

Middle East and North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

➔ **Israel-Palestine** Palestinians resumed protests at and launching of incendiary kites across Gaza-Israel border as Egyptian-brokered talks aimed at ceasefire between Israel and Hamas stalled. Following meeting with Palestinian Authority (PA) President Abbas, Egypt 6 Sept returned to previous position that PA must reconcile with Hamas and retake control of Gaza before Egypt brokers ceasefire. Israeli PM Netanyahu 2 Sept said there would be no deal before Hamas has returned remains of two Israeli soldiers Israel says were killed in 2014 war. Hamas 9 Sept announced end of talks with Israel, blaming PA, which had voiced opposition to talks, and said it would escalate protests at border. Israeli army reportedly shot dead three Palestinian protesters at border, one each on 9, 21 and 23 Sept, and seven more 28 Sept. U.S. 8 Sept cut further its financial support to Palestinians, redirecting \$25mn it had pledged to hospitals in East Jerusalem. U.S. 10 Sept ordered closure of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) mission in Washington D.C. and 16 Sept ordered PLO Ambassador Husam Zomlot to leave. Tensions increased at Holy Esplanade in Jerusalem with Israeli police and officials of Waqf, Jordanian body that administers area, coming to blows over access issues. U.S. President Trump 26 Sept took favourable stance toward two-state solution saying, “I like a two-state solution. That’s what I think works best”. He later clarified that he would also back one-state solution if Israelis and Palestinians preferred it. Syrian anti-aircraft system 18 Sept shot down Russian military aeroplane while attempting to hit four Israeli jets that had attacked missile factory near Latakia in north west Syria on coast, killing fifteen Russian officers; Russian President Putin blamed “tragic chain of accidents” while Israel expressed “sorrow” but vowed to continue strikes against Iranian forces in Syria (see Syria). Israel 4 Sept said it had carried out over 200 airstrikes against alleged Iran-linked targets in Syria since early 2017.

➔ **Lebanon** Limited number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon continued to return to Syria through Masnaa and Abboudieh border crossings in centre and north respectively, including 200 who returned 4 Sept and over 400 17 Sept. Govt 25 Sept said that in 2018 it had organised return of 25,000 Syrian refugees in coordination with Syrian govt and 25,000 others had made their own way home.

📌 ✂️ **Syria** Agreement between Turkey and Russia seems to have averted offensive by pro-govt forces on rebel-held Idlib province in north west, creating opportunity to consolidate deal in Oct. Summit of Turkey, Russia and Iran – guarantors of de-escalation agreement covering Idlib and adjacent rebel-held areas – in Tehran 7 Sept appeared to end in deadlock. Turkey publicly rejected prospect of pro-govt offensive and sent reinforcements to its observation points in Syria. Turkey’s European allies and U.S. also lobbied for negotiated alternative. After bilateral summit in Russian city of Sochi 17 Sept, Turkish President Erdoğan and Russian President Putin jointly announced agreement to create by 15 Oct demilitarised zone on edge of Idlib de-escalation area to be policed by Turkish and Russian forces; Turkey to take heavy weapons from rebels in demilitarised zone by 10 Oct and remove jihadist groups from zone; Idlib’s key highways to be secured and opened for transit by year’s end.

Iran and Syrian govt welcomed deal. Individuals and media outlets of jihadist alliance in Idlib region Hei'at Tahrir al-Sham voiced hostility to it and rejected disarmament. Syrian anti-aircraft system 18 Sept shot down Russian military aircraft while attempting to hit four Israeli jets that had attacked missile factory near Latakia in north west on coast, killing fifteen Russian officers; Putin blamed "tragic chain of accidents" while Israel expressed "sorrow" but vowed to continue strikes against Iranian forces in Syria. Israel 4 Sept said it had carried out over 200 airstrikes against alleged Iran-linked targets in Syria since early 2017. Moscow 24 Sept announced delivery of S-300 air defence system to Syria; U.S. national security adviser called delivery "significant escalation". In north-eastern city of Qamishli, fighting erupted 8 Sept between regime forces holding enclave and Kurdish Asayish forces, seventeen people killed. Turkey 23 Sept said it would take steps to create "safe zones" across northern Syria, including in areas held by Syrian Kurdish fighters allied with U.S. but which Ankara considers terrorists.

