

The Early Phoenix

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

1 February 2023

IRAN

1. [Iran Warns Pakistan To Complete Pipeline Or Face \\$18B Penalty](#) (*Iran International*).
The 25-year contract to export Iran's natural gas through a pipeline to Pakistan was signed between the two countries in 2009 and was supposed to be implemented by 2015, but international and US sanctions against Iran and Washington's pressure on Islamabad have prevented its implementation so far. Iranian officials who communicated with a visiting Pakistani delegation said that the US sanctions on Tehran are illegal, and Pakistan is bound to construct the 780-kilometer pipeline on its portion till February-March 2024 or pay a penalty of \$18 billion.
2. [Iran International Reveals Details of Smuggling Millions of Dollars from Iraq to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard](#) (*Iran International*). According to information obtained by the newspaper about the IRGC unit tasked with the smuggling of US dollars from Iraq to Iran, the Islamic Republic's embassy in Iraq was also involved in the money laundering operations that aim to funnel the regime's revenues from oil and gas exports to Iran.
3. [Azerbaijan Announces Arrest of Seven Iranian Spies](#) (*Iran International*). The government in Baku carried out a raid on the Iranian media network headquarters of "Salam News" and "Interaz" TV channel. Last week, the Baku Serious Crimes Court held the first round of hearing the case of five other suspects, including the captain of the Caspian Sea oil fleet of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan also issued a "travel warning" to its citizens regarding travel to Iran.
4. [Iran Warns US of Crushing Response to Any Aggression](#) (*Tasnim News*). "After US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told *Al Hadath* that the US would consider "all options" available [to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon](#), Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Monday that "the US government must note the legal and international responsibilities of its threats against Iran and it must think more about the

political consequences of such provocative statements”...The spokesman underscored that the US government also knows that Iran will not tolerate any aggression against its territory and interests and will respond to aggressors decisively and in a manner that would make them regret their action.

SYRIA

5. [Iran Relieves Top IRGC Commander in Eastern Syria After Israeli Strikes](#) (*Al Nahar*). Syrian opposition sources said that the leadership of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in Syria issued a decision relieving Haj Askar, commander of the IRGC in the border city of Al-Bukamal with Iraq, from his post and appointing Haj Abbas instead. The IRGC decision came a few hours after a series of raids on an Iranian militia convoy crossing from Iraq to Syria through the illegal border crossing.
6. [Daraa Province Community Initiative Collects \\$2 Million In One Month To Replace Syria's Failed Regime](#) (*Syria TV*). Amid clear disregard by the Assad regime's government departments concerning deteriorating services in Daraa, local residents in a number of cities and towns launched an initiative to improve and repair their own wells, telephone lines, and schools, and to light public roads using solar energy. Donations came from wealthy Syrian expatriates, especially those in the Arab Gulf countries.
7. [Corruption Perceptions Index \(CPI\) for 2022 Ranks Syria 179th out of 180 Countries](#) (*Syria TV*). Syria has maintained its penultimate rank in the list of the Global Corruption Index for the year 2022, according to the annual report issued by Transparency International, which monitors cases of transparency and corruption in 180 countries around the world. The report, which was issued by the international organization on Tuesday, said that corruption fuels the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and North Africa.

IRAQ

8. [Eight Missiles Target the Zlikan Military Base in Iraq, Where Turkish Forces are Located](#) (*Rudaw*). Several rockets targeted the Zlikan military base hosting Turkish troops in northern Iraq on Wednesday morning without resulting in any casualties, the

Kurdistan Region's counter-terrorism forces reported. The Islamic Resistance Ahrar al-Iraq Brigade, an Iran-backed armed faction, claimed responsibility for the attack through its telegram channels, saying they had fired 20 rockets at the military base, threatening to expand their operations into Turkish land.

9. [Corruption Perceptions Index \(CPI\) for 2022 Ranks Iraq 157th out of 180 countries](#) (*Mustaqila*). The Corruption Perceptions Index ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption on a scale from 0 (extremely corrupt) to 100 (very clean)...According to the index scale issued by Transparency International on Tuesday, Iraq scored only 28 out of a total of 100.

10. [Iraq and Syria Reach Agreement to Transport Goods Through Al-Qa'im Border Crossing](#) (*Iraqi News*). The two sides agreed to let Syrian cargo trucks transporting goods enter Iraq through the Al-Qa'im border crossing, allowing the return of Syria's most important commercial trade exchange partnerships in the region.

THE GULF

11. [Saudi Economy Grew by 8.7% in 2022](#) (*Al Khaleej Online*). Official data showed that the real gross domestic product in Saudi Arabia during the fourth quarter of 2022 recorded growth of 5.4 percent compared to the same period in the previous year 2021, while the real gross domestic product during the year 2022 achieved a growth of 8.7 percent, on an annual basis. This is the Kingdom's highest growth rate since 2011, when the economy grew by 10 percent.

12. [Energy and Defense at Forefront of Qatari-Japanese Strategic Dialogue](#) (*Al Khaleej Online*). Doha and Tokyo discussed expanding joint investments in the field of clean energy and enhancing defense cooperation, and in the field of cybersecurity, in addition to agreeing to exempt Qataris from entry visas to Japan.

13. [US Seizes Narcotics Worth \\$33 Million in the Gulf of Oman](#) (*Al Khaleej Online*). A [US Coast Guard vessel](#) seized 4,000 kilograms of hashish and 512 kilograms of methamphetamine worth a total estimated U.S. street value of \$33 million from a fishing vessel transiting international waters in the Gulf of Oman on January 30.

TURKIYE

14. [Senator Van Hollen Says No F-16s for Turkey if Sweden, Finland Not Admitted to NATO](#) (*Al Monitor*). Democratic Senator Chris Van Hollen slammed Turkiye as an "unfaithful ally" and called on the Senate to consider efforts to block F-16 sales to the country. The Senator said the United States and the European Union should consider sanctioning Turkiye if President Recep Tayyip Erdogan thwarts Sweden's candidacy for membership in NATO.

