



Middle East and North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

➔ **Israel-Palestine** Israeli forces conducted largest raid on Jenin refugee camp since Second Intifada, parliament passed govt's judicial overhaul despite massive protests, and tensions flared with Hizbollah.

Israeli forces killed a dozen Palestinians in Jenin raid amid West Bank volatility. Deadly violence continued across West Bank and Israel, killing at least 27 Palestinians and one Israeli during July. Notably, Israeli forces 3-5 July raided Jenin, claiming to target "terrorist infrastructure", killing 12 Palestinians and one Israeli soldier (by friendly fire), injuring over 140, and displacing 500 families. In response, Gaza militants 5 July fired five rockets at Israel, prompting Israeli airstrikes in Gaza. Palestinian 4 July conducted car-ramming and stabbing attack in Tel Aviv, injuring at least seven before being killed. Hamas militant 6 July killed Israeli soldier near Kedumim settlement before being shot dead. Israeli forces 25 July killed three Palestinians in Nablus city and 27 July killed teenager during raid in Qalqilya. Israeli cabinet 9 July voted for economic measures to prevent Palestinian Authority's (PA) collapse; Israeli forces 30 July again raided Jenin, arresting two Hamas members, indicating that Israel's goal of having PA operate successfully there had so far failed.

Knesset passed bill limiting Supreme Court's judicial authority. Knesset 24 July passed bill to remove Supreme Court's ability to block govt decisions deemed "unreasonable", while opposition boycotted vote and anti-govt protests and strikes against bill intensified, with thousands of military reservists threatening to boycott duty. Supreme Court 26 July said it would hear appeal against bill in Sept.

Israel and Hizbollah exchanged fire. After media late June reported Hizbollah had erected two tents housing armed militants in disputed Shebaa Farms area, Israel 6 July struck southern Lebanon with around 15 artillery shells in response to alleged rocket fire from Lebanon into northern Israel (see Lebanon). Adding to tensions, Israel early July began constructing fence around northern half of Ghajar town, located in occupied Lebanese territory, prompting Hizbollah's condemnation.

In other important developments. Syrian state media 2, 19 July reported Israeli airstrikes on Homs and capital Damascus (see Syria). PM Netanyahu 17 July recognised Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara (see Western Sahara).

➔ **Lebanon** Tensions picked up between Israel and Hizbollah as sides exchanged fire, economic crisis and presidential vacuum persisted, and deadly clashes erupted between militants in southern refugee camp.

Mutual antagonism continued between Hezbollah and Israel. Following uptick in tensions late June when Israeli media reported Hezbollah had erected two tents housing armed militants in disputed Shebaa Farms area, Lebanese state media 5 July claimed that Israeli forces had breached border three separate times while carrying out construction work. Israel next day struck southern Lebanon with around 15 artillery shells in response to alleged rocket fire from Lebanon into northern Israel. Lebanese security source 12 July claimed that Israeli forces had lobbed three grenade-like explosives across border, wounding three Hezbollah operatives, while Israel said that it had used stun grenades. Meanwhile, Israel early July began constructing fence around northern half of Ghajar town, located in occupied Lebanese territory, prompting condemnation by Hezbollah as well as Lebanon's caretaker govt. Tensions underscore risk that incident could trigger larger confrontation.

Economic crisis continued. Hardship remained severe despite period of relative stability for Lebanese Lira, due to continued intervention of Lebanese Central Bank and likely influx of hard currency during tourist season. Difficult economic conditions, however, continued to foment protest and public unrest. Several students 10 July reportedly attacked Education Minister's convoy, blaming him for public-school year heavily disrupted by teacher strikes. Depositors on four occasions 10-20 July entered banks and forcibly withdrew their savings.

Presidential vacuum entered its ninth consecutive month. Parliament in July did not hold presidential election session, reflecting prevailing deadlock between various political factions. Concerns arose that vacuum could engulf Central Bank, given incumbent governor Riyadh Salameh's term ended 31 July; several parties, including Christian Free Patriotic Movement, argue that caretaker cabinet cannot appoint new governor. Bank's four deputy governors 6 July stated that they would collectively resign if govt failed to appoint Salameh's replacement.

Militant factions clashed in southern refugee camp. Islamist militants 30 July shot dead Palestinian military general from Fatah and three escorts, sparking days of heavy clashes between factions in Ein el-Hilweh, country's largest refugee camp near Sidon city, that killed at least eleven.

