

Middle East and North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

➔ **Israel/Palestine** Israeli forces conducted raids and besieged Palestinian towns in West Bank, killing at least 28 Palestinians in some of worst violence since Second Intifada; Israel and Lebanon signed maritime deal.

Violent clashes between Israeli soldiers and Palestinians continued. Israeli operations, clashes or gunfire killed at least 28 Palestinians during month, according to UN; Israeli forces in 2022 have killed over 182 Palestinians in occupied territories – marking deadliest year since 2006. Notably, Palestinian gunman 8 Oct killed Israeli soldier and injured three others at checkpoint near Shufat refugee camp in East Jerusalem; in response, Israeli forces same day conducted raids and blocked entrances to camp. Israeli forces same day killed two Palestinian teenagers in Jenin refugee camp. Palestinian armed group “Lions’ Den” (cross-party alliance of individuals in old city of Nablus) 11 Oct claimed responsibility for killing Israeli soldier near Israeli settlement Shavei Shomron, west of Nablus; Israel blockaded Nablus, prompting Palestinians across West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza to hold strikes and protests. “Lions’ Den” 23 Oct claimed Israeli explosion killed one of its leaders in Nablus. Israeli forces 25 Oct raided Nablus city targeting “Lion’s Den” alleged explosives manufacturing site and triggering largest clash in weeks, killing five Palestinians, including alleged “Lion’s Den” leader; several “Lion’s Den” members turned themselves in to Palestinian Authority’s security services during month. Israeli forces 28 Oct killed two al-Aqsa Brigades members near Nablus city. Hamas claimed attack by gunman 29 Oct that killed one Israeli settler at checkpoint near Kiryat Arba settlement. Meanwhile, Israeli settlers repeatedly raided Palestinian neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem, Ramallah, Nablus and Hebron under army protection.

Rival Palestinian factions signed reconciliation deal. Following talks held in Algerian capital Algiers, Fatah and Hamas 13 Oct signed reconciliation deal promising new elections for Palestinian Authority presidency and Palestinian Legislative Council within one year; Fatah excluded reference to unity govt.

Israel and Lebanon signed maritime demarcation deal. Israeli and Lebanese leaders 27 Oct signed deal proposed by U.S. to demarcate maritime border along “line 23” (see Lebanon); former PM Benjamin Netanyahu opposed deal, vowing to scrap it if he gains power in 1 Nov elections.

↑ **Lebanon** Govt and Israel signed maritime border deal, defusing potential flashpoint; political divisions prevented new president’s election and hampered govt formation amid economic crisis.

Israel and Lebanon signed maritime border deal. Govt and Israel agreed demarcation agreement for their shared maritime border following months of U.S.-led mediation efforts that intensified in recent weeks amid rising tensions between Israel and Hizbollah. President Aoun and Israeli PM Yair Lapid 11 Oct declared their satisfaction with deal’s terms, which demarcates border along “line 23”, leaving Karish gas

field in Israeli waters and Qana prospect inside Lebanese waters; deal allows Lebanon to explore and potentially exploit Qana and entitles Israel to compensation for its share of Qana. Aoun and Lapid 27 Oct separately signed final agreement; later in day, Israeli and Lebanese delegations separately submitted signed copies to U.S. mediator Hochstein at UN Interim force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) headquarters. Earlier, Lebanon's army claimed Israeli gunboats 16, 17 Oct repeatedly violated Lebanese territorial waters near border opposite Naqura, which Israel denied.

Parliament failed to elect new president, raising fears of constitutional uncertainty in Nov. Parliament made no tangible progress on electing new president to succeed Aoun, whose six-year term ended 31 Oct. Lebanon appeared poised to enter presidential vacuum from 1 Nov onwards, which will likely further hamper International Monetary Fund (IMF)-mandated reform processes and fuel political polarisation between sparring political camps, raising risk of violent confrontation; crisis will also raise question of whether caretaker govt can validly exercise president's prerogatives. Similarly, govt formation efforts remained stalled, over five months after May parliamentary polls; Mikati and Aoun failed to settle on list of ministers, reportedly disagreeing over allocation of various ministries to different sectarian communities.

