



Middle East and North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

➔ **Israel-Palestine Lethal Israeli raids and settler violence continued unabated across West Bank amid Palestinian attacks, Israel launched strikes in Gaza and Saudi Arabia signalled possible normalisation deal.**

Israeli forces killed over dozen Palestinians. Israeli forces continued arrest raids across West Bank and killed at least 14 Palestinians. Notably, Israeli forces 19 Sept killed four Palestinians and injured 30 in Jenin, and 24 Sept killed two Palestinians in raid on Tulkarem city. Israeli soldier stationed on watchtower overlooking Al-'Arroub refugee camp in Hebron 9 Sept opened fire on three children, killing one. Daily Israeli settler violence continued: notably, settlers 9 Sept assaulted shepherd in Jordan Valley and 16 Sept stabbed Palestinian in Hebron. Meanwhile, Palestinians continued attacks: 6 Sept injured one Israeli in stabbing in Jerusalem and shooting attack 13 Sept injured two Israelis in Huwara. Israel advanced home demolitions, mainly in East Jerusalem, bringing total to 261 in 2023.

Israeli forces staged attacks in Gaza. Israeli soldiers 13 Sept opened fire at Palestinians protesting at Gaza border in solidarity with prisoners in Israeli jails and marking eighteenth anniversary of Israel's withdrawal from strip, killing seven and injuring over 25. Israeli forces 19 Sept killed Palestinian in Gaza and 15, 22, 23 Sept launched air attacks at alleged Hamas targets, while protestors continued activities until late month.

Saudi Arabia signalled progress on possible normalisation deal. Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman 20 Sept said normalisation with Israel was getting closer "every day" (see Saudi Arabia); Kingdom during Sept hosted first official Israeli delegation at UNESCO meeting and Israeli tourism minister, while Palestinian delegation also visited seeking measures on Palestinian statehood in any deal. First Saudi ambassador to Palestine 26 Sept presented credentials to PA President Abbas.

Regional tensions remained high with Syria and Iran. Syrian state media reported Israeli airstrike on Tartous city 13 Sept killed two soldiers. Israel 20 Sept struck two Syrian structures in Golan Heights; alleged Israeli drone next reportedly killed two near Syrian town Beit Jinn (see Syria). Defence Minister Yoav Gallant 11 Sept accused Iran of building airport in southern Lebanon as launchpad for attacks.

➔ **Lebanon Fighting resurged between Palestinian factions in southern refugee camp, economic crisis and presidential vacuum**

persisted, and army raised alarm over uptick in irregular Syrian migrants.

Violent clashes continued inside southern Palestinian refugee camp. After period of uneasy calm following clashes in Aug, triggered by late July assassination of Fatah general and three of his bodyguards, intense fighting between Palestinian armed militants 7 Sept resurged in Ein el-Helweh Palestinian refugee camp in south; combatants 12 Sept agreed to ceasefire, which collapsed next day before new ceasefire was announced 14 Sept that held thereafter. Fighting killed at least 18 during month, displaced hundreds of camp residents, and forced UN refugee agency UNRWA to suspend all services in camp.

Economic crisis remained severe. Interim Central Bank governor 4 Sept announced replacement of much-criticised Sayrafa platform – used by bank to inject U.S. dollars into market – with alternative system likely using “managed float” of Lebanese Lira; International Monetary Fund 15 Sept praised decision but nonetheless criticised “lack of action” on “urgently needed economic reforms”. Over 100 judges 1 Sept began open-ended strike, protesting devalued salaries. Human Rights Watch 13 Sept reported children in public schools had fallen between one and two years behind their curricula due to school closures. Households in capital Beirut and Mount Lebanon faced recurrent water shortages, as state could not pay for diesel needed to run pumping facilities.

Presidential vacuum entered eleventh consecutive month. French envoy Jean-Yves Le Drian 11 Sept conducted three-day visit to try and break prevailing deadlock over election of new president, as parliament had not convened for presidential election session since June, but mission apparently failed to deliver tangible progress.

Concerns rose over irregular Syrian migration. Army 4 Sept claimed that it had stopped more than 1,000 Syrians trying to enter Lebanon over previous week. Caretaker FM Abdallah Bou Habib 6 Sept exhorted international community to provide aid to Syria, arguing deteriorating economic conditions there had sparked recent migration wave. Tensions could rise between host communities and Syrian refugees amid hostile rhetoric from political elites.

➡ Syria Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) reasserted control in north east amid tensions with Arab leaders, clashes continued between rebels and regime in north west and anti-govt protests persisted in south.

