

Middle East and North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

➔ **Israel-Palestine** Low-level violence continued between Palestinians and Israeli security forces at Gaza-Israel fence and Palestinian Authority (PA) took steps to ease financial crisis in West Bank. In Gaza-Israel fence area, clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinian protesters 4 Oct left one protester dead; two rockets launched from Gaza hours later fell short of Israeli territory. Following 14 Oct meeting between Gaza-based Palestinian faction Islamic Jihad and Egyptian officials, Egypt released about 80 Islamic Jihad prisoners, most returned to Gaza. At southern end of strip Israel 17 Oct shot down drone near fence. Qatar 27 Oct began disbursing \$7.5mn to Palestinians. Israeli jets 29 Oct downed drone over Gaza. In West Bank, amid deepening financial crisis, PA and Israel 3 Oct agreed to reactivate joint committees established under Paris Protocol (framework for Israeli-Palestinian economic relations) to discuss economic issues; after PA agreed to receive tax revenues collected by Israel in West Bank, which it had rejected since Feb, Israel 6 Oct transferred \$428mn to PA. Israel continued to withhold portion of tax revenues which PA had earmarked for families of prisoners and martyrs. PA 7-11 Oct signed agreements with Egypt aimed at strengthening economic relations. PA 15 Oct said it would pay its employees salary arrears for April, May and June in coming days and pay those for July, Aug and Sept in coming months. PA President Abbas 16-17 Oct met Saudi Arabia's King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman in Saudi capital Riyadh and agreed to establish joint bodies to increase trade. Israeli security forces 18 Oct killed Palestinian wielding knife near Tulkarem. After PM Netanyahu failed to form coalition govt by 23 Oct deadline, Israeli President Rivlin that day mandated leader of Blue and White party Benny Gantz to form one instead. Lebanese army 13 Oct said Israeli drone had illegally entered its airspace; Lebanese civilian 23 Oct shot down Israeli drone within Lebanese territory.

↓ **Lebanon** Govt's announcement of austerity measures sparked nationwide anti-govt protests which paralysed country and PM Hariri resigned. Govt 17 Oct announced austerity measures to address economic crisis, including tax on use of social media platform WhatsApp, prompting thousands to take to streets, first in capital Beirut and then across country; crowds complained of govt corruption and economic mismanagement and demanded that govt resign. In Beirut, police 17-18 Oct tried to disperse protesters with tear gas and rubber bullets, leaving several dozen protesters and police injured, and arrested at least 70 protesters. Two Syrians 18 Oct died in Beirut after building they were in near protests caught fire. In Tripoli, protesters 18 Oct attacked former MP attempting to join demonstration, prompting his bodyguards to open fire and reportedly kill two. Christian party Lebanese Forces 19 Oct resigned from govt citing latter's lack of will to reform. Hizbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah same day expressed support for protests, but opposed govt's resignation. In strongholds of Hizbollah and Shiite Amal Movement in south, protesters attacked Hizbollah and Amal offices. Gunmen allegedly affiliated with Amal movement 19 and 20 Oct attacked protesters in Tyre and Nabatieh leaving several injured; Amal denied involvement. PM Hariri's 21 Oct announcement of economic reform package to resolve crisis failed to appease demonstrators. Security forces 21 Oct blocked hundreds

of purported Hizbollah and Amal supporters from reaching downtown Beirut; Hizbollah and Amal denied involvement. Hassan Nasrallah 25 Oct claimed protests were diverging from initial goals and serving political and external interests and announced withdrawal of Hizbollah supporters; in following days violence by Amal/Hizbollah supporters against protesters increased. PM Hariri resigned 29 Oct over differences concerning govt reshuffle and reform agenda. President Aoun next day requested govt to remain in place until new cabinet formed. In south, civilian 23 Oct shot down Israeli drone over Kfar Kila.

