

Middle East and North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

➔ **Israel-Palestine Tensions ran high amid increased Israeli settler violence against Palestinians in West Bank and worst clashes since May hostilities at Damascus Gate in East Jerusalem.** Israeli settlers stepped up attacks on Palestinians and their property in West Bank throughout month; daily incidents of vandalism and violence from 3 Oct mainly targeted villages in northern occupied West Bank surrounding Nablus and Salfit cities. Notably, settlers 15, 16 Oct attacked family in Yasuf village, injuring four, and 16 Oct injured at least 12 Palestinians in Burin village. In West Bank, Israeli forces 1 Oct injured at least 19 Palestinians protesting against settlements. Israeli soldiers 14 Oct killed Palestinian teenager allegedly throwing Molotov cocktail near Bethlehem city. In first such move in decade, Israel's defence ministry 19 Oct approved residency for 4,000 undocumented Palestinians in West Bank. Israeli housing minister 24 Oct announced advancement of 1,335 housing units in West Bank settlements, in addition to plans to approve additional 3,100 settlement units. In occupied East Jerusalem, Israeli police dispersed, arrested and beat Palestinians at Damascus Gate in worst clashes since May hostilities; security forces 18, 19 Oct raided Damascus Gate area, injuring at least 31 and arresting 35. Local Israeli magistrate court 6 Oct lifted ban on Jews silently praying at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade, sparking Palestinian protest; Jerusalem District Court 8 Oct overturned ruling. Jerusalem planning committee 13 Oct approved land expropriation from Palestinian area Khirbet Tabalya to build over 1,000 housing units in illegal settlement Givat Hamatos, marking first Jewish neighbourhood to be constructed beyond Green Line in at least 20 years. Israeli govt 22 Oct designated six Palestinian civil society organisations as terror groups, effectively outlawing them. Meanwhile, Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh 3 Oct arrived in Egyptian capital Cairo to meet Egyptian intelligence officials. In Golan Heights, Israeli PM Bennet 11 Oct announced plans to build two new illegal settlements, prompting protest same day by local Syrian Druze population. Israeli sniper allegedly killed Syrian man with suspected ties to Iran on Israeli-Syrian frontier in occupied Golan Heights; Israeli airstrikes 8, 30 Oct reportedly struck Syrian capital Damascus (see Syria).

↓ **Lebanon Investigation into Aug 2020 Beirut port explosion sparked divisions within govt and deadly sectarian clashes in capital Beirut.** Investigative Judge Tareq Bitar 12 Oct issued arrest warrant for former Minister of Finance Ali Hassan Khalil, close aide to head of Shiite party Amal and Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, for failing to appear for questioning over Aug 2020 Beirut port explosion; Hizbollah Sec Gen Hassan Nasrallah previous day accused Bitar of "biased" and "politicised" investigation and demanded judge be replaced; Lebanese courts repeatedly turned down legal challenges by Khalil and other politicians against Bitar. Political row over investigation into port explosion forestalled cabinet meetings and govt work from 13 Oct, as Shiite ministers reportedly threatened walkout if Bitar not removed. Dispute also triggered lethal fighting in capital Beirut. Hizbollah and Amal 14 Oct mobilised protest in front of Palace of Justice, located in Christian neighbourhood adjacent to Shia-populated

areas; gunfire and three-hour-long street battle ensued, killing seven Shiite Muslims, in troubling reminder of sectarian clashes during civil war (1975-1990). Hizbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah 18 Oct accused Christian party Lebanese Forces of staging ambush, while Lebanese Forces blamed violent protesters; Nasrallah called for official investigation and warned: "We won't leave the blood of our martyrs on the ground". Meanwhile, power supplies across country marginally improved by mid-month as Central Bank further depleted currency reserves, while roll out of rationing card faced bureaucratic complications. Following collapse of talks in June 2020, govt 19 Oct resumed negotiations with International Monetary Fund on financial assistance. U.S. 14 Oct voiced support for plan to deliver gas and electricity to Lebanon via Syria and also pledged additional \$67 mn for Lebanese Armed Forces. Parliament 19 Oct voted to bring elections, initially scheduled for 8 May 2022, forward to 27 March. Diplomatic spat late month erupted with Gulf states after footage emerged of Information Minister George Kordahi criticising Saudi-led war in Yemen; in move that could damage govt credibility and compound domestic crises, Riyadh, Kuwait, Bahrain and United Arab Emirates expelled Lebanese ambassador and recalled their ambassadors from Beirut, while Riyadh banned all Lebanese imports.