In north east, tensions simmered between SDF and Arab tribes. Following anti-SDF uprising in Deir ez-Zor province late Aug that saw clashes as Arab tribes effectively abandoned posts and called for unified opposition against group, U.S. officials 3 Sept met Arab tribal leaders and SDF commanders to diffuse tensions. SDF early Sept bolstered forces to regain control of towns and 6 Sept declared end of military operations but near-daily insurgent attacks continued. Renewed clashes 25 Sept erupted in Ziban town, as various actors late month attacked SDF positions across eastern Deir Ez Zor.

In north west, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and regime battled. Hostilities raged in southern Idlib during early Sept amid spate of Russian bombings as regime forces sought to regain strategic hills. HTS raid 1 Sept killed at least 16 soldiers in Latakia province and 2 Sept destroyed regime position in western Aleppo. HTS attack 15 Sept

killed five soldiers in Latakia. UN 19 Sept commenced aid deliveries to Idlib for first time since July.

Turkish-Kurdish clashes persisted, Israel conducted airstrikes. Turkish drone 7 Sept killed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) commander in Hasakah province and drone strikes 17 Sept killed five Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) members in Hasakah; 19 Sept killed high-ranking People's Protection Units (YPG) member in Manbij. SDF 18 Sept reportedly attacked Turkish-backed fighters, killing at least 13 in Tal Battalion, Aleppo province. Meanwhile, Syrian state media reported Israeli airstrike 13 Sept targeted Tartous city, killing two soldiers and injuring six, and missile factory in Hama province. Israel 20 Sept struck two Syrian structures in Golan Heights; alleged Israeli drone next reportedly killed two near Beit Jinn (see Israel-Palestine).

Anti-govt protests continued in south. Protests in Suwayda and Deraa provinces, sparked by currency crisis in Aug, took on more overtly anti-Assad tones as thousands marched calling for regime's downfall. Aside from Baath Party guards 13 Sept firing at protestors in Suwayda, injuring three, regime response centred on negotiations with Druze leaders.

Gulf and Arabian Peninsula

➡ **Iran Ties soured between Iran and nuclear watchdog amid safeguards concerns; govt implemented humanitarian deal with U.S., potentially clearing atmosphere for engagement on regional and nuclear files.**

In "unprecedented" move, govt scaled back cooperation with nuclear inspectors. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi 11 Sept opened Board of Governors meeting by noting "no further progress" in resolving outstanding safeguards concerns and voiced worry over "decrease in interest" among IAEA members; while confirmed decrease in Iran's rate of stockpiling uranium at highest end of enrichment likely forestalled formal censure resolution, 63 countries – including U.S. and E3 (France, Germany and UK) – urged Iran to "immediately" resolve safeguards concerns. U.S. and E3 13 Sept warned of possible censure resolution without Iran's "urgent actions". In move he described as "disproportionate and unprecedented", Grossi 16 Sept announced Iran had "effectively removed about one third of the core group of the Agency's most experienced inspectors"; U.S. and E3 18 Sept demanded Tehran "immediately reverse" decision.

In positive step toward de-escalation, U.S. and Iran concluded humanitarian deal. Five U.S. nationals detained in Iran, along with two family members, 18 Sept departed for Qatar en route to U.S.; Washington in turn released five imprisoned Iranian nationals and, in parallel, approximately \$6bn in Iranian assets held in South Korea were transferred to Qatari banks to be accessible for humanitarian purposes. Deal could serve as platform for more concerted diplomatic efforts to contain nuclear concerns and maintain momentum on regional engagement.

West continued sanctions. Citing Iran's non-compliance with 2015 nuclear deal, E3 14 Sept announced intent "to maintain nuclear proliferation-related measures and

arms and missile embargoes” due to expire in Oct; Iran pledged to respond. To mark anniversary of Mahsa Amini’s death on 15 Sept, U.S. blacklisted 29 Iranian persons and entities and imposed visa restrictions on thirteen individuals, while UK, Canada and EU issued designations. U.S. 18 Sept sanctioned Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence and Security as well as former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, citing their role in hostage-taking and human rights violations. U.S. 19 and 27 Sep sanctioned total of eighteen entities and individuals linked to Iran’s Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) program.

➡ **Iraq Protests turned deadly in Kirkuk city, govt relocated Iranian Kurdish groups away from Iranian border under pressure from Tehran, and Türkiye struck Kurdish militants in north.**

Clashes over Kurdish Democratic Party’s (KDP) presence in Kirkuk killed four. Following protests by Arab and Turkmen residents of Kirkuk city late Aug over govt decree to hand building used by Iraqi army back to KDP in line with deal between Baghdad and Erbil, KDP supporters 2 Sept held counterprotest demanding demonstrators unblock Kirkuk-Erbil highway, creating standoff with police acting as buffer. As clashes between sides erupted, security forces opened fire and killed four Kurds and injured over dozen; security forces next day deployed to city. Supreme Court 3 Sept issued temporary ruling delaying handover of building; absent lasting solution, violence could flare up again in run up to Dec provincial polls.

