



Daily



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MAX - MENA Region Daily Summary - December 23, 2024

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

Highlights of the Day

- **Iran:** US National Security Advisor warns Iran may accelerate nuclear program, per December 22 statement; reflects growing international concerns
- **Kuwait:** Power outages scheduled across Kuwait between December 23-28 due to maintenance work; allot for disruptions
- **Palestinian Territories:** Hamas, PIJ, PFLP call for PASF withdrawal from West Bank's Jenin, per December 21 reports; clashes likely to intensify
- **Qatar:** Energy Minister threatens to cease LNG exports to EU, per December 22 reports; reflects Doha's intent to leverage stockpiles
- **Syria & Turkey:** Turkish FM Fidan meets HTS leader al-Sharaa in Damascus on December 23; reflects Ankara's objective to become key partner

Actionable Items

Iraq: Vehicular traffic banned in Erbil city center on Fridays between 13:00-20:00, per December 21 reports; adhere to authorities' instructions

Current Situation - Erbil Governor Omed Xoshnaw announced that by decision of the traffic directorate, private vehicles will be prohibited from driving in the city center on Fridays between 13:00-20:00 (local time). Xoshnaw noted that the city center, particularly the Sheikhalla market and the Erbil Citadel, experiences an influx of tourists on Fridays which causes chaos and pollution. The vehicle ban aims to preserve the environment, boost public safety, and minimize crowds.

Recommendations - Those operating or residing in Iraq from December 23 are advised to adhere to authorities' instructions and allot for travel disruptions in central Erbil on Fridays due to the suspension of vehicular traffic. Seek alternative routes.

Source: [Omed Xoshnaw](#)

Kuwait: Power outages scheduled across Kuwait between December 23-28 due to maintenance work; allot for disruptions

Current Situation - The Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy announced that power outages are scheduled in areas across all six Kuwaiti governorates between December 23-28 due to maintenance work in some secondary substations. The outages will begin at 08:00 (local time) and continue for four hours till 12:00 every day. The Ministry also stated that the duration of the maintenance work may be extended or reduced depending on the conditions of the work. The full details of the areas affected by the ongoing outages can be found [here](#).

Recommendations - Those operating or residing in Kuwait between December 23-28 are advised to allot for disruptions due to the scheduled power outages and take necessary measures to ensure business continuity.

Source: [KUNA](#)

Saudi Arabia: NCM issues warnings for inclement weather across several governorates, including Riyadh, on December 23; allot for disruptions

Current Situation - Saudi Arabia's National Center for Meteorology (NCM) issued inclement weather warnings across several governorates, including **Riyadh** and **Mecca**, on December 23. A yellow alert has been issued for dust, winds, and reduced visibility in the **Riyadh** region until 17:00 (local time), primarily affecting Wadi ad-Dawasir. A yellow alert has been issued for rains, thunderstorms, winds, and low visibility across the **Mecca**

governorate until 17:00. An orange alert has been issued in some areas, including Adham, al-Lith, Maysaan, and Taif until 20:00, where moderate rain, strong winds, and hail can be expected. There will remain a risk of flash floods and thunderstorms in these areas. A yellow alert has been issued for **Medina** governorate's al-Henakiyah, al-Mahd, and Khaybar until 16:00, and in Badr and Wadi al-Fora'a between 13:00 to 20:00.

Recommendations - Those operating or residing in the aforementioned areas of Saudi Arabia on December 23 are advised to allot for disruptions and take necessary precautions due to the weather warnings issued by the NCM.

Source: [NCM](#)

Tunisia: FSN calls for protest outside Court of Cassation in Tunis at 10:00 on December 24; maintain heightened vigilance

Current Situation - The National Salvation Front (FSN) has called for a protest in front of the Court of Cassation in Tunis at 10:00 (local time) on December 24. The protest has been called to demand the release of detained politicians and an end to perceived politically motivated trials.

Assessments & Forecast - The FSN, an umbrella group comprising various political parties opposed to President Kais Saied, periodically holds demonstrations to protest the detention of political opponents on charges perceived as illegitimate and politically motivated. Based on precedent, the upcoming protest can be expected to garner a turnout in the low to mid dozens. It is likely to transpire peacefully overall, although anti-government sloganeering can be expected. Security forces may be deployed near the Court of Cassation due to its proximity to other government offices. Scuffles between security forces and demonstrators cannot be excluded, although it remains unlikely. Localized traffic disruptions near the protest are plausible.