↓ **Syria Deadliest attack in capital Damascus since 2017 killed over dozen regime soldiers, missile attack on Turkish forces raised prospect of renewed offensive in north west and hostilities rose in Idlib.** In rare attack, two roadside bombs 20 Oct targeting bus carrying troops killed at least 14 military personnel. In north west, guided missile fired 10 Oct from Tel Rifaat city – controlled by People's Protection Units (YPG), Syrian armed group with links to Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) – struck Turkish vehicle near Azaz city, Aleppo governorate, killing two Turkish officers; Kurdish militant group Afrin Liberation Forces reportedly carried out attack. Turkish forces responded by shelling YPG areas while Turkish President Erdoğan next day called attack "final straw", raising prospect of renewed Turkish offensive against YPG. In Idlib province, March 2020 ceasefire held despite uptick in Russian airstrikes and regime attacks. Car bomb 11 Oct killed at least nine, injured ten near govt offices in Afrin city, Aleppo governorate. Regime forces 16 Oct shelled police station in rebel-held Sarmada town, Idlib, killing four and injuring at least 17. Reports mid-month surfaced of govt forces' build up near Idlib governorate. Following Damascus attack, regime shelling 20 Oct killed at least 11, injured 30 in Ariha town, Idlib, in one of deadliest violations of March 2020 ceasefire. Other attacks during month killed at least six Turkish soldiers. In Daraa city in south west, Sept ceasefire deal held. In Deir ez-Zor governorate, unidentified drones 8, 11 Oct reportedly targeted Iran-affiliated militants. In central desert, clashes between Islamic State (ISIS) and govt forces, supported by Russian airstrikes, killed dozens throughout month. Alleged Iran-backed drone strike 20 Oct targeted U.S. military outpost in al-Tanf garrison in Homs governorate. Israeli airstrikes 8, 13 Oct killed regime soldiers and Iran-backed militants in Homs governorate, 30 Oct reportedly hit target in Damascus suburbs. Israeli sniper 16 Oct reportedly killed former Syrian Druze lawmaker in village near occupied Golan Heights. UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen 17 Oct announced Syrian Constitutional Committee agreed to start drafting new constitution during UN talks; Pedersen 22 Oct however called talks "big disappointment".

Gulf and Arabian Peninsula

➔ **Iran Indirect nuclear talks with U.S. still on hold as Washington warned of contingency plans.** Four months since last round of indirect talks with U.S. in Austrian capital Vienna and two-and-a-half months since President Raisi took office, deadlock persisted despite continued diplomatic activity. After expressing concern late Sept about lack of access at Iran's Karaj nuclear site "contrary to the agreed terms", International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Rafael Grossi 19 Oct embarked on five-day visit to U.S. where he said he was "expecting news soon" about Iran trip. FM Amirabdollahian 27 Oct said such visit was on cards but insisted "the date is not important". Enrique Mora, chief of staff of EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, 14 Oct visited Iran to "raise the urgency to resume [nuclear deal] negotiations"; foreign ministry same day announced "the two parties agreed to continue dialogue on questions of mutual interests"; Deputy FM Ali Bagheri 27 Oct met Mora and subsequently announced that: "We agree to start negotiations before the end of November". Mutual frustration between U.S. and Iran persisted in meantime. U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 13 Oct reiterated U.S. view that Iran is using lull in talks to expand nuclear activity, warning: "We are prepared to turn to other options if Iran doesn't change course". Raisi 18 Oct noted: "We are serious in result-oriented negotiations", saying other parties should lift "illegal and oppressive sanctions". U.S., UK, France and Germany 30 Oct warned "continued Iranian nuclear advances and obstacles to the IAEA's work will jeopardize the possibility of a return" to deal, while welcoming U.S. commitment to return to deal and "to stay in full compliance, so long as Iran does the same". Tensions surfaced with Azerbaijan. Armed forces 1 Oct held military drills, prompting Azerbaijani President Aliyev to question: "Why now, and why on our border?"; Iranian defence officials cited "overt and covert presence" of Israel's proxies as well as jihadist threat as reasons for drills (see also Azerbaijan). Cyberattack 26 Oct attributed by Iranian authorities to Israel and U.S. hampered fuel distribution across country.

