

Middle East and North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

➔ **Israel-Palestine** **Israeli forces fired live ammunition at Palestinians in West Bank, while Israeli police stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque compound as PM Bennett challenged status quo at site.** Following Palestinian protests in recent weeks at Evyatar settlement in Beita town near Nablus city, Israeli settlers 2 July vacated settlement while govt kept structures intact and maintained military presence until land status is determined. Israeli forces 9 July fired on hundreds of Palestinian demonstrators in Beita, wounding over 370, including 31 with live ammunition; during protests, soldiers 23 July shot Palestinian teenager who died next day. Israeli settlers buttressed by Israeli soldiers 3 July entered Qusra village, Nablus, and attacked local residents; Israeli soldiers fired live ammunition, killing one Palestinian and injuring 24 others. Israeli NGO Breaking the Silence 23 July claimed military are complicit in “drastic surge” in settler violence this year. Elsewhere in West Bank, Israel 7 July demolished Humsa village in Jordan valley for seventh time in less than one year, displacing 65 Palestinians, including 35 children. In Beit Ummar town, soldier 29 July shot and killed Palestinian man attending funeral of 12-year-old boy killed by Israeli forces previous day. In Jerusalem, Israeli police 18 July stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, firing tear gas and sponge-coated steel bullets to disperse Muslim worshippers to allow over 1,000 Israelis to visit compound. PM Bennett same day said Jews must have “freedom of worship” at site, suggesting dramatic revision of status quo, but next day backpedalled, stating Jews must have right “to visit”. Hamas same day warned of escalation. Palestinian Authority (PA) Head of General Authority of Civil Affairs Hussein al Sheikh 25 July apologised for death of Nizar Banat, who was killed by PA security forces during late June protests, called it “unfortunate accident”. In Gaza, Israeli military 3 July launched air raids on alleged “weapons manufacturing site”, fourth raid in Gaza since May ceasefire. Meanwhile, Israel’s governing coalition 6 July failed to renew “family reunification” law for first time since 2003; law bars Palestinians who marry Israeli citizens from attaining residency and citizenship in Israel.

➔ **Lebanon** **Parliament appointed businessman Najib Mikati as PM-designate after Saad Hariri’s resignation, unrest erupted amid plunging currency value and rising prices, and EU established sanctions framework.** Govt formation efforts faced major setback as PM-designate Saad Hariri 14 July visited President Aoun to submit new cabinet line-up, requesting response within 24 hours; Aoun reportedly rejected proposed cabinet despite appeals from French and U.S. ambassadors. Hariri next day relinquished mandate to form new govt that he received in Oct 2020, citing irreconcilable differences with Aoun. Parliament 26 July appointed Tripoli-based businessman Najib Mikati as new PM-designate; while expected to form reform-oriented govt, Mikati thus far lacks support of Christian parties. Mikati 28 July said Aoun had approved most of his nominees for new govt. Economic hardship and insecurity persisted. Following Hariri’s resignation, Lebanese pound 16 July fell to record lows, reaching nearly 24,000 to U.S. dollar before stabilising at 22,000. Ministry of health same day ended subsidies

for broad range of medications, leading to fivefold price increase, after delayed subsidy payments already caused medication shortages in pharmacies. Drop in currency value and medicine price hikes 16 July triggered protests in northern city Tripoli, leading to clashes with army that left 30 civilians and ten soldiers injured. Army chief Joseph Aoun next day warned against further deterioration of security and vowed to maintain stability, stating “everybody knows that the army is the last institution that is still effective”. Gas shortages 19 July worsened as consumers sought to stockpile for Eid al-Adha holidays, while electricity provisions reached record low of 2-3 hours daily. Meanwhile, EU 30 July adopted legal framework providing options to sanction persons and entities “responsible for undermining democracy or the rule of law in Lebanon”, urged leadership to “steer the country towards a sustainable recovery”; French MFA same day announced French-hosted international donor conference to aid country on one-year anniversary of Beirut port explosion on 4 August. Two rockets were launched 19 July from Lebanon toward Israel without causing damage; in response, Israel next day shelled launching areas and blamed Palestinian groups for attack.

