



Weekly

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MENA Weekly Summary - July 14 - July 20, 2021

Highlights of the Week

This report reviews notable events this week in the Middle East and North Africa. These include unruly protests over socio-economic grievances in Algeria, unrest due to water shortages in Iran's Khuzestan Province, ongoing demonstrations to "End Impunity in Iraq" despite the arrest of the suspected assassin of a prominent security analyst, the continuation of the political deadlock in Lebanon as PM-designate Hariri failed to reach a deal to form a government, the killing of a civilian in Libya due to the launch of a mortar shell from a wedding, an OPEC+ agreement to increase oil output following a compromise between Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and the dismissal by President Erdogan of a controversially appointed rector at a university in Turkey.

July 14 - July 20, 2021

- Unruly protests were recorded in various parts of **Algeria** due to socio-economic grievances
- Near-daily unrest occurred in **Iran's** Khuzestan Province amid increasing water shortages
- Iraqi PM al-Kadhimi announced the arrest of the suspected killer of a prominent security analyst amid protests to "End Impunity in **Iraq**"
- The political paralysis in **Lebanon** continued as PM-designate Hariri failed to form a government
- A civilian was killed in **Libya's** Benghazi when a mortar shell was launched at a wedding
- OPEC+ reached a deal to increase oil output after **Saudi Arabia** and the **UAE** compromised
- President Erdogan dismissed the rector of Istanbul's Bogazici University in **Turkey**

MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA



Algeria

Notable Developments:

1. On July 15, protesters clashed with security forces in Ghardaia Province's Berriane and set fire to the Berriane Municipality building as well as the state-owned electricity and natural gas distribution company office.
2. Additional unruly protests were reported in Ouargla, Adrar, and Touggourt.
3. On July 14-15, protests denouncing water cuts were recorded in Algiers Province's Bordj al-Bahri, Dar al-Beida, Bouzareah, Ain Benian.

ANALYSIS: The protests in Algeria's outlying areas, such as oil-rich Ouargla, come amid prolonged grievances against the government's perceived unequal distribution of economic opportunities. Large segments of the local populace believe that employment opportunities in these provinces are not commensurate with their contribution to Algeria's revenue from its natural resources. They also feel marginalized due to their perception that the government invests in Algeria's coastal northern provinces at their expense. Meanwhile, the protests against water cuts in Algiers Province show the gaps in essential infrastructure even in the more developed coastline, which are particularly acute during the summer period. These developments indicate a current shift in focus from political to socio-economic concerns in this region. This may indicate that some locals were at least temporarily placated by the large vote share received by independent candidates in the June 12 legislative elections and the formation of the new government. Protesters now aim to pressure the government on the socio-economic front to demand a more equitable distribution of resources and an upgrade in essential infrastructure. However, given that the government will remain unable to address such grievances in the short-term due to revenue losses in the past year, unruly protests will likely persist over the coming weeks, including in Algiers Province.

Iran

Notable Developments:

1. Unruly demonstrations against water shortages were recorded across Khuzestan Province every night between July 14-19, including in Ahvaz, Mahshahr, Kut Abdollah, Khorramshahr, Susangerd, Shadegan, and Hamidiyeh.
2. Security forces reportedly responded with tear gas and live ammunition in several instances. Iranian authorities confirmed the death of one individual in Shadegan, but blamed "rioters" for the killing.

ANALYSIS: Water shortages in Khuzestan Province are currently being exacerbated due to an ongoing drought and a drastic drop in precipitation, making it one of the driest years in the last 50 years. Major rivers in the region, which include the Karun river and its tributary Dez, as well as the Karkheh river, are partially dried out as water from these sources has been redirected to various provinces for industrial use for many years. The authorities' building of multiple dams and hydropower stations have also decreased the locals' accessibility to water for their essential needs. This perception of alleged mismanagement of water resources by the government, combined with the long-standing feelings of marginalization and heightened anti-government sentiments among the minority Arab population in Khuzestan, is the main reason for the escalation in violence at the latest protests. The reported use of force and the authorities' attribution of blame to the "rioters" for the killing of a protester, is liable to exacerbate grievances and fuel

separatist aspirations in the province. If the protest movement in Khuzestan is able to sustain its momentum over the coming days, it has the potential to spark anti-government protests in other provinces, including Tehran.