Economic hardship persisted amid limited reform progress. Passage of legislative reforms needed to unlock IMF financial bailout package remained grindingly slow. Parliament 18 Oct passed amendments to banking secrecy law but concerns remained that legislation will not meet IMF's standards. Parliament is yet to approve formal capital control law, which IMF considers "crucial for boosting economic activity", as Central Bank struggled to unify various exchange rates. Meanwhile, soaring energy prices before onset of winter threatens to deepen crisis and poverty.

↓ **Syria** **Deadly clashes erupted between opposition groups in north west as Hei'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) expanded beyond Idlib, prompting Turkish deployment; Russia continued air raids in Idlib.**

In north west, hostilities broke out between HTS and Turkish-backed groups. Idlib's dominant rebel group HTS blamed Turkish-backed groups for 7 Oct shooting of citizen journalist and wife in al-Bab city. In significant escalation, HTS and allied groups 11 Oct entered Afrin city in northern Aleppo and repelled Third Corps of Türkiye-backed coalition of armed groups Syrian National Army located there since 2018, as fighting reportedly killed dozens. Türkiye 15 Oct brokered truce, with HTS agreeing to withdraw from Afrin. However, HTS 17 Oct seized Kafr Jana town from rival Turkish-aligned faction, after sides accused each other of breaking deal, and 18 Oct approached Azaz city; Turkish troops same day deployed around Kafr Jana to end fighting. Meanwhile, HTS late Sept and 5 Oct conducted rare ground operation to expel regime forces after they advanced into no-man's land in western Aleppo province toward Idlib.

Russia stepped up airstrikes in Idlib and Türkiye struck Kurdish and regime forces. After conducting five air raids last month, Russia continued bombings in Idlib province on 7, 11 and 17 Oct, straining March 2020 ceasefire. Turkish drone 6 Oct killed People's Defence Units (YPG) commander in Aleppo province. Turkish forces 7 Oct shelled govt border guards base in Aleppo province, killing at least four.

Islamic State (ISIS) maintained simmering insurgency in multiple provinces. In north east, coalition 6 Oct claimed it killed ISIS leader in Hasakah province and two

others in “northern Syria”; 10 Oct reportedly killed ISIS militant in Raqqa province. ISIS 16 Oct assassinated son of pro-Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) militia commander in Hasakah province. In south, regime forces and reconciled rebels 14 Oct ambushed large ISIS cell in Jassem city, Daraa governorate, allegedly killing Daraa emir. In centre, ISIS cells targeted regime forces across southern Raqqa and western Deir al-Zor provinces.

In other important developments. In capital Damascus, IED by unknown group 13 Oct killed at least 18 regime soldiers. Israel 21, 24 Oct reportedly conducted airstrikes on capital Damascus. Cholera spread continued, with death toll reaching 60.

Gulf and Arabian Peninsula

➔ **Iran Nationwide protests surpassed forty-day milestone despite ongoing repression, Western powers voiced concern over Iran’s military assistance to Russia, and Islamic State claimed deadly attack.**

Anti-govt protests continued amid crackdown, as West imposed sanctions. Widespread unrest following death on 16 Sept of Mahsa Amini persisted as deeply-rooted discontent against govt, particularly among youth and university students, fueled nationwide protests that 26 Oct reached fortieth day. NGO Amnesty International 6 Oct reported security forces killed at least 66 people, including children, during violent crackdown after Friday prayers on 30 Sept in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan provinces home to Baluchi ethnic minority, labelling it “deadliest day on record since protests started”; total death toll during month likely surpassed 200, alongside 14,000 arrests. Western govts widely condemned govt’s crackdown. Notably, U.S. 6 and 26 Oct, Canada 3, 11, 19 and 31 Oct, UK 10 Oct, and EU 17 Oct blacklisted various officials; U.S. White House 26 Oct raised concern over Moscow “advising Tehran on best practices” of demonstration suppression.

