



## Middle East and North Africa

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### Eastern Mediterranean

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➔ **Israel-Palestine** **Deadly Israeli military raids and armed Palestinian resistance continued in West Bank amid growing settler violence, while Israel expanded annexation policies and returned to judicial overhaul.**

*Israeli forces and Palestinian militants clashed heavily in West Bank.* Israeli forces conducted over 500 raids that killed at least 19 Palestinians (bringing total killed this year to at least 165). Notably, rare house demolition by Israeli forces in Ramallah 7-8 June triggered clashes that injured at least 35. Underscoring dynamic in which growing Israeli raids in northern West Bank to address Israel-induced security vacuum in absence of Palestinian Authority (PA) has kindled greater Palestinian armed resistance, Israeli raid in Jenin 19 June sparked large-scale gunfight, killing seven Palestinians and wounding seven Israeli soldiers, as Israeli helicopters opened fire in first such engagement since Second Intifada; Israeli media reported remote-controlled IED may indicate Iranian support, while Netanyahu govt and settler leadership mulled extensive military operation. Israeli drone 21 June killed three in Jenin refugee camp. Militants in Jenin 26 June attempted to fire two rockets. Meanwhile, amid expanding settler violence, two Palestinian gunmen 20 June killed four Israeli settlers near Eli settlement outpost; around 400 settlers next day stormed Turmus Ayya village, killing a Palestinian.

*Israel advanced de facto annexation and restarted judicial overhaul debate.* Cabinet 18 June gave far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, also minister in Defence Ministry, authority to bypass approval process to build settlements. Govt 18 June moved forward plans to authorise constructing over 4,500 new settlement units in West Bank. After freezing judicial overhaul in March, Knesset 25 June began debating bill to limit Supreme Court's power; amid protests, PM Netanyahu 29 June claimed he dropped clause enabling parliament to overturn court's rulings.

*Violent crime flared in Israel, rare attack on Egyptian border killed three.* Clashes reportedly linked to organised crime 8 June killed five in Arab-majority town Yafa an-Nasariyye in northern Israel; violent crime has killed over 100 Palestinian citizens of Israel in 2023 and risks further exacerbating existing tensions. In first deadly exchange along border in over decade, Egyptian police officer 3 June infiltrated Israel and shot dead three Israeli border guards (see Egypt).

➔ **Lebanon** **Hardship from economic crisis continued to bite, fuelling protests and disorder, while presidential vacuum persisted with no end in sight and tensions surfaced between Hizbollah and Israel.**

*Difficult economic conditions continued to foment protest and public unrest.* Public school teachers 3 June called week-long strike over their devalued wages and working conditions. Employees of state electricity provider Electricite du Liban 13-23 June held limited strike in relation to delayed salary payments. Demonstrators 15 June vandalised four separate banks in capital Beirut's Sin El Fil neighbourhood to protest lack of access to their deposits. During June, internet services cut intermittently in some areas as state telecommunications infrastructure operator struggled to secure enough fuel to power its plants. Meanwhile, UN's International Organisation for Migration 13 June confirmed that in 2022 "an increasing number of deadly incidents took place after boats departed from Lebanon, destined for Greece and Italy", recording at least 174 deaths.

*Presidential vacuum entered its eighth consecutive month.* Parliament 14 June convened to hold first presidential election session since Jan but again failed to elect new head of state; opposition's preferred candidate Jihad Azour secured 59 of 128 votes (short of 86 required to win) in first round before MPs aligned with Shiite parties Hizbollah and Amal Movement frustrated quorum in second vote, where only 65 votes are needed. Political parties scaled up incendiary rhetoric around vote: referring to Azour, Shiite parties 11 June asserted they "would not accept a candidate imposed by Tel Aviv", while Maronite Patriarch Bechara Al Rahi accused Shiite parties of making mockery of democracy by obstructing second round. Parliament 19 June convened for ordinary session strictly limited to approving temporary benefits for public employees and retirees; Free Patriotic Movement party attended session, again relaxing its previous stance of opposition to non-electoral sessions.

*Tensions persisted between Hizbollah and Israel.* Israeli media 21 June reported that Hizbollah operatives had allegedly maintained at least two tents in disputed Shebaa Farms area for several weeks. Hizbollah 26 June claimed it downed Israeli drone that entered Lebanese airspace near Zibqin town in south.

