



## Daily



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## MAX - MENA Region Daily Summary - December 17, 2024

### Highlights of the Day

- **MENA:** CENTCOM conducts airstrike in Sanaa following Houthi attack targeting central Israel on December 16; similar strikes to recur
- **Iran:** Authorities reportedly execute several minorities in Yazd, Zahedan on December 15; will increase criticism toward Tehran
- **Israel & Palestinian Territories:** US asks Israel to approve military aid to PA, per December 15 report; comes amid growing security concerns
- **Libya:** Armed clashes in Zawiyah kill one, wound ten on December 15; highlights elevated risk of collateral damage
- **Syria:** SDF reports failure to agree permanent truce with SNA on December 17; renewed hostilities likely, Turkish incursion possible

### Actionable Items

**Iran: Authorities announce closure of government offices, educational institutions in Tehran province on December 17; allot for disruptions**

**Current Situation** - Iran's state media announced the closure of all government offices, educational institutions, and banks on December 17 across Tehran Province due to cold weather and air pollution. Medical services will remain operational during this time.

**Recommendations** - Those operating or residing in Tehran on December 17 are advised to allot for disruptions to public services due to the ongoing closures. Take necessary precautions to protect against the reported high levels of pollution.

Source: [IRNA](#)

**Israel: Anti-government protests slated in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem on December 18; maintain heightened vigilance**

**Current Situation** - The "Jerusalem Students for the Return of the Kidnapped" group has organized nationwide protests near educational institutions, including in **Tel Aviv** and **Jerusalem** during the morning hours (local time) on December 18. A detailed list of the protest locations in Hebrew can be found [here](#). The "Mishmeret 101" group called for a protest near Prime Minister's (PM) residence on **Gaza Street in Jerusalem** between 14:00 to 18:00 on December 18.

**Assessments & Forecast** - The protests at educational institutions are likely to remain contained within their premises. However, there is also a limited potential for spillover and expansion of demonstrations if they occur near key protest sites, such as at Menachem Begin Road in Tel Aviv or Paris Square in Jerusalem. Based on precedent, the protest organized by the "Mishmeret 101" group is expected to draw a turnout in the mid-dozens. Given the protest's location, a heightened security presence can be expected. The protest is likely to remain peaceful. However, security forces will intervene and may use riot dispersal measures if protesters are deemed as being unruly. Limited traffic disruptions can be expected around all protest sites.

**Recommendations** - Those operating or residing in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem on December 18 are advised to maintain heightened vigilance and allot for vehicular disruptions near the protest sites due to the slated demonstrations and associated risk of violence.

Source: [Jerusalem Students for the Return of the Kidnapped](#), [Hafganot](#)

**Morocco: Healthcare workers striking nationwide starting December 17-18; allot for disruptions to non-emergency public healthcare services**

**Current Situation** - The "Independent Union of Public Sector Doctors" has planned nationwide strikes, starting December 17-18, followed by a strike on December 24-26 and December 30-January 5, 2025. Additionally, diagnostic tests in regional medical centers will pause from December 30 -January 3. A national march is also planned in Rabat on

December 29, although specific details of the protest are yet to be announced. Emergency services will remain operational. The strikes are being organized in response to what the group perceives as the government's failure to address the demands of healthcare professionals and improve their working conditions.

**Assessments & Forecast** - The strikes are expected to disrupt non-emergency healthcare services nationwide. The government may seek to negotiate with the unions in light of the anticipated disruptions, which could lead to the postponement or cancellation of at least some planned strikes. Should the December 29 protest in Rabat go ahead, it can be anticipated to draw a turnout ranging from the high dozens to the low hundreds. An enhanced security presence may be recorded around protest sites. Spontaneous demonstrations in front of government offices and medical facilities, including in Rabat and Casablanca, also cannot be ruled out.

**Recommendations** - Those operating or residing in Morocco on December 17-18 and over the coming weeks are advised to allot for disruptions to non-emergency public medical services nationwide due to the slated protests by healthcare workers.

Source: [Hespress](#)

**Qatar: Government, financial institutions to be closed on December 18-19 to celebrate Qatar National Day; allot for disruptions**

**Current Situation** - Qatar's Amiri Diwan has announced that December 18-19 will be observed as public holidays to mark the country's National Day. The Qatar Central Bank has also declared holidays for all financial institutions during the same period in observance of the occasion. Government and financial institutions are scheduled to resume operations on December 22.

**Recommendations** - Those operating or residing in Qatar on December 18-19 are advised to allot for disruptions due to the slated closure of government offices and financial institutions.

