

THE EARLY PHOENIX

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

March 16, 2023

SYRIA

1. **[On the 12th Anniversary of the Syrian Revolution, Celebrations Permeate Idlib and Aleppo Countryside](#)** (*Syria TV*). On Wednesday, demonstrations took place in Idlib and the countryside of Aleppo, northwestern Syria, to commemorate the 12th anniversary of the Syrian revolution. Thousands of Syrians from various regions gathered in the center of Idlib to participate in the demonstration, which aimed to raise the Syrian revolution flag on the city's highest mast. Calls on social media urged people to commemorate the anniversary of the revolution, and participants from various regions joined the demonstration.
2. **[Annual Report on Syrians Killed and Displaced Since 2011](#)** (*Syrian Network for Humanitarian Rights*). The Syrian Network for Human Rights has released a report on the twelfth anniversary of the popular movement towards democracy in Syria, documenting the killing of 230,224 civilians, including 15,272 due to torture, the arbitrary detention or enforced disappearance of 154,817 people, and the displacement of nearly 14 million Syrians.
3. **[World Food Program: More Than Half of Syrians Suffer from Hunger](#)** (*Syria TV*). The urgent need for increased humanitarian assistance in Syria was highlighted by a warning from a United Nations agency that some 12.1 million Syrians are food insecure, while nearly three million others are at risk of slipping into hunger. Recent data has shown that malnutrition is on the rise, with

stunting rates among children at 28 percent. Additionally, a UN report released on Wednesday revealed that maternal malnutrition had reached unprecedented levels. The report emphasizes the severity of the situation and the need for immediate action to address the ongoing crisis.

4. **[Hosted by Putin, Assad Gives "Thanks and Gratitude" and Support for the Russian Operation in Ukraine](#)** (*Syria TV*). Russian President Vladimir Putin received Syrian regime leader Bashar al-Assad at the Kremlin on Wednesday evening. This comes after al-Assad's first official visit to Russia, following a series of surprise and unannounced visits in the past. During the protocol meeting, broadcast on official channels, Putin emphasized the continuous contact between Moscow and Damascus, stating that "important results have been achieved in Syria in the fight against international terrorism" thanks to the joint efforts and decisive contribution of the Russian forces..."

IRAN

5. **[Iran, China, and Russia Team up for Naval Drills This Week](#)** (*Iran Wire*). The Iranian, Chinese, and Russian navies are holding joint drills in the Gulf of Oman, which connects the strategic Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean. Iran, China, and Russia had similar exercises in 2019 and 2022, underscoring their growing military and political links amid growing tensions with the United States.
6. **[Europeans Suspend Academic Ties with Iran](#)** (*Iran International*). A high-ranking Iranian Ministry of Science official says Europeans have restricted their academic ties with the Islamic Republic. Germany has also closed the country's German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) office. Vahid Haddadi-Asl, the deputy minister in international affairs, told the state-run ISNA

news agency that the European countries are not interested in academic collaboration with Iran.

GULF REGION

7. **[Saudi Finance Minister: Our Investments in Iran May Be Established Quickly](#)** (*Al Khaleej Online*). Saudi Arabia's Finance Minister, Muhammad Al-Jadaan, announced on Wednesday that the kingdom's investments in Iran could increase rapidly following the recent agreement to restore diplomatic relations between the two countries. Speaking at the International Financial Sector Forum held by the Saudi Public Investment Fund in the capital, Riyadh, Al-Jadaan stated that "Saudi investments have an opportunity in Iran" and added that he did not see any issues in launching these investments, given their commitment to the principles of the agreement with Iran.
8. **[Turki Al-Faisal Says Two-State Solution Remains Saudi Arabia's Condition for Normalization with Israel](#)** (*The New Khalij News*). On Wednesday, former Saudi intelligence chief Turki Al-Faisal reaffirmed his country's commitment to its conditions for normalizing relations with Israel in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative. In an **[interview with the "France 24"](#)** channel, Al-Faisal stated that "the conditions are well-known, including the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state with recognized borders and Jerusalem as its capital, as well as the return of refugees. This is the position of the Saudi government." The Arab peace initiative was adopted by the Arab summit in Beirut in 2002, and successive Israeli governments refused to respond.
9. **[US Senate Confirms Ratney as New Ambassador to Saudi Arabia](#)** (*Al Sabraq Al Awsat*). On Wednesday, the US Senate approved Michael Alan Ratney as the US Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. US President Joe

Biden announced Ratney's candidacy for the post in April 2022. The US embassy in Riyadh welcomed the appointment... Ratney, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service with the rank of Minister-Counselor, most recently served as Acting Deputy Director at the Department of State's Foreign Service Institute.