**↓ Syria** **Deadly fighting escalated between Türkiye and Kurdish militants in north, while Russia and regime forces stepped up attacks in north west; Islamic State (ISIS) killed regime general in centre.**

*Hostilities surged between Türkiye and Kurdish forces in north.* Kurdistan Workers' Party 10 June terminated four-month unilateral ceasefire, citing Turkish operations in Syria and Iraq (see Türkiye and Iraq). Turkish drone strike 10 June killed senior People's Protection Units (YPG) commander in Tel Rifaat, Aleppo province; YPG-linked forces next day shelled Turkish base east of Azaz, prompting Turkish forces to retaliate with counter-battery fire. IED 12 June killed Russian soldier in Tel Rifaat. YPG-linked Afrin Liberation Forces 13 June shelled Turkish base near Kafr Jannah, west of Azaz; Turkish forces 14 June struck Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Syrian regime positions in Tel Rifaat and Manbij areas, killing at least eight Syrian soldiers, over dozen SDF/YPG fighters and several civilians. Turkish drone 14 June killed commander of Syrian branch of Turkish Marxist-Leninist Communist Party and 20 June killed PYD co-chair of Qamishli canton near Qamishli. Attacks on both sides somewhat subsided late June.

*Russia and regime forces increased attacks in north west.* Russia steadily increased number of airstrikes on opposition-held Idlib to levels not witnessed since late 2021 after dominant rebel group Hei'at Tahir al-Sham (HTS) late May killed senior

Russian officer. Notably, Russian warplanes 19 June carried out around 10 attacks near Idlib city and 23-27 June killed at least nine civilians across Idlib, Latakia and Aleppo provinces, causing displacement and aggravating humanitarian crisis. Large contingents of regime forces 19 June deployed to northern Aleppo, while regime stepped up artillery strikes; suspected HTS forces 22-23 June conducted four drone strikes in regime-held cities of Salhab, Qardaha and Deir Shamal. Russian airstrike 27 June reportedly hit HTS military post in Idlib's Jabal al-Zawiya area, killing at least six militants.

*ISIS continued intermittent attacks, Israel struck Damascus.* ISIS struck mostly in eastern Homs, Deir al-Zour and Quneitra provinces; notably, IED attack 13 June killed regime general in Homs city – first attack in city since 2017. Syrian state media reported Israeli missiles 14 June injured Syrian soldier in capital Damascus.

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## **Gulf and Arabian Peninsula**

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➔ **Iran Reports of indirect talks between U.S. and Iran suggested diplomatic momentum toward limited de-escalation understanding, while Tehran avoided censure at nuclear watchdog meeting.**

*U.S.-Iran engagement raised spectre of de-escalation.* Iranian and U.S. officials mid-month confirmed in media reports that sides had held indirect talks in May in Oman likely aimed at de-escalatory understandings that could see prisoner swap and measure of nuclear restraint by Tehran in return for release of some frozen assets for humanitarian transactions; U.S. 13 June confirmed recent allocation of \$2.7bn from Iraq-held Iranian funds but otherwise tempered expectations of major breakthrough.

*Tehran avoided censure at nuclear watchdog meeting.* International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Rafael Grossi 5 June told IAEA's Board of Governors that Iran's enriched uranium stockpiles had "risen by over a quarter in three months"; Grossi said Tehran had "provided a possible explanation" for presence of depleted uranium particles at 'Marivan' – one of three locations subject to agency probe into past nuclear activities at undeclared sites – and declared "the agency has no further questions" regarding origin of particles enriched up to 83.7 per cent. Consequently, U.S. and/or European allies did not introduce censure motion but nonetheless criticised Iran. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei 11 June backed engagement on safeguards with IAEA while emphasising that nuclear "infrastructures [should] remain untouched".

*West continued steady stream of sanctions.* U.S. 1 June sanctioned six individuals/entities linked to "terrorist plots" targeting "former U.S. government officials", among others. U.S. next day designated four persons/entities linked to "censorship of the Internet". U.S. Treasury Department 6 June blacklisted 13 persons and entities linked to "Iran's ballistic missile development". EU 23 June sanctioned four Iranian entities linked to "manufacturing of UAVs and their provision to Russia" and 26 June designated seven Iranian officials over human rights concerns.

*Maritime tensions persisted amid Iranian-Saudi normalisation.* U.S. and UK naval forces 4 June reported “Iranian fast attack boats harassed [a] commercial ship” transiting Strait of Hormuz. Iran 6 June reopened its embassy in Saudi Arabia (see Saudi Arabia). FM Amirabdollahian 19-22 June discussed idea of “regional cooperation forum” touring Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and UAE.