Govt began relocating Iranian Kurdish opposition groups. Ahead of 19 Sept deadline set by Iran for Iraq to disarm Iranian Kurdish opposition parties based in Kurdistan region, FM Fuad Hussein 12 Sept said Iraq had started relocating groups from Iranian border to undisclosed camps; Hussein next day visited Iranian capital Tehran to urge Iran not to resort to military action amid concern Iranian forces may stage operation to create buffer zone on Iraqi territory. Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) and Komala parties reportedly vacated bases in Erbil governorate, while Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK) – affiliated to Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) – refused to hand over weapons; deployment of Iraqi border guards reportedly caused tensions with PKK, raising prospect of violent escalation between pair.

Türkiye continued strikes on PKK targets. In north, clashes 6 Sept killed Turkish soldier. Authorities from Iraq’s Kurdistan region 17 Sept reported Turkish drone strikes killed four PKK members, including one senior member, near Sinjar mountains; drone strike next day killed three members of Peshmerga in Arbat airfield near Sulaymaniyah city. Reportedly, Turkish security forces 27 Sept targeted another seasoned PKK member near Sulaymaniyah.

Maritime dispute with Kuwait surfaced. Supreme Court 4 Sept nullified ratification of 2013 Iraq-Kuwait treaty regulating maritime navigation in Khor Abdullah channel.

➡ **Saudi Arabia Govt and Israel reportedly inched toward normalisation deal, ambassador to Iran commenced diplomatic duties, and officials hosted Houthi delegation for first time.**

Saudi Arabia and Israel signalled progress on possible normalisation deal. First official Israeli delegation 10 Sept arrived in capital Riyadh for UNESCO World Heritage Committee meeting. In first public visit by Israeli cabinet minister, tourism

minister 26 Sept arrived in Riyadh to attend UN World Tourism Organization event. In interview with U.S. broadcaster, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman 20 Sept said normalisation with Israel was getting closer “every day”. Israeli FM next day said normalisation deal could be in place “in first quarter of 2024” but U.S. officials cautioned that “there’s some way to travel” before reaching agreement. Amid reported progress, Palestinian delegation 6 and 14 Sept visited Saudi Arabia, requesting measures on Palestinian statehood be included in any deal with Israel. Saudi delegation 26-27 Sept visited occupied West Bank for first time in three decades; first Saudi ambassador to Palestine 26 Sept presented credentials to PA President Abbas (see Israel-Palestine).

Tehran and Riyadh exchanged ambassadors; officials held talks with Houthis. Fulfilling terms of reconciliation deal in March, albeit three months later than planned, Saudi ambassador to Iran and Iranian ambassador to Saudi Arabia 5 Sept commenced official duties in respective capitals. Riyadh 14-19 Sept hosted Houthi delegation and Omani mediators for political talks in first visit by rebels since outbreak of war (see Yemen).

➡ **Yemen Houthi delegation visited Saudi Arabia for first time in nine years, sporadic clashes surged between Houthis and govt forces, and Southern Transitional Council (STC) called for separate state.**

Houthi representatives travelled to Saudi Arabia for dialogue. In first official visit since outbreak of war in 2014, Houthi delegation and Omani mediators 14-19 Sept held talks with Saudi officials in Saudi capital Riyadh; talks reportedly included reopening of Houthi-controlled capital Sanaa airport and Hodeida port, reopening roads in Taiz, Al-Dhale, Marib and Hodeida governorates, prisoner exchange, roadmap for permanent ceasefire, ending airstrikes and cross-border attacks, establishing timeline for foreign troops to leave Yemen, and payment of public salaries from oil and gas revenues, possibly by directing revenue to neutral country’s bank; talks did not include representatives from Presidential Leadership Council (PLC). Meanwhile, Houthis 2 Sept announced that Yemenia airlines would increase flights between Sanaa and Jordanian capital Amman to six per week from 5 Sept.

