

The Early Phoenix

A first look at today's most notable stories from the Middle East, selected by ACLS experts
9 February 2023

TURKIYE - SYRIA EARTHQUAKE

1. [**U.S. Carrier George H.W. Bush in Mediterranean to Assist Türkiye with Earthquake Response**](#) (*Anadolu Agency*). The US military transported two civilian urban search and rescue teams and moved a US carrier in the Mediterranean Sea toward Türkiye, the Pentagon said Wednesday...Pentagon spokesman Patrick Ryder said the George HW Bush carrier in the Mediterranean is also moving toward Türkiye to be in position if Türkiye requests additional assistance.
2. [**Over 60 Countries Send Help to Türkiye After Quakes, Erdoğan Says**](#) (*Daily Sabah*). Speaking to reporters in Hatay province, which was devastated after Monday's earthquakes, Erdoğan noted that many countries are providing different kinds of assistance to help Türkiye. "These include Azerbaijan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and more, and they pledge to provide more support."
3. [**"Earthquake of the Age" in Türkiye: Millions Need Housing, Tens of Thousands Need Hospitals, and a "Terrifying Number" Remain Trapped Under the Rubble**](#) (*Al Quds Al Arabi*). According to official data, nearly 6,000 buildings were completely destroyed. However, the real number is not only related to the owners of the houses that were completely destroyed, but also almost all the houses located in the areas directly affected by the earthquake, which is a large area of 10 Turkish provinces, with an original population of nearly 13 million people.
4. [**Türkiye Pushing for Opening Two More Border Crossings for Vital Aid into Syria**](#) (*Daily Sabah*). Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said Türkiye is pushing for two more border gates to be opened into northwest Syria, which was devastated following Monday's earthquakes. Speaking to reporters in a joint news conference with Vice President Fuad Oktay on Wednesday, Turkish Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu said the [Bab al-Hawa] gate is already open, but more is required amid the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe.
5. [**Germany Calls for Opening All Crossings Between Turkey and Syria and Sends a Message to Russia**](#) (*Syria TV*). On Tuesday, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock - who belongs to the "Green Party" - called for the opening of all crossings between Turkey and Syria in order to ensure the flow of aid, following the devastating earthquake...For his part, Rolf Mützenich - leader of the parliamentary bloc of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's party -

said that Russia bears the duty to help now, adding: "It is said that the Russians have a great influence on the ruling regime in Syria." He explained, "If Russia is now really ready to provide assistance, it should work to open the border area, which still has closed border stations, in order to deliver humanitarian goods and medical care to the besieged."

6. [Arab Countries Send Oil Convoys and Aid to The Syrian Regime: What About the North? \(Syria TV\)](#). On Tuesday, media outlets close to the Syrian regime reported that the President of the UAE gave orders to provide \$50 million for the relief of those affected by the earthquake in Syria. Likewise, Algeria sent three planes to Syria. An official source at the Iraqi embassy to the Syrian regime in Damascus said, "Quantities of oil derivatives, foodstuffs, and humanitarian aid have been sent from Iraq to Syria." Meanwhile, no international or UN assistance has entered the stricken areas in northwestern Syria.
7. [US Military Ready to Support Relief Efforts in Syria and "Coordinate" with SDF \(Syria TV\)](#). The US Central Command announced on Wednesday its readiness to provide support for earthquake relief efforts in Turkey and Syria...General Michael Kurilla, commander of US Central Command, explained that "the headquarters of the Central Command has established a working group to accelerate the support process for those affected by the earthquake in both Turkey and Syria." He added, "The Central Command is coordinating with the US Ministries of Defense and State, the US Agency for International Development, and our partners in the Syrian Democratic Forces in this regard," pointing out that they are working closely with the command of US Forces in Europe on options for sending support to Turkey.
8. [Syria is Not Under Siege or Sanctions \(Syria TV\)](#). It is clear that Bashar's regime is engaged in a public relations campaign, exploiting the tragedy of the Syrians afflicted by the earthquake. The real problem is that part of the Arab and international public opinion has come to believe that Syria is under Western sanctions. Syria as a country is not under any kind of sanctions, neither international, nor American, nor European. No Security Council resolution has been issued based on Chapter VII that puts Syria, the "state," under siege or sanctions.
9. [Iran's IRGC Quds Force Commander Travels to Aleppo \(CNN Arabic\)](#). The commander of the Quds Force in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, Ismail Qaani, arrived in the Syrian city of Aleppo, on Wednesday evening, according to the official Iranian News Agency (IRNA). The agency quoted what it described as an "informed official" as saying that Qaani "visited the affected areas in the city of Aleppo and supervised the work of the Iranian relief cadres present at the rubble removal site" ...15 Iranian engineering units are

providing assistance to Syrian units and the Iraqi "Popular Mobilization Forces" and others in removing the rubble in Aleppo.

10. [Syria's White Helmets: War Responders Leading Quake Rescue](#) (*Nabarnet*).

Leveraging years of experience gleaned during Syria's war, the White Helmets are spearheading rescue efforts in the country's rebel-held north following the powerful earthquake that rocked Syria and Turkey...Cut off from government-held parts of Syria and overlooked by Turkish first responders preoccupied with the disaster on their side of the border, Syria's hard hit rebel areas have relied almost entirely on the White Helmets for search and rescue operations.

