



## Middle East and North Africa

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### Eastern Mediterranean

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↓ ⚡ **Israel/Palestine** Israel's destructive war in Gaza killed hundreds more Palestinians amid worsening famine and threat of Rafah invasion, while settler violence surged in West Bank; Israeli strike triggered unprecedented confrontation with Iran.

*In Gaza, Israel's deadly attacks continued amid discovery of mass graves, famine and Rafah offensive.* Israel killed almost 2,000 Palestinians in April, bringing death toll to at least 34,535 since Oct. Israel 1 April lifted two-week siege on al-Shifa hospital, which killed hundreds including medical staff; after withdrawal, observers on ground reported mass graves with bodies allegedly displaying signs of extrajudicial executions, torture and rape. Israel 1 April repeatedly targeted World Central Kitchen aid convoy, killing seven aid workers, prompting international outcry; UN data showed Israel has killed more than 180 aid workers since Oct. Israel 7 April pulled out most troops from Khan Younis city but 22 April reportedly re-entered city's east. Israel conducted repeated airstrikes on Rafah city, as it threatened ground invasion that could kill or again displace many of 1.4m Palestinians seeking refuge there. UNRWA chief 17 April warned "man-made famine is tightening its grip" across Gaza and accused Israel of continued aid obstruction, while World Food Program 24 April remarked "all three famine thresholds – food insecurity, malnutrition, mortality – will be passed in the next six weeks". Round of ceasefire talks 7 April resumed in Egypt; new momentum late April reportedly improved prospects of deal.

*Israel and Iran exchanged direct blows; Israel-Hizbollah hostilities intensified.* Airstrike on Iranian consular facility in Syrian capital Damascus, widely attributed to Israel, 1 April killed Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps personnel. In response, Iran 13 April unleashed barrage of 300 drones, cruise missiles and ballistic missiles at Israel in first ever direct attack (see Iran and Conflict in Focus). Meanwhile, hostilities between Israel and Hizbollah escalated (see Lebanon).

*Settlers rampaged West Bank.* Israeli forces and settlers killed dozens of Palestinians in April, bringing total killed in West Bank to at least 470 since 7 Oct. Notably, abduction and killing of 14-year-old Israeli 12 April sparked settler rampage in at least seventeen villages, killing four. In largest land seizure since Oslo Accords, Israel late March declared 800 hectares in West Bank "state land".

↓ ⚡ **Lebanon** Hizbollah and Israel traded heavy cross-border blows that escalated in scope and severity, underscoring risk of expanded conflict; mob violence flared against Syrian refugees.

*Hostilities between Hizbollah and Israel expanded in scope and severity.* Lebanon continued to face spectre of all-out war against backdrop of direct confrontation between Israel and Iran, and Israel's war in Gaza (see Iran, Israel-Palestine and Conflict in Focus). In parallel with Iran's unprecedented direct attack on Israeli territory 13-14 April, Hizbollah launched rockets against Israeli military in Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, citing earlier Israeli attacks on Lebanon rather than solidarity with Iran. In response, Israel struck Hizbollah targets in Baalbek in eastern Lebanon. Hizbollah 15 April claimed explosion that wounded several Israeli soldiers. Israel next day killed Hizbollah's Ismail Yusaf Baz, allegedly group's coastal region commander. Hizbollah drone strike 17 April wounded fourteen Israeli military personnel and four civilians – marking largest reported injury toll from single Hizbollah attack since Oct. Israeli drone strike 17 April killed at least three Hizbollah members. Further expanding scope of hostilities, Hizbollah 23 April launched drones at Israeli military base north of Acre city, marking deepest attack in Israel since Oct. Israel next day struck some 40 sites linked to Hizbollah, as Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant claimed military had killed around half of Hizbollah's brigade-level commanders. Hizbollah 25 April struck Israeli military convoy with anti-tank missiles and artillery, killing civilian. French mediation efforts continued; clashes could escalate further, particularly if Israeli govt responds to public pressure to confront Hizbollah more forcefully or opts to target Hizbollah in full or partial retaliation for Iranian attacks on its territory.

