

## Daily

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## MAX - MENA Region Daily Summary - July 12, 2021

*The following report reviews current events in the MENA region and their possible effect on business continuity and security.*

### Highlights of the Day

- **Iraq:** IED attacks target US logistical convoys in Basra, Diwaniyah provinces on July 11; meant to compel US troop withdrawal from country
- **Libya:** Protesters block entrance to Tobruk's Hariga Oil Port on July 11; allot for potential disruptions to operations
- **Syria:** Government announces on July 10 increase in price of bread, diesel; likely to exacerbate anti-government sentiments, trigger protests
- **Yemen:** Anti-Houthi forces claim 'liberation' of Bayda Governorate's Sawmaa District on July 11; extent of victory likely exaggerated

### Actionable Items

#### **Algeria: Authorities announce three-week extension of night time curfew in 14 provinces from July 12; adhere to government instructions**

The government has announced a three-week extension of the night time curfew in the following 14 provinces of Algeria from July 12 to August 2: Laghouat, Batna, Bejaia, Blida, Tebessa, Tizi Ouzou, Algiers, Setif, Sidi Bel Abbes, Constantine, M'sila, Ouargla, Oran, and Boumerdes. Residents of these provinces will be required to remain inside their homes from 00:01 (local time) until 04:00 during the three-week period.

*Those operating or residing in the aforementioned 14 provinces of Algeria between July 12 and August 2 are advised to adhere to government instructions and take necessary precautions to ensure business continuity due to the extension of the night curfew.*

#### **Israel: Administrative, maintenance staff of public healthcare facilities to go on**

### **strike on July 13; anticipate disruptions, delays**

The strike has reportedly been organized to denounce insufficient salaries and heavy workload. The chairperson of the Israeli Nurses' Federation has reportedly declared the organization's support for the labor action but has not explicitly stated that nurses will join the strike. The duration of the planned strike remains unclear.

This comes amid Israeli health workers' long-standing grievances over insufficient funding and perceived excessive workload. These grievances were particularly exacerbated in 2020, when major outbreaks of the COVID-19 pandemic threatened to overwhelm the Israeli healthcare system. Precedent labor action, such as a nurses' strike in July 2020 and a general health workers' strike in public hospitals and community health centers on May 10, highlight the long-standing dissatisfaction among health workers. While the planned labor action does not include medical personnel, it is likely that administrative and maintenance staff will largely adhere to the strike call in public healthcare facilities by abstaining from performing non-emergency tasks. Thus, disruptions and delays to medical services can be anticipated across Israel over the coming days.

*Those operating or residing in Israel on July 13 and over the coming days are advised to defer non-critical and non-emergency medical care while anticipating disruptions and delays at public healthcare facilities due to the planned strike by administrative and maintenance staff.*

### **Libya: Protesters block entrance to Tobruk's Hariga Oil Port on July 11; allot for potential disruptions to operations**

Unemployed graduates reportedly staged the protest to denounce the lack of employment opportunities in the oil sector. Video footage did not indicate the occurrence of unrest. It remains unclear whether operations at the port have been disrupted as a result of the protest.

This comes against the backdrop of a struggling national economy characterized by high unemployment rates particularly among the youth. The Libyan National Army (LNA)-imposed seven-month-long oil blockade, which ended in September 2020, greatly exacerbated the nation's underlying economic issues with the move costing the economy an estimated 9.8 billion USD in lost revenue. It also decreased employment opportunities in the oil industry, which resulted in large segments of the youth, particularly university graduates, becoming increasingly disillusioned and frustrated. The latest protest is thus not unprecedented, with similar demonstrations having occurred at other oil and gas facilities in the past. For example, unemployed graduates organized a protest in front of the Ruwais Power Station to demand job opportunities for youth in the area on May 19. Further such demonstrations can be anticipated in the coming weeks.