Iraq

Notable Developments:

1. On July 16, Prime Minister (PM) al-Kadhimi announced the arrest of an individual suspected of assassinating Hisham al-Hashemi, a renowned Iraqi security analyst, in July 2020.
2. On July 18, multiple anti-government protests held under the slogan “End Impunity in Iraq” were staged across the country, including Baghdad and Basra. The demonstrations were organized to denounce the recurrence of targeted assassinations of anti-government activists in recent months, particularly in southern Iraq.

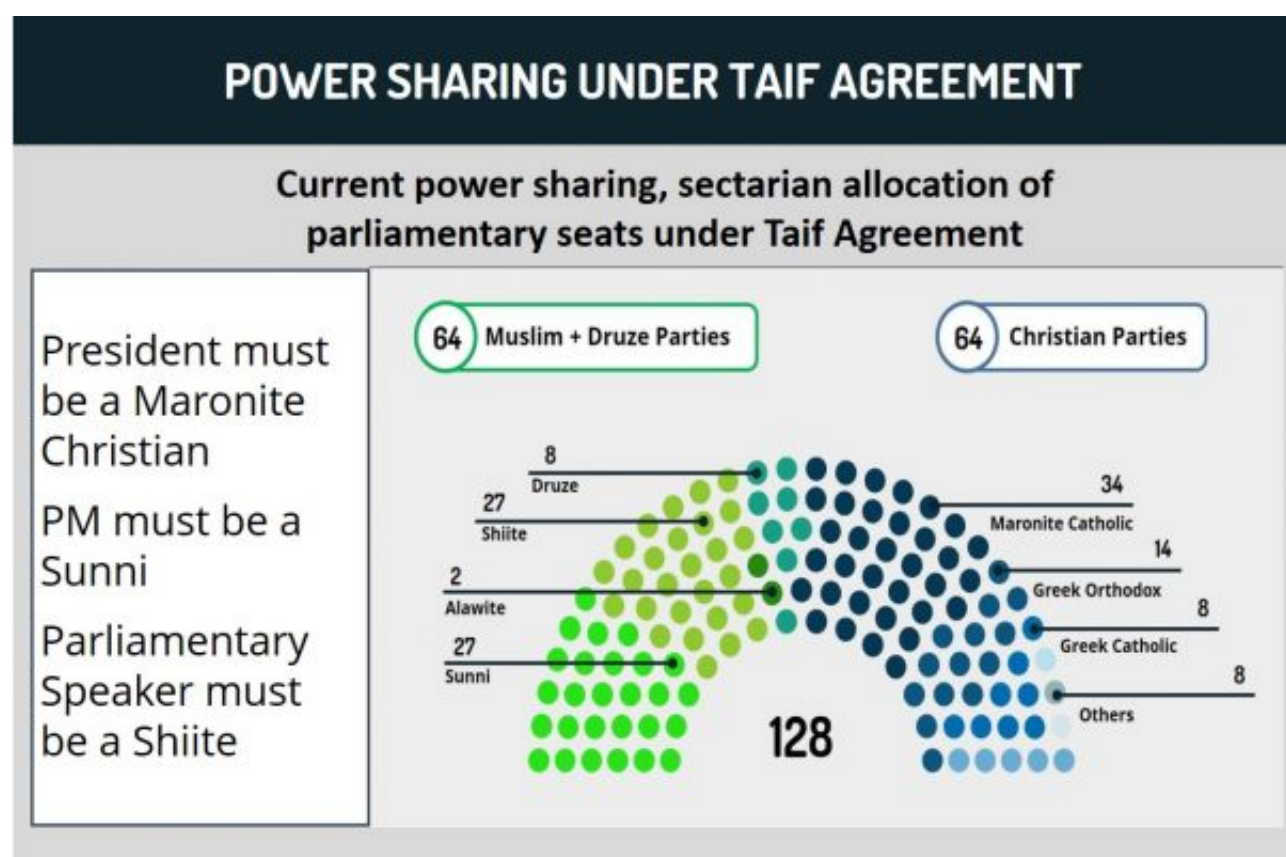
ANALYSIS: These developments occur amid persistent anti-government protests across Iraq, particularly Baghdad and the southern provinces, over the past year. For example, on May 25, mass demonstrations were staged in the capital to denounce the Iraqi government’s perceived lack of resolve to hold the suspected perpetrators of such assassinations, namely Iran-backed Shiite militias, accountable. Within this context, al-Kadhimi’s announcement represents an effort to boost the government’s legitimacy by projecting good governance. However, the subsequent anti-government demonstrations indicate that the arrest has done little to appease the protest movement or change their perception that the government is unwilling to crack down on the Shiite militias for their alleged attacks against political dissidents. The extended length of time taken to apprehend al-Hashemi’s killer likely contributed to the public’s poor reception of the announcement. Given the Shiite militias’ extensive influence in the country, both politically and militarily, they will likely remain undeterred by the arrest and persist with their strategy of eliminating voices of dissent. Therefore the protest movement will continue organizing similar anti-government demonstrations in the coming weeks and months.