Houthis and govt forces clashed sporadically. After hostilities broke out along several frontlines in Marib governorate in Aug, clashes 16 Sept erupted between govt forces and Houthis near Al-Mutoon district and 20 Sept reportedly in Taiz governorate. Bahrain late month claimed Houthi drone strike killed four Bahraini soldiers on Saudi Arabia’s border; Saudi-led coalition said it “reserves the right to respond”. In Houthi-controlled Sanaa, Houthis 21 Sept held military parade. Teachers in Houthi-controlled areas, including Sanaa, entered second month of strikes demanding unpaid salaries; in response, after announcing transportation allowance for teachers in late Aug, Houthis 8 Sept arrested representative of Yemeni Teachers Club in Mahwit.

STC leader renewed call for southern state. Following uptick in fighting between Houthis and STC-affiliated brigades in Aug in region straddling Al-Bayda governorate’s Al-Zahir district and Lahj governorates’s Al-Hadd and Yafea districts, resulting in dozens of casualties on both sides, head of STC and member of PLC Ayderous al-Zubaidi 22 Sept called for creation of separate southern state. Clashes between STC-affiliated group and suspected al-Qaeda militants 27 Sept reportedly

killed at least five STC-affiliated fighters in Abyan governorate.

North Africa

➔ Algeria Shooting incident revived longstanding tensions with Morocco, while UN redoubled efforts to strengthen Western Sahara peace process.

Security forces shot at individuals straying past Morocco's maritime border. Algerian coastguards late Aug fired on group of individuals after they crossed into Algerian waters from Morocco, leaving two dead; Algerian defence ministry 3 Sept said individuals, who were riding jet skis, had ignored warning shots. Morocco's National Council for Human Rights 4 Sept strongly condemned use of live ammunition against unarmed civilians, decrying incident as "severe violation of international standards and human rights laws". Several dozen Moroccan human rights activists same day gathered outside country's parliament in capital Rabat, denouncing "Algerian military regime" and demanding accountability.

U.S. stepped up diplomacy with Algeria, Morocco over Western Sahara. U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary for North Africa, Joshua Harris, late Aug-early Sept travelled to Algeria and Morocco ahead of UN envoy Staffan de Mistura's first visit to Morocco-controlled Western Sahara since his 2021 appointment (see Western Sahara); Harris reaffirmed U.S. support for UN-led political process, and announced strengthening of "strategic dialogue" with Algeria in likely attempt to encourage Algiers to distance itself from Russia.

UN expert visited Algeria to assess assembly rights after years-long delays. UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association, Clément Nyaletsossi Voule, 16-26 Sept conducted first visit of UN special rapporteur to Algeria since 2016; in preliminary remarks, Voule urged govt to pardon people convicted for their involvement in 2019 Hirak protest movement and "loosen up current tight restrictions on associations".

In other important developments. At UN General Assembly, heated exchange 26 Sept took place between Algerian and Moroccan representatives over Western Sahara.

➔ Egypt Amid mounting economic hardship, authorities announced bringing presidential election forward to December.

Authorities set presidential vote for December. National Election Authority 25 Sept scheduled presidential election initially expected in 2024 for 10-12 December, with possible runoff to be held on 8-10 Jan 2024; move comes as Cairo faces mounting pressure from International Monetary Fund (IMF) to switch to flexible exchange rate and take other steps which could escalate tensions.

IMF once again delayed disbursement of loan funds. Amid Cairo's lack of progress in meeting IMF's terms for \$3bn loan, IMF 17 Sept confirmed further postponement of first review of Egypt's economic reform program and disbursement of second tranche of funds, originally scheduled for March 2023. Meanwhile, statistics agency

10 Sept said annual inflation rate hit new record high of 39.7% in Aug, with food and drinks prices rising by 71.9% over one year.

Repression of opposition continued unabated ahead of presidential election. NGO Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights 26 Sept said security forces in recent weeks arrested around 73 campaign volunteers for opposition presidential candidate Ahmed Tantawi. Court 16 Sept sentenced opposition figure Hisham Kassem to six months in prison for slander, defamation and verbal assault on police officer; his political coalition, Free Current, next day announced boycotting presidential ballot in protest.

In other important developments. Explosion at air defence base in North Sinai 17 Sept killed seven soldiers; cause of blast – whether attack by Islamic State-affiliated militants or technical malfunction – remained unclear. U.S. administration mid-Sept reduced impact of human rights-related conditions on its military assistance to Egypt, withholding \$85mn of \$320mn conditioned on human rights; Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman 30 Sept threatened to place hold on remaining \$235mn.

