

Middle East and North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

➔ **Israel-Palestine** Violence continued along Israel-Gaza border despite talks between Israel and Hamas and temporary relaxation of Israel's blockade on Gaza. Gazan militants 8-9 Aug fired 150 rockets into Israel, to which Israel responded with airstrikes, killing at least three Palestinians. Egypt and UN Special Coordinator for Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov continued efforts to broker truce between Israel and Hamas; Mladenov 8 Aug urged both sides to step back from brink. After Gazans reduced rate of incendiary kite launches, Israel 15 Aug reopened Kerem Shalom crossing in south following July closure and restored Palestinian fishing area to nine nautical miles from shore. Gazans continued weekly protests at border; Israeli army 17 Aug killed two and wounded hundreds during clashes along border. Israel 19-28 Aug closed Erez crossing in north Gaza. At 15 Aug Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Central Council meeting boycotted by various PLO factions and Hamas and Islamic Jihad, Palestinian Authority (PA) President Abbas condemned possible Egyptian-sponsored truce between Israel and Hamas before intra-Palestinian reconciliation, threatening to make further cuts to Gaza. Abbas 16 Aug reportedly refused to meet Egyptian interlocutors, Fatah representatives held talks with Egyptians in Cairo 25-26 Aug. U.S. State Department 24 Aug said it would redirect over \$200mn that would have paid for aid programs in Gaza and West Bank; Palestinian delegate to U.S. said move confirmed U.S. was "abandoning the two-state solution". U.S. 31 Aug said it would no longer contribute funding for UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA); European and Arab countries criticised decision and promised to increase their contributions. Minority Druze community 4 Aug led tens of thousands in protests in Tel Aviv against law Israeli parliament passed in July that defines state of Israel as nation state of Jewish people. Tens of thousands of Palestinian citizens of Israel protested against law in Tel Aviv 11 Aug. Netanyahu 20 Aug during meeting with U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton called for "greater pressure" on Iran.

➔ **Jordan** Assailants 10 Aug detonated bomb under police car at music festival in Fuheis, mainly Christian town 20km north west of capital Amman, killing one officer. Security forces 12 Aug traced suspects to building in nearby Salt; during raid suspects detonated explosives causing building to partially collapse; four security personnel and at least three suspects reportedly killed. Interior minister 13 Aug said assailants were Islamic State supporters and had planned more attacks.

➔ **Lebanon** Syrian refugees in Lebanon continued to return to Syria. Hundreds returned from Bekaa region and town of Shebaa 13-14 Aug. UN refugee agency (UNHCR) head Filippo Grandi 13 Aug said it was premature to talk about mass repatriation of refugees; next day foreign ministry disagreed, arguing Syria is stable. FM Gebran Bassil 20 Aug said "there is no reason for the refugees to stay".

⬇️ 🌐* **Syria** After taking control of last opposition-held areas in south west, pro-govt forces intensified efforts to retake north west, raising risk of further escalation there in Sept. In north west, amid reports that govt was increasing troops in area,

army 9 Aug dropped fliers in rebel-held areas of Idlib province urging people to surrender. Next day govt carried out dozens of airstrikes in Hama, Idlib and Aleppo provinces, killing at least 29 people; most intense bombing in months. UN 30 Aug called on Russia, Iran and Turkey to hold off govt campaign in north west. In south west, as pro-govt forces took last pockets of territory from Islamic State (ISIS)-affiliated militants, Jordanian army said it had shelled ISIS militants in Syria 31 July-1 Aug as they approached Jordanian border, killing some. Israel said its airstrike in Syrian-held part of Golan Heights killed seven ISIS-affiliated militants night of 1-2 Aug. Russian envoy to Syria 1 Aug reportedly said Iranian forces in Syria had withdrawn their heavy weapons at least 85km from Israeli-held Golan Heights; Israel said it was not enough, demanding Iranian-backed forces leave Syria. Iran 28 Aug said it would maintain military presence in Syria as part of cooperation agreement with Syria that Iranian defence minister signed during Damascus visit 26-27 Aug. Russia said its military police and UN peacekeepers 2 Aug began patrols in Golan Heights and that to prevent “provocations against UN posts” its military police would set up eight observation posts there, to be handed over to Syrian army once situation stable. In east, opposition Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) backed by U.S.-led coalition continued efforts to retake ISIS-held pockets. ISIS attacked army position near Deir al-Zour city 15 Aug, twelve soldiers and five militants reportedly killed. Iraq 16 Aug said its airstrike in Syria killed ISIS militants planning attacks in Iraq. UN 13 Aug estimated up to 30,000 ISIS militants remained in Syria and Iraq, about half in each country. Syrian Democratic Council, SDF’s political wing, went to Damascus early Aug for second round of talks with govt; increase in contact has yet to yield tangible results.

