



Daily

04

SEP

12:16 UTC

MAX - MENA Region Daily Summary - September 4, 2021

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

Highlights of the Day

- **Algeria:** Security forces use tear gas to disperse protests in Kherrata, per September 2 reports; will increase anti-government sentiments
- **Iran:** Trial of two Swedes on drug-trafficking charges begins, per September 2 reports; to gain leverage during diplomatic negotiations
- **Libya:** Tripoli Military Region on September 3 releases statement on al-Tikbali Camp clashes; clashes likely to recur over coming days
- **Syria:** On September 3, Daraa Central Committee announces 'dead end' in implementing August 31 ceasefire agreement; clashes likely to recur
- **Yemen:** Unruly protests held in Aden on September 2 to demand release of arrested SSF commander; additional protests likely

Actionable Items

Turkey: Water cuts slated for eight districts of Istanbul on September 5; take necessary precautions to ensure business continuity

The Istanbul Water and Sewage Administration (ISKI) announced that water cuts are slated in eight districts of Istanbul between 01:00 (local time) and 09:00 on September 5. The water cuts will be in effect in multiple neighborhoods in Bayrampasa District, Beyoglu District, Esenler District, Eyupsultan Districts, Gaziosmanpasa District, Kagithane District, Sisli District, and Sultangazi District. These disruptions to water services are due to maintenance work at local water treatment plants.

Those operating or residing in the aforementioned areas in Istanbul on September 5 are advised to ensure an adequate supply of bottled water and consider accumulating water in appropriate, sealable containers to provide for essential activities due to the slated water cuts.

Notable Events

Algeria: Security forces use tear gas to disperse protests in Kherrata, per September 2 reports; will increase anti-government sentiments

The protesters called for the release of “prisoners of conscience” arrested during “Hirak” protests and reportedly clashed with security forces. Kherrata is located in Bejaia Province, a part of the Kabylie region, populated largely by the Algerian Berber ethnic minority.

This incident follows a significant lull in nationwide anti-government demonstrations since June. “Hirak” protests have been recorded on a frequent basis since February 2019 when the movement calling for the end of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s rule began. Additionally, the latest protest follows the Algerian government’s intensified condemnation of the Movement for the Self-Determination of Kabylia (MAK), which it holds responsible for the wildfires that killed at least 90 people in August. It is likely that security forces used disproportionate force against the protesters, as they perceived the demonstration to be a potential site for pro-MAK sympathies. However, protesters are likely to interpret the security forces’ actions as an assault on the Hirak movement, as well as an attempt by the government to curb all forms of political opposition. These increased anti-government sentiments will likely trigger similar protests in the coming weeks.

Iran: Border guard killed in clashes with armed smugglers in Kordestan’s Baneh on September 2; shows volatile security environment

The clashes occurred between armed livestock smugglers and the border police officer in Baneh, located approximately 20 km from the Iran-Iraq border. The guard later died as a result of his injuries. It was also announced that five people involved in the incident were arrested by the police later in the day.

This incident highlights the volatile security environment in Kordestan Province, particularly near the border areas due to the presence of militant groups and criminal elements. These activities stem from the Kurdish populace’s long-standing anti-government sentiments due to their perceived marginalization. The lack of development and economic opportunities for locals is a major factor that contributes to criminal activity in the region. Moreover, the porous Iran-Iraq border renders it difficult for security forces to monitor the area and makes it conducive for smuggling and militant networks to remain operational. Given that the incident resulted in the death of a border guard, the authorities will likely increase their security protocols to clampdown on smuggling activities in Kordestan Province. Despite this, smuggling activities will persist in the coming weeks.

Iran: Trial of two Swedes on drug-trafficking charges begins, per September 2 reports; to gain leverage during diplomatic negotiations

The two men were arrested in July 2020 for being members of an “international drug trafficking gang” after being found with a large quantity of drugs.

This development comes amid the ongoing trial in Sweden, of Hamid Noury, a former Iranian official accused of participating in the mass execution of dissidents in 1988. In the latest hearing on September 2, a witness stated that Ebrahim Raisi, the newly elected Iranian President was “well-known” to the prisoners and was present during the hastily-conducted “trials” which led to the execution of at least 5,000 political prisoners. Iran is known to jail dual and foreign nationals, often on unlawful charges, in an attempt to gain leverage during diplomatic negotiations on vital issues such as sanctions relief. For instance, in April, Iran conducted the trials of three dual nationals on allegedly fraudulent charges, during diplomatic talks on its controversial nuclear program. Therefore, Iran is likely to continue detaining dual and foreign nationals on charges perceived as being “false” by western countries, in a bid to gain maximum concessions during diplomatic proceedings.

Libya: Tripoli Military Region on September 3 releases statement on al-Tikbali Camp clashes; clashes likely to recur over coming days

The Tripoli Military Region stated that the Stability Support Apparatus (SSA) was sent to the Brigade 444-controlled al-Tikbali Camp to “correct the course of the Brigade 444”. This is due to the latter’s repeated defiance of Tripoli Military Region’s orders and illegal independent financial activity. Renewed clashes were reported in Tripoli’s Salah al-Din. Subsequent reports indicate that a preliminary ceasefire was reached between the two sides.

The Presidency Council (PC) called for an immediate ceasefire and Government of National Unity (GNU) PM Abdel Hamid al-Dbeibah on September 4 summoned the commanders of the militias involved. However, this is unlikely to prevent renewed clashes over the coming days given both sides’ attempt to expand territorial control in and around Tripoli. Thus, it is unlikely that the reported preliminary ceasefire will be durable. The likelihood of renewed clashes over the coming days is underscored by the September 3-4 reported movement of militias from Zawiya and Misrata to Tripoli to support the SSA and the Brigade 444, respectively. The fact that these militias are heavily armed highlights the threat of collateral damage to civilians in Tripoli should clashes recur.

