

Middle East and North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

➔ **Israel-Palestine** **Tit-for-tat attacks escalated between Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza; Israel and United Arab Emirates (UAE) signed deal to normalise relations, while anti-govt protests in Israel gathered steam.** In Gaza, militants 2-18 Aug launched near-daily cross-fence attacks into Israel – mostly incendiary balloons and flaming kites – to which Israel responded by striking Hamas targets in Gaza. In response to attacks, Israel 11 Aug closed Kerem Shalom crossing, 13 Aug halted fuel shipments to Gaza and 16 Aug closed fishing zone off Gazan coast. Israeli measures cut electricity supply in Gaza down to less than 4 hours per day, prompting militants in Gaza 19-21 Aug to launch around dozen rockets into Israel. Israel responded with retaliatory strikes against Hamas in Gaza; tit-for-tat attacks continued until 30 Aug; Hamas 31 Aug announced it had reached ceasefire agreement with Israel. After recording first four community-spread COVID-19 cases, Hamas 24 Aug imposed total lockdown in Gaza. In West Bank, Israeli security forces' fire night of 6-7 Aug killed bystander amid clashes with Palestinians in Jenin; night of 19-20 Aug Israeli forces fatally shot Palestinian allegedly preparing to attack Israeli civilians near Deir Abu Meshal village. In Jerusalem's Old City, Israeli police 17 Aug shot and killed Palestinian who stabbed police officer. In Israel, Palestinian 26 Aug stabbed to death Israeli rabbi in Petah Tikva city. Israel and UAE 13 Aug signed U.S.-brokered deal, with UAE agreeing to full normalisation of relations with Israel in return for "suspension" of West Bank annexation; PM Netanyahu same day said annexation plans remain "on the table". Across Israel, large-scale protests over govt's mismanagement of COVID-19 and economic crisis continued; most notably, some 20,000 gathered 29 Aug outside PM Netanyahu's official residence in Jerusalem calling for his resignation. In north, security forces night of 2-3 Aug killed four "terrorists" allegedly planting explosives near security fence between Israel and Syria in southern Golan Heights; suspected Israeli airstrikes 3 Aug reportedly killed around fifteen members of Iran-backed militia in Syria; suspected Israeli airstrikes 31 Aug left at least two dead in Syria. Israel night of 6-7 Aug downed drone that entered Israeli airspace from Lebanon. Hizbollah snipers night of 25-26 Aug allegedly opened fire on Israeli troops near Lebanese border; Israel responded by bombing Hizbollah posts in Lebanon.

↓ **Lebanon** **Massive explosion in capital Beirut fuelled violent anti-govt protests and prompted PM Diab's govt to resign.** In port of Beirut, large stockpile of highly explosive ammonium nitrate – stored, despite repeated warnings, near densely populated area without adequate safety measures – 4 Aug reportedly caught fire and triggered massive explosion that killed at least 190, injured some 7,000 and displaced up to 300,000. Catastrophe and govt negligence sparked popular anger against political elite: thousands 8-9 Aug took to streets of Beirut demanding justice; clashes broke out with security forces killing one police officer and reportedly injuring over 700 civilians and 70 security personnel. PM Diab 10 Aug announced resignation of his govt and blamed disaster in Beirut on corruption of political elite whom he accused of thwarting his reform efforts. Parliament 31 Aug

voted diplomat Mustapha Adib as new PM and President Aoun tasked him with forming govt. French President Macron 6 Aug travelled to Beirut and vowed to provide Lebanese people with support but warned that “if reforms are not carried out, Lebanon will continue to sink”. During emergency donor conference spearheaded by France, international donors 9 Aug pledged some \$250mn in humanitarian relief; International Monetary Fund (IMF) director Kristalina Georgieva 9 Aug said IMF was ready to “redouble” efforts to help Lebanon. In north, unidentified gunmen night of 21-22 Aug killed three in Kaftoun village; security forces 23-24 Aug arrested several suspects and attempted to arrest another one who reportedly blew himself up. Shiite religious banners 27 Aug triggered clashes between Shiites and Sunnis killing two in Khaldeh. Special Tribunal for Lebanon 18 Aug convicted in absentia one Hizbollah member and acquitted three others for involvement in assassination of former PM Rafik Hariri in 2005, confirming that no evidence was found implicating Hizbollah’s leadership or the Syrian regime. In south, Hizbollah 22 Aug claimed downing Israeli drone near Aita al-Shaab village; alleged cross-border attack by Hizbollah on Israeli troops night of 25-26 Aug prompted retaliatory airstrikes on Hizbollah posts. Amid surge in COVID-19 cases, caretaker govt 21 Aug imposed two-week partial lockdown and night time curfew.

