

## THE EARLY PHOENIX

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

March 20, 2023

### **SYRIA**

1. [\*\*UAE Host Assad and His Wife on Official Visit\*\*](#) (***Al Hurra***). Bashar al-Assad arrived in Abu Dhabi on Sunday for a formal visit, accompanied by his spouse, Asma al-Assad...Emirati President Muhammad bin Zayed stated that "Syria's absence from its brethren has been prolonged, and it is time for its return to them and to the Arab sphere." He also emphasized...the "support of the UAE for dialogue between Syria and Turkiye in the matter of refugee repatriation."
2. [\*\*Zelensky Sanctions Assad\*\*](#) (***Syria TV***). Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky asserted that Russia devastated Syria due to the insufficient international protection provided to the Syrian people, underlining the importance of holding Moscow accountable for its actions. On Saturday, Ukraine imposed sanctions on 141 official entities and 300 individuals from Syria, Russia, and Iran, encompassing Bashar al-Assad, his Prime Minister Hussein Arnous, and Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad.
3. [\*\*Senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad Leader Killed by Israel in Syria\*\*](#) (***Times Of Israel***). The Palestinian Islamic Jihad terror group on Sunday morning claimed one of its senior members, an engineer, was assassinated by Israel in Syria. In a statement, the military wing of the PIJ, the Ali Ramzi al-Aswad, 31, was shot dead by "agents of the Zionist enemy" in the Damascus area. The terror group said al-Aswad was a "leader" and an engineer.
4. [\*\*IRGC Quds Force Commander Expands Militia Control of Aleppo and Latakia\*\*](#) (***Syria TV***). Quds Force Commander Ismail Qaani toured Aleppo and Latakia in his second visit following the devastating February 6 earthquake. In the period that followed Qaani's first visit on February 8th, Iranian forces and militias expanded to almost completely control the scene in the stricken Aleppo

after the earthquake, and to supervise the demolition of dozens of buildings that were damaged by the bombing of the Syrian regime and its allies before the earthquake.

## **IRAN**

5. **[Saudi King Invites Iran's President to Visit Riyadh](#)** (*Al Nahar*). President Ebrahim Raisi of Iran has received a letter from King Salman bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia, extending an invitation for a visit to the Saudi capital, Riyadh...King Salman emphasized the importance of bolstering economic and regional cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia.
6. **[IRGC Commanders Warned Khamenei about Implosion](#)** (*IranWire*). Agitated elements within the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) tried to target Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's residence with artillery at least once since the start of Iran's recent protests, as frustration grows within the armed forces over the situation, IranWire can reveal. And during a January 3 meeting with the Supreme Leader, IRGC commanders expressed frustration over the ongoing protests and warned Khamenei about the Islamic Republic's future.

## **IRAQ**

7. **[Iraq, Iran Sign Joint Security Document](#)** (*Al Sharq Al Awsat*). Iraq and Iran have signed an agreement aimed at bolstering security along their shared borders...The joint security agreement includes coordination to protect the mutual borders between the two countries. Nour News, a media outlet close to the Iranian SNSC, said earlier in the day that the deal would facilitate efforts to **[deal with problematic Kurdish groups](#)** that coordinate measures against the Islamic Republic along with Israeli agents and armed insurgents.
8. **[SDF Confirms Nine Members Killed in Duhok Helicopter Crash](#)** (*Bas News*). The Syrian Democratic Forces confirmed that nine of its members, including counter-terrorism commander Sherfan Kobani, were killed in Wednesday's helicopter crash in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region's Duhok

province...The helicopters used Kurdistan Region's airspace to travel between Sulaymaniyah province and Rojava without the knowledge of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), according to a [statement released by the Kurdistan Security Council on Sunday](#).

## **LEBANON**

9. [France Supports Franjeh for Lebanese President](#) (*Al Sharq Al Awsat*).

Nizar Al-Alula, a Saudi Royal Court advisor, visited Paris to meet with his counterpart, Patrick Durel, Middle East advisor to French President Emmanuel Macron...Paris suggested that resolving the crisis could be achieved by accepting the nomination of Suleiman Frangieh for the presidency, while appointing Nawaf Salam as the Prime Minister.

## **EGYPT**

10. [Egypt and Turkiye Agree on Normalization Roadmap](#) (*Al Sharq News*).

On Saturday, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry and his Turkish counterpart, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, emphasized the existence of political determination to embark on a path of "comprehensive normalization" of relations between Egypt and Turkiye. Çavuşoğlu also announced initial arrangements for a summit between the leaders of both countries.

## **TURKIYE**

11. [Erdogan Announces Extension of Black Sea Grain Deal](#) (*Anadolu*

*Agency*). The Black Sea grain deal that was due to expire on Sunday has been extended, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced on Saturday. "As a result of our negotiations with both parties, we have ensured the extension of the agreement period expiring on March 19"...Ukrainian Infrastructure Minister Oleksandr Kubrakov said the deal "is extended for 120 days."

## **ISRAEL AND PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES**

12. [Israel, PA Meet in Egypt for Emergency Security Summit](#) (*Ynet News*). A conference [was] held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, on Sunday with the participation of Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, Jordan and the United States as part of the attempts to ease tensions in the region. These efforts also aim at stabilizing the Palestinian Authority, primarily with economic aid. Ramallah had to comply with the request of Jordan, Egypt and the United States to attend the conference.
13. [Biden and Netanyahu Discuss Judicial Reform in a Phone Call](#) (*Jerusalem Post*). US President Joe Biden spoke on Sunday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and "underscored his belief that democratic values have always been, and must remain, a hallmark of the US-Israel relationship," according to the White House readout of the call. It was the first conversation between the leaders about the [Netanyahu government's] proposed judicial reform.

## **GULF REGION**

14. [Kuwait Court Nullifies 2022 Parliamentary Vote, Sparking Political Crisis](#) (*Al Khaleej Online*). The Constitutional Court in Kuwait decided on Sunday to annul the National Assembly elected during 2022, and to invalidate the victories of those who won in the recent parliamentary elections...The ruling implies that the previous National Assembly should regain its powers, and the decision to dissolve it is considered legally void.