

THE EARLY PHOENIX

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

February 22, 2023

SYRIA

1. **Israel Targeted a Secret Meeting of the Revolutionary Guards in Damascus** (*Al Arabiya*). An informed "government" source reported that the Israeli raids targeted a secret meeting that included technical experts from the Syrian Guard with engineers from the Syrian regime's army, to discuss a program to produce drones and guided missiles, run by the Iranian regime's Revolutionary Guard, according to what Reuters reported on Wednesday.
2. **A New Shipment of Weapons for the Pro-Iranian Militias Entered Deir Ez Zour** (*Al Nahar*). A refrigeration truck loaded with weapons belonging to pro-Iranian militias flying Iraqi flags crossed from the city of Al-Mayadeen in the eastern countryside of Deir Ezzor towards Deir Ezzor. The truck was accompanied by 3 armored cars equipped with heavy machine guns and a number of personnel, after it set off from the Albu Kamal countryside, which is under the control of the Syrian forces and Iranian militias, east of Deir ez-Zour.
3. **Warnings of Outbreaks of Transmitted Diseases in Earthquake Zones in Syria and Turkey** (*The Syrian Observer*). The European Center for Disease Prevention and Control warned of the risk of the spread of water-borne diseases, such as cholera, among the residents of the earthquake-hit areas in Turkey and Syria, in the wake of the earthquake that struck on February 6th. The CDC warned that diseases transmitted through contaminated food and water, respiratory infections, and vaccine-preventable diseases pose a significant risk to residents of the earthquake-affected areas in Turkey and Syria due to the lack of proper sanitary conditions.

4. **[A Turkish Drone Targeted a Leader of the Syrian Democratic Forces Accused of Leading the Istanbul Bombing \(Syria TV\)](#)**. An informed source told Syria TV that Khalil Munji was killed in the targeting and Haval Akram, an administrator in the "Asayish" forces, was wounded in the city of Qamishli. Khalil is considered one of the influential people in and close to the "SDF" areas, and he supervises money transfers and an exchange company, in addition to his work in smuggling people from the region to European countries.
5. **[Syrian Experts: Initial Losses of the Earthquake are Seven Times Greater than the Gross Domestic Product \(Al Sharq Al Awsat\)](#)**. Syrian experts estimated the initial losses of the earthquake that struck Syria on February 6 at seven times the gross domestic product, or about \$44.535 billion. In a symposium held by Damascus University to discuss the repercussions of the earthquake, they assessed that the government in Damascus will not be able to deal with the losses without outside aid.

Turkiye

6. **[Turkish Defense Minister: 20,000 Syrians Returned to their Homeland After Quake \(Daily Sabah\)](#)**. Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, stressing that a new influx of refugees from Syria is out of the question, announced that 20,000 Syrian citizens had returned to Syria in "a one-way direction."
7. **[Erdogan: 200,000 New Houses Will Be Built in Quake-hit States \(Rudaw\)](#)**. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Tuesday promised to construct nearly 200,000 permanent houses in 11 quake-stricken provinces in the country within a year, adding that his government has mobilised all resources to meet the urgent needs of the victims.
8. **[906-bed Ship Will Offer Shelter for Quake Victims \(Daily Sabah\)](#)**. Initially, after the earthquakes, a ship with 400 cabins and 1,056 beds was brought to the port in the district by the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources for the purpose of hosting quake survivors. The ship was docked at

Iskenderun Port on Monday, prior to the two earthquakes centered in Hatay's Defne and Samandağ districts that shook the devastated region once again.

9. **[Earthquake Dominates the Election Agenda for Erdogan's AK Party](#)** (*Daily Sabah*). As Türkiye reels from the Feb. 6 earthquakes, the worst in the country's recent history, the government strives to speed up recovery and rebuilding efforts. The May 14 elections, which dominated the country's agenda for a long time, were, understandably, almost forgotten amid the tragedy dubbed the "disaster of the century" by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who is again running for the top office.

