. Unclaimed rockets fired from southern Lebanon 4 Aug struck Israeli border town Kiryat Shimona; Israeli air force next day retaliated with air strikes in first such attacks inside Lebanon since 2013/2014. In response, Hizbollah 6 Aug launched 19 rockets at uninhabited areas of disputed Shebaa farms area, triggering Israeli mortar response. In incident underscoring lingering sectarian tensions, brother of teenager killed in Sept 2020 clashes near capital Beirut between Hizbollah and Sunni Arabs 31 July shot dead alleged Hizbollah-linked perpetrator in southern town of Jiyeh; relatives of teenager 1 Aug ambushed attendees at alleged perpetrator’s funeral, clashes left another five dead before army deployed to end confrontation.

➔ **Syria Govt forces continued to target rebels in south west, hostilities persisted between Kurdish and Turkish-backed forces in north east, and Idlib ceasefire held despite violations.** In Daraa province in south west, regime throughout month renewed attacks on Daraa city’s besieged al-Balad neighbourhood as Russian-mediated talks continued to falter, reportedly over local leaders’ refusal to surrender rebels and weapons; fighting killed at least 32, including 12 civilians, and displaced at least 38,000 people by 24 Aug. U.S. and EU 4 Aug condemned escalation of violence; UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen 12 Aug warned civilians face shortages of basic goods and said “near siege-like situation must end”. In Hasakah province in north east, Turkish-backed armed groups 18-23 Aug and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) shelled one another’s positions. Suspected SDF explosive device 19 Aug reportedly killed one Turkish soldier and two Turkish-backed combatants in Ras al-Ayn countryside. Turkish airstrikes targeting Peoples Protection Units (YPG) in northern Syria continued during month. In north west, March 2020 ceasefire held despite reported clashes, artillery shelling and Russian airstrikes in countryside throughout month that killed at least 23; notably, regime artillery shelling reportedly killed four children in Qastoun village in Hama province 7 Aug and nine people in separate attacks on Balshun and Kansafra villages in Idlib province 19-20 Aug. Explosion at training camp of jihadist rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham 24 Aug killed at least eight militants near Ram Hamadan village. In central desert, Russia continued airstrikes against suspected Islamic State (ISIS) targets, reportedly killing at least nine militants throughout month. Suspected ISIS explosive device 12 Aug reportedly killed two Iran-linked fighters. Israel reportedly launched airstrikes on Iran-linked targets near Hader town, Quneitra province, 17 Aug and on Homs province and weapons depot in Damascus countryside 19 Aug; latter reportedly killed four Hizbollah combatants. President Assad 10 Aug approved new cabinet; main portfolios unchanged.

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## Gulf and Arabian Peninsula

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➔ **Iran** **President Raisi took office, Vienna talks remained paused as Tehran continued nuclear activities, and international powers condemned Iran over recent maritime incident.** Ebrahim Raisi sworn in 5 Aug as country's eighth president, completing conservative takeover of centres of powers across Islamic Republic; Raisi same day indicated that "sanctions against Iran must be lifted and we will support any diplomatic plan that achieves this goal". Indirect U.S.-Iran negotiations in Austrian capital Vienna, however, remained on hold with new administration in capital Tehran yet to set date for resumption. Meanwhile, Iran's nuclear activities continued apace. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) 16 Aug reported that Iran's production of enriched uranium metal had yielded 200g enriched to 20% and next day confirmed that number of centrifuge cascades enriching uranium to 60% had doubled to two; IAEA Board of Governors set to produce quarterly report on status of Iran's nuclear activity in Sept. Amid diplomatic impasse, U.S. Treasury Dept 13 Aug blacklisted "individuals and business involved in an international oil smuggled network" linked to Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Tensions in maritime theatre continued, fuelling international opprobrium against Tehran. Following late-July deadly attack on tanker off Oman coast, Tehran 4 Aug submitted letter to UN Security Council denying involvement. U.S. military investigation 6 Aug concluded explosive-laden Iranian-made drone caused "extensive damage"; G7 same day condemned Tehran, underscoring "all available evidence clearly points to Iran", while U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 9 Aug told UN Security Council that "it is on all of our nations to hold accountable those responsible". In separate incident, UK Maritime Trade Operations 3 Aug warned of "potential hijacking" of tanker off United Arab Emirates' coast. As total COVID-19 fatalities rose, surpassing 100,000 deaths since Feb 2020 on 19 Aug, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei 11 Aug described pandemic as "country's number one problem today". Raisi 16 Aug said U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan (see Afghanistan) "should become opportunity to restore life, security and lasting peace"; UN during month warned in worst-case scenario as many as 150,000 Afghan refugees could flow to Iran in next six months (see Afghanistan).