*Intimidation and violence flared against Syrian refugees.* Syrian men 8 April reportedly abducted and later killed Pascal Sleiman, official of Christian party Lebanese Forces, which called incident “a political assassination” in thinly-veiled allusion to Hizbollah's potential involvement; in response, Hizbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah accused Lebanese Forces of instigating civil war. After various political leaders linked Sleiman's murder with presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, vigilante groups in parts of capital Beirut, Byblos city and elsewhere reportedly targeted Syrians with intimidation and mob violence.

➡ **Syria Clashes between local strongmen in south killed dozens, Israeli strike on Iran's consular facility in Damascus sparked unprecedented direct confrontation, and Iran-backed groups attacked U.S. forces.**

*In south, deadly clashes between rival local strongmen killed dozens.* In bloodiest upsurge in region in years, underscoring insecurity and lack of state authority, IED 6 April killed eight children in Sanamayn city, Deraa province; group led by local leader Mohsen al-Haimed next day blamed explosion on rival group led by Ahmed Jamal al-Labbad, and attacked homes of latter, killing twenty. Separately, tensions 25 April escalated in Suwayda when local factions arrested three govt officers in response to arrest of university student during anti-govt protests in Feb; govt 28 April sent reinforcements to region, raising concerns of potential military operation.

*Israel struck Iranian consulate, triggering unprecedented direct confrontation.* Airstrike on Iranian consular facility in capital Damascus, widely attributed to Israel, 1 April killed two senior Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) commanders and five officers; in response, Iran 13 April unleashed massive barrage of drones, cruise missiles and ballistic missiles at Israel (see Iran, Israel-Palestine and Conflict in Focus). While direct hostilities late April subsided, risk remained high of direct or indirect attacks between parties and their allies/proxies in Syria. Rocket fire 8 April targeted Israeli-occupied Golan Heights; Israel next day struck army military

infrastructure in Mahajjah area, Deraa province; suspected Israeli airstrike 19 April struck army positions in Deraa province.

*In east, Iran-backed groups targeted U.S. bases.* Iran-backed groups 1 April launched drone attack on U.S. Al-Tanf base, Homs province, and 6 April launched missile at Conoco gas field, Deir ez-Zor province. Rockets launched from Iraq 21 April targeted U.S. base in Rumalyn, Hassakah province (see Iraq).

*In other important developments.* Türkiye targeted Kurdish militant targets, amid risk of escalation in coming months (see Türkiye). Tribal militias continued attacks on Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF): notably, 3 April killed two SDF members at checkpoint in Dhiban town, Deir ez-Zor province. ISIS insurgency continued as alleged ISIS attacks 18 April killed 22 regime soldiers and affiliated fighters near Sukhna town, Homs province.

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## **Gulf and Arabian Peninsula**

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↓ **Iran** Years-long shadow war between Iran and Israel escalated into overt and direct hostilities, with Tehran launching unprecedented retaliatory attack on Israeli territory with massive barrage of drones and missiles.

*Israeli strike on Iran's Syrian consulate triggered unprecedented confrontation.* Airstrike on Iranian consular facility in Syrian capital Damascus, widely attributed to Israel, 1 April killed two senior Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) commanders and five officers, marking most significant in string of Israeli operations against Iranian military personnel since late 2023. After Iran's leadership loudly vowed revenge, IRGC 13 April seized *MSC Aries*, container ship linked to Israeli ownership, in Gulf of Oman. In first ever direct attack, Iran later same day unleashed massive barrage of 300 drones, cruise missiles and ballistic missiles at Israel, which according to Israeli and U.S. officials were intercepted with near-total success with exception of minor damage at Israeli airbase and reported wounded civilian. Tehran signalled action was limited and concluded, warning any Israeli response would be met by more substantial counter-response; hinting of weaponising nuclear program, senior IRGC official 18 April warned that "reconsidering nuclear doctrine and policies of [Iran] is probable and imaginable" were Israel to target nuclear facilities. Israel 18-19 April conducted drone/missile attack in Isfahan city, impact of which Tehran largely dismissed. Both sides late April refrained from further hostilities, but risk of direct confrontation remains as pair seek to establish new red lines (see Conflict in Focus). Meanwhile, U.S. 25 April sanctioned more than two dozen additional persons and entities linked to development or transfer of Iranian UAVs.

