

Middle East and North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

➔ **Israel-Palestine** Low-level violence continued between Israeli forces and Palestinians along Israel-Gaza fence. Palestinians in Gaza continued to protest each Friday near fence that separates Gaza strip from Israel. Israeli gunfire left hundreds of protesters injured and incendiary balloons from Gaza started fires in nearby Israeli communities. Israeli security forces 11 July shot and killed Hamas member who tried to stop Palestinian youths approaching Gaza-Israel fence, Israel claimed incident was case of mistaken identity. Hamas same day responded by firing two rockets into southern Israel, which caused no injuries. Egyptian delegation same day met Hamas leadership in Gaza to discuss measures to prevent escalation of violence and consolidate ceasefire; Egyptians also discussed ways to repair relations between Hamas and Fatah. In West Bank, Palestinian Authority (PA) 1 July said it would pay its employees 60% of their June salaries; PM Shtayyeh next day announced PA had received first instalment of Qatari loan pledged in May. UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) 29 July announced \$50mn contribution from United Arab Emirates. Israeli security forces 22 July demolished dozens of Palestinian homes in neighbourhood under PA control in south east Jerusalem prompting PA President Abbas 25 July to declare that PA had suspended all agreements with Israel and assigned committee to recommend course of action. Israeli security forces 30 July defused bomb near Joseph's Tomb, religious site in Nablus in West Bank and clashed with Palestinians there, at least four Palestinians injured, fifteen arrested. Israel 31 July approved construction of some 7,000 houses for Israelis and 700 houses for Palestinians in West Bank. In Iraq, Israel 19 July struck Iraqi army base where Iranian security forces suspected to be present, reportedly killing one Iranian Revolutionary Guard commander, and another army base 28 July. In southern Syria, Israel 24 July reportedly carried out airstrikes close to Golan Heights targeting Syrian govt positions which left six Iranians and three Syrians dead.

➔ **Jordan** Govt 16 July restored diplomatic ties with Qatar, two years after breaking them off over Gulf crisis.

➔ **Lebanon** Disagreement in cabinet over which judicial body should handle case of deadly shooting in June paralysed govt, and hundreds protested against austerity budget. Shooting at convoy of refugee affairs minister near capital Beirut late June that killed two of his assistants paralysed govt because cabinet was divided on which judicial body should prosecute case; several mediation attempts failed. Civil servants 17 July went on strike nationwide and hundreds gathered in Beirut to protest austerity measures. Army veterans 18 July clashed with security forces outside parliament where legislators were discussing 2019 budget. Veterans next day again clashed with security forces and parliament ratified budget. Protesters vowed to challenge budget in court. As U.S.-Iran tensions continued to rise, U.S. imposed additional sanctions on Hizbollah; 9 July added two Hizbollah MPs and one security official to sanctions list; 19 July imposed sanctions on Hizbollah security official.

➔ **Syria** Pro-govt forces continued offensive against rebel-held areas of Idlib province in north west causing significant civilian suffering but failed to take new

ground, and in west Israeli air raids hit Iranian targets. In north west, jihadist coalition Hei'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) 11 July took al-Hamamiyat town in northern Hama province, but pro-govt forces same day repelled rebels' advance, and 28 July recaptured Jubain and Tal Malah. Hizbollah fighters from Lebanon 11 July reportedly joined pro-govt offensive in north west for first time, despite group's leader Hassan Nasrallah same day announcing that it was reducing its presence in Syria. Pro-govt and Russian offensive reportedly caused at least 662 civilian deaths and damaged 37 medical facilities since late April, including hospitals known to Russia through UN's de-confliction mechanisms. Russian and govt airstrikes 16-26 July killed at least 100 civilians in Maarat al-Numan, Khan Shaykhun and Ariha, in Idlib province; NGO Save the Children 24 July reported 33 children killed 24 June-24 July. In Turkish-controlled Afrin, Aleppo province, suspected fighters of Kurdish People's Protection Units 11 July killed five combatants and eight civilians in car bomb attack, including three children. Media outlet Foreign Policy 9 July reported that UK and France had agreed to increase their military presence in north east by 10% and 15% respectively to compensate for ongoing U.S. drawdown. In Deir al-Zour province in east, U.S. and French special representatives to Syria 10 July met Arab council to discuss governance and devolving authority from Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces to local Arab leaders. U.S. special envoy James Jeffrey 23 July met Turkish officials to discuss creation of safe zone on Syria-Turkey border. Islamic State (ISIS) 11-12 July claimed bombings in al-Hasakah and Qamishli cities, with no deaths reported. In west, Israeli warplanes 30 June-1 July attacked govt and Iranian targets in Damascus and Homs, killing sixteen, including three children and ten Iranian and Hizbollah fighters.