➔ **Syria Clashes in Idlib further strained March ceasefire, while skirmishes allegedly broke out between U.S. forces on one side and govt and Russian troops on another in north east.** In north west, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) militants 3 Aug reportedly fended off govt attack in Latakia province, killing 12 soldiers; four HTS and two other rebel fighters killed. Rebel groups 11 Aug reportedly repelled govt offensive in Jabal al-Zawiya in southern Idlib. Russia 3 Aug reportedly carried out airstrikes against rebel-held parts of Latakia and Idlib provinces, killing three civilians near Binnish town north of Idlib; 18 Aug bombed near camps housing displaced persons in Harbanoush and Sheikh Bahr Nahr areas, Idlib province. IEDs 14 and 17 Aug struck joint Russian-Turkish patrols along M4 highway, and joint patrol 25 Aug came under fire, no casualties reported; Kataib Khattab Al-Shishani, unknown group suspected to be composed of militants from Caucasus, claimed responsibility for 17 Aug attack. In north east, U.S. forces on joint patrol with Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) 17 Aug returned fire against Syrian regime checkpoint near Tal Al-Zahab, reportedly killing one govt soldier; U.S. forces later same day claimed patrol had come under fire from checkpoint’s vicinity. Intermittent clashes continued between Turkish-backed forces and SDF along fronts dividing “Euphrates Shield” area from Manbij and “Peace Spring” area from the SDF-held north east. Russian military convoy 26 Aug reportedly rammed into U.S. armoured vehicle during altercation near Derik, allegedly injuring four U.S. soldiers. In east, following spate of killings of prominent Arab tribe figures late July, suspected Islamic State (ISIS) militants 2 Aug killed prominent sheikh of al-Aqaidat tribe in Deir al-Zour, prompting some Arab tribe members 4 Aug to protests against SDF whom they held responsible, killing two SDF fighters in clashes same day. Also in Deir al-Zour, roadside bomb 18 Aug killed one Russian general. In south west, Israel 2 Aug killed four unidentified militants along fence between Syria and occupied Golan Heights, next day launched air raids on Syrian army installations in Quneitra. U.S. 20 Aug sanctioned six senior Syrian regime officials and leaders of Syrian military units.

Gulf and Arabian Peninsula

➔ **🌐* Iran U.S. triggered mechanism under UN Security Council Resolution 2231 endorsing 2015 nuclear deal to reimpose all pre-agreement UN sanctions on Iran, raising prospect that tensions could escalate in Sept.** UN Security Council 14 Aug resoundingly rejected U.S. resolution aimed at indefinitely extending UN arms embargo on Iran set to expire in Oct; U.S. 20 Aug triggered “snapback” mechanism of Resolution 2231 to reinstate within 30 days all UN sanctions in place prior to Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) at midnight GMT 20 September; all remaining JCPOA parties and majority of Security Council members disputed U.S.’s legal standing to invoke “snapback”, citing U.S. withdrawal from deal in 2018. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Iran 26 Aug announced “agreement on the resolution of the safeguards implementation issues specified by the IAEA”; deal facilitates IAEA access to two sites following months-long standoff. U.S. 14 Aug announced that it had seized Iranian petroleum of four tankers bound for Venezuela; in apparent attempt to retrieve seized fuel, Iranian security forces two days earlier had briefly boarded Liberian-flagged tanker near Strait of Hormuz. U.S. 19 Aug sanctioned two United Arab Emirates (UAE)-based companies and one UAE-based Iranian national for links to U.S. blacklisted Iranian airliner. Regional tensions with both U.S. and its allies remained high: Iran 7 Aug called on UN to hold U.S. accountable for intercepting Iranian airliner in Syrian airspace in July; Israel’s army chief of staff 7 Aug said Israel had “thwarted a squad sent by Iran” during 2 Aug incident at Israel-Syria border that prompted retaliatory airstrikes. President Rouhani 15 Aug described normalisation of Israel-UAE relations as “a big mistake”; in response to Rouhani’s “inflammatory” remarks, UAE next day summoned Iranian envoy to Abu Dhabi; Emirati coast guard 17 Aug opened fire on Iranian fishermen, killing two; Iran same day seized Emirati vessel for “illegally entering Iranian waters” and 18 Aug summoned UAE’s envoy to Tehran over fishermen’s killing. Atomic Energy Organization of Iran 23 Aug said July explosion at Natanz nuclear facility was result of “sabotage”. Guardian Council 24 Aug scheduled presidential elections for June 2021.