EGYPT AND NORTH AFRICA

11. [Egyptian Government Will Sell its Shares in 29 Companies and 3 Banks Within a Year](#)

(*Al Quds Al Arabi*). Mostafa Madbouly, the Egyptian Prime Minister, announced that the government will start offering its shares in 32 companies and banks over the course of a full year, starting from the current quarter until the end of the first quarter of 2024, whether to the stock exchange or to the strategic investor...Offering shares in state-owned companies on the stock exchange and selling land to investors comes within the framework of a plan previously announced by the prime minister, aimed at making state-owned assets worth \$40 billion available for partnership with the Egyptian or foreign private sector for a period of 4 years.

12. [Moody's Downgrades Egypt's Credit Rating...and Inflation is Expected to Accelerate](#)

(*Aljazeera*). On Tuesday, Moody's downgraded Egypt's sovereign rating by one notch to "B3" (B3) from "B2" (B2), pointing to a decline in its foreign exchange reserves and a decrease in its ability to absorb external shocks...Moody's said that the strategy to sell state-owned assets, announced by the government, and that begins this month within the new International Monetary Fund program, will support the generation of sustainable non-debt-related capital flows to meet the increasing external debt service payments, but indicated that these measures will take "time to reduce the risks."

13. [Libyan Military Committee Adopts Mechanism to Remove Mercenaries from Libya](#)

(*Al Sharq Al-Awsat*). The Libyan Joint Military Committee (5+5), which includes the two sides of the military conflict in the country, reached a mechanism to withdraw mercenaries and foreign forces from Libya at the conclusion of its meetings that took place on Wednesday in Cairo under UN auspices, while the Libyan Parliament approved, by a majority of its members, the thirteenth constitutional amendment, as a prelude to hold the postponed presidential and parliamentary elections.

GULF REGION

14. [UAE and Italy Discuss Military Relations](#) (*Al Khaleej Online*). After diplomatic tension, especially after the cancellation of arms export permits to the UAE in 2020, Emirati-Italian military talks were held on Tuesday to discuss ways to develop military and defense relations.
15. [Oman to Supply China with 4 Million Tons of Liquefied Natural Gas](#) (*The New Arab*). The Oman LNG Company signed an agreement with the Chinese company Unipec to supply about one million metric tons of LNG annually over a period of four years, starting from 2025. The company said that this deal is its first contract with a Chinese company, and that it “contributes to strengthening the strategic partnership of Oman LNG with various companies operating in the field of energy.”
16. [UAE Central Bank Grants License to Russian MTS Bank](#) (*The New Arab*). MTS bank is a financial technology unit of Mobile Telesystems, Russia’s largest mobile operator. The bank obtaining a license to open a branch means granting it the right to conduct banking operations, such as issuing loans, accepting deposits, maintaining accounts, managing assets, and opening correspondent accounts in dirhams at the Central Bank of the UAE...The harsh Western sanctions imposed on Russia have not yet targeted the telecoms infrastructure directly, which means that MTS does not face the same restrictions as banks and energy companies.

IRAQ

17. [Iraqi Central Bank Reduces Official Exchange Rate Versus the Dollar Ahead of Washington Negotiations](#) (*Al Sharq Al-Awsat*). About a week after the Iraqi Prime Minister, Muhammad Shia’a al-Sudani, promised that the exchange rate of the Iraqi dinar would rise again against the US dollar, the Central Bank of Iraq decided to reduce the exchange rate of the dollar against the dinar to 1300 compared to 1450, which was decided by the previous government headed by Mustafa Al-Kazemi.

IRAN

18. [Iran-Russia Ties Growing: Shamkhani](#) (*Tasnim News*). Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani hailed the expansion of relations with Russia in different fields. Shamkhani arrived in Moscow on Tuesday to take part in the fifth session of the regional security dialogue, which focuses on the situation in Afghanistan.

19. [In “Warning Sign” For US, Iranian Warships Are Reportedly Sailing Toward Panama Canal](#) (*IranWire*). After a stopover in Brazil, two Iranian naval ships are reportedly sailing toward the strategic Panama Canal, as the Islamic Republic seeks to project power into the Americas...The Iranian-made Mowj-class destroyer Dena and the logistics ship Makran have been navigating around the world since September 22, 2022, to “show the growing military and naval power of the Islamic Republic of Iran”, according to Iran’s official news agency IRNA.

ISRAEL AND PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

20. [Netanyahu Pledges “forever” Security Control of West Bank](#) (*Al Sharq Al-Awsat*). Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reaffirmed his well-known position that he will not give up security control in the West Bank under any circumstances, even with any future scenario (an agreement with the Palestinians). Netanyahu attacked the Palestinian Authority and said it does not play its role in confronting those it needs to confront (Palestinian militants). “There is no alternative to our control here,” Netanyahu said, on a visit to the “Dovdovan” unit, on Tuesday, which is a special forces unit in the Israeli elite units, known as the “undercover” forces and spearheading the army’s activity in the West Bank.