

The Early Phoenix

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

27 January 2023

SYRIA

1. [**SDF Commander: We Are Not Part of the PKK; Turkiye Will Attack Kobane in February \(Al Hadath\)**](#). In a wide-ranging [interview](#) broadcast on Thursday, Syrian Democratic Forces commander Mazloum Abdi told *Al Hadath* that he expects Turkey to attack Kobane in February and does not yet know whether Russia, the Syrian regime, Iran, or the U.S. will stop it. He also said the SDF is not a part of the PKK, is a Syrian project, and wants ultimately to be a force under the authority of the Syrian government.
2. [**Exclusive First Time Televised Appearance for American-Backed Free Syrian Army in Al Tanf, Southeast Syria \(Syria TV\)**](#). Lieutenant Colonel Fareed Qasim said that General McFarlane of United States CENTCOM conducts periodic visits to them, adding that his most recent visit yesterday was to initiate more training to the Syrian forces on how to combat drone attacks. This visit comes after Al-Tanf base had been struck with three drones a few days ago. Concerning the living conditions in Al Rukban camp, the Syrian commander stated that they are communicating with regional countries to find a solution. The commander also stated that his group is conducting several patrols to stop the smuggling of Captagon to Jordan.
3. [**SDF Announces Arrest of ISIS Raqqa Governor in Northeast Syria \(Enab Baladi\)**](#). In a massive raid conducted by Syrian Democratic Forces and US forces in Raqqa, Tabqa, and their suburbs to combat ISIS terrorism, news outlets say more than 68 people were arrested. Atta Ahmed al-Maithan confessed to having been assigned the leadership of the Islamic State cells in Raqqa and admitted responsibility for the December 26 attack on security headquarters in the city.
4. [**Judicial Authorities Backed by Turkiye Announce Arrest of 16 ISIS Members in Aleppo \(Zaman Al Wasl\)**](#). The operation took place in cooperation between Syrian fighters and the Turkish authorities in Gaziantep. The Syrian Judicial Authority in Aleppo issued a decision to imprison 15 of the 16 accused persons who were pending investigation.
5. [**Lebanese Hizballah Expands its Real Estate Hegemony in Damascus \(Al Sharq Al Awsat\)**](#). Large warehouses that were intended for vegetables in south Damascus are

now the headquarters for the Lebanese and Iranian militias. Groups from the same militias have also seized abandoned villas in the richer parts of Damascus.

6. [**Syrian Media Highlights A U.S. Congressional Letter to Secretary Blinken Expressing Deep Concern Over U.S. Policy Towards Syria \(Enab Baladi\)**](#). The Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Michael McCaul, [sent a letter](#) to the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, expressing serious concern over the Biden administration's Syria policy. McCaul urged immediate action to prevent any foreign investment into Syria, which he considers a form of normalization.

IRAQ

7. [**Breaking News: Iraq Likely to Win International Commercial Court Judgment Against Türkiye Over Türkiye's Oil Arrangements with Erbil \(@BilalWahab, Twitter\)**](#). Researcher Bilal Wahab reported on Twitter on Thursday that the International Commercial Court in Paris is prepared to issue an arbitration ruling in Baghdad's favor in a claim filed by Iraq against Türkiye. Baghdad claimed that Ankara, by allowing the Kurdistan Regional Government to export oil via the Iraqi-Türkiye pipeline without Baghdad's consent, is in violation of the two countries' pipeline agreement.
8. [**Iraqi Prime Minister Signs Strategic Partnership Agreement with France \(Bas News\)**](#). Iraqi PM Sudani and President Macron signed a bilateral memorandum of understanding in combating corruption and recovering stolen Iraqi funds, a strategic partnership agreement to increase economic as well as security cooperation, and a joint declaration on cultural heritage and antiquities maintenance.
9. [**KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani Discusses Iraqi Federal Court Ruling With White House Middle East Coordinator Brett McGurk \(Bas News\)**](#). Concerning the Iraqi Federal Supreme Court ruling which prevents Baghdad from sending Erbil's share of the federal budget for the last two months of 2022, Prime Minister Barzani expressed his disappointment with the ruling in light of the otherwise "positive atmosphere" and improving relations between Erbil and Baghdad. He described the ruling as "politically motivated and an overreach of the Court's authority."
10. [**KRG President Nechirvan Barzani Visits Türkiye to Discuss Energy Relations \(Bas News\)**](#). The discussions covered the relations between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Iraqi federal government, including the negotiations to resolve the

pending issues between the two sides and the existing opportunities to expand the joint partnership of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region with Turkey in the field of energy, which can actively contribute to filling the void and addressing the needs in the world today, especially Europe's need for natural gas.``

