

The Early Phoenix

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

3 February 2023

LEBANON

1. [Two Years After the Assassination of Lokman Slim, His Mother Says Sadness is Her Companion](#) (*Al Sharq Al Awsat*). Lokman's mother, Mrs. Salma Mershaq, refused to leave her home located in the heart of Dahiyeh, the stronghold of Hezbollah, which many of his opponents pointed fingers at for the assassination of Lokman two years ago, and she is still busy writing. She is a Lebanese-Egyptian-Syrian writer, as she is from a Syrian father and a Lebanese mother, who was born and lived in Egypt. She finds nothing but the word to soothe her wounds and ease her pain...She regrets that the judiciary failed to reveal the killers of her son, and the situation reached by the Lebanese judiciary, "where the final word is no longer for the law – but for the murderer who portrays himself as a hero," wondering: "What barbarism is this?!"
2. [Five Countries Will Meet in Paris to Discuss Lebanon's Crisis](#) (*Al Nahar*). French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna, who is currently in Saudi Arabia, expressed her "grave concern about the political blockage of Lebanon's horizons." She announced that Paris will be hosting the United States, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Egypt, in an attempt to encourage Lebanese politicians to find a way out of the crisis in their country.

IRAN

3. [An Anti-Hijab Prisoner In Iran Seriously Ill After Hunger Strike](#) (*Iran International*). A photo of Meysami along with a letter from Rajaei-Shahr prison in Karaj were published on social media Thursday, showing him in a horrible condition after losing weight. However, the political activist wrote in the letter to prison officials that "I will still insist on my three demands of stopping the execution of protesters, releasing six political prisoners, and stopping mandatory hijab." The title of the political activist's letter is "For the days of suffering and suffering and suffering".
4. [Iranian Banks Don't Need SWIFT Anymore: Official](#) (*Tasnim Agency*). Speaking to *Tasnim*, the deputy governor of the Central Bank of Iran for international affairs said

Iranian banks do not need to use SWIFT for financial transactions anymore. Mohsen Karimi said all banks across Russia, all branches of Russian banks in other countries with access to SPFS (a Russian equivalent of the SWIFT financial transfer system) and 106 non-Russian banks in 13 countries are now connected to Iran's interbank system, SEPAM.

5. [Macron Warns of Iran Nuclear 'Consequences' After Talks with Netanyahu](#) (*France 24*). In a statement released after a dinner meeting in the Elysee Palace, Macron warned that if Tehran continues with the atomic project "would inevitably have consequences."
6. [Lobbyist Alliance Met Secretly in New York to Support Reviving The Nuclear Deal](#) (*Al Arabiya*). A coalition of progressive activists funded by George Soros, Charles Koch and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund is secretly lobbying to revive the Iran nuclear deal by linking it to the Iranian human rights movement, according to internal correspondence obtained by *The Washington Free Beacon*. Activist groups plan to "pursue a two-track legislative agenda, in which they will find a way through legislation to give cover for pro-deal Democrats by supporting Iranian women and Iranian human rights, without specifying in any way how to revive the nuclear deal, while at the same time building a coalition of members of both chambers."

SYRIA

7. [Artificial Intelligence Fails to Solve the Ethical Dilemmas of Syria](#) (*Syria TV*). A group of Syrian researchers presented "ChatGPT" with several questions regarding a solution in Syria. The platform provided five different visions, none of which discussed justice or accountability.
8. [Iranian Militias Arrest Syrians Loyal to Them](#) (*Al Sharq Al Awsat*). The Iranian Revolutionary Guard and Lebanese Hezbollah launched a campaign of arrests among the pro-Tehran militias of Syrian nationality, in the cities of Al-Bukamal and Al-Mayadeen, which are under the control of the regime forces and Iranian militias in the eastern countryside of Deir Ezzor...sources said the arrests are due to their interrogation on charges of communicating with the "International Coalition" and Israel, and the lack of confidence of the Iranian militias and "Hezbollah" in their loyalists of Syrian nationality,

and they are suspected of providing the “International Coalition” with information about Militia movements and locations.