Nuclear talks faded into background. Nuclear talks, already at impasse before protests erupted, appeared during month as afterthought for parties. UN’s nuclear watchdog IAEA 10 Oct informed member states that Iran had completed installing, but not yet activated, seven cascades of advanced centrifuges at Natanz Fuel Enrichment Plant, with work underway on two of three additional cascades. IAEA chief 28 Oct described Iran’s nuclear activities as “an even more relevant problem every day”.

Concerns grew over Tehran-Moscow military cooperation. Ukraine and Western powers grew increasingly concerned over transfers of Iranian drones to Russia: Kyiv 17 Oct estimated that Russia had used “more than a hundred Iranian kamikaze drones” in Ukraine war within past week, which Iranian officials continued to deny; U.S., UK and France asserted such transfers would violate UN Security Council resolution 2231, which in 2015 endorsed nuclear agreement.

In other important developments. Govt 26 Oct reported terrorist attack against shrine in Shiraz city, killing at least fifteen and injuring dozens, which Islamic State (ISIS) claimed responsibility for. Security officials 25 Oct reported “120 heavy cyber-attacks” targeting infrastructure over course of 20 days.

↑ Iraq Parliament elected president, breaking year-long political deadlock and paving way for new govt, while Türkiye and Iran continued attacks in Kurdistan amid intra-Kurdish tensions.

Election of president led to appointment of PM-designate and new cabinet. Parliament 13 Oct elected Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) member Abdul Latif Rashid as president, as nine rockets landed near Green Zone in capital Baghdad, injuring ten people. Rashid won support of Shiite Coordination Framework and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) after former reportedly promised KDP not to enforce Feb 2022 Supreme Court ruling on oil and gas sales. Rashid same day named framework's nominee Mohammed Shia al-Sudani PM-designate, tasked with forming cabinet by 12 Nov. Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr 15 Oct refused to join new govt; with Sadr sidelined, PM-designate 27 Oct passed cabinet. Sadr is likely to watch govt performance at distance while retaining street-mobilising power for future.

Protesters marked three-year anniversary amid tensions between rival Shiite factions. On anniversary of 2019 Tishreen protest movement, demonstrators 1 Oct protested in Baghdad and southern governorates; in Baghdad, security forces clashed with protesters, injuring over 80. In Dhi Qar governorate, police imposed curfew after unknown groups 3 Oct attacked govt buildings and injured security forces. Unidentified groups 4 Oct fired rockets at presidential palace in Basra city, used by security forces and Iran-aligned groups; al-Sadr 6 Oct announced banning weapons use, except in Salaheddin province, for armed groups under his command.

In Kurdistan region, Türkiye and Iran continued operations amid intra-Kurdish tensions. After Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) 1 Oct killed Turkish soldier, Turkish drone 4 Oct reportedly killed two alleged PKK members in Sulaymaniyah governorate; armed group 8 Oct fired missiles at Zilkan base housing Turkish forces in Dohuk governorate. Regional authorities said Turkish strike 28 Oct killed two PKK militants in Sinjar. Continuing Sept operation, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps 4 Oct reportedly struck alleged Iranian Kurdish groups in Sedikan area; 9 Oct announced end of operation. Meanwhile, in regional capital Erbil, explosive device 7 Oct killed PUK officer close to ousted PUK leader Lahur Talabani – cousin and rival of current PUK leader Bafel Talabani.

➡ Saudi Arabia Saudi-U.S. relationship faced strains following decision to cut oil production.

