



Daily

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MAX - MENA Region Daily Summary - October 13, 2021

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

Highlights of the Day

- **Jordan:** King approves cabinet reshuffle recommended by PM Bisher al-Khasawneh on October 11; effort to accelerate Jordan's economic recovery
- **Kuwait:** Authorities to allow women to join combat roles in military, per October 12 reports; to showcase progressive reforms
- **Saudi Arabia:** Authorities launch National Investment Strategy (NIS) on October 11; to boost to 'Vision 2030' efforts
- **Tunisia:** SNJT calls for protest outside union's headquarters in Tunis at 10:00 (local time) on October 14; maintain heightened vigilance

Actionable Items

Algeria: Ministry of Transport to reopen maritime travel from October 21 onwards; remain cognizant of authorities' updates

The Ministry of Transport announced on October 12 that from October 21, "Algerie Ferries" will operate a weekly ferry alternating between Algiers and Oran to Spain's Alicante. Additionally, from November 1, weekly ferries will operate from Algiers to France's Marseille and back. The reopening of maritime travel comes amid the lightening of international travel restrictions originally put in place in March 2020 due to the onset of COVID-19 and follows Algeria's decision to partially reopen its air borders on June 1. Further announcements regarding new air and sea routes are likely in the coming months.

Those operating or intending to travel or from Algeria are advised to remain cognizant of the lifting of certain travel restrictions. Consult with local authorities before travelling to ensure compliance with all health, safety, and security regulations.

Israel: 'Slut March' slated to take place from 09:00 on October 15 from Tel Aviv's Atarim Square towards Habima Square; maintain vigilance

An opening rally will be held at Atarim Square at 09:00 (local time). From there, protesters will march through Rabin Square to Habima Square, where demonstrations will be held at the locale between 12:30-14:00. The protest movement has also called for a poster-making event at Habima Square at 18:00 on October 13.

The "Slut March" which calls for the "end of rape culture" has been occurring in Israel annually since 2012. While the October 13 poster-making event is liable to attract a medium participation rate, numbering in the low to high dozens, the October 15 march will likely witness high attendance between the high hundreds to low thousands. Security forces will likely be deployed along the route of the march and protest locales to ensure that the demonstrations transpire peacefully, potentially resulting in major traffic disruptions. Given past precedent, the potential for detentions or localized incidents of unrest between orthodox or far-right members who may oppose the sentiments expressed during the march, and security forces cannot be fully ruled out.

Those operating or residing in Tel Aviv on October 15 are advised to maintain vigilance and allot extra time for travel or plan alternate routes avoiding the vicinity of Atarim Square, Rabin Square, and Habima Square due to the planned march.

Tunisia: SNJT calls for protest outside union's headquarters in Tunis at 10:00 (local time) on October 14; maintain heightened vigilance

The National Union of Tunisian Journalists (SNJT) has called on its members and other civil society organizations to protest the "continuous aggressions against professionals in the sector".

This follows the assault of journalists by anti-Saied protesters held on Tunis' Habib Bourguiba Avenue on October 10, wherein protesters threw rocks at journalists covering the event. This indicates that at least some protesters perceive media personnel to be complicit with the government and its alleged unconstitutional activities. In this context, the latest calls for protest by the SNJT is an effort to denounce the recent incidents of violence against journalists and portray them as objective professionals. The demonstration will likely attract participants in the high dozens or low hundreds, which will likely cause localized disruptions around the SNJT headquarters. A heightened security presence is likely at the venue as authorities will seek to monitor the event. If the protesters are extensively disruptive or ignore the police' instructions to disperse, there is a potential for confrontations to occur between the former and the latter.

Those operating or residing in Tunis during October 14 are advised to maintain heightened vigilance in the vicinity of the SNJT Headquarters due to the slated protest and the potential for localized unrest.

Notable Events

Jordan: King approves cabinet reshuffle recommended by PM Bisher al-Khasawneh on October 11; effort to accelerate Jordan's economic recovery

As part of the royal decree, King Abdullah II also approved the establishment of the Ministry of Investment.

This comes against the backdrop of significant economic challenges incurred by Jordan over the past year, which is reflected by its 24.8 percent unemployment rate in the second quarter of 2021. While this is the fourth reported reshuffle of Prime Minister (PM) al-Khasawneh since he took office in 2020, the establishment of the Ministry of Investment in the latest government restructure indicates that officials are exploring additional avenues to strengthen Jordan's economy. The new ministry will likely seek to accelerate investment opportunities by overcoming some of the bureaucratic challenges that the existing Jordan Investment Commission (JIC) experiences. This is particularly against the backdrop of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) four-year economic recovery program, which stresses efforts to elevate donor and investor support. Overall, this development demonstrates PM al-Khasawneh's aim to project his government's continued efforts to advance Jordan's economic recovery. The implementation of additional economic reforms is likely over the coming months to justify the latest cabinet reshuffle.

Kuwait: Authorities to allow women to join combat roles in military, per October 12 reports; to showcase progressive reforms

The Defense Minister stated that women will be allowed to join several combat roles, including officers. Women were previously restricted to civilian roles.

Kuwait is often depicted as more progressive than its Gulf neighbors, particularly in terms of women's participation in public affairs. For instance, in 2005, women were granted the right to vote and run for office. In addition, in 2009, four women won seats in parliamentary elections. The latest development thus constitutes a continued effort by the authorities to expand women's role into strategic fields such as the military sector. By announcing such a measure, the government also likely aims to showcase itself as more progressive and accepting of Western values. This is likely with the aim of raising Kuwait's profile vis-a-vis the international audience to attract foreign investment. This is particularly given the ongoing economic crisis the country is facing, which is illustrated by the contraction of its GDP by 9.9 percent in 2020 and a record budget deficit increase of approximately 175 percent in 2020-21. Thus, further such modernization measures will likely be announced.