↓ **Syria** **Deadly violence between regime forces and former rebels escalated in south west; Idlib ceasefire held despite violations, and U.S. troops foiled attack on coalition base in east.** In Daraa province in south west, conflict escalated in late July as regime forces 26 July launched artillery strikes and ground offensive on blockaded neighbourhoods, prompting renewed clashes with insurgents across province that 26-31 July reportedly killed at least 32 people, including children. Unidentified gunmen 1-26 July reportedly killed at least 17 civilians and 17 soldiers and former rebels who had enrolled in regime forces or struck reconciliation deals with govt. Regime forces from late June until late July severely restricted movement in and out of neighbourhoods of Daraa city after residents – who had organised campaigns to boycott May presidential elections – refused to relinquish their arms and strike new settlement deal with regime. In Idlib province in north west, March 2020 ceasefire held despite reported clashes, artillery shelling and Russian airstrikes in countryside throughout month that killed at least 35 people; notably, regime artillery shelling reportedly killed at least 24 civilians in Jabal al Zawiyah area 3-22 July. Jihadist rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham ramped up pressure on smaller jihadist entities in Idlib throughout month, issuing ultimatums to Jundallah militants and Chechen group Junud al-Sham to either join its ranks or disband, prompting latter to dissolve. In Deir Ez-Zor province, U.S. and allied Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces 7 July foiled unidentified drone attack on base housing U.S. troops. In central desert, Russia continued airstrikes against suspected Islamic State (ISIS) targets, reportedly killing dozens of militants throughout month; suspected ISIS militants reportedly killed five govt soldiers and allied militia fighters in Raqqa countryside 13 July. Israel reportedly launched airstrikes on Iran-linked targets in al-Safirah area near Aleppo city 19 July, killing five militiamen, and on al-Qusayr area near Homs city 22 July. UN Security Council 9 July unanimously renewed authorisation for cross-border aid operations from Turkey through Bab al-Hawa crossing until 10 Jan 2022. Amid economic strains, govt 11 July announced sharp bread and fuel price hikes.

Gulf and Arabian Peninsula

➔ **Iran** **Tehran announced pause of nuclear talks in Vienna as it continued to expand its nuclear activities, while protests over water access erupted in south west.** After sixth round of indirect U.S.-Iran negotiations in Austrian capital Vienna concluded 20 June, reportedly making notable progress, Deputy FM Seyed Abbas Araghchi 17 July said talks must “await our new administration” when President-elect Ebrahim Raisi takes office on 5 August, putting talks on hiatus for at least six weeks. Iran continued its nuclear activities, further straining fraught relations with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and international powers. IAEA 6 July received and conveyed to Board of Governors Iran’s notification of its intent to move ahead with production of uranium metal enriched to 20 per cent, which is banned until 2031 under 2015 nuclear deal; E3 (UK, France and Germany) same day called moved “serious violation of Iran’s commitments” under deal, while U.S. same day described it as “unfortunate step backward”. Meanwhile, U.S. Treasury Dept 2 July delisted three Iranians allegedly linked with Iran’s missile programme sanctioned in Sept 2020, underscoring that move is unrelated to nuclear talks; Commerce Dept 9 July blacklisted eight entities “for facilitating the export of U.S. items to Iran” in violation of sanctions; federal court 13 July indicted four Iranians on charges of planning kidnapping of U.S. citizen; Tehran next day called allegations “baseless and ridiculous”. Following late June U.S. airstrikes in Syria and Iraq that allegedly targeted Iran-linked militias, Iran’s UN envoy 3 July in letter to UN Security Council president condemned operation “in strongest terms” and denied Iranian involvement in attacks on U.S. targets in Iraq. Armed drone 29 July attacked tanker in Arabian Sea, killing two crew members; Israel, U.S. and UK 1 Aug blamed Iran, which denied responsibility. Protests over access to water 15 July broke out in south-western Khuzestan province; at least three deaths reported and UN human rights chief 23 July described situation as “catastrophic”.

➔ **Iraq** **Amid ongoing rocket attacks, PM Kadhimi and U.S. President Biden set timeline of U.S. combat troop withdrawal; Islamic State (ISIS) militants killed dozens of civilians across country.** Rockets 5, 7 July hit Ain al-Assad airbase in Anbar province (west) hosting coalition troops, injuring two; Shiite armed group Revenge of al-Muhandis Brigade same day claimed responsibility. Rockets next day targeted U.S. embassy in capital Baghdad, landing in Green Zone; Iran-backed militias denied involvement. Following talks with PM Kadhimi, U.S. President Biden 26 July announced 2,500 U.S. troops in country would end combat mission by end of year but would continue training and advisory roles. Meanwhile, ISIS militants 3 July killed four fishermen at Haditha Dam, Anbar province. Militants 4 July clashed with villagers in Diyala province (east), killing five. ISIS-linked suicide bomber same day killed at least 35 and wounded over 60 in Sadr City market, Baghdad, on eve of Eid al-Adha, marking third market bombing in neighbourhood in 2021. Security forces 19 July announced arrest of prominent ISIS leader “Emir of Baghdad”. Power line failure 2 July caused widespread blackout in Baghdad and southern provinces amid extreme summer heat, triggering protests in southern city Basra. Joint Operation Command 4 July confirmed ISIS attacked dozens of electricity pylons early month. Supreme Judicial Council 8 July issued arrest warrants for suspects in 2020 killing of security specialist and govt adviser Husham al-Hashimi; Kadhimi 16 July announced arrest of suspects; protesters 18 July demonstrated in