➔ **Syria New insurgent group emerged in Idlib amid hostilities between regime and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), Russia blocked cross-border aid, and clashes between Turkish-backed and Kurdish militants continued.**

New militant faction emerged in Idlib as hostilities persisted. After "Revolutionary Shield Company" late June emerged in Idlib province, claiming to fight HTS "criminality", group 14 July executed man accused of being HTS member outside Idlib city and 17 July searched vehicles on M4 highway; attacks come after nearly four years of relative stability in Idlib. Meanwhile, regime continued shelling throughout July, including civilian homes in Jisr al-Shoughur 9 July and "double-tap" attack killing rescue worker in Aleppo province 11 July. HTS 7 July conducted first raid since April, targeting regime position in Latakia, and 10 July shelled regime base in Jurin, Hama, killing one. Unknown group, likely HTS, 19 July conducted drone attack on Russian base in Hmemeim, Latakia.

Russian veto on cross-border aid compounded humanitarian crisis in north-west. Russia 11 July vetoed renewal of UN Security Council authorisation for cross-border aid in north-west, where 3mn have been without aid since 10 July. Govt 13 July said it would allow aid through Bab al-Hawa crossing providing UN does not communicate with “terrorist organisations”, referring to de-facto authorities in northwest.

Turkish-backed and Kurdish forces continued hostilities, particularly in northern Aleppo. In northern Aleppo, controlled by Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army (TFSA), car bomb 9 July killed five civilians in Shawa village. Turkish IED 9 July killed three in Manbij city, including senior commander of Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)-affiliated Manbij Military Council. People’s Defence Units (YPG) forces 10 July raided TFSA position near Afrin city, killing at least five. SDF forces same day shelled Turkish base near Azaz, north Aleppo. Militants affiliated with YPG 29 July attacked TFSA positions in Afrin; Turkish drones next day struck YPG and regime positions nearby in response.

In other important developments. Alleged Israeli airstrikes 2 July targeted Homs city; 19 July struck near capital Damascus. U.S. airstrike 7 July killed alleged ISIS leader in al-Bab city, Aleppo governorate. Middle East Eye 12 July reported U.S. plans to assassinate leaders of Iran-linked resistance factions.

Gulf and Arabian Peninsula

➔ **Iran Purported diplomatic momentum toward U.S.-Iran de-escalatory understanding showed no sign of progress, while maritime tensions picked up.**

Amid stalled diplomacy, U.S. criticised Iran’s weapons transfers to Russia. UN Security Council 6 July convened its semi-annual meeting on implementation of Resolution 2231 during which U.S. placed marked emphasis on Iran’s military cooperation with Russia, describing transfer of UAVs used in Ukraine as “a flagrant violation” of 2231’s restrictions, while UK, France and Germany underscored their joint concerns over continued expansion of Iranian nuclear activity. News late June reported U.S. Special Envoy for Iran Robert Malley is on leave reportedly pending investigation into handling of classified information, which could deepen already-fraught political debate in Washington over diplomatic engagement of Iran.

Maritime incidents continued as U.S. bolstered regional military posture. U.S. military 5 July reported disrupting “two attempted commercial tanker seizures by the Iranian navy” in international waters, one of which involved “multiple, long bursts from both small arms and crew-served weapons” by Iranian ship against Bahamian-flagged *Richmond Voyager*. Iranian sources claimed that *Richmond Voyager* had struck Iranian ship, injuring five, and was subject to “a court order to seize it”; Chevron denied any such incident. U.S. Navy next day reported that Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps forces had detained tanker, assessing that incident may have been smuggling-related. Indonesian authorities 11 July confirmed seizure of Iran-flagged tanker on suspicion of unauthorised ship-to-ship transfer in North Natuna Sea. U.S. defence official 14 July announced deployment of F-16 fighters as part of effort “to deter Iran from going after oil tankers”, while U.S. guided-missile

destroyer and F-35 fighters entered region mid-July; Pentagon 20 July additionally announced deployment of Amphibious Readiness Group/Marine Expeditionary Unit to region.

In other important developments. U.S. 18 July approved 120-day sanctions waiver allowing Iraq's payments for Iranian electricity supplies to be carried out through third-party banks, with qualification that funds be used for humanitarian purposes (see Iraq).

➔ **Iraq Tensions rose between Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's movement and rival Shiite Coordination Framework, protestors torched Swedish embassy over Quran burning, and pro-Iran groups demanded U.S. waivers.**

Tensions between Sadrists and rivals mounted. Israel 5 July claimed Kataib Hezbollah (member of framework) in March kidnapped Russian-Israeli academic Elizabeth Tsurkov while conducting research partly on al-Sadr's movement; Kataib Hezbollah denied allegation. Pro-Iran groups affiliated with framework interpreted Tsurkov's meetings with Sadrists as Israeli attempt to infiltrate movement. Sadrist supporters 15-16 July attacked offices of Shia parties, including Dawa party, Badr Organization, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, in Basra, Najaf and capital Baghdad after alleged defamation of Sadr's father, Ayatollah Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr.

