



Daily

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13:41 UTC

MAX - MENA Region Daily Summary - August 26, 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:** Parliament approves 18 ministers appointed by President Raisi on August 25; marks hardliners' full control of government branches
- **Israel:** Israel accelerates 'operational plans' to strike Iranian nuclear sites, per August 25 statement; to influence Washington's policy
- **Israel & Palestinian Territories:** August 25 protest along Gaza Strip-Israel border ends without major violence; risk of escalation remains
- **Saudi Arabia:** Riyadh, Moscow sign agreement on military cooperation, per August 24 reports; reflects Saudi concern over relations with US
- **Turkey:** Three PKK militants killed in UAV attack in Sirnak's Kupeli on August 24; part of Ankara's strategic use of UAVs

Actionable Items

Israel: Lists of 'red', 'orange', 'yellow' risk countries to be updated from August 31; remain cognizant of authorities' instructions

The "red" list of countries to which travel is banned for Israeli citizens and residents will include only Bulgaria, Brazil, Mexico, and Turkey from August 31, with Spain and Georgia being moved to the "orange" list. Slovakia, Poland, and Bahrain have been added to the "yellow" list, which already includes Hong Kong, Hungary, Taiwan, New Zealand, China, Singapore, and the Czech Republic. Vaccinated or recently recovered travelers from "yellow" list countries must isolate until receiving a negative COVID-19 PCR test result upon arriving in Israel. Austria, Australia, and Moldova have been shifted from the "yellow" to the "orange" list. The "orange" list includes all countries not on the "red" or "yellow" list. Those traveling to Israel from the "orange" list countries will have to isolate for 14 days regardless of whether they have been vaccinated or recently recovered from the virus. There is an option to shorten the isolation period upon the receipt of two negative PCR test results. Those who are not vaccinated or recently recovered from

COVID-19 will be required to quarantine regardless of the country of departure.

Those planning to travel to and from Israel over the coming weeks are advised to remain cognizant of the authorities' instructions regarding quarantine regulations based on the country colour system as well as other travel restrictions and health procedures to ensure business continuity.

UAE: Authorities announce new travel regulations for Abu Dhabi on August 25; remain cognizant of authorities' updates

The UAE's national carrier, Etihad Airways, announced that incoming travelers to Abu Dhabi are required to register on the Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship (ICA) application or website prior to flight. Individuals who are flying to Abu Dhabi on or before August 27 are required to register at the earliest. Individuals who have received both doses of COVID-19 vaccination can register no later than five days before their flight. These new measures are not applicable to UAE nationals and travelers transiting through Abu Dhabi. Vaccinations are not currently mandatory for entry into Abu Dhabi.

Those planning to travel to Abu Dhabi on August 27 and over the coming days are advised to remain cognizant of authorities' updates regarding quarantine regulations, travel restrictions, and health procedures to ensure business continuity.

Notable Events

Iran: Parliament approves 18 ministers appointed by President Raisi on August 25; marks hardliners' full control of government branches

The Parliament rejected the appointment of the education minister out of 19 ministers nominated by President Ebrahim Raisi. At least two ministers have previously worked for the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Former IRGC commander-in-chief Mohsen Rezaei was appointed as the Vice President for Economic Affairs on August 25.

The Parliament's approval, with almost no viable opposition to Raisi's appointments, was widely anticipated and likely reflects the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's intent to form a fully hardliner-dominated cabinet. This is further evidenced by the lack of any vetoes on the parliament's approval of cabinet ministers by the Guardian Council, a body overseen by Khamenei. The move provides hardliners with full control of the branches of government along with the legislature and the judicial, which will mitigate opposition to decision-making. Over the coming weeks, the cabinet will likely prioritize tackling the COVID-19 pandemic and overall economic deterioration in Iran. To this end, the new cabinet's formation will not imperil the potential resumption of the nuclear talks in the coming weeks or months as the negotiations are reported to be backed by Khomeini.

