

Middle East and North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

➔ **Israel-Palestine** Violence continued between Israeli security forces and Palestinians across Israel-Gaza fence, in West Bank and Jerusalem. In Gaza, militants 1-10 Feb launched near-daily rocket attacks into Israel to which Israeli security forces retaliated by striking Hamas targets in Gaza. Egypt and UN 13 Feb maintained cease-fire discussions. Militants 15 Feb launched at least two rockets into Israel, prompting Israel to strike Hamas in Gaza. After three days of no cross-fence attacks, Israel 19 Feb increased fishing zone off Gaza to fifteen nautical miles and issued 2,000 additional travel permits for Palestinian businessmen. Israeli security forces 23 Feb shot dead member of Palestinian faction Islamic Jihad (PIJ) who they claimed was trying to plant bomb in Israel-Gaza fence area, Israeli bulldozer mutilated body while attempting to retrieve it; in response, PIJ 23-24 Feb launched over 80 rockets at Israel, which prompted Israel to launch airstrikes targeting PIJ in Gaza and Syria, leaving six dead. Egypt and UN mediated ceasefire 24 Feb. Israel 27 Feb eased restrictions on Gaza after two days of calm. In West Bank, Israeli security forces 5 Feb killed Palestinian protesting against U.S. peace plan in Hebron; clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinians 6-7 Feb left three Palestinians dead in Jenin and Qaffin towns; Palestinian security forces 18 Feb opened fire on Palestinians in Qabatiya city, killing one. Israeli PM Netanyahu 25 Feb said he would advance plans to build some 3,500 homes for Israelis in E1 area near Ma'ale Adumim settlement. Israel 27 Feb approved construction of 1,739 homes for Israelis in West Bank. In Jerusalem, Israeli police 6 Feb killed Palestinian with Israeli citizenship who had opened fire at them at Holy Esplanade; police 22 Feb killed Palestinian attempting to stab them. In Syria, suspected Israeli airstrikes near Damascus 6 Feb reportedly killed over twenty govt troops and Iranian-backed militants; 27 Feb reportedly killed Hizbollah commander near Golan Heights.

➔ **Lebanon** Parliament gave new govt vote of confidence as anti-govt protesters clashed with security forces. In capital Beirut, govt 6 Feb approved financial rescue plan that includes taking "painful steps" to tackle economic crisis. Parliament 11 Feb gave govt vote of confidence, as protesters attempting to disrupt parliamentary session clashed with security forces, leaving around 400 protesters injured. Lebanon 12 Feb formally requested International Monetary Fund (IMF) to send delegation to help draw up comprehensive rescue plan. Team of IMF advisers 20-24 Feb met PM Diab and other govt representatives and discussed options to overcome crisis. Hizbollah 25 Feb said it opposed IMF managing financial crisis.

↓ **Syria** Deadly fighting escalated in Idlib province in north west between Russian-backed regime forces on one side and rebels and Turkish troops on other; political wing of Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) held talks with govt and in south Israeli airstrikes killed over twenty govt troops and members of pro-Iranian militias. In north west, regime forces' artillery fire and Russian airstrikes killed total of eighteen Turkish soldiers and three Turkish civilian contractors early Feb; in retaliatory strikes, Turkish forces killed thirteen Syrian soldiers. Regime forces 7 Feb captured strategic town of Saraqib, bypassing and encircling four Turkish military

observation posts; rebel forces recaptured town 26 Feb. Turkish President Erdoğan 10 Feb gave Syrian regime until end of Feb to withdraw behind Turkish observation posts and in later statements threatened direct military action. Turkish-backed rebels 20 Feb launched offensive along strategic M4 highway. Suspected regime airstrike 27 Feb killed 33 Turkish soldiers in Idlib province; Turkey said its retaliatory strikes next day killed over 300 regime soldiers. Regime and Russian airstrikes targeting schools and nurseries 25 Feb killed 21 civilians in Idlib city and surrounding area. NGO Syrian Network for Human Rights said 276 civilians killed in Syria in Feb. In north east, having reached agreement with SDF, coalition of Syrian Kurdish parties Kurdish National Council (KNC) 2 Feb announced that reopening of its offices in SDF-held territory. Syrian Democratic Council, SDF's political wing, 9 Feb confirmed its delegation had travelled to capital Damascus to begin Russian-mediated talks with regime centred on formation of autonomous local administrations in Kurdish-majority areas in north east. In south, Israeli airstrikes 6 Feb reportedly killed over twenty govt soldiers and pro-Iranian militants near Damascus. Israeli airstrikes in Damascus area 23 Feb killed four pro-Iranian fighters and two members of Palestinian group Islamic Jihad.