Gulf and Arabian Peninsula

➔ **Iran** Militants launched deadly attack on military parade in Ahvaz in south west as govt continued to negotiate future of nuclear deal in light of U.S. withdrawal. International Atomic Energy Agency 30 Aug confirmed Iran's full compliance with 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Govt discussed regional issues with EU/E4 (UK, Germany, France and Italy) in meeting in Brussels 12 Sept. U.S. 14 Sept placed sanctions on Thai aviation company linked to Iran's Mahan Air. Govt 29 Sept said it expected EU to establish legal framework to bypass U.S. sanctions by 4 Nov when U.S. oil-related sanctions to be re-introduced. Militants opened fire on army parade in Ahvaz in south west 22 Sept, killing 25 people, twelve Revolutionary Guards and thirteen civilians; both anti-govt Arab group Ahvaz National Resistance and Islamic State (ISIS) claimed attack. President Rouhani 23 Sept said U.S. and "puppet" Gulf allies enabled attack, which U.S. denied. Iraqi protesters allegedly angry at Iran's role in Iraqi politics 7 Sept burnt down Iran's consulate in Basra. Militants fired mortars at U.S. embassy in Iraqi capital Baghdad 6 Sept and U.S. consulate in Basra, southern Iraq 8 Sept; U.S. 11 Sept blamed Iran-backed militias. Army 8 Sept launched seven missiles against headquarters of Kurdish militants Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI) in Iraqi Kurdistan, killing twelve; in response, protesters demonstrated at Iranian embassies in Helsinki, Paris and Athens. Israel 4 Sept said it had carried out over 200 airstrikes against alleged Iran-related targets in Syria since early 2017. After Facebook, Twitter and YouTube suspended hundreds of Iranian accounts allegedly used in disinformation operations in Aug, FM Zarif 16 Sept claimed companies closed real accounts but allowed "regime change propaganda" bots to continue.

➔ **Iraq** Political parties took steps toward creation of new govt as violent protests continued in south. Parliament 5 Sept convened for first time since May legislative elections, but disputes between two main alliances prevented election of parliamentary speaker, who, according to constitution, should be chosen in first session. Both alliances – Reform and Construction bloc led by Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr and Construction bloc led by Hadi al-Ameri – claimed to have largest number of seats, earning right to appoint PM and ministers. Sadr and Ameri 12 Sept agreed on new parliamentary speaker, Mohammad Rikan al-Habousi, and two

deputy speakers. Parliament must now elect new president, by convention a Kurd: Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) 19 Sept nominated Kurdish politician Barham Salih as its presidential candidate. Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) 23 Sept nominated Fuad Hussein as its candidate. Kurdish region 30 Sept held national assembly elections. Protests continued in south over poor services and unemployment; protesters 7 Sept burnt down Iran's consulate in Basra, reportedly expressing anger at Iran's overbearing role in Iraqi politics. Groups fired mortars at U.S. embassy in Baghdad 6 Sept and U.S. consulate in Basra 8 Sept; U.S. blamed Iran-backed militias. In emergency parliamentary session 8 Sept, governor of Basra criticised PM Abadi and cabinet for failures. Govt 9 Sept sent additional security forces to Basra province to restore calm. Islamic State (ISIS)-related insecurity continued, predominantly in Kirkuk, Diyala and Salah al-Din provinces: ISIS militants 3 Sept killed seven civilians in attack on village of Albu Shaher, Kirkuk province. Iranian army 8 Sept launched missiles at headquarters of militant Iranian-Kurdish group Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) in Iraqi Kurdistan, killing at least twelve. In far north, Turkey continued operations against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), claiming to have killed over fifteen militants in airstrikes.

➔ **Kuwait** Military chiefs from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries including Qatar met in Kuwait 10-12 Sept for 15th GCC Supreme Military Committee; first meeting since Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt and Bahrain cut ties with Qatar in June 2017. Military chiefs from Egypt, Jordan and U.S. joined talks 12 Sept to discuss enhanced military cooperation.

➔ **Qatar** Military chief of staff 10-12 Sept attended 15th Gulf Cooperation Council Supreme Military Committee meeting in Kuwait; first meeting since Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt and Bahrain cut ties with Qatar in June 2017 (see Kuwait).

