

# Middle East and North Africa

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## Eastern Mediterranean

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➔ **Israel-Palestine** **Israeli forces launched wave of arrests inside Israel and suppressed Palestinian protests in West Bank amid attacks by settlers; ceasefire between Israel and Hamas faced strains.** Following May deadly fighting between Israel and Gaza-based Palestinian factions that triggered widespread violence across Israel and West Bank, Israeli forces sought to restore security in what Palestinian activists claimed was attempt to suppress protests. Israel 3 June concluded operation that led to arrest of 2,142 citizens, 90% of them Palestinian. Israeli border police 5 June detained journalist Givara Budeiri, releasing her after four hours; International Press Institute director Barbara Trionfi same day slammed arrest. Israeli police 6 June detained twins Muna and Mohammed El-Kurd over their activism against removal of families from East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah; police same day clashed with protesters outside station before Muna's release. In Jerusalem, Israeli-run municipality 7 June issued demolition orders to residents of al-Bustan area in Silwan neighbourhood, giving some 1,500 Palestinian residents 21 days to evacuate and demolish their houses; court hearing on matter postponed until 7 Aug. Thousands of Israelis 15 June rallied in nationalist march around Jerusalem's Old City chanting "death to Arabs". While attempting to suppress protest, Israeli police injured over 30 Palestinian protesters. Citing marches, Hamas 15 June flew incendiary balloons into southern Israel; Israel 15-17 June struck Hamas military compounds in Gaza in first strikes since ceasefire, leaving no casualties. In Gaza, Egyptian delegation 3 June arrived to aid reconstruction plans. In West Bank, Israeli settlers 8 June shot and mutilated Palestinian man after setting fire to Palestinian-owned land in al-Rihiya village, south of Hebron city; settlers fired live bullets at Palestinians attempting to extinguish fire. Israeli forces 11 June shot and killed four Palestinian residents protesting illegal settler outpost in Beita town. Palestinian security forces 24 June killed prominent activist Nizar Banat, outspoken critic against Palestinian Authority's (PA) security coordination with Israel, leading to protests throughout West Bank against PA, which police repressed. In Gaza, Egyptian delegation 3 June arrived to aid reconstruction plans. New Israeli govt led by ultra-nationalist Naftali Bennett 13 June sworn in following power-sharing agreement between eight op-position parties, ousting Benjamin Netanyahu as PM.

➔ **Lebanon** **Political infighting continued to stall govt formation while Lebanese pound fell to record low amid worsening economic crisis.** Amid ongoing stalemate over govt formation, President Aoun 2 June released statement criticising PM-designate Saad Hariri's "continuous evading of responsibilities" that "constitutes a persistent violation of the constitution and national accord"; Hariri same day hit back stating presidency is held "hostage to the personal ambitions" of Jibril Bassil, Aoun's son-in-law and leader of Christian group Free Patriotic Movement. Economic crisis and living conditions continued to deteriorate. Protesters 2 June blocked main roads in capital Beirut to protest economic situation after court previous day suspended Central Bank decree that allowed withdrawal at better rate than fixed exchange rate; suspension reversed next day. Lebanese pound 13 June hit

low of 15,300 to dollar on black market, marking lowest rate since March. Workers 17 June held general strike to protest economic situation and political stalemate, accompanied by roadblocks in Beirut and other cities; Energy Minister Raymond Ghajar same day stated petrol subsidy is poised to end. Ministry of economy and trade 18 June raised price of subsidised bread for fifth time in one year. Lebanese pound 26 June dropped further to 18,000 to dollar, prompting new roadblocks and minor riots in Tripoli and Sidon cities as well as other locations. Energy ministry 29 June raised fuel prices. Meanwhile, international stakeholders maintained pressure. France 17 June convened virtual donor conference over concerns about pressure of economic crisis on Lebanese Armed Forces, with French defence ministry calling for “increased commitment and co-ordination from everyone”. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell 19 June berated govt stalemate as putting country on edge of “financial collapse”, warning EU response could include targeted sanctions; Borrell next day pinned “strong mistrust” as root of crisis.