Iraq: IS claims on August 24 IED attack on security patrol vehicle in Salahuddin's al-Aith; effort to co-opt counter militancy operation

Al-Aith is located approximately 60 km from Tikrit. The security patrol consisted of both Iraqi security forces and Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) members. As per the claim, the IED attack that occurred on August 22 resulted in the “killing and wounding of those on board”. On August 22, Iraqi security forces announced the killing of three militants and raiding of hideouts in Al-Aith, during which two soldiers were slightly injured and a vehicle damaged.

Islamic State (IS) militants are active in northern and central Iraq including Salahuddin and frequently target Shiite PMU members. With regards to the latest incident, it is likely that IS is attempting to portray what was most likely a counter-militancy attack as a planned attack perpetrated by them. This is a likely effort to raise their profile and boost the morale of their supporters amid repeated counter-militancy operations. Nevertheless, this highlights the entrenched militant presence in Salahuddin Governorate and shows that IS maintains significant operational capabilities in the region. For these reasons, militant attacks and counter-militancy operations are likely to recur in Salahuddin over the coming weeks.

Israel: Israel accelerates ‘operational plans’ to strike Iranian nuclear sites, per August 25 statement; to influence Washington’s policy

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Chief of Staff, Aviv Kohavi, stated that the recent “progress” in the Iranian nuclear program had led the IDF to “speed up” its plans to strike Tehran’s nuclear sites.

This comes amid Israel’s long-standing perception of Iran’s nuclear program as a threat to its national security. This concern has been heightened by Washington’s efforts to restore the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and Iran’s recently bolstered nuclear activities. In July, the Israeli government approved a budget increase to boost the IDF’s preparedness for a potential strike against Tehran’s nuclear program. Kohavi’s latest statement is likely aimed at dissuading the US from reviving the JCPOA ahead of the Israeli Prime Minister (PM) Naftali Bennett’s visit to Washington, where he will reportedly attempt to convince US President Joe Biden that the JCPOA is no longer relevant due to Tehran’s increased nuclear capabilities. Israel also aims to convey that it is militarily preparing itself to deter Iran from advancing its current nuclear trajectory. Tensions between Israel and Iran will remain particularly over the coming weeks and months.

Israel & Palestinian Territories: August 25 protest along Gaza Strip-Israel border ends without major violence; risk of escalation remains

Over 1,000 Gazans participated in the demonstration. One IED was thrown at the border fence. Israel Defense Forces (IDF) used tear gas and rubber bullets. Hamas security personnel reportedly worked to restrain the protesters. Later, on August 25, Israel eased commercial restrictions on the entry of goods into the Gaza Strip.

This comes amid a spike in tensions along the Gaza Strip-Israel border. On August 21, an Israel Border police officer was seriously wounded by gunfire during riots along the Israel-

Gaza border fence. On August 21-22 and 23-24, Israeli airstrikes targeted Hamas facilities. The fact that the latest border protest transpired without major violence, with Hamas personnel working to prevent such a scenario, indicates that the Islamist movement does not aim to enter a broad conflict with Israel or severely anger partners like Egypt, which closed the Rafah border crossing following the violence at the border on August 21. The easing of commercial restrictions shows Israel's readiness to reward Hamas for de-escalatory conduct. The risk of an escalation remains elevated in case of further perceived transgressions from Gaza-based militants by Jerusalem.

Lebanon: President Aoun on August 25 signs decree to protect energy resources; will not alter security, socioeconomic hardships

The decree tasks the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), internal security forces as well as the municipal police to monitor energy resources. President Michel Aoun signed a decree to grant 600 billion Lebanese Pounds (LBP) for urgent social assistance to the public sector employees.

Anti-government protesters have in recent weeks resorted to storming energy plants as well as using weapons such as RPGs and firearms against fuel stations amid the acute fuel shortages. The deployment thus indicates an effort to prevent further violence as the destruction of critical infrastructures will further amplify the ongoing socioeconomic crisis. There are reportedly 320,000 public sector employees in Lebanon. In May, they staged a mass anti-government strike to denounce the economic crisis in Lebanon. The allocation of funds is thus likely an appeasement measure to prevent further labor actions and disruptions to operations in the public sector. Overall, these decrees are unlikely to significantly change the status quo in Lebanon given the ongoing political stalemate regarding government formation. Therefore, the overall security and economic situation in Lebanon will remain unstable over the coming weeks.

