

# Middle East and North Africa

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## Eastern Mediterranean

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➔ **Israel-Palestine** **Israel bolstered de facto annexation of West Bank settlements, and Palestinian Authority (PA) resumed security cooperation with Israel.** In largest demolition in West Bank in years, Israeli forces 4 Nov bulldozed entire Palestinian village of Khirbet Humsa, rendering homeless more than 71 Palestinians. Authorities 9 Nov issued eviction notices to dozens of Palestinian businesses in Wadi al-Joz area of East Jerusalem. Israel's ministry of housing opened tender for the construction of over 1,200 housing units in Givat HaMatos in Jerusalem in move poised to sever geographic contiguity between Jerusalem and West Bank. Israeli forces 4 Nov killed off-duty Palestinian security forces officer in Nablus; soldiers 25 Nov shot and killed Palestinian allegedly attempting to ram car into checkpoint near Jerusalem. U.S. Sec State Pompeo 19 Nov made first visit by top U.S. diplomat to Israel's West Bank settlements; signalling increased support for Israel, he announced foodstuffs originating from Area C in occupied West Bank would carry "Made in Israel" label and U.S. would define Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement as anti-Semitic. PA 17 Nov announced resumption of security coordination with Israel in occupied territories following May suspension due to prospective de jure annexation; PA justified move by citing Israeli letter signalling commitment to past agreements, including Oslo; PLO 11 Nov confirmed willingness to resume peace talks with mediation of new U.S. administration. In Gaza, unidentified groups 15, 21 Nov fired rockets into Israel; Israeli air force retaliated with strikes in Gaza city and Khan Younis. Hamas and Fatah delegations 3-16 Nov met in Egypt's capital Cairo to discuss reconciliation. Meanwhile, Israel continued diplomatic normalisation efforts: Israel and Bahrain 18 Nov entered negotiations over opening of mutual embassies; PM Netanyahu 22 Nov reportedly met Crown Prince bin Salman in visit to Saudi Arabia. Israel and Lebanon 11 Nov held third round of negotiations over maritime border delineation. Israeli air force 18 Nov killed three in airstrikes on Syrian army and Iranian Quds Force installations in Syria in retaliation for explosives allegedly planted on Israeli-occupied Golan Heights by Iran-linked forces.

➔ **Lebanon** **Formation of new cabinet remained stalled while Central Bank audit delays further hampered progress toward necessary reforms.** PM-designate Hariri – whom lawmakers nominated last month to form new govt – struggled throughout month to overcome disputes over allocation of executive portfolios: major Christian parties sought to nominate Christian ministers while Hariri 13 Nov called Hizbollah "a big obstacle" to creating govt of "independent experts" as group remained opposed to his leadership. Citing banking secrecy laws, Central Bank governor Riyad Salameh 2 Nov refused to submit documents to U.S.-based company Alvarez & Marsal conducting Central Bank audit, although audit is necessary prerequisite for bailout talks to resume with International Monetary Fund (IMF). Finance Minister Ghazi Wazni 5 Nov extended deadline for document submission by three months; Alvarez & Marsal 20 Nov, however, terminated its contract citing lack of transparency. Parliament 27 Nov renewed commitment to

undertake forensic audit of Central Bank. Further complicating process, U.S. 6 Nov sanctioned Free Patriotic Movement leader Gebran Bassil – President Aoun’s son-in-law and heir-apparent – for corruption under Global Magnitsky Act in highest-profile round of designations to date; Bassil 17 Nov vowed to quit politics if found guilty of corruption. With international assistance dependent on elusive institutional reform, French Middle East envoy Patrick Durel 13 Nov met with Aoun to urge speedy govt formation to release financial support from IMF; France 28 Nov scheduled new international donor conference for early Dec. Meanwhile, unidentified assailants 13 Nov infiltrated Byblos mosque, injuring local sheikh; some 100 people next day protested downtown in capital Tripoli to denounce attack. At least 270 Syrian families 27 Nov left Bsharri town amid reprisal attacks following murder allegedly committed by Syrian. Internationally, Israeli military 10 Nov claimed downing of Hizbollah drone allegedly violating Israeli airspace; Lebanese and Israeli delegations next day held third round of UN-mediated maritime border delineation talks in southern town of Naqoura.