*Separatist militants in south east launched deadly attacks.* In Sistan and Baluchestan province (south east), separatist Baluch militant group Jaish al-Adl 3 April launched coordinated assault on military and police targets in Rask and Chabahar cities, which IRGC next day said killed ten security forces personnel and eighteen militants. Jaish al-Adl ambush 9 April reportedly killed six policemen.

*Authorities renewed imposition of cultural conservative mandates.* Govt 13 April launched renewed campaign to enforce mandatory hijab wearing on women, which

could reignite social and political discontent that led to widespread anti-regime protests following death of Mahsa Amini in 2022.

➔ **Iraq Iran-backed armed groups carried out first strikes on U.S. targets in Iraq and Syria in months, govt engaged U.S. on withdrawing U.S.-led coalition troops and Turkish President Erdoğan made landmark visit.**

*Iran-backed groups resumed attacks on U.S. forces after lull.* Marking first such attack since early Feb, rockets launched from Zummar town, Ninewa governorate, 21 April targeted U.S. base in Syria; U.S. next day shot down drones near Ain al-Asad air base in Anbar governorate. Islamic Resistance in Iraq 1 April claimed aerial attack that struck building in Israeli city Eilat; group throughout April claimed series of unconfirmed attacks on Israeli targets. Amid direct hostilities between Iran and Israel, govt 13-14 April closed airspace and PM Sudani 16 April claimed no drones or missiles were fired at Israel from Iraq (see Iran, Israel-Palestine and Conflict in Focus).

*Iraq and U.S. discussed troops' drawdown, PM Sudani visited Washington.* U.S. and Iraq 8 April held third round of talks within Higher Military Commission on drawdown of U.S.-led anti-Islamic State mission in Iraq. PM al-Sudani 15 April met U.S. President Biden in U.S. capital Washington, signing some twenty agreements, committing to talks on security cooperation and announcing plans to hold joint Security Cooperation Dialogue. Lack of clarity on future of U.S.-led coalition's mandate risks raising tensions between govt and Iran-aligned paramilitary groups who are pushing for U.S. withdrawal.

*Erdoğan made first state visit since 2011, as Turkish strikes persisted.* Erdoğan 22 April met PM Sudani in capital Baghdad and Kurdish authorities in Erbil, signing 25 cooperation agreements, including on security, energy and water management; Erdoğan also claimed pair discussed "joint steps" against Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) ahead of suspected Turkish summer offensive. Clashes with PKK 9 April killed Turkish soldier; Turkish military 15 April launched airstrikes in mountains Asos and Hakurk areas of north.

*Baghdad-Erbil tensions improved.* Ahead of Sudani's visit to U.S., Federal Finance Ministry 4 April said it released funds to pay March salaries of civil servants and social security beneficiaries in Kurdistan region, easing tensions between Baghdad and Erbil over delayed payments.

➔ **Saudi Arabia Riyadh denied any role in intercepting Iranian projectiles targeting Israel.**

*Heightened regional tensions underscored risk of expanded conflict.* In response to suggestions that Riyadh intercepted Iranian drones and missiles launched 13-14 April in retaliation for Israel's bombing of Iran's consulate in Syrian capital Damascus, Saudi sources denied any role in defending Israel (see Iran, Israel-Palestine and Conflict in Focus). Reflecting improved relations with Iran, first group of Iranian pilgrims in nine years 22 April travelled to Saudi Arabia for umrah pilgrimage. U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 29 April met Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Riyadh to discuss tensions in region and Gaza crisis.