➔ **Iraq Parliament passed budget to expand public employment and resolve oil spat with Erbil, Türkiye struck Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in north and Islamic State (ISIS) maintained low-level insurgency.**

*Parliament passed controversial federal budget.* Against International Monetary Fund’s advice for tighter fiscal policy, parliament 12 June passed record-large budget, which relies almost exclusively on hydrocarbon exports and adds 700,000 new public employees in response to youth-led protests over unemployment. Notably, budget outlined new revenue-sharing mechanism for oil exports between federal govt and Kurdistan Regional Govt (KRG) that resolves a main sticking point between pair; arrangement guarantees Erbil 12.7% share of federal expenditures and increases its allocation of public salaries and pensions; KRG’s allocated budget is estimated to increase by 30%. Govt 19 June met Turkish energy delegation in capital Baghdad to discuss resumption of oil exports after Ankara paused them following international arbitration ruling. Over 50 MPs in Kurdistan regional parliament late June resigned in protest of Supreme Court’s ruling in May that assembly’s decision taken in Oct to delay elections by year was unconstitutional.

*Türkiye struck PKK, which ended unilateral ceasefire in Türkiye.* Suspected Turkish drone 1 June hit house in Sinjar district, injuring two PKK-affiliated fighters. After unidentified gunmen 9 June shot dead PKK member in Sulaymaniyah, PKK blamed Turkish intelligence and 10 June declared end to four-month unilateral ceasefire in Türkiye, citing operations against its members (see Türkiye and Syria). Turkish forces 26 June said it “neutralised” four PKK members in north.

*Low-scale ISIS insurgency continued.* ISIS attack 11 June killed three soldiers and injured four others in Wadi al-Naft, Kirkuk governorate. Iraqi forces conducted anti-ISIS operations throughout month; notably, 2 June killed four suspected ISIS militants in Diyala governorate. Defence Ministry 17 June announced killing four suspected militants in airstrike in Tarmiya district, north of Baghdad. Israeli jets 24 June killed suspected ISIS militants in Al-Rafi’i in Kirkuk governorate.

*In other important developments.* Govt 20 June announced first local provincial elections since 2013 will be held 18 Dec. Clashes between two rival Iranian Kurdish dissident groups 22 June killed two fighters in Zirgwez, Sulaymaniyah governorate.

➔ **Saudi Arabia Reconciliation with Iran continued, while dialogue with Yemen’s Huthis remained stalled and tensions surfaced with United Arab Emirates (UAE).**

*Iran reopened embassy in Riyadh.* Three months after signing China-brokered reconciliation deal, Iran 6 June reopened embassy in Riyadh to end seven-year diplomatic absence. Saudi FM Faisal bin Farhan 17 June visited Iranian capital Tehran and described discussions as “positive and clear”; Saudi embassy in Iran has

yet to open. Iranian navy commander 3 June claimed Iran would form naval alliance with India, Pakistan and Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia.

*Talks remained deadlocked with Huthis, friction with UAE became visible.* Although dialogue with Huthis remained stalled, first direct flight between Yemen and Saudi Arabia since 2016 17 June arrived in Jeddah city and Huthi media 21 June reported Saudi Arabia and Huthis exchanged bodies of fighters (see Yemen). Tensions between Saudi Arabia and UAE behind scenes intensified over differences in approaches to Yemen and Sudan crises, with Riyadh accusing Abu Dhabi of undermining conflict resolution efforts.

*In other important developments.* Saudi Arabia 4 June announced voluntary unilateral oil production cuts in July. U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 6-8 June visited Saudi Arabia for meeting with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Riyadh 11-12 June hosted Arab-China business conference.

➡ **Yemen Negotiations between Huthis and Saudi Arabia remained stalled despite flurry of diplomatic activity and confidence-building steps, while rival forces jostled for control in southern provinces.**

*Huthi-Saudi talks remained deadlocked despite steps to ease tensions.* In attempt to increase pressure on Huthis, Saudi Arabia 5 June held talks on Yemen with Chinese officials and 7 June with U.S. officials. Other diplomatic efforts continued at high intensity: notably, UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg 4-5 June travelled to Saudi Arabia and Oman, and Presidential Leadership Council leader Rashad al-Alimi 8 June met U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken in Saudi capital Riyadh. Negotiations, however, remained stuck over various Huthi demands, including salary payments and increasing flights from Sanaa airport. In positive steps, national carrier Yemenia Airways 8 June announced doubling flight schedule to six, with first direct flight since 2016 between Yemen and Saudi Arabia 17 June arriving in Saudi Arabian city Jeddah; Huthi media 21 June reported Saudi Arabia and Huthis exchanged bodies of fighters. Huthis officials issued weekly warnings of return to hostilities and Huthi redeployments along front underscored potential of renewed war. Meanwhile, UN 16-18 June convened talks between govt and Huthis in Jordanian capital Amman, where Huthis reportedly agreed to negotiate release of prominent political prisoner and Islah member Mohammed Qahran.