Gulf and Arabian Peninsula

➡ **Bahrain** Govt 16 Aug rejected finding of UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention that jailing of activist Nabeel Rajab was “unlawful” and “discriminatory”. Amid ongoing feud with Qatar, govt 21 Aug said it would no longer issue visas to Qataris. Ali Mushaima, son of jailed opposition leader Hassan Mushaima, 1 Aug began hunger strike outside Bahraini embassy in London to protest govt’s alleged refusal to allow his father medical treatment; Hassan Mushaima taken to hospital for cancer scan 28 Aug, but son continued hunger strike end month.

➡ **Iran** U.S. 7 Aug reinstated on Iran unilateral sanctions lifted by 2015 nuclear deal, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA); U.S. to re-impose sanctions on Iran’s oil exports in Nov. Supreme Leader Khamenei 13 Aug declared “there will be no war, nor will we negotiate with the U.S.”. German, French and UK FMs and EU foreign policy chief Mogherini 6 Aug issued joint statement regretting re-imposition of sanctions and updating Blocking Statute to shield European firms from U.S. penalties; next day, Mogherini encouraged European companies to increase business with Iran. U.S. 16 Aug announced creation of Iran Action Group within State Department and appointed Brian Hook as Special Representative on Iran. Iranian navy held major training exercise in Persian Gulf and army tested Fateh-110 ballistic missile early Aug. Economic situation deteriorated with value of rial falling to 100,000 to the dollar mid-Aug. Parliament 28 Aug questioned President Rouhani on his govt’s handling of economic crisis and removed labour minister 8 Aug and finance minister 26 Aug in no-confidence votes. Insecurity continued in north west

near borders with Iraq and Turkey; following clashes near Oshnavieh 11 Aug Kurdish militants Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) claimed to have killed twelve Revolutionary Guards, while govt claimed to have killed eleven militants. Kurdish militants 16 Aug claimed to have killed four Iranian border guards in ambush on border post near city of Baneh. Heads of all five states on Caspian Sea – Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan – met 12 Aug in Kazakh city, Aktau and signed convention on Caspian’s legal status with implications for each country’s rights to extract resources from it; contents of convention not disclosed (see Kazakhstan).

➡ **Iraq** Electoral commission 10 Aug released results from partial recount of votes cast in May parliamentary election; no major changes from initial results. Several parties continued to question legitimacy of vote due to concerns over electronic voting system and following fire in Baghdad warehouse in June that destroyed ballots preventing full recount. Supreme Court 19 Aug approved final results. Parties intensified negotiations aimed at forming largest parliamentary bloc, thereby winning PM position and right to form cabinet. PM Abadi, Shiite clerics Moqtada al-Sadr and Ammar al-Hakim and former PM Iyad Allawi 19 Aug agreed to unite their coalitions in one parliamentary bloc, but their combined seats fall short of 165 needed for parliamentary majority. Sunni politicians 15 Aug formed National Axis alliance comprising some 50 seats. Abadi 30 Aug fired Falih al-Fayyadh from positions of national security adviser and chairman of Shia militias Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) for being involved in “partisan political matters”; Fatah Alliance, coalition of parties linked to PMU, criticised decision 31 Aug. Islamic State (ISIS)-related insecurity continued, predominantly in Kirkuk, Diyala and Salah al-Din provinces; UN 13 Aug reported 20,000-30,000 ISIS fighters remained in Iraq and Syria, about half in each country. Govt 17 Aug claimed to have killed 28 ISIS militants in two airstrikes in eastern Syria. In far north, Turkey continued operations against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). Turkish army claimed its airstrike near Kocho town in Sinjar region 15 Aug killed senior PKK commander and airstrikes in multiple locations in Iraq 18 Aug killed seven other militants (see Turkey).

