

THE EARLY PHOENIX

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

February 28, 2023

SYRIA

1. **[U.S. House of Representatives Votes 414 to 2 to Condemn Assad's Diversion of UN Aid and Urge Enforcement of Caesar Act \(ACLS\)](#)**. On Monday evening, the U.S. House of Representatives voted 414-2 on a resolution condemning the Assad regime, calling for a mechanism to prevent the regime from diverting UN aid, and calling on the U.S. administration to strictly enforce the Caesar Act. **[The resolution's sponsor, Congressman Joe Wilson, said](#)** "Syria's brutal dictator Assad is stealing humanitarian aid...I am deeply saddened there has been a weakening of sanctions by the Biden administration on the Assad regime through permitting direct transactions with the Assad regime. This will do nothing to help with earthquake relief and will only endanger Syrian civilians by enriching the regime. We are already seeing the result of Biden's weak policy this week with Arab countries beginning to normalize with the regime and ignoring the Caesar Act which threatens dire consequences for normalization. Despite this, let it be known that Congress will continue to stand with the Caesar Act on a bipartisan basis and strengthen sanctions on Assad and those who engage this barbaric regime."
2. **[Ignoring Normalization Questions, Egyptian Foreign Minister Says Damascus Visit is for Humanitarian Discussions Only \(Syria TV\)](#)**. On Monday, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry held talks with the Syrian regime's foreign minister, Faisal al-Miqdad, after his meeting with the regime's president, Bashar al-Assad...In response to a journalist's question of whether Egypt would restore relations with Syria to their previous state, Shoukry said,

"The Syrian people have their status with the Egyptian people, and the aim of this visit is a humanitarian goal" [only]...Shoukry also ignored journalists' questions about Syria's return to the Arab League.

3. **Report: Assad Regime Bombed Earthquake-Affected Areas 84 Times Since Feb 6 (Syria TV)**. On Monday, the "Syria Response Coordinators" team issued a statement that "Syrian regime forces have targeted areas in northwestern Syria since the date of the earthquake on February 6 more than 84 times, most of which focused on areas with a high population density."
4. **Report: Iran Seeks to Modernize "Worn Out" Syrian Air Defense Systems (Syria TV)**. Iran has been talking openly about modernizing the air defenses of the Syrian regime to help it protect itself from Israeli air raids...On February 24, Iranian state television announced Tehran's intention to provide Damascus with long-range and advanced domestic missile systems for air defense. It is likely we will see Iran supplying it with radars and defensive missiles such as the Khordad 15 system. An unnamed intelligence source told *Newsweek* that Tehran plans to deploy the Bavar-373 air defense system in addition to new Sayyad 4B missiles, which are said to have a range of 300 km.

IRAN

5. **IRGC Commander Threatens to Attack European Union States (Iran International)**. The commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guard has threatened European countries that the Islamic Republic can target them by increasing the range of its weapons. In remarks in the southern city of Abadan on Monday, the IRGC commander Hossein Salami said Europe is a pioneer in imposing sanctions against the Iranian people, and European countries have become a place for gatherings of "anti-Iranian separatists and fugitives." "We have the ability to

increase the range of weapons and strike them seriously, but we have not yet done so,” he added. “We warn them. The lives of Europeans depend on oil and security, and they should be careful and not endanger themselves.”

6. **Trading in Tehran Bazaars Comes to a Halt Amid Currency's Fall** (*Iran International*). Trading in Tehran markets has largely come to a halt as the currency rial is near its all-time low, Iran International has learned from merchants and traders. A textile trader told Iran International that “For now we have stopped selling our goods because we have no guarantee we can refill our stocks”...Local media reported that the Central Bank of Iran intervened in the currency market by injecting \$700 million in UAE dirhams on Sunday and the rial marginally rose from its all-time low of 600,000 against the US dollar. But such a sizeable intervention has not produced the desired result of stabilizing the rial.

GULF REGION

7. **Saudi Arabia Benefits from Sanctions Against Russia by Increasing Oil Exports to Europe** (*The New Arab*). Saudi Arabia benefited from the sanctions on Russian oil and fuel and increased its oil exports to the European Union by 126% in 2022...However, Saudi Arabia was not the only country benefiting from the sanctions against Russia, as American companies, African countries and Latin American countries also benefited, as US exports to Europe increased by 22.3% last year.
8. **EU Sanctions Dubai-based Russian Shipping Company** (*Middle East Eye*). The European Union has slapped sanctions on a Dubai-based subsidiary of Russia’s state-owned shipping giant, as the West steps up efforts to stem Moscow’s use of the Middle East as an economic lifeline. Sanctions were placed

on Sun Ship Management, which the EU said is part of the Russian government-controlled shipping company, Sovcomflot.

EGYPT

9. **Fourth Devaluation of the Egyptian Pound is Approaching** (*The New Arab*). The Central Bank of Egypt is close to a new devaluation of the pound within the next two weeks, in a fourth wave of floating the local currency within one year. [The pound] may quickly drop to 35 pounds against the dollar, according to expectations in economic circles and international banks.

10. **Egyptian Central Bank Sells Treasury Bills Worth 60 Billion Pounds after Raising Interest Rate to 22.45%**. (*Al Masry Al Youm*). The Central Bank of Egypt sold short-term treasury bills, with a total value of EGP 60.214 billion for the first and second offerings, on behalf of the Ministry of Finance. The weighted average interest rate on the second issuance of bills amounted to about 22.449%, up from the previous highest interest rate of 22.39% recorded last week.

