

Middle East and North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

➔ **Israel/Palestine** **Violence continued to run high across Israel, West Bank and East Jerusalem, leaving three Israelis and over dozen Palestinians dead, as tensions flared at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade.** In occupied East Jerusalem, Israeli police on second Friday of Ramadan on 15 April stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque firing rubber bullets, teargas and stun grenades, injuring over 150 Palestinians and arresting near 500, as some Palestinian youths threw stones and fireworks at police; rumours of Israel's intention to restrict Muslim access spread on social media during month. Further clashes between Israeli police and Palestinians in and around Holy Esplanade 17, 21 April reportedly injured dozens. Israeli police 20 April stopped hundreds of ultra-nationalist Israelis from entering flashpoint Damascus Gate. Israeli police again raided Al-Aqsa on third and fourth Fridays of Ramadan 22, 29 April, injuring over 70 Palestinians. In Tel Aviv city, Palestinian gunman from West Bank city of Jenin 7 April killed three Israelis in bar; police next day shot dead suspected gunman in Jaffa, and Israeli soldiers 9 April raided house of gunman and killed Palestinian Islamic Jihad member in Jenin. Elsewhere in West Bank, Israeli forces killed over dozen Palestinians; notably, 2 April killed three Palestinian Islamic Jihad members at Arraba junction south of Jenin; 10 April killed four Palestinians including two women and teenager in separate incidents. Israeli troops 13-14 April reportedly killed at least six Palestinians, including 14-year-old, in Jenin city, Silwad town and Nablus city. Meanwhile, Palestinians 10, 11 April vandalized Jewish shrine Joseph's Tomb in Nablus. Israel 18 April shot down first rocket fired from Gaza since Jan 2022 and 19 April responded with airstrikes targeting alleged weapons manufacturing site in Gaza; 21 April carried out air raids in central Gaza, while several rockets were launched 20-21 April into southern Israel. Yamina party member Idit Silman 6 April quit govt coalition claiming it was not living up to right-wing values; defection stripped govt coalition of parliamentary majority. Regionally, Israel 9 April reportedly launched airstrike near Masyaf city in Syria's Hama province; 14 April reportedly fired missiles at Syrian military positions near Syrian capital Damascus (see Syria).

➔ **Lebanon** **Grain shortage triggered bread crisis, govt struck preliminary deal with International Monetary Fund (IMF), and ambassadors of Gulf countries returned after Oct 2021 diplomatic spat.** Amid rising global commodity prices, country mid-month experienced dramatic grain shortage triggered by Central Bank refusal to continue previous policy of providing importers with U.S. dollars at highly subsidised exchange rate; Central Bank reportedly requested govt to sign formal loan agreement that would guarantee repayment of any amount disbursed for this purpose. Govt 12 April decided grain subsidies for importers would be covered by funds govt obtained by selling so-called "Special Drawing Rights", which it received from IMF in Sept 2021. Lebanese lira continued to decline in value, trading at around 25,000 to U.S. dollar by mid-month; reports mid-month indicated long queues to get bread across country as many bakeries were forced to shut down. Govt and IMF 7 April signed "Staff Level

Agreement” for institution to provide \$3bn over period of four years; deal comes with stringent conditions and seen as trial that could lead to release of additional funding, particularly some \$11bn pledged at 2018 donor conference; observers during month expressed concern about deal being used by govt as electoral ploy ahead of polls in May. Following diplomatic dispute that surfaced in Oct 2021 after then-Information Minister Georges Kordahi made critical comments about Saudi Arabia’s role in Yemen’s war – leading some Gulf countries to suspend diplomatic ties – Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and internationally recognised govt of Yemen 7 April returned ambassadors to capital Beirut. Boat licensed for 12 passengers carrying at least 60 irregular migrants that was headed to Italy 23 April capsized off coast near Tripoli city after attempted interception by Lebanese Navy; total number of dead unknown while 45 were rescued; passengers accused Navy of ramming vessel, while Navy blamed person steering vessel. Israeli tanks 25 April fired into southern Lebanon in response to rocket fired into northern Israel same day.