➡ **Syria Clashes erupted in Manbij area in north east, Russian strikes in Idlib province resumed, and suspected ISIS militants killed dozens in central desert.** In north east, following 31 May-1 June clashes between Kurdish security forces and predominantly Arab residents protesting mandatory conscription in Manbij area that left at least eight dead, Kurdish civilian administration 2 June agreed to suspend conscription, release protesters and investigate shootings after meeting with local tribes’ elders same day; latter 7 June issued 17 requests, including permanent end to conscription. In Hasakah province, also in north east, landmine 9 June struck Russian military convoy in al-Asadiyah village, killing one soldier. In Idlib province in north west, March 2020 ceasefire continued to hold despite reported clashes, artillery shelling and Russian airstrikes in countryside throughout month that killed at least 31; notably, in Jabal al Zawyeh area, regime artillery and Russian airstrikes reportedly killed 13 civilians and militants affiliated with jihadist rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) 10 June, and at least another nine 17 June. In Daraa province in south west, unidentified gunmen 1-23 June reportedly killed eight former rebels who had enrolled in or struck reconciliation deals with govt forces while landmine killed at least four govt soldiers. In Aleppo province, missile strikes 12 June reportedly targeted hospital in Afrin town, killing at least 13 people; some observers suspected Russia while Turkey blamed Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG). In central desert, Russia continued air raids against suspected Islamic State (ISIS) targets throughout month, reportedly killing dozens; suspected ISIS militants 3-5 June reportedly killed 23 govt troops and Iran-linked fighters in separate attacks. Israel 8 June reportedly launched airstrikes on govt troops and allied militia fighters in capital Damascus, killing at least 11. U.S. 27 June announced airstrikes in Iraq and Syria targeting “facilities used by Iran-backed militia groups”; Iran’s foreign affairs ministry immediately criticised action and unidentified assailants 28 June fired rockets at U.S. base in Deir Ez-Zor province. Ahead of 10 July UN Security Council vote to renew cross-border aid mandate, World Health Organization 25 June warned failure to renew mandate could trigger new “humanitarian catastrophe”.

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## **Gulf and Arabian Peninsula**

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➔ **Iran Sixth round of nuclear talks made progress while UN temporary inspections agreement into nuclear sites expired with unclear next steps; Ebrahim Raisi elected president.** Following sixth round of indirect U.S.-Iran negotiations in Austrian capital Vienna held 12-20 June, Iran's lead negotiator Abbas Araghchi 20 June announced "we are closer to an agreement than ever" while U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan same day remarked there remained "a fair distance to travel"; it remains to be seen if agreement will emerge in remaining five weeks of Rouhani administration. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi 7 June briefed board of governors, emphasising Iran's lack of cooperation on addressing safeguards concerns at four undeclared nuclear sites. Arrangement concluded in Feb on facilitating continued IAEA monitoring of Iranian nuclear activity expired 24 June; IAEA next day called for "immediate response" on status of technical understanding, but Tehran had yet to agree on extension by end of month. Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant 21 June underwent electricity shutdown due to "technical problem"; Iranian media 23 June reported "an act of sabotage" against building owned by the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran. Regarding sanctions, U.S. Treasury 10 June blacklisted "members of smuggling network" allegedly linked to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards-Quds Force and Huthis in Yemen and same day removed sanctions on five individuals and entities, citing "verified change in behaviour or status". Treasury 17 June published COVID-19-related general licenses clarifying scope of humanitarian transactions with Iran. U.S. Justice Dept 22 June announced seizure of 33 websites linked to Iranian media. Following passage of two Iranian vessels late May suspectedly bound for Venezuela, U.S. State Dept 10 June warned Tehran against transferring weapons or illicit materials to Caracas. Meanwhile, ahead of presidential election 18 June, three of seven candidates pulled out of race; electoral authorities 19 June announced victory for judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi who won 61.9% of vote, with voter turnout at 48.8% - lowest in Islamic Republic's history; Raisi will take office as Iran's eighth president 3 August.

