



Daily

28

JUL

13:14 UTC

MAX - MENA Region Daily Summary - July 28, 2021

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

Highlights of the Day

- **Iran:** Armed operatives allegedly working for Israel's Mossad arrested on July 27; part of strategy to deflect responsibility
- **Iraq:** KRG announces new regulations for tourists until August 3; adhere to government instructions
- **Tunisia:** Authorities reportedly prevent local businessmen, officials from leaving country on July 26-27; impending arrest campaign likely
- **UAE:** Abu Dhabi reduces business establishment fees by more than 90 percent from July 27; effort to foster business, economic growth

Actionable Items

Iraq: KRG announces new regulations for tourists until August 3; adhere to government instructions

During the evening hours of July 27, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) announced a series of new COVID-19 measures to contain the spread of the virus. The measures will be in place until August 3 when the authorities will reconvene to review the measures. The new regulations state that tourists who are not vaccinated or have not been tested within the past 48 hours will not be allowed to enter the KRG-administered territories. It will be mandatory to wear masks in public institutions, public areas and touristic places, including for vaccinated individuals. Public gatherings and funerals will be prohibited. Cinemas and party venues will be closed, but swimming pools and sporting venues will be allowed to stay open in accordance with current health guidelines related to mask use and social distancing. Religious sites will be allowed to remain open if they comply with the health guidelines. In addition, people employed at places of worship, malls, markets, restaurants and cafes should be vaccinated or take a PCR test every 72 hours.

Those operating or residing in Iraq from July 28 until August 3 are advised to adhere to government instructions and take necessary precautions to ensure business continuity due to revision in COVID-19 guidelines and travel to the KRG-administered territories. Remain abreast of local authorities' updates.

Israel & Palestinian Territories: US CDC raises COVID-19 alert for travel to Israel, PT on July 26; routine procedure, adhere to regulations

The US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) raised the travel alert level to Israel and the Palestinian Territories (PT) to level 3, the second-highest in its categorization of the risk posed by COVID-19 abroad. The notice added that travelers should ensure they are fully vaccinated before traveling to Israel and that unvaccinated travelers should avoid nonessential travel. The US authorities also stated it has "no plans to arrange repatriation flights" from Israel at this time.

COVID-19 cases in Israel have increased over recent weeks. While the seven-day average on June 27 was 142 confirmed cases per day, this figure has increased to 1,426 as of July 27. The CDC's elevated risk level thus highlights this increase in morbidity in the region. However, the advisory is a routine procedure that the CDC undertakes to monitor the levels of contagion in foreign countries as part of its guidance to travelers. It is not reflective of a sudden suspension of air travel between Israel and the US. The risk level could be elevated further if cases continue to increase in Israel.

Travelers to Israel and the Palestinian Territories are advised to remain abreast of advisories issued by health authorities and adhere to all local COVID-19 regulations to avoid disruptions to travel and operations.

Kuwait: Unvaccinated citizens to be banned from traveling abroad from August 1; remain cognizant of government instructions

The Kuwaiti cabinet announced on July 27 that only citizens and expats who have been fully vaccinated government will be allowed to travel abroad. This measure will go into effect on August 1. The rule excludes children under the age of 16, citizens holding a health ministry certificate stating their vaccination exemption, and pregnant women holding a pregnancy certificate from the authorities. In June, Kuwaiti authorities announced that fully vaccinated foreigners will be allowed to enter the country from August 1 after banning this measure in February to limit the spread of COVID-19 related infections. The Kuwaiti civil aviation authority also announced that all arrivals in the country must show proof of a negative COVID-19 PCR test taken no longer than 72 hours prior to departure and must not be showing any symptoms. All arrivals must quarantine at home for seven days or take a PCR test upon arrival in Kuwait, which if negative would exempt them from home isolation.

Those operating or residing in Kuwait from August 1 onwards are advised to remain cognizant of the authorities' updates concerning changing regulations for international travel and COVID-19 measures.

Saudi Arabia: Unvaccinated individuals to be banned from entering government

facilities, public transport from August 1; adhere to government measures

According to the Saudi Ministry of Interior, the authorities will ban unvaccinated citizens and residents from entering government facilities and public transport from August 1. Individuals who have not received both jabs of any of the approved COVID-19 vaccines will be prohibited from entering any governmental and private facilities, regardless of being employed by the facility. All economic, cultural, recreational and sports events will also be limited to fully vaccinated Saudi citizens and residents. Entry will be granted upon providing the authorities with proof of vaccination via the dedicated “Tawakkalna” app, including when using public transportation. This follows the Saudi authorities’ decision on July 24 to ban all unvaccinated citizens and residents from entering public establishments such as malls and restaurants from August 1 and from traveling outside the Kingdom from August 9. These measures are part of the ongoing efforts by Saudi Arabia to limit the spread of COVID-19 in the Kingdom.

Those operating or residing in Saudi Arabia from August 1 onwards are advised to remain cognizant of government measures on the requirement of COVID-19 vaccination for entry on public transportation and government establishments.

Notable Events

Iran: Armed operatives allegedly working for Israel’s Mossad arrested on July 27; part of strategy to deflect responsibility

A network of Mossad agents was reportedly arrested near Iran western border. The number of arrestees and their nationality remains unspecified. Large cache of weapons, including grenades, rifles, shotguns, and ammunition were seized. Iranian authorities allege that the armed operatives were planning to use the weapons to provoke violence during the ongoing protests in the country.