Quran burnings sparked unrest, straining ties with Sweden and Denmark. Protestors, mostly from Sadrist movement, overnight 19-20 July ransacked Swedish embassy in capital Baghdad after Sweden permitted demonstrators to burn Quran in front of Iraqi embassy in Stockholm. Govt 20 July expelled Swedish ambassador, withdrew ambassador to Sweden and threatened to sever diplomatic ties. Hundreds 22 July attempted to storm Baghdad's Green Zone to reach Danish embassy after Quran burning previous day in Danish capital Copenhagen; demonstrators same day set fire to Danish Refugee Council headquarters in Basra governorate.

Pro-Iran factions demanded U.S. waivers. PM al-Sudani 11 July announced deal to exchange Iraqi oil for Iranian gas. Group of pro-Iran "resistance factions" 14 July protested outside U.S. embassy to demand waivers, amid faltering support for unilateral moratorium on attacks on U.S. forces. U.S. 18 July signed 120-day waiver allowing Iraq to pay for Iranian electricity through non-Iraqi banks.

In other important developments. Türkiye continued targeting Kurdistan Workers' Party in north (see Türkiye). President Rashid 3 July revoked special decree granted to head of Chaldean Church, provoking protests among Christian community. In first visit to Syrian capital Damascus since 2011, al-Sudani 16 July held talks on security cooperation with Syrian President Assad. In Kurdistan region, militant 7 July allegedly shot dead two members of Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan in Sulaymaniyah province; explosion 23 July killed former member of Kurdistan Democratic Party-linked intelligence agency in Dohuk city.

➔ **Saudi Arabia Tensions with United Arab Emirates (UAE) continued to surface, while govt engaged Iran.**

Rising tensions with UAE came to light. *The Wall Street Journal* 18 July reported that Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman (MBS) during off-record press conference

in Dec 2022 said UAE “stabbed us in the back” and that he would “take punitive steps” after sending list of demands to UAE; the news surfaced during period of rising Saudi-UAE economic competition and tensions over key issues, including Yemen and oil policy.

Riyadh continued diplomacy with Iran. Oil minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman 5 July reportedly discussed bilateral relations with Iranian counterpart on sidelines of OPEC conference in Austrian capital Vienna. State media 4 July cited foreign ministry affirming Saudi Arabia and Kuwait’s exclusive claim to Durra gas field in Gulf maritime “Divided Area” and called on Iran to negotiate demarcation of area’s eastern border.

In other important developments. UN human rights experts 7 July called for release of two Saudi women jailed for critical tweets. Saudi Arabia 18 July agreed to purchase Turkish drones in biggest defence contract in Turkish history (see Türkiye).

➤ **Yemen Negotiations between Huthis and Saudi Arabia remained stalled, Southern Transitional Council (STC) mobilised forces in Hadramawt amid mounting tensions, and economic crisis sparked protests.**

Huthi-Saudi talks made no progress. Negotiations remained at impasse over use of oil revenues for civil and military salary payments and Riyadh’s insistence on its role as mediator in conflict. Huthi delegation 9 July completed Hajj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia and reportedly met Saudi officials in Saudi capital Riyadh. Meanwhile, Huthis targeted forces in al-Dhale, southern al-Bayda, and Taiz governorates to pressure Riyadh. In UN Security Council briefing, UN Envoy Hans Grundberg 10 July highlighted need for de-escalation of economic hostilities and concern over military posturing and parades; President of Huthi Revolutionary Committee Mohammed al-Huthi same day accused UN of perpetuating conflict and called for lifting of sanctions. Security Council 10 July renewed mandate for UN Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA) until 14 July 2024.

STC mobilised supporters amid tensions with Saudi-aligned forces in Hadramawt. STC 7 July held annual rally in Hadramawt governorate, expressing discontent at newly-formed Saudi-led Hadramawt National Council (HNC); STC 7 July mobilised protests for Southern Homeland Day and reiterated calls to evict Israh-aligned First Military Region from Hadramawt. STC same day accused First Military Region of shooting protestors at tribal leader’s residence in Seiyun city. STC leader Ayderous al-Zubaidi 9 July threatened to “blow up the situation in Hadramawt”; Saudi-Emirati rivalry has intensified tensions, with Riyadh utilising HNC to diversify its influence in Hadramawt and weaken UAE-backed STC.