*Govt promised to start Sudan mediation process.* On sidelines of International Humanitarian Conference for Sudan in French capital Paris and amid growing scrutiny of Saudi Arabia's role in mediating Sudan's conflict, Riyadh 15 April promised to restart Jeddah talks within three weeks (see Sudan).

➔ **Yemen Red Sea crisis continued amid ongoing Houthi attacks and U.S.-UK airstrikes, clashes erupted between Houthis and govt-aligned forces in south, and new Houthi currency widened economic fault lines.**

*Houthis targeted international shipping in adjacent waters.* Houthis continued attacks on international shipping in Red Sea and Gulf of Aden: notably, Houthis 7 April claimed targeting two Israeli ships, UK ship and number of U.S. frigates over 72-hour period; 10 April claimed targeting four vessels, including U.S. warship; 24 April said it targeted U.S. and Israeli ships; 29 April fired three missiles at vessel in Red Sea. Group 26 April launched drone attack targeting vessel some 600km off coast in Arabian Sea/Indian Ocean, in first confirmed assault at such range. In response, U.S. 1 April destroyed unmanned surface vessel, throughout April shot down Houthi armed drones, while U.S. and UK airstrikes 1 April targeted Houthi locations in Hodeida province and capital Sanaa; Houthis 8 April reported that U.S. airstrike injured civilian in Hodeida governorate. U.S. and UK 15 April reportedly conducted airstrikes in Taiz governorate. Israel's repeated threats to launch ground invasion in Gaza's Rafah city could prompt Houthis to escalate maritime attacks (see Israel-Palestine).

*In south, hostilities broke out between Houthis and rival forces.* Clashes between Houthis and separatist Southern Transitional Council, part of internationally-recognised Presidential Leadership Council (PLC), late March erupted along Karsh front in Lahj governorate, reflecting increasing tensions on western coast where Houthis are attempting to consolidate positions near Mocha city and Bab al-Mandeb Strait to forestall possible ground operations against them. Houthis 3 April reportedly attacked forces of PLC, allegedly killing eleven fighters. Houthi drone 12 April reportedly killed at least three. Houthis 20 April announced clashes with govt forces killed four Houthi officers. Shelling 26 April killed three women and two girls in Taiz's Maqbna district; govt and Houthis exchanged accusations over incident.

*Houthis launched new currency, escalating economic war with govt.* Houthi-controlled Central Bank in capital Sanaa late March issued new metal 100 riyal coin in Houthi-governed areas in north to replace damaged banknotes; move is expected to exacerbate financial divide with PLC-controlled Aden Central Bank and lead to further devaluation of riyal.

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## **North Africa**

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➔ **Algeria Political opposition emerged to President Tebboune's anticipated run for second term; meeting with Libya and Tunisia spurred talk of new regional grouping.**

*President of centrist party criticised President Tebboune's possible re-election bid.* Ahead of 7 Sept presidential election, Soufiane Djilali, president of moderate centrist Jil Jadid party, 8 April said under Tebboune "political life has been anaesthetised",

and indicated it would be preferable if president did not run for second term; Tebboune yet to officially confirm his candidacy amid reports of internal splits within security forces over who to support.

*Algerian, Libyan and Tunisian heads of state held high-level discussions.* Amid continued Algiers tensions with Rabat, Tebboune 22 April met Tunisian President Kaïs Saïed and Libyan Head of Presidential Council Mohamed al-Menfi in Tunisian capital Tunis as part of new effort to convene every three months as group of three, raising prospect of new bloc of central North African states as alternative to pre-existing body Arab Maghreb Union that includes Mauritania and Morocco. However, al-Menfi 24 April sent envoys to Mauritania and Morocco emphasising need to include both in regional bloc cooperation, dampening attempts to create new grouping.