➔ **Syria Tensions continued to mount in Idlib, Islamic State (ISIS) launched series of attacks and clashes broke out between govt forces and local fighters.** In north west, amid rising tensions with Russia following last month’s military escalation, Turkish troops 8-10 Nov withdrew from Marhatat post on Aleppo-Damascus road and Anadan post in Aleppo governorate, citing Russian harassment of resupply convoys and regime-led protests outside posts; Turkish military 2-21 Nov fortified position in Jabal al-Zawiya mountain near M4 highway. Regime forces 8-9 Nov shelled Turkish positions in Jabal al-Zawiya and Saraqib city. Regime shelling of rebel-held areas also persisted, 4 Nov killing at least seven in marked escalation; rebels same day killed three in apparent retaliation. In sign of continuing crackdown on rival groups, rebel group Hei’at Tahrir al-Sham 3 Nov stormed Ahrar al-Sham headquarters in Jabal al-Zawiya, Idlib governorate (northwest). Meanwhile, ISIS attacks on Turkish-controlled Aleppo governorate increased: ISIS 4 Nov claimed IED explosion that killed Turkish-backed group Faylaq al-Sham soldier in al-Bab city; ISIS 7 Nov detonated IED in al-Bab, killing three policemen. In north east, in Hasakah province, ISIS 1 Nov claimed responsibility for killing of Kurdish Internal Security Forces in Markadeh village. In Deir Ez-Zor province, ISIS-affiliated cells 9 Nov killed four near al-Mayadin; roadside IED 20 Nov killed five fighters from Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Clashes between regime forces and ISIS in central desert 26-28 Nov killed at least 29 regime soldiers and 30 militants. Meanwhile, also in north west, Kurdish-led SDF 23-24 Nov clashed with Turkish-backed forces in Ain Issa, north of Raqqa city, killing dozens of Turkey-backed fighters, and local militias 8 Nov took control of al-Masakin checkpoint in north-western Daraa, allegedly killing five regime soldiers. In south east, amid govt attempts to improve its control, govt forces clashed with local fighters; authorities 8 Nov arrested a dozen people during clashes in Daraa city. Damascus 11-12 Nov hosted conference on refugee return; Russia pledged \$1bn for reconstruction. Alleged Israeli airstrikes 15-22 Nov and shelling 25 Nov killed at least 27 pro-Iran militants.

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## Gulf and Arabian Peninsula

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➔ **Iran** **Iran remained in breach of 2015 nuclear deal, while U.S. administration maintained maximum pressure policy on Tehran.**

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) director general 18 Nov informed agency's Board of Governors that traces of uranium "at a location in Iran not declared to the Agency still needs to be fully and promptly explained by Iran". IAEA next day derestricted latest report on Iranian compliance with Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA); report concluded that Iran continued to exceed limitations on uranium stockpile, which as of 2 Nov stood at 12 times JCPOA's cap. Tensions with U.S. continued. *The New York Times* 16 Nov reported President Trump 12 Nov had considered military action against Iran's main nuclear site; reporting underscored risk of growing friction between Iran and U.S./U.S. allies during Trump's final months in office. Iran 27 Nov confirmed death of senior nuclear scientist in ambush east of capital Tehran; FM Zarif claimed "serious indications of Israeli role". Meanwhile, U.S. continued to roll out unilateral sanctions designations: Treasury 10 Nov sanctioned "a network of six companies and four individuals that facilitated the procurement of sensitive goods" for Iranian military company as well as intelligence minister; Treasury 18 Nov targeted Islamic Revolution Mostazafan Foundation, describing it as "a key patronage network for the Supreme Leader"; State Dept same day blacklisted two Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps officials for role in suppressing Nov 2019 protests; U.S. 25 Nov sanctioned four China and Russia-based companies "for supporting Iran's missile program". Following U.S. election victory of Democratic candidate Joe Biden, FM Zarif 17 Nov reiterated Iran "will resume honouring its commitments under the JCPOA" if new U.S. administration lifts sanctions in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2231. Meanwhile, third wave of COVID-19 prompted authorities 21 Nov to implement lockdown in Tehran and 150 other cities for initial two-week period; cases and fatalities continued to reach record levels throughout month, with 948,700 cases and 47,875 fatalities reported as of 29 Nov.

➔ **Iraq** **Rocket attacks on Baghdad's Green Zone resumed while Islamic State (ISIS) continued deadly assaults; clashes erupted between Kurdish factions.**

Shortly after U.S President Trump announced troop reductions in Iraq by Jan 2021, rocket attacks 17 Nov hit Baghdad's Green Zone and surroundings, killing at least one civilian; Kataib Hizbollah-affiliated group Ashab al-Kahf claimed responsibility for attack in apparent retaliation for arrest previous night of three of its members in Fallujah city, Al Anbar governorate. Despite attack, Kataib Hizbollah 18 Nov announced last month's unilateral truce still in place. Meanwhile, ISIS attacks persisted across country. Jihadists 3 Nov killed Iraqi policeman in Salah al-Din governorate. In major attack, ISIS militants 8 Nov attacked paramilitary coalition Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) outpost in Radwaniyah palace in capital Baghdad, killing around 11; military 13 Nov claimed killing of ISIS fighters responsible for attack. Authorities 8 Nov commenced large anti-ISIS operations in Makhoul and Khanouka mountain ranges in Salah al-Din with coalition aircraft; French airstrikes near Makhmur town, Erbil governorate, 11 Nov killed three ISIS fighters. Protests early Nov broke out across country: in Baghdad, protesters demonstrated against police violence while protesters in Basra and Nasiriyah cities called for resignation of local governors; Basra authorities 6 Nov