➡ **Syria Attack on U.S. military base injured four soldiers, govt-aligned militias and Syrian Democratic Forces besieged each other’s positions, and Idlib ceasefire held despite violations.** Two explosions 7 April hit U.S. military base Green Village near al-Omar oil field in Deir ez-Zor province, injuring four U.S. soldiers; International Coalition reportedly responded with rocket fire on positions of Iranian-backed militias west of Euphrates. In Aleppo city, regime-affiliated militias besieged People’s Protection Forces (YPG)-controlled al-Ashrafiyyah and Sheikh Maqsoud neighbourhoods, preventing entry of food, flour and oil for population of 200,000 people for three weeks; Russian-mediated talks 12 April reportedly failed to defuse crisis. In response, YPG-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) 14 April said they tightened siege on govt-controlled neighbourhoods in Qamishli and Hasakah city in Hasakah province, taking over around ten govt offices in Qamishli and closing highway to govt-run Qamishli airport. Offices of Kurdish National Council in Kobane city, Aleppo province, were reportedly attacked 20 April with Molotov cocktails; U.S. next day condemned attacks. In north east, Turkey continued shelling and drone strikes hitting YPG targets. In Idlib province, March 2020 ceasefire held despite escalating violations. Notably, govt forces 4 April shelled rebel-held Maaret al-Naasan, killing four children; Turkish-backed opposition forces and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham reportedly retaliated with artillery targeting govt positions. Russian warplanes same day reportedly carried out airstrikes in Fulayfil village in Jabal a-Zawiya area. Turkish FM Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu 23 April announced closing of Turkish airspace to Russian planes flying to Syria for three months. In central Syria, Russian airstrikes targeting Islamic State (ISIS) reportedly increased since beginning of month, killing dozens. Low-level ISIS attacks continued throughout month, reportedly killing several govt soldiers and SDF fighters. According to state media reports, Israel 9 April launched airstrike near Masyaf city in Hama province; 14 April reportedly fired missiles at Syrian military positions near capital Damascus. Amid skyrocketing food prices, World Food Programme early month reportedly announced reduction in food assistance in north-western Syria from May.

Gulf and Arabian Peninsula

➔ Iran Talks between U.S., Iran and other world powers to revive 2015 nuclear accord reached one-year mark without breakthrough, while Iran-Saudi Arabia dialogue resumed for first time since Sept 2021.


Nuclear talks remained at impasse despite technical elements of framework bringing U.S. and Iran back into compliance with deal all but agreed; as 6 April marked one year since start of talks in Austrian capital Vienna, impasse remained focused on bilateral political issue between Washington and Tehran, namely whether and under what conditions U.S. Biden administration will remove 2019 designation by Trump administration of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as Foreign Terrorist Organisation. U.S. State Dept 26 April indicated that EU coordinator "continues to convey messages back and forth". Iranian atomic agency chief 6 April confirmed that, in line with timetable agreed with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) last month, Tehran had provided IAEA with documentation related to agency's safeguards probe into undeclared nuclear activity; he also indicated "probably the agency's representatives will travel to Iran for further talks". Iran 4 April transferred centrifuge part production from TESA Karaj to Natanz facility; IAEA 14 April informed member states that it had put its cameras in place at workshop (though without access to footage) and Iran had commenced activity there. Govt 25 April confirmed fifth round of Iraq-hosted talks with Saudi Arabia, described as "positive". U.S. 8 April tallied total number of Iran-related sanction designations under Biden administration at 107, of which 86 "have specifically targeted the IRGC-related persons as well as affiliates". World Bank 14 April issued economic update on Iran, forecasting GDP growth in 2022/2023 at 3.7%, down from 4.1% in 2021/2022, with inflation projected at 37.6%.

↓ Iraq Deadlocked govt formation led to unprecedented constitutional impasse, Turkey launched new operation against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and Islamic State (ISIS) stepped up attacks during Ramadan.

Govt formation remained stalled after last month's failed attempts to achieve two-thirds quorum in parliament, leaving country in unprecedented situation that upends constitutional timeline for parliament to appoint president within 30 days of speaker's election (completed in mid-Jan); constitution requires president to appoint PM. Following Shiite cleric and leader of bloc that won largest share of seats in Oct 2021 parliamentary election Muqtada al-Sadr's announcement late March that he would give rivals in Shia Coordination Framework 40 days to negotiate with his allies Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and Sunni Sovereignty Alliance to form govt, KDP and Sovereignty Alliance 1 April issued statement reaffirming commitment to Tripartite Alliance with Sadr, now rebranded "Saving the homeland" bloc. Hundreds of demonstrators 15 April protested political deadlock in capital Baghdad. Turkish military 17-18 April launched new operation against PKK in northern Iraq dubbed "Claw-Lock"; fighter jets targeted infrastructure and bases used by PKK militants in Metina, Zab and Avashin-Basyan regions; Turkish Defence Ministry next day announced killing at least 19 militants. President Salih 19 April called attack threat to Iraq's national security and Foreign Ministry 20 April summoned Turkey's envoy. As part of yearly uptick in attacks during Ramadan, ISIS conducted over dozen attacks against security forces in central regions. Notably, Security Media Cell 4 April announced that alleged ISIS