➔ **Iraq** **Divisions emerged within political factions ahead of Oct elections, security operations targeted Islamic State (ISIS), and intra-Kurdish rivalry boiled over in Kurdistan.** Tensions rose within ethno-sectarian political blocs ahead of 10 Oct parliamentary elections. Within Sunni bloc, rivalry between Parliament Speaker Mohammed al-Halbousi, politician Mohammed al-Kabourli and challenger Khamis al-Khanjar escalated throughout month into acts of sabotage, including removal of campaign advertisement. Among pro-Iran Shia parties, tensions arose between factions of paramilitary coalition Population Mobilisation Forces (PMF), chiefly Asaib Ahl al-Haq and Kataib Hezbollah, which early Aug publicly accused each other of corruption. Hamid al-Yaseri, leader of PMF group Ansar al-Marjaiya, 14 Aug delivered speech describing resistance groups' loyalty to Iran as "treasonous". Shiite cleric and leader of largest parliamentary bloc Muqtada al-Sadr 27 Aug reversed July decision to boycott Oct election. In northern Baghdad, security forces 14 Aug launched large-scale anti-ISIS operation, arresting seven suspected ISIS members, and next day killed ISIS leader Mustafa Hassan Ismail. In Di-

yala province, security forces 18 Aug arrested three suspected ISIS members for attack on power lines. PM Kadhimi 23 Aug announced second operation in Tarimyah town, north of Baghdad. In Kurdistan region, infighting within prominent political faction escalated. Co-chair of Patriotic Union of Kurdistan Bafel Talabani 2 Aug issued decision to expel his cousin and co-chair Lahur Talabani from Iraq, in move that escalated July power struggle between two leaders; Lahur 3 Aug declared authorities had issued warrant for his arrest and said he had no intention of leaving, raising prospect of clash between Peshmerga brigades under each leader's command. President Barham Salih 3 Aug intervened to mediate, alleviating tensions. Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) 12 Aug conducted mortar attack on Turkish military base in northern Iraq, killing one Turkish soldier; reported Turkish drone and airstrikes 16-17 Aug around Sinjar district targeting PKK-linked Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS) and medical clinic killed at least ten people, including civilians and senior YBS member Said Hassan. Internationally, govt 28 Aug hosted regional summit with Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, the Emirates and some European countries to discuss avenues for cooperation, especially on economy and energy.

➡ **Saudi Arabia** **Huthis continued cross-border attacks and anti-corruption authorities arrested hundreds of officials.** Saudi-led coalition reported interception of Huthi drones/missiles targeting Khamis Mushait city on 4, 13, 22, 24, 27, 28, 29 and 30 Aug. Notably, authorities said Huthi drone attack 30 Aug targeted Abha airport, injuring at least eight people; coalition same day announced retaliatory attacks in Yemen's capital Sanaa. Anti-Corruption Commission 9 Aug announced July-Aug arrest of 207 current and former govt officials accused of bribery, abuse of power, and forgery in anti-graft crackdown spearheaded by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia reportedly terminated contracts of hundreds of Yemeni white-collar workers without official justification, raising prospect of potentially severe impact on remittances. Qatar 11 Aug appointed first ambassador to Saudi Arabia since intra-Gulf dispute erupted in 2017.

