

Daily

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MAX - MENA Region Daily Summary - September 27, 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:** Tehran refuses IAEA access to nuclear site, per September 26 reports; likely attempt to increase pressure on US
- **Iraq:** IS-attributed attack kills at least four individuals in Diyala's Abbarah District on September 26; shows IS entrenchment in area
- **Israel & Palestinian Territories:** IDF on September 26 assesses to have foiled plots by Hamas-linked cell in Israel; operations to continue
- **Tunisia:** Thousands protest against President Kais Saied on Tunis' Habib Bourguiba Avenue on September 26; shows increasing opposition to Saied
- **Yemen:** Two Houthi-launched ballistic missiles hit Marib governor's house in Marib al-Wadi District on September 26; further such attacks likely

Actionable Items

Israel: MoH announces change in 'Green Pass' requirements from October 3; remain cognizant of authorities' updates

The Israeli Ministry of Health (MoH) has announced that from October 3 everyone in Israel will be required to have proof of at least one vaccination dose in order to obtain a "Green Pass". This includes those individuals who contracted and recovered from COVID-19 six months prior as well as those who received their "Green Pass" based on a positive serological test result. Under the current "Green Pass" rules, entry to certain businesses and events is limited to those with proof of vaccination, recovery from COVID-19, or a negative PCR test result. Moreover, anyone who has not received a booster shot six months after getting a second vaccination dose will have their "Green Pass" revoked. Teachers will require a "Green Pass" to enter schools from October 3 and lack of attendance due to the inability to meet this regulation will be considered unjustified that does not warrant being paid.

Those operating or residing in Israel over the coming weeks are advised to remain cognizant of the authorities' instructions and updates regarding quarantine regulations, travel restrictions, and other health procedures to ensure business continuity.

Notable Events

Iran: Tehran refuses IAEA access to nuclear site, per September 26 reports; likely attempt to increase pressure on US

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) indicated that its inspectors sought to replace and fix cameras at the Karaj nuclear site but they were refused access on September 24. The IAEA reported that Iran gave access to all its sites between September 20-22.

This follows the September 12 deal between the IAEA and Iran whereby Tehran agreed to allow the former to operate monitoring equipment at its nuclear facilities and replace their memory cards. Last week, Iran's Foreign Minister (FM), Hossein Amirabdollahian, reportedly stated that Tehran would ask for greater sanctions relief to agree on limitations on its nuclear program. Tehran's violation of the September 12 agreement likely constitutes an attempt to gain leverage and apply pressure on Washington to undertake significant measures towards the lifting of economic sanctions. However, the US is unlikely to engage in such a process as long as Iran continues to breach the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) terms, including those pertaining to IAEA monitoring of nuclear sites. Thus, the current impasse in the JCPOA indirect talks between Washington and Tehran will persist.

Iran: Security forces dismantle militant cell in Khuzestan Province on September 25; shows underlying risk of militancy

Iranian security forces announced that they successfully identified and dismantled a militant cell that was attempting to destabilize the "country's security". Security forces seized dozens of weapons in the operation. The location of the incident was not specified.

This follows a lull in militancy-related activity in Khuzestan Province. The last such incident was recorded on March 26, when Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahwaz (ASMLA)-affiliated elements opened fire on military and police stations in Khuzestan's Shush. This cell was also likely linked to ASMLA and intended to conduct attacks against government-linked personnel and infrastructure. This is because such attacks are a form of retaliation to the Iranian government's perceived oppressive policies towards the minority Arab population residing in Khuzestan Province. Despite the Iranian security apparatus' heightened vigilance towards this threat, this incident highlights the underlying risk of militancy in the region. This is especially around symbolic dates, such as Arbaeen, as the militants tend to seek to capitalize on such events to raise their profile. Further operations targeting Ahwazi militants will likely occur over the coming months.