On July 6, Iran accused Israel of conducting an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) attack against a nuclear-linked facility in Karaj on June 23, which was largely understood to have been conducted from within Iran using ground operatives. The latest operation was thus conducted as part of efforts to locate Israel-linked individuals within Iran. That said, this development comes amid frequent attempts by the Iranian government to portray external actors as playing an important role in instigating internal instability in the country. Tehran has often employed this strategy to deflect responsibility during times of heightened anti-government sentiments such as amid the current protests surrounding the water crisis in Khuzestan. Therefore, similar arrests of foreign-linked individuals and operatives may be recorded over the coming days.

Saudi Arabia: Government bodies sign MoU for ‘Saudization’ of finance sector on July 27; effort to increase job opportunities for Saudi citizens

The Saudi Central Bank (SAMA), the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (MHRSD), and the Human Resources Development Fund (HADAF) signed a joint Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to increase Saudi citizens’ employment in the financial sector. The MoU aims to create around 200,00 jobs for Saudi nationals.

This development is part of the “Saudization” process, which aims to prioritize the employment of Saudi nationals at the expense of foreign workers across various sectors. For instance, on July 4, the government announced the localization of jobs in legal consultancy firms, law firms, real estate firms, cinemas, driving schools, and engineering and technical professions. The government’s efforts to implement “Saudization” policy coupled with the economic repercussions of COVID-19 have led to a sharp decrease in the expatriate population, with approximately 607,000 expatriates leaving Saudi Arabia in 2020. However, authorities will likely encounter challenges to effectively implement this measure because Saudi nationals generally lack the relevant qualifications for high-skill jobs as compared to expatriate workers. Regardless, the government will likely announce additional “Saudization” measures over the coming weeks and months.

Saudi Arabia & Yemen: Coalition intercepts four ballistic missiles, two UAVs launched towards Kingdom on July 27; attacks to recur

According to the official Saudi news agency, the projectiles and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) were intercepted above the Kingdom’s southern Jazan Province. The Houthis have not claimed the attacks as per the time of writing.

This development occurs comes amid an overall downtick in the number of Houthi-perpetrated cross-border attacks towards Saudi Arabia over recent weeks. The latest attacks constitute the third such attempt in July compared to at least twelve such operations in June and 14 in May. One main reason for this downtick could have been the anti-Houthi forces’ launch of new offensives in southern and eastern Bayda as well as in southwestern Marib governorate since the start of July. Therefore, it is possible that the Houthis were preoccupied with preserving its territorial control within Yemen, which may have resulted in a decrease in the allocation of its resources towards conducting cross-border attacks into the Kingdom. Nonetheless, the latest attack shows the Houthis’ continued capabilities to launch attacks into Saudi Arabia, indicating that further similar attacks will be recorded over the coming days and weeks.

Syria: SAA fire mortar shells, raids private residences in Daraa al-Balad on July 27; breach of agreement to increase tensions

A large convoy of Syrian Arab Army (SAA) military vehicles and tanks entered Daraa city and besieged the Daraa al-Balad neighborhood. Subsequently, pro-government forces reportedly raided several civilian residences. Locals opened fire to prevent the raids, and, in the resulting exchange of fire at least two civilians were wounded. Following this, the SAA reportedly fired at least five mortar shells.

On July 24, the Syrian government and the local committees in Daraa al-Balad signed an agreement for the disarmament of locals in exchange for pro-government forces establishing three military checkpoints and ending the government-imposed siege in the area. It is possible that the military reinforcements were brought in under this pretext. However, the pro-government forces subsequently surrounded Daraa al-Balad and carried out raids to likely search for weapons in the residences of the locals, which has been

perceived by the locals as a breach of the agreement. Given that the Syrian government will likely continue to use force or conduct additional raids, back-and forth hostilities remain likely between the former and locals in Daraa-al Balad environs.

Tunisia: Authorities reportedly prevent local businessmen, officials from leaving country on July 26-27; impending arrest campaign likely

Reports indicate that President Kais Saied issued an order prohibiting various individuals from leaving Tunisian territory. The list supposedly includes businessmen, senior officials, members of Parliament (MPs), government delegates, mayors, and presidents of sports clubs.

Saied's reported decision indicates that the president is likely preparing to initiate an arrest campaign targeting high-level individuals in the coming days. This is supported by the fact that over the past two days Saied temporarily suspended the work and powers of the Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP), dismissed MPs holding some of the most important cabinet ministries, and lifted the parliamentary immunity of all members of parliament. Saied will likely justify this anticipated arrest campaign as an effort to project accountability to the local population, thus legitimizing his decision to suspend the powers of the ARP. That said, this directive is more likely to impact government officials and high-profile Tunisian businessmen who have close ties to the government rather than foreign nationals traveling to and from Tunisia. Overall, the on-ground security situation in Tunisia will remain volatile over the coming days.

UAE: Abu Dhabi reduces business establishment fees by more than 90 percent from July 27; effort to foster business, economic growth

Business set-up fees have been reduced by 94 percent in the emirate of Abu Dhabi. Individuals will need to pay 1,000 Dirhams (approximately 270 USD) to get started. For existing businesses, license renewal fees have also been reduced to 1,000 Dirhams.

The Abu Dhabi government aims to encourage prospective businesses to set-up their organizations in the emirate by making it cost-effective and removing administrative hurdles for doing business. The UAE reportedly has zero corporate tax rates. Taken together, such measures highlight the efforts to encourage private sector businesses to consider Abu Dhabi as a viable place of operations. These measures are also aimed at making Abu Dhabi a more attractive option for businesses as compared to Dubai which remains the commercial capital of the UAE at present. The implementation of such measures will diversify the government's sources of state income and enable it to move away from its dependence on oil-related earnings in the long run. Overall, such measures will make Abu Dhabi a competitive business environment both regionally and internationally and foster economic growth in the coming months.

Upcoming Notable Dates

July 28

- **Iran:** Eid-e-Ghadir

July 30

- **Morocco:** Throne Day

August 9

- **MENA:** Islamic New Year