

# Middle East and North Africa

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## Eastern Mediterranean

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➔ **Israel-Palestine** Tit-for-tat attacks between Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza continued and Israel retaliated against Hizbollah for its strike in north. In Gaza, clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinian protesters near fence area 6 Sept left two Palestinians dead. Same day Palestinian militants fired five rockets into Israel, one landed near Sderot, no casualties reported, and Israel struck Hamas targets in Gaza. Palestinian drone 7 Sept damaged military vehicle in Israel, prompting bombing of three Hamas targets. Hamas night of 9-10 Sept reportedly shot down Israeli drone near Rafah in south. Palestinian militants 10 Sept fired two rockets into Israel over Ashkelon and Ashdod where Israeli PM Netanyahu was addressing campaign rally, both intercepted. Attacks between Israel and Palestinian militants continued 11 Sept. Israeli forces 25 Sept shot dead Palestinian near fence area during weekly protests. Following alleged Israeli drone strikes on Hizbollah assets in Lebanese capital Beirut late Aug, Hizbollah 1 Sept launched missiles from Lebanon into Israel, hitting military vehicle, causing no casualties. Israel same day fired artillery and conducted airstrikes targeting Hizbollah assets near border, no casualties. Hizbollah 9 Sept claimed it shot down Israeli drone over southern Lebanon. Following unclaimed airstrikes in Syria 8-9 Sept that left eighteen Iranian and Hizbollah combatants dead, Iran-backed militia in Syria 9 Sept fired several rockets toward Israel, which fell short of Israeli territory. Iraqi PM Mahdi 30 Sept said Israel was responsible for attacks in Iraq on Iranian-backed militia. PM Netanyahu 10 Sept pledged that, if re-elected after 17 Sept legislative elections, he would annex Jordan Valley and northern Dead Sea region in West Bank along Jordanian border. Israeli cabinet 15 Sept held meeting in Jordan Valley; Netanyahu same day vowed, if re-elected, to annex Jewish-settled parts of Hebron city in south of West Bank. Legislative elections resulted in stalemate between Netanyahu-led right-wing bloc and Benny Gantz-led centre-left bloc with neither winning enough seats to form govt.

➔ **Jordan** Thousands of teachers 5 Sept demonstrated in capital Amman to demand higher wages and clashed with security forces, who used tear gas to disperse protesters; 50 teachers arrested. Teachers' syndicate (JTA) 8 Sept launched nationwide strike demanding govt raise teachers' pay by 50% and accountability for security forces' conduct during 5 Sept protests, talks between govt and JTA failed to reach resolution.

➔ **Lebanon** Tensions between Lebanon and Israel remained high as Hizbollah and Israel exchanged cross-border fire for first time in years. Following alleged Israeli drone strikes on Hizbollah assets in capital Beirut late Aug, Hizbollah 1 Sept launched at least two anti-tank missiles into northern Israel, hitting military vehicle, but causing no casualties. Israel retaliated same day with artillery fire and airstrikes targeting Hizbollah assets near border, causing no casualties. PM Hariri same day called on U.S. and France to intervene. Israel 3 Sept accused Hizbollah of building missile factory in Bekaa Valley in east. Hizbollah 9 Sept claimed it had shot down Israeli drone over Ramiyeh in south near Israeli border; Israel said that drone had fallen down. U.S. 10 Sept issued sanctions against four Hizbollah members; 12 Sept

said future sanctions could target Hizbollah's allies. After deadly shooting in June left govt paralysed for weeks, two members of rival Druze parties 4 Sept exchanged gunfire in Choueifat just south of Beirut, no injuries reported. Protesters 29 Sept demonstrated across Lebanon over worsening economic situation; clashes between security forces and demonstrators reported in Beirut.