Oman: 800 expats to be replaced by locals in electricity sector jobs, per September 2 reports; effort to boost employment of locals

Employees will first receive training funded by the Ministry of Labour before receiving permanent employment contracts. This will increase the “Omanization” of the electricity sector to 90 percent from the current 47 percent.

This development comes amid the frequent implementation of “Omanization” measures by the government, most recently in July, when expatriates were banned from financial and administrative jobs. These measures come in the wake of large-scale anti-

government demonstrations in cities across Oman in May 2021, during which locals protested the lack of employment opportunities. By limiting employment opportunities to Omani citizens, the government is aiming to address socio-economic grievances of segments of the local population, as well as reduce the risks of further protest activity. However, the fact this recent measure includes an “on-the-job training programme” possibly indicates that Omanis’ do not possess the skill level required for these jobs. This highlights the limitations of the “Omanization” measures as the expatriate population is relatively more skilled than a majority of the Omani populace, and cannot be entirely replaced without adversely impacting business efficiency, at least in the short term.

Saudi Arabia & Yemen: Coalition intercepts UAV targeting Khamis Mushayt on September 2; comes amid uptick in cross-border hostilities

The coalition also intercepted an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) targeting an unspecified location in southern Saudi Arabia on September 3.

The Houthis have stepped up their offensive against Saudi Arabia in recent weeks, with a total of 12 cross-border attacks in August compared to only six in July. The UAV interception over Khamis Mushayt is the latest among a host of similar attacks by the Houthis targeting the same location using UAVs. This is largely due to the Houthi perception that King Khalid Airbase, located near Khamis Mushayt in the southern Asir Province, along with Abha Airport, functions as the launchpad for the Saudi-led Coalition’s aerial campaign within Yemen. Therefore, by persistently launching such attacks the Houthis aim to damage these airbases to hinder the Coalition’s operations and project itself as protecting the Yemeni populace, given that near-daily Saudi-led airstrikes have caused extensive civilian casualties. However, Saudi Arabia’s relatively strong aerial defensive capabilities have prevented such a scenario so far. Regardless, further Houthi attempts to target the Kingdom’s southern provinces are likely to persist in the coming weeks and months.

Syria: On September 3, Daraa Central Committee announces ‘dead end’ in implementing August 31 ceasefire agreement; clashes likely to recur

The committee stated that the implementation is being obstructed by “impossible demands” by the Fourth Division of the pro-government Syrian Arab Army (SAA), such as the complete surrender of arms by the rebels and the establishment of additional military checkpoints. It called on the UN to safely move Daraa residents to Jordan or Turkey.

On August 31, a Russia-brokered ceasefire agreement was signed between the Daraa Central Committee and pro-government forces. This followed several failed talks and ceasefires since June. However, the latest statement confirms our previous assessment that dissenters from both sides will attempt to undermine the latest ceasefire agreement primarily due to mutual lack of trust. Pro-government forces’ demand of complete surrender of weapons as well as the rebels’ lack of willingness to do so highlights the persistent mistrust between both sides. Given this background, any subsequent ceasefire agreement is liable to be equally fragile. While the displacement of Daraa residents is

unlikely to be agreed upon, pro-government forces' perceived attempts to violate the ceasefire agreement will lead to clashes between the two sides over the coming days.

Yemen: Security forces dismantle 'terrorist cell' in Hadramout's Mukalla on September 2; cell likely linked to AQAP

According to the official Hadi news agency, Southern Transitional Council-affiliated (STC) Hadrami Elite Forces (HEF) arrested a militant cell leader and three others who were planning to carry out attacks in Mukalla. HEF also seized various explosive devices and mobile phones from the militants.

Hadramout, and specifically the town of Mukalla constituted al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's (AQAP) traditional stronghold until 2016 when the UAE-backed HEF drove the militant group out of the governorate. In this context, it is likely that the militants in the latest incident were affiliated with AQAP. Given that Hadramout is AQAP's traditional stronghold, the group likely still retains logistical networks and receives support from radicalized segments of the local population, which perpetuates its entrenchment in the region. The fact that the militants possessed explosive devices and communication devices further showcases their ability to maintain limited operational capabilities in Mukalla. Regardless, the HEF's successful dismantling of the cell highlights their surveillance and timely intelligence gathering capabilities before the potential materialization of militant attacks. The HEF will continue to maintain vigilance towards threats emanating from AQAP in the region.

Yemen: Unruly protests held in Aden on September 2 to demand release of arrested SSF commander; additional protests likely

The Aden commander of the Special Security Forces (SSF), a paramilitary force that falls under the command of the Hadi-led government's Minister of Interior, was reportedly arrested by Southern Transitional Council (STC)-linked forces following a confrontation between the former and a guard at the Aden International Airport. Protesters blocked roads and burned tire fires in Khormaksar and Mansoura Districts to demand the release of the official.

Although conflicting accounts of the reason for the confrontation between the SSF commander and the airport guard have been reported, given the heightened tensions between the STC and the Hadi-led government, it is likely that his arrest was politically motivated. The subsequent protests in several districts of Aden calling for the release of the SSF commander highlight the extent to which such incidents and arrests can affect the broader security environment in Aden. The possibility that some demonstrations may have been staged by Hadi-aligned forces to pressurize the STC to release the SSF commander also cannot be ruled out. Further protests over the issue are likely in Aden until the commander is released.

Upcoming Notable Dates

September 6-8

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

September 9

- **MENA:** Islamic New Year

September 11

- **Egypt:** Norouz

September 15-16

- **Israel:** Yom Kippur

September 16

- **Libya:** Martyrs' Day