Source: [QNA](#), [Qatar Central Bank](#)

## Notable Events

**MENA: CENTCOM conducts airstrike in Sanaa following Houthi attack targeting central Israel on December 16; similar strikes to recur**

**Current Situation** - The US Central Command (CENTCOM) forces conducted precision strikes against a key command and control facility in Sanaa, which served as a coordination hub for Houthi operations, including attacks on US warships and commercial

vessels in the Red Sea. According to unconfirmed reports, a senior Houthi official was killed in the strikes. Earlier, on December 16, the Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saree claimed that they used a “hypersonic” missile, “Palestine-2,” to [target an Israeli military installation in central Israel](#).

**Assessments & Forecast** - The latest CENTCOM airstrikes in Sanaa likely represent a response to the Houthi attack on central Israel on December 16, though the US and UK regularly conduct strikes against Houthi assets in Yemen to counter the group’s threat. This follows the Houthis’ continued attacks on the Israel territory, including the direct hit in Yavne on [December 9](#), underscoring their growing audacity in directly challenging Jerusalem. Given the latest developments, an Israeli military response targeting Houthi-controlled areas to deter further aggression cannot be ruled out in the coming days. However, sporadic Houthi attacks against the Israeli territory are likely to persist.

**Source:** [CENTCOM, Yahya Saree](#)

**Iran: Authorities reportedly execute several minorities in Yazd, Zahedan on December 15; will increase criticism toward Tehran**

**Current Situation** - A human rights organization reported that Iranian authorities executed at least nine Baloch and one Kurdish citizen in Zahedan and Yazd. Most of these individuals were allegedly executed for drug-related crimes and murder.

**Assessments & Forecast** - Mass executions by authorities in Iran are [not unprecedented](#). In November, the UN passed a draft resolution condemning the “alarming” increase in the use of the death penalty in Iran, particularly for ethnic minorities, and for executions based on forced confessions and lack of a fair trial process. According to a human rights organization, Iranian authorities reportedly executed 126 prisoners in November, including at least 25 Kurdish and 15 Baloch citizens. Within this context, the latest executions, if confirmed, are likely to heighten criticism of Tehran over its practice of mass executions and the alleged disproportionate targeting of minorities for punitive measures. Human rights organizations and minority groups will likely highlight these executions as evidence of authorities disproportionately targeting minorities, including Kurdish and Baloch citizens, who are believed to face systemic discrimination in Iran. In general, these executions are reflective of Iran’s hardline stance towards drug-related offenses. Overall, similar incidents are expected to recur.

**Source:** [Halvash](#)

**Israel: Cabinet approves 11 million USD plan to increase demographic growth in Golan Heights, per December 15 reports; will support IDF presence**

**Current Situation** - The cabinet unanimously approved the plan, which will invest in education, renewable energy, student housing, and an absorption plan for new residents. Subsequently on December 16, Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that

Israel had “no interest in a conflict with Syria”.

**Assessments & Forecast** - Following the toppling of the Bashar al-Assad-led government in Syria, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) increased its military presence on the Israel-Syria border in the Golan Heights and in the buffer zone, citing potential threats posed by the opposition rebel groups gaining power. The latest plan is likely an additional measure to address the perceived increase of threats at the border with Syria. An increase in the civilian population will facilitate a stronger IDF foothold in the area and bolster the military’s strategic operations. Meanwhile, the plan will likely continue to be condemned by countries critical of Israel, as it may be perceived as violating provisions of international law. In the same vein, Netanyahu’s statement is likely to placate tensions with Syria’s new transitional government, which will likely be exacerbated due to the latest development in the coming weeks, Israel is expected to continue implementing this plan.

Source: [Reuters](#)

### **Israel & Palestinian Territories: US asks Israel to approve military aid to PA, per December 15 report; comes amid growing security concerns**

**Current Situation** - According to a report by an Israeli news outlet citing US, Israeli, and Palestinian sources, Washington requested Jerusalem to urgently approve the shipment of military equipment and ammunition to the Palestinian Authority (PA).

**Assessments & Forecast** - This comes amid ongoing Palestinian Authority Security Forces ([PASF counter-militancy operations](#)) in Jenin and, more broadly, a deteriorating security situation across the [West Bank](#). If confirmed, the urgency in Washington’s messaging reflects its perception of the PA’s inability to assert its control and the growing entrenchment of militant groups in the West Bank. Israel’s approval, however, remains uncertain. This is particularly due to the far-right composition of the Israeli government. Some coalition members for example, continue to oppose the PA’s authority and have historically supported measures to weaken it further, such as withholding tax revenues used to pay PASF personnel. Regardless, these developments will reinforce the perception among Palestinians that the Fatah-led PA is collaborating with Israel to their detriment, further eroding Ramallah’s legitimacy. In the immediate term, the security landscape in the West Bank can be expected to remain extremely volatile, with additional confrontations between militants and PASF likely to recur in the coming days.

