

Middle East and North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

➔ **Israel-Palestine** **Israeli forces killed five Palestinians in West Bank, Hamas and Israel exchanged fire in Gaza, and Israeli forces clashed with Bedouin protesters in Negev desert.** In West Bank, Israeli police 5 Jan ran over elderly Palestinian activist in Umm al-Khair village who attempted to prevent police from confiscating unregistered Palestinian cars; man later died from injuries. Israeli forces 6 Jan shot dead Palestinian in raid on Balata refugee camp; Israeli settler same day ran over and killed Palestinian at Beit Shira checkpoint. Israeli soldiers 12 Jan assaulted Palestinian-American man near Ramallah city and left him blindfolded and bound; man was found dead next day after suffering heart attack. Israeli soldier 17 Jan shot dead Palestinian attempting to stab him at bus stop at Gush Etzion junction in West Bank. Israeli forces 28 Jan reportedly injured at least 26 Palestinians while dispersing rallies in Beita town and Beit Dajan village. Meanwhile, Israel 5 Jan indefinitely shelved plans to approve construction in controversial E-1 area of West Bank. In occupied East Jerusalem, Israeli authorities 19 Jan evicted family and demolished house in Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood; French, German, Italian and Spanish foreign ministries same day urged Israel to stop construction of housing units in East Jerusalem. In Gaza, two rockets were fired 1 Jan into sea near Tel Aviv; Hamas said launch was unintentional and Israel responded by striking alleged Hamas missile manufacturing sites; Hamas then fired two anti-aircraft missiles toward Israeli helicopters. Islamic Jihad-affiliated administrative detainee 4 Jan ended five-month hunger strike after Israel announced release date for Feb; Islamic Jihad had previously threatened violence if detainee died. In Negev desert, Israeli forces 12-13 Jan cracked down on Bedouin citizens near Sawe al-Atrash and Beer Sheeva protesting tree planting by Jewish National Fund, considering forestation part of govt effort to expel them from legally unrecognised land; crackdown led to injuries and dozens of arrests; United Arab List party (member of governing coalition) condemned move, threatening to boycott parliamentary voting. Reaffirming Israel's intention to deepen ties with Jordan, Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz 5 Jan met Jordanian King Abdullah II in Jordan's capital Amman.

➔ **Lebanon** **Currency continued to depreciate, prompting central bank to announce new scheme, while Hizbollah and Amal ended months-long boycott of cabinet.** Lebanese lira continued to depreciate, with exchange rate reaching near 34,000 to U.S. dollar on 11 Jan, a record low. Central bank same day announced it would provide banks with unlimited amounts of U.S. dollars at rate about 30 per cent lower; in response, market rate rapidly fell. By 20 Jan, U.S. dollar traded around 23,000 in informal market, reversing losses that lira had suffered since early Dec. Deputy PM Saadeh al-Shami 24 Jan announced round of talks with International Monetary Fund (IMF) aimed at establishing strategy to address "deep economic challenges". Efforts continued to put in place schemes whereby country would be supplied with Egyptian natural gas and Jordanian electricity via Syria, thereby improving dismal performance of public electricity grid, which currently supplies less than three hours daily. Energy ministers of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria 26 Jan signed agreement to deliver electricity to Lebanon via

Syria; Lebanon now seeks to secure World Bank loan to finance deal. On political front, Shiite groups Hizbollah and Amal 15 Jan announced end to boycott of cabinet sessions in place since 12 Oct 2021 in attempt to force replacement of Judge Tarik Bitar who heads investigation into Aug 2020 Beirut port explosion, citing need to pass 2022 budget and push forward with economic reform and IMF talks. Diplomatic spat with Gulf countries failed to find resolution. Hassan Nasrallah, leader of Hizbollah, early Jan accused Riyadh of spreading extremist ideology and holding Lebanese citizens in Gulf “hostage”; PM Mikati immediately issued statement saying that Nasrallah’s comments did not represent the views of govt or Lebanese people. Hezbollah 12 Jan hosted conference for Saudi opposition figures in capital Beirut. Kuwaiti FM 27 Jan visited Beirut, reportedly conveying 12 conditions, assumed to be formulated by Saudi Arabia, for restoring relations between Lebanon and Gulf countries; conditions reportedly included end to Hizbollah’s regional posture and ban on political activities deemed hostile to Gulf countries in Lebanon.