THE GULF

9. [Saudi Arabia and Iraq Announce Cooperation to Reduce Regional Tension](#) (*Al Jazeera*). Saudi Arabia and Iraq announced on Thursday that the two countries are working together to reduce tension in the region and enhance its stability, during a visit by Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan...Since 2021, Baghdad has been hosting talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the last of which took place in April 2022 to end the estrangement that has extended since 2016, in the hope of reaching understandings regarding differences in several files, most notably the Yemen war.
10. [Doha Hosts Fifth Qatari-American Strategic Dialogue](#) (*Al Khaleeji Online*). Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdul Rahman Al Thani discussed with the US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland the strengthening of bilateral relations, especially in the field of energy, as well as regional issues such as the security of the region and the Palestinian cause and others.
11. [King Salman Dismisses Saudi Central Bank Governor](#) (*Al Sharq Al Awsat*). King Salman bin Abdulaziz issued a royal order to relieve Dr. Fahd bin Abdullah bin Abdul Latif Al-Mubarak, governor of the Saudi Central Bank, from his post, and to appoint him as an advisor in the royal court with the rank of “minister.” The orders also require the appointment of Ayman bin Muhammad. Bin Saud Al-Sayyari, Governor of the Central Bank of Saudi Arabia, with the rank of minister.

ISRAEL & PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

12. [Netanyahu Visits France to Press Macron on Iran](#) (*The New Arab*). Netanyahu hopes that Iran's role supplying drones to Russian invaders in Ukraine as well as the crackdown on protests at home will prompt Western allies to drop any pursuit of a revival of the 2015 deal over its atomic drive. The prime minister has also said Israel is considering sending military aid to Ukraine, apparently dropping its previously more neutral stance over the conflict in the hope of a more confrontational Western position towards Iran.

13. [Israeli Foreign Minister Visits Sudan to Announce Normalization During this Year](#) (*Al Jazeera*). Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen revealed that Israel has presented a draft peace agreement with Sudan, which will be signed during this year, after his meeting with the head of the Transitional Sovereignty Council in Sudan, Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan - Thursday - in the capital, Khartoum.
14. [US Pushes Palestinians to Adopt Security Plan with West Bank Crackdown](#) (*The New Arab*). The plan was drafted by US Lieutenant General Michael Fenzel and involves PA forces being deployed around Jenin and Nablus in order to suppress fighters from Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Lions' Den, and other armed groups who have led attacks on Israeli forces in the occupied territories.

TURKIYE

15. [Sweden Tightens Terrorism Laws Amid Tension Over NATO Bid](#) (*The New Arab*). The new law, which the government hopes will come into force in June, will give authorities much wider powers to detain and prosecute individuals who support terrorist organizations, either through financing or other means.
16. [Turkish Defense Minister Announces Continuing Talks with Assad and Sees Progress on F-16 Issue with U.S.](#) (*Al Jazeera*). Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said that tripartite meetings between Turkiye, Russia and Syria will continue in the coming days at the level of technical delegations. He also pointed to positive progress regarding the purchase of American F-16 fighters...Akar made it clear that Turkiye follows a stable foreign policy based on logic, stressing that the only goal of Turkiye's military operations in neighboring countries is to eliminate what he described as "terrorist organizations," secure borders, and prevent the influx of new refugees into Turkiye.
17. [Turkiye Summons Nine Ambassadors of Western Counties](#) (*Al Jazeera*). The consulates of several foreign countries in Turkiye decided to suspend the work of their employees, under the pretext of the existence of a threat of terrorist acts in the country...Turkish Interior Minister Suleiman Soylu accused those countries of waging a "psychological war" against Turkiye that could harm its tourism sector and "seeking to destabilize it," while a spokesman for the ruling Justice and Development Party described the Western warnings as "irresponsible."

JORDAN

18. [King Abdullah Visits White House to Discuss Al Aqsa Conflict](#) (*Middle East Eye*). US President Joe Biden emphasized US support for Jordan's custodianship of holy sites in Jerusalem and discussed efforts to reduce tensions in the occupied West Bank on Thursday, during a meeting at the White House with Jordanian King Abdullah II.

IRAQ

19. [Election Dispute Between al-Sudani and al-Maliki Splits the Coordination Framework](#) (*Independent Press Agency*). Political sources revealed that a new dispute broke out between Prime Minister Muhammad Shia'a al-Sudani and the head of the State of Law Coalition, Nuri al-Maliki, because of al-Sudani's nomination of a leader of the League of the Righteous Movement for the upcoming provincial elections, which al-Maliki considered a rebellion as he wanted to limit the nominations to his person.

EGYPT

20. [Exchange Rate Remains at 30 Egyptian Pounds to the Dollar](#) (*Egypt Independent*) While [the Central Bank Defies Expectations and Keeps Interest Rates Unchanged](#). (*al Borsa News*). The Monetary Policy Committee of the Central Bank decided not to raise the basic interest rates on the pound in its meeting on Thursday. The committee kept the rates of the return of deposits and lending for one night and the price of the main operation of the Central Bank at the level of 16.75%, 17.75% and 16.57%, respectively. The credit and discount rate was kept at 16.75%. The bank thus defied most of the expectations that indicated that it would raise interest between 1 and 3% today.