➔ **Iraq Parliamentary elections held amid record low turnout, gun attacks and fraud allegations, while security forces arrested two prominent Islamic State (ISIS) members.** Iraqis 10 Oct cast their ballots in general election that witnessed lowest voter turnout of any election since 2003, with only 41% participation of registered voters. Main winners included Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's movement, which boosted seats in parliament from 54 to 73, while pro-Iran Shiite parties, including Fateh Alliance, lost seats; Tishreen protest movement-linked party Imtidad recorded successes in southern governorates. EU observer mission 12 Oct said vote was "well-managed and competitive" amid concerns over low turnout and press freedoms. Notably, gun attack on election centre in Riyadh region, south of Kirkuk city, reportedly killed three police officials; unknown gunmen same day attacked voting centre in Sa'diyah town, Diyala governorate, injuring two soldiers. Several Shiite parties 12 Oct alleged fraud, called for recount; pro-Iran paramilitary group Kataib Hezbollah called vote "scam", threatening violence. Hundreds of supporters of paramilitary coalition Popular Mobilisation Forces 17 Oct blocked roads south and north of capital Baghdad in protest at results and 19 Oct began sit-in near Green Zone in Baghdad. Earlier in month, around 1,000 protesters 1 Oct demonstrated in Baghdad's Tahrir Square, marking two-year anniversary of Oct 2019 protest movement. Meanwhile, ISIS

attacks remained lethal, primarily in Kirkuk, Anbar, Diyala and Salah-al Din governorates. Notably, ISIS 3 Oct killed soldier in clashes near Tuz Khurmatu district that cut off Baghdad-Kirkuk highway; attack on village in Diyala 26 Oct killed 12 and injured another 15. PM al-Kadhimi 11 Oct announced capture of senior ISIS leader Sami Jasim in intelligence operation and 18 Oct announced arrest of ISIS militant Ghazwan al-Zobai in unidentified foreign country and transport to Iraq 16 Oct; al-Zobai was mastermind behind 2016 bombing that killed almost 300 people in Baghdad. ISIS attack 26 Oct on Shiite village in Diyala governorate killed at least 15 and prompted retaliation by residents on Sunni village accused of siding with group. Turkey continued operations against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK): airstrikes throughout month targeting suspected PKK in northern Iraq neutralised dozens of alleged militants.

➔ **Saudi Arabia** **Cross-border Huthi attacks injured airport workers in Jazan and 'Asir provinces.** Saudi-led coalition intercepted alleged Huthi drones and ballistic missiles targeting Jazan, 'Asir and Najran provinces throughout month. Notably, coalition 6 Oct intercepted drone targeting Abha international airport in 'Asir, with drone debris leaving four workers slightly injured. Drone 8 Oct targeting King Abdullah airport, Jazan, also left ten injured, including three Bangladeshi and one Sudanese nationals. Amid ongoing de-escalatory talks with Tehran, *Financial Times* 15 Oct reported FM Prince Faisal bin Farhan al-Saud said kingdom was "serious" about Iran talks, describing them as "cordial"; Saudi officials also reportedly said they are considering Iranian request to open consulate in Jeddah town despite Riyadh's stance that not enough progress has been made to reopen Saudi consulates in Iran. FM al-Saud 14 Oct met U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken in U.S. capital Washington; same day met U.S. Special Envoy for Iran Robert Malley.

↓ 🇲🇪 **Yemen** **Huthis launched multi-pronged assault in central Yemen, increasing risk of battle for Marib city, while tensions between govt and Southern Transition Council (STC) escalated in south.** On military front, after consolidating control in al-Bayda governorate in Sept, Huthi forces made major breakthroughs in last contiguous bloc of territory under govt control in central Yemen's Abyan, Shebwa and Marib governorates, substantially raising likelihood of battle for Marib city. Huthis early month encircled Abidya district and gained control of Rahaba and Harib districts in Marib governorate as well as Usaylan, Bayhan and al-Ain districts in Shebwa governorate; gains enabled push into Jebel Murad and al-Jubah districts in Marib governorate in attempt to surround Marib city; fall of Marib city would deal heavy blow to govt credibility and UN mediation efforts. Meanwhile, Huthis continued cross-border attacks into Saudi Arabia (see Saudi Arabia). In Hodeida governorate, Saudi-led coalition 6, 23, 24 Oct destroyed eight explosive-laden boats amid reports of build-up of Huthi forces. In south, tensions between govt and separatist STC rose; notably, gun battles between rival forces in Aden 2 Oct killed four militants. Car bomb targeting Aden Governor Ahmed Lamlas and Govt Minister Salem al-Socotri 10 Oct killed six and injured seven others; Lamlas and al-Socotri survived. Car bomb at Aden Airport 30 Oct killed several civilians. PM Maen Saeed Abdulmalek 12 Oct returned to Aden for first time in over six months. Insecurity and protests persisted in Aden as well as Lahij, Mukalla, Abyan governorates and Socotra island; notably, gunmen 4 Oct killed humanitarian worker in Tur al-Baha district, Lahij. On diplomatic front, UN Envoy Hans Grundberg continued regional listening tour, including in Saudi capital Riyadh

and Aden in first Yemen visit since taking up position. In UN Security Council briefing, Grundberg 14 Oct confirmed meeting Huthi representatives in Omani capital Muscat and highlighted “growing gap” between Huthi’s and govt’s visions of ceasefire and political settlement. Economic situation worsened with ongoing fuel and electricity shortages. Yemeni riyal 17 Oct fell to record low YR1,385 to dollar, prompting govt to close exchange shops and implement measures to curb demand for foreign currency.