↓ **Syria Islamic State conducted largest-scale attack since 2019, killing dozens and displacing thousands, amid ongoing insecurity in north west.** In one of most significant Islamic State (ISIS) attacks in Syria since group’s territorial defeat in 2019, ISIS 20 Jan attacked Kurdish-run Ghwayran/al-Sina’a prison in al-Hasakah city in attempt to free ISIS detainees; clashes in following days with Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and U.S. coalition killed some 500 people, including over 370 ISIS fighters, according to SDF; UN 23 Jan estimated that fighting displaced tens of thousands of civilians. SDF 24 Jan said it raided parts of prison forcing militants to surrender. ISIS carried out other attacks throughout month, including alleged rocket attack on military transport bus 3 Jan killing five soldiers and injuring 20 in Badia area. SDF and ISIS 29 Jan engaged in renewed clashes around al-Sina’a prison complex. In Aleppo in north west, series of bombing attacks 13 Jan struck locations in Al-Bab, Afrin and Azaz towns, reportedly killing one civilian and two suspected suicide bombers. Turkey 15 Jan responded by bombing SDF-controlled areas; according to SDF, Turkish bombing of Kobani city killed at least one civilian and injured 11. Shelling 20 Jan killed at least six in Afrin city and Maryamayn town, prompting Turkish forces to shell Kurdish-held areas. In Idlib in north west, March 2020 ceasefire held despite violations. Russian fighter jets carried out air strikes in rebel-held areas in Idlib and ISIS targets in central desert; notably, air raids 13 Jan killed at least 11 ISIS members in Homs and Deir ez-Zor deserts. In Deir ez-Zor, U.S.-led coalition 5 Jan stated that Iranian-backed militias targeted SDF base Green Village housing coalition troops. Syrian state media reported that Israeli missiles 31 Jan targeted outskirts of capital Damascus. Six-month reauthorisation for using Bab al-Hawa border point for cross-border humanitarian assistance 10 Jan went into effect until 10 July. In historical verdict, German court 13 Jan sentenced former Syrian Colonel Anwar Raslan to life in prison for complicity in torture, 27 murders and physical and sexual assault during Syria’s civil war in 2011-2012.

Gulf and Arabian Peninsula

➔ **Iran Negotiations aimed at restoring 2015 nuclear deal neared critical juncture, while regional tensions with U.S. continued.** Eighth

round of talks in Austrian capital Vienna that started on 27 Dec continued throughout month, with all participants noting some measure of progress although U.S. and European parties emphasised necessity of faster progress; negotiations 28 Jan paused for consultations with capitals and set to resume early Feb. Amid continued expansion of Iranian nuclear capabilities, U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 13 Jan referred to “not months ahead, weeks ahead” before window for returning to mutual compliance with 2015 deal closes. Iran’s foreign ministry 17 Jan indicated that deliberations were centred around four draft texts, underscoring Tehran’s desire for deal that is “reliable and stable”. Senior South Korean diplomat early Jan visited Vienna “to explore ways to resolve the issue of frozen Iranian assets in Korea”; Seoul 23 Jan confirmed payment of outstanding Iranian UN dues using frozen funds. U.S. official 23 Jan said “very hard for us to imagine getting back into the nuclear deal” so long as four citizens remain imprisoned in Iran, as indirect talks on detainees take place. International Atomic Energy Agency 31 Jan announced Iranian notification on ceasing centrifuge parts production at Karaj facility and shifting that activity to Isfahan site. Meanwhile, around two-year anniversary of killing of Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Qods Force Commander Qassem Soleimani in U.S. drone strike, there was marked uptick in exchanges involving U.S. forces and Iran-backed militias in Iraq and Syria; notably, rocket fire and armed drone struck Ain al-Asad air base in western Iraq (see Iraq and Syria). Foreign ministry 8 Jan added 51 U.S. nationals, including currently serving military commanders and members of Trump administration, to its sanctions list, citing their involvement in Soleimani’s killing; White House next day warned Iran of “severe consequences” if it should attack U.S. nationals.