Gulf and Arabian Peninsula

➔ **Bahrain** Authorities 27 July executed three people for alleged crimes of terrorism. Rights groups said that two of convicted were Shiite activists who confessed under duress and had faced mass trial.

➔ **Iran** Relations between Iran and its allies on one side and U.S. and its allies on other remained tense as maritime confrontations intensified and Iran breached limits of 2015 nuclear deal, raising risk of military clash in Aug. British navy 4 July detained tanker off Gibraltar suspected of trying to smuggle Iranian oil to Syria. In Strait of Hormuz, Iranian boats 10 July allegedly tried to impede British tanker before British warship warned them off, Iran denied responsibility; U.S. President Trump 18 July said U.S. had downed Iranian drone, Iran denied; Iran 18 July claimed to have seized Panamanian tanker; Iranian security forces 19 July seized British-flagged tanker and temporarily detained another British-owned tanker. U.S. 19 July said it was developing multinational maritime security framework for Middle Eastern waterways. UK 23 July unveiled plan for separate European-led maritime security coalition to defend shipping in Middle East. Iran 24 July test-launched medium-range missile. United Arab Emirates officials attended 6th Iran-UAE meeting on maritime affairs in Tehran 30 July, first such meeting since 2013. Iran's stockpile of low enriched uranium exceeded nuclear deal's limit 1 July. Iran 7 July said it had raised uranium enrichment beyond limit and set 6 Sept as new deadline for deal's parties to protect it from U.S. sanctions, threatening further violations. EU foreign policy chief Mogherini 15 July said infringements would not push P4+1 (UK, France,

Russia, China and Germany) to activate dispute resolution mechanism for non-compliance, which could lead to re-imposition of sanctions. U.S. 18 July sanctioned individuals and firms it said were involved in acquiring materials for Iran's nuclear program; 31 July sanctioned FM Zarif and announced extension of sanction waivers allowing countries to continue civil nuclear projects with Iran for 90 days. Suspected Kurdish militants 9 July killed three soldiers in Piranshahr in north west near Iraq. In south east near Pakistan border, clashes between Iranian border guards and unidentified gunmen 21 July left two guards dead.

➡ **Iraq** Amid continued U.S.-Iran tensions, PM Mahdi issued decree placing Iran-backed militias under his command and ordering their integration into formal security framework, and security forces intensified operations against Islamic State (ISIS). Mahdi 1 July issued decree legalising Iran-backed Popular Mobilisation Unit (PMU) militias, granting him authority to appoint PMU head, forcing them to sever ties with political groups and integrating them into conventional security forces; Shiite cleric and political leader Moqtada al-Sadr and Hikma opposition bloc 2 July commended move. U.S. Treasury 18 July sanctioned four Iraqis, including two PMU commanders, for corruption and human rights abuses. Drone 19 July dropped grenade on base in Salah al-Din province, where Iranian Revolutionary Guard commanders were present; attack unclaimed, Pentagon denied responsibility. Security forces upped operations against ISIS. Security forces 8 July killed three ISIS militants, following launch of operation in Mosul, Anbar and Salah al-Din provinces; U.S. military 15 July confirmed it had carried out airstrikes in support of Iraqi forces. In capital Baghdad, double suicide bombings claimed by ISIS same day killed at least five civilians. In Sinjar mountains, PMUs 24 July clashed with ISIS militants, killing five. Suspected ISIS attacks 31 July killed seven members of security forces in Dujail, Salah al-Din province, and Kalar, Suleimaniya province. Govt 9 July said it had signed agreement with Iraqi Kurdistan regional govt for security cooperation in Nineveh, Salah al-Din, Diyala and Kirkuk provinces. In Iraqi Kurdistan's capital Erbil, unidentified gunmen 17 July killed two, including Turkish diplomat; Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) denied involvement. Turkey continued air and land raids against PKK targets in north, killing fourteen 20 June-20 July. Israeli warplanes attacked Iraqi army bases in Amerli, Salah al-Din province and in Ashraf, north east of Baghdad 19 and 28 July, both suspected of housing Iranian advisors and missiles, one Iranian Revolutionary Guard commander reported killed.