Iraq: IS-attributed attack kills at least four individuals in Diyala's Abbarah District on September 26; shows IS entrenchment in area

According to reports, Islamic State (IS) militants conducted a multi-pronged attack involving explosives and sniper fire in Hadd al-Akhdar, located about seven km north of Baqubah. The militants detonated an IED targeting a truck in the area and waited for a crowd to form around the blast site before opening fire upon the individuals. Among the casualties was an Iraqi police officer. IS has not claimed responsibility for the attack.

This comes amid continued operations by IS militants across multiple areas in Diyala Province, which remains one of the Sunni jihadist group's main areas of operations in Iraq. The fact that the areas surrounding Hadd al-Akhdar are covered with agricultural fields and farmlands likely enabled the militants to establish hideouts and conduct the latest attack while remaining undetected. That the attack involved two distinct phases, designed to cause maximum casualties, shows the sophistication with which it was planned and executed. Further militant attacks are likely to occur in and around Abbarah District in the coming weeks as IS remains entrenched in the area.

Israel & Palestinian Territories: IDF on September 26 assesses to have foiled plots by Hamas-linked cell in Israel; operations to continue

In an update to the September 26 large-scale arrest operation across the West bank, Israeli authorities determined that the Hamas-linked cell was planning an immediate attack in Jerusalem and other parts of Israel in the scale of previous attacks "carried out during the second intifada", which included suicide bombing and mass shooting. While over 20 operatives of the cell have been arrested, some additional members are still believed to be at large.

The plot highlights a well-orchestrated effort by Hamas to entrench itself in the West Bank and use it as a launch pad to conduct attacks in Israeli territory. This shows the group's active involvement in attempting to destabilize Israel's security environment, despite being involved in ongoing negotiations with Israel to receive economic concessions in the Gaza Strip. As all the members of the militant cell are yet to be apprehended, the IDF will continue its operations in the West Bank, which may trigger additional confrontations with Palestinians. Security measures will also be bolstered, particularly in Jerusalem, due to the threat posed by the militants still at large.

Saudi Arabia & Yemen: Coalition downs armed UAV over Yemen on September 26; likely meant to target strategic infrastructure in Saudi Arabia

The Saudi official news agency reported that the explosive unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) was intercepted over Yemeni airspace. The target of the attack was not specified.

This comes amid an increase in Houthi cross-border attacks into Saudi Arabia over recent months. Although the target of the latest attack remains unspecified as the UAV was intercepted before it could enter Saudi airspace, it was likely meant to target strategic

infrastructure in the southern provinces of Asir, Jazan, and Najran. This coincides with an intensification of hostilities between the Houthis and the Saudi-backed anti-Houthi forces on multiple fronts across Yemen, primarily Shabwa and Marib governorates. The Saudi-led Coalition's aerial support has been vital for anti-Houthi forces in preventing the Shiite group from making major territorial advances towards Marib city, the last Hadi government-held provincial capital in northern Yemen. The increase in attempts to target strategic infrastructure in Saudi Arabia is therefore likely part of an effort by the Houthis to pressure the Kingdom into easing its aerial campaign in Yemen. The Saudi authorities will maintain heightened vigilance of this threat over the coming days.

Syria: Airstrikes attributed to Russia target Turkish-backed forces in Aleppo's Barad on September 26; Turkish retaliation possible

The Russian airstrikes reportedly targeted the Turkish-backed Hamza Division. At least seven Turkish-backed rebel fighters were killed. Meanwhile, Turkish President Recep Erdogan is scheduled to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin in Sochi on September 29 to discuss the situation in Syria.

In recent months, there has been an increase in frequency of Russian airstrikes targeting Turkish-backed forces in northern Idlib and Aleppo provinces. This has increased tensions between the two nations, with Erdogan recently stating that Russia needs to alter its strategy in Syria. These Russian airstrikes likely constitute an effort by Moscow to balance power relations in the border areas between Turkish-backed rebel-held and pro-government forces-held territories. Such actions are viewed by Ankara as a threat to Turkish interests in northwestern Syria and are thus liable to prompt symbolic retaliatory attacks against pro-government forces in northern Aleppo Province. Turkey is unlikely to directly attack Russian forces as this would constitute a significant escalation and be detrimental to Turkey's geopolitical interests. Overall, the security situation in northern Syria will remain volatile in the coming days and weeks.