➔ **Syria** Govt forces backed by Russian airstrikes continued to take ground from rebels in Idlib province in north west, while U.S. and Turkish forces conducted first joint patrols in safe zone along Turkish border in north east. Russia failed to respect ceasefire in Idlib which it declared 31 Aug. Notably, Russian airstrikes 10 Sept hit town of Kabaneh killing one civilian. Regime forces 24 Sept advanced into Khan Shekhoun in Idlib; fighting left four regime fighters and two militants dead. Leaders of Russia, Turkey and Iran in Turkish capital Ankara 15 Sept signed joint communiqué saying they would establish constitutional committee in Geneva under UN auspices comprising members from govt, opposition and civil society to draft new constitution. Parties expressed commitment to uphold Sept 2018 Sochi agreement aimed at de-escalating conflict in Idlib. Russia and China 19 Sept vetoed UN Security Council resolution calling for ceasefire in Idlib; Russia vetoed because resolution lacked exemption for military operations against UN-designated terrorist groups. In north east, U.S. and Turkish troops 8 and 24 Sept conducted joint patrols in safe zone. Turkish President Erdoğan continued to threaten Turkish military action in north east if U.S. does not ensure creation of safe zone. At UN General Assembly, govt 28 Sept called for immediate withdrawal of U.S. and Turkish troops; said it had right to carry out countermeasures if demand refused. In east, suspected Israeli airstrikes 9 Sept killed at least eighteen Iranian and pro-Iranian fighters near Iraqi border; in Salihya, near Deir al-Zour city regime forces 20 Sept fired on protesters calling for removal from area of Iran-backed militias, killing two. Opposition Syrian Democratic Forces 13 Sept closed crossing points between areas under its control and govt-held areas to crack down on smugglers. Govt and Iraq 30 Sept reopened al-Qaim border crossing after several years. U.S. 10 Sept designated Al-Qaeda affiliate Hurras al-Din as terrorist group, offering \$5mn reward for information on group's leaders.

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## **Gulf and Arabian Peninsula**

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➔ **Bahrain** During meeting with U.S. President Trump at White House 16 Sept, Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa agreed to buy U.S. anti-aircraft weapons system.

↓ **Iran** Alleged Iranian attack on Saudi oil facilities caused tensions to rise sharply between Iran on one side and Saudi Arabia and U.S. on other and significantly raised tensions in region. Iranian delegation met French officials in Paris 2-3 Sept to discuss France's proposed deal, namely that Europe provides Iran \$15bn credit line until end of 2019 enabled by U.S. sanctions waivers in return for Tehran returning to full compliance with nuclear deal and negotiating table to discuss broader agreement. U.S. 4 Sept ruled out sanctions waivers. Following 14 Sept missile and drone strikes on Saudi oil facilities, Yemen's Huthis claimed they launched attacks but Saudi Arabia and U.S. held Iran responsible, Tehran denied. FM Zarif 19 Sept warned that any strike on Iran would trigger "all-out war". U.S. 20 Sept said it would deploy military forces and equipment to Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates to

deter Iran. E3 (France, Germany and UK) 23 Sept held Iran responsible for attacks. Despite efforts by French President Macron to facilitate face-to-face meeting, Presidents Rouhani and Trump declined to meet during UN General Assembly. Iran 7 and 16 Sept seized two ships in and near Strait of Hormuz which it accused of smuggling fuel. UK 10 Sept accused Iran of selling oil to Syria in breach of EU sanctions. Rouhani 22 Sept launched regional cooperation initiative to enhance Gulf maritime security. Govt made good on threat to further violate nuclear deal if by 6 Sept parties had not mitigated economic impact of U.S. sanctions; 7 Sept said it had started using more advanced centrifuges. Rouhani said Iran would further violate deal if parties did not provide economic relief by 5 Nov. U.S. continued to impose additional sanctions on Iran, including on its central bank. In north west near Iraqi border, clashes between border guards and unidentified gunmen in Marivan 6 Sept left at least two dead.

➡ **Iraq** Govt continued efforts to remain neutral amid U.S.-Iran tensions as unclaimed drone strikes continued to target Iran-backed paramilitaries, and security forces pursued operations against Islamic State (ISIS). Unclaimed drone strike on weapons depot of Iran-backed Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) in Anbar province 10 Sept killed 21 PMU members. PMU next day said it had downed surveillance drone in Diyala province. Unclaimed drone 22 Sept struck PMU base in Anbar province, no casualties reported. PM Mahdi 30 Sept said Israel was responsible for airstrikes on PMU. Govt 19 Sept said it would not join U.S.-led maritime security coalition for Middle Eastern waterways. PM Mahdi 25 Sept visited Saudi Arabia and held talks with Crown Prince Bin Salman aimed at reducing regional tensions. Iran's ambassador to Iraq 27 Sept said Tehran would not hesitate to attack U.S. in Iraq if it launched attack on Iran. Three attacks by unidentified gunmen in capital Baghdad 21-22 Sept left seven PMU militants and family members dead. Unidentified assailants 23 Sept launched several rockets at Green Zone in Baghdad, no injuries reported. Fight against ISIS continued. In Salah al-Din, Nineveh and Anbar provinces, clashes between security forces and ISIS 2-25 Sept reportedly left 46 militants and three members of security forces dead. In Karbala province, ISIS claimed 21 Sept bombing of minibus that killed twelve pilgrims. In Erbil, Nineveh and Diyala provinces, U.S.-led coalition and govt airstrikes 8-24 Sept killed twenty militants. In north, Turkey said it "neutralised" several dozen PKK militants 1-30 Sept. Clashes between Turkish forces and PKK in Haftanin region 22 Sept reportedly left seven militants and three soldiers dead. Govt 30 Sept reopened al-Qaim border crossing with Syria after years of closure.

