



Middle East and North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

↓ 🇵🇸 ⚡ **Israel-Palestine** **Israel intensified assault on southern Gaza amid widespread starvation and disease, as momentum built toward possible ceasefire; West Bank braced for further turmoil and risk of wider conflict with Hizbollah loomed.**

War approached fifth month. Israel's assault on Gaza, which passed its 100th day, displaced 85% of population and killed over 27,000 Palestinians; Israeli soldier death toll reached 218 as of 30 Jan, with 22 Jan marking Israel's deadliest single day of war. Israel stepped up bombardment in Khan Younis city, including zones it declared "safe", and indicated plans to expand operations to Rafah, which hosts huge proportion of 2mn displaced. Israel also signalled intent to control Philadelphi Corridor between Gaza and Egypt, fuelling tensions with Cairo who warned of "serious threat" to relations and raising risk of mass casualties or mass expulsion. Hamas continued ambush attacks and rocket fire, as reports late Jan suggested group had reconstituted in northern Gaza. Amid collapsing and besieged health services, starvation risks rose: after U.S. and other states suspended funding to relief organisation UNRWA, following allegations of staff involvement in 7 Oct attacks, UN special rapporteur on right to food 28 Jan said "famine is now inevitable".

Hamas mulled latest ceasefire proposal; Israeli cabinet grew divided. Amid talks in Paris, Hamas 30 Jan said it was considering new ceasefire and hostage release proposal, signalling some diplomatic progress and fuelling hope of possible multi-stage truce. Public and international pressure mounted as Israel appeared no closer to achieving its two main objectives – destroying Hamas and liberating hostages – and war cabinet grew visibly conflicted over path forward: PM Netanyahu 18 Jan rejected two-state solution, openly contradicting Washington. International Court of Justice 26 Jan found it plausible Israel's acts amount to genocide and ordered Israel to prevent committing/inciting genocide acts.

Violence in West Bank continued. Israeli forces and settlers have killed 370 Palestinians since 7 Oct; Israeli air strike 7 Jan killed seven Palestinians in Jenin. Reports mid Jan indicated Israeli security agency Shin Bet had warned Palestinian Authority at risk of financial collapse and territory on brink of explosion of violence.

Israel-Hizbollah hostilities continued. Risk of expanded conflict on northern front grew (see Lebanon).

↓ **Jordan** **Iran-backed Iraqi umbrella group conducted first deadly strike on U.S. forces in region since Gaza war; Jordan's military continued airstrikes in Syria aimed at combatting smuggling.**

Iran-backed militants killed three U.S. troops at base in north east. In significant escalation, Tehran-aligned Iraqi umbrella group Islamic Resistance in Iraq – likely operating in Syria – 28 Jan launched drone strike on U.S. base in Jordan's north east, known as Tower 22, killing three U.S. service members and wounding at least 34; U.S. President Biden vowed retaliation, saying “we will hold all those responsible to account at a time and in a manner of our choosing”. Since Gaza war, militants have launched over 160 attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria, although causing no fatalities until 28 Jan.

Jordan-Syrian border remained wracked by instability. After deadly clashes erupted between Jordanian security forces and militants/drug smugglers from Syria in Dec, Jordanian jets 4 Jan launched airstrike in Syria's Suwayda province and 9 Jan launched four airstrikes in same area; security forces 7 Jan killed five drug traffickers in gun battle on Jordanian-Syrian border. Jordan 18 Jan reportedly struck two houses in Syria's Arman town in Suwayda, reportedly killing nine people, including children. Amman blames Iran-backed militant groups in govt-controlled areas of Syria for surge of cross-border smuggling activity.

➡ **Lebanon** **Cross-border hostilities between Hizbollah and Israel continued at high intensity as Israel stepped up pressure to secure Hizbollah's withdrawal, highlighting risk of expanded regional conflict.**