➔ **Libya** **Floods devastated eastern city of Derna after Storm Daniel caused dam collapse, leaving thousands dead; UN envoy for Libya reiterated support for unified govt before elections.**

Up to 20,000 people feared dead after devastating floods. As Storm Daniel 11 Sept hit eastern Libya, two dams located upstream from coastal city of Derna collapsed; water swiped away entire neighbourhoods, resulting in an estimated 20,000 deaths. In rare sign of unity, aid in following days poured from across country. Various state agencies affiliated with Tripoli-based govt sent in aid and some military commanders from western Libya arrived in Derna. East-based authorities however denied entry to Derna to Tripoli-based govt ministers in likely attempt to prevent Tripoli from taking credit for rescue efforts. International support effort also defied traditional geopolitical divides. Traditional allies of general commander of Libyan National Army, Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, including United Arab Emirates and Egypt, immediately stepped in to help, but historical allies of Tripoli-based authorities, Qatar and Türkiye, also sent search and rescue teams and specialized equipment to help locate survivors. Debate erupted over human responsibility for tragedy. Hundreds of protesters 18 Sept rallied in Derna, blaming long-term neglect for dam collapse and chanting slogans against eastern parliament, House of Representatives (HoR), and its speaker Aguila Saleh. Country's top prosecutor 25 Sept announced detention of eight current and former officials pending investigation into collapse of dams; several others reportedly detained in following days.

UN envoy for Libya reiterated support for unified govt before elections. UN special envoy to Libya, Abdoulaye Bathily, early Sept met with several Libyan officials, including Aguila Saleh and Khalifa Haftar, and Tripoli-based PM Dabaiba. In meeting with latter, Bathily 5 Sept reiterated elections should take place under supervision of unified govt. Bathily in aftermath of Derna flood continued to urge Libyan stakeholders to step up efforts toward holding elections and unifying national institutions.

Controversy over former FM's meeting with Israeli counterpart persisted. After revelation that Tripoli-based FM Najla al-Mangoush held talks with her Israeli

counterpart, Eli Cohen, in Aug sparked widespread protests, leading to her dismissal, prosecutor's office 2-3 Sept launched investigation into bilateral meeting.

➡ **Tunisia Authorities continued to silence govt critics, controversy over EU-Tunisia migration deal persisted, and President Saïed kept hard stance against austerity despite risk of economic collapse.**

Judicial harassment of An-Nahda officials continued. Authorities 5 Sept arrested Islamist-inspired An-Nahda party's interim president Mondher Ounissi and senior official Abdel Karim Harouni as part of investigation into alleged illegal financing from abroad. Security forces same day also arrested former PM and An-Nahda leader Hamadi Jebali at his home in city of Sousse, released him after 7-hour interrogation by judicial unit responsible for financial corruption cases.

EU-Tunisia migration control deal continued to face pushback. In heated debate at EU parliament, EU lawmakers 12 Sept discussed EU-Tunisia migration control deal signed in July; several MEPs accused EU Commission of failing to recognise mounting evidence of Tunisian authorities' abusive treatment of sub-Saharan migrants, while others denounced deal's failure to reduce migration flows. European Ombudsman 15 Sept announced asking EU Commission to clarify how it plans to ensure respect for human rights in migration-related actions resulting from agreement. Meanwhile, Tunis mid-Sept denied entry to EU parliament's foreign affairs committee delegation; committee later "condemned" decision and demanded "detailed explanation".

In other important developments. Amid persistent risk of economic collapse, Saïed 8 Sept called on Central Bank to purchase treasury bonds to help finance budget directly, in spite of Central Bank Governor Marouane Abassi's previous warning that move could lead to higher inflation and greater pressure on banks' liquidity. Saïed 15 Sept also pressed PM Ahmed Hanachi, who took office 1 Aug, to set up commissions in every ministry to review public sector hiring processes, in likely attempt to break political parties' patronage networks.

📌 **Western Sahara UN envoy Staffan de Mistura visited Morocco-controlled Western Sahara for first time since appointment two years ago in bid to revive stalled political process on disputed territory.**

UN envoy visited Morocco-controlled Western Sahara for first time. Ahead of UN Security Council meeting on Western Sahara in October, UN envoy for Western Sahara, Staffan de Mistura, 4 Sept began first visit to Morocco-controlled Western Sahara since 2021 appointment; de Mistura had renounced previous trips due to Rabat-imposed restrictions on meeting list.

U.S. redoubled engagement to advance UN-led political process. U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary for North Africa, Joshua Harris, 31 Aug-4 Sept visited Algeria and Morocco to support UN efforts to revive peace process; Harris notably met with Polisario Front independence movement leader, Brahim Ghali, in Sahrawi refugee camps of Tindouf (Algeria).

In other important developments. At UN General Assembly, heated exchange 26 Sept took place between Algerian and Moroccan representatives over Western Sahara.

