



THE EARLY PHOENIX

A first look at today's most notable stories from the Middle East, selected by ACLS experts
20 January 2023

LEBANON

1. [Lebanese Deputies Will Sit in Parliament Until the Election of a President](#) (*Arabic News*). Lebanese deputies announced on Thursday a peaceful sit-in inside the parliament building in the center of the capital, Beirut, until a new president is elected.
2. [Beirut Prevents Two French Judges From Examining The Investigation Documents of the Port Explosion](#) (*Al Jazeera*). A senior Lebanese judicial source said on Thursday that two French judges visiting Beirut this week as part of an investigation into the 2020 port explosion were denied access to documents from the Lebanese investigation, while the families of those arrested in the case carried out a sit-in in front of the Palace of Justice in Beirut, to demand the release of their children.
3. [The Book "The Prophet" by Gibran in its First Centenary, 1923-2023](#) (*Houna Loubnan*) Since its publication in 1923, "The Prophet" has sold ten million copies in English in the United States alone. It has sold more than forty million copies in different languages.
4. [World Food Program: Acute Food Insecurity Threatens Two Million Lebanese and Syrian Refugees](#) (*Al Modon*). The representative of the World Food Program in Lebanon, Abdullah Al-Wardat, revealed that "37 percent of the Lebanese population and Syrian refugees face a high level of acute food insecurity. They are classified in the third (crisis) stage, as emergency humanitarian measures are required to help this group." This percentage reflects the impact of 1.29 million Lebanese residents and 700 thousand Syrian refugees.

IRAQ

5. [**Iraq Wins 25th Gulf Cup Championship**](#) (*Iraqi News*). The Iraqi national team won the 25th Gulf Cup title after achieving a 3-2 victory over Oman. With this win, the Iraqi team is crowned with the Gulf Cup title for the fourth time in its history, after an absence that lasted for 35 years.
6. [**US Officials: Iran and Syria Used Iraq as a Haven for Money Laundering**](#) (*Al Nahar*). Iraqi experts believe the decline in the value of the Iraqi dinar against the dollar is due to the controls imposed by the Federal Reserve Bank in New York on international dollar transactions in November 2022, in a move to limit money laundering and the transfer of dollars to Iran and other Middle Eastern countries subject to sanctions, according to the *Wall Street Journal*.

ISRAEL

7. [**CENTCOM Commander Travels To Israel To Meet New IDF Chief**](#) (*Iran International*). General Michael Erik Kurilla, head US Central Command (CENTCOM), spoke with the new IDF commander about regional threats, opportunities to strengthen the bilateral military relationship, and upcoming training exercises between CENTCOM forces and the IDF.
8. [**Israel, US Discuss Regional Impact of Russia's Military Alliance with Iran**](#) (*The Jerusalem Post*). The regional impact of Russia's growing military alliance with Iran was on the agenda when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke Thursday in Jerusalem with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan. The two men also discussed a joint Israeli-American strategy against Iran and a possible normalization deal between Saudi Arabia and the Jewish state.

THE GULF

9. [**Saudi Minister: We Aim to Manufacture 500,000 Electric Cars Annually by 2030**](#) (*Al Sharq Al-Awsat*). Saudi Investment Minister Khaled Al-Falih revealed that the Kingdom seeks to produce 500,000 electric cars annually by 2030, pointing in an interview with *Al Sharq Al-Awsat* to an expected announcement in the first half of

this year of a new partnership project between Saudi Arabia and a global company for the production of electric cars.

IRAN

10. [**What is Iran's Response to a Possible Military Attack by the Israeli Regime?**](#) (*Khabar Online*). Referring to Iran's military capability against Israel, an Iranian newspaper wrote: Iran independently has the special power to inflict an irreparable blow. Missiles that take seven minutes to reach Tel Aviv and drones and other weapons that have repeatedly practiced attacking the Dimona nuclear facility and the regime's strategic centers.
11. [**Iranian MP Warns EU of Fallout of Plan to Blacklist IRGC**](#) (*Iran International*). An Iranian lawmaker warned the European Union that its plan to brand the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a “terrorist organization” may have heavy and unbearable consequences and ruin any chance of negotiations. Speaking to Tasnim on Wednesday, Mohammad Esmaeil Kowsari cautioned the European governments against falling into the trap of a plot hatched by the US and the Zionist regime to blacklist the IRGC. “The consequences of the European Union’s plot against the IRGC might be unbearable for the European countries.”