➡ **Kuwait** Govt 12 July said it had arrested Muslim Brotherhood "terrorist cell" from Egypt and 14 July deported to Cairo several suspects with convictions in Egypt; govt promised to "crack down ruthlessly against saboteurs".

➡ **Qatar** Emir al-Thani 9 July met U.S. President Trump in Washington and offered to help ease U.S.-Iran tensions. Govt 7-9 July hosted in Doha talks between Taliban and U.S., and between Taliban and Afghan govt (see Afghanistan).

➡ **Saudi Arabia** Govt maintained hard line against Yemen's Huthi rebels, whom it considers Iranian proxies, and encouraged Sudanese military and opposition to engage in talks aimed at political transition. Yemen's Huthi movement continued attacks into southern Saudi Arabia, but govt reported no casualties or major damage. Saudi-led coalition fighting Huthis in Yemen 8 July accused Huthis of "strong" ties to al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Same day, govt said Huthi-operated "booby-trapped boat" sought to damage commercial ship in Red Sea, but no other sources

confirmed reporting. Following visit to capital Riyadh by U.S. Envoy to Sudan Donald Booth late June, govt and United Arab Emirates (UAE) early July encouraged leaders of Sudan's Transitional Military Council and protest movement to engage in talks mediated by African Union and Ethiopia; Saudi and Emirati leaders expressed optimism about 17 July agreement between parties (see Sudan). U.S. Congress 17 July passed three resolutions aimed at blocking U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia and UAE without congressional approval. U.S. President Trump 25 July vetoed all three resolutions saying they would "weaken America's global competitiveness"; senators voting to override presidential veto 30 July numbered less than necessary two-thirds majority.

➡ **United Arab Emirates** Govt made public its military drawdown in Yemen and encouraged talks aimed at political transition in Sudan. Govt 22 July publicly acknowledged its military drawdown in Yemen, which it started in April. FM Gargash 22 July reiterated govt's commitment to political process, described drawdown as "confidence-building measure", and said UAE and Saudi-led coalition "not leaving Yemen". By end July, military had reportedly withdrawn 50-75% of its troops, but aimed to retain lead in liaison with and advice to Yemeni forces on Red Sea coast. Following late June visit to capital Abu Dhabi by U.S. Envoy to Sudan Donald Booth, govt and Saudi Arabia early July encouraged leaders of Sudan's Transitional Military Council and protest movement to engage in talks mediated by African Union and Ethiopia; Emirati and Saudi leaders expressed optimism about 17 July agreement between parties (see Sudan). Rocket carrying UAE surveillance satellite 10 July launched in French Guiana via European Space Agency (ESA) but crashed minutes after take-off, prompting ESA to announce investigation. U.S. Congress 17 July passed resolutions aimed at blocking U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia and UAE without congressional approval. UAE and Iranian officials held 6th joint meeting on maritime affairs 30 July in Iranian capital Tehran, first such meeting since 2013.