suicide bomber injured at least four soldiers in Nwegeit mountains, Ninewa province, while Iraqi troops killed three militants. Counter-ISIS operations continued throughout month. In Ninewa governorate, suspected Hashd al-Shaabi-linked militant groups 3-4 April launched rockets on Turkey's Zilkan military base in Bashiqa town; three missiles launched from Hamdaniya district in Ninewa 6 April targeted oil refinery in Khabat district, Erbil governorate. U.S.-led international coalition 8 April announced downing drone targeting Ain al-Assad airbase in Anbar governorate. Unknown attackers 15 April launched explosives-laden drone at Hashd al-Shaabi base in Tal Afar district, which injured one commander, possibly in retaliation for 6 April attack.

↑ **Saudi Arabia** **Saudi-led coalition and Huthis in Yemen halted cross-border attacks, while Riyadh and Iran resumed talks in Iraq.** Huthis halted cross-border attacks into kingdom and Saudi-led coalition stopped airstrikes following 1 April truce between warring parties in Yemen (see Yemen). Iranian Foreign Ministry 4 April reportedly said Iran was ready to resume talks with Saudi Arabia after Iran suspended them in March; fifth round of talks was held 21 April in Iraqi capital Baghdad, making it first time dialogue took place since Sept 2021. Iraqi PM al-Khadimi in interview 30 April expressed optimism for Saudi-Iran ties, saying: "We are convinced that reconciliation is near". Saudi Arabia 7 April announced it would send ambassador back to Lebanon after Oct 2021 diplomatic spat (see Lebanon). Turkey 8 April announced it would move trial for 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi to Saudi Arabia, effectively ending probe; Turkish President Erdoğan 28 April visited Saudi Arabia to meet Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman.

↑  **Yemen** **In major breakthrough, fighting slowed and cross-border attacks halted after warring parties agreed two-month truce, while President Hadi handed over power to new presidential council.** In first coordinated cessation of hostilities since 2016, UN Envoy Hans Grundberg 1 April announced two-month nationwide truce starting next day between Hadi govt and Huthis, which includes cessation of military operations and cross-border attacks, opening of Sanaa airport for biweekly commercial flights to Jordan and Egypt, permission for around 18 fuel ships to enter Huthi-controlled Hodeida port, and negotiations over opening road access to besieged Taiz city. Fighting slowed significantly following announcement of truce: Saudi-led coalition airstrikes and Huthi cross-border attacks into Saudi Arabia halted, while fighting around Marib city persisted at low level. Grundberg 6 April expressed concern over "some hostile military activities", especially around Marib, while absence of mechanism to monitor violations leaves truce fragile; collapse of deal could see swift return to front-line fighting and cross-border attacks. In first visit since taking office, Grundberg 11 April travelled to capital Sanaa and met senior Huthi officials. First commercial flight from Sanaa International Airport in six years was postponed 24 April after disputes over passports being used by travellers. Amid Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)-led consultations in Saudi capital Riyadh and reportedly under pressure from Saudi Arabia, President Hadi 7 April announced removal of VP Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar and transferred executive authority to new Presidential Leadership Council led by veteran politician and security official Rashad al-Alimi; Council includes diverse anti-Huthi factions and equal number of northern and southern leaders. Al-Alimi 8 April promised to "end the war and achieve peace". Al-Alimi and other council

members arrived in southern Aden city from Saudi Arabia and were sworn in 19 April with UN envoy and EU and GCC ambassadors in attendance. Following formation of presidential council, Saudi Arabia 7 April announced \$3bn financial aid to govt, \$1bn of which United Arab Emirates will supply, and \$300mn for UN aid response; subsequently, Yemeni riyal nearly doubled in value from around 1,000 to about 650 YR to dollar, but subsequently declined.