North Africa

➔ **Algeria** **Authorities continued to curtail space for civil society activism; tensions ran high between Algiers and Paris.** Amid celebrations marking anniversary of Oct 1988 riots, authorities 5 Oct reportedly arrested 70 individuals in 11 provinces for allegedly defying ban on protests; some subsequently released. Series of court decisions sent chilling message to civil society activists throughout Oct. Notably, authorities 11 Oct upheld two-year prison sentence for “hate speech” and “inciting an unarmed gathering” against prominent leader of Hirak protest movement, Chems Eddine Laalami; 17 Oct sentenced Hirak figure Mohad Gasmi to five-year imprisonment on “terrorism” charges; and 18 Oct upheld two-year jail term for “contempt” against prominent civil society leader Amira Bouraoui. Administrative court of Algiers 13 Oct dissolved lead civil society group Rassemblement Actions Jeunesse (RAJ), over alleged violation of law on associations; RAJ leaders denied accusation, alleged association targeted because of its support for Hirak movement. Algiers court 12 Oct sentenced younger brother of late President Bouteflika, Saïd, to two years in prison for “obstructing the course of justice”; several former govt officials also sentenced to prison on various charges. Security services 13 Oct claimed to have foiled planned attacks by outlawed Movement for the Self-Determination of Kabylie and arrested 17 people in relation to case in Kabylia region; also accused a country “in North Africa” and Israel of involvement in alleged plot amid persistent diplomatic tensions with Rabat over Western Sahara. Algerian media outlets mid-Oct accused Rabat of involvement in 13 Oct bomb blast that killed Algerian soldier in Tlemcen province near border with Morocco. President Tebboune 31 Oct ordered halt to gas exports to Spain via Morocco. Meanwhile, diplomatic row erupted between Algiers and Paris: Algiers 2 Oct recalled ambassador to France, citing “inadmissible interference in [Algeria’s] internal affairs” following French President Macron’s controversial statements notably on colonial past in Sept, and France next day said Algiers had closed its airspace to French military.

➔ **Egypt** **Violence continued to decline in North Sinai, and President Sisi lifted years-long nationwide state of emergency.** Among few security incidents reported in Sinai, army vehicle 3 Oct detonated explosive device allegedly planted by Islamic State-affiliated Sinai Province militants near Al-Masura checkpoint, south of Rafah town; toll unknown. Sisi 7 Oct reportedly issued decree making entire Sinai Peninsula “military zone”, which enables defence minister to impose series of special measures. Meanwhile, Sisi 25 Oct lifted nationwide security-related state of emergency, which had granted authorities sweeping powers for over four years, and 27 Oct appointed Lt Gen Osama Askar armed forces chief of staff. Human rights groups cautiously welcomed end of state of emergency, with NGO

Human Rights Watch 26 Oct deeming move “insufficient” to address country’s “prolonged human rights crisis”. Sisi 12 Oct took part in Visegrad Group summit in Hungary’s capital, Budapest, said country would not give in to any “orders” from EU on human rights; statement comes after U.S. in Sept withheld small section of annual military aid to Cairo due to human rights concerns. Military court 13 Oct upheld life sentences for 32 people accused of plotting to kill Sisi in 2014. Amid stalled negotiations between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan on Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (see Nile Waters), Sisi at Cairo Water Week conference 24 Oct called for “balanced and legally binding agreement”. After Turkey’s plans to sell armed drones to Ethiopia disclosed 14 Oct, Egyptian security source reportedly called for freezing of deal, said any such agreement should be discussed between Cairo and Ankara; both countries in recent months have negotiated reestablishing diplomatic ties.