Lebanon

Notable Developments:

1. On July 15, Prime Minister (PM)-designate Saad Hariri announced that he is abandoning his effort to form a government after he failed to reach an agreement with President Michel Aoun over his proposed list of 24 non-partisan cabinet members.
2. The Lebanese political system functions according to the 1989 Taif agreement that provides the basis for a power-sharing agreement among the various political parties along sectarian lines. It stipulates that the PM must be a Sunni.
3. The largest Sunni bloc and Hariri’s political party, Future Movement, has announced that it will not nominate anyone for the premiership.
4. On July 20, the value of the Lebanese Pound (LBP) fell to 22,000 against the USD.

ANALYSIS: Hariri's decision comes after repeated consultations with Auon since October 2020 over the formation of the government. The announcement has created widespread disillusionment among the local population who view the sustained political deadlock as the primary cause for the economic crisis. Political parties are yet to announce a replacement candidate for Hariri. Thus, coupled with the Future Movement's decision not to nominate anyone for the premiership, the political paralysis will continue over the coming weeks. While the PM Hassan Diab-led caretaker government will perform regular government functions, it will be unable to implement structural reforms required to systematically revive the economy. The deteriorating economic situation will therefore amplify acute socio-economic grievances and may escalate into nationwide demonstrations to demand an overhaul of the political system. Overall, the security, political, and economic situation will remain unstable for the foreseeable future.



Libya

Notable Developments:

1. The authorities arrested two individuals after a mortar shell landed in Benghazi's al-Laithi District on July 18. The mortar shell was launched from a local wedding celebration in the city.
2. One civilian was reportedly killed and at least five others were wounded.

ANALYSIS: This incident comes amid increased stability in Libya in recent months as rival political and military actors are currently committed to the UN-led reconciliation and stabilization process. Celebratory shooting during weddings and other events is considered commonplace in Arab countries. However, mortar shelling is very rare. This incident thus points towards the widespread proliferation of arms, including artillery equipment, in Libya. The perpetrators were likely linked to or affiliated with militias in the region as they are more likely to possess such weaponry. It cannot be entirely ruled out that the shelling was a deliberate attack as part of inter-militia tensions in Benghazi. This is partly supported by the fact that such inter-militia tensions, particularly in al-Laiti District, are not unprecedented. This was illustrated on April 4 when armed clashes erupted between the Libyan National Army's (LNA) al-Saiqa Special Forces and an official of the criminal investigation unit in Benghazi. Regardless, the perpetrators' swift arrest shows that local security forces retain the capacity to acquire and act upon intelligence in a short span of time. That said, given the widespread proliferation of arms, as well as the occasional diverging interests of different militia factions in Libya, further such security incidents may be recorded in Benghazi over the coming months.

Saudi Arabia & UAE

Notable Developments:

1. On July 19, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)+ extended an agreement to increase oil output by 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) each month from August, with the goal of ramping up output to two million bpd by the end of 2021. The increase in oil output is expected to continue until December 2022, as opposed to April 2022, as was previously agreed.
2. The baseline production level, which refers to the maximum volume of crude oil a country can produce as recognized by the OPEC, will be revised for Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Russia, Iraq, and Kuwait from May 2022.

ANALYSIS: This agreement comes amid the gradual recovery of global oil prices following their initial decline against the backdrop of the pandemic. It specifically follows the reaching of a compromise between the UAE and Saudi Arabia on July 14 regarding the increasing of baseline production levels. While the UAE demanded an increase of its baseline production level from 3.17 mbpd to 3.8 mbpd, it managed to reach a consensus with other OPEC members and agreed on 3.5 mbpd. This highlights the UAE's relative influence within OPEC. However, as the new baselines are only applicable from May 2022, this was likely a calculated effort to appease the UAE and prevent potential fallouts, especially between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. Overall, this highlights the UAE and Saudi Arabia's willingness to find a middle ground to secure the interests of their oil-dependent economies. Coordinated energy policy by OPEC+ members will help in the stabilization of the global oil markets over the coming months.