*Regional actors manoeuvred their affiliated forces in south.* Following Riyadh's request, Al-Alimi's Nation Shield Forces 6 June deployed from Saudi border toward Aden province, signalling intent to counteract United Arab Emirates (UAE)-backed Southern Transitional Council's (STC) influence in south; STC next day reportedly sent reinforcements to Aden. In Hadramawt province, after STC took steps to solidify its influence with UAE support in recent months, Saudi Arabia invited several prominent Hadrami leaders to Riyadh for discussions regarding future of region, underscoring tensions between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi; participants of discussions 21 June established Hadramawt National Council.

*In other important developments.* Huthis continued to economically undermine govt, notably by importing cooking gas through Hodeida port to break govt's monopoly in Marib. Clashes between suspected al-Qaeda militants and UAE-backed pro-govt Shebwa Defence Forces 10 June reportedly killed three in Shebwa province.

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## North Africa

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### ➔ **Algeria** Political parties started to position themselves ahead of 2024 presidential election, while media crackdown continued.

*Political manoeuvring started ahead of 2024 presidential election.* Opposition party Front of Socialist Forces 2 June called on opposition to join forces “beyond ideological divisions” to overcome political apathy and restrictions of political freedoms. Nine pro-govt political groups, including ruling National Liberation Front, National Democratic Rally and El-Bina el-Watani movement, 4 June reciprocated with joint initiative to strengthen “national cohesion” amid “growing risks” facing Algeria.

*Media crackdown continued.* Algiers Court of Appeal 18 June lengthened prominent journalist Ihsane El-Kadi’s prison sentence from five to seven years – with two years suspended – for allegedly receiving foreign funding for political propaganda with an aim to harm state security.

*In other important developments.* UN General Assembly 6 June elected Algeria as non-permanent member of UN Security Council for two-year term starting 1 Jan 2024. President Tebboune next day outlined Algiers’ priorities within Security Council, including supporting Sahrawi people’s right to self-determination and Palestinian cause. Tebboune 13-15 June visited Russia, agreed with President Putin to deepen bilateral strategic partnership.

### ➔ **Egypt** IMF continued to pressure Cairo to privatise state assets and allow flexibility in its currency; govt stiffened entry requirements for Sudanese refugees.

*Divergence persisted between Egypt and IMF on economic reform program.* International Monetary Fund (IMF) 11 June confirmed that review of Egypt’s economic reform program did not take place in March as initially planned due to slow pace of reforms and, as a result, second tranche of \$3bn loan package was not disbursed. Central Bank of Egypt same day said annual inflation rate in May rose to 32.7%, from 30.6% in April, highlighting that prices have not yet declined since January devaluation. President Sisi 14 June signalled refusal to let Egyptian pound float and allow for further devaluation, citing impact on livelihoods. National dialogue proceeded with meetings three days a week.

*Egyptian border guard shot three Israeli soldiers dead.* Egyptian border guard 3 June entered Israel through Nitzana border crossing and fatally attacked three Israeli soldiers; assailant’s family denied allegations of religious radicalisation, but acknowledged his resentment toward Israel after Israeli forces reportedly killed one of his colleagues. Israel subsequently gave its soldiers authorisation to shoot at any suspicious Egyptian soldier; incident unlikely to undermine bilateral security cooperation, however.

*Egypt, Türkiye moved forward with normalisation of relations.* FM Sameh Shoukry 3 June travelled to Türkiye to attend Turkish President Erdoğan’s inauguration ceremony, days after Egyptian presidency announced that Sisi and

Erdoğan had agreed to immediately exchange ambassadors as part of diplomatic relations upgrade.

*Cairo stiffened entry requirements for Sudanese.* As thousands of people fleeing fighting in Sudan remained stranded at Sudan-Egypt border with no valid travel documents, Cairo 10 June required all Sudanese to obtain electronic visas to enter Egypt, reversing longstanding visa exemption for women, children and elderly men.