➔ **Libya** **Uncertainty persisted over whether elections will take place in Dec, while tensions within PM Dabaiba’s govt resurfaced.** Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR) 6 Oct issued long-awaited parliamentary election law despite lack of proper qualified majority and without consulting political rivals; text envisages parliamentary elections taking place several months after presidential election set for 24 Dec. Critics, especially among Tripoli-based constituencies, immediately denounced procedural flaws and said sequencing violates political component of UN-backed peace plan that envisages simultaneous presidential and legislative elections. Participants in Libya Stabilization Conference in capital Tripoli, 21 Oct reiterated their support for 24 Dec date (set during UN-backed forum in Nov 2020), as did embassies of France, Germany, Italy, UK and U.S. in joint statement 25 Oct. So-called 5+5 Joint Military Commission, comprising representatives of Libya’s two rival military coalitions, 6-8 Oct met in Switzerland’s Geneva city in presence of UN Envoy Ján Kubiš, agreed on Action Plan envisaging “phased, balanced and synchronized withdrawal” of mercenaries, foreign fighters and forces. Tensions still brewing between Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar-led Arab Libyan Armed Forces (ALAF) and Tripoli-based Govt of National Accord (GNU) over salary disputes, with GNU refusing to pay ALAF salaries to Haftar’s central command and instead demanding to make direct payment to individual bank accounts. Political tensions between easterners within GNU and PM Dabaiba resurfaced. Notably, deputy PM Hussein al-Qatrani and others 10 Oct accused Dabaiba of sidelining ministers from east. Amid stalled unification of Central Bank, Dabaiba’s govt took controversial measures against heads of some top income-generating institutions, notably sacking head of state-owned Telecommunications holding company Faisal Gergab mid-Oct, allegedly after latter’s refusal to authorise transfer of profits into govt accounts; oil ministry 19 Oct also announced suspension of National Oil Corporation head Mustafa Sanalla, officially to allow investigations into alleged administrative offences. UN human rights investigators 4 Oct said war crimes and crimes against humanity likely committed by all conflict parties, including external actors, since 2016.

➔ **Tunisia** **Both supporters and opponents of President Saïed’s power grab demonstrated in large numbers, illustrating growing polarisation.** Tens of thousands 3 Oct marched across country in support of Saïed’s seizure of almost total power. In response, over 5,000 anti-Saïed protesters, largely mobilised by Islamist-inspired party An-Nahda and Islamo-populist Dignity Coalition, 10 Oct gathered in capital Tunis; five journalists injured during protest, while heavy police

presence prevented any march down capital's main avenue. Saïed 11 Oct unveiled new govt of 24 ministers, including many political newcomers, also nominated his close ally Taoufik Charfeddine as interior minister – a position he had previously held in Sept 2020-Jan 2021. Saïed 14 Oct dismissed members of assembly speaker's cabinet, which critics said is equivalent to dissolving assembly. After former President Marzouki 9 Oct urged Paris to suspend its support for Saïed's "dictatorial regime", Saïed mid-Oct said he will withdraw Marzouki's diplomatic passport, and judiciary 15 Oct opened investigation into Marzouki's comments. Authorities 3 Oct detained MP Abdellatif Aloui and TV anchor Ameer Ayed for allegedly "conspiring against state security and insulting the army" after they strongly criticised Saïed in TV programme 1 Oct; 17 Oct arrested MP and former minister Mehdi Ben Gharbia on tax fraud and money-laundering charges. Saïed 21 Oct promised to launch "national dialogue" over country's political and electoral systems but vowed to exclude "those who stole the people's money and traitors". Internationally, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell 19 Oct urged Saïed to restore constitutional order, said "parliament cannot stay closed indefinitely"; and EU parliament 21 Oct passed resolution calling for swift return to "full-fledged democracy", urging Saïed to "engage in an inclusive national dialogue". Amid economic turmoil, credit rating agency Moody's 14 Oct downgraded country's sovereign rating from B3 to Caa1, signalling growing concerns over Tunis' ability to secure much-needed funding amid myriad challenges.

↑ **Western Sahara Appointment of new UN envoy after two-year search signalled major step toward rekindling peace process.** UN Sec-Gen Guterres 6 Oct appointed Italian-Swedish diplomat Staffan de Mistura as new personal envoy for Western Sahara; post had remained vacant since 2019 as Morocco or Polisario Front independence movement rejected a dozen other candidates. UN Security Council 29 Oct renewed mandate of UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for one year, also expressed concern at breakdown of 1991 ceasefire and called for revival of UN-led negotiations. NGO Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project 27 Oct reported Moroccan forces mid-Oct launched strikes on Polisario Front positions in Tifariti and Mahbes areas. Amid persistent diplomatic tensions between Algeria and Morocco over Western Sahara, Algerian media outlets accused Rabat of involvement in 13 Oct bomb attack that killed Algerian soldier in Tlemcen province near border with Morocco.