



Middle East and North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

↓ **Israel-Palestine** Israeli brutality at Jerusalem’s Al-Aqsa Mosque triggered multi-front rocket attacks, raising spectre of major escalation, while deadly violence continued across West Bank and Israel.

Israeli raids on Al-Aqsa Mosque triggered rockets from Gaza, Lebanon and Syria. Israeli police raids and brutality against Palestinian worshippers at Al-Aqsa Mosque during Ramadan triggered rocket fire from Gaza, Lebanon and Syria, which may mark beginning of tumultuous period as mutual deterrence between Hizbollah and Israel erodes and shadow war with Iran moves further into light. Israeli police 1 April shot dead Palestinian at entrance of Al-Aqsa. Israeli forces 4-6 April violently raided mosque, injuring at least 18 Palestinians and arresting 450. In response, Palestinian militants in Gaza 5 and 6 April fired rockets into Israel, which responded with airstrikes. In major escalation, militants in Lebanon 6 April fired 34 rockets into Israel in heaviest rocket fire since 2006 war (see Lebanon); Israel blamed Hamas, which denied role, and 7 April struck alleged Hamas targets in southern Lebanon and Gaza. On Syrian front, Israel 2 April shot down alleged Iranian drone that entered Israel and Israeli airstrikes 2, 4, 8, 9, 29 April struck Syria: notably, alleged Palestinian Islamic Jihad rockets fired from Syria 8 April targeted Israeli-occupied Golan Heights and Israel next day struck suspected launch sites (see Syria). Defence Minister Yoav Gallant 16 April accused Iran of waging “multi-front war of attrition”.

Deadly violence and extreme volatility continued in West Bank and Israel. Israel security forces conducted over 421 raids in West Bank and East Jerusalem during month, killing at least 14 Palestinians and arresting 630 amid near-daily gun battles. Israel settler attacks persisted unabated and Palestinians continued attacks: notably, Palestinian gunman 7 April killed three Israeli-British settlers in Jordan Valley; Palestinian minor from Nablus 19 April shot two Israelis in East Jerusalem’s Sheikh Jarrah.

In other important developments. Demonstrations against judicial reform in Israel continued. Govt 2 April authorised controversial “national guard” to deal with Palestinian unrest in Israel. Israeli forces 15 April attacked orthodox Christians attending Holy Fire ceremony in Jerusalem, limiting their access to site. Senior Hamas delegation 18 April travelled to Saudi Arabia.

↓ **Lebanon** Armed groups and Israel exchanged fire in most significant cross-border escalation since 2006 war; economic hardship continued and parliament postponed May municipal elections.

Cross-border hostilities flared amid Israeli raids in Jerusalem. Amid Israeli police brutality against Palestinian worshippers at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque (see Israel-Palestine), militants in southern Lebanon 6 April fired 34 rockets into northern Israel in largest cross-border barrage since 2006 war, causing minor injuries and property damage; Israel blamed attack on Palestinian militant group Hamas and next day responded with early morning airstrikes in southern Lebanon and Gaza against alleged Hamas infrastructure. While calm subsequently returned, hostilities highlighted that Israeli actions at Muslim holy sites could trigger direct confrontation between Israel and Hizbollah or associated armed groups, echoing earlier warnings by Hizbollah and Hamas representatives in Lebanon.

Economic crisis continued amid worsening living conditions. Following dramatic collapse of Lebanese lira in late March, Central Bank intervention stabilised currency around 100,000 to \$1 in April; another sharp devaluation remains likely given low foreign currency reserves. Ministry of Finance 4 April confirmed that govt had spent almost two thirds of \$1.13bn worth of Special Drawing Rights from International Monetary Fund – one of its few remaining foreign currency sources. Living conditions continued to erode amid high fuel prices, shortages of essential imported products and public unrest. Notably, state electricity provider 3 April reported collapse of three electricity transmission towers in northern Bekaa due to theft of steel, jeopardising region's electricity supply.

Presidential vacuum continued as parliament postponed municipal elections. Presidential vacuum entered sixth consecutive month as parliament in April held no election session. Underscoring prevailing deadlock, Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea 1 April reiterated his party would block any candidate from Hizbollah's axis. Caretaker cabinet 18 April convened to authorise public-sector wage and benefit increases, medication imports, and sanitation contracts. In first parliamentary session not aimed at electing president since vacuum began, MPs 18 April extended mandate of municipalities and local public officials for additional 12 months, in effect postponing municipal elections due by 31 May. Critics see decision as step toward indefinitely delaying long-overdue polls, eroding increasingly important institution.

