

# Middle East

---

## Eastern Mediterranean

---

➔ **Israel/Palestine Tensions continued in Jerusalem, Israeli forces stepped up lethal raids in West Bank, and Israeli high court authorised forcible displacement of Palestinians in West Bank.**

In occupied East Jerusalem, around 600 Israeli settlers 5 May stormed al-Aqsa Mosque compound. Israeli police 16 May injured over 70 Palestinians during funeral procession of Palestinian who died of wounds sustained during April clashes at Al-Aqsa Mosque. Tens of thousands of Israeli ultra-nationalists in annual event 29 May marched through Jerusalem's Old City, as some chanted "Death to Arabs" and attacked Palestinians and journalists; hundreds of Israelis entered al-Aqsa compound. In West Bank, Israeli security forces stepped up raids across West Bank, raising tensions with Hamas; increased public calls for assassination of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar prompted Hamas 7 May to threaten retaliation. Israel military raid in Jenin city 11 May saw U.S.-Palestinian *Al Jazeera* journalist Shireen Abu Akleh killed by gunshot to head, which sparked international outcry; Israeli authorities initially blamed Palestinian gunmen before walking back claim and 19 May announced there would be no investigation; Palestinian Authority 26 May said Israel killed her deliberately, which if confirmed would mark 48th journalist killed by Israeli forces since 2000. Israeli police 13 May attacked Abu Akleh's funeral procession in East Jerusalem, injuring dozens of Palestinians. Also in Jenin area, clashes 13 May killed one Israeli officer, one Palestinian and injured dozen Palestinians. Israeli forces 24-25 May shot dead 16-year old Palestinian during clashes at Joseph's Tomb in Nablus city and injured at least 80 other Palestinians, and 27 May shot dead 15-year old Palestinian in al-Khader town near Bethlehem city. Settler attacks against Palestinians and their property continued during month in Ramallah, Nablus, Qalqilya, Hebron and Salfit cities. Meanwhile, Israeli high court 4 May rejected petition against forced displacement of around 1,200 Palestinian residents from Masafer Yatta, collection of hamlets in southern West Bank, amounting to single largest displacement of Palestinians in decades. Two Palestinians from Jenin 5 May carried out axe attack in ultra-Orthodox Elad city (near Tel Aviv), killing three Israelis and injuring four. Regionally, Israel reportedly carried out airstrikes in Syria (see Syria).

➔ **Lebanon Parliamentary elections resulted in no clear winner as reformists expanded presence and Hizbollah and its allies lost majority, while currency crisis continued to jeopardise critical imports.**

New political groups hailing from civil society and 2019 protest movement made significant inroads in parliamentary elections held 15 May, totalling 13 seats (up from one seat previously); Hizbollah and its allies lost parliamentary majority despite retaining all 27 seats reserved for Shiite MPs; Lebanese Forces party became single largest in parliament, stripping title from main Christian rival, Free Patriotic Movement. Election day saw several violent incidents. Notably, supporters of Lebanese Forces and Hizbollah-Amal movement allegedly clashed in Kfarhouna, south Lebanon. Early signs of political jostling that could complicate govt-formation efforts emerged, raising risk of violence between opposing camps. Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea 15 May suggested his party would not accept re-appointment of Amal Movement head

Nabih Berri as parliamentary speaker, view echoed by other key figures opposed to Hezbollah and allies; in response, head of Hezbollah's parliamentary group Mohammad Raad evoked spectre of "civil war" if opposing political forces fail to approve consensus govt. Striking more conciliatory tone, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah 18 May called on rival blocs to compromise. In first session since vote, parliament 31 May re-elected Berri as speaker. Meanwhile, extended queues 18 May emerged at gas stations due to fuel shortages allegedly caused by delayed payments in foreign currency to importers. Govt 18 May temporarily shut down Deir Ammar power plant, key facility for state-provided electricity, due to lack of available fuel oil. Industry leaders 18 May warned country faces another bread crisis, as flour mills and bakeries suffer from shortages of imported wheat due to lack of foreign exchange; World Bank 6 May approved emergency loan of \$150mn to finance immediate wheat imports. Central Bank 18 May extended decree authorising Sayrafa ("Exchange") Platform, through which Central Bank sells U.S. dollars some 10-15% below market rate to counter Lebanese lira's depreciation, until end of July 2022; currency's value sharply fell following polls, from around 27,000 to 31,000 on 19 May, and to all-time low of 35,600 by 26 May.

