

## THE EARLY PHOENIX

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

**March 13, 2023**

### **GULF REGION**

1. **Saudi FM: Agreement with Iran Doesn't Translate to Resolving all Differences** (*Al Sharq Al Awsat*). Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said that the Saudi-Iranian agreement to restore diplomatic relations confirms the mutual desire on both sides to "resolve differences through communication and dialogue." However, he emphasized that this "does not imply solving all outstanding differences between the two countries." Last Friday, Riyadh and Tehran reached an agreement in Beijing to resume their severed relations since 2016 and reopen their embassies within two months.
2. **After the Saudi Agreement, Iranian Talks with Bahrain and Oman** (*Al Khaleej Online*). The capitals of Bahrain and Oman witnessed meetings with Iranian delegations two days after the agreement between Riyadh and Tehran to restore relations. The Bahrain News Agency (BNA) reported that yesterday evening, Parliament Speaker Ahmed Al-Musallam discussed with the head of the Iranian Shura Council delegation, Mojtaba Rezakhawa, "means of cooperation and joint coordination in international forums."
3. **Bahrain Receives F-16 Block 70 Fighter Aircraft** (*Al Bilad Press*). The Kingdom of Bahrain is the first country in the world and the region to be equipped with this type of F-16 fighter... This was witnessed by the official ceremony of handing over the aircraft on the morning of Friday, March 10...at the headquarters of the manufacturer Lockheed Martin in South Carolina, in the friendly United States of America, which is one of the largest leading companies in the field of military supplies and equipment.

4. [\*\*UAE Withdraws Bid for 2026 World Bank-IMF Meetings in Favor of Qatar\*\*](#) (*Al Arabiya English*). The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has withdrawn its bid to host the 2026 World Bank and International Monetary Fund meeting and will instead support Qatar as a potential host, the office of Qatar’s emir and the UAE’s state news agency said on Sunday, in the latest sign of warming ties between the Gulf neighbors.
5. [\*\*Oil Giant Saudi Aramco Has Profits of \\$161B in 2022\*\*](#) (*Al Arabiya English*). On Sunday, Saudi Arabian oil giant Aramco reported a record annual net profit of \$161.1 billion for 2022, up 46 percent from the previous year on higher energy prices, increased volumes sold, and improved margins for refined products. The profits, which are around triple that of Exxon’s \$56 billion, follow similar reports in February from international peers such as BP, Shell, and Chevron, which have mostly posted record profits for last year.

## IRAN

6. [\*\*Iranian Officials Hail ‘End Of US Influence’ In Middle East\*\*](#) (*Iran International*). The decline of American and “Zionist power” has begun, a military advisor to Iran’s ruler Ali Khamenei said Sunday, following a Chinese brokered deal with Saudis. General Yahya Rahim Safavi echoed the sentiment expressed by all forces in Iran who are considered “Principlist” or loyal to Khamenei, who for years has espoused a policy of siding with China and Russia against the United States. China appeared to be the power that brokered a deal between Tehran and Riyadh to restore diplomatic relations after seven years of open hatred and rivalry.
7. [\*\*Russia Sending US Weapons to Iran to Be Reverse-Engineered\*\*](#) (*CNN*). A new report has revealed that Russia is sending US and NATO weapons and equipment captured on the battlefield in Ukraine to Iran to be reverse-engineered. In a report Friday, CNN cited four sources familiar with the matter as saying that Tehran has been trying to reverse-engineer the systems and probably produce similar ones. According to the sources, the US, NATO, and

other Western officials have seen several instances of Russian forces seizing smaller, shoulder-fired weapons equipment, including Javelin anti-tank and Stinger anti-aircraft systems that Ukrainian forces have left behind on the battlefield. In many cases, Russia has then flown the equipment to Iran to dismantle and analyze, likely so the Islamic Republic military can attempt to make their version of the weapons, sources said, adding that Russia believes that continuing to provide captured Western weapons to Iran will incentivize Tehran to maintain its support for Russia's war.