Economic hardship sparked protests. Protests 11-12 July erupted in Aden, Lahij, Taiz and Hadramawt governorates over electricity shortages and currency devaluation, as Riyal 11 July reached low of 1,500 to U.S. dollar for first time since April 2022; STC blamed govt ineptitude. Head of Presidential Leadership Council Rashad al-Alimi 12 July met Saudi officials in Riyadh to secure financial assistance and emphasised importance of resuming oil exports from Hadramawt and Shebwa governorates.

In other important developments. Replacement ship 16 July arrived in Yemen to begin unloading oil from stranded tanker *FSO Safer*. Unknown gunman 21 July killed World Food Programme worker in Turbah town, Taiz governorate.

North Africa

➔ Algeria Ruling party remained plagued by divisions, and tensions with Morocco remained elevated.

Internal divisions continued to plague ruling party. Amid disagreements within ruling National Liberation Front (FLN) over support for President Tebboune's candidacy in 2024 presidential election, 11th party congress remained unscheduled. Meanwhile, power struggle between FLN's sec gen, Abou El Fadl Baadji, and president of FLN parliamentary group, Latifi Ahmed Salah, continued. After removing Salah from his role in June, Baadji 10 July took him to FLN's disciplinary committee for "insubordination, transgression and political deviation" as he refused to cede duties.

Israel recognised Western Sahara as part of Morocco, drawing Algeria's ire. At Non-Aligned Movement summit held in Azerbaijan, Algeria's permanent representative to UN, Ambassador Amar Bendjama, 5 July called for decolonisation of Western Sahara. Moroccan counterpart, Ambassador Omar Hilal, retorted that Western Sahara was "an agenda of adversity, hostility and destabilisation" for Algiers. Meanwhile, Algiers 20 July denounced Israel's recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara as "blatant violation of international law" (see Western Sahara). Moroccan King Mohammed VI 29 July welcomed Israel's move while calling for "return to normality" with Algeria and "opening of borders between the two neighbouring, sister countries and peoples".

In other important developments. After Tebboune 17-21 July visited China to gain support for membership to BRICS bloc of emerging economies, Algiers 21 July applied to join alliance, also submitted request to become shareholder member of BRICS Bank with \$1.5bn. Algiers 24 July said it had summoned Danish and Swedish envoys to condemn recent desecrations of Koran in Copenhagen and Stockholm.

➔ Egypt Amid significant economic, social and political challenges, Cairo turned to foreign policy, restoring full diplomatic ties with Türkiye and agreeing to resume talks with Ethiopia on GERD.

Successful privatisation round not enough to quell Gulf and IMF wariness. PM Mustafa Madbouly 11 July announced Egypt had sold assets worth \$1.9bn, including \$1.65bn in foreign currency; Gulf investors played limited role, signalling continued wariness toward purchasing Egyptian assets. International Monetary Fund (IMF) 13 July welcomed sales as important step consistent with reform program, however reiterated call on Cairo to implement structural reforms to improve long-term economic sustainability.

Repression of critics continued to mar national dialogue initiative. National dialogue coordinator Dina Rashwan 12 July announced that Board of Trustees would meet same day to finalise proposals before submitting them to President Sisi for approval. Journalist Khaled Dawood and human rights lawyers Ahmed Ragheb and

Naged El-Bori, 18 July froze participation to dialogue to protest sentencing of researcher Patrick George Zaki to three years in prison on charges of “disseminating false news”. Board of Trustees same day urged Sisi not to enforce verdict, and Sisi 19 July pardoned Zaki.

Cairo restored full diplomatic relations with Türkiye, resumed talks with Ethiopia. Cairo and Ankara 4 July exchanged ambassadors for first time since 2013, with Cairo appointing Amr el-Hamamy as ambassador to Türkiye, and Salih Mutlu Sen becoming Türkiye’s ambassador to Egypt. Outstanding issues, such as stance on Libya and fate of Muslim Brotherhood leaders living in Türkiye, remained unresolved. Sisi and Ethiopian PM Abiy Ahmed 13 July met for first time since 2019, agreed to resume negotiations on Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) with aim of reaching final deal on filling and operation of dam within four months (see Nile Waters). Egypt 13 July hosted leaders from Sudan’s neighbouring countries, announced initiative to end conflict (see Sudan).

In other important developments. In North Sinai, group of detainees 30 July reportedly seized weapons inside police facility in el-Arish city and killed four security forces, while wounding several others.