*Those conducting business out of the Hariga Oil Port in Tobruk on July 11 and over the coming days are advised to allot for potential disruptions to operations at the facility, including delivery delays.*

## **Tunisia: On July 11, authorities announce fresh COVID-19 restrictions in Tataouine, Siliana governorates; adhere to government instructions**

The authorities have announced that a night curfew will be implemented between 20:00 (local time) and 05:00 in Tataouine Governorate from July 11-31 due to a spike in COVID-19 infections. All shops and commercial spaces, except for restaurants, will remain closed during this period. The authorities have also announced a one-week extension of the night curfew in Siliana Governorate from July 12 till July 19. The curfew will be implemented between 20:00 and 05:00. All events and gatherings will remain banned during this period and all non-essential shops will remain closed.

*Those operating or residing in Tataouine or Siliana governorates on July 12 and over the coming weeks are advised to adhere to government instructions and take necessary precautions to ensure business continuity due to the imposition of a night curfew in these areas.*

## **Notable Events**

### **Iraq: IED attacks target US logistical convoys in Basra, Diwaniyah provinces on July 11; meant to compel US troop withdrawal from country**

The attacks did not result in any material damage or casualties.

These attacks were likely perpetrated by Iran-backed Shiite militias as these groups are known to frequently use roadside IEDs to target US-led Coalition logistical convoys in Iraq. Such attacks are aimed at hindering the US-led Coalition forces' operations in Iraq and thus put pressure on the US to fully withdraw its forces from Iraqi soil. The fact that these IEDs are detonated while the convoys are traveling along highways indicates that the perpetrators have prior knowledge of the route of these convoys and are closely monitoring their movement from a nearby location. This is because the perpetrators would need to be within close proximity of the IED to trigger it. This highlights the significant gaps in these convoys' security protocols. Although these attacks are specifically meant to target US-led Coalition logistical convoys, they carry the risk of collateral damage as civilian vehicles utilize these routes as well. Nevertheless, Iran-backed Shiite militias will continue to target US-led Coalition logistical convoys over the coming weeks to maintain pressure on the US.

### **Israel & Palestinian Territories: Israel announces on July 11 freezing of 184 million USD in tax revenues to PA; attempt to pressure PA**

The Israeli security cabinet reportedly voted to withhold the revenues to offset the Palestinian Authority's (PA) pension payments to Palestinians who were involved in acts of militancy against Israelis.

This comes amid persistent friction between Israel and the PA surrounding the latter's payments to Palestinian security prisoners and convicted militants. Israeli security cabinets have regularly declared similar asset freezes, for instance in February 2019. The

latest decision thus highlights the Naftali Bennet-led government's effort to increase pressure on the PA to abandon payments to convicted militants. This strategy is unlikely to be successful as the abandonment of these payments would undermine the PA's legitimacy among the Palestinian populace. This would contradict Israel's interest in preserving political stability in the West Bank, including the PA's functioning security coordination with Israel. These concerns have likely been instrumental in convincing the Israeli authorities to forgo the deduction of the cost of pension payments from tax transfers on several past occasions, such as in December 2020. Regardless, the current development is liable to increase tensions between Israel and the PA over the coming weeks.

### **Syria: Government announces on July 10 increase in price of bread, diesel; likely to exacerbate anti-government sentiments, trigger protests**

The Syrian government increased the price of a liter of diesel from 180 to 500 Syrian Pounds (SYP) and doubled the price of subsidized bread to 200 SYP.

This comes amid a series of austerity measures adopted by the Syrian government over recent months to boost its revenues, which have been severely impacted by the civil war and international sanctions, particularly on the export of Syrian oil from which the government derives a significant part of its income. While the latest increase in bread prices can be partly linked to the ongoing drought in Syria, which has significantly reduced wheat production levels in recent months, this announcement also coincides with the government's decision to increase public sector salaries by 50 percent as well as raise public sector and military pensions by 40 percent. Therefore, the latest price hikes may be part of an effort to compensate for the anticipated increase in government spending. Regardless, this development will elevate the economic distress of segments of the local populace, which will aggravate anti-government sentiments and possibly trigger protests in government-held territories of Syria.