➡ **Yemen** Huthi forces kept up cross-border attacks into Saudi Arabia and fighting continued on Red Sea coast and between anti-Huthi groups in south, as United Arab Emirates (UAE) continued to withdraw forces from Red Sea coast. UAE 22 July publicly acknowledged its military drawdown from all its operations in Yemen, but appeared to retain lead for liaison with and advice to Yemeni forces on Red Sea coast. UAE FM Gargash 22 July reiterated commitment to political process, described drawdown as "confidence-building measure", and said UAE and coalition "not leaving Yemen". Main Yemeni forces – Giants Brigade, Guards of the Republic and Tihama Resistance – 2 July announced formation of command cell for "Joint Resistance Forces". Huthis continued cross-border attacks into Saudi territory and reportedly stepped up attacks on towns south of Hodeida. Huthis and Saudi-led coalition held each other responsible for attack on market in Saada province in north 29 July that killed at least ten civilians, including children. UAE-backed forces continued to clash repeatedly with Hadi govt-affiliated units, particularly in al-Dhale and Taiz governorates. Hadi govt's Economic Committee 25 June announced restoration of govt monopoly over fuel imports and distribution, angering Yemeni businessmen working in govt-controlled territory; Huthis early July claimed move was attempt to cut off fuel supplies in areas they control.

North Africa

➔ **Algeria** Weekly nationwide protests demanding regime change continued, and rival political camps emerged with competing visions for the way ahead. Hundreds of thousands continued to gather every Friday in major cities, demanding resignation of interim President Ben Salah, army chief of staff Gaïd Salah and PM Bedoui. Ben Salah's 90-day term ended 9 July, but he remained in post due to indefinite postponement of presidential elections. In concession to protesters, Ben Salah 3 July called for inclusive political dialogue and creation of new independent electoral commission. Mainly nationalist and Islamist opposition parties and activists in umbrella group Forces for Change took part in what they called National Dialogue Forum in Ain Benian, in capital Algiers 6 July; participants drafted common plan including creation of independent committees to manage national dialogue and organise elections. 70 associations close to ruling parties, National Liberation Front (FLN) and allied National Rally for Democracy (RND), 17 July met in what they called Civilian Forum for Change and advocated govt's departure and moving quickly to presidential polls. Leftist and more radical group, Force for Democratic Alternative, refused to attend Ain Benian meeting and called Civilian Forum for Change "a scam". It convened 21 July in Algiers and underscored its preconditions for opening dialogue including govt's immediate resignation, new constituent assembly and rejection of elections in short term. Ben Salah 25 July said authorities would release arrested protesters and announced appointment of six mediators to conduct dialogue between authorities and various opposition groups, aiming to establish roadmap to elections; Gaïd Salah 30 July rejected appeasement measures. Ben Salah 31 July fired Justice Minister Brahmi and appointed Algiers prosecutor Zeghmati, without stating reason. Authorities continued corruption probes into officials close to former President Bouteflika: 7 July arrested FLN's former secretary general and senator Ould Abbès for misuse of public funds.

➔ **Egypt** President Sisi consolidated executive's power over judicial branch, Islamic State (ISIS) continued attacks in Sinai, and authorities kept up repression of civil society. Following April constitutional referendum that consolidated govt's power, Sisi 11 July nominated new head of Constitutional Court, asserting greater control over judiciary. In North Sinai province, militants 17 July beheaded four civilians in town of Bir al-Abd and ISIS claimed responsibility saying victims were informers; murders prompted security forces to undertake series of raids. Suicide bomber 18 July killed civilian and soldier in town of Sheikh Zuweid. Sisi 22 July renewed national state of emergency for three more months. Govt maintained repression of civil society and opposition: authorities 11 July arrested supporter of former President Mubarak for social media posts criticising current executive. Kuwait authorities 14 July deported eight Egyptians due to links with Muslim Brotherhood. Parliament 15 July approved new NGO law to relax restrictive provisions in 2017 legislation, rights groups dismissed changes as "merely cosmetic".