Gulf and Arabian Peninsula

➔ **Iran** Govt slowed escalation on nuclear front after E3 (France, Germany and UK) triggered 2015 nuclear deal's dispute resolution mechanism mid-Jan and conservative coalition won a majority in parliamentary elections. President Rouhani assured EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell, who visited Tehran 3-4 Feb, that Iran would continue to comply with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) monitoring. IAEA 5 Feb assessed that Iran's uranium production and enrichment was not at critical level. U.S. 9 Feb seized significant haul of weapons "of Iranian design and manufacture" in Arabian Sea. Following Iran's failed satellite launch 9 Feb, U.S. Sec State Pompeo 11 Feb accused govt of using satellite launches to enhance ballistic missile technology; Iran next day rejected allegations. U.S. 13 Feb implemented 45-day sanctions waiver to allow Iraq to import gas from Iran; U.S. Senate same day passed war powers resolution aimed at preventing President Trump from engaging in military action against Iran without declaration of war or specific authorisation by Congress, Trump vowed to veto bill. Iran-Israel tensions persisted following reports by Syrian state media that missile attacks into Syria 6 and 13 Feb came from Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. Israeli defence minister 8 Feb said U.S. and Israel had agreed they would counter Iran in Iraq and Syria respectively. Guardian Council 13 Feb published final list of 7,100 vetted candidates for 21 Feb parliamentary elections having disqualified over 8,000 including 75 sitting lawmakers. Rouhani 16 Feb said elections in 44 of 208 districts were not competitive and criticised mass disqualification of moderate candidates; U.S. 20 Feb sanctioned five Iranian officials for their roles in disqualifying candidates. Alliance of conservative candidates won most seats, enough to hold majority in 290-seat parliament. Turnout at 42.5% was lowest since 1979.

➔ **Iraq** President Salih appointed former minister Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi as new PM but parliament failed to approve his cabinet, anti-govt protesters continued to face violent repression and security forces kept up operations against Islamic State (ISIS). Salih 1 Feb appointed former communications minister Allawi as PM and

tasked him with forming govt. Shiite parliamentary blocs Sairoun and Fatah same day endorsed Allawi's nomination. Anti-govt protesters rejected Allawi on grounds that he is part of ruling elite. Popular Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr 2 Feb instructed his supporters to help security forces clear roads and public spaces occupied by protesters: Sadr's supporters same day began attacking protesters including in Najaf city 5 Feb that left around two dozen dead, and attack in Karbala next day that left over ten dead; Sadr 8 Feb called on his supporters to leave protest sites and 11 Feb said he would disband Peace Brigades unit within his support base responsible for violence. Sadr expressed support for Allawi's nomination. Allawi 19 Feb said he had formed cabinet of independents. Parliament late Feb failed to approve Allawi's cabinet after Sunni and Kurdish parties boycotted vote. Unclaimed rockets 13 and 16 Feb struck military bases hosting U.S. troops in Kirkuk province and in Green Zone in capital Baghdad. ISIS attacks 2-28 Feb left at least twelve civilians, ten security force members and six militants dead in Diyala, Nineveh, Kirkuk and Salah ad-Din provinces. Security forces continued anti-ISIS operations, reportedly killing around 80 militants 4-28 Feb in Diyala, Salah ad-Din and Kirkuk provinces. Despite parliament's non-binding resolution in Jan instructing govt to expel foreign troops from Iraq, NATO Sec Gen Stoltenberg 13 Feb said govt had asked NATO to continue training Iraqi security forces. U.S. 13 Feb renewed sanctions waiver allowing Iraq to continue importing Iranian energy for 45 more days.

➡ **Qatar** Govt 15 Feb confirmed that efforts to resolve intra-Gulf dispute between Qatar and Saudi-led bloc stalled early Jan, after preliminary discussions that began in Oct failed to reach diplomatic breakthrough. U.S. and Afghan Taliban 29 Feb signed peace deal in capital Doha (see Afghanistan).