Syria: Six pro-government personnel killed in clashes with IS near Homs' Palmyra on September 26; shows IS's operational capabilities in area

"Liwa al-Quds", a Palestinian militia that operates as a part of the pro-Syrian government forces, reportedly announced that the attack occurred in Jabal al-Amour, located about 15 km north of Palmyra in Homs Province.

This comes amid frequent IS-perpetrated attacks targeting pro-government forces operating around Palmyra and Sukhna in Homs Province in recent months. The frequency of IS activity and the ability of the Sunni militant group to cause casualties among its adversaries' ranks highlights that it is able to capitalize upon the terrain of the Badia Desert, which currently constitutes one of IS's most prominent areas of operations in Syria, to remain active. The militants likely utilize their hideouts to remain covert and avoid capture during ongoing counter-militancy operations. The fact that IS is willing to directly engage in clashes in contrast to the utilization of remote-controlled IEDs or sniper fire, which require less manpower, indicates that IS has a relatively large presence

of fighters in the region. Hence, IS is likely to actively engage in further clashes with pro-government forces in Homs Province over the coming days and weeks.

Tunisia: Thousands protest against President Kais Saied on Tunis' Habib Bourguiba Avenue on September 26; shows increasing opposition to Saied

Anti-Saied protestors also vandalized the French flag and chanted anti-France slogans. Participants in a smaller pro-Saied demonstration burnt copies of the 2014 constitution.

This is the first large-scale anti-Saied protest following the president's September 22 decision to abolish the provisional commission, which is responsible for determining the constitutionality of draft bills. The diversity of the crowd with the participation of younger protestors, who initially approved of Saied's July 25 decision to suspend the parliament, underscores the increasing local opposition to Saied. The anti-France undertone of the protest is a new development. This is likely a response to the 18th Francophone Summit scheduled to be held in Tunisia in November. Protestors interpret the potential presence of French President Emmanuel Macron at the summit as tacit support for Saied's actions. This is especially given Tunisia's past colonial ties with France that make Tunisians sensitive towards perceived French intervention in Tunisia's domestic affairs. Overall, there is a risk of an increase in civil unrest in Tunisia over the coming days and weeks as Saied's recent decisions continue to divide Tunisian society.

Yemen: Two Houthi-launched ballistic missiles hit Marib governor's house in Marib al-Wadi District on September 26; further such attacks likely

A mosque, school, and several houses adjacent to Governor Major General Sultan al-Arada's house were also damaged in the attack. No casualties were reported.

This follows similar attacks on the residence and office of Governor al-Arada in August 2019 and June 2021, respectively. It also comes amid an intensification in hostilities between Houthi and anti-Houthi forces around Marib city, the last Hadi government-controlled provincial capital in northern Yemen, with the Houthis reportedly capturing several locations in Marib's Harib District on September 22. It is likely that the Houthis targeted the governor in an effort to neutralize the symbolic leader of Marib. This would create a political vacuum in Marib city, possibly devolving the security situation in the city. This could compel anti-Houthi forces to partially retreat from the frontlines and fall back towards the city to secure it, which would reduce the pressure on Houthi forces. The successful killing of the Marib governor could also diminish the morale of anti-Houthi forces operating in the governorate. The Houthis will therefore likely conduct further such attacks targeting the Marib governor in the coming months.

Upcoming Notable Dates

September 27-28

- **Israel:** Simchat Torah

September 28

- **Iran:** Arbaeen

October 2

- **Qatar:** Shura Council elections

October 3

- **Iraq:** Independence Day

October 6

- **Egypt:** Armed Forces' Day
- **Syria:** Anniversary of October Liberation War