Oil cuts fuelled tensions with U.S. Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies (OPEC+) 5 Oct agreed to 2mn barrel cut in daily oil production, sparking heavy criticism from U.S., which perceives higher oil prices as helping Russia mitigate impact of Western sanctions. Chairman of U.S. Foreign Relations Committee 10 Oct called for freezing all cooperation with Riyadh; U.S. President Biden next day vowed "consequences" for U.S.-Saudi relations, as media reported U.S. cancelled U.S.-Gulf Cooperation Council Working Group on Iran meeting scheduled 17 Oct; Riyadh 13 Oct maintained move was based only "on economic considerations". Meanwhile, Court 3 Oct reportedly sentenced U.S.-Saudi dual citizen Saad Ibrahim Almadhi to 16 years in prison for tweets criticising govt.

After Yemen's truce lapsed, Riyadh continued engagement with Yemen's govt and met Huthis. As April truce expired without parties committing to extension, Huthis 2 Oct threatened to target oil companies operating in Saudi Arabia; Saudi officials

discussed truce renewal with Yemeni officials and potential prisoner swap with Huthis (see Yemen).

➔ 🌟 **Yemen** April truce remained stuck in limbo after parties failed to agree extension, raising risk of Huthi regional attacks and new cycle of escalation.

Truce remained stuck between outright collapse and extension. Ahead of 2 Oct expiry, UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg 1 Oct proposed reopening roads in Taiz governorate, expanding flights from Sanaa airport, lifting restrictions on Hodeida port, and paying public sector salaries and pensions; however, Huthis at eleventh hour demanded govt pay salaries of defence and interior ministries in Huthi-controlled areas using oil and gas revenues, which govt rejected. Main sticking point during month remained source of revenue that ought to cover salary payments, with reports suggesting possible regional player could foot bill; unconfirmed reports late month suggested backchannel talks between Huthis and Saudi Arabia to revive truce were ongoing.

In absence of extension, risk of return to frontline and cross-border hostilities grew. Huthis 2 Oct threatened to target international energy companies operating in Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, ahead of influx of visits to region for World Cup in Qatar in Nov. In first announced military action since truce expiry, Huthi drone 21 Oct targeted cargo ship docking at oil terminal in al-Shihr port, Hadramawt governorate, as Huthis accused companies of looting country's resources. In response, govt's National Defence Council designated Huthis as terrorist organisation. Elsewhere, clashes between Huthis and Saudi-led coalition-aligned Southern Transitional Council (STC) 6 Oct reportedly killed at least eight in Yafa, Lahij governorate. UN 13 Oct reported skirmishes along frontlines in Taiz, Marib, Hodeida and Dhale governorates during month.

In south, tensions continued within anti-Huthi bloc. STC mobilised protestors demanding withdrawal of Islah-aligned forces, in effort to extend its rule in Hadramawt governorate; thousands of pro-STC demonstrators 14 Oct reportedly protested in Seiyun, Hadramawt governorate.

In other important developments. Saudi delegation 12 Oct travelled to Sanaa, and Huthi delegation visited kingdom, to finalise prisoner exchange talks for first time since 2014; both parties reiterated agenda did not include truce. Yemeni riyal's value 4 Oct plummeted to 1,174 to dollar, lowest since April.

North Africa

➔ **Algeria** Govt poised to significantly increase military budget as Algiers seeks to enhance regional influence.

Govt submitted plans to double defence spending in 2023. Govt mid-Oct reportedly submitted 2023 draft finance law to parliament's finance committee, seeking to push military budget to \$23bn from \$10bn this year; increase comes amid tensions with Morocco over disputed Western Sahara, jihadist violence in Sahel region and unrest in Libya; parliament expected to endorse law in Nov.

Algiers continued to reassert its position on international scene. Army chief of staff Gen. Saïd Chengriha 13 Oct gathered his counterparts from Mauritania, Mali and Niger in capital Algiers to discuss revival of joint military operations centre known as CEMOC. After Algiers in Sept took part in Vostok military exercises in Russia's far east, Algeria and Russia around 20 Oct conducted four-day joint naval exercise in Mediterranean. In first visit by Moroccan state official since Algiers cut diplomatic ties with Morocco in August 2021, Moroccan FM Nasser Bourita 29 Oct arrived in Algiers to take part in preparations for 1 Nov Arab League summit.