Amid deadly clashes, Israel warned of war. Lebanon continued to face spectre of all-out war as Israel's campaign in Gaza continued (see Israel-Palestine). In notable escalation, Israeli strike 2 Jan killed senior Hamas leader Saleh al-Arouri and six companions in Hizbollah-controlled area of southern Beirut; in retaliation, Hizbollah 6 Jan attacked Israel's Meron air control base some 5km from border. Israel 8 Jan killed Hizbollah commander Wissam al-Tawil 10km from border, marking most senior party figure to be killed since 7 Oct; Hizbollah next day claimed to strike Israel's northern command HQ in Safed city. Anti-tank missile from Lebanon 14 Jan killed two Israel civilians who refused to evacuate border community of Yuval. Hizbollah 23 Jan again struck Mount Meron base. Israeli strikes brought number of displaced residents to at least 82,000, many of whom crowded into nearby urban centres such as Tyre. Meanwhile, Israeli govt continued to face pressure to confront Hizbollah's presence south of Lebanon's Litani River, which violates UN Security Council Resolution 1701. As Israel continued to threaten war on northern front, U.S. envoy Amos Hochstein 11 Jan met Lebanese leaders in Beirut to discuss diplomatic options for calming border tensions that could both allay Israel's security concerns and prove acceptable to Hizbollah. Without immediate diplomatic off-ramp, however, risk of all-out conflict between pair remains pertinent as Israel has signalled willingness to escalate militarily against Hizbollah unless diplomacy succeeds soon. Adding to pressure, Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant 29 Jan warned Israeli forces will “very soon go into action” on northern front.

Presidential vacuum persisted. Country's presidential vacuum entered its fourteenth consecutive month in Jan with little prospect of breakthrough. Parliament 26 Jan approved budget within constitutional deadline for first time in

twenty years but faced widespread criticism over its content. Unidentified hackers 7 Jan launched cyberattack at Beirut airport; Public Works Minister 12 Jan bemoaned 2024 budget's paltry allocation to airport's cybersecurity.

📌 ⚡ **Syria** **Hostilities escalated as Iran-backed groups traded blows with U.S. forces, Israel killed Hamas and Iranian commanders, and Türkiye intensified attacks in north; killing of U.S. soldiers in Jordan could provoke retaliatory strikes in Syria.**

In east, Iran-backed groups and U.S. exchanged tit-for-tat attacks. Iran-backed militias launched nearly 30 attacks on U.S. bases during Jan: notably, Islamic Resistance in Iraq 2 Jan announced attacks on Al-Shaddadi, Al-Rumaylan, Al-Malikiyah bases housing U.S. personnel in Hasakah province; 14 Jan attacked U.S. Kharab Al-Jir base in Hasakah province and Conoco base in Deir ez-Zor province. U.S. retaliatory attacks on 7, 8 and 14 Jan targeted Iran-backed groups in Al-Bukamal, Al-Mayadeen, and Deir ez-Zor cities. In major escalation marking first fatal strike on U.S. forces since Gaza war, Iran-aligned Iraqi militants – likely operating in Syria – 28 Jan killed three U.S. personnel in Jordanian base on Syrian-Iraqi border (see Jordan), raising prospect of imminent U.S. retaliation in Syria.

In south, Israel targeted Hamas and Iran, Jordan continued airstrikes. Iran-backed fighters 1 Jan reportedly launched rockets at Israeli-occupied Golan Heights; Israel next day struck Kanaker village in southern Damascus countryside. Israel 8 Jan killed Hamas commander Hassan Akasha in Beit Jinn village, Rif Dimashq. Israeli airstrike 20 Jan struck capital Damascus, killing five Iranian military personnel, including Iran's head of intelligence in Syria, and several civilians; Iran vowed to respond. Presumed Israeli missile targeting IRGC base in Damascus 29 Jan killed seven, including three IRGC members and civilians. Israel 31 Jan struck army positions in Deraa city. In Suwayda province, Jordan continued airstrikes targeting trafficking.

In north, Türkiye intensified shelling as part of strikes on Kurdish militants. In response to killing of over a dozen Turkish soldiers in Iraq (see Iraq), Turkish military announced it 12-16 Jan conducted 114 airstrikes targeting Kurdish forces in Syria and northern Iraq; notably, Turkish drone 14 Jan killed three regime soldiers in Qamishli, Hasakah province. In north east, intensified Turkish shelling cut over 1mn off from electricity.

In north west, hostilities persisted between regime and opposition. Deadly clashes between regime forces and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)/National Liberation Front 3, 9, 10, 18 and 19 Jan erupted along frontlines in southern Idlib province; shelling 1 Jan killed eleven civilians near Aleppo city. Meanwhile, Iran 15 Jan launched direct attack on alleged ISIS target in Idlib, in retaliation for deadly bombing (see Iran).