Baghdad demanding govt to ensure adviser's killers are held accountable. Ahead of Oct parliamentary elections, Shiite cleric and leader of largest parliamentary bloc Muqtada al-Sadr 15 July announced withdrawal from polls; Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, head of Chaldean Church, next day said Christians would not vote over concerns of militias and risk of fraud. Peshmerga and Kurdistan Workers' Party 24 July traded accusations of opening fire on each other's positions in Duhok province. In Nasiriyah, deadly fire caused by oxygen containers 12 July killed at least 92 in COVID-19 ward at al-Hussein Teaching Hospital. Kirkuk health director 22 July warned of health sector collapse amid record highs of COVID-19 cases.

➔ **Saudi Arabia Huthis continued cross-border attacks and tensions surfaced between Riyadh and United Arab Emirates (UAE) over oil production dispute.** On southern border, Saudi-led coalition announced interceptions of Huthi drones and missiles on 2, 3, 24, 25, 27, 28, 30 and 31 July (see Yemen). Saudi Arabia and UAE clashed in public spat over OPEC+ agreement to cut oil production beyond April 2022, with UAE pushing for higher baseline production level; sides 18 July reached compromise and UAE Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed next day visited Saudi counterpart Mohammed bin Salman, ending standoff and cooling tensions. Earlier in month, Riyadh 2 July imposed 3%-15% tax on products produced by Gulf Cooperation Council-based companies whose workforce does not include 10%-25% of nationals from country in which companies are based, in move seen as challenge to UAE's free trade zones. Riyadh 3 July shuttered flights to and from UAE, citing COVID-19 concerns. Meanwhile, Saudi Deputy Defence Minister Khaled bin Salman 6-7 July visited U.S. capital Washington to meet U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and U.S. Sec State Anthony Blinken; topics reportedly included U.S.-Saudi partnership, Yemen and Iran.

➔ **Yemen While violence eased in Marib, heavy clashes between tribal forces and Huthis erupted in southern al-Bayda governorate; tensions heightened between Southern Transition Council and govt.** Following last month's heavy clashes, fighting eased in Marib governorate as Huthis redirected their forces from northern front lines to southern al-Bayda governorate; local forces from al-Humaiqan tribe – supported by southern separatists and Salafist fighters, many from Yafa tribe – 2-4 July made territorial gains, reportedly including in az-Zahir and as-Sawmah districts, in most intense fighting in area in 18 months. By 11 July, Huthis had largely regained territories and began to push into al-Humaiqan tribal territory. Elsewhere, Huthis 4 July reportedly carried out attack on military base in Abyan in rare missile strike on southern region, while cross-border attacks on Saudi Arabia continued (see Saudi Arabia). Meanwhile, on diplomatic front, UN efforts at kickstarting ceasefire negotiations effectively halted as approval by UN Security Council's permanent members of leading candidate Hans Grundberg for new UN special envoy position stalled; outgoing envoy Martin Griffiths 19 July took up new position as UN's humanitarian chief, leaving Yemen position vacant. Omani officials reportedly continued pushing for ceasefire between Riyadh and Huthis without any progress. In south, tensions rose between the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and internationally-recognised govt. Talks in Saudi Arabia's capital Riyadh between two sides to discuss implementation of Nov 2019 Riyadh Agreement 1 July ended inconclusively; STC accused govt of arresting and attacking its supporters in Shebwa governorate, while govt alleged STC was fostering violent protests and un-

rest in Shebwa; both accused other of building up forces in Abyan governorate. Tensions stemming from STC President Aydrous al-Zubaidi's late June reshuffle of STC-aligned security forces continued; move seen as attempt to consolidate control in southern Aden city's state and parallel institutions. STC leader and Aden Governor Ahmed al-Lamlas 14 July announced formation of "popular security committees", which govt viewed as attempt to reinforce STC's position in city. Yemeni Riyal hit historic low, plunging to YR1,000 to U.S. dollar on 12 July, marking 72% depreciation of pre-war value.

North Africa

➔ **Algeria** President Tebboune formed new govt, space for civil society activism continued to be restricted, and tensions ran high with Morocco.