📌🌐* **Syria** In north east, U.S. withdrew from front lines and Turkey launched offensive against Kurdish-led People's Protection Units (YPG); Turkey-U.S. and Turkey-Russia deals calmed fighting mid-month, but clashes erupted late Oct between Turkish-backed rebels and govt forces; in Nov fighting between Turkish and Kurdish forces could rise again. U.S. forces' 7 Oct withdrawal from positions near Turkish border prompted Turkey to launch offensive 9 Oct against YPG. Turkey took territory from YPG in 140km stretch from west of Tel Abyad to Ras al-Ayn; 120 civilians killed in fighting. Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) 13 Oct agreed to regime forces' limited deployment in YPG-held areas to help repel Turkish incursion. Unconfirmed numbers of Islamic State (ISIS) fighters escaped detention. Turkey and U.S. 17 Oct announced Turkish ceasefire to allow YPG withdrawal with view to creating safe zone. In 22 Oct Turkey-Russia deal, Turkey gave YPG until 29 Oct to retreat 30km from Turkish border in 440km stretch between Manbij and Iraqi border under supervision of Russian and Syrian govt forces. U.S. 24 Oct said it would deploy in east to protect SDF-controlled oil fields. Russia 29 Oct said YPG had withdrawn from planned safe zone. Clashes between Syrian troops and Turkish-backed rebels near Ras al-Ayn in safe zone 29 Oct left six Syrian soldiers killed; Turkish-backed rebels same day said they had captured undisclosed number of govt troops near Ras al-Ayn. U.S. forces 31 Oct carried out patrol on Turkey-Syria border with SDF support near Qataniyah. In north west, Russian and Syrian govt forces continued attacks on rebels in Idlib de-escalation zone; notably Russian airstrike on Taftanaz airport 20 Oct killed nine fighters of jihadist group Hei'at Tahrir al-Sham. President Trump 27 Oct said U.S. operation previous night in Barisha, Idlib province led to death of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi; ISIS confirmed death 31 Oct. UN-sponsored constitutional committee comprising representatives from govt, opposition and civil society opened first session in Geneva 30 Oct.

Gulf and Arabian Peninsula

➡ **Iran** Iran-U.S. tensions remained high, relations between Iran and United Arab Emirates (UAE) continued to ease and unclaimed explosions damaged Iranian tanker in Red Sea. President Rouhani 13 Oct repeated that opening of Iran-U.S. negotiations depended on U.S. first lifting its sanctions on Iran and returning to nuclear deal. Govt 16 Oct denied that U.S. carried out cyber-attack on Iran in Sept as reported by Reuters. UAE 20 Oct unfroze \$700mn of Iranian funds. On request of U.S. President Trump, Pakistan PM Khan 13 Oct visited Iran and 15 Oct Saudi Arabia in bid to ease tensions between two states; visits yielded no breakthrough. Iranian official 31 Oct announced Saudi Arabia had released nineteen Iranian fishermen, eleven detained since Dec 2018, eight since Jan. Two explosions 11 Oct damaged Iranian tanker in Red Sea off Saudi coast; FM Zarif 15 Oct said "one or a number of

governments” had attacked tanker. Australia 5 Oct said Iranian authorities had released two of its citizens arrested for allegedly photographing “military and banned zones” and same day freed Iranian whom U.S. was trying to extradite. France 16 Oct said Iran was detaining French scholar Roland Marchal and urged his release; Iran has been detaining another French scholar with dual Iranian nationality since June.

