

## Daily

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## MAX - MENA Region Daily Summary - May 29, 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 prevent protesters from mobilizing in Algiers on May 28; part of government effort to repress opposition activity
- **Bahrain:** Two expats arrested for impersonating finance company officials as part of scam, per May 27 reports; maintain vigilance
- **Libya:** Militiamen reportedly storm Misrata Courts Complex on May 27; highly notable given rarity of such security incidents in city
- **Turkey:** Lawsuit filed against Istanbul Mayor on May 28 for insulting election board members; effort to suppress political rivals
- **Yemen:** Large-scale protest to denounce poor living conditions recorded in Taiz city on May 27; similar protests likely across south Yemen

### Actionable Items

#### **Bahrain: Two expats arrested for impersonating finance company officials as part of scam, per May 27 reports; maintain vigilance**

According to reports, two expatriate workers scammed a Bahraini woman into providing her bank details and withdrew 5300 USD from the latter's bank account. Following a complaint by the woman, the authorities arrested the expats.

This comes amid an uptick in financially motivated crimes in Bahrain and highlights an emerging trend of individuals seeking to impersonate officials from government or private departments to gain access to citizens' personal information for illicit purposes. This is evidenced by the anti-cybercrime department's warning on January 18 regarding scam calls emanating from outside Bahrain, wherein criminals claimed to be officials from a Research Center. Expatriate workers in Bahrain, especially those hailing from South Asia and Southeast Asia often work in low-income jobs. The COVID-19 pandemic has also led to

lay-offs and reduced income including for expats working in white-collar positions. This has likely prompted certain individuals to resort to criminal activities such as financial scams as a means to sustain or supplement their income. Overall, the risk of fraudulent phone calls and online scams will continue to persist over the coming months.

*Those operating or residing in Bahrain are advised to take necessary precautions to protect against phishing calls at all times. Avoid providing personal information like name, bank details, passwords to unverified or suspicious callers and stay vigilant of such incidents.*

### **Israel: Anti-government protests to take place in Tel Aviv, Ra'anana, Jerusalem during evening hours of May 29; maintain heightened vigilance**

In **Tel Aviv** and **Ra'anana**, the protests will occur at 20:30 (local time) at 68, Pinkas Street and 18, Tzipman Street, respectively. In **Jerusalem**, protesters will gather at the Knesset at 19:00 and march towards Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's residence on Balfour Street from 20:00.

This comes amid a political deadlock since the March 23 legislative elections, following which PM Netanyahu failed to meet a 28-day deadline to form the government. The protesters aim to pressure New Hope Party leader, Gideon Sa'ar and the New Right party leader, Naftali Bennett to form a coalition and avoid another election and likely prevent a new government by PM Netanyahu primarily due to corruption allegations against him. The protests in all three cities will garner participation in the high-dozens to low-hundreds based on the high mobilization capacity of similar protests in the past. Significant security deployment will be seen at the protest locales. Cordoning off of roads will likely result in traffic disruptions near all three locales. Protesters may resort to localized violence to express their discontent over the political deadlock.

*Those residing in Israel during the evening and night hours of May 29 should maintain heightened vigilance in the vicinity of Tel Aviv's Pinkas Street; Ra'anana's Tzipman Street; and Jerusalem's Knesset and Balfour Street due to the planned protests and the potential for localized unrest in these areas.*

## **Notable Events**

### **Algeria: Man arrested in Tissemsilt on May 27 for promoting Rachad Movement pamphlets online; shows online surveillance to curb opposition**

The man was reportedly paid by activists to share pamphlets "inciting gatherings" and "disturbing public order" on social networking sites. The Rachad Movement is an opposition political movement whose aim is to overthrow the government through "nonviolent means". Meanwhile, a member of the "Hirak" detainee defense committee was reportedly arrested in Tebessa on May 26.