Silencing of dissent continued. Authorities 11 Oct arrested journalist Nadir Kerri on undisclosed charges after he published article on govt's car import policy; 13 Oct released him under judicial control. NGO Committee to Protect Journalists 18 Oct said it had submitted report to UN Human Rights Council warning that "journalists in Algeria have increasingly faced pretrial detention and judicial harassment".

➔ **Egypt Authorities faced increasing domestic and international pressure to improve human rights record as country hosts UN climate conference; jihadist activity persisted in Sinai Peninsula.**

Pressure built up on govt to improve human rights record. Ahead of annual UN Climate Change Conference (COP27) to take place in Sharm el-Sheikh city 6-18 Nov, UN experts 7 Oct said govt is creating "climate of fear" to dissuade civil society organisations to engage visibly at COP27. Local civil society coalition COP Civic Space 19 Oct said thousands still detained without legal basis, and NGO Amnesty International next day denounced "cruel and inhuman conditions" for opponents and civil society activists still in jail. As preparations for Sisi-sponsored national dialogue dragged on, authorities 11 Oct announced imminent liberation of 70 detainees held in pretrial detention for political issues; 16 Oct announced release of another 25 detainees.

Economic problems fed into political discontent. Amid economic crisis, govt 1 Oct increased cost of eight subsidised staple goods, including cheese, cooking oil and lentils. International Monetary Fund and govt late Oct reached preliminary agreement for \$3bn loan conditioned on series of economic reforms. Calls for anti-govt protests to be held 11 Nov – to coincide with COP27 – mid-Oct started circulating online. In response, authorities in following days increased patrolling and erected checkpoints in capital Cairo and other cities, reportedly searching mobile phones for anti-govt content.

Govt forces and allies continued to combat jihadists in Sinai Peninsula. Parliament around 3 Oct extended state of emergency in North Sinai by another six months. Sinai Tribal Union and govt forces 3-5 Oct reportedly killed 11 Islamic State (ISIS)-affiliated Sinai Province (SP) militants in Jilbana area, about 20km east of Suez Canal. Exchanges of fire between SP elements on one hand and army and tribal fighters on the other reported 5, 14, 16 Oct in Rafah area, with fatalities on both sides. Suspected SP militants 20 Oct killed two tribal fighters south of Bir al-Abd town and in Jilbana area.

➔ **Libya Series of deals between Ankara and Tripoli inflamed internal and regional tensions; UN Security Council extended political mission's mandate as new envoy took office in capital Tripoli.**

Energy deals between Tripoli-based govt and Ankara triggered uproar. Tripoli-based govt 3 Oct signed preliminary economic and maritime agreements with Türkiye, opening door to joint oil and gas exploration and drillings in Libya-claimed Exclusive Economic Zone in Mediterranean, disputed by Egypt and Greece. East-based PM Bashagha and House of Representatives (HoR) Speaker Aguila Saleh immediately rejected deal as null and void, saying Tripoli-based govt's term expired in Dec 2021. Egypt and Greece 3 and 9 Oct condemned hydrocarbon exploration deal as "illegal", with Athens vowing to oppose it "with all legal means". EU 3 Oct reiterated that it considers 2019 agreement demarcating Turkish and Libyan Exclusive Economic Zones (which latest oil and gas deal builds on) as infringement of sovereign rights of other states. Tripoli-based PM Dabaiba 25 Oct travelled to Türkiye and reportedly signed two military deals with Turkish govt with a view to strengthening military cooperation.