⬇ **Libya** Hostilities spread to new areas: fighting between Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) and forces nominally loyal to UN-backed Govt of National Accord (GNA) continued in and around capital Tripoli, GNA carried out airstrikes in Jufra and Waddan in centre, and LNA in Misrata east of Tripoli. Parties continued to receive military support from allies (GNA from Turkey, LNA from

United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt), while diplomacy to stop war remained paralysed. Fighting in and around Tripoli led to no substantial change in territorial control. Suspected LNA airstrikes on Tajura migrant detention centre near Tripoli 2 July killed at least 50 migrants, prompting international outrage; LNA denied responsibility, claimed it targeted weapons depot. GNA 20-21 July carried out airstrikes on LNA-held Tripoli airport and Wadi Rabea, reportedly killing thirteen LNA. LNA 22 July launched large-scale assault on several fronts to capture Tripoli, which GNA forces repelled, capturing eleven LNA. Suspected LNA airstrikes 27 July targeted Zawiya hospital killing five medics. For first time since April outbreak, GNA drones 25 July attacked LNA in Jufra and Waddan in centre, destroying LNA assets. LNA 26 July struck Misrata airport some 200km east of Tripoli, from where GNA drones took off, no damage reported. Instability increased in east. In Benghazi, unclaimed car bombs 11 July killed two soldiers and two civilians; LNA blamed GNA supporters. Five bodies recovered in Benghazi 18 July. Cairo 14-16 July hosted some 70 members of Tobruk-based parliament House of Representatives (HoR) in bid to revive body's legitimacy; Tripoli-based parliamentarians boycotted meeting, but participants reaffirmed HoR authority to appoint unity govt. U.S., UK, France, UAE, Egypt and Italy 16 July called for halt to conflict. UN envoy 29 July called for truce on Eid al-Adha holiday around 10 Aug accompanied by confidence-building measures, followed by summit of "concerned countries" to cement arms embargo, and then by national conference.

➡ **Mauritania** Constitutional Council 1 July rejected opposition petition against 22 June presidential election results and confirmed ruling majority's candidate Mohamed Ould Ghazouani as president. Police next day released unknown number of activists and opposition members it had arrested late June during protests against election outcome. Govt 3 July restored internet access after imposing blackout late June. Police 3 July arrested journalist Ahmedou Ould al-Wadea for unknown reasons, released him 15 July.

➡ **Morocco** On occasion of twenty year anniversary of his rule, King Mohammed VI 29 July urged cabinet reshuffle, said he would pardon 4,764 prisoners, including eight activists of Hirak protest movement that formed in Rif region in north in late 2016. Security forces 27 July arrested five suspected Islamic State (ISIS) militants in Tangiers. Court in Salé near capital Rabat 18 July sentenced to death three main suspects in killing of two Scandinavian tourists near Imlil village in Atlas Mountains in Dec 2018.

➡ **Tunisia** President Essebsi died 25 July bringing forward presidential elections due later in year to Sept, and Islamist militancy continued to threaten security. Following "severe health crisis" in June, Essebsi was discharged from hospital 1 July in "normal health", but readmitted 24 July and died next day, aged 92, of repetitive faintness. Same day Parliament Speaker Mohamed Ennaceur sworn in as interim president, to hold post for no longer than 90 days; first round of presidential election planned for 15 Sept. Legislative elections to be held 6 Oct. Essebsi 20 July had refused to ratify electoral law amendments that parliament passed in June that would have imposed tougher eligibility criteria for presidential candidates and which would have barred presidential front-runner businessman Nabil Karoui. Prosecutor 9 July charged Karoui with money laundering, and imposed on him asset freeze and travel ban. Govt 4 July said death toll from 27 June attacks in capital Tunis claimed by

Islamic State (ISIS) had risen to two. Police in Tunis 2 July surrounded Islamist militant and alleged mastermind of June attacks, who detonated his suicide vest, killing himself but no others. Citing security concerns, PM Chahed 5 July banned women from wearing full face veil in public institutions. ISIS 17 July released video allegedly filmed in Tunisia calling for militants to carry out attacks.

➡ **Western Sahara** Moroccan security forces 19 July intervened to disperse residents in Laayoune celebrating Algeria's victory in football tournament, killing one civilian; Polisario Front independence movement called on UN to launch international investigation and on EU to intervene, and sent complaint to UN Security Council. Polisario Front leader Brahim Ghali late July reportedly said he would make military service compulsory in Sahrawi refugee camps in Tindouf in neighbouring Algeria in preparation for "inevitable war" with Morocco.