➡ **Syria Rocket attack killed ten govt-backed fighters in Aleppo, Idlib ceasefire held despite violations, and Israel reportedly conducted multiple deadly missile attacks.** In Aleppo province, rocket attack on military bus 13 May killed ten govt-aligned militants and injured nine in Anjara area. In Idlib province, March 2020 ceasefire held despite violations reportedly including Russian airstrikes. In north east, Turkish-backed, Kurdish and regime forces reportedly traded fire throughout month. Turkish President Erdoğan 3 May announced initiative to build infrastructure in north-west Syria to facilitate voluntary return of one million Syrian refugees; Erdoğan 23 May announced plan to launch cross-border operation targeting Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and creating 30 km "safe zone" along border, without giving specific timeline; U.S. next day warned Turkey against offensive; Turkish drone strikes 27 May reportedly struck targets in Tel Rifaat town, north of Aleppo. Ahead of July UN Security Council vote on renewing mandate for cross-border humanitarian aid to north west Syria, Russian deputy UN ambassador said there was "no reason" to continue aid deliveries, raising prospect of Russian veto. In central desert, Russia reportedly carried out airstrikes targeting Islamic State (ISIS), while ISIS allegedly continued low-level attacks. Reports of Russian troop redeployments mid-month surfaced claiming Russia troops had withdrawn from Latakia province to Russia's Hmeimim airbase, and allegedly transferred bases to Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Lebanese Hezbollah. In Deir ez-Zor province, unidentified aircraft 7 May reportedly struck alleged Iran-backed militia positions in govt-held Hawija Katia area. Syrian state media reported Israel 11 May fired missiles at Hadar town, Quneitra province; 13 May carried out missile attack on alleged Iranian-linked target in Masyaf area, Hama province, killing five Syrians, including one civilian, and injuring seven; 20 May fired missiles near Damascus capital, killing three. Govt 17 May raised unsubsidised benzine and diesel price by around 40%, while cement price rose by 90%, raising fears of new bout of inflation.

---

## **Gulf and Arabian Peninsula**



---

➔ **Iran** **Efforts to restore 2015 nuclear deal remained stalemated as Tehran edged toward breakout capability; price hikes fuelled protests which left at least five killed.** Revival of nuclear accord remained blocked over key remaining points of contention, namely 2019 U.S. designation of Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) as Foreign Terrorist Organization and economic guarantees on sanctions relief. EU facilitator of Vienna talks Enrique Mora sought to inject momentum into stalemated process by travelling to capital Tehran on 11 May – exactly two months after talks in Austrian capital Vienna were paused with technical text all but ready. Iranian and U.S. officials, however, still appeared to put onus on other; U.S. Biden administration 13 May maintained “Iran needs to decide whether it insists on extraneous conditions” or finalises agreement. Senior U.S. official 25 May described deal’s prospects “tenuous at best”; Treasury Dept same day sanctioned “international oil smuggling and money laundering network” linked to IRGC. Meanwhile, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi 10 May reported Iran’s stockpile of uranium enriched to 60% stood at 42kg, up from 33.2kg tallied in IAEA’s 3 March quarterly report; Grossi also addressed agency’s ongoing safeguards probe into undeclared sites, asserting “Iran has not been forthcoming” with necessary information. President Raisi 9 May unveiled major economic reforms redirecting state subsidies from importers of basic staples, following abrupt cut on flour subsidies in late April that resulted in fivefold price increase; govt 12 May announced hikes on items including dairy products and chicken. Protests over costs erupted in Khuzestan and other provinces; as of 18 May, human rights groups had tallied five deaths, as security forces clamped down on demonstrators, with dozens detained. Police also clashed with protesters over govt handling of 23 May Abadan building collapse that killed at least 29. Unidentified assailants 22 May shot dead colonel of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ Quds Force in capital Tehran. Incident at Parchin military facility 26 May caused one fatality; media reports blamed drone attack. Iran 27 May seized two Greek-flagged vessels in Gulf, possibly in retaliation for earlier U.S. confiscation of Iranian crude aboard tanker detained in April.

➔ **Iraq** **Govt formation efforts remained stalled, army clashed with Sinjar Resistance Units in Sinjar, and Turkish forces launched drone strikes in northern Iraq.** Govt formation remained deadlocked. Shiite cleric and leader of largest bloc in Oct 2021 parliamentary elections Muqtada al-Sadr faced setback when Federal Supreme Court 15 May banned govt from appointing senior positions, proposing draft laws and contacting new loans, ending Sadr’s plans to govern without fully authorised govt; Sadr same day announced intention to go into opposition, allowing second largest bloc, Shia Coordination Framework (SCF), to form govt. Meanwhile, SCF sought to intimidate Sunni MPs through threats of violence and court rulings; notably, after SCF petitioned Supreme Court, court 16 May revoked parliamentary status of Sunni lawmaker Mishan al-Jubouri on corruption charges. In Sinjar district, Nineveh province, clashes 1-2 May erupted between army and Kurdish Workers’ Party (PKK)-affiliated Sinjar Resistance Units (YBŞ), notably in Dukuri village, following military operation to clear YBŞ forces from area; clashes killed at least three and displaced around 3,000. Joint Operations Command 3 May