IRAN

10. **[Iranian Regime Sentences a Dual German National to Death](#)** (*Bas News*). Germany has condemned Iran for the death sentence handed down by the Tehran Revolutionary Court to Jamshid Sharmahd, an Iranian-German national accused of leading the Tondar group, which is banned as a "terrorist" organization by Iran. Germany has declared two employees of the Iranian embassy [persona non grata](#) and ordered them to leave the country in protest over Iran sentencing a German national to death, a statement from the foreign office said on Wednesday. Another [Iranian Austrian](#) dual national was sentenced to 7.5 years in prison for charges of espionage.
11. **[Iranian Opposition Figure Says Britain Should Close Iran's Embassy Instead of Advising Iran International to Relocate](#)** (*Iran International*). Iranian opposition figure Masih Alinejad says the UK government should have closed the Iranian embassy instead of advising Iran International to relocate to the US in response to the Iranian regime's threats. On February 22, the IRGC top commander Salami said the threats against Iran International journalists which forced the channel to stop its broadcasting in the UK and move to the US "[show how far the Islamic Revolution's realm of power](#), field of infiltration and radius of influence has extended."

12. **[Exclusive: Secret Letter Reveals Iran’s Predicament In Controlling Food Prices](#)** (*Iran International*). In the confidential letter, dated February 5, the secretary of Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani briefed President Ebrahim Raisi of a meeting with food importers and other officials of the agriculture ministry. According to the letter, the country will also face a shortage of maize or corn within one or two months as Brazil – which had been replaced by many countries as the main exporter – has run out of the produce and Ukraine will not supply Iran with its needed corn.
13. **[Iran Uses Secret Prisons to Force Confessions From Protesters](#)** (*CNN*). The network has been able to find the location of more than 40 unofficial torture centers and undeclared secret prisons in Iran, which are located in government-controlled facilities such as the basement of mosques.
14. **[Iran Says IAEA Inspectors in Tehran Are Resolving Nuclear Enrichment Ambiguities](#)** (*Al Arabiya*). “Officials of the International Atomic Energy Agency are in Tehran and have been starting negotiations, visits and checks... Ambiguities created by an inspector are being resolved,” the head of Iran’s Atomic Energy Organization said.

IRAQ

15. **[Iraq and Saudi Arabia Sign Border Security Agreement for First time in 40 Years](#)** (*the New Arab*). The security memorandum of understanding was signed by Saudi Interior Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud and his Iraqi counterpart Abdul Amir al-Shammari in Riyadh, the Iraqi interior ministry said in a statement Sunday. Riyadh has accused Iran-backed militias of conducting attacks on Saudi Arabia from Iraqi soil.
16. **[Iraqi Kata’ib Hizballah Militia Distances Itself from Iran-Saudi Talks in Iraq, Calls for Attacks in Saudi Arabia](#)** (*Malik*). Iran-backed militant leader Abu Ali al-Askari...stated that the best way to bring peace to the region is by [moving the conflict inside Saudi Arabia](#) and further demanded that Iraq’s Shia

officials end their support for parliament speaker Mohammed al-Halbousi, saying Halbousi's fall from power was imminent.

ISRAEL & PALESTINE

17. **[Secret Israeli-Palestinian Talks to De-Escalate Rising Tensions](#)** (*Axios*). The weeks of secret talks, which have not been previously reported, are among the first pieces of evidence of direct high-level engagement between the Palestinian Authority and the new right-wing Israeli government.
18. **["Dismayed" UN Security Council Says Israeli Settlements Impede Peace](#)** (*Daily Sabah*). "The Security Council reiterates that continuing Israeli settlement activities are dangerously imperiling the viability of the two-State solution," the Council said in a statement supported by all 15 members but which does not have the binding force of a resolution considered last week. Israel was quick to hit back at the declaration, with the office of Prime Minister Netanyahu saying it denied the "historic" rights of the Jewish people.
19. **[Israel Signals Readiness for Military Confrontation With Iran](#)** (*Iran International*). Israel's Channel 12 reported on Tuesday that Netanyahu met five times in recent weeks with Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi, Mossad head David Barnea, Military Intelligence chief Aharon Haliva and other military figures to examine Israel's readiness for a possible attack on Iranian nuclear targets.
20. **[Nine Palestinians Killed in Israeli Raid on West Bank City of Nablus](#)** (*Al Arabiya*). Palestinian medical officials said two Islamic Jihad commanders were killed in the Israeli raid. The other seven fatalities included at least three civilians, among them a 72-year-old man and a 14-year-old boy. Some 70 Palestinians were wounded, the medical officials said.
21. **[Netanyahu Calls for Talks as Opposition to Judicial Reform Grows](#)** (*Daily Sabah*). Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has previously derided opponents of the proposals, which would increase the power of politicians to appoint judges and curb the power of the Supreme Court to overturn government decisions, as embittered leftists who refuse to accept the result of the last election.