➔ **Saudi Arabia** Defence forces shot down several missiles fired from Yemen by Huthi forces aimed at cities in south west, Jizan and Najran; debris from missile shot down over Najran 5 Sept reportedly injured over twenty. Spain 4 Sept suspended sale of 400 precision bombs to govt over concerns about their use against civilians in Yemen, but reversed decision 13 Sept after alleged pressure from Riyadh. Military chief 10-12 Sept attended 15th Gulf Cooperation Council Supreme Military Committee meeting in Kuwait; first meeting since Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt and Bahrain cut ties with Qatar in June 2017. King Salman 16 Sept brought together leaders of Eritrea and Ethiopia as well as UN Sec-Gen Guterres in western city of Jeddah for signing of "Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship" to bolster Eritrea and Ethiopia's historic July peace accord that ended twenty years of war between two countries. Govt next day hosted talks between Eritrean President Afwerki and Djibouti President Guelleh to work toward resolving longstanding border dispute (see Eritrea and Djibouti). Govt 18-20 Sept hosted new Pakistani PM Imran Khan and agreed to significant investment in development projects in Pakistan (see Pakistan).

⚠️ ⚠️ **Yemen** UN-led consultations planned for early Sept failed to start and fighting escalated on outskirts of Huthi-held port city of Hodeida raising risk of further escalation in Oct; but opportunities to mediate confidence-building measures remain. Huthi representatives 8 Sept told team of UN envoy Martin Griffiths they would not leave capital Sanaa for talks in Geneva; they asked to travel in Omani instead of UN plane and to take wounded with them, but complications

arose in negotiating details of procedure among Saudi-led coalition, Omanis and Huthis. Griffiths continued efforts to bring parties to talks; 18 Sept announced Saudi-led coalition would allow flights to leave Sanaa to evacuate those in need of urgent medical care. Forces backed by United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Red Sea coast early Sept launched assault to take control of road between Hodeida and Sanaa and 12 Sept claimed they had captured it; Huthis later said they had retaken it. Huthi rebels 30 Sept claimed they had launched attacks on Dubai international airport and boats off coast of Saudi port city Jizan. UAE 14 Sept delivered letter to UN Security Council arguing only way to bring Huthis to negotiating table was to continue offensive on Hodeida. Saudi-led coalition 1 Sept acknowledged that it had made mistakes in Aug airstrike on school bus in north that left 51 dead, including 40 children. Amid growing international criticism of coalition's conduct in Yemen, U.S. Sec State Pompeo 11 Sept defended campaign, telling Congress that "Saudi Arabia and UAE are undertaking demonstrable actions to reduce the risk of harm ... resulting from military operations". UN Human Rights Council 28 Sept voted to extend international probe into alleged war crimes committed in country; govt, Saudi Arabia and UAE denounced decision.

North Africa

➔ **Algeria** Political positioning and govt repression continued ahead of 2019 presidential election. Following President Bouteflika's 20 Aug call for creation of "popular front" ahead of 2019 poll, secretary general of ruling party National Liberation Front (FLN) 3 Sept announced creation of political platform gathering sixteen parties. Business Leaders Forum 8 Sept, General Union of Algerian Workers 16 Sept and National Union of Algerian Women same day called on Bouteflika to run for fifth term. Bouteflika 1 Sept returned to country after five days in Switzerland for medical checks. Authorities prevented meetings of new political movement Citizenship and Democracy, created in June to prepare "peaceful transition" to end Bouteflika's rule, 8 Sept in Constantine in north east and 15 Sept in Bejaia, 220km east of capital Algiers; several movement leaders and members arrested 15 Sept in Bejaia. Overhaul of senior staff in security and intelligence institutions ongoing since June continued: army chief Ahcène Tafer and air force chief Abdelkader Lounes dismissed late Aug and early Sept respectively; Abdelhamid Ghriss appointed defence ministry secretary general 17 Sept following dismissal of Mohamed Zenakhri. Govt reportedly imposed travel ban on five generals mid-Sept for alleged involvement in drug trafficking. Thousands of residents of Ouargla in south 15 Sept protested against lack of development projects and infrastructure including university hospital in area after local hospital early Sept failed to save life of woman stung by scorpion.

