

# Middle East and North Africa

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## Eastern Mediterranean

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♦ **Israel-Palestine** Deadly clashes escalated between Palestinian protesters and Israeli security forces at Gaza-Israel border, while rocket fire from Gaza and Israeli bombing there increased, leaving at least eighteen Palestinians dead. Israel responded with force to Palestinian protests at Gaza border each Friday: Israeli forces shot dead three Palestinians 5 Oct and six 12 Oct. Israel 16 Oct gave Hamas 19 Oct deadline to end protests; Hamas 19 Oct kept smaller protests at greater distance from border. In response to more protests 26 Oct, Israeli forces shot dead five protesters. Israeli air strike 28 Oct killed three Palestinian boys between twelve and fourteen whom Israel claimed were trying to blow up border fence. Rocket fired from Gaza landed in Be'er Sheva in Israel 17 Oct, Hamas and Islamic Jihad denied responsibility; Israel responded with airstrikes on twenty targets in Gaza, killing one Palestinian. Islamic Jihad 26-27 Oct fired some 39 rockets into Israel, in response Israeli air force bombed around 100 targets in Gaza; Islamic Jihad 27 Oct announced ceasefire after talks with Egypt, Israel accused Syria of ordering attack, with Iranian involvement. UN and Egypt continued efforts to hold ceasefire talks between Israel and Hamas; Palestinian Authority (PA) PM Hamdallah 8 Oct refused to meet UN Special Envoy Mladenov, accusing him of having "stepped outside of his role" in trying to secure Hamas-Israel deal; PA continued to demand that Hamas cede control of Gaza before UN and Egypt broker ceasefire. Israeli media 22 Oct reported that as part of Gaza ceasefire deal, Qatar would pay for Gaza's fuel and pay civil servant salaries for three months; in response, PA discussed possible measures against Gaza, including calling new elections and halting all PA payments to Gaza, including for civil servant salaries, healthcare, fuel and electricity. Palestinians protested in West Bank against new PA law cutting social security benefits. Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Central Council 30 Oct called for PA to end security coordination with Israel and suspend its recognition of Israel until Israel recognises Palestine; PA President Abbas and PLO Executive Council yet to decide on moves. Abbas met Omani leader Sultan Qaboos in Omani capital Muscat 22 Oct. In unexpected visit to Muscat, Israeli PM Netanyahu met Qaboos 26 Oct, first visit of any Israeli leader to country since 1996. Omani FM 27 Oct said Oman is offering ideas to bring Israel and Palestinians together.

♦ **Lebanon** After Israeli PM Netanyahu at UN General Assembly late Sept claimed Shiite political and military movement Hizbollah was enhancing missiles at sites near Beirut airport, FM Gebran Bassil 1 Oct took foreign journalists and diplomats to sites to show that no such facilities existed. U.S. Senate 12 Oct passed two bills tightening sanctions on Hizbollah and U.S. Department of Justice 15 Oct designated Hizbollah as one of five top transnational crime threats. Syrian refugees in Lebanon continued to return to Syria, some through govt-run programs at Masnaa, al-Zamarani and Abboudieh border crossings in centre and north, including 500 6 Oct and around 800 15 Oct, and others independently.

♦ **Syria** Parties implemented Russia-Turkey deal signed in Sept to avert offensive by pro-govt forces on rebel-held Idlib province in north west well enough to keep

both sides committed. In partial fulfilment of Turkey's obligations under deal, Turkey removed some of rebels' heavy weapons from demilitarised zone by 10 Oct and jihadist groups either withdrew from zone or adopted lower profile by 15 Oct. Jihadist alliance Hei'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) 14 Oct issued statement implicitly consenting to deal's terms, but refusing to disarm or give up armed struggle. In apparent attempt to spoil agreement, rebel group Wa-Harrid al-Mumineen (And Spur on the Believers) launched mortars at Syrian army base in Ghab Plain, Hama province 13 Oct. Russian President Putin 18 Oct said implementation was incomplete, but expressed satisfaction with Turkish efforts to fulfil commitments. Leaders of Turkey, Russia, Germany and France 27 Oct held summit in Istanbul that welcomed agreement, emphasised need for durable ceasefire, and reiterated commitment to political process. Russia 2 Oct delivered first part of S-300 air defence system to Syria after Syrian anti-aircraft system accidentally downed Russian military aircraft while attempting to hit four Israeli jets in Sept. Syria and Jordan reopened Nassib border crossing and UN, Syria and Israel reopened crossing from Syria into Israeli-occupied Golan Heights near town of Quneitra 15 Oct, both for first time since they were shut in 2015; same day in Damascus, FM Muallem discussed with Iraqi FM "speeding up" reopening of crossings on Syria-Iraq border. Following militant attack on military parade in Iranian city of Ahvaz late Sept, Iranian army 1 Oct carried out ballistic missile and drone strikes against reported Islamic State (ISIS) targets near al-Bukamal in east Syria. UN envoy Staffan de Mistura 17 Oct said he would leave post in Nov for personal reasons after four years in role; UN Sec-Gen Guterres 30 Oct told Security Council he intended to appoint Norwegian diplomat Geir Pedersen.