Turkey

Notable Developments:

1. On July 14, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan dismissed Melih Bulu, rector of Istanbul's Bogazici University. Naci Inci, Bulu's deputy, was appointed acting rector.
2. On July 16, Inci dismissed a lecturer citing a disciplinary investigation over alleged "insults of superiors". He reportedly played an active role in a protest movement led by Bogazici students and staff denouncing President Erdogan's appointment of Bulu in January 2021.

ANALYSIS: These developments come amid demonstrations over recent months by the Bogazici protest movement demanding the resignation of Bulu, a member of Erdogan's Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP). Bulu's nomination was perceived by many students as an attempt to tighten oversight over Bogazici University and undermine freedom of expression at the institution, whose student body and academic staff largely lean towards opposition parties. Turkish authorities had previously cracked down on protesters, some of whom had been labeled by the government as "terrorists". Thus, Erdogan's dismissal of Bulu will likely be perceived by the activists as indicative of their success to pressure the government. However, the ousting was likely due to Erdogan's understanding that Bulu will prove unable to quell internal dissent. Given Inci's ties with Bulu, his nomination is likely to be perceived as a continuation of the government's illegitimate interference into the university's administration. In this context, Inci's dismissal of a critical lecturer further indicates that authorities will continue the clampdown on critical individuals within educational facilities. This will prompt activists to stage further demonstrations over the coming weeks, particularly in Istanbul, which have a high risk of unrest.

Other Developments

- **Algeria & Morocco:** The Algerian foreign ministry recalled its ambassador to Morocco on July 18 to protest the Moroccan UN envoy's comments in support of independence for Algeria's Kabylie region. The Kabylie region, encompassing mainly the provinces of Tizi Ouzou and Bejaia, is a region inhabited by Algeria's Berber ethnic group.
- **Egypt:** The Islamic State (IS) claimed that IS-affiliated Wilayat Sinai militants conducted an attack against an Egyptian Armed Forces (EAAF) water tanker near North Sinai's Sheikh Zuweid on July 18.
- **Iran:** On July 19, the authorities announced a six-day lockdown in Tehran from July 20-25 to contain rising COVID-19 cases. Market places, public offices, movie theaters, gyms, banks, and restaurants will be closed during this period in Tehran, as well as in the adjacent Alborz province. Entry and exit to and from both Tehran and Alborz provinces are also banned.
- **Iraq:** On July 15, prominent Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, the leader of the Sadrist Movement and the "Peace Companies" militia, announced that he is withdrawing from both the upcoming general elections in October as well as his support for the current government.

- **Jordan:** US president Joe Biden hosted King Abdullah II in the White House on July 19 to hold bilateral talks. Biden conveyed to the monarch that the US will “always be there” for Jordan.
- **Morocco & Israel:** The Israel National Cyber Directorate announced on July 15 that Rabat and Jerusalem signed a cyber defense accord in an effort to strengthen their bilateral cybersecurity partnership.
- **Saudi Arabia:** On July 18, authorities restricted the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca to 60,000 fully vaccinated citizens and residents for the second year in a row to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus in the Kingdom.
- **Turkey & Israel:** Turkey’s ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) spokesperson stated on July 14 that Ankara and Jerusalem are reportedly working on improving bilateral relations.
- **Yemen:** The anti-Houthi forces claimed to have seized territory from the Houthis in various parts of Marib’s Rahba and Mahaliya districts on July 15 and 17.

The Upcoming Week

- **July 21:** In **Israel**, access to weddings and similar large social events with more than 100 guests will be reserved to individuals who are fully vaccinated, recovered from a COVID-19 infection or who receive a negative result from a COVID-19 PCR test taken within the previous 48 hours.
- **July 21-23:** Across the **MENA** region, many countries have declared public holidays for Eid al-Adha.
- **July 22:** COVID-19 vaccination centers will reopen in **Dubai** after a three-day closure for the Eid al-Adha holiday.
- **July 23:** Revolution Day, which marks the anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, will be celebrated in **Egypt**.
- **July 25:** Across **Tunisia**, Republic Day will be celebrated. The holiday commemorates the declaration of a republic in the country in 1956.

- **July 25:** The first commercial flights between **Morocco** and **Israel** are scheduled to commence as part of various bilateral agreements reached by the governments.
- **July 25:** Flights for passengers coming from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka will resume to the **UAE's** Dubai.
- **July 26:** US President Joe Biden will host **Iraqi** Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi at the White House.