➡ **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** **UAE took steps to improve relations with main regional rivals Turkey and Qatar.** In effort to de-escalate regional tensions and focus on economic growth, UAE National Security Adviser Sheikh Tahnoun Bin Zayed Al Nahyan 18 Aug met with Turkish President Erdoğan in Turkish capital Ankara; Erdoğan same day announced prospect of "serious" UAE investments in Turkey and said he was open to meeting with UAE's de facto ruler Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Erdoğan's office 31 Aug announced Erdoğan and Al Nahyan had spoken by phone about bilateral relations and regional issues; UAE presidential diplomatic adviser Anwar Gargash same day commented call "very positive and friendly". In first visit of senior Emirati official to Qatar since resumption of diplomatic ties in Jan, Sheikh Tahnoun Bin Zayed Al Nahyan 26 Aug headed delegation visiting Qatar's emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani in Qatari capital Doha; discussions included bilateral relations, enhancing economic and trade cooperation and investment projects.

➡ **Yemen** **Fighting lulled in north but violence persisted in south amid tensions between govt and southern separatists; UN Sec-Gen appointed new special envoy, and UN sounded alarm over risk of famine.** In north, fighting quietened with post-Eid al-Adha reduction in fighting largely continuing throughout month. Huthis continued cross-border attacks into Saudi Arabia (see

Saudi Arabia). In south, Huthis made advances towards Shebwa governorate and other territories controlled by Yafa tribal confederation; Huthi pressure increased fragile security situation amid wave of tit-for-tat assassinations targeting govt and Southern Transitional Council (STC) officials. Alleged Huthi attack targeting Saudi-led coalition's al-Anad military base in Lahj governorate 29 Aug killed at least 30 soldiers and wounded at least 50 others. Saudi mediation attempts to broker power-sharing accord between Hadi govt and STC remained stalled. After govt-aligned speaker of House of Representatives 28 July decided to hold parliamentary meeting in eastern Hadramawt governorate, part of pre-1990 independent south, protesters 1 Aug in response to STC call for civil disobedience reportedly burnt tyres, blocked roads and closed shops in Seiyun and Mukalla cities in Hadramawt governorate. STC during month made series of unilateral security appointments; mid-month threatened to enforce independent local exchange rate in areas under STC control as Yemeni riyal early Aug fell below record YR1,060 to \$1 in govt-controlled areas. On diplomatic front, UN Sec-Gen Antonio Guterres 6 Aug announced selection of Swedish diplomat and current EU Ambassador to Yemen Hans Grundberg as new UN special envoy for Yemen; govt officials, Saudi Arabia and Oman 7 Aug welcomed appointment while Huthi chief negotiator next day said talks with Grundberg would be futile without progress toward reopening ports and airports. UN Assistant Sec-Gen for the Middle East Khaled Khairi 23 Aug raised alarm over fuel shortages, called on govt to allow entry of essential supplies into Hodeida port and urged all parties to stop "weaponizing the economy" amid Huthi-govt standoff over tax and customs payments at Hodeida port. UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths same day warned two thirds of population dependent on humanitarian aid and 5mn people in immediate danger of famine.