Following legislative elections and appointment of new PM in June, Tebboune 7 July unveiled new govt, renewing half of outgoing ministers; return of Ramtane Lamamra, top diplomat under former President Bouteflika in 2013-2017, as FM could presage Algeria's international re-engagement. Independent MP Brahim Boughali elected parliament's new speaker 8 July. Security forces throughout month prevented most bi-weekly marches of Hirak protest movement in capital Algiers; marches however took place in Bejaia and Tizi-Ouzou cities, both Kabylia province. As part of traditional appeasement gestures around Independence Day and Islamic festival of Eid al-Adha, Tebboune 4 July pardoned 18 incarcerated Hirak activists and 14 July granted amnesty to another 101. NGO National Committee for the Liberation of Detainees 19 July still recorded 197 "prisoners of conscience" across country. Meanwhile, harassment of civil society continued; police 15 July briefly arrested journalist Zoheir Aberkane as he was documenting release of pardoned activists in front of El Harrach prison (Algiers); next day detained Hirak activists Guettache Aness Elwoudjoud and Saïd Niya during unauthorised Hirak protest in Algiers, before releasing them 19 July. Tensions ran high between Algeria and Morocco over Western Sahara. In virtual Non-Aligned Movement meeting, FM Lamamra 14 July called on UN to accelerate appointment of UN envoy for Western Sahara; in response, Morocco's Permanent Representative to UN Omar Hilale same day called for Algeria's Amazigh-speaking Kabylia region "to fully enjoy their right to self-determination", prompting Algiers 18 July to recall its ambassador to Morocco.

➔ **Egypt** Authorities continued clampdown on outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, and jihadist violence persisted in Sinai Peninsula.

Court of Cassation 11 July upheld life sentences of ten Muslim Brotherhood (MB) top officials, including former leader Mohamed Badie, on accusations of killing policemen and organising mass jailbreaks during 2011 uprising. Parliament's lower house next day approved legal amendment that enables govt to dismiss public sector employees suspected of being affiliated with MB. Court of Cassation 14 July rejected appeal by group of 13 people, including two prominent civil society activists, against their placement on Egypt's terrorism list in April 2020; all 13 have been detained since 2019 on accusations of having received funds from MB to incite revolution and commit violence. Jihadist attacks persisted in Sinai Peninsula. Notably, Islamic State (ISIS)-affiliated Sinai Province (SP) militants' gunfire 2 July wounded soldier south of Rafah town and 12 July targeted pro-govt militia south of Sheikh Zuweid town. IEDs likely planted by SP militants 11, 13 and 17 July blew up army tanks south of

Sheikh Zuweid, killing or wounding soldiers on board. Suspected SP militants 31 July killed at least five troops in attack on checkpoint in Sheikh Zuweid town: three militants also killed in exchange of fire. NGO Human Rights First 15 July said ISIS recruitment was ongoing in Egyptian prisons and fuelled in large part by torture and other abuse of inmates. Meanwhile, Qatar 29 July named ambassador to Egypt after Cairo and Doha signed reconciliation agreement in Jan; Egypt had appointed ambassador to Doha in late June. Tensions with Ethiopia ran high as Addis Ababa completed second filling of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (see Nile Waters).

➔ **Libya Transition remained at standstill with all political and economic tracks of peace process deadlocked; authorities reopened strategic road linking west and east.** In Geneva city (Switzerland), delegates of UN-backed Libyan Political Dialogue Forum 28 June-2 July failed to forge agreement on legal framework to hold presidential and parliamentary elections in Dec; political factions remained at loggerheads over electoral roadmap and which type of ballot to hold. Renewed attempts by House of Representatives (HoR) to approve 2021 state budget proposed by govt of national unity 6 and 13 July failed; main stumbling block related to funding for Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar-aligned forces; Economic Working Group comprising UN, U.S., EU and Egyptian representatives 26 July urged Libyan govt and parliament to “find realistic compromise solutions” on budget. Appointment of new Central Bank governor remained in stalemate, with HoR and rival Tripoli-based High Council of State disagreeing on appointment process. UN Special Envoy for Libya Ján Kubiš 8 July submitted final report of international audit of Central Bank’s rival branches, launched in 2018, to Presidency Council and heads of Central Bank’s branches; auditors reportedly said Central Bank’s division complicates access to foreign exchange, impedes monetary reform, and undermines integrity and oversight of commercial banks, and recommended steps toward its reunification. Kubiš 15 July told UN Security Council Libya’s banking system “will likely collapse” if country’s two central bank branches do not unify, also said stalled political talks could unravel Oct 2020 ceasefire agreement. HoR Speaker Aghela Saleh 27 July warned Libya would return to “square one” and new rival govt could emerge in east if polls were delayed. PM Dabaiba 30 July said strategic Misrata-Sirte road linking west and east had reopened in line with Oct 2020 ceasefire provisions. Rival militias 22-23 July reportedly clashed in capital Tripoli, leaving seven dead including three civilians; Mohamed Kani, leader of Haftar-aligned al-Kani militia accused of having killed over 100 people in and around Tarhuna city in 2020, killed 27 July in Benghazi city reportedly while resisting arrest by another Haftar-aligned unit.