📌🌐* **Iraq** Anti-govt protests erupted in capital Baghdad and southern provinces leading to violent crackdown on protesters that left at least 250 dead and 8,000 wounded; violence and political instability could rise further in Nov. After demotion of iconic general stirred anger late Sept, protesters 1 Oct took to streets in Baghdad calling for jobs, improved public services and end to corruption. Security forces’ violent attempts to disperse protests, including with live ammunition, caused protests to swell and spread to southern provinces. Before unrest subsided 7 Oct clashes left 149 protesters and eight members of security forces dead. PM Mahdi 9 Oct announced measures including cabinet reshuffle, punishment of corrupt officials, job creation schemes and stipends for poor. Highest Shiite authority Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani 11 Oct denounced repression and called on govt to investigate; Mahdi next day launched commission of inquiry, which 22 Oct blamed security officials for losing control of forces; govt same day fired 44 army and police commanders. Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr 19 Oct expressed support for protests and called on govt to resign. Protesters 25 Oct returned to streets in Baghdad and southern provinces calling, among other things, for Mahdi to resign. Further clashes left scores killed and wounded; notably in Karbala, about 100km south of Baghdad, security forces 29 Oct sought to disperse crowds violently leaving at least fourteen dead. Explosion at weapons depot near Baghdad reportedly linked to Iran-backed paramilitaries 14 Oct injured twelve security force members. Unclaimed rocket strike on Baghdad’s Green Zone 30 Oct killed one soldier. U.S. 17 Oct renewed sanctions waiver allowing Iraq to continue importing Iranian energy for 120 more days. Islamic State attack in Salah al-Din province 21 Oct left two dead. U.S. 20 Oct said it would move forces it withdrew from Syria to western Iraq; Iraqi military 22 Oct said U.S. troops did not have permission to stay. In north, Turkish airstrikes 1-15 Oct left five PKK members dead.

➡ **Kuwait** U.S. 14 Oct approved sale of \$281mn worth of military equipment to Kuwait.

➡ **Saudi Arabia** Tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran eased partly thanks to third-party intervention by Iraq and Pakistan, and Saudi airstrikes against Huthis in Yemen reduced in intensity and scope. With Riyadh’s blessing, Iraq reportedly engaged Iran to reduce Saudi-Iran tensions. Pakistani PM Khan visited Iran and Saudi Arabia, 13 and 15 Oct respectively, in bid to ease tensions. FM Jubeir 21 Oct denied mediation efforts. Following 14 Sept suspected Iranian attacks on Saudi oil facilities, U.S. 11 Oct announced deployment of 3,000 military personnel and two Patriot missile batteries to Saudi Arabia. Govt 13 Oct denied involvement in 11 Oct attack on Iranian tanker in Red Sea off Saudi coast. Iranian official 31 Oct announced Saudi Arabia had released nineteen Iranian fishermen, eleven detained since Dec 2018, eight since Jan. Following Huthis’ 20 Sept unilateral cessation of cross-border attacks into Saudi Arabia, Saudi airstrikes on Huthi-controlled territory reduced in frequency and geographic scope. Govt continued to mediate talks between Yemeni govt and United Arab Emirates-backed southern separatists in Jeddah and Riyadh; both sides closed in on agreement to form new, more inclusive govt and end hostilities in south (see Yemen). Russian President Putin 14 Oct visited Saudi Arabia for

first time in twelve years; he discussed regional security with King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman while trade delegates signed economic agreements worth \$2bn.

➡ **United Arab Emirates** United Arab Emirates (UAE) took steps to improve relations with Iran, continued to withdraw military from Yemen and received visit by Russian President Putin. Iranian MP 20 Oct said UAE had unfrozen \$700mn of Iranian funds. UAE forces continued to withdraw from south Yemen, 14 Oct handing over al-Anad international airport near Aden to Saudi forces and 30 Oct completing withdrawal from Aden. In Saudi-mediated negotiations in Jeddah and Riyadh, Saudi-backed Yemeni govt and UAE-backed southern separatist group Southern Transitional Council (STC) came close to signing agreement that would see southerners gain equal representation with northerners in govt and place in future peace talks with Huthis. Russian President Putin 15 Oct visited Abu Dhabi for first time since 2007; Russian Direct Investment Fund said officials concluded deals worth over \$1.3bn in energy, advanced technology and health sectors.