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## North Africa

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➔ **Algeria Political tensions ran high as deadly wildfires sparked violence in Kabylia and govt cut diplomatic relations with Morocco.** Angry mob 11 Aug lynched man to death in Kabylia region's Tizi Ouzou province, accusing him of sparking deadly wildfires which devastated region starting 9 Aug; victim, Djamel Bensmail, had reportedly travelled to help fight fires and assist in rescue operations; wildfires, deadliest in country's history, had killed at least 90, including 57 civilians and 33 soldiers, by mid-Aug. Prosecutor 12 Aug ordered investigation into killing, and authorities in following days reportedly arrested around 90 people for suspected involvement. After video calling for Kabylia to be wiped off Algeria's map circulated on social media, NGO Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights 17 Aug filed legal complaint for "incitement to hatred and violence". President Tebboune's office next day blamed wildfires on recently outlawed Movement for the Self-Determination of Kabylie (MAK) and Islamist movement Rachad, said MAK receives support from neighbouring Morocco. Govt 24 Aug cut diplomatic ties with Morocco, citing "hostile actions"; relationship between Algiers and Rabat has long been strained, notably over Western Sahara conflict. UN, Arab League, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and others next day called for dialogue between Algiers and Rabat to avoid escalation. Algiers prosecutor 26 Aug issued international arrest warrant against MAK leader Ferhat Mehenni for movement's alleged involvement in lynching

of Bensmail. Meanwhile, court in Tamanrasset town (south) 12 Aug sentenced journalist Rabah Karèche to eight months in prison on charges of “publishing false information endangering national unity and state security”, after he reported on protest movement by ethnic Tuareg minority in Ahaggar area earlier this year. Tebboune 28 Aug set early municipal and provincial elections for 27 Nov.

➔ **Egypt** **Amid ongoing violence in Sinai Peninsula, security forces faced accusations of extrajudicial killings.** In Sinai Peninsula, army vehicle 9 Aug struck explosive device south of Rafah town, leaving one army colonel killed and several soldiers wounded. Roadside bomb 12 Aug killed seven soldiers including officer and wounded six others near New Rafah town; Islamic State (ISIS) later claimed responsibility. Sniper fire targeted security forces throughout month in New Rafah area, leaving one soldier dead 20 Aug. Armed forces 1 Aug said they had killed 89 suspected ISIS militants in recent operation, and published video showing killings of two unarmed people; NGO Amnesty International 5 Aug called on public prosecution to investigate newly released video which apparently showed security forces engaging in extrajudicial killings in North Sinai. President Sisi 18 Aug signed into law bill granting Supreme Constitutional Court power to decide whether international agreements and court decisions are applicable in Egypt, potentially providing means for authorities to avoid enforcing country’s human rights commitments. Meanwhile, U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken throughout month faced pressure from range of parties, including Democratic caucus at House of Representatives and NGO Amnesty International, not to use national security waiver to release \$300mn in military aid for Egypt conditioned on human rights record. U.S. Central Intelligence Agency Director William Burns 15 Aug met with President Sisi and General Intelligence Service Director Abbas Kamel in capital Cairo, discussed ways to “enhance security and intelligence cooperation” on various issues including Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, Libya, Afghanistan and Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

➔ **Libya** **Implementation of UN-backed peace process stalled amid tensions between rival armed coalitions and rising blockages between parliament and govt.** Leader of Arab Libyan Armed Forces (ALAF) Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar 9 Aug ordered raft of appointments and promotions of senior military officials under his command; move came two days after Presidency Council (supreme armed forces commander as per UN-brokered political transition roadmap) cautioned against unilateral decisions to nominate or promote military officials. 5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC) – comprising military officers loyal to now dissolved UN-backed Govt of National Accord (GNA) and others affiliated with ALAF – 14 Aug called on Govt of National Unity (GNU) to suspend military agreements with all countries, said it had agreed on measures for “urgent removal of foreign forces and mercenaries”; GNA-aligned political and military figures accused JMC of overstepping its authority. UN 26 Aug welcomed creation of joint security force comprising members of rival coalitions to secure key water pipeline; joint force 29 Aug reportedly prevented sabotage attempt by gunmen affiliated with former Qadhafi-era official. Meanwhile, delegates of UN-backed Libyan Political Dialogue Forum 11 Aug failed to reach consensus on legal framework to hold elections in Dec, and House of Representatives (HoR) mid-Aug said it is drafting bill for direct presidential election. Amid repeated govt failure to obtain HoR approval of 2021 state budget, Oil and Gas