8. [\*\*US Says Iranian Claims of Prisoner Swap are False\*\*](#) (*Al Arabiya English*). The US has denied a claim that Iran plans to release three American prisoners in exchange for releasing frozen funds. Iran's top diplomat said Sunday that a deal was nearly finalized but did not elaborate. "Unfortunately, Iranian officials will not hesitate to make things up, and the latest cruel claim will cause more heartache for the families of Siamak Namazi, Emad Shargi, and Morad Tahbaz," a National Security Council official told Al Arabiya English.

## SYRIA

9. [\*\*One Syrian Killed, Seven Injured by Turkish Border Guards\*\*](#) (*Rozana Fm*). Mazen Alloush, Director of the Public Relations and Media Office at the Bab al-Hawa border crossing, confirmed to Rozana that they received the injured individuals from the Turkish side after midnight yesterday and transferred them to Bab al-Hawa Hospital. Unfortunately, one of the individuals died due to severe injuries. One of the injured individuals reported that during the torture, the "gendarmes" **poured diesel fuel on their wounds** and threw the body of another deceased individual, who was tortured, from the city of Harem into a Turkish forest.
10. [\*\*Iran-Backed Nujaba Militia Establishes New Outposts Southeast of Homs\*\*](#) (*Zaman Al Wasel*). The Iraqi "Haraket al-Nujaba" militia established two new military points on Saturday near the town of Mahin in the eastern countryside of Homs.

11. **Iraqi Popular Mobilization Militia Increases Deployment in Aleppo** (*Syria TV*). Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) members have extensively deployed in Aleppo, northern Syria. The militia members have been accused of harassment and violations against the local population under the pretext of providing earthquake relief and assistance.
  
12. **Syrian Regime Declines Quadripartite Meeting with Turkey, Iran, and Russia** (*Syria TV*). The Syrian regime has refused to participate in a quadripartite meeting that will include Turkey, Russia, and Iran unless the regime is provided with guarantees. This demand comes after Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu announced a meeting in Moscow this week that would include the deputy foreign ministers of the Syrian regime, Turkey, Iran, and Russia. According to Al-Watan newspaper, which is close to the Syrian regime, the meeting of the deputy foreign ministers of the Syrian regime, Turkey, Russia, and Iran, has been postponed until the regime receives the requested guarantees.
  
13. **Asma al-Assad Exploits Case of Child Earthquake Survivor for Her Husband's Political Goals** (*Zaman Al Wasel*). Today, more than six years ago, the Assad regime seized the opportunity of the presence of the Syrian girl "Sham (9 years)", who was previously displaced by the Assad regime with Russian support from their home in early 2020 in the countryside of "Maarat al-Nu'man," which forced the family to flee. Like the rest of the Syrians who reject Assad's rule and rise against him, she lives in the city of "Armanaz" in northwestern Syria.

## **EGYPT**

14. **Sisi Says Egypt Aims to Consolidate Economic, Investment Ties with China** (*Arab News*). Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi said his country was keen to consolidate economic and investment cooperation with China and Chinese companies in areas of common interest. His remarks came during a meeting on Saturday with the China International Energy Group chairman and

his accompanying delegation of senior executives. Meanwhile, The Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics in Egypt has revealed that the [value of trade exchange with China increased](#) by 2.6% during the first 11 months of 2022, reaching \$14.9 billion compared to \$14.5 billion during the same period in 2021.

15. [Egypt Has Started Selling Army-Owned Companies](#) (*The New Arab*). On Sunday, Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly announced the commencement of procedures to offer the "Wataniya" company, which owns car gas stations, and the "Safi" water bottling company, both of which are affiliated with the Ministry of Defense (army), through the offering advisor on Wednesday.