EGYPT

12. [**Russian Central Bank Includes the Egyptian Pound in Currency Exchange Rates**](#) (*Al Arabiya*). This comes in light of the decline in the price of the US dollar against the Egyptian pound, after successive increases that coincided with the liberalization of the exchange rate. The new decision will allow Egypt and Russia to use the ruble and the pound in commercial transactions between the two countries, instead of the dollar, as the volume of trade exchange between Egypt and Russia is estimated at about \$4.7 billion for the year 2021.
13. [**Columbia University Names Egypt-born Nemat Shafik as First Woman President**](#) (*Al Arabiya*). Columbia University named former Bank of England Deputy Governor and current London School of Economics President Nemat “Minouche” Shafik as its president, marking the first time a woman has been named to lead the renowned American educational institution.

TURKEY

14. [Greek PM: “We Will Not Go to War with Turkey” \(Ahrām Online\)](#) "We will not go to war with Turkey," Mitsotakis said during a session at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland on Thursday. "We should be able to sit down with Turkey as reasonable adults and resolve our main difference, which is the delimitation of maritime zones in the Aegean and the eastern Mediterranean...I also think it's never helpful to...weaponize foreign policy for domestic reasons. It's usually not a good approach because you end up poisoning your public opinion." Both he and Erdogan face elections in the first half of this year.
15. [TRNC Slams UN Peacekeeping Force for Blocking Entrance to Taksim Field \(Anadolu Agency\)](#). The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) slammed the UN Peacekeeping Force on Thursday for blocking the entrance to Taksim Field, which is located in the buffer zone on the border with the Greek side. "We do not accept the UN Peacekeeping Force's attitude to prevent physical access to the area in question. Taksim Field, which has great importance in the just struggle of the Turkish Cypriot people, in its history and past, both in terms of sports and culture, has been in use by the Cetinkaya Sports Club since 1930," the Presidency of the TRNC said in a statement. Installing barbed wire at the gates, damaging the historical Lefkosa walls and placing block barriers not only violates the status quo but also causes deprivation of rights, it said.
16. [Türkiye, US Agree to Continue to Hold F-35 Talks \(Daily Sabah\)](#). Turkish and American defense ministry delegations have agreed to continue to hold consultative talks on F-35 fighter jets, said the Defense Ministry on Thursday. Türkiye had ordered more than 100 F-35 jets made by Lockheed Martin Corp. In 2019, the U.S. suspended Türkiye from the F-35 fighter jet program after objecting to the latter purchasing the Russian S-400 missile defense system.
17. [Ex-US Senior Official Bolton Snubbed over Turkish Elections Meddling Call \(Daily Sabah\)](#). Former United States National Security Adviser John Bolton faced harsh criticism on Thursday after calling for NATO to expel Türkiye and extend support to opposition parties in the upcoming elections. "Bolton, who previously admitted that he supported coups, called on NATO to intervene in the elections in Türkiye. It is a futile effort to try to take the democratic will of the Turkish nation under tutelage,"

said Presidential Spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin. "Gone are the days when you played colonial governor," Kalin wrote on Twitter, citing Bolton's opinion article – titled "NATO's Electoral Message for (Turkish President Recep Tayyip) Erdoğan" – which was published in the *Wall Street Journal* on Tuesday.

SYRIA

18. [**After They Escaped Drowning... Lebanon Departs About 200 Syrian Refugees \(Syria TV\)**](#). Lebanese authorities deported about 200 Syrian refugees to their country, most of whom survived the sinking of their boat, which was heading to Europe on New Year's Eve. After driving them ashore near the port of Tripoli, the Lebanese army loaded nearly 200 rescued Syrian refugees into trucks and dumped them on the Syrian side of an unofficial border crossing in Wadi Khaled, a remote area in northeastern Lebanon, according to testimonies of survivors and human rights observers reported by the Associated Press.
19. [**Russia Accuses America of Using the Syrian Kurds \(Al Sharq Al-Awsat\)**](#). While Turkey reaffirmed that it would not allow the establishment of a "terrorist corridor" established by its opponents on its southern border with Syria, Russia came out with a remarkable position yesterday, accusing the United States of fueling the situation in the region by "using the Kurds to create separatist entities" and declaring its "understanding" of Turkey's security concerns in northern Syria.
20. [**Why did Flights Stop at Damascus Airport after Abdallahian's Visit...What is Israel's Role? \(Syria TV\)**](#). On January 14, after the Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian 's plane landed, the flight schedule changed at Damascus airport and turned to Latakia airport. The data, which was monitored by the "Syria TV" website, indicate that Israeli hands disrupted Damascus International Airport during Abdallahian's visit, and the disruption has continued almost all this week.