⚡ **Saudi Arabia** Saudi-led coalition stepped up airstrikes against Huthi forces in Yemen's north, prompting renewed cross-border attacks, and deployed helicopters attack against Hurayzi tribesmen in east. In Yemen, Huthi rebels claimed responsibility for 14 Feb downing of Saudi military jet in al-Jawf governorate; Saudi-led coalition's retaliatory airstrikes in al-Jawf 15 Feb killed 31 civilians. After Saudi Arabia joined talks between Yemeni govt and Huthis on confidence building measures in Jordanian capital Amman, Yemeni govt 16 Feb agreed in principle with Huthis to organise exchange of up to 1,400 detainees. Saudi airstrikes early Feb slowed Huthi offensive along main front lines in al-Jawf, Saana and Marib governorates, preventing Huthis from taking al-Hazm, capital of al-Jawf, and making push to Marib city, Yemeni govt's main urban strongholds. In response, Huthis resumed cross-border missile attacks on southern Saudi Arabia. In eastern Yemen, fighting erupted late Feb between Saudi-backed forces and Hurayzi tribesmen in al-Mahra governorate; Saudi military deployed attack helicopters to disperse Omani-backed Hurayzi tribesmen after they blocked Saudi-backed forces from taking control of Shehn border crossing with Oman.

➡ **United Arab Emirates** Thousands of Emirati soldiers 9 Feb returned from Yemen as part of planned military withdrawal. British law firm Stoke White, invoking principle of universal jurisdiction, 12 Feb requested UK, U.S. and Turkey to open investigations into senior Emirati officials suspected of perpetrating war crimes in Yemen. Govt 3 Feb announced discovery of 80 trillion cubic feet of shallow gas reserves by state-owned Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) at Jebel Ali gas field, largest gas discovery in last fifteen years worldwide; ADNOC signed agreement with Dubai Supply Authority to jointly explore gas reserves.

↓ 🌐 **Yemen** Fighting escalated in north as Huthis pursued counteroffensive against govt forces, seizing control of al-Jawf governorate and resuming cross-border attacks into Saudi Arabia, raising risk that violence intensifies further in north in March; fighting erupted in east near border with Oman between Saudi-backed forces and local tribesmen; and govt and southern separatists failed to advance implementation of Riyadh Agreement in south. Huthis 14 Feb claimed responsibility for downing Saudi military jet in al-Jawf governorate; Saudi-led coalition next day retaliated with airstrikes killing 31 civilians. After Saudi Arabia agreed to join talks between Yemeni govt and Huthis on confidence building measures in Jordanian capital Amman, Yemeni govt 16 Feb agreed in principle with Huthis to organise exchange of up to 1,400 detainees. After govt forces launched major offensive toward rebel-held capital Sanaa in Jan, Huthis pursued counteroffensive in al-Jawf, Sanaa and Marib governorates begun late Jan. Intense Saudi airstrikes slowed Huthis' progress toward capturing govt-controlled cities of al-Hazm, capital of al-Jawf, and making push to Marib city, govt's main urban strongholds and operations centres. In response to Saudi airstrikes, Huthis resumed missile attacks on southern Saudi Arabia. In east, Saudi-led coalition forces late Feb clashed with local tribal forces in al-Mahra governorate after members of Hurayzi tribe attempted to stop Saudi-backed forces from taking control of Shehn border crossing with Oman. Govt attempted to calm situation by replacing al-Mahra governor. In south, govt and separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) failed to fulfil commitments in Saudi-brokered "Phase 2" roadmap to implement Nov Riyadh Agreement; notably, govt delayed appointment of security chief and governor in Aden following STC's refusal to allow presidential guard to return to Aden. STC mid-Feb requested greater UN participation in implementation of agreement. Army regiment on island of Socotra 27 Feb switched sides and pledged allegiance to STC.

North Africa

➡ **Algeria** Protesters repeated calls for President Tebboune and PM Djerad to make good on promised democratic reforms. Tebboune 5 Feb pardoned some 6,000 prisoners with minor sentences. Algiers court 28 Feb acquitted Tebboune's son, Khaled Tebboune, of corruption charges, while main suspect Kamel Chikhi was sentenced to eight years. Senate 18 Feb adopted govt action plan that reflects protesters' demands to enhance democratic norms, transparency in public life, rule of law and separation of powers. Tebboune 19 Feb told media that govt would discuss new constitution with political actors and civil society before holding referendum mid-2020. Protesters 21 Feb marked one-year anniversary of peaceful protests. PM Djerad 14 Feb hinted Algeria will finance govt action plan with loans from African Development Bank and Arab investment funds. Islamic State (ISIS)-affiliated suicide bomber 11 Feb detonated explosives at military base in Bordj Badji Mokhtar on Mali border, killing one soldier.