➔ **Egypt** President Sisi continued to shuffle members of his inner circle as authorities continued to crack down on dissent. Sisi 1 Sept removed head of Administrative Control Authority (ACA) Major General Mohamed Irfan (one of his closest allies, Irfan is expected to be promoted) and reportedly dismissed head of General Intelligence Service (GIS) Major General Abbas Kamel. Sisi 20 Sept replaced Director of Military Intelligence (MI) Mohammed Shehat with former head of Second Field Army Major General Kahled Megawer. Govt 3 Sept took off air popular TV host with ties to GIS Lamees el-Hadidy after she reportedly upset Sisi with

comments made during March election. Ahmed Bahgat 11 Sept said he was being forced to sell his Dream TV network to state-owned entities and move popular presenter to a GIS-owned network. Muslim Brotherhood affiliated, Istanbul-based, Mekemeen TV channel 15 Sept reported 27 army personnel had been arrested 13 Sept; many reportedly come from Second Field Army, previously led by two senior officers who have had disagreements with Sisi since 2013. Authorities 15 Sept arrested Alaa and Gamal Mubarak, sons of former President Mubarak, on revived 2011 charges of stock market fraud. Authorities 18 Sept froze funds of four prominent activists, including former diplomat Maasoum Marzouk, following their arrest in Aug on suspicion of belonging to terrorist organisation. Sisi 2 Sept ratified July law allowing govt to monitor social media accounts. Backpack exploded in alleged botched attack on U.S. embassy in Cairo 4 Sept, authorities same day arrested one suspect. In Sinai peninsula, security forces 10 Sept reportedly killed eleven suspected jihadists. Military chiefs from Egypt, Jordan and U.S. 12 Sept joined 15th Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Supreme Military Committee meeting in Kuwait attended by all GCC members including Qatar; first meeting since Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt and Bahrain cut ties with Qatar in June 2017.

↓ **Libya** After eruption of violence in capital Tripoli late Aug, fighting escalated despite UN-mediated ceasefires; end-month security situation in capital was calm but precarious. Armed groups from towns surrounding Tripoli maintained offensives early Sept in bid to oust Tripoli-based militias and pressure Prime Minister Faiez Serraj to step down. UN 3 Sept mediated ceasefire and in follow-up meeting 9 Sept most parties agreed to lay down arms and support formation of ceasefire monitoring mechanism. Long-range artillery fire struck Tripoli's Maitiga airport 11 Sept and fighting broke out in capital's south 18-19 Sept. Tripoli-based UN-backed Govt of National Accord 26 Sept announced new ceasefire, which took effect previous day, and two main armed groups reportedly retreated from city. But security in capital remained precarious end-month as most Tripoli armed groups refused to withdraw from state institutions they guard. At least 115 people killed since fighting erupted late Aug, at least half were civilians in residential areas. Attack by gunmen on National Oil Corporation headquarters in Tripoli 10 Sept killed two; govt said Islamic State (ISIS) behind attack. U.S. govt 12 Sept placed sanctions on militia leader Ibrahim Jedran for overseeing June attempt to seize control of Gulf of Sirte oil facilities. Govt and Central Bank 12 Sept announced economic reform package aimed at reducing black market speculation on foreign currency transactions that benefitted some Tripoli armed groups.

➔ **Mauritania** In legislative elections 1 and 15 Sept, ruling party Union for the Republic (UPR) won majority in National Assembly with at least 89 seats out of 157. In simultaneous local elections, UPR won all thirteen regional councils. Court 3 Sept charged activist Abdallahi Salem Ould Yali, arrested in Jan for social media messages denouncing marginalisation of Haratin community, with incitement to violence and racial hatred.

➔ **Tunisia** Political competition between President Essebsi and PM Chahed continued. Executive bureau of Essebsi's Nida Tounes party, led by Essebsi's son, 14 Sept froze Chahed's party membership. Essebsi, in meeting with An-Nahda party president 3 Sept, reportedly failed to secure support for possible parliamentary no-confidence vote against Chahed. Informal alliance between An-Nahda bloc (68 MPs)

and new pro-Chahed bloc Alliance Nationale (43 MPs, mostly dissident Nida Tounes members) now holds parliamentary majority. Essebsi 24 Sept announced in TV interview end of his alliance with An-Nahda. Unions 19 Sept agreed to 6.5% private sector salary increase; public sector workers union (UGTT) is demanding 10% increase to public sector wages, in spite of International Monetary Fund (IMF) recommendations to freeze public payroll. UGTT 20 Sept called for nationwide public sector strikes 24 Oct and 22 Nov against govt plans to privatise companies and stalled pay negotiations.