➔ **Iraq Parliament held first session since Oct election, Popular Mobilisation Forces stepped up attacks, and Islamic State carried out one of its deadliest attacks in months.** Parliament 9 Jan held first session since Oct election, re-electing Mohammed al-Halbousi as parliament speaker, Sadrist movement’s Hakim al-Zamili as first deputy and Kurdistan Democratic Party’s (KDP) Shakhawan Abdullah as second deputy; session went ahead despite verbal altercations and suspected attempts at disruption in line with Shia coordination framework’s wishes; latter 10 Jan filed complaint at Supreme Court challenging parliament proceedings as unconstitutional but court 25 Jan rejected appeal to overturn selection of speaker. Following session, unclaimed hand grenade attacks 13 Jan targeted KDP headquarters, 14 Jan struck Sunni Taqaddum and Azm party offices in capital Baghdad in likely warning to Shia leader of largest bloc Muqtada al-Sadr not to exclude Shia parties in govt formation. Twin explosions 16 Jan targeted banks associated with Kurdish politicians in Baghdad, injuring two. Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Commander Ismael Qaani and Hizbollah representative Mohammed al-Kawtharani 16-17 Jan mediated between Shia parties in Baghdad, with some sources indicating Iran’s possible acceptance of non-Shia majority govt. Rockets 25 Jan struck near speaker’s residence in Karma district, Anbar province, injuring two civilians. In increase of attacks compared to last month, Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF)-affiliated resistance factions early Jan conducted at least 22 attacks on domestic and foreign targets; notably, in commemoration of 2020 assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, PMF 3-6 Jan launched drone and rocket attacks on Green Zone and airport in Baghdad and Ain al-Asad air base in Anbar governorate; previously unknown group Qassem al-Jabarayn 5 Jan claimed Ain al-Asad attack. Also marking Soleimani’s killing, thousands 1 Jan rallied in

Baghdad chanting anti-U.S. slogans. PMF-affiliated groups 6 Jan attacked Peshmerga forces near Altun Kopri in Kirkuk governorate. Rocket attack targeting U.S. embassy in Baghdad's Green Zone 13 Jan injured two. Six rockets 28 Jan hit Baghdad International Airport compound and landed near U.S. air base Camp Victory. ISIS attacks continued throughout month; most notably, suspected ISIS gunmen 21 Jan attacked army barracks in Azim district in Diyala governorate, killing 11 soldiers.

➡ **Saudi Arabia Tit-for-tat cross-border attacks with Huthis continued, while Riyadh eased tensions with Qatar and Iran.** Saudi-led coalition throughout month intercepted Huthi drones and ballistic missiles targeting southern kingdom including Najran city, Dhahran Al-Janoub governorate, Uhud Al-Masraha governorate, Khamis Mushait city, Taif city; notably, missile 23 Jan injured two foreign residents in Jazan. Coalition intensified air strikes on Huthi targets in Yemen (see Yemen). Saudi Arabia and Qatar 7 Jan halted dispute at World Trade Organization over Saudi Arabia-based television channel's alleged theft of sports content broadcast by Qatari state-run channel. Three Iranian diplomats 17 Jan arrived in Saudi Arabia to reopen office at Organisation of Islamic Cooperation in Jeddah port city for first time since 2016; Iranian FM spokesperson same day said Iran was ready to reopen embassy in Saudi Arabia depending on "practical efforts" by latter. Meanwhile, govt critic Princess Basmah bint Saud 6 Jan returned home to Jeddah after being imprisoned in state prison without charges since March 2019.