➡ **Kuwait** Following suspected Iranian airstrikes on Saudi oil installations 14 Sept and drone sighting same day over capital Kuwait City, parliament 16 Sept urged govt to increase security. Army 18 Sept said it would raise its readiness levels and carry out military exercises. Govt 20 Sept raised security levels at oil facilities and commercial ports.

➡ **Qatar** Govt exchanged harshly worded statements with Saudi Arabia that quashed hope of mediation in intra-Gulf crisis. Saudi Arabia 7 Sept stated it expected Doha to fall into line with its regional policy and that there would be no solution to crisis "unless Qatar responds to the demands of the four countries [imposing blockade on it] and stops supporting terrorism, embracing extremists and stopping its in-

terventions in [their] internal affairs”. Qatar called Saudi statement “sudden and unfounded” and accused Riyadh of maintaining “coercive” approach of “denial and evasion” in dealing with dispute.

↓ 🌐\* **Saudi Arabia** Saudi Arabia and U.S. held Iran responsible for 14 Sept aerial attacks on oil facilities in east, which initially nearly halved oil production, causing sharp rise in tensions and raising risk of confrontation between Saudi Arabia and/or U.S. and Iran or its allies in coming weeks. Cross-border attacks between Huthis and Saudi Arabia could intensify in Oct if Huthis’ offer of unilateral suspension of attacks fails to produce mutual de-escalation agreement. Govt said drones and missile debris indicate Iranian-made technology and held Iran responsible, but did not echo U.S. claim that attacks were launched from Iran. Tehran denied responsibility. Govt 16 Sept invited UN experts to view oil facilities and said it would “take the appropriate measures” based on findings; experts began investigation in country 20 Sept. Govt 18 Sept joined U.S.-led initiative to secure Gulf waters called International Maritime Security Construct. Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman 18 Sept met U.S. Sec State Pompeo in Saudi city of Jeddah to discuss response to crisis; Pompeo described attacks as “act of war”. U.S. 20 Sept said it would deploy additional troops and military equipment to Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (UAE) in response to countries’ requests for assistance with air and missile defence systems. In Jeddah in south, Saudi-backed Yemeni govt and Yemen’s UAE-aligned southern separatist group Southern Transitional Council (STC) 4 Sept onward held indirect talks aimed at power-sharing agreement to end fighting, no outcome end-month. Yemen’s Huthis 18 Sept said they would cease attacks into Saudi Arabia; Saudi govt 27 Sept agreed to partial ceasefire in four Yemeni provinces including Huthi-controlled capital Sanaa. Huthis 29 Sept claimed that their 25 Aug cross-border offensive in Najran province, Saudi Arabia killed hundreds of Saudi soldiers and captured “thousands”; Saudi Arabia and Yemeni govt denied claim.

➡ **United Arab Emirates** Rift between UAE- and Saudi Arabia-backed forces in Yemen persisted, as Saudi-backed Yemeni govt refused to accept proposed power-sharing deal with Yemen’s southern separatists. In Saudi city of Jeddah, Yemeni govt and UAE-aligned southern separatist group Southern Transitional Council (STC) 4 Sept onward held indirect talks aimed at power-sharing agreement to end fighting, no outcome end-month. Huthis 18 Sept claimed they had identified dozens of potential targets in UAE for drone strikes. Govt condemned 14 Sept attacks on Saudi oil facilities. Emirates News Agency 19 Sept announced UAE would participate in U.S.-led initiative to secure Gulf waters called International Maritime Security Construct. U.S. 20 Sept said it would deploy additional troops and military equipment to Saudi Arabia and UAE in response to countries’ requests for assistance with air and missile defence systems.