SUDAN

11. **United Nations: Humanitarian Situation in Sudan is Worsening** (*Al Sharq Al Awsat*). The latest United Nations report warned of the continued deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Sudan, which has reached its highest level ever... The report, which was released on Monday, said that about 15.8 million people, or a third of the country's population, need humanitarian aid in 2023, an increase of one million people from last year. The report appealed to humanitarian aid partners, the international community and donors, to provide more than \$1.7 billion to continue the flow of humanitarian assistance and protection to the 12.5 million most vulnerable people in Sudan.

YEMEN

12. [Pledges in Geneva of \\$1.2 Billion to Support Yemen](#) (*Al Sharq Al Awsat*). In a conference on Monday, the United Nations obtained pledges from international donors to provide \$1.2 billion to support its humanitarian response in Yemen during 2023, while it was calling for the collection of \$ 4.3 billion. The list of donors is topped by the United States, the European Union, Germany and the United Kingdom. This amount is half of what the United Nations succeeded in raising during last year's donors' conference.

IRAQ

13. [Sadrists Return to the Arena Through the Gate of the Electoral Law](#) (*Al Sharq Al Awsat*). Thousands of followers of the Sadr movement and some civil movements demonstrated on Monday in front of the gates of the Green Zone where the Iraqi parliament is located, to pressure the parliament to back down from reading the draft amendment to the election law for the second time...The parliament decided to postpone consideration of the law until next week. The Sadr movement supported the position of the Najaf religious authority, rejecting the one-district system and closed electoral lists.
14. [Turkish Airstrike Kills PKK Commander in Sinjar](#) (*Bas News*). A Turkish drone strike on Monday targeted a vehicle of an affiliated armed group of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in the predominantly Yezidi town of Sinjar, killing a military commander, according to a security source.

LEBANON

15. [Lebanon Security Chief's Term to End After Authorities Skip on Renewal](#) (*Al Arabiya*). The term of Lebanon's powerful General Security

chief Abbas Ibrahim is set to end this week as neither cabinet nor parliament have discussed a measure that would allow him to stay on after reaching the legal retirement age. Ibrahim, who hails from southern Lebanon, has headed the General Security directorate since 2011 and is considered a key regional interlocutor who has good ties with the Iran-backed Hezbollah and links with Western governments. On Thursday, he will turn 64, which is the legal retirement age in Lebanon...Lebanon's caretaker cabinet did not discuss an extension at its meeting on Monday. Information Minister Ziad Makari told reporters after the meeting that the cabinet "can do nothing" and that the decision was to be taken by the interior minister.

16. **[Christian Blocs Reject Franjieh-Salam Deal](#)** (*Nabarnet*). The country's two main Christian blocs, the Lebanese Forces and the Free Patriotic Movement, have rejected a proposed French-backed presidential settlement under which Suleiman Franjieh would be elected as president and Nawaf Salam would be named as premier, media reports said on Monday. In a statement, the Lebanese Forces denied a media report published in al-Liwaa newspaper that had claimed the LF was willing to "secure a quorum for Franjieh's election." "The LF has repeatedly stressed its stance that categorically rejects any Hezbollah presidential candidate, and accordingly this stance fully applies to the candidate of the Axis of Resistance, Mr. Suleiman Franjieh," the LF said.
17. **[Lebanon's National News Photo Archive Stolen](#)** (*Al Arabiya*). A server containing photographs documenting Lebanon since 1961 has been stolen from the state news agency's headquarters in a crime "of national proportions," Information Minister Ziad Makari said on Monday...This period includes the country's devastating 1975-1990 civil war. "What happened was a crime of national proportions," the minister said. Unidentified individuals broke into the

room housing the server at the information ministry before stealing the server itself and five computers, he added.

TURKIYE

18. **World Bank Estimates Earthquake Damage in Türkiye Exceeds \$34 Billion** (*World Bank*). The two very large earthquakes of February 6 caused an estimated \$34.2 billion in direct physical damages in Türkiye, the equivalent of 4% of the country's 2021 GDP, according to a World Bank rapid damage assessment report released on Monday.
19. **Türkiye Participates in NATO Maritime Drill in Mediterranean** (*Daily Sabah*). The Turkish navy is taking part in NATO's annual maritime exercise off the Mediterranean hosted by Italy, the Defense Ministry said Monday. "We are participating in the exercise with our TCG Preveze submarine and our TCG Barbaros frigate, which is assigned to NATO Permanent Naval Task Group-2," the ministry said on Twitter. The Dynamic Manta-2023 exercise began on Monday off Italy's Sicily Island and will continue until March 10.

ISRAEL AND PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

20. **US Citizen Murdered in Terror Attack Near Jericho** (*Jerusalem Post*). A US-Israeli dual national was killed in a shooting attack near the Beit Haarava Junction on Highway 90 in the Jordan Valley on Monday afternoon. The terrorists proceeded to drive to the area of the Monastery of Saint George in Wadi Qelt, burned their vehicle and switched to a different vehicle before driving away from the area. The roads leading to Jericho were closed as Israeli forces searched for the terrorists.

21. **Israeli Settlers Rampage Through West Bank Town; Palestinians Report One Killed, Dozens Wounded** (*Haaretz*). A few hours after Sunday's shooting which killed two Israelis, a large group of settlers entered the West Bank town of Hawara and began throwing rocks at houses and setting trees and cars in the village on fire. 36 houses have been burned along with 15 cars and 9 families have been evacuated...The Palestinian Red Crescent reports that 98 Palestinians have been wounded in the attacks by settlers, along with damage to 3 ambulances...An Israeli military reserves battalion arrived at Hawara, south of Nablus, along with fire brigades, and is using riot control equipment to repel the settlers. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called on the settlers "not to take the law into your hands" in an announcement on Sunday night.