This comes amid President Abdelmadjid Tebboune's increasing crackdown on political opposition. On May 18, the government classified the Rachad Movement and the

Movement for the Autonomy of Kabylie (MAK) as “terrorist” groups. In this context, the arrest in Tissemsilt is likely part of the government’s efforts to limit the influence of such groups in Algeria, especially ahead of the legislative elections on June 12. It highlights the authorities’ heightened surveillance of social networking sites to curb any form of opposition activity. This is because large-scale anti-government gatherings in the country at this time could significantly undermine the upcoming electoral process and diminish the legitimacy of the new parliament. Thus, further arrests of opposition figures are likely to be recorded in Algeria over the coming weeks.

### **Algeria: Security forces prevent protesters from mobilizing in Algiers on May 28; part of government effort to repress opposition activity**

A heavy security deployment was reported in central Algiers throughout May 28 to prevent the mobilization of “Hirak” protesters. Security forces reportedly blocked strategic roads in the city that generally witness large-scale anti-government marches on Fridays. However, small-scale protests were nevertheless recorded in Algiers’ Ain Benian and El Harrach districts. Some protesters moved towards El Harrach prison to demand the release of detained activists.

This is the second consecutive Friday during which security forces have been deployed in heavy numbers across central Algiers to prevent “Hirak” protesters from mobilizing. This is part of the government’s effort to contain large-scale anti-government activity in the country ahead of the legislative elections on June 12. This is because such widespread opposition to President Abdelmadjid Tebboune and the upcoming elections would serve to delegitimize the new parliament. Such measures are however likely to be perceived by large segments of the local population as excessive and could encourage a low voter turnout in the elections. Nevertheless, a heightened deployment of security personnel will likely continue to be witnessed in Algiers every Friday until June 12.

### **Libya: Militiamen reportedly storm Misrata Courts Complex on May 27; highly notable given rarity of such security incidents in city**

According to reports, militiamen stormed the Misrata Courts Complex and opened fire on policemen guarding the building in an attempt to kidnap the Director of Huda Prison in Misrata over allegations that the latter was involved in harassing families of prisoners. Reports do not indicate if the incident led to any casualties on either side.

This development is highly notable due to the rarity of such security incidents in Misrata, which is one of the relatively secure cities in the country. This is because while several militias are known to operate out of Misrata, most of them are known to cooperate and thus rarely engage in hostilities with each other, unlike militias in Tripoli. Nevertheless, this incident highlights the security instability arising from the presence of such militias in Misrata as they operate almost entirely independently and without any government oversight. It also shows such militias’ willingness to use force for personal gain, which poses a risk to strategic infrastructure and facilities in the city. Therefore, further similar security incidents may be recorded in Misrata over the coming weeks.

## **Morocco: SPLA claims attacks on RMA positions along 'Berm' in Western Sahara on May 27; localized hostilities to persist**

The armed wing of the Polisario Front, the Sahrawi People's Liberation Army (SPLA), claimed attacks on Royal Moroccan Army (RMA) positions in Mahbes.

The SPLA claims near-daily attacks on RMA positions along the "Berm" in Western Sahara. This has been the case since the November 2020 military operation by the RMA in Guerguerat, which the Polisario Front perceived as a unilateral violation of a ceasefire agreed to by both sides in 1991. These SPLA attacks are indicative of the consistent pressure that the Polisario Front seeks to apply on Rabat for concessions that align with its aspirations of "self-determination" in the disputed territory. However, the limited nature of these attacks and the increasing international recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara prevent the Polisario Front, which already has little international support, from exerting its desired influence over Rabat. Therefore, there is a low chance that the current status quo in the region will significantly change at this time. Nevertheless, localized hostilities are expected to persist along the "Berm" in Western Sahara over the coming days and weeks.

## **Saudi Arabia & Yemen: Coalition intercepts UAV targeting Asir Province's Khamis Mushayt on May 28; attacks to continue**

The Houthi spokesperson announced that the attack on the King Khalid Airbase made use of two "Qasef-2k" unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and that it was carried out "accurately".