### **Syria: HTS announces on July 11 arrest of ten IS militants in Idlib's Kafr Tekharim, Foua; comes amid persistent crackdown on IS's structures**

According to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's (HTS) General Security Service (GSS), several IEDs and firearms were seized. The arrestees, described as members of Islamic State (IS) cells, are suspected of involvement in "criminal acts".

This development comes amid occasional counter-militancy operations targeting IS operatives across HTS-controlled territory. On January 31, the GSS announced the killing of an IS militant in Idlib's Dana for allegedly assassinating a former HTS-affiliated Syrian Salvation Government (SSG) official. On January 13, two IS militants detonated suicide belts during GSS raids in Idlib's Sarmada and Kafr Tekharim. Despite the rarity of IS-claimed acts of militancy in HTS-controlled areas, the current raid highlights HTS's persistent effort to clamp down on the rival Sunni jihadist group. IS is regarded as imperiling the already precarious security environment of the region, which witnesses frequent asymmetric attacks. While the nature of the arrestees alleged "crimes" remain

unspecified, their detention indicates the GSS's systematic effort to gather intelligence on and dismantle IS's organizational structures in the region. Further anti-IS raids are thus likely to occur in HTS-controlled territory over the coming weeks.

### **Yemen: Anti-Houthi forces claim 'liberation' of Bayda Governorate's Sawmaa District on July 11; extent of victory likely exaggerated**

Sawmaa is located in southeastern Bayda, approximately 30 km east of Bayda city.

This follows anti-Houthi forces' claim that they made large-scale territorial advances vis-a-vis the Houthis in Bayda Governorate's Sawmaa, al-Zahir, and Na'im districts between July 3-6. This, combined with the Houthis' current preoccupation with their offensive against anti-Houthi forces in Marib Governorate, likely allowed anti-Houthi forces to break through the Shiite group's defenses in Bayda Governorate. However, anti-Houthi forces may be exaggerating the extent of their latest success in Sawmaa District. This is because Bayda Governorate is one of the Houthis' main strongholds in Yemen and anti-Houthi forces have been unable to make major territorial gains in this region despite multiple attempts in recent years. This weakens their claim that they were able to secure full control of Sawmaa District within such a short span of time. They may have prematurely claimed victory in Sawmaa to demoralize the Houthis. Nevertheless, the anti-Houthi forces will attempt to consolidate their foothold in areas surrounding Bayda city over the coming days and weeks to facilitate an offensive on the provincial capital.

### **Yemen: Protest against appointment of new oil company director recorded in Aden's al-Mualla on July 11; likely staged by pro-Hadi elements**

Yemen Petroleum Company workers denounced the Southern Transitional Council (STC)-affiliated Governor of Aden's decision to appoint a new director for the company. The previous director was appointed by the Hadi-led government. The Hadi-led government's Prime Minister (PM), Dr. Moeen Abdul Malek overturned the governor's decision on July 11.

This comes amid persistent tensions between the Hadi-led government and the STC. The decision to replace the director by Aden's Governor, who is also the STC's Secretary-General, comes amid the STC's efforts to appoint its loyalists in leadership positions within strategic organizations in Yemen. This is also likely the main reason for the Hadi-led government's swift overturning of the decision, as the former fears that it may lose its control over the company due to the new director's close ties with the STC. The protest was thus likely staged by pro-Hadi elements to showcase opposition to the STC's perceived attempts to control key public organizations. The overturning of the Governor's decision will elevate tensions between the Hadi-led government and the STC, and further delay the implementation of the Riyadh agreement.

## **Upcoming Notable Dates**

## **July 15**

- **Turkey:** Democracy and National Unity Day

## **July 17-18**

- **Israel:** Tisha B'Av

## **July 19**

- **MENA:** Arafat Day

## **July 19-23:**

- **MENA:** Eid al-Adha

## **July 23:**

- **Egypt:** Revolution Day
- **Oman:** Renaissance Day

## **July 25:**

- **Tunisia:** Republic Day