➡ ✂ **Yemen** Saudi airstrikes against Iran-aligned Huthi forces in north reduced in intensity and scope, and Yemeni govt and southern separatists made headway in Saudi-mediated talks, creating opportunity to avoid further hostilities in south and pivot to national level peace talks. Saudi Arabia responded positively to Huthis' Sept unilateral ceasefire, largely limiting airstrikes to front-line positions and, reportedly at Riyadh's request, Yemeni govt 16 Oct allowed eight fuel shipments to enter Huthi-administered port of Hodeida. Saudi airstrike in Saada province in north 21 Oct killed five civilians. After Huthis' unilateral prisoner release in Sept, Huthis 10 Oct proposed prisoner swap with govt, which has not yet responded. In south, sporadic fighting continued in Abyan and Shebwa governorates between govt forces and southern separatist groups including Southern Transitional Council (STC). But in Saudi capital Riyadh, negotiations to end rift between Saudi-backed Yemeni govt and UAE-backed STC advanced toward signing of so-called Riyadh Agreement (formerly known as Jeddah Agreement) that would see southerners gain equal representation with northerners in govt and place in future peace talks with Huthis. Govt repeatedly postponed signing ceremony due to differences over selection of interior and defence ministers, govt's demand that UAE withdraw completely from south and request for security-first sequencing of implementation. Fighting between govt forces and STC escalated in Abyan province 31 Oct prompting parties to postpone signing of Riyadh Agreement without setting new date. Saudi forces progressively took control of Aden in south during month as UAE forces withdrew, completing withdrawal 30 Oct. Saudis brought in new troops and equipment 26 Oct. Huthi forces 29 Oct attacked convoy transporting defence minister in Marib province in centre, killing two soldiers.

North Africa

➡ **Algeria** Security forces' harsh crackdown on protest movement appeared to ease late Oct, as govt continued to prepare for presidential election in Dec despite significant opposition. In capital Algiers and other major cities, tens of thousands continued to demonstrate every Friday, demanding army quit politics, purge of ruling elite, end to corruption, release of imprisoned opposition and civil society leaders and rejecting presidential election planned for 12 Dec. Police 4 Oct arrested five

members of human rights organisation Rassemblement Action Jeunesse (RAJ) in Algiers; after sit-in protest in Algiers 10 Oct demanding their release, police arrested RAJ president Abdelwahab Fersaoui. Police 8 Oct for first time harassed and tried to stop students' weekly demonstration in Algiers. Army chief of staff Gaïd Salah 15 Oct accused some protesters to be paid by dirty money. Hundreds protested at parliament building 13 Oct against proposed legal and fiscal framework for oil sector, which they said caretaker govt has no legitimacy to pass and gives privileges to foreign companies. Opposition parties criticised lack of opposition representation in electoral body created early Sept. Nineteen personalities including former FM Brahimi 15 Oct launched new dialogue initiative.

➔ **Egypt** After authorities cracked down on late Sept protests against President Sisi's rule, govt took economic measures to relieve pressure on citizens. Authorities 1 Oct said they had put nearly 1.8mn people back onto food subsidy program and 4 Oct reduced fuel prices; measures reversed key austerity policies introduced in agreement with International Monetary Fund. Security forces 12 Oct arrested prominent pro-democracy activist Esraa Abdel-Fattah; prosecutor next day jailed her for fifteen days pending investigation on charges of collusion with terrorist organisation and spreading false news; she said she was tortured by police. Insecurity persisted in North Sinai. Bomb hit truck in Bir al-Abd 12 Oct killing at least nine civilians. Security forces 10 Oct reportedly killed militant who tried to blow himself up near al-Arish city. Shells hit two houses in Sheikh Zuweid 19 Oct, killing at least four civilians; media said army carried out strikes. Suspected Islamic State (ISIS) combatants 28 Oct killed policeman in Sheikh Zuweid. Police 29 Oct killed thirteen suspected militants in al-Arish city. Sisi 26 Oct extended nationwide state of emergency by three months. Tensions rose between Egypt and Ethiopia over latter's construction of its Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on Nile River; Egypt fears project will curtail its share of river water. After tripartite talks with Ethiopia and Sudan 4-5 Oct, Egyptian officials 5 Oct said negotiations had reached "deadlock" and 20 Oct said Ethiopia should agree to involvement of external mediator. Govt 22 Oct said it had accepted U.S. invitation to Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan to meet in Washington. Sisi met Ethiopian PM Abiy in Russia during Africa-Russia summit 23-24 Oct and agreed to resume talks.