11. [**Iraqi News Highlights Report of Possible Collusion Between the Kurdistan Region and Turkiye \(Al Iraqi News\)**](#). The American news outlet "The Hill" reported on Thursday that the Kurdistan Regional Government, in order to spite Baghdad, allowed recent Turkish airstrikes inside Iraq. "The Hill" also indicated that the differences between the Kurdish parties threaten a Kurdish civil war.

LEBANON

12. [**Protests Against Central Bank as Currency Declines to Nearly 56,000 Lira to the Dollar \(Middle East Eye\)**](#). Lebanese protesters blocked roads and burned tires near the Central Bank in [Beirut](#) and chanted slogans against Central Bank governor Riad Salameh, as the weakened local currency plummeted to a new low against the dollar.

THE GULF

13. [**Saudi Authorities Confiscated Three Million Captagon Pills Hidden in Wooden Planks \(Al Sharq Al Awsat\)**](#). Today's shipment of 2,972,400 Captagon pills was coming through the Kingdom's eastern port.

TURKIYE

14. [**Due to the "Current Political Environment," Turkiye Postpones the Next Tripartite Meeting with Sweden and Finland \(Anadolu Agency\)**](#). Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said in a joint news conference with his Serbian counterpart that a meeting to be held under the June 2022 tripartite memorandum signed by Türkiye, Finland, and Sweden is "meaningless."
15. [**Turkish Foreign Minister Slams Former Secretary of State Pompeo Over Allegations in Pompeo's New Book \(Anadolu Agency\)**](#). In a joint news conference with Thailand's Foreign Minister in Ankara, Turkish Foreign Minister Cavusoglu denied Pompeo's claim that the U.S. had to partner with the YPG because Turkiye was not capable of combating ISIS. Cavusoglu said, "The only NATO army which took part in hand-to-hand fights against

Daesh/ISIS terrorists is the Turkish army. We eliminated more than 4,500 Daesh terrorists both in Syria and Iraq." Cavusoglu also spoke about Erdogan's October 2019 meeting with Vice President Pence and said that when Secretary Pompeo was not allowed to enter the one-on-one meeting between Erdogan and Pence, Pompeo had a "meltdown."

IRAN

16. [Spanish Prime Minister Meets Female Chess Champion Who Defected From Iran](#) (*Iran International*). After she competed in the FIDE World Rapid and Blitz Chess Championships without wearing the hijab, Sarasadat Khademalsharieh received a warning not to return to Iran and had to seek asylum. On Thursday, the Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez hosted her in Madrid for a game of chess.
17. [Tehran Seeks Tokyo's Cooperation for Port Infrastructure Development](#) (*Tehran Times*). The head of Iran's ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) discussed infrastructural, transit, and training cooperation with the Japanese ambassador to Tehran on Tuesday. Japan is interested in investing in Shahid Rajaei port in Hormozgan Province, as they had previously negotiated for maritime cooperation in this port.
18. [Deadly Attack on the Azerbaijani Embassy in Tehran](#) (*Arab News*). A man armed with a Kalashnikov-style rifle stormed the Azerbaijan Embassy in Iran's capital Friday, killing the head of security at the diplomatic post and wounding two guards, authorities said... Azerbaijan borders Iran's northwest. There have been tensions between the two countries as Azerbaijan and Armenia have fought over the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

EGYPT

19. [Cairo and New Delhi to Elevate Bilateral Relations to Strategic Partnership](#) (*Ahram Online*). Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi decided to upgrade the relations between both countries – especially political relations and relations in the fields of security, defense, energy, and economy – to the level of Strategic Partnership.
20. [US Dollar Price Stabilizes in Egypt on Thursday](#) (*Egypt Independent*). The price of the dollar in banks across the country has recorded its lowest price at 29.84 to the dollar.