↓ **United Arab Emirates Huthis in Yemen launched largest attack on country to date, killing three people.** After United Arab Emirates (UAE)-aligned forces in Yemen seized territory in north-western Shebwa governorate (see Yemen), Huthis carried out attacks on UAE. Huthis 2 Jan seized Emirati vessel in Red Sea and 17 Jan claimed attack targeting industrial facility in Musaffah and extension of airport in capital Abu Dhabi, killing three and injuring six; Huthis 24 Jan targeted Dhafra air base hosting U.S. military in UAE. Attacks come after increasing visibility of Emirati role in Yemen as reports have indicated in recent weeks that UAE has stepped up air operations and support to anti-Huthi groups, despite previous 2019 UAE announcement of withdrawal from conflict. Authorities 31 Jan said they had intercepted missile fired by Huthis from Yemen. Attack came as Israeli President Herzog 30-31 Jan travelled to UAE in first ever visit by Israeli president and discussed security and bilateral relations with Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

↓ **Yemen Battlefield hostilities escalated as anti-Huthi forces regained Shebwa governorate and Saudi-led coalition intensified bombing after Huthis launched deadly attacks on United Arab Emirates.** United Arab Emirates (UAE)-aligned Giants Brigades early month recaptured al-Ain, Bayhan and Usaylan districts in north-western Shebwa governorate, al-Saadi junction connecting Marib and Shebwa governorates, and Harib district in southern Marib governorate; Giants Brigades later gained control of strategic road leading to al-Abdiya district and advanced toward Umm Rish camp in al-Juba district in Marib, although local and regional media late month reported that Giants' military push was being halted; gains represented Huthis' first visible territorial losses since their push toward Marib city in Jan 2020. In response to losses, Huthis carried out series of missile and drone attacks on UAE (see United Arab Emirates); Saudi-led coalition

reacted by launching air strikes on capital Sanaa; notably, coalition 18 Jan carried out air raids on Sanaa killing at least 20; 21 Jan struck telecoms facility in Hodeida city killing three children and causing four-day nationwide internet outage. Attack 21 Jan targeting prison in Huthi-held Saada city reportedly killed at least 91 and injured over 200; coalition denied responsibility. U.S. President Biden 19 Jan said administration was considering re-designating Huthis as international terrorist organisation. Elsewhere, clashes continued without major shifts in front lines. In south, Taiz city witnessed increased levels of fighting, with govt forces making small advances around Jabal Habashi and Maqbana districts' border. On political front, tensions between local authorities and tribal movements resurfaced in Hadramawt governorate as tribal conglomeration Hadramawt Inclusive Committee in Wadi Hadramawt area vied for establishment of locally-led military unit outside of ministry of defence chain of command as governor rejected idea. On economic front, currency volatility persisted as Yemeni riyal 30 Jan fell to 1,030 to U.S. dollar, following its appreciation last month, amid fuel shortages and price hikes, notably in Sanaa. Internationally, Iranian FM 10 Jan met Huthi top negotiator and Omani officials; UN Envoy Hans Grundberg 12 Jan briefed UN Security Council, notably highlighted military escalation and concern over militarisation of Hodeida port; 19 Jan met Saudi Vice Minister of Defense and Yemeni FM in Saudi capital Riyadh.

