

The Early Phoenix

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

2 February 2023

IRAN

1. [Tehran Claims Kurdish Groups in Iraq Involved in Latest Drone Attack](#) (*Iran International*). Nour News Agency, affiliated with the Iranian regime's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), claimed on Wednesday that parts of a micro aerial vehicle and explosive materials were ordered by a foreign intelligence service and smuggled into Iran from Iraqi Kurdistan.
2. [Iranian Army Leader Attends Parliament Session to Review Response Options](#) (*Tehran Times*). Deputy Chief of the Iranian Army for Coordination Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari attended a session of the Iranian parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee. The session addressed Iran's response options in the face of possible threats, Iran's official news agency IRNA reported... "The commander of operations of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Army also presented a report on the operational capabilities of the army's ground, air and air defense forces," Amouei told IRNA.
3. [IAEA Chides Iran For Undeclared Change To Uranium Enrichment Setup](#) (*Iran International*). The International Atomic Energy Agency found that the interconnection between the two clusters of centrifuges changed during an unannounced inspection on January 21 at the Fordow Fuel enrichment Plant (FFEP), a site dug into a mountain where inspectors are stepping up checks after Iran said it would dramatically expand enrichment.
4. [Azerbaijan Says Number of People Arrested on Espionage for Iran Has Risen to 39](#) (*Iran International*). The Azerbaijani news agency APA quoted the ministry on Wednesday that 39 people have been detained as part of a special operation to uncover subversive activities in the country "under the guise of religion."
5. [Regime Newspaper: Baku Should Not Take Orders from Tel Aviv](#) (*Tehran Times*). Without mentioning the issue of the suspected Iranian spies arrested in Azerbaijan, the

regime based newspaper *Tebzan Times* slammed the Azerbaijani foreign ministry calls for international condemnation of the attack on its embassy in Tehran.

6. [Iranian Couple Sentenced to 10 Years for Dancing in Support of Protests](#) (*Iran International*). An Iranian court has sentenced two bloggers to ten and a half years in prison each for dancing in the streets in support of the nationwide protests. The couple were charged with “colluding with the intention of disrupting national security and promoting propaganda.” Besides the jail term, a two-year ban to use social media, and a two-year ban on leaving Iran has also been imposed on the couple. They have been charged with “encouraging corruption and public prostitution”.
7. [Exclusive - Former Iranian Regime Official Calls for Limiting Khamenei's Power, Resuming Ties with US](#) (*Iran International*). Iran International received an audio recording from a January 30 meeting where Mohammad Reza Salehi, a logistics chief at the Presidential Office under President Hassan Rouhani, said that as a result of the uprising in Iran, reformists and moderates have four options before them: Hoping for a foreign military attack; joining the protesters and helping the revolution in Iran; doing nothing and hoping that the regime will implode as a result of increasing financial corruption. The fourth and last option is working hard to bring about real and serious reforms in the structure of the regime by reducing the power of non-elected and non-accountable offices and strengthening the political structure's republican nature and restoring the people's right to determine their fate.

THE GULF

8. [Kuwait Thwarts Largest Drug Smuggling Operation in its History](#) (*Al Khaleej Online*). The Kuwaiti security services managed to thwart the largest drug smuggling operation in its history, which consisted of about 15 million narcotic tablets of the type “Lyrica,” and more than half a ton of raw lyrica powder.
9. [Saudi Arabia and Turkey are Discussing Military Cooperation](#) (*Al Khaleej Online*). The Saudi Chief of the General Staff and the Turkish Deputy Minister of National Defense discussed the strategic relations between the two countries, especially in the field of defense and military cooperation, and ways to enhance it.

10. [French Foreign Minister Makes First Visit to Riyadh and Abu Dhabi](#) (*Al Sharq Al-Awsat*). French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna’s visit includes the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates...Paris pointed the finger at Iran, which it considers to be “pursuing a destabilizing policy, whether through its proxies in the region or directly,” referring to the nuclear files and the proliferation of Iranian drones and missiles. It went so far as to accuse Iran of “contributing to war crimes” being committed in Ukraine by providing the drones that Russian forces use in their attacks on Ukrainian facilities, including civilian infrastructure.