used live ammunition against unarmed protesters, killing one and injuring seven. Meanwhile, tensions increased between rival Kurdish factions: Kurdish Democratic Party leader Masoud Barzani 2 Nov accused Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) of conducting last month's attack on Kirkuk-Ceyhan oil pipeline. PKK militias 4 Nov launched rocket-propelled grenade at Peshmerga vehicle in Duhok province, killing one; PKK forces same day attacked Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) forces protecting oil well, injuring two. Relations between Erbil and Baghdad tense after national parliament 12 Nov passed Budget Deficit Law requiring KRG to transfer share of oil revenues to Baghdad; Kurdish representatives walked out of parliament during vote in protest. Ministry of migration and displacement 9 Nov announced closure of camps for internally displaced to areas outside Kurdistan; national authorities forced those displaced to leave camps in Anbar, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salah al-Din despite opposition to rushed move from international community.

➔  **Yemen** **Clashes continued on northern and southern front lines; U.S.'s likely designation of Huthis as terrorist organisation in Dec could prompt retaliatory attacks and hamper humanitarian operations.** U.S. reportedly continued to consider designating Huthi rebel group as Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO); move would have detrimental impact on UN-led mediation efforts, economy and humanitarian situation, and could prompt rebels to launch major retaliatory strikes into Saudi Arabia. UN reportedly confirmed mid-Nov withdrawal of all U.S. staff from capital Sanaa in anticipation of designation. UN Sec-Gen António Guterres 20 Nov warned that Yemen was "in imminent danger of the worst famine the world has seen for decades", likely in response to designation rumours. In north, military situation remained largely stalemated with neither govt forces nor Huthis making progress along most active front lines in Marib and al-Jawf governorates, while military activity also decreased in Hodeida and al-Dhale governorates. However, following two weeks of intense clashes, Huthi- and govt-linked media 20 Nov reported Huthis had seized strategically important Mas military camp west of Marib city; if confirmed, group became close to seizing high ground around main highway leading to last major urban govt stronghold. In south, sudden escalation of violence 18 Nov erupted between separatist Southern Transition Council forces and President Hadi loyalists in Abyan governorate; fighting in south and Saudi objections to Hadi cabinet nominees again delayed formation of new unity govt under Riyadh Agreement. Meanwhile, diplomatic efforts remained largely stalled as UN attempts to pave way to talks between govt and Huthis through Joint Declaration initiative remained dependent on formation of new unity govt.

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## **North Africa**

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➔ **Algeria** **Record low voter turnout in constitutional referendum highlighted widespread scepticism over President Tebboune's commitment to democratic reforms.** In 1 Nov referendum, 66.8% of voters approved constitutional amendments, which set two-term limit for president and MPs, make it easier to create political parties, hand over some presidential powers to PM and enhance powers of parliament and judiciary; pro-democracy Hirak movement however boycotted vote, decrying revised constitution as superficial

change, while turnout was lowest since 1962 independence at 23.7%. Demonstrators opposing referendum 1 Nov destroyed ballot boxes and clashed with police notably in Bejaia city, Kabylia province. Meanwhile, Army Chief of Staff Saïd Chengriha became more visible as Tebboune remained hospitalised in Germany after he was infected with COVID-19 in late Oct; number of Chengriha's TV appearances dramatically increased throughout month. Appeals court in Kenchela city 25 Nov reduced Hirak activist and figure of Amazigh community Yacine Mebarki's prison sentence on charges of "inciting atheism" and "offending the precepts of Islam" from ten years to one. Amid deteriorating socio-economic situation, Energy Minister Abdelmajid Attar, who holds Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries' rotating presidency, 11 Nov said producer group and allies may consider deepening oil production cuts in 2021 to shore up market; Attar late Oct said state-owned oil and gas company Sonatrach had suffered \$10bn losses between Jan and Sept due to COVID-19 pandemic, and gas exports decreased by 41% during same period. Govt 8 Nov added new restrictions to limit spread of COVID-19, notably forbidding public transportation between provinces; night curfew remained in place in 29 out of 48 provinces.