Gulf and Arabian Peninsula

↓ **Iran** Islamic State (ISIS) killed 80 in deadliest bombing in decades, while Iran struck Syria, Iraq and Pakistan in sign of increasingly assertive regional posture amid escalation on multiple fronts fuelled by Gaza war.

ISIS killed scores at ceremony for slain commander. ISIS 3 Jan conducted dual bombings at commemoration ceremony for Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani in Kerman city (south east), which killed over 80 and injured more than 200, marking deadliest terrorist attack in Iran since 1979 revolution.

Tehran struck out at foes both east and west. IRGC 15 Jan announced it had launched ballistic missiles into Syria's Idlib purportedly aimed at ISIS, and northern Iraq at sites it claimed were linked to Israeli intelligence. Iranian forces next day launched strikes on village in Pakistan's Balochistan province, claiming to target "strongholds" of Jaish al-Adl – anti-Iranian Baloch militant group that 15 Dec conducted deadly attack in Iran's Balochistan province; Pakistan condemned strike and claimed it killed two children. Pakistan 18 Jan launched strikes on village near Iranian border city of Saravan (south east), claiming to target Pakistani Baloch militants; pair took steps to de-escalate late Jan (see Pakistan). Unidentified gunmen 27 Jan killed nine Pakistani workers in Saravan.

Iran-aligned groups continued attacks across region amid Gaza war. Amid Houthi attacks in Red Sea and U.S.-UK retaliatory airstrikes (see Yemen), Iran 15 Jan disavowed involvement. Iran 21 Jan confirmed deaths of five IRGC members in alleged Israeli strikes in Syrian capital Damascus, as President Raisi pledged revenge. Attacks against U.S. and allied forces in Iraq and Syria by Iran-aligned groups continued, exceeding 160 incidents from mid Oct to late Jan (see Iraq and Syria). In significant escalation, drone strike 28 Jan, attributed by U.S. to Iran-backed militants, killed three U.S. service members in Jordan; U.S. pledged retaliation (see Jordan).

Iran expanded nuclear activities. After International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) late Dec announced Iran increased three-fold its production of uranium enriched up to 60%, IAEA chief Rafael Grossi 18 Jan stressed need for urgent diplomacy; nuclear expansion, hampered cooperation with IAEA and limited diplomacy with West bode ill for swift resolution of simmering nuclear crisis.

↓ **Iraq** Iran launched first direct attack in Iraq since Gaza war and hostilities between U.S. and Tehran-backed militias escalated; region braced for retaliation after Iraqi umbrella group killed U.S. troops in Jordan.

Gaza war continued to fuel escalation. In first direct Iranian attack since start of war in Gaza, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps 15 Jan launched three missiles at house of prominent Kurdish businessman in Kurdistan's regional capital Erbil, killing at least four; like similar strike in March 2022, Iran claimed attack targeted Mossad activities, which Kurdistan Regional Govt (KRG) denied. Meanwhile, U.S. 4 Jan struck Iran-backed Harakat al-Nujaba group in capital Baghdad, reportedly killing

four, including commander of paramilitary coalition Hashd al-Shaabi. U.S. for first time acknowledged use of ballistic missiles by Iran-backed umbrella group Islamic Resistance in Iraq in 20 Jan attack on Ain al-Asad base in Anbar governorate, injuring several personnel. In major escalation marking first fatal strike on U.S. forces since Gaza war, drone attacks by Islamic Resistance in Iraq, likely operating in Syria, 28 Jan killed three U.S. personnel in north-eastern Jordan (see Jordan). U.S. and Iraq late Jan began formal talks on withdrawal of U.S. forces. Militant group Kataib Hezbollah 30 Jan announced suspension of attacks on U.S. forces “to prevent embarrassment” of Iraqi govt.

Türkiye-PKK attacks intensified in north. Late Dec spate of attacks on Turkish troops continued, as PKK 5 Jan killed five soldiers in attack on military base and clash 12 Jan killed nine Turkish soldiers. In response, Türkiye 12-16 Jan launched airstrikes in both northern Iraq and Syria, targeting PKK/People’s Protection Units militants. Ankara also increased attacks on Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), party based in Sulaymaniyah province; Turkish FM Hakan Fidan 16 Jan threatened “further measures” if PUK did not change its attitude toward PKK.