➔ **Libya Political deadlock persisted despite headlines suggesting that rival factions reached agreement on election laws while selection of new interim govt remained controversial.**

*Stakeholders sent contradictory signals on elections and new govt.* Following series of meetings in Moroccan town of Bouznika, members of 6+6 joint committee – composed of House of Representatives (HoR) and rival Tripoli-based High State Council (HSC) representatives – early June announced agreement on legal framework for presidential and parliamentary elections. HoR Speaker Aguila Saleh and head of HSC Khaled Meshri 6-7 June travelled to Morocco but failed to sign off on electoral legislation as points of contentions persisted, notably on whether military officers can run for president. Meanwhile, amid competing plans aimed at appointing new interim govt before elections take place, eastern forces commander Khalifa Haftar 16 June congratulated outcome of Morocco talks and called for formation of “technocratic” govt to oversee election preparation, suggesting that he may now favour parliament-led selection process, rather than keeping Tripoli-based PM Dabaiba in office as part of power-sharing deal. In briefing to UN Security Council, UN Envoy to Libya Abdoulaye Bathily 20 June said failure to reach agreement among major stakeholders on eligibility criteria for presidential election, linkage between presidential and parliamentary elections, and formation of new unified govt could “trigger a new crisis”.

*Tripoli conducted fresh strikes in west.* Dabaiba 1 June insisted drones strikes carried out late May in western Libya targeted sites used by “criminal gangs” for human trafficking, drug and fuel smuggling, denying HoR claims that strikes were aimed at “settling political scores”; Dabaiba also denied Turkish involvement in strikes. Forces loyal to Dabaiba 7-8 June conducted fresh strikes near Zuwara city, reportedly targeting fuel smuggling site.

*Tensions over control of oil wealth threatened to escalate.* Eastern-based PM Osama Hammad 24 June threatened to impose blockade on oil and gas facilities to prevent exports in protest at alleged unfair distribution of oil revenues by Tripoli-based authorities; 26 June said he discussed matter with Tripoli-based National Oil Corporation Chairman Farhat Bengdara.

*In other important developments.* Drone strikes 29 June reportedly hit Al-Kharruba airbase used by Russian paramilitary group Wagner; Tripoli-based authorities denied responsibility.

➔ **Tunisia Authorities continued to silence dissent, and European Union (EU) proposed financial assistance while urging Tunis to tighten border control.**

*Opposition protested continued harassment of govt critics.* Islamist-inspired An-Nahda party 12 June confirmed three imprisoned party leaders on hunger strike to protest “detention conditions and non-respect of fundamental rights”; one of them, Sahbi Atig, early June reportedly spent several days in intensive care due to deteriorating health. Hundreds of main opposition coalition National Salvation Front supporters 18 June protested in capital Tunis to demand release of President Saïed’s opponents, including coalition’s co-founder Jaouhar Ben Mbarek and An-Nahda leader Rached Ghannouchi. Authorities 20 June detained prominent journalist Zied Heni near Tunis for allegedly “insulting the head of state”, released him on bail two days later.

*EU offered financial aid to Tunis to boost economy, tighten border control.* EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen 11 June visited Tunis along with Italian PM Giorgia Meloni and Dutch PM Mark Rutte, said EU may loan over €1bn to help Tunisia boost its battered economy and tighten border control. Ahead of meeting, Saïed 10 June said Tunisia would not accept to act as other countries’ border guard. German and French Interior Ministers Nancy Faeser and Gérald Darmanin 19 June met with Saïed in Tunis to discuss migration and security issues; France announced nearly €26mn in aid to combat irregular migration. Families of jailed judges and politicians late June accused EU of whitewashing Saïed’s authoritarianism in hope he can stem migration to Europe.

*Anti-migrant sentiment persisted, notably in Sfax.* In joint statement, human rights and other organisations 2 June condemned violence against sub-Saharan migrants and urged authorities to protect migrants and combat discrimination. Tensions continued to run high in coastal city of Sfax, a hub for migrant crossings to Europe. Notably, clashes 17-18 June reportedly broke out between Sfax residents and migrants, causing property damage, while hundreds 25 June demonstrated in Sfax against presence of irregular migrants.

➡ **Western Sahara Attack reported in Morocco-controlled Western Sahara for first time since ceasefire collapsed in Nov 2020.**

*Bombing reportedly damaged phosphate facility in Western Sahara.* NGO Western Sahara Resource Watch late May reported explosion in Morocco-controlled Western Sahara destroyed section of conveyor belt transporting phosphates from mine to export facility; neither Morocco nor Polisario Front independent movement commented on incident which, if confirmed, would be first attack in Morocco-controlled Western Sahara since ceasefire collapsed in 2020 and highlight unexpected vulnerability of Morocco’s security apparatus.

*Israel pledged to recognise Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara.* During visit to Morocco, Israeli Parliament Speaker Amir Ohana 8 June said Israel will soon support Morocco’s claim of sovereignty over Western Sahara; move could lead to full upgrade of Israeli-Moroccan ties, with countries’ respective missions, now designated as liaison offices, becoming embassies, and free trade agreement in medium term.