➡ **Qatar** Emir Tamim bin Hamed al-Thani, Qatar’s head of state, 15 Aug pledged to invest \$15bn in Turkey, helping to slow Turkish lira’s precipitous fall (see Turkey).

➡ **Saudi Arabia** As govt continued crackdown on dissent, Canada 3 Aug called for immediate release of two female activists arrested late July, Samar Badawi and Nassima al-Sada, and “all other peaceful human rights activists”. Govt 6 Aug broke off relations with Canada, sending home Canadian ambassador, pulling students with govt scholarships from Canadian schools, ceasing investment in Canada and diverting all holdings.

➡ **United Arab Emirates** After UAE Minister for International Cooperation Reem al-Hashimy met Ethiopian PM Abiy Ahmed in Addis Ababa 10 Aug, Ethiopian govt said that UAE was exploring investment opportunities there, including building oil pipeline from Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa to Eritrean port city of Assab.

➡ **Yemen** Intense fighting continued ahead of UN envoy’s planned consultations with President Hadi’s govt and Huthi leaders in Geneva 6-8 Sept; initiative could increase parties’ commitment to restarting peace talks, but fighting could also escalate in Hodeida port city and elsewhere if initial discussions end in

acrimony. Efforts by UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths slowed United Arab Emirates (UAE)-backed campaign to capture port city Hodeida, but UAE-backed forces 19 Aug said they had taken Durayhimi, town south of Hodeida, from Huthis, opening route to main Hodeida-Sanaa road. Infighting between Yemeni forces in Saudi-led coalition intensified: UAE-backed Salafists clashed with Saudi-linked Islamists with ties to Hadi govt in Taiz city in south 15 Aug, leaving dozens dead and injured; Security Belt forces, UAE-backed faction largely comprised of southern secessionists, clashed with Hadi govt forces in Aden 18 Aug after flag of unified Yemen was raised at military graduation ceremony. Huthi spokesperson, Mohammed Abdulsalem, 18 Aug met Hassan Nasrallah, leader of Lebanese Iran-linked movement Hezbollah reportedly in Lebanese capital Beirut. In Hodeida, alleged Saudi-led coalition mortar fire 2 Aug (apparently aiming at Huthi attack boat) hit busy shipping wharf, killing at least 28 civilians. Coalition airstrike 9 Aug hit school bus in Saada region in north, killing some 30 schoolchildren; coalition spokesperson said target was legitimate, claiming two senior Huthi commanders were on board. Under international pressure including from senior U.S. Pentagon officials and military commanders, Saudi-led coalition investigated incident. Coalition airstrike in pro-Huthi district near Hodeida 23 Aug killed at least 22 children and four women. Associated Press 6 Aug alleged that Saudi-led coalition has been recruiting and making deals with members of radical group al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula; key figures involved said that U.S. was aware of arrangements and held off drone attacks on group.

North Africa

➔ **Algeria** President Bouteflika 17 Aug dismissed army generals Said Bey and Lahbib Chentouf as part of purge in security and intelligence institutions ongoing since June. Homemade rocket 18 Aug killed two children in Tamellaht village, Kabylia region in north; local sources said Islamist militants involved. Soldiers 19-20 Aug clashed with locals in Djanet in south east near Libyan border protesting after army killed smuggler 18 Aug, two protesters reportedly killed. Social unrest increased July-Aug especially in south following sharp fall in purchasing power and growing political uncertainty over Bouteflika's possible succession.

➔ **Egypt** Authorities continued crackdown on dissent. Security forces 23 Aug arrested former diplomat Maasoum Marzouk in Cairo on charges including joining terrorist group after he called 5 Aug for referendum on govt and threatened to organise protest in Cairo's Tahrir Square. Several opposition activists reportedly arrested same day on same charges. Italian police 1 Aug arrested opposition leader close to Muslim Brotherhood Mohamed Mahsoub at Egypt's request; next day released him and refused Egypt's request for extradition. Security situation in Sinai improved slightly. Govt 12 Aug said police killed twelve alleged Islamic State (ISIS) Sinai Province (SP) militants in shootout in Arish city in north Sinai. Car bomb 19 Aug killed military officer south of Arish city. SP militants 25 Aug attacked police checkpoint on Arish-Qantara road, four police and four militants reportedly killed. Insecurity persisted in Cairo area. Police 11 Aug prevented suicide bomber entering Coptic Church in north Cairo suburb Shubra al-Kheima, he detonated his explosive vest outside church killing only himself; police next day said they had arrested six people in connection with case. Police 13 Aug said they had killed six suspected