► **Libya Parliament approved roadmap for selection of new unity govt before elections, drawing UN’s ire, and oil revenue distribution took centre stage.**

Parliament adopted controversial plan to appoint new unity govt. East-based House of Representatives (HoR) 25 July approved roadmap paving the way for appointment of supposed unity govt before presidential and parliamentary elections; HoR presented plan as part and parcel of broader roadmap agreed to in June by HoR and Tripoli-based High State Council (HSC) representatives forming UN-backed “6+6” committee. UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) 26 July criticised “unilateral” initiative going counter to UN-backed efforts to enable elections as soon as possible, and warned it could “inflict serious negative consequences for Libya and trigger further instability and violence”. In response, HoR accused UN of misleading public opinion when describing decision as “unilateral”.

Rival factions set up joint committee on oil revenue distribution. Head of east-based govt, Osama Hamad, HoR chairman Aguila Saleh, and eastern strongman Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar late June-early July made separate calls for “fairer” redistribution of oil revenues, threatening to close off oil production should Tripoli fail to put portion of oil revenues at direct disposal of eastern authorities. In response, Tripoli-based Presidency Council Chairman Mohamed Menfi around 6 July agreed to form committee tasked with “distributing oil revenues” and including representatives from eastern and western Libya. UN, EU and most western embassies in following days welcomed decision.

Struggle for control of Central Bank led to kidnapping, oil field closure. Gunmen 11 July kidnapped former finance minister and prominent figure from eastern Libya, Farj Bou Matari, at Tripoli airport. Tribesmen close to Haftar 13 July shut down oil production at El Feel and El Sharara oil fields to protest Matari’s abduction, who was released 15 July. Tripoli-based oil ministry next day said production had resumed at oil sites. Kidnapping likely linked to claims that Bou Matari early July enjoyed

tentative backing of rival assemblies, HSC and HoR, to replace Siddiq al-Kebir as Central Bank governor.

➡ **Tunisia Security forces expelled Sub-Saharan migrants to desert areas while European Union reached migration control deal with Tunis.**

Authorities expelled Sub-Saharan migrants to border areas amid spike in tensions. Clashes between Tunisians and Sub-Saharan migrants 3 July left one Tunisian man dead in coastal city of Sfax. As disturbances went on for several days, with local rights activists reporting beatings and arbitrary detentions of migrants by locals, authorities allegedly expelled around 1,200 sub-Saharans from Sfax and took them further south to remote areas near borders with Libya and Algeria. NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) 6 July said migrants left “with little food and no medical assistance” at Tunisia-Libya border. Paris-based weekly news magazine *Jeune Afrique* 12 July reported death of two migrants in Haouza area near Algeria, and Libyan authorities late July announced finding several bodies of migrants on border with Tunisia. UN experts 18 July urged authorities to “halt any further deportations”, saying “collective expulsions are prohibited under international law”, and reiterated concern about “reports of racist hate speech in the country”.

EU, Tunisia signed partnership largely focused on migration control. European Commission President Ursula von Der Leyen and President Saïed 16 July signed partnership agreement, with European Union (EU) allocating €105mn to Tunisia to reinforce border management and speed up repatriation of irregular Tunisian migrants. HRW 19 July urged EU to suspend migration control funding to Tunisian security forces, citing latter’s “serious abuses” against Sub-Saharan migrants.

In other important developments. Tunis Court of Appeal 13 July released political opponents Chaïma Issa and Lazhar Akremi, who had been detained since Feb as part of crackdown on govt critics; next day banned them from traveling abroad and appearing in public following prosecutor’s office’s request. On two-year anniversary of Saïed’s power grab, over 300 people 25 July rallied in capital Tunis to denounce crackdown on fundamental freedoms and demand release of political prisoners.

➡ **Western Sahara In new diplomatic victory, Morocco secured Israel’s recognition of its sovereignty over Western Sahara.**

Israel recognised Morocco’s sovereignty over Western Sahara. Israel 17 July recognised Morocco’s sovereignty over Western Sahara, also announced appointment of military attaché in Rabat liaison office, which suggests impending full upgrade of diplomatic relations. Algiers 20 July criticised move as “blatant violation of international law” that “can in no way legitimise sovereignty over occupied Sahara lands” (see Algeria). Moroccan King Mohammed VI 29 July welcomed Israel’s decision while calling for “return to normality” with Algeria and “opening of borders between the two neighbouring, sister countries and peoples”.

EU-Morocco fishing deal expired. Fishing protocol to EU-Morocco association agreement 17 July expired and was not renewed pending EU Court of Justice’s final decision on legality of including Western Sahara in protocol; expiration leaves European trawlers without license to fish in Moroccan and Western Saharan waters.