Baghdad and Erbil ended budget dispute; Islamic State (ISIS) maintained activity. After KRG President Barzani’s 13 Jan visit to Baghdad, govt next day agreed to allocate monthly funds to KRG, marking shift from previous arrangement of loans. Suspected ISIS militants 6 Jan reportedly attacked Hashd al-Shaabi forces in Salah al-Din governorate, killing two; 14 Jan killed three soldiers near Haditha town.

➔ **Saudi Arabia Riyadh conditioned normalisation with Israel on Palestinian statehood, while Germany further loosened restrictions on exporting offensive weapons to kingdom.**

Riyadh publicly toughened stance on price of normalisation with Israel. During regional tour, U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 8 Jan met Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Al-Ula city to discuss war in Gaza and hostilities in Red Sea; Blinken said Saudi Arabia and other regional states remained open to building diplomatic ties with Israel but Israel must first end Gaza war and work toward Palestinian state – marking first time senior U.S. official explicitly linked Palestinian statehood with normalisation. Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to UK, Prince Khaled bin Bandar, next day reiterated Riyadh was open to normalisation but “we can’t live with Israel without a Palestinian state”. Survey conducted by Washington Institute for Near East Policy in Nov-Dec found 96% of Saudis believe Arab countries should cut all ties with Israel in protest of Gaza war (see Israel-Palestine).

Germany supplied offensive weapons, citing Israel’s security. After U.S. officials late Dec announced preparations to loosen ban on offensive weapons sales to Saudi Arabia, German FM Annalena Baerbock 7 Jan said Germany would stop blocking sale of Eurofighters to Riyadh, citing its “constructive attitude toward Israel” amid reports Saudi Air Force had shot down Houthi projectiles fired at Israel (see Yemen). Germany 10 Jan announced it approved export of 150 Iris-T guided missiles, resuming arms sales banned in response to 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

↓ ⚡ **Yemen** U.S. and UK began bombing campaign against Houthis, risking wider escalation, as U.S. “terrorist” designation of group could compound humanitarian crisis and hamper peace process; frontlines displayed signs of possible renewed conflict.

U.S. and UK launched anti-Houthi airstrikes. In major escalation, U.S. and UK 11 Jan launched airstrikes against dozens of Houthi targets in Sanaa, Sa’adah, Taiz, Hajjah and Hodeida governorates, and 13-14, 16-20, 22, 24, 27 and 31 Jan struck locations in Hodeida, Taiz, Dhamar, al-Bayda, and Sa’adah governorates, citing Houthi attacks on international shipping. Houthis remained defiant, as strikes appeared to inflict limited damage on group’s capabilities or morale and proved counterproductive: Houthis 15, 17 Jan struck U.S.-operated ships in Gulf of Aden and vowed further action, raising prospect that attacks from both sides could escalate in coming weeks.

U.S. re-designated Houthis terrorist organisation. After removing group from “Foreign Terrorist Organisation” list in Feb 2021, U.S. 17 Jan designated Houthis “Specially Designated Global Terrorist”, citing need to impede funding. Designation may hamper international response to humanitarian crisis, further complicate peace talks between Riyadh and Houthis and dampen prospects of dialogue with other conflict actors.

Local fighting escalated in several regions, threatening to upend de facto truce. Houthi shelling 12 Jan killed two govt soldiers in Hodeida governorate. Houthi drone 14 Jan targeted Shabwa Defence Forces in Marib governorate, killing two soldiers. Houthis next day attacked border guards in al-Jawf governorate, killing two. Giants Brigade 23 Jan claimed it repelled Houthi offensive in Bayhan town, Shabwa, causing casualties. Risk of wider ground fighting along frontlines loomed as Houthis may initiate new major offensive, particularly if U.S. and UK provide support to anti-Houthi groups.

Eastern leaders formed new group; regional proxy competition continued. In move seen as countering separatist Southern Transitional Council’s attempts to assert control in east, prominent local leaders in eastern governorates (Hadramawt, al-Mahra, Shebwa and Socotra) 9 Jan announced formation of single entity to counter external influence and advocate equal representation in any political settlement. Highlighting competition between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates-backed Hadhrami Elite Forces 16 Jan blocked entry of Saudi-backed Nation Shield Forces into Mukalla city.