➡ **Syria Damascus intensified normalisation with Arab states, Hei'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) attacked regime in northwest, and Islamic State (ISIS) launched near-daily attacks in centre as Türkiye killed group's global leader.**

Syria and Arab states pursued normalisation. Syrian FM Faisal Mekdad visited several Arab countries for first time since start of war in 2011. Mekdad 1 April met Egyptian counterpart in Egyptian capital Cairo and 12 April met Saudi FM in Saudi Arabian city Jeddah, next day announcing move toward reopening embassies and resuming flights. Syria and Tunisia 12 April re-established diplomatic ties; Mekdad 18 April met Tunisian President Saied in Tunis. Mekdad 15 April met Algerian counterpart in Algeria. Saudi FM Faisal bin Farhan 18 April met President Assad in capital Damascus, amid discussion of Syrian participation in May Arab League meeting. Meanwhile, Syrian, Turkish, Russian and Iranian officials 4 April met in Russian capital Moscow to foster Turkish-Syrian rapprochement (see Türkiye).

HTS targeted regime forces along north-western front. Idlib's dominant group HTS and allied factions conducted raids on regime positions in north west, while al-

Qaeda-leaning Ansar al-Islam for first time in several years conducted two raids 7 and 14 April. Notably, HTS and allies began regularly using anti-tank guided missiles for first time since March 2020.

ISIS continued attacks, Turkish operation killed group's chief. ISIS cells launched near-daily attacks on civilians in centre, killing dozens during April, and engaged in battles with regime and Russian Wagner Group forces. U.S.-led coalition airstrike 3 April killed senior ISIS leader in Idlib and coalition 8 and 17 April conducted raids to capture two ISIS leaders in north east and Aleppo province. Turkish President Erdogan 30 April announced killing of suspected ISIS global leader in Aleppo.

Israel launched airstrikes and Türkiye struck Kurdish forces. Israel 2, 4, 8, 9, 29 April launched airstrikes amid multi-front escalation (see Israel-Palestine). Turkish defence minister 17 April announced “neutralisation” of ten People’s Defense Units/Kurdish Workers’ Party (YPG/PKK) militants in northern Aleppo after alleged YPG/PKK attack previous day injured four Turkish soldiers. Turkish drone strikes 14 April killed two senior YPG/PKK commanders in Qamishli.

Gulf and Arabian Peninsula

➔ **Bahrain** **Bahrain and United Arab Emirates (UAE) announced plans to restore diplomatic ties with Qatar, concluding process to end almost six-year intra-Gulf rift.**

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➔ **United Arab Emirates** **United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain announced plans to restore diplomatic ties with Qatar, concluding process to end almost six-year intra-Gulf rift.**

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➔ **Saudi Arabia** **Riyadh continued normalisation process with Iran, intensified engagement with Syria and maintained peace efforts in Yemen.**

Saudi-Iranian rapprochement progressed and Riyadh stepped up engagement with Damascus. Following breakthrough deal in March, Saudi and Iranian FMs 6 April met in Chinese capital Beijing for first bilateral meeting in seven years. Saudi Arabia 8 April and Iran 12 April sent delegations to prepare opening of respective embassies by May deadline (see Iran). Meanwhile, Saudi FM Faisal bin Farhan 12 April met Syrian counterpart in Jeddah and next day announced steps toward reopening embassies and resuming flights. Saudi Arabia 15 April hosted Gulf Cooperation Council, Egyptian, Iraqi and Jordanian FMs in Jeddah to discuss potential Syrian attendance at Arab League summit in May, without reaching agreement. In first visit since beginning of Syrian conflict, Saudi FM 18 April met Syrian President Assad in Damascus (see Syria).

Riyadh continued peace efforts in Yemen, U.S.-Saudi ties displayed strains. Riyadh 8 April sent first delegation to Yemen since start of military intervention in 2015 and mid-month participated in prisoner swap, as negotiations appeared to make progress (see Yemen). Saudi Arabia and other OPEC+ members 2 April announced further cuts in oil production, against U.S. wishes; CIA chief William Burns early April travelled to Saudi Arabia to meet Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman and intelligence officials to reportedly express that U.S. was "blindsided" by Saudi decisions to resume ties with Iran and Syria.