*Tensions increased with United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Niger.* Strains with UAE remained high following Tebboune's 30 March televised interview in which he indirectly accused Emiratis of "stirring trouble" in conflicts in Libya, Mali and Sudan; mistrust further fuelled by UAE state-owned company Taqa 17 April beginning discussions to take over Spanish gas company Naturgy that has 49% stake in Medgaz pipeline linking Algeria to Spain, amid fears UAE would gain leverage over Algeria and its economy. Meanwhile, tensions also increased with Niger over migration flows; Niamey 3 April summoned Algerian ambassador with Algerian authorities following day responding in kind.

*In another important development.* Govt remained focused on non-alignment, hosting Russian and NATO officials 13 and 17 April respectively.

➡ **Egypt Officials continued advocating for ceasefire in Gaza while economic pressures forced govt to implement rolling blackouts and asset sales.**

*Govt continued calls for Gaza ceasefire, amid worries of Palestinian refugee influx.* President Sisi 8 April penned joint op-ed in Washington Post newspaper with French President Emmanuel Macron and Jordanian King Abdullah II calling for immediate ceasefire in Gaza and negotiations toward two-state solution; Sisi same day met with Palestinian PM Mohamed Mustafa in capital Cairo to again reject scenario of mass displacement of Palestinians. Amid fears of influx of refugees from war, FM Shoukry 12 April called U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken to reiterate Cairo's opposition to possible Israeli military operation in southern Gazan city of Rafah, while Al-Araby Al-Jadeed news site 18 April reported Cairo reinforced troops near Gaza border in case ground invasion leads to refugee crisis. Egypt and Turkey 20 April affirmed alignment on Gaza situation and humanitarian aid.

*Govt resorted to rolling blackouts and sale of state-owned assets.* Amid economic downturn, electricity ministry 14 April announced resumption of daily rolling power outages, previously suspended during holy month of Ramadan, to save \$1bn annually. International media outlets 22 April reported govt plans to buy natural gas internationally to meet rising domestic demand amid declining production from existing fields. Meanwhile, Planning Minister 21 April said authorities aim to raise \$1bn in 2024 and \$1.5bn in 2025 through sale of state-owned assets to private investors.

*In other important developments.* Sisi 2 April sworn in for third consecutive term following Dec elections and promised to implement recommendations of national dialogue initiative issued Aug 2023 which included electoral reform and protection of human rights. Police 4 April arrested fourteen pro-Palestinian activists on charges of forming terrorist group and circulating fake news; detainees released 7 April amid uncertainty over status of cases.

➡ **Libya UN Special Envoy resigned due to political deadlock; disputes over financial control continued as Russia delivered military materiel to eastern forces.**

*UN head of mission resigned amid ongoing political deadlock.* UN Special Representative for Libya Abdoulaye Bathily 16 April resigned citing entrenched resistance among Libyan leaders and no appetite for negotiations or reunification among rival govts and military coalitions; Bathily also blamed international actors for meddling and attempting to carve out influence. Meanwhile, High National Elections Commission 16 April issued statement affirming readiness to conduct municipal and general elections, although notable gaps in electoral laws remained that would likely hamper any vote.

*Rival govts sparred over financial challenges.* Tripoli-based Finance Ministry 9 April issued statement blaming current liquidity crisis on parallel spending by eastern authorities, accusing them of relying on counterfeit currency. Meanwhile, east-based House of Representatives 30 April passed 2024 budget for its govt amid uncertainty over whether Tripoli-based Central Bank of Libya would provide funds; earlier, eastern authorities 16 April published court order appointing guardianship committee over Libyan Investment Authority funds and accused Tripoli-based govt of “financial abuses, violation and embezzlement”.

*Russian equipment arrived in east.* Russian navy vessels reportedly delivered armoured personnel carriers and rocket launchers to eastern military commander Khalifa Haftar-led forces; social media 14 April showed shipments unloaded in eastern port of Tobruk, marking Russia’s first openly conducted delivery of military material using navy vessel. Meanwhile, in continued insecurity, judicial police reportedly linked to armed group clashed with Stability Support Authority militia members in capital Tripoli 11 April, with no casualties reported. Tripoli govt 13 April dispatched members of Law Enforcement Administration to oversee maintenance work at Ras al-Jedir crossing with Tunisia, but border point remained closed amid unresolved disputes over who will manage security. Political activist Seraj Daghman reported dead in prison southeast of Benghazi city 19 April, with some reports suggesting he may have been executed.