➡ 🌐\* **Yemen** Fighting continued in south between pro-govt forces and southern separatists and troop movements suggest parties readying for escalation in coming weeks; and cross-border attacks between Huthis and Saudi Arabia could intensify in Oct if Huthis’ offer of unilateral suspension of attacks fails to produce mutual de-escalation agreement. In south, govt forces and United Arab Emirates-aligned southern separatist group Southern Transitional Council (STC) continued to clash in Abyan and Shebwa governorates and reportedly assembled fighters and equipment in strategic areas in preparation for new round of major fighting. Govt and STC held

indirect talks in Saudi city of Jeddah 4 Sept onwards aimed at power-sharing agreement to end fighting, no outcome end-month. While Huthis claimed responsibility for 14 Sept attacks on Saudi oil facilities, Saudi Arabia, U.S. and other foreign powers held Iran responsible. U.S. said attacks launched from Iran and described them as “act of war”. Saudi-led coalition 20 Sept launched airstrikes on Huthi positions near Hodeida targeting sites used to develop sea mines. Huthis 23 Sept claimed that coalition airstrikes in Amran governorate killed five civilians. Coalition airstrike in Qataba, Dhale province 26 Sept killed at least sixteen civilians including seven children. Huthis 18 Sept said they would cease attacks into Saudi Arabia; Saudi govt 27 Sept agreed to partial ceasefire in four Yemeni provinces including Huthi-controlled capital Sanaa. Huthis 29 Sept claimed that their 25 Aug cross-border offensive in Najran province, Saudi Arabia killed hundreds of Saudi soldiers and captured “thousands”; Saudi Arabia and Yemeni govt denied claim. Stalemate in Hodeida persisted: in 9-10 Sept meeting, Redeployment Coordination Committee comprising govt and Huthi representatives failed to agree on who would provide security in Hodeida port following redeployment of military forces. Huthis 30 Sept said they would release without conditions 350 prisoners in attempt to deliver on stalled UN-brokered prisoner exchange deal agreed in Dec; released 290 by end-month.

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## North Africa

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↓ **Algeria** Security forces hardened crackdown on protest movement, stepping up arrests and banning people from outside capital Algiers to join protests there, as govt stuck to plan to hold presidential election by end of year. In Algiers and other major cities, hundreds of thousands continued to demonstrate every Friday and students gathered every Tuesday to demand departure of Interim President Ben Salah and PM Bedoui, end to de facto rule of army chief of staff Gaïd Salah, and election of constituent assembly to reform radically governing system. After national committee of dialogue and mediation 8 Sept recommended in its final report holding of presidential elections, Ben Salah 15 Sept said poll would take place 12 Dec. Former PMs under Bouteflika Ali Benflis and Abdelmadjid Tebboune 26 Sept announced their candidacies. Several opposition parties said they would boycott election. Security forces arrested demonstrators and protest movement figures: 11 Sept arrested former opposition party leader Karim Tabbou, released him 25 Sept, re-arrested him 26 Sept, 13 Sept arrested 22 demonstrators in Algiers, 16 Sept arrested civil society activist Samir Belarbi. Gaïd Salah 18 Sept hardened his tone, ordering army to prevent people from outside Algiers entering capital to join protests; security forces 20 and 27 Sept set up roadblocks on roads into city to stop people joining Friday protests. Authorities continued to arrest current and former officials on allegations of corruption: 18 Sept arrested former Telecommunications Minister Moussa Ben Hammadi and 19 Sept put in pre-trial detention for “destruction of official documents” MP Mohamed Djemai, elected president of ruling party National Liberation Front shortly after President Bouteflika resigned in April. Military court 25 Sept sentenced Bouteflika’s brother Said along with three co-defendants to fifteen years in prison for plotting against state and undermining army.

↓ **Egypt** Thousands demonstrated across country calling for President Sisi’s resignation; in response security forces deployed in main cities and arrested around