➔ **Iran** **Efforts to revive nuclear accord showed no sign of progress, Tehran and Arab Gulf states continued normalisation, and hostilities in Levant and underscored looming conflict risks.**

Holding pattern continued on nuclear talks as Western sanctions increased. Diplomatic track in April showed little sign of progress. U.S., E3 and other G7 members 18 April noted “a diplomatic solution remains our preferred solution” and described 2015 deal as “useful reference”, which underscored that 2015 agreement is in all likelihood not revivable. Meanwhile, West continued issuing Iran-related sanctions. U.S. 19 April blacklisted seven individuals and entities allegedly part of “a sanctions evasion network” supporting Iran’s drone and military programs. In parallel to EU and UK sanctions, U.S. 24 April designated five Iranian authorities and entities, in addition to imposing visa restrictions on eleven more officials, over human rights violations. Washington 27 April sanctioned five Iranian officials and entity for “wrongful detention of U.S. nationals”.

Momentum continued toward de-escalation in Gulf. Following 10 March Saudi-Iranian normalisation deal, sides continued to improve ties. Tehran 4 April announced appointment of Reza Ameri, foreign ministry veteran, as ambassador to United Arab Emirates – filling position that had been vacant since 2016. FM Hossein Amirabdollahian 6 April met his Saudi counterpart in Chinese capital Beijing for first bilateral meeting in seven years; sides underscored intention to reopen diplomatic facilities by 9 May and subsequently exchanged visits by delegations.

Escalation in Levant and tensions at sea spotlighted risks. Following deadly hostilities in north-eastern Syria between U.S. forces and Iran-aligned groups late March, Tehran 3 April claimed that it had “never been involved, directly or indirectly, in any attacks against the U.S. military forces in Syria and Iraq”. Meanwhile, Israeli military 2 April downed alleged Iranian drone from Syria and early April launched multiple strikes in Syria, amid multi-front escalation (see Israel-Palestine, Lebanon and Syria); hostilities underscore risk that region remains potential theatre for future multi-actor escalation involving Iran-backed forces. In maritime domain, Iran’s navy 27 April seized Marshall Islands-flagged oil tanker in Gulf of Oman; U.S. reportedly had seized China-bound Iranian oil shipment.

➔ Iraq Türkiye continued strikes in Kurdistan region amid intra-Kurdish tensions, rifts surfaced between armed Shiite factions in capital Baghdad, and deadly tribal clashes flared in south.

Türkiye continued strikes in Kurdistan, highlighting inter-party tensions. After Türkiye 3 April asserted Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) infiltrated Suleimaniya international airport security, Suleimaniya officials 7 April claimed Türkiye carried out drone strike near airport, allegedly targeting Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) commander Mazloum Abdi’s convoy that was accompanied by three U.S. personnel. Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)-led regional govt same day accused Suleimaniya authorities – dominated by rival Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) – of provoking attack, while PUK party leader Bafel Talabani indirectly accused KDP of providing Türkiye with intelligence. Turkish FM Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu 11 April vowed to continue operations in Suleimaniya, alleging PKK controls city. Alleged Turkish drone 15 April killed two near Penjwen town, Suleimaniya governorate.

Friction persisted between Shiite armed groups, intercommunal violence flared in south. Highlighting potential for violent infighting within Shiite paramilitary coalition Popular Mobilisation forces, Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr’s militia Saraya al-

Salam 9 April paraded weapons through Baghdad's Dora district in response to dispute with Kataib Hizbollah over local property. Meanwhile in Dhi Qar governorate in south, following months of tensions between al-Rumaid and al-Omar clans in al-Islah district, protests over water scarcity and related demand for dismissal of district commissioner (member of al-Rumaid clan) 13 April escalated into armed clashes between groups, killing four and injuring dozen. Security sources 19 April reported clashes between Atab and Hatem tribes in Dhi Qar's al-Nasr district, following killing of tribal leader.

Low-level Islamic State (ISIS) insurgency continued, Baghdad and Erbil inked oil deal. Security forces 7 April killed five alleged ISIS members in Diyala governorate. Suspected ISIS members 18 April killed two in al-Mudadiya district, Diyala governorate. Following International Chamber of Commerce ruling in March on Kurdistan's oil exports to Türkiye that marked win for federal govt in years-long dispute, Baghdad and Erbil 4 April signed temporary agreement, likely solidifying Baghdad's sole control over Türkiye-Iraq pipeline on Iraqi side.