North Africa

➡ **Algeria** Ruling party confirmed ambition to play active role in President Tebboune’s re-election campaign after years on the sidelines; amid strained bilateral relations, Bamako denounced Algiers-sponsored 2015 peace accord.

Ruling party and military asserted support for Tebboune’s re-election bid. At Central Committee session, National Liberation Front’s new secretary general, Abdelkrim Benmbarek, 7 Jan expressed support for President Tebboune’s candidacy

in presidential election due to be held before year's end; stance confirms party's comeback on political stage after being sidelined in wake of 2019-2021 Hirak protest movement. Army also expressed support for Tebboune. During inspection visit to second military region (west), army chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Saïd Chengriha, 15 Jan called on citizens to adhere "to the project of the rebirth of a new Algeria, led ... by Abdelmadjid Tebboune".

Algeria-Mali diplomatic tensions remained elevated. Mali's junta 25 Jan revoked Algiers-sponsored 2015 peace deal with separatist rebels, citing "increasing number of unfriendly acts, instances of hostility and interference in Mali's internal affairs" by Algiers. Foreign ministry next day denounced Mali's "use of international mercenaries" and rearmament program "funded by third countries". Earlier in month, Algerian ambassador to Mali and Malian ambassador to Algiers 5 and 7 Jan returned to their posts two weeks after being recalled for consultations; diplomatic row erupted in Dec over Algiers' consultations with rebel leaders and Tebboune's meeting with Malian opposition leader Mahmoud Dicko.

Algeria took seat on UN Security Council. Algeria's two-year term as non-permanent member of UN Security Council started 1 Jan, with Western Sahara and Palestine as priority issues on country's agenda.

➔ **Egypt Amid Gaza war, tensions between Egypt and Israel continued to rise; IMF held talks with Cairo to expand \$3bn loan and potentially soften reform program.**

War in Gaza continued to strain Egypt-Israel relations. Israel's request to occupy fourteen-kilometre-long buffer zone on Egypt's border with Gaza, known as Philadephi Corridor, with a view to halting weapons smuggling route from Egypt into Gaza, ratcheted up tensions. Cairo, which currently patrols area, 22 Jan issued warning to Israel, saying any move to control Philadelphii Corridor would pose serious threat to bilateral relations. Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet) director Ronen Bar 29 Jan met with head of Egypt's General Intelligence Directorate Abbas Kamel in Cairo to discuss tensions over control of Philadelphii Corridor. Meanwhile, security situation remained precarious along border with Gaza and Israel. Egyptian forces reported preventing drug smuggling attempt 15 Jan on Egyptian-Israeli border near Awja crossing, with six suspected smugglers arrested; Israeli army reported one soldier wounded same day in exchange of fire with armed individuals near Awja. Anonymous military source quoted next day by The New Arab website said they were not smugglers, but pro-Hamas militants attempting to infiltrate Gaza.

IMF showed readiness to expand loan amid economic impact of Gaza war. Insecurity in Red Sea impacted shipping traffic through Suez Canal. Osama Rabie, chairman of Suez Canal Authority, 11 Jan said traffic since 1 Jan had dropped by 40% compared to a year prior, inflicting damage to key source of foreign reserves. Drop in Suez Canal traffic also contributed to further weakening of Egyptian pound on black market. Egyptian media outlet Al Ahram 14 Jan reported exchange rate on black market had shot up to record high level of close to 60 pounds to the dollar. International Monetary Fund (IMF) confirmed readiness to help Cairo. Financial institution 11 Jan said increasing size of IMF loan to Egypt was "critical", and delegation led by IMF Egypt Mission Chief Vladkova Hollar mid Jan travelled to Cairo to discuss \$3bn loan and reform program.

➔ **Libya** Tripoli-based govt's decision to lift fuel subsidies sparked backlash, and latest UN-sponsored national dialogue initiative aimed at resolving political stalemate remained stalled.

Public debate revolved around financial and economic feuds. Tripoli-based PM Abdulhamid Dabaiba 10 Jan announced controversial plan to remove fuel subsidies, in likely attempt to curb smuggling of subsidised fuel. Move created uproar among constituencies and politicians who have ties to smuggling rackets, and eastern-based govt in following days called decision "null and void". Amid opposition and concern that removal of subsidies without proper compensation plans could cause significant inflation and impact ordinary Libyans, Dabaiba 17 Jan said issue will be put to referendum.