Recommendations - Those operating or residing in Tunis during the morning hours of December 24 are advised to allot for disruptions near the Court of Cassation due to the slated protest.

Source: [FSN](#)

Turkey: Authorities detain journalist for criticizing Turkish military, per December 21 reports; remain cognizant of local laws

Current Situation - Authorities arrested the journalist for allegedly comparing the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) to terrorist organizations in the context of its activities in Syria. The charges include "insulting institutions of the state" and spreading "false and misleading" information to the public.

Assessments & Forecast - Turkish authorities are known to strictly prosecute acts of

criticism against the state, including state officials, the military, and any other symbols of the state through a broad interpretation of Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code. Most recently, a journalist was arrested on [November 10](#) for social media posts critical of a mayor in Istanbul. The journalist's prosecution underscores authorities' heightened sensitivity to criticism of the TSK and its operations, given the military's prominent status in Turkish society. The government's defensive stance on allegations of collaboration with terrorist groups reflects its intent to control narratives on national security. In light of Turkey's significant involvement in Syria's post-conflict transition, authorities are expected to maintain a high level of vigilance against comments targeting Turkish state institutions in the coming days, including about its military.

Recommendations - Those operating or residing in Turkey are advised to remain cognizant of local laws and refrain from making public statements or social media posts that may be perceived as critical of Turkey, its state institutions or its officials, as this may lead to prosecution and arrest.

Source: [Kocatepe Gazetesi](#)

Notable Events

Iran: US National Security Advisor warns Iran may accelerate nuclear program, per December 22 statement; reflects growing international concerns

Current Situation - US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan reportedly warned that a "weakened" Iran could push to build a nuclear weapon. Sullivan stated that the US is monitoring this risk and remains in contact with Israel on the matter. He has also briefed the incoming Donald Trump administration on the threat.

Assessments & Forecast - Sullivan's remarks come amid several events that have weakened Iran's geopolitical standing in the region over the past months. This includes Israel's significant degradation of two Iranian proxies, Hamas and [Hezbollah](#), in addition to the [ousting](#) of former Syrian President and Iranian ally, Bashar al-Assad. The weakening of Iran's primary deterrence tool, Hezbollah, its apparent loss of influence in Syria, and the significant damage inflicted on its aerial defenses from Israel's [October 26](#) attacks have likely left Iran feeling increasingly exposed. Coupled with the incoming Trump administration's anticipated strict stance on its nuclear program, this has likely fueled concerns that Iran will return to accelerating its nuclear program as a new deterrent tool to avert perceived threats and reassert its regional influence. Tensions between Iran and Israel/the West will remain elevated.

Source: [Reuters](#)

Israel & Lebanon: Two Jerusalem residents indicted over alleged contact with Hezbollah,

per December 22 reports; similar arrests likely

Current Situation - Two Jerusalem residents were charged with “contact with a foreign agent” and allegedly passing information to a Hezbollah operative during the war. The pair allegedly provided their handler with photos of Caesarea and Israeli news articles related to the security situation. One of the indictees was further charged with a weapons offense after taking a photo with a rifle belonging to a Palestinian gunman during a visit to Jenin, located in Area A of the West Bank.

Assessments & Forecast - This highlights that like its benefactor Iran, Hezbollah has engaged in efforts to identify Israeli residents who may be sympathetic to their cause. Considering their travel to Jenin, it is plausible that the indictees were Arab-Israeli citizens or Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem. This is lent credence by prevalent anti-Israel sentiments among segments of these populaces who are motivated to act against Israeli interests in light of the war in Gaza and Lebanon. As suggested by precedent, Hezbollah will likely continue to capitalize on discontent among Arab-Israeli citizens and Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem, who can travel more freely within Israel, to recruit and gather intelligence.

Source: [Mannie Fabian](#)

Palestinian Territories: Hamas, PIJ, PFLP call for PASF withdrawal from West Bank’s Jenin, per December 21 reports; clashes likely to intensify

Current Situation - Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) released a joint statement on December 21 demanding that the Palestinian Authority Security Forces (PASF) cease ongoing counter-militancy operations in the Jenin Refugee Camp and reject US involvement in Palestinian affairs. On December 22, PASF spokesperson Anwar Rajab announced that a PASF soldier was killed and two were wounded in an exchange of fire with “outlaws” in Jenin Refugee Camp.