## **TURKIYE**

16. [Turkish Defense Minister Says F-16 Talks with Washington Have Reached a Positive Point](#) (*Anadolu Agency*). According to Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, discussions with the US Department of Defense regarding procuring F-16 fighter jets have reached a positive point. Akar stated that the Turkish government is aware of the White House's support and hopes that Congress makes a wise decision. Additionally, Akar emphasized that Turkey has alternatives and is vital in acquiring F-16s.
17. [36 Parties to Run in Türkiye's Crucial Election as Alliances Reshuffle](#) (*Daily Sabah*). The Supreme Election Board (YSK) announced Saturday that 36 political parties could compete in Türkiye's upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections slated for May 14. The head of the YSK, Ahmet Yener, announced the details regarding the elections, including poll hours, how many people will be casting votes on a single poll, and more, following two days of assessments.

## **IRAQ**

18. [Iraq Confiscates Three Million Captagon Tablets Hidden Inside Boxes of Apples](#) (*Al Hadath*). Security Forces Announced on Saturday the seizure of

more than three million pills of the narcotic Captagon on the border with **Syria**, a type of amphetamine stimulant whose smuggling has increased dramatically over the past years in the Middle East.

19. [\*\*Iraqi Commandos Kill 22 ISIS Militants in Anbar Desert\*\*](#) (*The National News*). Lt Gen Abdul Wahab Al Saedi, head of the country's elite Counter Terrorism Service, told a press conference that all those killed wore explosive-laden belts, adding that senior leaders were among the dead. He named two of the slain field leaders as Barzan Hussein, who served as ISIS's governor of Fallujah, Al Janoob, and Rokan Hameed Allawi.
  
20. [\*\*Iraqi Security Forces Announce Numbers of ISIS Remnants\*\*](#) (*Al Hadath*). ISIS maintains about 400 to 500 fighters in Iraq, a senior Iraqi military official said on Sunday, while the organization continues to launch sporadic attacks against security forces and civilians. According to estimates published in a UN Security Council report in February, the group has "between 5,000 and 7,000 members and supporters spread between Iraq" and Syria, "about half of them fighters."

## **YEMEN**

21. [\*\*Less Than 24 Hours After Chinese-Brokered Iran-Saudi Deal, Houthis Launch New Attack on Yemeni Government Forces\*\*](#) (*Al Bilad Press*). Residents also said that the Houthi militia targeted civilian homes in the village of Al-Balayli, in the Hays district, with artillery shells. The joint forces responded by bombing a center of fixed and moving targets of the Houthi militia, inflicting direct human and material losses on its ranks, according to the "NewsYum" news site.

## **LEBANON**

22. [\*\*Hizballah Hails Restoration of Iranian-Saudi Relations\*\*](#) (*Beirut Observer*). The Deputy Secretary-General of Hezbollah, Sheikh Naim Qassem,

tweeted, “The return of Iranian-Saudi relations is a significant turning point for the region’s stability, security, and progress.”

## **ISRAEL AND PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES**

23. **In the US, Smotrich Walks Back Huwara Remark, Touts Unity as Hundreds Protest Visit** (*Times of Israel*). Visiting the less-than-welcoming United States, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich appeared to embark on a charm offensive Sunday, telling American investors he was sorry for calling to “wipe out” the Palestinian town of Huwara and committing to “protect every innocent life, Jew or Arab,” as several hundred American Jews and Israeli ex-pats protested his appearance outside.
  
24. **Editorial: Where Was the US When Iran and Saudi Arabia Restored Ties?** (*Jerusalem Post*). It is no secret that the Biden and the Obama administrations before it viewed their role as moving away from the Middle East. Obama did this by setting redlines in Syria that were never enforced, allowing Russia to enter the country. The Biden administration has done the same by signaling to the Saudis and Emiratis that they are on their own when fighting the Houthis in Yemen. It is no secret that the Biden and the Obama administrations before it viewed their role as moving away from the Middle East. Obama did this by setting redlines in Syria that were never enforced, allowing Russia to enter the country. The Biden administration has done the same by signaling to the Saudis and Emiratis that they are on their own when fighting the Houthis in Yemen.