➡ **Egypt** Violence continued in Sinai Peninsula and govt pursued talks with Ethiopia and Sudan over Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on River Nile. In Sinai Peninsula, local media 3 Feb reported that unidentified attackers blew up section of gas pipeline near el-Arish city, without impacting gas imports from Israel. Govt 17 Feb announced it had started building latest in series of new military bases,

this one in Abu Sultan to protect Suez Canal. Egyptian officials 10 Feb resumed mediation between Israel and Hamas to avoid military escalation. Local media mid-Feb reported that military had begun building wall along parts of border with Gaza considered vulnerable to incursions and tunnels. National security agency 7 Feb arrested Patrick Zaky, activist and student at University of Bologna in Italy, in Mansoura, north of Cairo; Italian President of European Parliament David Sassoli 12 Feb called for Zaky's immediate release. Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan 14 Feb announced broad agreement on filling and operation of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on River Nile; U.S. and World Bank worked on final draft agreement on technical issues ahead of 27-28 Feb ministerial meeting in Washington DC which Ethiopia boycotted. Foreign affairs and water resources ministries 29 Feb criticised Ethiopia's decision. Former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak 25 Feb died in hospital.

➡ **Libya** Despite intense diplomacy aimed at brokering ceasefire in Jan, fighting and arms imports continued throughout month and UN-led talks faltered. Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar's Arab Libyan Armed Forces (ALAF, previously Libyan National Army) kept up assault on capital Tripoli held by forces loyal to UN-backed Govt of National Accord (GNA). Rockets hit Tripoli's Meitiga airport and 6 Feb Tripoli University causing no casualties. Strike on residential neighbourhood of Nauwfilayin 12 Feb killed one. Missile hit Tripoli's functioning port 18 Feb; Turkish President Erdoğan 22 Feb said Turkish military had suffered losses in Libya, possibly reference to two Turkish soldiers presumed killed in port strike. Haftar 23 Feb claimed his forces had killed sixteen Turkish soldiers, figure believed to be exaggerated. Both sides continued to receive shipments of arms and military equipment from external backers. Cargo flights landed in Benghazi city from Haftar allies Jordan and United Arab Emirates early Feb; Turkey reportedly continued shipments of military equipment to Tripoli for GNA forces and pro-Turkey Syrian fighters continued to arrive, now estimated at over 2,000. Talks between five ALAF and five GNA military representatives in Geneva early Feb failed to produce ceasefire agreement; GNA initially called off second meeting due 18 Feb following ALAF strike on Tripoli port but subsequently talks resumed without producing agreement. Negotiations on new governing framework and new govt of national unity kicked off 26 Feb but GNA and House of Representatives pulled their delegates citing lack of progress in military talks. UN hosted talks on financial/economic track in Cairo 16-17 Feb with no breakthrough. Oil sector closures supported by pro-Haftar tribes continued, reportedly causing revenue shortfall of over \$2bn. UN Security Council 12 Feb adopted first conflict-related resolution since April 2019 outbreak of hostilities, calling on parties to commit to ceasefire and on UN member states to comply with arms embargo, Russia abstained. EU foreign affairs ministers 17 Feb agreed to launch new operation in Mediterranean Sea to enforce UN arms embargo, expected to launch in March.

➡ **Tunisia** PM Fakhfakh 19 Feb formed coalition govt comprising mainly independent ministers, to which parliament gave vote of confidence 27 Feb with 129 votes to 77; govt excluded Qalb Tounes, party of media mogul Nabil Karoui, which has second-largest parliamentary bloc with 38 MPs, and populist forces Karama coalition (fifteen seats in parliament) and Free Destourian party (seventeen seats). An-Nahda 17 Feb announced (and later retracted) intention to halt negotiations to form new govt. Interior Ministry 11 Feb announced discovery of terrorist training camp in Kasserine governorate in west and seizure of materials for manufacturing explosives.

Govt 25 Feb announced joint operation which killed two members of Islamic State affiliate, Jund al Khilafa.

➡ **Western Sahara** Israeli journalist Barak Ravid 3 Feb revealed that negotiations were ongoing between Morocco, Israel and U.S. over normalisation of Morocco-Israel relations and U.S. recognition of Moroccan sovereignty in Western Sahara.