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## **Gulf and Arabian Peninsula**

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➡ **Bahrain** Following killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Saudi Arabia's consulate in Istanbul 2 Oct, Bahrain 20 Oct made statement supportive of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait 5 Oct signed agreement providing \$10bn to Bahrain to support fiscal program aimed at eliminating budget deficit by 2022.

➡ **Iran** Govt scored legal win against U.S. but latter imposed new sanctions. Govt 3 Oct won case in International Court of Justice (ICJ) against U.S. over humanitarian sanctions; President Rouhani described ruling as "great victory" while U.S. same day accused Iran of abusing ICJ for "political and propaganda purposes" and withdrew from 1955 bilateral treaty upon which Iran built legal case. U.S. 16 Oct announced new sanctions on banking, industrial and other entities reportedly linked to Iranian Basij paramilitary force. Re-imposition of U.S. energy-related sanctions in early Nov could heighten Iran-U.S. tensions. EU late Sept announced that it was setting up Special Purpose Vehicle to support trade with Iran, providing economic benefits for continued Iranian compliance with 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Following militant attack on military parade in Ahvaz late Sept, army 1 Oct carried out ballistic missile and drone strikes against reported Islamic State (ISIS) targets near al-Bukamal in east Syria and, separately, 16 Oct claimed to have killed alleged mastermind of attack in Iraq. Sunni militant group Jaish al-Adl 16 Oct kidnapped fourteen Iranian border guards close to Pakistani border and reportedly took them across border; govt 20 Oct called on Pakistan to help rescue abductees. Finan-

cial Action Task Force 19 Oct gave Iran until Feb 2019 to carry out outstanding elements of action plan to counter money laundering and terrorism financing; parliament 7 Oct approved Iran's accession to UN terrorism financing agreement. Denmark 30 Oct accused Iran of plotting assassination attempt of exiled leader of Iranian separatist group Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahvaz (ASMLA) in Copenhagen in Sept, recalling ambassador from Tehran and calling for EU sanctions.

➡ **Iraq** Breaking deadlock since May legislative elections, parliament 2 Oct elected Kurdish politician Barham Salih as president, who same day appointed Shiite politician Adel Abdul Mahdi as PM and tasked him with forming govt. In second round parliamentary vote for president (by convention a Kurd), Salih, Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) nominee, defeated Fuad Hussein, Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) nominee, with 219 votes to 22, after KDP MPs withdrew in protest; they claimed that largest Kurdish bloc had right to name president. Two competing Shiite alliances – Reform and Construction bloc led by Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr and Construction bloc led by Hadi al-Ameri – agreed on Mahdi as compromise candidate for PM. According to constitution, Mahdi has until 1 Nov to form cabinet; parliament 25 Oct approved fourteen of 22 cabinet ministers proposed by Mahdi. Iraqi Kurdistan PM Barzani 17 Oct met with outgoing PM Abadi and PM-designate Mahdi in Baghdad to discuss Erbil-Baghdad issues, including allocation of national budget for Kurdistan and control over disputed territories. Electoral commission 20 Oct issued results of Kurdistan's Sept parliamentary elections: KDP won most seats with 45 and PUK came second with 21; following over 1,000 allegations of electoral fraud, electoral commission carried out investigation, cancelled results from over 96 polling stations and annulled 120,000 votes. Islamic State (ISIS)-related insecurity continued, mainly in west and north; improvised bomb attack on bus in Baiji, Salah al-Din province 6 Oct, killed one; car bomb 23 Oct killed six in Qayyara, Nineveh province. ISIS claimed responsibility for roadside bomb 30 Oct that killed three Shiite pilgrims in Khanaqin in north east. In far north, Turkey continued operations against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), claiming airstrikes killed eleven militants 4 Oct and three 18 Oct.