This incident comes amid frequent Houthi-launched UAV attacks on Saudi territory, particularly targeting the southern provinces of Asir, Najran, and Jazan, near the border with Yemen. The Houthis have sought to repeatedly target the King Khalid Airbase in Khamis Mushayt with the aim of hampering the Saudi-led Coalition's aerial campaign against the Shiite group in Yemen. Through persistent attacks, the Houthis seek to increase the risk associated with the Kingdom, and cause disruptions to travel and business activity, which would thereby negatively impact the latter's economy. However, the Coalition's ability to successfully thwart a majority of the Houthi-launched devices highlights its bolstered defense capabilities. Nonetheless, such attacks show the continued threat posed by the ongoing Yemeni civil war and the effects of its spillover into Saudi Arabia. The Houthis will continue their attempts to target key infrastructure like airports, air bases, and energy-related sites in Saudi Arabia in the coming weeks.

## **Syria: IS 'leader', SNA personnel killed in clashes in Aleppo's al-Bab on May 28-29; anti-IS operations likely to be bolstered**

The Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) and local police reportedly conducted a raid targeting an Islamic State (IS) hideout, which resulted in clashes between the

militants and the former. Militants threw a grenade and detonated an explosive belt during the confrontation, ultimately killing at least two SNA members, one police personnel, and two militants, including a senior IS leader.

This incident comes amid increased car bomb and IED attacks in Turkish-controlled parts of Aleppo Province over recent months. Several such attacks have resulted in indiscriminate civilian casualties, which has thus led to suspicion of IS involvement, as the group is known to conduct similar attacks to garner media attention and boost its profile. Hence, the latest raid was likely part of the Turkish-backed authorities' efforts to curtail IS activities in Aleppo. This incident is slightly noteworthy given that a relatively senior operative or IS leader was killed, as this will likely affect the group's ranks and their command structure in the province. This will likely embolden Turkish-backed authorities to bolster their anti-IS operations in Aleppo Province over the coming weeks.

### **Turkey: Lawsuit filed against Istanbul Mayor on May 28 for insulting election board members; effort to suppress political rivals**

Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu is being prosecuted for allegedly insulting the Supreme Board of Election (YSK) in a speech in November 2019. Imamoglu had allegedly criticized the re-election for the post of mayor in June 2019 following YSK's cancellation of the March 2019 election results by stating that it had affected Turkey's international standing. The indictment against Imamoglu seeks a prison sentence of up to four years.

This development is highly notable as it highlights persistent efforts by the President Recep Tayyip Erdogan-led government to undermine Imamoglu due to his widespread popularity. According to a leading research company in Istanbul, in May, 51.4 percent of voters stated that they would choose Imamoglu against Erdogan's 39.9 percent in a presidential election. Given that Imamoglu has denied the latest allegations, opposition parties and the former's supporters will likely view the indictment as the AKP-led government efforts to suppress political rivals in the lead up to the 2023 presidential elections. Therefore, as the hearing proceeds, this issue may increase anti-government sentiments and trigger protests, especially in Istanbul over the coming months.

### **Yemen: Large-scale protest to denounce poor living conditions recorded in Taiz city on May 27; similar protests likely across south Yemen**

Hundreds of protesters reportedly denounced deteriorating living conditions in Taiz due to perceived corruption by local authorities. Additionally, on May 28, protesters gathered outside the headquarters of the Saudi-led Coalition in Aden's al-Buraiqeh District to denounce poor living conditions in the city.

This comes amid frequent anti-government protests across south Yemen denouncing the lack of adequate government investment in infrastructure, delayed salaries, corruption and partisan biases among local authorities, and the lack of basic services, which reiterates widespread socio-economic grievances amid large segments of the local population. Protesters in Taiz criticized the reported deterioration of the Yemeni rial to

930 rials against the US dollar, as this is bound to inflate prices of basic necessities of the local population. Meanwhile, the protesters in Aden blamed the Saudi-led Coalition for the socio-economic deterioration in the city. The persistence and scale of such protests highlight the government's inability to meet these demands due to low state revenues and inefficient local institutions. Therefore, further similar socio-economic protests are likely to be recorded across south Yemen, including in Taiz, Aden, and Hadramout governorates.

## Upcoming Notable Dates

### June 4

- **Iran:** Anniversary of Ayatollah Khomeini's death

### June 5

- **Iran:** 15th Khordad National Uprising
- **Israel & Palestinian Territories:** Naksa Day

### June 6:

- **Iran:** Martyrdom of Imam Sadeq