2,000. Thousands 20 Sept marched in several cities including capital Cairo, Alexandria, Damietta and Suez, chanting anti-govt slogans. Protests continued next day in Suez. Protests erupted after former businessman Mohamed Ali, who lives in Spain, posted videos online in which he accuses Sisi of mismanagement and misuse of public funds; videos went viral early Sept. In televised speech 14 Sept, Sisi denied allegations. In hours after protests, security forces carried out arrests and increased their presence in main cities, including Cairo's Tahrir Square. Human rights group 26 Sept said police 20-25 Sept arrested about 2,000 people in relation with protests. Thousands of police deployed in Cairo and closed Tahrir Square 27 Sept to prevent new Friday protests. Court 11 Sept sentenced eleven Muslim Brotherhood leaders, including former Supreme Guide Mohamed Badie, to life in prison on charges of spying on behalf of Palestinian Islamist group Hamas. Insecurity persisted in North Sinai. Army vehicle triggered explosive device near Sheikh Zuweid 17 Sept, two soldiers reportedly killed and eight injured. Police 22 Sept raided suspected Islamist militants' hideout west of al-Arish city and killed fifteen. Islamic State (ISIS) 27 Sept attacked military checkpoint near Bir al-Abed, seven soldiers and one civilian reportedly killed. Near Cairo, security forces 18 Sept killed nine suspected Islamist militants in raid in cities of al-Obour and 15th May. Human rights activists early Sept criticised raids as "extrajudicial killings". Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan held new round of talks in Cairo 15-16 Sept aimed at resolving dispute over Ethiopia's construction of its Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on River Nile; parties failed to make breakthrough, with Egypt fearing that project would curtail its share of Nile water. Parties agreed to reconvene 4-5 Oct. At UN 24 Sept, Sisi called for international intervention in negotiations.

➔ **Libya** Fighting continued in capital Tripoli and airstrikes hit elsewhere, as UN led preparations for international conference to take place late Oct or Nov aimed at aligning foreign stakeholders behind de-escalation efforts. In Tripoli, balance of power remained about equal between armed groups affiliated to Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) and those aligned with UN-backed Govt of National Accord (GNA). Forces clashed sporadically in several neighbourhoods. LNA and GNA continued to launch drone strikes on locations further afield including Misrata and Sirte on Mediterranean coast and Jufra in centre. In first significant blow against LNA stronghold in Tarhunah, 60km south east of capital, GNA strike 13 Sept reportedly killed eleven, including three senior military figures aligned with LNA. Authorities shut down Tripoli's GNA-held Mitiga airport after rocket 1 Sept narrowly missed plane carrying pilgrims, LNA denied responsibility. GNA drone strike allegedly carried out by Turkish operators hit LNA-base in Jufra area around 9-10 Sept, reportedly killing United Arab Emirates officers. In apparent retaliation, LNA stepped up air attacks, with strikes on Tripoli's Mitiga and Misrata airports 17-18 Sept; LNA 16 Sept struck GNA affiliates in Sirte area, killing two combatants. Four U.S. airstrikes killed 43 suspected Islamic State (ISIS) combatants near town of Murzuq in south 19, 25, 27 and 29 Sept. UN envoy Ghassan Salamé held high-level meetings in Ankara, Cairo and Abu Dhabi in late Aug and early Sept, intensifying outreach to main foreign stakeholders to obtain commitments to stop providing weapons to local proxies and participate in conference in Berlin in late Oct or Nov. Ministerial-level representatives attended preliminary technical meeting in Berlin 17 Sept and foreign ministers 26 Sept attended event on Libya on margins of UN General Assembly in New York. During speech at UN in New York, UN-backed PM Serraj 25 Sept

called Haftar “war criminal” and ruled out peace talks, hours later Haftar said he was open to dialogue with GNA.

➡ **Morocco** Hundreds protested outside court in capital Rabat at opening of trial of female journalist Hajar Raissouni, arrested in Rabat 31 Aug for alleged abortion and sex before marriage, protesters demanded her release. Court 30 Sept sentenced Raissouni to one year in jail for “illegal abortion” and sexual relations outside marriage; her fiancé was also sentenced to one year in prison and her gynaecologist for two years. Defence lawyers said they would appeal.

➡ 🇹🇵\* **Tunisia** Two political outsiders won most votes in first round of presidential election 15 Sept and will face off in second round 13 Oct; authorities could use incarceration of one, Nabil Karoui, as grounds for cancelling second round or nullifying results, risking constitutional void and power vacuum, as interim presidency ends 24 Oct, and street protests if rival camps mobilise supporters. Kaïs Saïed, constitutional law professor with no political affiliation, came first with 18.4%, followed by imprisoned media businessman Nabil Karoui with 15.6%. Turnout was low at 49%. Parties continued campaigning ahead of 6 Oct legislative elections. Former President Ben Ali, who fled country in Jan 2011, died in Saudi Arabia 19 Sept.

➡ **Western Sahara** As position of UN special envoy remained unfilled three months after former envoy Horst Köhler resigned, leader of Polisario Front independence movement Brahim Ghali 13 Sept sent letter to current president of UN Security Council, Russian permanent representative at UN, calling for urgent appointment of new special envoy, saying delay has paralysed peace process.