Minister Mohamed Oun 16 Aug warned budget stalemate put oil production at risk. After HoR speaker 25 Aug demanded that PM Dabaiba appear before chamber to be questioned about govt's performance or face no-confidence vote, Dabaiba 27 Aug accused HoR of obstructing govt and hindering elections, said body's reasons for delaying budget approval were "unrealistic and flimsy". Military prosecutor's office 5 Aug issued arrest warrant for Qadhafi's son, Saif al-Islam Qadhafi, over alleged ties to Russian security personnel suspected of war crimes in Libya in 2019; move came days after Saif Qadhafi revealed ambitions for political comeback in interview with U.S. newspaper *The New York Times*. Islamic State (ISIS) 23 Aug claimed responsibility for previous day car bomb attack against ALAF checkpoint in Zella area (south).

↓ **Tunisia** In worst political crisis since 2011, President Saïed extended parliament's suspension indefinitely, consolidating his power grab. Following late-July move to dismiss govt, suspend parliament and assume public prosecutor's powers, Saïed 5 Aug said there was "no turning back", dismissed "dialogue except with the honest" and pledged "rights and freedoms" would not be violated. Several prominent civil society organisations same day jointly called on Saïed to swiftly release roadmap for ending exceptional measures. Parliament Speaker Rached Ghannouchi 11 Aug acknowledged public anger over country's economic and political situation, pledged his Islamist-inspired An-Nahda party – which was part of coalition govt and largest group in parliament – would "engage in self-criticism" and review its policies to match Tunisians' aspirations; also stressed situation does not justify taking "step back from democracy". Saïed 23 Aug however extended suspension of parliament "until further notice". Dismissal of senior govt officials continued, including Economy Minister Ali Kooli and Communications Technology Minister Mohamed Fadhel Kraiem 2 Aug. Reshuffle of top security officials also under way: Saïed 18 Aug reportedly appointed new director general of national security and new commander of National Guard, while interior ministry next day appointed nine senior officials including new intelligence chief. Meanwhile, authorities 6 Aug placed senior An-Nahda official and former Minister Anouar Maarouf under house arrest over alleged abuse of authority; 12 Aug arrested 14 individuals including public officials and issued arrest warrants for three others, including former industry minister, for alleged corruption; former head of anti-corruption body Chawki Tabib placed under house arrest 20 Aug after security forces earlier same day took control of body's headquarters in capital Tunis. NGO Amnesty International 26 Aug said at least 50 people, including judges, senior state officials and civil servants, arbitrarily barred from travelling abroad over past month, noted total number facing travel bans likely to be far greater; Saïed 16 Aug said travel bans form part of efforts to prevent people suspected of corruption or of posing security threat from leaving country. Egypt 3 Aug expressed support for Saïed's "historic measures", while U.S. 13 Aug urged "swift return to ... parliamentary democracy", stressed "need to appoint a PM-designate".

➡ **Western Sahara** Tensions persisted as Polisario Front independence movement contested Rabat's economic and diplomatic moves on disputed territory. Polisario Front's representative in Spain, Abdulah Arabi, 7 Aug protested airline Binter Canarias' recent decision to resume flights to and from Morocco-controlled Western Sahara, arguing it constitutes "violation of interna-

tional law” and reiterating “any economic activity in the territory requires the consent of the Sahrawi people”. Algeria 24 Aug cut diplomatic ties with Morocco, citing “hostile actions”; relationship between Algiers and Rabat has long been strained, notably over Western Sahara conflict (see Algeria). UN Sec-Gen Guterres 27 Aug appointed Russian diplomat Alexander Ivanko as head of UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO); search for UN Sec-Gen’s personal envoy for Western Sahara still ongoing. Sierra Leone 30 Aug opened consulate to Morocco in Dakhla city in Morocco-controlled Western Sahara.