10. **[UAE Acquires \\$100 Million Stake in Parent Company of TikTok](#)** (*The New Khalij News*). The Abu Dhabi-based artificial intelligence company "G42" has invested around \$100 million in the Chinese company "ByteDance," which is the parent company of the popular social media platform "Tik Tok." As per a report by Bloomberg, the valuation of ByteDance has reached approximately \$220 billion with the investment from G42, significantly lower than the previously set valuation of \$300 billion during the last share buyback program.

IRAQ

11. **[Iraq Faces Drinking Water Shortage Due to Iran and Turkiye Water Diversions](#)** (*Al Iraq News*). Adel Al-Mukhtar, a specialist in water affairs, warned on Wednesday of the severity of the drought crisis in Iraq during the upcoming summer. He stated that the drinking water crisis might be prolonged in the shadow of this drought. He also noted that no real government action was taken to address the crisis. He said, "Until now, there has been no real government action to solve the serious drought crisis."

LEBANON

12. **[Lebanese Judiciary Requests Arrest of Central Bank Governor](#)** (*Al Nahar*). The Lebanese Ministry of Justice has intervened in the case of the prosecution against Salameh, his brother Raja, and his assistant Marianne Howayek, issuing warrants for their arrest and the seizure of their

property...Salameh also failed to appear before a Lebanese government council investigating European charges against him.

LIBYA

13. **Tons of Uranium Missing from Libyan Site, IAEA Tells Member States** (*Arab News*). UN nuclear watchdog inspectors have found that roughly 2.5 tons of natural uranium have gone missing from a Libyan site that is no longer under government control, the watchdog told member states in a statement on Wednesday seen by Reuters.

YEMEN

14. **UN Yemen Envoy Travels to Iran to Discuss Yemen Crisis** (*Al Sharq Al Awsat*). The UN envoy to Yemen, Hans Grundberg, capitalized on the recent Saudi-Iranian agreement and visited Tehran to break the deadlock in the Yemeni crisis and push for a renewed push for peace. Yemeni parties have emphasized that dismantling and disarming the Iranian-backed Houthi militias is necessary to achieve national consensus and restore stability.

ISRAEL AND PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

15. **Israel Blocks EU's Foreign Chief from Visiting over Critical Comments** (*Ynet News*). Due to his recent critical comments about Israel, the Foreign Ministry reportedly blocked the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell from visiting the country. On Tuesday, Borrell recently expressed interest in visiting Israel and the West Bank and voiced concerns over the Israeli government's planned judicial reform.
16. **IDF Says Hizballah Terrorist Crossed Border from Lebanon with Suicide Belt, Planted Explosive** (*Jerusalem Post*). The Megiddo bombing was likely

carried out by a Hezbollah terrorist who crossed the Israeli-Lebanese border undetected earlier this week and planted a bomb at the junction, the IDF revealed on Wednesday, saying that it is still investigating the incident alongside the Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency). Security forces later killed the terrorist while he was wrapped in an explosive belt.

17. **[Herzog: 'Israel is at Edge of Abyss,' Civil War is a Real Threat](#)**

(Jerusalem Post). “Those who think a real civil war, with lives lost, is a line we will not cross have no idea. Precisely now, 75 years into Israel’s existence, the abyss is at our fingertips,” President Isaac Herzog said in an introduction speech to what he called the “People’s Directive,” a comprehensive document intended to end the current conflict in Israel over the government’s proposed reforms of Israel’s judicial system.

TURKIYE

18. **[Erdogan: Türkiye to 'Do Its Part' on Finland's NATO Bid](#)** *(Daily*

Sabah). President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will meet with Finnish counterpart Sauli Niinisto in Istanbul on Friday. The leaders will discuss all aspects of bilateral relations and steps that can be taken to improve cooperation.

According to the statement, they will also exchange views on last year’s NATO Madrid summit, Finland’s NATO membership bid, Türkiye-EU relations, and regional and international issues... On Wednesday, two Turkish officials told Reuters that the country’s Parliament would “likely” ratify Finland’s NATO accession bid before it closes in mid-April.

19. **[Kılıçdaroğlu at the Syrian Border: No One Will Be Able to Enter Turkey By Waving Their Arms](#)** *(Cumhuriyet)*. Nation Alliance presidential

candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu gave a statement on the Syrian border in

Hatay...Kılıçdaroğlu said, "We will send our Syrian brothers and sisters to their homeland within two years at the latest without bringing a disgrace to this noble nation...We will also return Afghans who crossed the Iranian border and came to Turkey to Iran, where they came from. We want Syria, Iran and Afghanistan to know this. We speak plainly and clearly. We don't have a secret account behind us. There is no prejudice against any country or any foreigner. But we want to live freely in our own country. We do not want the demographic structure of our own country to change...No one will be able to enter Turkey through these borders by waving their arms. I want this to be known by everyone."