North Africa

➡ **Algeria Accusations toward army chief of alleged criminal activities exposed divisions within military, and space for civil society remained restricted.** Guermit Bounouira, former private secretary of late Army Chief of Staff Gen Ahmed Gaïd Salah, in videos released from 9 Jan, made series of allegations against military figures, notably accusing current Army Chief of Staff Gen Saïd Chengriha of drug and arms trafficking; military court in Blida province next day sentenced Bounouira, who has been in prison since 2020, to death on several charges including “high treason”. Meanwhile, hundreds of human rights groups, civil society activists and journalists 8 Jan jointly denounced govt’s crackdown on citizen’s constitutional rights, said repression had intensified in recent days with detention of youth movement Rassemblement Actions Jeunesse (RAJ) leaders Nasser Eddine Hamitouche 2 Jan and Hicham Khiat 6 Jan. Court in capital Algiers 9 Jan sentenced opposition party Democratic and Social Movement leader and figure of Hirak protest movement Fethi Ghares to two years in prison on charges of insulting president, disseminating information endangering national unity and state security. NGO National Committee for the Liberation of Detainees 23 Jan recorded 247 “prisoners of conscience” across country. President Tebboune 5 Jan said Algerian ambassador to Paris would return to his post next day, possibly ending three-month diplomatic row. Algeria 11 Jan criticised West Africa’s regional bloc ECOWAS sanctions on Mali, asked Malian junta to complete transition within 16 months and offered to mediate between both sides.

➡ **Egypt Repression of rights defenders and political activists continued while violence persisted in North Sinai.** Authorities took symbolic measures in apparent bid to appease Western partners but repression continued. Authorities 8 Jan released Coptic human rights activist Ramy Kamel and Egyptian-Palestinian activist Ramy Shaath while forcing latter to abandon his Egyptian

nationality; next day released 15 women who had been in pre-trial detention for two years on charges of “spreading false news” and “promoting terrorism”. Meanwhile, security forces 12 Jan arrested opposition activist Hossam Mahmoud Sallam after his Khartoum-Istanbul flight landed at Luxor airport; Istanbul-based NGO We Record next day denounced “kidnapping”. One of last remaining independent rights groups, Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, 10 Jan said it was forced to suspend its operations due to repressive laws. Group of U.S. foreign affairs experts Working Group on Egypt 22 Jan called on U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken to deny \$130mn in annual security assistance (withheld from Egypt in Sept 2021) unless Cairo fully meets series of human rights conditions by 30 Jan deadline; U.S. Senator Chris Murphy 28 Jan said U.S. President Biden had decided to reprogram funds, applauded “important message”. Meanwhile, U.S. State Dept 25 Jan announced \$2.5bn in arms sale to Egypt. In Sinai Peninsula, army around 9 Jan killed two suspected Islamic State (ISIS)-affiliated Sinai Province (SP) militants in Bir al-Abd area. Military governor for North Sinai 15 Jan announced residents of villages south of Sheikh Zuweid town had returned home. Suspected ISIS militants around 19 Jan reportedly killed or wounded 13 soldiers in ambush in Joura area, south of Sheikh Zuweid. Suspected ISIS militants 25 Jan allegedly kidnapped six people in Bir al-Abd town, and explosive device hours later killed up to five soldiers in same area.

➔ **Libya** **Following failure to hold presidential election in late Dec, parliament and others manoeuvred to postpone polls indefinitely.** Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR) Speaker Aguila Saleh 17 Jan called for replacing interim Govt of National Unity (GNU) with new govt, contending PM Dabaiba’s mandate expired 24 Dec, and proposed new constitutional drafting process. High National Election Commission (HNEC) same day said six to eight months needed to resume electoral process (constitutional drafting process notwithstanding), 20 Jan set up committee to review presidential candidacies submitted in Nov. Dabaiba 23 Jan also called for adoption of new constitution before elections, but denied his mandate expired on 24 Dec, insisting new govt can only be appointed following elections. UN Special Adviser Stephanie Williams 24 Jan insisted “Libya does not need another prolonged transitional period”; comment came after Williams 16 Jan said holding elections by June, in line with UN-brokered 2020 roadmap, was “very reasonable and possible”. Dabaiba 31 Jan announced applications for interim PM would open next day and said HoR would meet 8 Feb to vote on new PM; several politicians throughout month appeared to campaign for PM position, including former Tripoli-based Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha and Tripoli-based High State Council Chair Khaled Mishri, both of whom recently made important overtures to eastern strongman Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar. Islamic State (ISIS)-affiliated combatants 24 Jan claimed having killed two security personnel near southern town of Sabha one week earlier; new attack in same area 26 Jan reportedly killed another three. Meanwhile, French govt 4 Jan said around 300 mercenaries had left eastern Libya, hailing start of phased withdrawal of thousands of foreign forces in line with 2020 ceasefire. Central Bank Governor Saddek Omar Elkaber 20 Jan announced launch of bank’s reunification process. Brussels Prosecutor’s Office 21 Jan said it had issued international arrest warrant against Libyan Investment Authority Chairman Ali Mahmoud Hassan on corruption and embezzlement charges as part of investigation into management of Libyan assets frozen in Belgium after fall of Muammar Qadhafi in 2011.

