

THE EARLY PHOENIX

A first look at today's most notable stories from the Middle East, selected by ACLS experts

16 DECEMBER 2022

IRAN

1. [Leaked Info Reveals Details About John Bolton Terror Plot \(Iran International\)](#). A Syria-based commander of the Revolutionary Guard's Qods (Quds) extraterritorial force was behind a failed operation to assassinate two former US officials.
2. [Mahan Air – Smuggling Weapons into Syria and Lebanon in Service of the Iranian Quds Force \(Israel Alma\)](#). Mahan Air's planes and crews serve as a central civilian cover platform for smuggling weapons into Syria and Lebanon for the IRGC Quds Force.

TURKEY

3. [Erdogan: I Offered Putin a Meeting between the Leaders of Turkey, Russia and Syria \(Anadolu Agency\)](#). Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan revealed on Thursday that he had offered his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, a tripartite meeting [among] the leaders of Turkey, Russia and Syria.
4. [Thousands Rally in Istanbul to Support Mayor Facing Ouster \(Associated Press\)](#). Thousands of people gathered outside the Istanbul municipal building for a second day on Thursday to denounce a legal verdict that could lead to the city's popular mayor Ekrem Imamoglu being ousted from office and barred from running in elections next year.

SYRIA

5. [Assad Regime Arrests Hizballah's Main Drug Dealer in Southern Syria: Settling Scores or Appeasing Jordan? \(Alaraby\)](#). The arrest of al-Ramathan [indicates] that the military security is trying to whiten the image of the regime in front of the world, specifically in front of Jordan. However, the truth behind this is a struggle within the Syrian security branches, which have become totally dependent on drug smuggling and promotion.
6. [Jordan Hands Long Prison Terms to 2 Captagon Smugglers \(Arab News\)](#). Jordan's judiciary on Thursday sentenced two men to long prison terms for attempting to smuggle nearly two million captagon pills into the country from Syria.
7. [Syria: Repatriations Lag for Foreigners with Alleged ISIS Ties \(Human Rights Watch\)](#). More than 42,400 foreigners accused of Islamic State (ISIS) links remain abandoned by their countries in camps and prisons in northeast Syria despite increased repatriations of women and children in recent months, Human Rights Watch said today.

8. [Source: International Coalition Intends to Build a Base in Raqqa](#). (*Baladi News*). A Kurdish source said that the international coalition against ISIS is in the process of building a military base on the banks of the Euphrates River in the city of Raqqa.

LEBANON

9. [UNIFIL Soldier Killed by Gunfire](#) (*Annahar*). The Irish Defense Forces announced in a statement that an Irish soldier from the United Nations peacekeeping mission was killed in Lebanon late on Wednesday when a convoy of two armored vehicles came under small arms fire.
10. [Vote Sessions 'Become a Farce' as MPs Fail Again to Elect President](#) (*Nahar net*). Lebanon's divided parliament failed to elect a new president Thursday for a tenth time, despite the damage the political deadlock is doing to efforts to bail out its bankrupt economy.

THE GULF

11. [Aramco and Total Energies to Build \\$11 bln Saudi Petrochemicals Plant](#) (*Reuters*). Saudi Arabian Oil Company (Aramco) and Total Energies will join forces to build a new petrochemicals complex in Saudi Arabia, the French energy group said on Thursday.

IRAQ

12. [Iraq Fortifies Border with Iran to Curb Infiltration, Smuggling](#) (*Diyaruna*). Iraqi officials announced operations to fortify the southeastern part of the frontier with Iran to 'safeguard the border and close loopholes'.

NORTH AFRICA

13. [Egypt seeks US help in reviving Ethiopia dam deal](#) (*Iraqi News*). Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on Wednesday sought US help in pressing Ethiopia into an agreement concerning a mega-dam that the parched Arab country sees as an existential threat.