North Africa

➔ **Algeria** **President Tebboune pursued appeasement policy toward political opponents, and tensions continued to run high with Morocco over Western Sahara.** Presidency 3 April said Tebboune had pardoned over 1,000 convicts on occasion of Muslim holy month of Ramadan, and ordered provisional release of 70 people detained for links to Hirak protest movement. Political activist and Hirak member Hakim Debbazi 24 April died while in pre-trial detention at Kolea prison in capital Algiers; cause of death unclear. Authorities 29 April arrested leading opposition figure Karim Tabbou on undisclosed charges. Trials of former President Bouteflika-era politicians and businessmen continued. Court 13 April sentenced former PMs Abdelmalek Sellal and Ahmed Ouyahia to five and four years in prison respectively for “squandering of public funds” and “abuse of office for the purpose of granting undue advantages”. Govt 12 April accused Morocco of killing three civilians in 10 April drone strikes in disputed Western Sahara near Mauritanian border; Algerian special envoy for Western Sahara and Maghreb countries, Amar Belani, 14 April denounced “targeted assassinations” and “repeated acts of state terrorism”, warned “possible spillover” of Moroccan “warmongering” into Algerian territory will be considered *casus belli* (see Western Sahara). Amid deteriorating relations with Spain over Western Sahara, Algiers offered new energy partnership to Italy: state-owned oil and gas company Sonatrach and Italian energy company ENI 11 April signed cooperation agreement in Algiers to increase amount of gas exported from Algeria to Italy. Govt 27 April threatened to suspend gas exports to Spain if Madrid transferred it onward to “a third destination” as latter reportedly set to help Rabat to “guarantee its energy security”. Algiers 7 April voted against resolution suspending Russia from UN Human Rights Council over reports of “gross and systematic violations and abuses of human rights” in Ukraine, arguing UN mechanisms need to inquire on site in Ukraine.

➔ **Egypt** **Fighting intensified in Sinai Peninsula, and repression of opposition activists showed no sign of abating.** High levels of violence reported in Sinai since late March between Islamic State (ISIS)-affiliated Sinai Province (SP) militants on one hand, and govt forces and allied tribal militias on the other; SP also continued to abduct civilians. Sniper fire 1 April killed one soldier in Al-Buhaira area near Bir al-Abd town. SP operatives 2-3 April killed at least two people suspected of collaborating with army in Bir al-Abd area; 8 April abducted two agricultural workers from field in Jalbana area, west of al-Arish town, and three residents of Malsaq town, Bir al-Abd region. Army and allied tribal forces 4 April killed one suspected SP militant and arrested another south of Sheikh Zuweid town; tribal militia 11 April claimed militiamen in cooperation with army had in recent days cleared certain areas around Rafah city and Sheikh Zuweid town of SP militants, killing five SP operatives in Rafah area. Five ISIS operatives reportedly killed 24

April south of Rafah in counter-terrorism operations. Exchanges of fire between suspected militants and Sinai Tribal Union fighters in Al-Muqata'a area near Sheikh Zuweid 22-25 April left at least seven killed. Gunfire 25 April targeted army patrol in same area, killing two soldiers. Meanwhile, after authorities 9 April announced death of economist and opposition party official Ayman Hadhoud, who disappeared in Feb, NGO Egyptian Organization for Human Rights 11 April called for investigation into his death. Italian court same day suspended trial of four Egyptian security officers accused of detaining and killing Italian researcher Giulio Regeni in 2016, citing Cairo's refusal to cooperate and locate officers. In apparent reaffirmation of Turkey's commitment to normalising relations with Egypt, senior Turkish official early April reportedly said Ankara would soon appoint ambassador to Egypt for first time in nine years.