Saudi Arabia: Authorities launch National Investment Strategy (NIS) on October 11; to boost to 'Vision 2030' efforts

This strategy will reportedly increase the private sector and foreign direct investment (FDI) contribution to GDP up to 65 percent and 5.7 percent, respectively. It will also

increase contribution of non-oil exports from 16 percent to 50 percent. Meanwhile, authorities ordered foreign firms working in Saudi's energy sector to boost local input from 30-35 percent to 70 percent, as a precondition for securing government contracts.

This plan, which forms a part of the Kingdom's "Vision 2030" is significant due to its scope and comes amid the authorities' efforts to reduce dependency on oil revenues, strengthen the private sector, and boost Saudi's profile as a leading global economy. Through market-forward policies such as the NIS, authorities want to showcase the country as conducive for investments and simultaneously boost its competitiveness among its Gulf neighbors. The precondition for foreign companies to boost local input to obtain government contracts is part of the authorities' efforts to increase employment opportunities for local citizens and reduce the outsourcing of international companies' logistical requirements. The government will take additional measures to strengthen the country's economy in the near future.

Saudi Arabia & Yemen: Two UAVs targeting Khamis Mushayt intercepted on October 12; attacks aimed at showcasing Kingdom as vulnerable

According to the official Saudi news agency, the Saudi-led Coalition intercepted two explosive-laden unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) that aimed to target Asir Province's Khamis Mushayt.

This incident comes amid increasingly frequent Houthi-perpetrated cross-border attacks against the Kingdom's southern regions over the recent months. The last similar attack targeting Khamis Mushayt was recorded on October 7. These attacks into Saudi Arabia aim to portray the Kingdom as vulnerable to the spillover of the conflict in Yemen due to Riyadh's involvement in fighting the Houthis. Moreover, the Houthis perceive the King Khalid Air Base near Khamis Mushayt as a launchpad for the Coalition's airstrikes against the Shiite group in Yemen, which motivates the latter to frequently target the base. The Coalition's ability to intercept most of the Houthi-perpetrated attacks highlights its heightened vigilance and responsiveness to the threat of Houthi-launched cross-border aerial attacks. The Saudi-led Coalition will likely seek to respond to these attacks by increasing its airstrikes against Houthi-linked assets over the coming weeks. Overall, the tit-for-tat dynamic of hostilities across the Saudi Arabia-Yemen border will persist.

Syria: Officials complete reconciliation processes in Daraa's Saida on October 12; shows effort to secure areas around Jordan-Syria border

Reconciliation agreements between Syrian government officials and local leaders were also reportedly completed Daraa's al-Naymah and Kiheel. All three towns are located in relatively close proximity to the M5 Highway, which leads to the Jaber border crossing with Jordan.

This marks the latest set of reconciliation agreements made in several areas in Daraa since hostilities between local rebels and pro-government forces largely abated in September. As part of these agreements, the Syrian government agreed to lift its siege on

several rebel-held towns in Daraa primarily in exchange for the expulsion of rebels and the handing over of weapons. Moreover, the recent calm in Daraa has helped facilitate the reopening of the Jaber border crossing on September 29, which was closed due to the spike in armed conflict in Daraa al-Balad on July 31. Thus, the latest focus on areas near the Jordan-Syria border indicate the Syrian government's aim of imposing authority over areas which may impact relations between Damascus and Amman, particularly regarding cross-border movement. Additional reconciliation agreements in Daraa's towns will likely be announced over the coming weeks.

Yemen: AQAP claims on October 11 attack against Houthis in Bayda's Sawmaa District; shows persistent capabilities in Sawmaa

The claim was for an attack conducted by Al-Qaeda in Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) against the Houthis on October 7 wherein two Houthi fighters were killed. Unconfirmed reports indicate that AQAP ambushed a Houthi vehicle in Sawmaa's Ja'ir village.

This AQAP claim follows a lull of eight weeks with the last claim of attack against the Houthis recorded on August 3 in Bayda's Sawmaa District. On September 23, the Houthis announced a large-scale counter-militancy operation that allegedly cleared Sawmaa and Maswarah districts from AQAP's and Islamic State (IS)-affiliated Wilayat Yemen's presence. Against this backdrop, the latest AQAP-claimed attack highlights its continued entrenchment in southern Bayda. The claimed killing of two Houthi fighters is also likely an effort to project the Sunni jihadist group's persistent capabilities in the area, which in parallel denotes the Houthis' propensity to exaggerate the success of their counter-militancy operations in their territories. As the recent claim is liable to somewhat tarnish the credibility of the Houthis' September 23 announcement, the Shiite group will intensify their search operations to crackdown on AQAP elements in Sawmaa District over the coming weeks.

Upcoming Notable Dates

October 14

- **Yemen:** Liberation Day

October 15

- **Tunisia:** Evacuation Day
- **Iran:** Martyrdom of Hasa al-Askari
- **Israel:** "Slut Walk" TLV

October 18-19

- **MENA:** Al-Mouled Al-Nabawy

October 23

- **Libya:** Liberation Day

October 27

- **Egypt & Saudi Arabia:** Arab solidarity motorcycle rally