➔ **Egypt President Sisi's allies won vast majority of seats in parliament's lower house, and security situation remained tense in Sinai peninsula.** In late Oct and early Nov elections, pro-Sisi Mostaqbal Watan party won vast majority of 568 available seats in parliament's lower house (28 more will be attributed by Sisi); turnout below 30%; run-offs to take place in late Nov and early Dec. In ongoing targeting of Muslim Brotherhood (MB) supporters, parliament's legislative committee 1 Nov approved draft law that would dismiss any civil servants with ties to MB. In Sinai peninsula, armed forces continued to struggle to contain local jihadist insurgency, with Bir al-Abd area remaining major hotspot of violence. Explosive devices planted by Islamic State's Sinai Province affiliate during its two-month occupation of villages west of Bir al-Abd town 4-9 Nov killed at least two soldiers and unknown number of civilians. Suspected Sinai Province militants 7 Nov kidnapped Coptic Christian in Bir al-Abd town. Suspected jihadists 13-14 Nov shot and killed two soldiers in Rafah area near border with Gaza Strip, 19 Nov struck gas pipeline near al-Arish town. New rounds of negotiations between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan failed to produce agreement on filling and operation of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (see Nile Waters).

➔ **Libya Ceasefire agreement faced implementation obstacles, while political talks made slow progress.** 5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC) – comprising military officers loyal to UN-backed Govt of National Accord (GNA) and others affiliated with Field Marshal Haftar's Arab-Libyan Armed Forces (ALAF) – 2-4 Nov met in western Ghadames city, for first time inside Libya, to establish subcommittees to follow-up on Oct ceasefire agreement; 10 Nov met again in central city of Sirte, agreed that JMC's headquarters would be based there. In following days, subcommittees started to discuss reform of Petroleum Facilities Guards, military unit tasked with protecting oil facilities that both GNA and Haftar's forces have rival chains of command over. Military forces from both sides, however, remained positioned on front lines and foreign military equipment continued to arrive to rival factions, in defiance of ceasefire. Acting UN Special Representative for Libya Stephanie Williams 19 Nov said GNA forces remained stationed at Abu Grein and al-Washkah localities, with patrolling activities reportedly taking place there, while

ALAF continued to set up fortifications and military outposts between Sirte and al-Jufra towns, and around al-Jufra airbase; Williams same day said military cargo flights were recently monitored at al-Watiya and Misrata airports, under GNA control, while intense cargo aircraft activity was monitored between Benina airport, al-Jufra and al-Gardabiya airbases under ALAF control. In Tunisia, UN-backed political negotiations 9-15 Nov produced noncommittal roadmap to presidential and parliamentary elections to be held 24 Dec 2021; document sets general principles guiding transition period and states that Libyan institutions have 60 days to agree on legal framework for elections. Delegates late Nov resumed consultations online, no substantial progress reported. Feud late Nov erupted between Central Bank of Libya (CBL) on one hand, and GNA and National Oil Corporation (NOC) on the other, over latter's 22 Nov decision to withhold oil revenues in transit account and stop them from accruing to CBL; move is backed by U.S. and UN, but CBL argues it is illegal and could hinder public sector payments.

➔ **Tunisia Oil production resumed in Kamour area in south, ending four-month blockade.** Govt and protesters – who blockaded oil and gas fields in southern Kamour area in July to protest against lack of redistribution of hydrocarbon wealth – 6 Nov reached agreement on reopening of oil and gas pumping station in exchange for employment opportunities and regional development; oil production resumed next day. Favourable terms of agreement fuelled calls for similar measures in other regions including Gabès, Gafsa, Kairouan, Kasserine and Tozeur. Notably, workers' union in Kairouan 21 Nov called for general strike 3 Dec. Court of Auditors 10 Nov said Islamist-inspired party An-Nahda and media mogul Nabil Karoui's liberal Heart of Tunisia party, both pillars of current parliamentary coalition, violated electoral law in 2019 by signing contracts with foreign communication agencies and paying these services through non-declared bank accounts; in joint statement, several civil society organisations 14 Nov called for legal action.

↓ 🇲🇷 **Western Sahara Decades-old ceasefire between Morocco and pro-independence Polisario Front collapsed, sparking concerns that long-frozen conflict could reignite.** Around 1,000 Moroccan soldiers 13 Nov moved into UN-monitored Guerguerat Buffer Strip in Western Sahara, in violation of 1991 ceasefire agreement, with Moroccan govt reporting that troops had successfully secured key road to Guerguerat border crossing point with Mauritania, which supporters of Polisario Front had blockaded since 21 Oct, and set about building new sand berm to protect Guerguerat road. Polisario Front same day accused Moroccan security forces of shooting at civilians who had been “demonstrating peacefully” and declared end of ceasefire and resumption of hostilities. Moroccan govt immediately denied allegations and reiterated its commitment to ceasefire. In following days, Polisario troops targeted various military posts along East-West sand berm that separates Moroccan-controlled Western Saharan territory from Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic-controlled territory; death toll unknown. UN mission in Western Sahara 16 Nov confirmed opposing sides exchanged fire in previous days. Low-scale violence persisted throughout late-Nov.