➔ **Morocco Tensions ran high with Algeria over Western Sahara.** In virtual Non-Aligned Movement meeting, Algerian FM Ramtane Lamamra 14 July called on UN to accelerate appointment of UN envoy for Western Sahara; in response, Morocco’s Permanent Representative to UN Omar Hilale same day called for Algeria’s Amazigh-speaking Kabylia region “to fully enjoy their right to self-determination”, prompting Algiers 18 July to recall its ambassador to Morocco. Meanwhile, Spanish PM Pedro Sánchez 10 July sacked FM Arancha Gonzalez Laya in apparent good-will gesture toward Morocco following sharp deterioration of bilateral relations since April hospitalisation in Spain of Western Sahara independence movement leader Brahim Ghali. UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders Mary Lawlor 1 July urged Morocco to stop criminalising human rights activists, notably

those working on issues related to Western Sahara, denounced “cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and torture” of imprisoned activists (see Western Sahara).

↓ **Tunisia President Saïed invoked constitution to dismiss PM and suspend parliament, escalating months-long political crisis.** Saïed 25 July used Article 80 of country’s constitution, which grants president greater powers in emergency situations, to dismiss PM Hichem Mechichi and freeze parliament for 30 days, also said he would assume executive authority and public prosecutor’s powers, and strip lawmakers of their immunity. Tens of thousands immediately gathered in capital Tunis to applaud move. Earlier same day, thousands had protested across country against govt’s handling of health and economic crises and biggest party in parliament, Islamist-inspired An-Nahda, on occasion of Republic Day – which marks abolition of monarchy in 1957 –, leading to scuffles with police. Saïed 26 July sacked defence minister and acting justice minister, next day ordered dismissal of over 20 senior govt officials including military Attorney General Taoufik Ayouni. Parliament Speaker and An-Nahda leader Rached Ghannouchi 26 July decried Saïed’s move as “coup”, said parliament should be in session, and called on Tunisians to “defend the revolution”; clashes same day erupted between Saïed and An-Nahda supporters in front of army-barricaded parliament building. Mechichi 26 July said he would hand over power to individual chosen by Saïed. Saïed 30 July vowed he would “not turn into a dictator”. Authorities 30-31 July detained MPs Yassine Ayari, Maher Zid and Mohamed Affes; all three had accused Saïed of “coup”. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell 27 July urged resumption of parliament; U.S. 30 July called on Saïed to “quickly lift emergency measures and unfreeze parliament”, next day urged him to outline swift return to “democratic path”. Earlier in month, health ministry 9 July said health system had “collapsed” amid spiralling COVID-19 cases and deaths, and Mechichi 20 July sacked Health Minister Faouzi Mehdi. Parliament 12 July approved economic recovery law which promotes integration of informal sector into formal economy and allows Tunisians to open foreign currency bank account under certain conditions.

➔ **Western Sahara Diplomatic row between Morocco and Algeria over Western Sahara took another turn, and pressure rose on Morocco to stop crackdown on Sahrawi activists.** In virtual Non-Aligned Movement meeting, Algerian FM Ramtane Lamamra 14 July called on UN to accelerate appointment of UN envoy for Western Sahara; in response, Morocco’s Permanent Representative to UN Omar Hilale same day called for Algeria’s Amazigh-speaking Kabylia region “to fully enjoy their right to self-determination”, prompting Algiers 18 July to recall its ambassador to Morocco (see Algeria, Morocco). UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders Mary Lawlor 1 July urged Morocco to stop criminalising human rights activists, notably those working on issues related to Western Sahara, denounced “cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and torture” of imprisoned activists; Lawlor expressed particular concern over cases of Sahrawi activists Naama Asfari and Khatri Dadda, who have been detained since 2010 and 2019, respectively, and Sultana Khaya, who has been under house arrest since Nov 2020. NGO Amnesty International 19 July said Morocco had intensified repression against pro-independence Sahrawi activists through “ill-treatment, arrests, detentions and harassment” since Nov 2020, reporting 22 cases of human rights violations by Moroccan security forces against Sahrawi activists and human rights defenders.