➡ **Tunisia Opposition to President Saïed continued to intensify amid growing concern over human rights.** Powerful labour union UGTT 4 Jan criticised Saïed's newly released political roadmap, which sets legislative elections for Dec, said it "does not break with individual rule and exclusion", and called on authorities to resume "social dialogue". Civil society activists from "Citizens against the coup" initiative 23 Dec-12 Jan went on hunger strike to protest "total removal of liberties". UN Human Rights Office 11 Jan voiced "serious concern" about deteriorating human rights situation, urged authorities to promptly release or formally charge Islamist-inspired party An-Nahda Deputy President (and former Justice Minister) Nouredine Bhiri and another man arrested late Dec on terrorism allegations; Bhiri hospitalised 2 Jan after starting hunger strike. On occasion of 11th anniversary of former President Ben Ali's departure, hundreds 14 Jan demonstrated against Saïed's power grab in capital Tunis despite gathering ban; police cracked down on protest using sticks, water cannons and tear gas, leaving several people injured; An-Nahda 19 Jan said party member Ridha Bouziane had died in hospital from injuries sustained during protest, but court same day said man's body bore no visible signs of violence. Saïed 15 Jan launched online public consultation on reforms aimed at informing drafting of new constitution; over 30 civil society groups around 24 Jan criticised process, called for inclusive dialogue instead. Saïed 19 Jan suspended salaries and privileges of independent body High Judicial Council members citing need to combat corruption in judiciary; Association of Young Magistrates 25 Jan denounced "smear campaign" against judicial independence. Chief of Presidential Cabinet Nadia Akacha 24 Jan resigned citing "fundamental differences in opinion" over country's interests. Interior ministry 28 Jan said police 10 Jan arrested woman coming from Syria for allegedly planning terrorist attack in Tunisia.

➡ **Western Sahara Recently-appointed UN envoy embarked on regional tour signalling renewed international effort to resolve Western Sahara conflict; several drone attacks reported during month.** UN Sec-Gen's Personal Envoy for Western Sahara Staffan de Mistura 12-19 Jan visited Maghreb region to try and relaunch negotiations on disputed territory. De Mistura met with Moroccan FM Nasser Bourita in Moroccan capital Rabat 13 Jan; Polisario Front independence movement leader Brahim Ghali in Sahrawi refugee camp in Algeria's Tindouf province 16 Jan; Mauritanian President Ould Ghazouani in Mauritania's capital Nouakchott next day; Algerian FM Ramtane Lamamra and Algerian envoy for Western Sahara and Maghreb countries Amar Belani in Algeria's capital Algiers 19 Jan. Morocco and Algeria reaffirmed their position: Morocco stated its readiness to resume negotiations under so-called roundtable format, which includes Mauritania and Algeria, while Algeria called for direct negotiations. French newspaper *La Croix* reported Moroccan drone strike 3 Jan killed three Mauritanian civilians in UN buffer zone. Sources close to political force Sahrawi Movement for Peace mid-Jan reported drone attack killed four Polisario members in eastern Mehaires area in Polisario-held Western Sahara.