➔ **🇮🇶 Iraq Tensions between Iraq and Turkey heightened, attacks on activists and U.S. assets increased, and violence involving Islamic State (ISIS) continued.** In northern Iraq, amid ongoing Turkish operations against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), Turkish airstrike 11 Aug reportedly killed two Iraqi army officers and several PKK militants; President Salih same day said attack violated Iraqi sovereignty and called for immediate end to “these acts of aggression”. Turkey 13 Aug said it would continue its anti-PKK operations if Baghdad continued to “overlook” PKK presence in Iraq; PKK 17 Aug announced it had shot down Turkish helicopter. In Basra province, unidentified gunmen 14 Aug killed activist sparking three days of demonstrations; PM Kadhimi 17 Aug fired two senior Basra security officials and ordered investigation into violence targeting activists; in Dhi Qar province, unidentified gunmen opened fire 17 Aug on three other activists, and gunmen 19 Aug killed one more activist, prompting demonstrations 21 Aug calling for resignation of Basra governor, clashes with security forces ensued. In Dhi Qar province, protesters 22 Aug destroyed offices of Shiite political parties after bombing at anti-govt camp that injured 11. Attacks on U.S. assets intensified: unidentified

assailants 5-30 Aug launched numerous rocket and IED attacks targeting facilities hosting U.S. personnel and supply convoys of U.S.-led coalition. In Washington, during second round of U.S.-Iraq “strategic dialogue”, Iraq 19 Aug committed to protect coalition forces and signed agreements with U.S. firms worth \$8bn aimed at reducing Baghdad’s energy dependence on Iran; Kadhimi 20 Aug met U.S. President Trump who said U.S. forces would leave Iraq “shortly” but warned that “if Iran should do anything” in Iraq, U.S. would intervene. Meanwhile, ISIS militants 5-30 Aug killed at least 30 in Salah al-Din, Diyala, Kirkuk and Anbar provinces; anti-ISIS operations 4-26 Aug killed at least 29 militants in Kirkuk, Erbil and Nineveh provinces. Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and federal govt 15 Aug signed agreement under which Baghdad will pay KRG \$268mn per month for three months in return for 50% of customs revenues from KRG territories.

➔ **Saudi Arabia Saudi efforts to end impasse between Hadi govt and separatists in southern Yemen faltered while hostilities continued with Huthis.** In southern Yemen, Riyadh 2 August helped broker agreement between Hadi govt and separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) over reappointment of current PM Maen Abdulmalik Saeed as well as appointments of pro-STC governor and neutral security chief in Aden city, but within days clashes between two sides broke out again in southern governorate of Abyan. STC 25 Aug announced it had withdrawn from Nov 2019 Riyadh agreement, citing “irresponsible behaviour by parties”. Saudi-led coalition 20 Aug said it intercepted drone fired by Huthis from Sanaa, reflecting recent uptick in cross-border attacks. In rare display of unity, Saudi Arabia along with five other members of Gulf Cooperation Council 10 Aug urged UN Security Council to extend arms embargo on Iran.