↓ **Libya** Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) intensified airstrikes on forces allied to UN-backed Govt of National Accord (GNA) and civilian targets as it pursued campaign to take capital Tripoli; UN kept up diplomatic efforts to push two sides' international backers to support ceasefire. LNA stepped up airstrikes against GNA's strategic sites, notably hitting Misrata airport 5 Oct and large weapons depot in Misrata 16 Oct. LNA denied targeting civilians after suspected LNA airstrike on horse-riding club in Janzur west of Tripoli 6 Oct wounded six; and strike near military intelligence camp in Tripoli's Fornaj neighbourhood killed three girls 14 Oct. Unidentified gunmen 16 Oct killed two women and three children on road from Aziziya to capital Tripoli; LNA accused GNA-allied militias. GNA-backed offensive against LNA stronghold in Tarhunah, 60km south east of capital reportedly killed eleven LNA supporters 16 Oct. GNA 27 Oct launched attack on Haftar's forces in southern Tripoli to regain positions lost mid-Oct, said it took eight LNA fighters prisoner. Germany hosted third UN-backed meeting of international stakeholders 21 Oct with view to holding international conference on Libya by end of year, but parties continued to disagree on right approach; UN pushed for minimum agreement on

cessation of hostilities while some regional capitals demanded comprehensive political, military and financial plan. LNA 19 Oct expressed support for ongoing UN-backed talks, but said no political process would be possible without first eradicating militias in Tripoli.

➡ **Morocco** PM Othmani 9 Oct presented new govt of 23 ministers (reduced from 39), after King Mohammed VI urged cabinet reshuffle in July. Mohammed VI 16 Oct pardoned journalist Hajar Raissouni, sentenced late Sept to one year in jail for alleged abortion and sex outside marriage; her fiancé and doctor were also pardoned. Security forces 25 Oct arrested seven suspected members of Islamic State (ISIS)-linked cell in Casablanca and northern towns of Chefchaouen and Ouazzane.

➡ **Tunisia** In second round of presidential elections 13 Oct, constitutional law professor with no political affiliation Kaïs Saïed won with 72.7% of votes, beating media mogul Nabil Karoui. In light of Karoui's incarceration, Saïed 5 Oct stopped campaigning to ensure level playing field and avoid cancellation of second round. Appeal court 9 Oct freed Karoui, giving him several days to campaign. Saïed sworn in as president 23 Oct. In legislative elections 6 Oct, Islamist-inspired party An-Nahda won most seats with 52 out of 217, ahead of Karoui's liberal party Heart of Tunisia, which won 38, according to preliminary results. An-Nahda launched consultations with several parties represented in parliament and independent MPs to form majority in parliament and then govt. PM Chahed 29 Oct dismissed foreign affairs and defence ministers and secretary of state for diplomacy, reportedly after consultation with President Saïed. Unidentified assailant killed French tourist and injured soldier with knife in Bizerte in north 14 Oct. Security forces arrested suspect next day, his motivations remained unclear.

➡ **Western Sahara** UN Security Council renewed mandate of UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for twelve months, as position of UN special envoy remained unfilled more than four months after former envoy Horst Köhler resigned. Initially UN Security Council members considered approving technical extension of MINURSO's mandate for a few months, but France and U.S. 26 Oct presented resolution to extend it by one year, which Council passed 30 Oct. Morocco reportedly imposed series of preconditions for appointment, while Polisario Front independence movement allegedly threatened to suspend its participation in any diplomatic initiative until UN names new envoy.