confirmed clashes ended; tribal leaders and Hashd al-Shaabi paramilitary force mediated ceasefire. YBŞ has come under pressure from Turkish air campaign against PKK in Kurdistan and restriction of cross-border movement into Syria due to govt construction of wall along Syrian border. Suspected Turkish drone 21 May reportedly targeted vehicle near Chamchamal town in Sulaymaniyah province, killing five, including at least two alleged PKK members; another drone same day hit vehicle in Makhmour refugee camp in Nineveh province, reportedly killing two. Drone attack claimed by Ahrar Sinjar militia 21 May reportedly targeted Zilkan military base hosting Turkish troops in Bashiqa, Nineveh province, killing one. In Kurdistan region, six missiles reportedly launched from Bartella town in Nineveh province 1 May hit oil refinery in regional capital Erbil. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps 11 May reportedly targeted Erbil with artillery fire. Iraqi Security Media Cell 24 May announced it shot down drone approaching airbase near airport of capital Baghdad that hosts Iraqi and U.S. forces. Low-level Islamic State (ISIS) attacks continued throughout month; notably, two ISIS attacks in Kirkuk and Nineveh provinces 23 May reportedly killed 12.

➔ **Saudi Arabia** **Coalition and Huthis refrained from cross-border attacks as April truce largely held.** Cross-border Huthi attacks and coalition airstrikes remained halted after April truce (see Yemen). Vice Minister of Defence Khalid bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud 17 May met U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan during which latter reaffirmed U.S. commitment to help Riyadh defend its territory. U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 30 May held phone call with Saudi FM Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud to discuss efforts to prolong truce in Yemen. Despite pressure from U.S. and Europe to increase oil production, OPEC+ 5 May decided to maintain planned production levels. *Financial Times* 22 May quoted Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman, signalling support for Russia as member of OPEC+. Meanwhile, following fifth round of talks in April after seven-month hiatus, Iranian FM 17 May dismissed Iranian lawmakers' statement that he would soon meet Saudi counterpart saying "no new developments" had occurred since April talks, while FM Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud 24 May said "some progress but not enough" had been made in talks with Iran.

➔   **Yemen** **April truce largely held as UN scrambled to extend deal ahead of June expiration to avoid potential return to hostilities; Sanaa airport opened for first commercial flight in six years.** Hostilities remained largely paused between govt and Huthis, notwithstanding slight increase in reported violations on ground, notably in Jabal Balaq mountains in Marib governorate, Taiz and Hajjah governorates. Huthis 23 May downed alleged Saudi-led coalition spy drone, killing three and injuring three in capital Sanaa. In positive development, first commercial flight in six years 16 May left Sanaa international airport after it had been temporarily postponed in April; reopening of airport was part of UN-brokered truce along with ending restrictions on fuel shipments into Hodeida port and lifting Huthi siege on Taiz city. Regarding latter, Huthis 17 May announced new demands, including halting fighting in Taiz governorate and removing military equipment from main roads; first round of talks between Huthis and govt to reopen Taiz roads 29 May ended with no tangible results. On diplomatic front, as expiration of truce on 2 June approached, UN envoy Hans Grundberg worked to secure extension. Grundberg 12 May spoke with head of Presidential Council Rashad al-Alimi,

PM Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed and VP of Council Tareq Saleh about truce. Yemeni FM Ahmed Awak bin Mubarak 17 May met U.S Sec State Anthony Blinken in U.S. capital Washington and said govt was “very hopeful to extend” truce. Head of Huthi Supreme Political Council 22 May said Huthis “are not against” extending truce. Grundberg 30 May returned to Aden city and met with Rashad al-Alimi to discuss reopening Taiz roads, and 31 May met with Huthi’s chief negotiator Mohammed Abdul-Salam, where he discussed renewing truce and reopening roads in Taiz governorate. In gesture to support truce, Saudi-led coalition 6 May returned over 100 prisoners to Yemen. Clashes between suspected al-Qaeda militants and Southern Transitional Council-aligned militia Security Belt 6 May reportedly killed dozen in Dhale governorate. Saudi Arabia 16 May agreed to transfer \$174mn deposit to Yemeni central bank. Yemeni riyal was volatile after relative stability during Ramadan: 8 May deteriorated to 1040 riyal to U.S. dollar before 18 May appreciating to 980.