➔ 🇻🇪 **Yemen** **First Saudi diplomatic visit to Yemen in eight years and prisoner swap injected momentum into peace talks, raising hope for comprehensive agreement in May to halt hostilities.**

Peace process picked up speed amid Saudi-Huthi talks and prisoner swap. Saudi Arabia 3 April invited Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) members to Saudi Arabian capital Riyadh to discuss negotiations with Huthis, where it presented draft agreement that reportedly included six-month nationwide ceasefire, end to transport restrictions, release of detainees and payment of salaries to civil and military employees in both Huthi and govt-controlled areas. Saudi-led coalition 6 April announced lifting of most restrictions on commercial ships docking in southern ports, including Aden, for first time in eight years. Saudi and Omani delegations 8 April met Huthi leaders in Sanaa to discuss renewal of ceasefire that lapsed in Oct 2022, in first official Saudi diplomatic mission to Yemeni capital since kingdom launched military campaign in March 2015; draft agreement was reportedly modified to include declaration of cessation of war instead of truce, roadmap for humanitarian aid and economic arrangements, and steps toward comprehensive political solution; parties also discussed departure of foreign forces. Although stumbling block remained over Saudi Arabia's status as mediator or conflict party, Huthi chief negotiator 14 April said negotiations were "serious and positive". In key confidence-building measure, Huthis, govt and Saudi Arabia 14-16 April concluded swap of 887 detainees; Saudi Arabia 17 April unilaterally released 104 detainees. UN Envoy Hans Grundberg 17 April described talks as best opportunity for peace in eight years.

Parties clashed in Marib, Shebwa and Lahij governorates. Huthi forces and Saudi-backed Salafi group, Saba Axis, clashed along front lines in Marib governorate. Huthis, Giants Brigade and Southern Transitional Council (STC)-affiliated Shebwa Defence Forces clashed along border between Shebwa and al-Bayda.

Saudi-led coalition sought to ease tensions in south. Coalition continued meetings with pro-govt and Southern Transitional Council (STC)-affiliated officials to ease tensions, particularly over Wadi Hadramawt area where STC forces seek to replace Islah-affiliated troops. STC President and PLC member Aydrous al-Zubaidi 1 April

announced plan for STC to integrate new southern components, consolidating STC as chief representative on southern issue.

North Africa

➔ **Algeria** Amid repression of free speech, three parties set up opposition committee; Algiers stepped up anti-Morocco rhetoric.

Three opposition parties set up joint committee. In unprecedented initiative since end of Hirak protest movement in 2021, three leftist parties (Rally for Culture and Democracy, Workers' Party, and Union for Change and Progress) 12 April met to discuss country's political situation, announced setting up joint committee to reflect on way forward, saying Algeria "is going through a pivotal period for its future in a situation of global upheaval". Workers' Party and Union for Change and Progress few days earlier had jointly denounced "marginalisation" of political parties and "criminalisation" of trade unions.

Media crackdown continued. Algiers court 2 April sentenced prominent journalist Ihsane El-Kadi to five years in prison – with two years suspended – for "receiving foreign funding" with an aim to harm state security. NGO Amnesty International next day condemned "latest escalation in crackdown on media". Parliament 13 April approved law further curbing press freedom, notably by tightening media ownership rules and allowing courts to compel journalists to reveal their sources.

Authorities stepped up anti-Morocco rhetoric. In interview with Qatar-based media outlet Al Jazeera published 5 April, President Tebboune for first time accused "neighbouring country" of orchestrating kidnapping and murder in April 2012 of seven Algerian diplomats stationed at consulate in Gao city, northern Mali. Interior Minister Brahim Merad 13 April accused Morocco of political destabilisation, saying "Algeria is being targeted through drugs and is facing a war from its western neighbour"; 15 April urged citizens and members of civil society to take action "in order to defeat these destructive attempts".

➔ **Egypt** Economic crisis remained major threat to country's stability; conflict in neighbouring Sudan fuelled fears of regional destabilisation.

Doubts persisted about Cairo's commitment to reform program. Ahead of first review of country's \$3bn rescue package, International Monetary Fund in April continued to pressure Cairo to privatise certain state assets and allow flexibility in Egyptian pound to help absorb external shocks and rebuild foreign currency reserves. Authorities in April did not announce any new sales of govt-owned assets to Gulf investors that could ease foreign currency and funding crisis. Amid rampant inflation, foreign investors also complained about central bank's hesitant monetary policy, calling for steeper interest rate hikes.

Long-awaited national dialogue set to begin in May. Authorities late March-early April said National Dialogue, which was first called by President Sisi in April 2022, will kick off 3 May. Representatives of human rights groups set to participate in dialogue 9 April met with National Dialogue General Coordinator Diaa Rashwan, urged

authorities to open civic space; attendees also called for extension of 12 April deadline for NGOs to regularise their status under 2019 NGO law, which govt next day rejected.