➔ **Iraq Amid ongoing calls to resolve targeted killings of activists, rockets attacks continued to target U.S.-led coalition and skirmishes broke out between Kurdish factions.** Rocket attacks against U.S.-led coalition forces persisted. Armed group 6 June launched rocket at Baghdad international airport base hosting coalition forces; U.S. troops same day shot down two drones above Ain al-Asad airbase, Anbar province. Three drones 9 June struck Balad airbase, Salahaddin province; rockets same day struck capital Baghdad, with no casualties reported. Iraqi armed forces 16 June shot down two explosives-laden drones over Baghdad military facilities. Rocket 20 June struck Ain al-Asad airbase, with no casualties reported. After pro-Iran armed groups linked to paramilitary coalition Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) vowed to increase attacks on coalition forces following 26 May arrest of Anbar PMF commander Qasim Muslih suspected of involvement in killings of activists, authorities 9 June released Muslih, citing lack of evidence, in possible sign of govt's desire to avoid confrontation with PMF. PM Mustafa al-Kadhimi 12 June met protesters in Nasiriyah city, stating "the assault on [activists] comes as part of a battle waged by the state against corruption". Protesters 20 June staged sit-in in front of Karbala court, Erbil city, demanding govt accountability for

May killing of anti-corruption activist Ihab al-Wazni. Meanwhile, tensions rose between Kurdish factions amid Turkish attacks on Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Ankara 5 June used drones to strike PKK forces near camp for internally displaced south of Erbil, killing at least three civilians; Turkish drone 13 June targeted PKK vehicle in Sulaymaniyah province, killing three militants and civilian driver. Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) during month established outposts closer to PKK areas; PKK 5 June launched missile at KRG convoy in Amedi district, killing at least one Peshmerga member; PKK 8 June launched rocket at border area of Zakho district, killing one Peshmerga member. Elsewhere, Iraqi military 14 June launched new operation against Islamic State (ISIS) militants in Jazeera region and Anbar, western Nineveh and Salahaddin provinces. U.S. 27 June announced airstrikes in Iraq and Syria targeting "facilities used by Iran-backed militia groups"; Iran's foreign affairs ministry criticised action.

➡ **Saudi Arabia** **Huthis continued cross-border attacks.** Saudi-led coalition 6, 10, 14, 17, 20 June claimed it intercepted explosive-laden Huthi drones targeting city of Khamis Mushait. Alleged Huthi drone 13 June fell on school in Aseer province, no casualties. Huthis next day said they launched drone at Abha airport. Saudi air defences 19 June intercepted 17 Huthi drones launched toward kingdom. Saudi-led coalition 23 June announced destruction of four Huthi drones targeting Saudi territory. Huthis 25 June claimed to have targeted King Khalid air base in Khamis Mushait with drone. Huthis 27 June announced launch of five ballistic missile and five drones at multiple targets. Meanwhile, U.S. Sec Def Lloyd Austin 2 June reportedly informed Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of U.S. administration's decision to withdraw anti-missile systems from Saudi Arabia; Saudi officials 21 June said this does not affect kingdom's capacity to defend itself.

↓ 🌐\* **Yemen** **Huthis reinvigorated offensive in Marib governorate, raising prospect of all-out summer offensive in coming month, while nationwide ceasefire talks remained stalled.** In north, after brief lull in fighting in first half of June between Huthis and govt-aligned forces, hostilities 19 June escalated in Marib governorate, with Huthis stepping up drone and missile attacks in Marib and across border in Saudi Arabia; fighting fuelled fears that Huthis may launch long-anticipated offensive to coincide with summer dust storms that limit Saudi-led coalition's airstrike capacity. Huthis' seizure of Marib city and surrounding oil and gas facilities could trigger mass displacement and cut off 90% of country's petroleum gas supply. Huthis claimed Saudi-led coalition 5, 18, 21 June carried out airstrikes in Marib and Saada governorates while Saudi air defences 19 June intercepted 17 Huthi drones launched toward kingdom (see Saudi Arabia). Meanwhile, ceasefire negotiations remain deadlocked. Omani mediation delegation 5-11 June travelled to capital Sanaa to meet Huthi leaders to discuss UN-backed ceasefire initiative. Huthis maintained position on unilateral reopening of Hodeida port and Sanaa airport as pre-condition for ceasefire talks and demanded withdrawal of foreign forces from Yemen. Saudi and Hadi govts insisted issues be treated as package, as discussed in 2020. Outgoing UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths in his last UN Security Council briefing 15 June painted "bleak picture" of conflict and expressed hope Omani mediation process will "bear fruit". In sign of growing U.S. frustration with lack of progress, U.S. Envoy for Yemen Timothy Lenderking 17 June blamed Huthis for failed ceasefire talks. Meetings between govt and Southern Transitional Council (STC) in Saudi capital Riyadh on implementation of 2019 Riyadh Agreement stalled.