➔ **Libya Political feud engulfed country's economic and financial institutions as rival authorities sought to secure access to oil revenues; UN efforts to negotiate way out of political impasse remained vain.** Five military officers loyal to eastern strongman Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar 9 April withdrew from UN-backed so-called 5+5 Joint Military Commission (comprising representatives of country's two rival military coalitions), urged Haftar to shut down oil production to prevent Tripoli-based PM Abdulhamid Dabaiba from accessing oil revenues; move came after National Oil Corporation (NOC) transferred oil sales revenues to Tripoli-based Central Bank of Libya (CBL), whose governor has remained loyal to Dabaiba, despite promising in March to abide by Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR) order not to do so. NOC mid-April declared force majeure and suspended operations at Al-Feel and Sharara oil fields, Zuwetina and Brega oil terminals, after local protesters allegedly backed by Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) entered sites; all sites remained closed by month's end. Clashes between two rival militias allied with Dabaiba's govt 22 April disrupted operations in Zawiyah oil facility (west). Meanwhile, delegates from HoR and rival Tripoli-based consultative High State Council (HSC) 13-18 April attended UN-backed political talks on legal framework for elections in Egypt's capital Cairo; participants failed to make breakthrough but agreed to resume talks in May (after Muslim holy month of Ramadan). HoR-appointed PM Fathi Bashagha 21 April presided over his first cabinet meeting in Sebha city (south); govt renewed commitment to pursuing "peaceful option" to assume duties in Tripoli. Meanwhile, Islamic State (ISIS) 19 April claimed responsibility for previous night car bomb attack targeting LNA camp in Umm al-Aranib town (south); no casualties reported. LNA said it repelled 25 April attack by armed group, reportedly affiliated with ISIS, in Ghadwa area near Sabha city. British daily newspaper *Financial Times* 28 April reported some 1,000 pro-Moscow Syrian mercenaries and about 200 operatives from Russian private military company Wagner Group, who had been stationed alongside Haftar-led forces, pulled out of Libya in recent weeks; also said some 5,000 pro-Moscow mercenaries allegedly remain in country.

➔ **Tunisia President Saïed declared new voting system and seized control of election commission, threatening electoral level playing field and entrenching one-man rule.** Saïed 6 April unilaterally declared new voting system ahead of Dec elections: voting to take place in two rounds and electorate to vote for individuals rather than lists. Presidential decree reforming election commission issued 22 April: Saïed to select three of existing nine members to serve

in new seven-member panel along with three judges (chosen by judiciary, which Saïed has also taken over) and information technology specialist. U.S. State Dept 26 April expressed “deep concern” over Saïed’s move to restructure election authority. Meanwhile, anti-terrorism police 1 April summoned several members of now-dissolved Parliament – including Parliament Speaker (and Islamist-inspired An-Nahda party President) Rached Ghannouchi – for questioning after they voted in late-March online session to cancel all measures decreed by Saïed since July power grab; MPs reportedly under investigation for “seeking to change the form of government”. Saïed early April held consultations with powerful labour union UGTT, employers’ association UTICA, National Bar Association and NGO Human Rights League in preparation for long-awaited national dialogue aimed at “building the new Republic”; UGTT Sec Gen Nourredine Taboubi 13 April said union would only participate in inclusive dialogue after Saïed ruled out talks with political opposition. Hundreds 10 April joined protest organised by An-Nahda and civil society platform “Citizens Against the Coup” in capital Tunis, denounced Saïed’s power grab and demanded return to constitutional path. In bid to form united front against Saïed and re-establish constitutional and democratic processes, opposition Al-Amal party leader Nejib Chebbi 26 April launched “National Salvation Front” alliance of five political parties, including An-Nahda, and five civil society organisations. Military court 8 April sentenced journalist Amer Ayyad and politician Abdellatif Aloui to four and three months in prison, respectively, for criticising Saïed during TV program in Oct 2021. Govt 30 April said authorities arrested ten suspects for planning terrorist attacks against security forces.

➔ **Western Sahara Moroccan drone attacks reportedly killed three near Mauritanian border, and Polisario Front independence movement suspended relations with Spain in protest at Madrid’s rapprochement with Morocco.** Algeria 12 April accused Morocco of killing three civilians in 10 April drone strikes in Polisario-held Western Sahara near Mauritanian border (see Algeria). After Spain in March endorsed Morocco’s autonomy plan for Western Sahara, ending year-long diplomatic crisis between Madrid and Rabat, Spanish PM Pedro Sánchez 7 April met with King Mohamed VI of Morocco in Rabat; leaders announced roadmap to normalise relations. Polisario Front 9 April announced suspension of relations with Spain, citing Madrid’s “instrumentalisation of Sahrawi cause” for political and economic purposes. Meanwhile, UN Security Council 20 April held semi-annual closed-door meeting with UN Envoy for Western Sahara Staffan de Mistura; latter same day announced upcoming regional tour for new consultations with conflict parties.