Assessments & Forecast - The latest clashes between the PASF and militants come [amid an ongoing PASF campaign](#) to curb militant activity in the northern West Bank and reestablish PA control in militant strongholds like Jenin. Militant groups’ criticism regarding US interference in Palestinian affairs follows an unconfirmed [December 15 report](#) claiming that the US requested Israeli approval for an urgent military aid transfer to the PASF. Such rhetoric seeks to delegitimize the PA’s actions as serving the interests of external parties such as Israel and the US. However, the December 22 clashes reflect the PASF’s resolve to continue its campaign to degrade the militant threat, with clashes likely to recur in the coming days.

Source: [PFLP](#)

Qatar: Energy Minister threatens to cease LNG exports to EU, per December 22 reports; reflects Doha’s intent to leverage stockpiles

Current Situation - Qatar's Energy Minister Saad al-Kaabi reportedly stated that Qatar would cease liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports to the EU if any member states strictly imposed the new Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD). This stipulates larger companies operating in the EU to take action against their supply chains for non-compliance with human rights and environmental standards. This will include penalties of up to five percent of non-compliant firms' turnovers.

Assessments & Forecast - Qatar has emerged as a critical LNG supplier for Europe through long-term LNG supply agreements with Germany, France, Italy, and the Netherlands. These countries have turned toward Qatar to replace Russian LNG supplies in light of Moscow's conflict in Ukraine. Al-Kaabi's statement indicates Doha's intent to leverage the EU's reliance on its LNG stockpiles to circumvent the potential impact of the CSDDD. It likely reflects concerns that state-owned LNG supplier QatarEnergy would be liable to face penalties under the CSDDD amid international concerns regarding Qatar's poor human rights record. Given the adverse impact this would incur on Qatar's state revenues, Doha is likely to maintain pressure on the EU to grant it leeway on the implementation of the CSDDD.

Source: [Financial Times](#)

Syria & Turkey: Turkish FM Fidan meets HTS leader al-Sharaa in Damascus on December 23; reflects Ankara's objective to become key partner

Current Situation - Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan stressed Ankara's readiness to share expertise in restructuring state institutions. He stated that there was "no place" for the People's Protection Units (YPG) in Syria whom he accused of stealing Syria's natural resources. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) leader Ahmed al-Sharaa declared that the transitional government would not allow any factions, including the YPG-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), to bear weapons outside "state control". He indicated that the transition government would soon announce the structure of the Defense Ministry and military.

Assessments & Forecast - Since the emergence of the HTS-led transition government, Turkey has sought to establish itself as a [key partner](#) to Syria's de facto leader al-Sharaa. Fidan's remarks concerning the YPG, which Turkey views as the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), underscores Turkey's intent to influence al-Sharaa's institution-building. Ankara is liable to leverage further support to the new government on al-Sharaa's commitment to reducing the influence of the YPG and SDF. Al-Sharaa's statement shows some willingness to comply in this regard, with the HTS-led authorities likely to pressure the SDF to disarm or integrate into an HTS-led Defense Ministry in the coming weeks.

Source: [Anadolu Agency](#)

Other Developments

- **Iran:** According to December 21 reports, Tehran summoned Western diplomats over the arrest of two Iranian nationals by the US who were suspected of illegally exporting sensitive technology to Iran which was allegedly used in the [January 28 attack in Jordan](#).
- **Iraq & Oman:** On December 22, Baghdad and Muscat signed two memoranda of understanding aimed at strengthening political cooperation, highlighting a strengthening in ties.
- **Israel & Palestinian Territories:** Reports from December 23 indicate that an attempted stabbing attack was recorded near Hizma checkpoint, located four km north of Jerusalem. Security forces neutralized the assailant and no casualties were recorded.
- **Libya:** The Charge d'affaires at the US Embassy signed a lease for a new property in Tripoli, as a measure toward the resumption of diplomatic operations, per December 21 reports.
- **Qatar:** Serbia reimposed visa requirements on Qatari passport holders prior to its accession to the EU, per a December 22 announcement.

Notable Dates

25 Kuwait Holiday: National Day
FEB

26 Kuwait Holiday: Liberation Day
FEB

28 MENA Holiday: Ramadan
FEB

28 Israel Travel: Tel Aviv Marathon
FEB

2 Qatar Holiday: March Bank Holiday
MAR

5 Iraq Holiday: Rebellion Anniversary
MAR