STC 18 June suspended participation, citing govt intransigence; STC 21 June denied rejecting Riyadh Agreement and said it agreed to Hadi govt's return to southern city Aden as soon as possible. STC 26 June said it would end all communication with parties to Riyadh Agreement. Protests in south occurred throughout month, including in Aden and Taiz city, amid water and electricity shortages and ongoing depreciation of Yemeni riyal.

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## North Africa

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➔ **Algeria** **Legislative elections marred by repression and lowest voter turnout since country's independence.** Legislative elections called by President Tebboune with view to bolstering his legitimacy and extinguishing long-running Hirak protest movement held 12 June amid calls for boycott; voter turnout lowest since country's independence at 23%. Constitutional Council 23 June announced final results, with ruling party National Liberation Front (FLN) winning 98 out of 407 seats in parliament's lower house followed by independent candidates (84 seats), Islamist party Movement of Society for Peace (65 seats) and FLN's traditional ally National Democratic Rally (58 seats). Violent incidents reported on election day in several localities of Kabylia province, including clashes between youth and police in Bejaïa and Bouïra cities. Tebboune 30 June named Finance Minister Ayman Benabderrahmane as new PM, asking him to form new govt. Ahead of vote, authorities continued to step up repression, notably preventing 4 and 11 June Hirak protests in capital Algiers. Hirak 4 June launched online campaign to call for liberation of political prisoners, and NGO National Committee for the Liberation of Detainees 21 June recorded 261 "prisoners of conscience" across country, up from around 200 late May and 66 mid-April. Presidential decree 10 June widened Penal Code's definition of acts of terrorism to include any acts "undermining the integrity of the national territory", opening new avenue for prosecution of Hirak activists. Authorities same day arrested prominent Hirak figure Karim Tabbou and journalists Ihsane El Kadi and Khaled Drareni, released them after 24 hours. Authorities 13 June cancelled France-based TV channel France 24's accreditation citing "clear and repeated hostility toward our country and its institutions". Govt 7 June scheduled local elections for Sept.

➔ **Egypt** **Nile waters crisis with Ethiopia started to shake up domestic politics, and jihadist attacks regained intensity in Sinai Peninsula.** Various opposition figures tried to use diplomatic impasse over Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD, see also Nile Waters) to challenge President Sisi's rule. Left-wing and Nasserist opposition groups, along with public personalities 1 June launched new coalition with view to "defending Egypt's water rights", notably calling for binding agreement with Ethiopia. Spain-based businessman Mohamed Ali 9 June – whose online videos accusing Sisi of corruption triggered wave of anti-govt protests in 2019 – called on Egyptians to take to the streets 10 July and carry out "Nile Revolution". In response to rising pressure, authorities continued to clamp down on dissent. Family of former Egyptian Ambassador Yahia Najm, who has criticised govt's handling of GERD crisis, 6 June said authorities arrested Najm late May. In Sinai Peninsula, jihadists stepped up attacks against army and civilians. Islamic State-affiliated Sinai Province (SP) 3 June infiltrated army camp south of Sheikh Zuweid town, wounding at least four soldiers, and next day ambushed army patrol in same

area, reportedly killing or wounding four. IEDs 4 June killed or wounded passengers of pro-army militia vehicle south of Rafah town, and killed intelligence officer in Northern Sinai. Suspected SP combatants 8 June kidnapped five civilians near Bir al-Abd town. IEDs 15-17 June reportedly targeted army convoy and bulldozers in Rafah and Sheikh Zuweid areas; death toll unknown. Meanwhile, army 14 June killed senior SP official Abdullah Bariq al-Awassi south of Rafah.