➔ **United Arab Emirates United Arab Emirates (UAE) reached historic deal with Israel to normalise relations.** Israel and UAE 13 Aug signed U.S.-brokered deal with UAE agreeing to full normalisation of relations with Israel in return for “suspension” of West Bank annexation. Deal paves way for two states to exchange ambassadors and initiate open cooperation in areas of security, tourism, trade and healthcare; agreement makes UAE fourth Arab country (after Egypt, Jordan and Mauritania) to formally recognise Israel. Iranian President Rouhani 15 Aug described normalisation of Israel-UAE relations as “a big mistake” and Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps same day warned UAE of “dangerous future”; UAE next day summoned Iranian envoy to Abu Dhabi. Emirati coast guard 17 Aug opened fire on Iranian fishermen, killing two; Iran same day seized Emirati vessel for “illegally entering Iranian waters” and 18 Aug summoned UAE’s envoy to Tehran over fishermen’s killing. In rare display of unity, UAE along with five other members of Gulf Cooperation Council 10 Aug urged UN Security Council to extend arms embargo on Iran following visit by U.S. Special Envoy for Iran Brian Hook to region.

➔ **Yemen Huthis escalated their military offensive in Marib governorate while UN peace efforts remained deadlocked.** In north, following end of Eid al-Adha holiday, Huthis 2 Aug ramped up their multi-front military campaign to take control of oil-rich Marib governorate – Hadi govt’s last major urban stronghold in north Yemen – and surrounding governorates with sustained attacks on tribal and govt positions in al-Jawf, Marib and al-Bayda governorates. Huthis and govt both claimed to have inflicted significant losses on rival forces in al-Jawf throughout month. Saudi-led coalition 20 Aug said it intercepted drone launched by Huthis from capital Sanaa, reflecting recent trend of

intensifying cross-border attacks. In south, Riyadh 2 Aug helped broker agreement between Hadi govt and separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) over reappointment of current PM Maen Abdulmalik Saeed as well as appointment of pro-STC governor and neutral security chief in Aden city, but within days clashes between two sides broke out again in southern governorate of Abyan. STC 25 Aug announced it had withdrawn from Nov 2019 Riyadh agreement, citing “irresponsible behaviour by parties”. Tensions among anti-Huthi groups intensified after clashes erupted in Taiz city between pro-govt forces allied with Islah, Yemen’s main Sunni Islamist party, and rival groups with ties to United Arab Emirates, in early August. Huthis and Hadi govt intensified their criticisms of UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths for alleged bias: Huthis accused UN of lack of balance following UN report on violations of children rights officially published 23 Aug, while Hadi govt rejected UN’s July peace proposal on grounds it “undermines the govt’s sovereignty”. Meanwhile, Huthis 15 Aug reportedly agreed to issue visas to team of UN technical experts to inspect floating oil storage facility, FSO Safer, off coast of Huthi-held Hodeida port; facility reportedly holds around 1mn barrels of oil at risk of leaking, threatening closure of port. Huthis 20 Aug announced that security operation in al-Baydah province consolidated territorial control, and killed Islamic State (ISIS) leader Abu Al-Walid Al-Adani.

North Africa

➔ **Algeria Harassment of journalists and civil society activists continued, while authorities announced referendum on new constitution.** Court in capital Algiers 10 Aug sentenced journalist Khaled Drareni to three years in prison on charges of “inciting an unarmed gathering” and “undermining the integrity of the national territory”. Court in Constantine city 24 Aug sentenced journalist Abdelkrim Zeghileche to two years in prison on charges of “endangering national unity” and “insulting the head of state”. NGOs Reporters Without Borders 26 Aug said Algeria “must stop violating press freedom” and Amnesty International next day called on authorities to “immediately end escalating campaign of media harassment”. Amid COVID-19 pandemic, authorities 15 Aug reopened some mosques and most public places, but land, air and sea borders remained closed; 31 Aug relaxed movement restrictions with only 18 provinces still under curfew. During 18-20 Aug National Conference on the Economic and Social Recovery Plan, President Tebboune unveiled plan to revive economy and reduce dependence on oil and gas as source of foreign currencies by end of 2021; also ruled out turning to International Monetary Fund for support despite major economic downturn amid COVID-19 pandemic. Presidency 24 Aug set 1 Nov as date for referendum on new constitution that would give parliament and PM more powers; new constitution has been key demand of Hirak protest movement.