Saudi Arabia: Riyadh, Moscow sign agreement on military cooperation, per August 24 reports; reflects Saudi concern over relations with US

The agreement was signed by the Saudi Deputy Defense Minister, Prince Khalid bin Salman, and the Russian Deputy Minister of Defense, Alexander Fomin, on August 23, during an international military forum in Moscow.

US allies in the Middle East are highly concerned about the US military redeployment from the region. June 18 reports indicated that the US would withdraw personnel, aircraft, and air defense systems, including several Patriot aerial defense batteries from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, and Jordan. Washington also announced the withdrawal of its Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system from Saudi Arabia. Over the past two years, Riyadh has been further concerned by motions within the US Congress to suspend US arms sales to Saudi Arabia against the backdrop of perceived human rights violations in the war in Yemen. These trends as a whole likely pushed Riyadh to seek to diversify its alliances and defense cooperation, with Russia potentially playing a key role as a major arms exporter to the Middle East. Riyadh will seek to foster further military relations with

Moscow over the coming months.

Syria: Pro-government forces shell Daraa's Tafas with artillery on August 26; tensions around town liable to increase

At least one resident was killed and four wounded. Meanwhile, a pro-government forces' vehicle was targeted in an IED attack on the Nawa-al-Sheikh Miskin Road, located about 20 km north of Tafas. According to Syria's official news agency, one soldier was killed and eight more wounded.

The developments come amid persistent tensions in Daraa Province, particularly surrounding the weeks-long pro-government siege on the provincial capital's Daraa al-Balad neighborhood, which is rebel-dominated. Despite ongoing Russia-mediated negotiations, which envision an end to the siege in exchange for the expulsion of wanted rebels, mutual hostilities have persisted around Daraa city. Despite frequent hostilities between pro-government forces and rebel elements in other areas of Daraa, instances of artillery shelling in Tafas are somewhat less frequent. While this may remain localized, it signals the pro-government forces' potential readiness to expand the scope of military measures against rebel-dominated locales in Daraa. As rebel fighters will likely perceive it as a deliberate provocation, they are liable to conduct retaliatory attacks against pro-government elements. Thus, tensions around Tafas are liable to increase over the coming days.

Turkey: Three PKK militants killed in UAV attack in Sirnak's Kupeli on August 24; part of Ankara's strategic use of UAVs

According to the Ministry of Interior (Mol), security forces used an armed unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) "J-Siha" to neutralize three armed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militants.

This development comes amid Ankara's sustained efforts to develop UAV technologies for military purposes, including targeting PKK militant networks in Turkey's southeastern provinces. Seven PKK militants were killed in a counter-militancy operation involving the use of UAVs in Mardin's Nusaybin on May 7. Ankara's use of such devices has also extended beyond Turkey's borders, with reported UAV strikes targeting PKK militants in northern Iraq. In addition, four instances of Turkish-launched armed UAVs against the People's Protection Unit (YPG) have been recorded over the past week around Syria's Qamishli. Kupeli's rugged landscape provide a natural shelter for militants, allowing them to remain entrenched and to evade security forces' detection. Thus, using such aerial assets bolster Turkish surveillance and assault capabilities in these inhospitable terrain, enabling Turkish forces to hinder militants' movements and ranks. Turkish forces will likely continue to use UAVs to target militant hideouts in Turkey's southeastern provinces over the coming weeks and months.

Upcoming Notable Dates

August 28

- **UAE:** Emirati Women's Day

August 29

- **Israel:** Jerusalem Night Run

August 30

- **Turkey:** Victory Day

September 6-8

- **Israel:** Rosh Hashanah (New Year)