Islamist militants in south-western suburb of Cairo Sixth of October City. ISIS 26 Aug claimed attack on checkpoint west of Arish city previous day, at least four security force personnel and four militants reportedly killed. President Sisi 18 Aug signed law, approved by parliament in May, to tighten govt's control over internet usage. Egypt and UN Special Coordinator for Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov continued efforts to broker truce between Israel and Hamas (see Israel-Palestine).

↓ 🇱🇧* **Libya** Violence erupted in capital Tripoli between armed groups linked to UN-backed Govt of National Accord (GNA) over control of territory and institutions, and could escalate further in Sept. Clashes broke out 26 Aug between fighters of Seventh Brigade, militia established by GNA's defence ministry in 2017, and coalition of armed groups operating under GNA's interior ministry. Clashes 26-31 Aug left at least 39 people dead, including at least eighteen civilians, and continued end month. Other armed groups, including some opposed to GNA from city of Misrata, threatened to join fight in Tripoli. UNSMIL 19 Aug said members of brigades nominally loyal to GNA's interior ministry had in recent weeks attacked state institutions and prevented them from working, and called on GNA to prosecute those responsible; targeted institutions reportedly include internationally recognised Tripoli-based National Oil Corporation and GNA-managed sovereign wealth fund Libyan Investment Authority. 80 members of eastern Tobruk-based parliament House of Representatives (HoR) 28 Aug called on UN political mission (UNSMIL) to restart political dialogue to change composition of Presidency Council; western Tripoli-based High State Council and Misratan politicians issued similar statements. Progress along election roadmap remained stalled after HoR 27 Aug again failed to pass constitution referendum law. Suspected Islamic State (ISIS) militants 23 Aug attacked GNA checkpoint in Wadi Kaam area, east of Tripoli, killing at least six security personnel. U.S. airstrike in Bani Walid, about 150km south east of Tripoli, killed ISIS commander 28 Aug. Tripoli court of appeal 15 Aug sentenced 45 people to death for allegedly killing demonstrators in Tripoli during 2011 uprising against Colonel Qadhafi; 54 other defendants sentenced to five years in prison.

➡ **Mauritania** Govt intensified crackdown on dissent ahead of 1 Sept legislative, regional and local elections. Prominent anti-slavery activist and candidate in legislative elections Biram Dah Abeid arrested 7 Aug, charged 13 Aug with "assault on life and integrity of the person" and "threats of violence" after journalist allegedly filed complaint against him. Another anti-slavery activist Abdellahi el Housein Mesoud arrested 9 Aug and charged with "complicity" in same case. Journalists Babacar Ndiaye and Mahmoudi Ould Saibout arrested 8 Aug after posting article critical of lawyer close to govt.

➡ **Morocco** Cabinet 20 Aug approved law reinstating compulsory twelve-month military service for men and women aged 19-25, scrapped in 2006. King Mohammed VI late Aug pardoned 889 detainees, including 188 people detained for taking part in demonstrations in Rif region in north to demand development and denounce corruption.

➡ **Tunisia** President Essebsi 13 Aug said he would propose bill introducing equality between men and women in inheritance, one of over 90 recommendations for reforms made by presidentially-appointed commission on individual freedoms and equality (COLIBE) in June. In capital Tunis, around 5,000 people protested

against reform package proposed by COLIBE 11 Aug and thousands demonstrated in support of it 13 Aug. Repeated water cuts prompted several demonstrations throughout country early Aug. Police clashed with locals calling for reopening of Ras Jedir border crossing with Libya, closed to goods in July, 28-29 Aug in Ben Guerdane in south, district security chief injured. Interior ministry of Libya's Govt of National Accord 1 Sept said it had reopened Ras Jedir border crossing.