More controversies affected oil sector. National Oil Corporation (NOC) 7 Jan declared force majeure at Sharara Oil Field after protesters closed site in uproar over deteriorating economic conditions in southern region; NOC 21 Jan lifted force majeure after deal with protesters.

UN envoy initiative to resolve political stalemate found no traction. U.S. ambassador to Libya, Richard Norland, in Jan visited capital Tripoli and eastern city of Benghazi to mobilise support for UN envoy Abdoulaye Bathily-sponsored meeting of Libya's five main political stakeholders to settle "issues impeding progress toward elections". Speaker of eastern-based House of Representatives (HoR), Aguila Saleh, 23 Jan met with Norland in Benghazi and confirmed rejection of Bathily's invitation, insisting that first step toward unification should be appointment of new unity govt. Norland same day also met with Libyan National Army (LNA) leader Khalifa Haftar in Benghazi to discuss political stalemate. Following meetings with Norland, Dabaiba and head of Tripoli-based advisory body High Council of State, Mohamed Takala, around 25 Jan announced accepting Bathily's invitation. Bathily also held series of meetings, including with Haftar 30 Jan and Saleh next day, who reiterated his side would not attend UN-brokered political dialogue unless govt appointed by east-based parliament was present, or both govts were excluded. Meanwhile, Presidency Council pushed separate initiative, National Reconciliation Conference, with preparatory committee meeting held 14 Jan in Zuwara city; conference would supposedly be held in Sirte city in April and include members of former Qadhafi regime.

➔ **Tunisia** Crackdown on free speech continued with judicial harassment of journalists, and IMF for first time placed Tunisia on so-called black list.

Repression of dissent continued. Tunis court 10 Jan gave journalist and columnist Zied el-Heni six-month suspended prison sentence for allegedly insulting minister during radio broadcast, and released him from prison, where he had been held since 28 Dec. Authorities 3 Jan arrested Al Jazeera journalist Samir Sassi on suspicion of belonging to "terrorist organisation", before releasing him few days later. Interior ministry note leaked on social media 13 Jan requested opening of investigation against twenty public figures (most of whom are likely to stand in presidential election due to be held by year's end) on allegations of money laundering.

Protesters took to streets on different occasions. Demonstration in support of Palestinians 11 Jan took place in front of South Africa embassy in capital Tunis;

protesters expressed support for Pretoria's genocide case against Israel at International Court of Justice. Hundreds of people 14 Jan demonstrated in Tunis to mark anniversary of 2011 uprising that led to ousting of then-President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, and to demand release of jailed opposition leaders. Demonstrations 17-18 Jan broke out in El Hencha village, north of Sfax city, after boat carrying 37 residents attempting to cross Mediterranean Sea went missing.

In another important development. Tunisia 5 Jan appeared on International Monetary Fund's "negative list" of countries with over eighteen-month delay in completion of consultations with financial institution. President Saïed late Jan extended state of emergency by eleven months until 31 Dec 2024.

➡ **Western Sahara Reports of Moroccan artillery movement fuelled speculation of possible military operation in Western Sahara; Rabat secured chairmanship of UN Human Rights Council.**

Media reports emerged of possible Moroccan military operation in buffer zone. Spanish newspaper *La Razón* 16 Jan reported movement of heavy artillery in Bir Gandouz area in Morocco-controlled Western Sahara. Local sources indicated Morocco might be preparing limited operation against Polisario Front independence movement inside UN-monitored buffer zone, while Moroccan press speculated Rabat may want to take over buffer zone, which could spark escalation with Algeria. Meanwhile, drone allegedly fired by Moroccan military 31 Dec killed three Mauritanian civilians in Guerguera area, Morocco-controlled Western Sahara. In retaliation, Mauritania early Jan reportedly increased customs duties applied to Moroccan goods entering Mauritania through Guerguera border crossing.

Rabat scored symbolic win at UN Human Rights Council. Morocco 10 Jan secured chairmanship of UN Human Rights Council despite strong opposition from Algeria and South Africa, who argued situation in Western Sahara and Rabat's human rights record make country unfit to preside over intergovernmental body.