IRAQ

11. [Iran-Backed Group Claims Responsibility for Rocket Attack on Turkish Camp in Zilkan, Iraq](#) (*Rudaw*). In a statement referring to the missile unit that targeted the Turkish military camp...the group calling itself “Liwa Ahrar al-Iraq” said that operations will continue unless “the occupier withdraws immediately and completely.”
12. [Iraq Recovers \\$80 Million of \\$2.6 Billion Stolen in “Theft of the Century” Scandal](#) (*Iraqi News*). The authorities managed to recover more than \$80 million from the stolen funds and return them to the state treasury, the statement mentioned. Thus, Baghdad succeeded in recovering a new batch of the funds stolen from the General Commission for Taxes in what is known as the ‘theft of the century’ involving former senior officials and businessmen.
13. [Iraq’s January Oil Revenues Exceeded \\$7.6 billion](#) (*Iraqi News*). Total quantities of crude oil exported during January from oil fields in central and southern Iraq were more than 98.46 million barrels, while the quantities exported from oil fields in Kirkuk through the port of Ceyhan were more than 2.47 million barrels. The total exports of crude oil during December exceeded 103.28 million barrels with revenues exceeding \$7.7 billion, according to final statistics issued by SOMO.
14. [PM Barzani: Iraq's Top Court Used to Undermine Agreements Between Erbil and Baghdad](#) (*Bas News*). Kurdish officials have been critical of the Federal Supreme Court's decisions in recent years, particularly the court's ruling against the Kurdistan Region's oil

and gas law on the grounds that it contradicts the Iraqi constitution. The leaders of the Kurdistan Region argue that the Iraqi court has not been formed in accordance with the constitution; hence its decisions should not be considered constitutional.

YEMEN

15. [**U.S. Drone Strike Kills Al Qaeda Explosives Expert in Northeast Yemen**](#) (*Al Hadath*).

The attack is the first of its kind since the beginning of this year. Yemeni media revealed that Hassan al Hadrami, the Al Qaeda official responsible for manufacturing explosive devices and explosives in the terrorist organization, was killed in a raid by a drone believed to be American, in the Samada area in Wadi Ubaidah in Ma'rib Governorate, in the northeast of the country.

Lebanon

16. [**After 25 years, Lebanon Changes its Official Currency Exchange Rate**](#) (*Al Nahar*). The Central Bank announced on Wednesday that the new official exchange rate for the pound is 15,000 to the dollar. This constitutes a 90 percent devaluation from the previous official rate of 1,507.50 pounds per dollar, a rate that had remained unchanged for about 25 years.

SYRIA

17. [**The Assad Regime Implements the Slogan of Liberating the Golan Heights with Drugs and Hashish—But Gets Caught by Israeli Army**](#) (*Orient*). The Times of Israel newspaper revealed an unprecedented incident in the Golan Heights where Israeli security forces arrested two Syrian men who tried to smuggle drugs into Israel.

18. [**Assad Announced His New Foreign Policy Based on Pragmatism**](#) (*Syria TV*). The head of the Syrian regime, Bashar al-Assad, met with a number of journalists and officials in his media institutions. During the meeting, he talked about the foreign policy that his regime will follow in the coming period, to “deal pragmatically with international and regional transformations,” in addition to discussing the future of normalization with the Turkish government. However, he did not address the living and economic conditions that continue to collapse...One journalist who attended said, “It is not important to obtain a specific answer from President al-Assad to a question, as the political details are constantly changing rather only a vision and a method of assessing the situation, on the principle that governs this or that file, on the factors of strength and balance in the movement of Syrian politics.”

19. [Assad Regime Wants 20% of the \\$2 Million Donated in a Local Initiative to Rebuild Daraa City \(Orient\)](#). After public donations exceeded \$2 million in less than a month since the launch of the “Fazaa Ahl al-Khair” campaign in Daraa, the Assad militia sought to take credit for that campaign, demanding a percentage of the donations allocated to rehabilitate the infrastructure in the province.

EGYPT

20. [Egypt Proposes Initiative to Stop Current Escalation in Palestine \(Middle East Monitor\)](#). According to the sources, Cairo conveyed the messages of the Palestinian Authority to the Israeli side, and Egypt called on Israel to stop the military escalation without any conditions.

TURKIYE

21. [US & Five EU Countries Close Istanbul Consulates After America Warns of Terrorist Threat \(Enab Baladi\)](#). In addition to Germany, Sweden, the UK, and the Netherlands closing their consulates in Istanbul for security reasons, [Bas News](#) reported that France has also temporarily closed its embassies...The US embassy warned its citizens last week of the possibility of terrorist attacks against the background of the burning of the Qur’an in Europe.

ISRAEL

22. [Israel Targeting Iranian Arms Flow to Ukraine, Netanyahu Tells CNN \(Jerusalem Post\)](#). Israel is targeting the production of Iranian weapons that could be sent to Russia for use against Ukraine, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told CNN in an interview aired on Wednesday. “Israel... acts in ways that I will not itemize here against Iran’s weapons productions, which are used against Ukraine,” Netanyahu said. Israel has already been active in working to thwart Iran’s ability to develop nuclear weapons, but in his conversation with CNN, he said that such efforts were also directed toward preventing the flow of Iranian weapons to Russia.