➡ **Kuwait** Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and UAE 6 Oct signed agreement providing \$10bn to Bahrain to support fiscal program aimed at eliminating budget deficit by 2022.

➡ **Oman** FM Yousuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah 27 Oct said that Oman is offering ideas to bring Israel and Palestinians together, but not acting as mediator. Palestinian Authority President Abbas visited Oman 21-23 Oct meeting Omani leader Sultan Qaboos. Days later, in unexpected visit, Israeli PM Netanyahu met Sultan Qaboos 26 Oct, first visit of Israeli leader to country since 1996. Following killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Saudi Arabia's consulate in Istanbul 2 Oct, Oman 21 Oct welcomed Saudi Arabia's response, including firing of top officials and arrests, but insisted on "allow[ing] justice to take its course".

↓ **Saudi Arabia** Killing of self-exiled Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Saudi Arabia's consulate in Istanbul 2 Oct and govt's insufficient explanations of events sparked international criticism of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who some suspect ordered killing. Turkish President Erdoğan 23 Oct said there were strong signs "the murder was the result of a planned operation" and emphasised need for

investigation by “objective, fair teams”. Turkey 11 Oct told U.S. that 2 Oct audio and video recordings from inside consulate proved Khashoggi was tortured, murdered and dismembered there. Initial Saudi investigation 20 Oct alleged Khashoggi died in fight after escalation of “discussion” at consulate. State prosecutor 20 Oct said authorities had arrested eighteen Saudis in connection with case and 25 Oct said Turkish evidence indicated killing was premeditated, contradicting previous statement; eighteen arrested aligned with list of suspects that Turkey had identified, including fifteen Saudi “hitmen” who visited Istanbul day of killing. King Salman fired five senior officials, including deputy intelligence chief Ahmed al-Asiri and Crown Prince’s adviser Saud al-Qahtani, and tasked Crown Prince to chair committee to restructure intelligence services. UAE 14 Oct issued statement affirming solidarity with Saudi Arabia against “attempts to undermine its regional stature and fundamental role in establishing regional peace and security”. Bahrain late Oct made similarly supportive statement. Oman 21 Oct welcomed Saudi Arabia’s response but insisted on “allow[ing] justice to take its course”. U.S. President Trump oscillated between trying to deflect criticism of ally Saudi Arabia and threatening consequences. Joint statement by France, Germany and UK 21 Oct said “more efforts are needed and expected towards establishing the truth”. Chancellor Merkel 22 Oct said Germany would suspend arms exports to Saudi Arabia until case is cleared up. Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait 6 Oct signed agreement providing \$10bn to Bahrain to support fiscal program aimed at eliminating budget deficit by 2022.

➔ **United Arab Emirates** Following killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Saudi Arabia’s consulate in Istanbul 2 Oct, UAE 14 Oct issued statement affirming solidarity with Saudi Arabia against “attempts to undermine its regional stature and fundamental role in establishing regional peace and security”. Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait 6 Oct signed agreement providing \$10bn to Bahrain to support fiscal program aimed at eliminating budget deficit by 2022.

➔ **Yemen** Campaign by UAE-backed Yemeni forces to strangle Huthi-held Hodeida city slowed, as UN envoy pursued confidence-building measures to improve conditions ahead of possible new talks in Nov; fighting could escalate in Nov around Hodeida and on other frontlines. UAE-backed forces continued efforts to surround Hodeida and squeeze Huthi supply lines, pushing as far north as Kilo 16, junction linking city with road to capital Sanaa. Campaign appeared to have slowed mid-Oct, but Saudi-led coalition had reportedly deployed reinforcements around Hodeida by end Oct, possibly signalling forthcoming escalation. New frontlines threatened delivery of humanitarian aid to north, where conditions worst, and aid storage facilities around Hodeida. In south, separatist group Southern Transitional Council (STC) 3 Oct called for uprising against govt in Aden and southern provinces. Govt urged STC to stop mobilising non-state military units and join political process. Pressure from Saudi Arabia on separatists calmed situation. After UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths’ planned consultations with warring parties failed to start in Sept, he worked toward bringing parties together in Nov, again to build consensus on framework for peace talks. U.S. Defence Secretary Mattis 30 Oct called for ceasefire within 30 days. U.S. Sec State Pompeo 31 Oct echoed statement, calling for missile and drone strikes from Huthi-controlled areas into Saudi Arabia and UAE to stop and “subsequently” for Saudi-led coalition airstrikes to cease in all populated areas. Griffiths worked to roll out confidence-building measures, including opening air routes from Sanaa airport to evacuate patients with chronic conditions, prisoner exchanges, evacuation of