➔ **Egypt President Sisi continued to take steps to reinforce his power while insecurity persisted in North Sinai.** In first round of Senate elections 11-12 Aug, pro-Sisi party Mustaqbal Watan secured overwhelming majority of seats in newly created upper chamber of parliament; most opposition parties boycotted ballot, which saw extremely low turnout at 15%; run-off vote scheduled for Sept. Amid economic downturn caused notably by COVID-19 pandemic, govt 16 Aug announced price hikes for public transportation in capital Cairo and next day

reduced size of subsidised bread loaf from 110 to 90 grams, while keeping price unchanged. In North Sinai, Islamic State (ISIS)-Sinai Province early Aug reportedly executed four civilians suspected of cooperating with army in Bir al-Abed city; group remained in control of several villages in Bir al-Abed area after seizing them late July. Govt 30 Aug said army killed over 70 suspected jihadists in military operations in North Sinai 22 July-30 Aug; seven soldiers including three officers also killed. Egypt and Greece 6 Aug signed agreement on demarcation of their maritime border in Mediterranean Sea, creating exclusive economic zone for oil and gas drilling rights; deal reportedly came in response to similar deal between Turkey and Libyan Govt of National Accord (GNA) in 2019; GNA immediately said it will not allow any party to violate its maritime rights while Turkey said deal was “null and void” and later deployed seismic research vessel in disputed waters (see Cyprus). On-off negotiations between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan on filling and operations of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam continued under African Union auspices; final agreement remains elusive as Cairo and Khartoum denounce Addis Ababa’s failure to commit to legally binding deal (see Nile Waters).

➔ **Libya Head of Tripoli-based UN-backed Govt of National Accord (GNA) PM Serraj announced unilateral ceasefire amid intensifying diplomatic efforts to revive political negotiations, while rival authorities faced series of protests.** Germany and U.S. intensified their efforts to find way out of stalemate in oil-rich central Libya, which GNA-allied forces backed by Turkey have been seeking to take back from Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar’s Arab-Libyan Armed Forces (ALAF) in recent months. U.S. President Trump 13 Aug discussed with Turkish President Erdoğan creation of demilitarised zone around Sirte city and nearby Jufra airbase and reopening of Haftar-controlled oil sites. During visit to Libya, German FM Heiko Maas 17 Aug met with Serraj and reiterated calls for demilitarisation of central Libya. Haftar’s spokesperson 19 Aug said ALAF won’t retreat from Sirte and leave city to “invaders”. Serraj 21 Aug announced unilateral ceasefire, called for resumption of oil production and export through Libya’s National Oil Corporation and for presidential and parliamentary elections in March 2021. Haftar’s ally, Tobruk-based House of Representatives Speaker Aghela Saleh, same day expressed support for truce and elections, and proposed Sirte as new capital for Libya. Haftar’s spokesperson 23 Aug dismissed ceasefire, said GNA is planning Turkish-backed offensive on Sirte. Oil and gas export blockade imposed by ALAF remained in force, but Haftar-aligned Petroleum Facilities Guard 19 Aug announced partial lifting of blockade in Marsa al-Brega oil export terminal solely for export of locally stored oil barrels, citing shortage of gas in local power stations. Protests 23 Aug erupted in capital Tripoli and other western cities over deteriorating living conditions and bad governance, and continued in following days; armed men fired live ammunition to disperse protesters in Tripoli wounding several, and abducted at least six. Serraj 29 Aug dismissed Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha allegedly over his handling of protests and subsequently announced plan to reshuffle cabinet. In Sirte, protests late-Aug erupted against Haftar forces and in support of former Qadhafi regime; ALAF forces cracked down on protestors reportedly killing one and arresting over 50.

➔ **Tunisia Political crisis continued amid intensifying polarisation between Islamists and anti-Islamists.** After PM-designate Hichem Mechichi 10 Aug said he would form cabinet composed of “independent expertise”, Islamist-inspired party An-Nahda, largest group in parliament, immediately rejected idea and reiterated call for “political” govt reflecting balance of forces in parliament. However, Mechichi night of 24-25 Aug announced technocratic govt, citing need to “focus on the economic and social situation”; parliament 25 Aug said it would hold confidence vote 1 Sept. Prominent business association UTICA 18 Aug called for economic emergency law to “preserve the economic sovereignty” as economic situation continued to deteriorate amid COVID-19 pandemic, with economy shrinking by 21.6% in second quarter of 2020 compared to same period last year and unemployment rate reaching 18% by mid-Aug.