↓ **Libya Tensions between rival armed coalitions rose and Islamic State staged first attack in a year; at Berlin conference, Libyan govt and foreign states renewed calls for elections in Dec and foreign forces withdrawal.** Forces loyal to now dissolved UN-backed Govt of National Accord (GNA) 5 June held military ceremony in Misrata city (west) to mark first anniversary of Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar's defeat in capital Tripoli; Haftar's Arab Libyan Armed Forces (ALAF) held their own military parade in Benghazi city (east) late May to mark seventh anniversary of launch of their "Dignity Operation". High-level Turkish delegation 12 June visited Tripoli and condemned parade by "putschist Haftar", prompting pro-ALAF MPs to denounce violation of Libyan sovereignty and triggering brawl in House of Representatives 14 June. Following months-long delay, PM Dabaiba 20 June said strategic road linking Misrata to Sirte city (centre) had reopened in line with Oct 2020 ceasefire provisions, which ALAF same day denied; 5+5 Joint Military Commission – comprising military officers loyal to GNA and others affiliated with ALAF – next day postponed reopening. In first Islamic State (ISIS) attack since May 2020, suicide bombing 6 June and explosive device 14 June killed six ALAF-aligned fighters in Sebha area (south). ALAF 17 June said it had launched counter-terrorism operation in south west and 19 June closed Essen border crossing with Algeria, prompting Presidency Council to same day ban military movements unless approved. Unidentified gunmen 3 June abducted NGO Libyan Red Crescent official Mansour al-Maghrabi in Ajdabiya city (east). At international conference co-sponsored by UN in Germany's capital Berlin, new interim national unity govt and foreign stakeholders 23 June renewed calls to hold presidential and parliamentary elections in Dec in line with UN roadmap, and for "all foreign forces and mercenaries" to withdraw "without delay" despite reservations from Turkey, whose forces are deployed in Libya. Ahead of 1 July deadline set by UN to clarify electoral roadmap and enact necessary legislation for Dec elections, delegates of UN-backed Libyan Political Dialogue Forum 28 June-1 July met in Switzerland in bid to break deadlock in negotiations.

➡ **Morocco Tensions remained high between Morocco and Spain over Western Sahara.** European Parliament 10 June approved resolution condemning Rabat's use of migrants, including unaccompanied minors, as tool of political pressure on Spain; Moroccan authorities in May had let thousands of migrants enter Spanish enclave of Ceuta in apparent protest at hospitalisation in Spain of Polisario Front independence movement leader Brahim Ghali. Moroccan FM Nasser Bourita 9 June accused Spain of "europeanising bilateral crisis". Ahead of holiday season, Rabat early June launched annual transit plan for its diaspora; scheme excludes all sea links via Spain, inflicting considerable economic damage on several Spanish transportation companies.

➡ **Tunisia** **Violent protests erupted on outskirts of capital Tunis over alleged police brutality and price hikes, while attempts to solve political crisis remained stalled.** Protesters 8-16 June clashed with police in several underprivileged peri-urban areas of Tunis, notably Sidi Hassine neighbourhood, after man died in police custody 8 June and video showing police stripping and beating 15-year-old circulated on social media next day. UN human rights office in Tunisia 14 June expressed concern over “serious and repeated violations” by police since early 2021 and some 100 civil society activists 18 June demonstrated in Tunis against police brutality. Amid continued economic crisis, some 2,000 people, mainly supporters of opposition Free Destourian Party (fuelled by nostalgia for former President Ben Ali), 5 June protested in Tunis against govt’s decision to scrap state subsidies on some basic commodities in exchange for International Monetary Fund’s aid package; scuffles reported between protesters and police. Meanwhile, relations soured between President Saïed and main trade union and political power broker UGTT after Saïed 15 June turned down UGTT’s national dialogue initiative, instead calling for dialogue over constitutional reform and electoral code; UGTT 18 June alleged Saïed was seeking dismissal of PM Mechichi prior to national dialogue and wanted to restore presidential system. Court of Cassation 15 June ordered release of media mogul and former presidential candidate Nabil Karoui after over six months in pre-trial detention on charges of money laundering and tax evasion.

➡ **Western Sahara** **Polisario Front independence movement leader testified before Spanish court and left country for Algeria.** Polisario Front leader Brahim Ghali 1 June testified before Spain’s High Court to answer accusations against him of alleged crimes, including torture and genocide; court allowed him to leave Spain where he had been treated for COVID-19 since April. Ghali overnight 1-2 June returned to Algeria and received President Tebboune’s visit in military hospital; in interview with French newspaper Le Point, Tebboune 3 June attacked Rabat and reiterated his full support to Polisario Front.