injured Huthi fighters, and payment of civil service salaries. Huthis 3 Oct released two sons of ex-President Saleh, who were transferred to Jordan. Saudi Arabia and UAE 23 Oct donated \$70mn to UNICEF program that pays salaries of 135,000 Yemeni teachers. Saudi Arabia 2 Oct announced \$200mn deposit in Central Bank to stabilise Yemeni riyal, but price of goods such as diesel and cooking oil continued to rise. President Hadi 14 Oct replaced PM Bin Daghr over failure to stem economic deterioration.

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## North Africa

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➤ **Algeria** Leadership struggle paralysed lower house of parliament (ANP). After speaker Saïd Bouhadja late Sept dismissed ANP Secretary General Bachir Slimani for unclear reasons, around 200 MPs from ruling party National Liberation Front (FLN) and its partner in ruling coalition National Rally for Democracy (RND) 16 Oct demanded Bouhadja's resignation over alleged "mismanagement, exaggerated and illicit expenses and dubious recruitment", locking up parliament building for several hours. ANP Bureau 17 Oct declared speaker position vacant. Mouad Bouchareb, head of FLN parliamentary group, elected as replacement 24 Oct with FLN and RND backing; many opposition MPs boycotted plenary session during which vote was held. In ongoing overhaul of senior security and intelligence personnel that started in June, five senior army generals dismissed July-Aug arrested 15 Oct on charges of illicit enrichment, influence peddling and corruption.

➤ **Egypt** Govt continued crackdown on all forms of opposition and security forces continued operations against suspected Islamist militants in Sinai and elsewhere. Top appeals court 15 Oct upheld 2017 sentence against former President Morsi and nineteen others of three years in prison for insulting judiciary in 2013. Authorities 18 Oct denied media reports that one of accused, former MP and political activist Mustafa El Naggar, had been arrested in Aswan in south or forcibly disappeared. Police 21 Oct arrested author of book critical of Sisi's economic policies for publishing false news, released him 29 Oct following court order. Authorities late Oct issued arrest warrants for lawyers Ezzat Ghoneim and Azouz Mahgoub missing since Sept, when they were allegedly released from police custody; human rights organisations accused govt of forcibly disappearing them. Govt mid-Oct extended for three months nationwide state of emergency first imposed in April 2017 after church bombings. In Sinai, Islamic State (ISIS) 2 Oct said military had killed senior militant Abu Hamza al-Maqdisi; security forces early Oct killed fifteen suspected jihadists and 9 Oct killed ten others near Arish city; suspected jihadists 20 Oct reportedly shot dead three workers in Arish city; roadside bomb 25 Oct reportedly killed three in Arish city. In Nile valley, between Assiut and Sohag, about 350km south of capital Cairo, security forces 15 Oct reportedly raided cave hideout, killing nine men allegedly planning attacks on "vital installations". Former army officer turned al-Qaeda affiliate and founder of al-Murabitun militant group Hisham al-Ashmawy arrested 7 Oct in Derna in eastern Libya; President Sisi 8 Oct called on Libyan authorities to extradite him. UN and govt continued efforts to hold ceasefire talks between Israel and Hamas (see Israel-Palestine).

➤ **Libya** PM Serraj pursued cabinet reshuffle and began to implement new economic reforms and security measures in capital Tripoli, as violence flared in south.