*In other important developments.* Algerian, Libyan and Tunisian heads of state 22 April held high-level discussions in Tunisian capital Tunis over stronger regional integration (see Algeria).

➡ **Mauritania Govt summoned Malian ambassador amid cross-border attacks against jihadists that harmed civilians.**

Malian soldiers and allied Russian paramilitary Africa Corps, formerly Wagner Group, 7 April reportedly wounded and killed several civilians in Madallah village in Fassala commune in south east during cross-border anti-jihadist operations. Govt 19

April summoned Malian Ambassador in protest; following day, Defence Minister Hanena Ould Sidi travelled to Malian capital Bamako for talks.

➔ **Tunisia** **Uncertainty regarding upcoming elections persisted as opposition faced crackdown and youth violence surged in capital Tunis.**

*Election uncertainty remained as opposition members faced continued detention.* Ahead of Sept-Oct presidential elections, President Saïed 6 April declared he will not let candidates supported by foreigners run, alluding to Mondher Zenaidi, minister under former President Ben Ali currently in exile in France, who in March implied he would run in polls; opposition continued to fear Saïed will limit competition or even cancel elections on claim that his mandate reset in 2022 following adoption of new Constitution. National Council of Regions and Districts 19 April held first session and elected Imed Derbali president, amid fears it may be used to subvert parliament since its prerogatives remained murky. Uncertainty continued over fate of fourteen members of opposition jailed since Feb 2023, with their period in pre-trial custody over the fourteen months maximum under Tunisian law; judges 12 April accused 40 people, including the fourteen opposition members, of terrorism, with accusation chamber to confirm or deny accusations 2 May. Opposition coalition National Salvation Front 30 April announced intention to boycott presidential elections unless political opponents freed and judicial independence restored.

*Youth violence surged in Tunis amid worsening economic crisis.* After three people early April self-immolated in separate incidents due to deteriorating living conditions, youth gangs 12-13 April clashed in several districts of capital Tunis, resulting in knife injuries and unprecedented degree of violence. Judiciary 15 April delivered 30 detention warrants, with unusually high number leading to fears of criminal group retaliation against police including through riots and clashes.

*In other important developments.* Saïed 1 April declared audits into public sector showed many jobs had been obtained through corruption or favouritism, though removal of thousands of public servants could lead to frictions. Govt 22 April hosted Algerian and Libyan heads of state for high-level discussions in Tunis over stronger regional integration (see Algeria).

➔ **Western Sahara** **UN mediation appeared at standstill; reports emerged of French interest to invest in Morocco-controlled Western Sahara.**

*UN discussions with Morocco, Algeria and Polisario Front remained stalled.* UN envoy Staffan de Mistura 4 April met Moroccan FM Nasser Bourita as latter expressed unwillingness to compromise on stances, including demanding Moroccan overall sovereignty over an autonomous Western Saharan and refusal to allow further process until ceasefire violations end. De Mistura 15 April also met Polisario Front representative to UN Sidi Mohamed Omar and 16 April Algerian FM Ahmed Attaf, where both reiterated their traditional position supporting Western Saharan independence; UN Security Council (UNSC) 16 April held closed door consultations on issue, ahead of which Omar called on UNSC to take tangible action to enable UN Mission to fulfil mandate and allow Western Saharan self-determination and independence.



*France reportedly began preparations to invest in Morocco-controlled Western Sahara.* News site Africa Intelligence 1 April reported France seeking to finance series of projects in Morocco-controlled Western Sahara, in attempt to try and mend relationship with Morocco. Polisario Front 6 April denounced plans, criticising Morocco for its “intransigence and arrogance” over investment claims.