Rival camps held military parades, adopted bellicose rhetoric. On occasion of military parade in southern city of Sebha, East-based military commander Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar 17 Oct called for popular "rebellion" against "governmental failure"; said his forces "are ready to protect the people in their uprising". Forces loyal to Tripoli-based govt 22 Oct held televised military exercise in Dabaiba's presence. Aguila Saleh and Khaled al-Mishri, head of Tripoli-based High State Council, 20-21 Oct met in Morocco, said they had agreed to take steps to unify rival govts and resume dialogue on holding elections; Dabaiba 21 Oct rejected "parallel paths".

UN renewed efforts to help break political stalemate. New UN Sec-Gen Special Representative Abdoulaye Bathily 14 Oct arrived in Tripoli to assume his duties and in following days held talks with rival leaders, including Dabaiba, Aguila Saleh, Presidential Council Chairman Mohammed al-Menfi, and National Oil Corporation chairman Farhat Bengdara. UN Security Council 28 Oct unanimously extended political mission UNSMIL's mandate for another year, urged parties to agree on roadmap to presidential and parliamentary elections.

➡ **Tunisia President Saïed's plan to hold parliamentary elections in December continued to face opposition, including boycott calls, and govt reached preliminary deal with International Monetary Fund amid ever-worsening economic and fiscal crisis.**

Opposition protests gathered thousands and more parties announced election boycott. Three political parties including Al Massar (Social Democratic Path) 3 Oct announced they will join group of at least 13 other parties boycotting parliamentary elections scheduled for 17 Oct. Thousands 15 Oct joined opposition coalition National Salvation Front protest in Tunis demanding Saïed's resignation and accountability for economic crisis; anti-Islamist, anti-revolution Free Destourian Party same day held parallel anti-govt demonstration. Meanwhile, Saïed 7 Oct said he may amend electoral law ahead of parliamentary elections to avoid attempts by would-be candidates to buy sponsorship – each candidate must gather 400 signatures of registered voters. Electoral commission President Farouk Bouasker 20 Oct ruled out any amendment, citing lack of time.

Tensions persisted within interior ministry. Military court in Sfax city 6 Oct ordered arrest of police trade union sec gen, Nabil Ayari, following clashes between police unionists and other security forces in Sept; Interior Minister Taoufik Charfeddine

has been in conflict with police unionists since August over control of security apparatus.

Govt and IMF reached preliminary agreement for loan conditioned on painful reforms. Govt around 15 Oct reached preliminary agreement with International Monetary Fund (IMF) over \$1.9bn rescue package; approval by IMF's executive board conditioned on reforms, including decrease of energy subsidies and privatisation of some state-owned companies by year's end. Meanwhile, economic and fiscal crisis hit new low as gas stations around 8 Oct began running out of fuel, sparking long queues at petrol stations.

➡ **Western Sahara UN Security Council renewed peacekeeping mission's mandate for one year, while Morocco and pro-independence Polisario Front continued to seek diplomatic support for their respective positions.**

UN Security Council called for revival of UN-led peace process. UN Security Council 27 Oct extended mandate of UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) until 31 Oct 2023; resolution, adopted by 13 votes in favour with Russia and Kenya abstaining, renewed call on Morocco and Polisario Front to "resume negotiations" to allow for "lasting and mutually acceptable" solution, and expressed "deep concern" at breakdown of 1991 ceasefire. Ahead of vote, UN Sec-Gen António Guterres 3 Oct released annual report on situation in Western Sahara, noting that low-intensity military clashes between Moroccan military and Polisario Front continued, Morocco conducted airstrikes in Western Sahara, and Polisario Front imposed limits to MINURSO's operations east of the sand berm.

Diplomatic battle over Western Sahara continued. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa 18 Oct hosted Polisario Front leader and Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic President Brahim Ghali and reaffirmed his position in favour of Western Sahara's right to self-determination. During visit to Morocco, Belgian FM Hadja Lahbib 20 Oct reiterated Belgium's support for UN-led process and said Rabat's autonomy plan for Western Sahara was "good basis" for final settlement of dispute.