UN-backed PM Serraj 7 Oct appointed four new ministers (interior, economy, finance and sports) without consulting fellow members of Presidency Council (PC) or seeking approval from Tobruk-based parliament House of Representatives (HoR); spokesperson 22 Oct said cabinet reshuffle still ongoing. Serraj's appointment of former militia leader and politician from Misrata, Fathi Bash Aga, as interior minister and Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Ali Issawi, suspected of involvement in 2011 killing of prominent eastern military commander, as economy minister triggered outrage in east. Consultations between Tripoli-based High State Council (HSC) and HoR to remove Serraj and change composition of PC he heads continued. Unidentified gunmen 16 Oct killed leader of so-called Tripoli Brigade, Khairi al-Kikli, dubbed Hankoura, while other gunmen cut off supply of city's drinking water. Serraj 23 Oct approved plan for new security arrangements in Tripoli, Greater Tripoli Security Plan, which is supposed to create joint police and army forces to secure city; UN political mission (UNSMIL) same day welcomed plan. Haftar's east-based Libyan National Army (LNA) 7 Oct arrested former Egyptian army officer turned al-Qaeda affiliate and founder of al-Murabitun militant group Hisham al-Ashmawy in eastern city of Derna. Fighting flared in south near Chadian border mid-Oct reportedly between LNA and its auxiliaries on one side and gunmen whom LNA claimed were Chadian armed groups on other. LNA 13 Oct reportedly carried out airstrikes on alleged Chadian rebels near Tamassah oasis. Clashes between LNA-allied and Chadian militia 13-14 Oct reportedly left four Libyans and eleven Chadians dead. Haftar discussed insecurity in border area with Chadian President Déby in Chadian capital Ndjamena 16 Oct (see Chad). Islamic State (ISIS) militants attacked town of Fuqaha' in Jufra region (centre) 28 Oct killing at least five people, kidnapping ten and setting fire to public buildings.

➡ **Mauritania** During first session of National Assembly elected in Sept, police 8 Oct outside parliament building clashed with activists demanding release of anti-slavery campaigner and new MP Biram Dah Abeid in custody since early Aug, nine protesters reportedly injured. Following Sept legislative elections, PM Yahya Ould Hademine resigned 29 Oct. President Ould Abdel Aziz same day appointed Mohamed Salem Ould Bechir as new PM; new govt appointed 30 Oct, with army chief Mohamed Ould Ghazouani named defence minister and ruling Union for the Republic (UPR) party President Sidi Mohamed Ould Maham named govt spokesperson.

➡ **Morocco** As numbers of people trying to reach Europe illegally through Morocco rise, security forces' efforts to stop them led to casualties. After security forces 25 Sept opened fire on boat carrying 25 Moroccan illegal migrants, killing one Moroccan woman, court in Tétouan in north 17 Oct sentenced to two years in prison man who protested on social media. Security forces night of 9-10 Oct opened fire on another boat carrying about 50 Moroccan migrants, injuring sixteen-year-old boy. Army 21 Oct clashed with illegal migrants in Melilla, Spanish enclave in Morocco, as about 300 tried to cross border fence from Morocco into Melilla, one migrant killed.

➡ **Tunisia** In first major terrorist attack in capital Tunis since 2015, thirty-year-old female suicide bomber 29 Oct blew herself up in centre of capital Tunis, twenty injured including fifteen police officers; by end Oct no group had claimed responsibility. Power struggle between President Essebsi and PM Chahed continued. Businessman and leader of Free Patriotic Union (UPL) party Slim Riahi switched allegiance from Chahed to Essebsi; UPL, previously member of pro-Chahed alliance in

parliament, 14 Oct merged with ruling party Nida Tounes, depriving Chahed of simple majority needed to counter potential vote of no-confidence in parliament. Riahi appointed Nida Tounes secretary general 17 Oct. Essebsi's chief of staff Slim Azzabi resigned 9 Oct, reportedly in part because Essebsi's 8 Oct statement sealing end of alliance between members of ruling coalition, Nida Tounes and An-Nahda, came from Nida Tounes party, not from presidential office. Prominent Nida Tounes leader Borhen Bsaies arrested 2 Oct for alleged corruption under former President Ben Ali after Tunis court of appeal upheld Feb sentence of two years in prison. Far-left and Arab nationalist coalition Popular Front 2 Oct presented purported evidence of existence of parallel security apparatus in An-Nahda, several An-Nahda leaders denied allegations; in past claims that political groups have parallel security apparatuses have served as pretext for their criminalisation.

➡ **Western Sahara** Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and Polisario Front independence movement accepted UN Envoy for Western Sahara Horst Köhler's Sept invitation to discuss next steps in peace process in Geneva early Dec. UN Security Council to vote on renewal of UN mission MINURSO 31 Oct.