Source: [Walla](#)

### **Libya: Armed clashes in Zawiyah kill one, wound ten on December 15; highlights elevated risk of collateral damage**

**Current Situation** - The clashes involved an armed group led by Mohammed al-Kashlaf (also known as al-Qasab) and an armed group affiliated with the al-Shurafa tribe. One

individual was killed and ten others wounded during the clashes. The Coastal Road near Zawayah was temporarily blocked due to the clashes and educational activities were suspended in the city on December 15. Local officials and notables reportedly intervened which led to the cessation of clashes.

**Assessments & Forecast** - Zawayah witnesses frequent armed clashes, with at least 19 such incidents having been recorded since the beginning of 2024, highlighting the volatile security environment in the coastal city. Although the cause for the clashes remains unclear, given the involvement of al-Kashlaf, it is plausible that they erupted over a fight for control of the refinery which is currently retained by al-Kashlaf's group. Nevertheless, the casualty toll, the blocking of major roads, the recorded disruption to civilian lives and the material damage sustained by the Zawayah Oil refinery highlight the extent of the risk of collateral damage to uninvolved bystanders and strategic infrastructure posed by such clashes. Further armed confrontations will likely take place in the coming weeks.

Source: [al-Wasat](#)

**Oman: Muscat to reportedly expel Houthi delegation based on US directives, per December 15 reports; may affect Oman's role as impartial mediator**

**Current Situation** - According to a December 15 report, the US has requested Oman to expel the Houthis' official spokesperson, along with members of their negotiating delegation and other officials from Muscat.

**Assessments & Forecast** - The US has previously similarly urged Qatar to expel the Hamas delegation from Doha. This precedent lends credibility to the latest reports, making the US' reported request to Muscat seem plausible. This is further bolstered by the fact that the move also aligns with Washington's broader strategy of intensifying pressure on groups it designates as terrorist organizations, particularly to limit their movement and ability to operate outside their home territories. Similarly, it fits with Washington's current posture against the Shiite group, where it has worked to curb its operational capabilities by periodically targeting assets in Yemen and imposing sanctions on Houthi-linked financial networks. For Oman, complying with this directive could signal a shift from its traditionally more neutral foreign policy and potentially challenge its impartial image. This may prompt the Houthis to reassess Muscat's trusted role as a mediator. Oman is nonetheless expected to advance efforts to maintain its credibility, including offering to mediate conflicts during periods of elevated tensions.

Source: [Fares al-Hemyari](#)

**Syria: SDF reports failure to agree permanent truce with SNA on December 17; renewed hostilities likely, Turkish incursion possible**

**Current Situation** - The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) announced that US-led efforts to make the ceasefire between the SDF and Turkey-backed Syrian National Army (SNA)

failed, claiming it was due to Ankara's intransigence on several key issues. Meanwhile, a US-based media outlet reported that Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) have increased their deployment along the Syrian border, raising concerns of an imminent incursion into SDF-held territories.

**Assessments & Forecast** - This follows the SNA's capture of Manbij from the SDF and the latter's confirmation of a temporary truce on [December 10](#). Suggestions that Ankara and its ally are preparing an offensive in northern Syria are lent credence by reports indicating that SNA troops are amassing on the western bank of the Euphrates River and in the SNA-controlled buffer zone north of Ain Issa. Advancements from these positions would facilitate the SNA to seize sections of the M4 Highway, encircling Kobane and cutting off SDF supply lines to the city. This would align with one of Ankara's main strategic goals, the dislocation of the SDF from the border area. Hence, a resumption of SNA-SDF hostilities in northern Syria is highly likely, while a Turkish ground incursion cannot be ruled out.

**Source:** [SDF](#)

## Other Developments

- **Algeria:** According to reports on December 16, a parliamentarian has called on authorities to initiate legal proceedings against two individuals accused of insulting a respected revolutionary figure in a video shared on their social media platforms.
- **Egypt:** Cairo on December 15 unveiled its plan to localize 23 high-priority industries, including solar and wind energy components, as a part of the country's strategy to reduce reliance on imports.
- **Qatar & Syria:** Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that its Embassy in Damascus would resume operations from December 17.
- **Syria:** According to a report quoting the Director of the Damascus International Airport, international operations at the airport are scheduled to begin in the coming days.

## Notable Dates

**24** Libya Holiday: Independence Day  
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**25** Israel Holiday: Hanukkah  
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**25** MENA Holiday: Christmas Day  
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**26** Jordan Holiday: Boxing Day  
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**1** MENA Holiday: New Year's Day  
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**3** Iraq Travel: Qasem Soleimani's Death Anniversary  
JAN

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