Detention of soldiers in Sudan sparked rumours of Cairo's involvement in conflict. As conflict broke out in neighbouring Sudan (see Sudan), paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) 15 April captured group of Egyptian soldiers in Merowe town, located between capital Khartoum and Egyptian border. Sisi, who has close ties with Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan's army, 17 April denied any involvement in Sudanese conflict, saying Egyptian soldiers were on Sudanese soil to carry out military drills with their Sudanese counterparts. *The Wall Street Journal* 19 April however alleged Cairo had sent warplanes and pilots to back Sudanese military. RSF around 20 April allowed Egyptian soldiers to return home. Govt 27 April said 16,000 people had crossed into Egypt since fighting broke out; thousands more people reportedly stranded late April at Sudan-Egypt border with little humanitarian assistance.

➔ **Libya Efforts to unify country's rival factions behind electoral roadmap remained in stalemate, making presidential and parliamentary elections in 2023 increasingly elusive; concern grew over potential fallout of Sudanese conflict.**

Political process remained stalled. East-based House of Representatives (HoR) 2 April published in official gazette series of amendments to 2021 laws on presidential and parliamentary elections. Amendments provide for ineligibility for president of dual nationals, but otherwise do not significantly differ from original laws, suggesting their main purpose may be to show Libyans, UN and international partners that parliament is actively working toward elections as means of fending off a UN-backed alternative mechanism. In briefing to UN Security Council, UN envoy for Libya Abdoulaye Bathily 18 April said he had offered UN technical assistance to HoR-High State Council committee working on electoral laws, made no mention of his previously announced proposal to create High-Level Panel for Elections that would take over drafting of election laws.

UN gathered rival military coalitions' leaders on Libyan soil for first time in years. Bathily 26 March in capital Tripoli and 8 April in Benghazi city hosted meetings between commanders of rival military coalitions; another meeting between rival chiefs of staff held 14 April in Benghazi without participation of UN envoy. Bathily early April also toured Libya's neighbouring states of Chad, Niger and Sudan to discuss repatriation from Libya of foreign fighters.

Potential fallout of conflict in neighbouring Sudan sparked concern. After conflict between Sudanese army and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) 15 April broke out in Sudan, credible media reports, including from *The Wall Street Journal* 19 April, alleged eastern strongman Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar's forces delivered weapons to RSF, which Haftar denied; some reports claimed weapons delivered via airlift, but local sources alleged weapons hauled overland. Matter could fuel tensions between Haftar and its Egyptian ally, which supports Sudanese army (see Egypt). Amid growing concern about potential spillover of fighting into southern Libya, where Sudanese militiamen are present, Haftar forces 24 April closed border with Sudan and reportedly sent military reinforcements to southern town of Kufra.

➔ **Tunisia Authorities detained Islamist-inspired An-Nahda party leader Rached Ghannouchi, while President Saïed cast doubt on IMF bailout.**

Amid opposition protests, authorities arrested most prominent opposition leader. Hundreds 9 April joined protest led by opposition coalition National Salvation Front in capital Tunis to demand release of over 20 opposition activists detained since Feb. Authorities 17 April arrested Islamist-inspired An-Nahda party leader former parliament speaker, Rached Ghannouchi, charged him with “conspiracy against the state”; move came few days after Ghannouchi said efforts to “eradicate” Islamist opposition threatened to unleash civil war. Interior ministry 17 April also banned An-Nahda from holding meetings, and police in following days raided and shut down its headquarters in Tunis as well as several regional offices, raising spectre of formal ban on party. After U.S., EU, France, Türkiye and others condemned Ghannouchi’s detention, govt 19 April said “Tunisian justice will not yield to pressure”.

Saïed’s absence from public stage fuelled rumours of power vacuum. Saïed’s 12-day absence reportedly caused by minor heart attack late March-early April sparked concern about succession as 2022 constitution provides that head of constitutional council, which has never been installed, takes over presidency in case of permanent power vacuum.

Saïed cast doubt on International Monetary Fund (IMF) rescue package. In clearest rejection to date of terms of stalled \$1.9bn bailout package, Saïed 6 April said he would not accept IMF’s “diktats”. EU Commission 27 April said EU financial assistance would be conditioned to deal with IMF.

➔ **Western Sahara For first time in months, ground convoy completed resupply of UN mission in Polisario-controlled territory.**

UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) 5-7 April resupplied two sites hosting peacekeepers east of sand berm after Polisario Front independence movement provided safe passage to ground convoy coming from Morocco-controlled Western Sahara. Meanwhile, UN envoy for Western Sahara, Staffan de Mistura, 3-10 April conducted consultations with Algeria, France, Mauritania, Russia, Spain, UK and U.S. ahead of UN Security Council closed-door session on Western Sahara on 19 April; resumption of negotiations between Morocco and Polisario remained elusive.