

## THE EARLY PHOENIX

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

March 27, 2023

### **SYRIA**

1. [\*\*Washington Says “No Plans” to Reduce Military Presence in Syria after Iranian Attacks \(Syria TV\)\*\*](#). John Kirby, Strategic Communications Coordinator at the National Security Council at the White House, confirmed that the US has no plans to reduce its military presence in Syria following an attack on its eastern military base. He also indicated that retaliatory measures against pro-Iranian militias are not ruled out...He further stated, "Our mission to eliminate ISIS will not change. With fewer than 1,000 American soldiers in Syria, the force is smaller than before, but it remains sufficient. We will continue to carry out this mission."
2. [\*\*Iran Joins Front Line between its Militias and US Forces in Eastern Syria \(Al Sharq Al Awsat\)\*\*](#). Iran warned of a "decisive" response if [Iranian] bases built to combat ISIS at the request of the Damascus government are bombed again. It remains unclear how to differentiate these bases from others where Iranian Revolutionary Guard-linked militias are deployed in eastern Syria near the Iraqi border. The Iranian stance followed the deaths of 19 fighters, mostly from pro-Iranian groups, due to US airstrikes targeting military bases and weapons depots in eastern Syria on Thursday-Friday night. These airstrikes were in retaliation for a drone strike that killed an American contractor.
3. [\*\*NGO Says Syrian Regime Has Killed 643 Palestinians by Torture \(Syria TV\)\*\*](#). The Action Group for the Palestinians of Syria has documented 3,076 Palestinian detainees with uncertain fates inside the Syrian regime's security prisons. The group reports that 643 Palestinian refugees have been killed under torture in those prisons. Additionally, the group has documented 110 Palestinian refugee women who have disappeared within the regime's prisons, with their fates still concealed by the regime's security services.

### **IRAN**

4. [\*\*Iranian Central Bank Announces 46% Inflation, Highest in 50 Years\*\*](#) (*Iran International*). According to a document from a confidential meeting of senior government officials, which was recently published by Iran International, the Central Bank of Iran has omitted certain sensitive information regarding the inflation rate in its latest statistical report. This meeting was held to discuss the management of economic statistics release due to concerns about public dissatisfaction. On Sunday, the 6th of Esfand (the twelfth and final month of the Solar Hijri calendar), the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran announced that the inflation rate for the 12 months ending in Esfand last year was 46.5 percent. However, they did not disclose the details of the inflation index for the month of Esfand.
  
5. [\*\*Iranian Protesters Flood Zahedan Streets; Sunni Cleric Urges Regime Leadership to Listen to the People\*\*](#) (*Iran Wire*). Thousands of Iranian protesters returned to the streets of Zahedan on March 24, as the southeastern city's Sunni Friday prayer leader reiterated his call on the country's Shia establishment to heed the "legitimate demands of the majority of the people." Each week, Zahedan residents have been holding protest rallies after Friday prayers led by Molavi Abdolhamid, Iran's most prominent Sunni cleric.

## **GULF REGION**

6. [\*\*Gulf Countries Condemn Israeli Plan for New West Bank Settlements\*\*](#) (*Al Khaleej Online*). Gulf countries have denounced the Israeli authorities' plan to issue bids for constructing new settlement units in the occupied Palestinian territories, as well as approving a law that permits the return to four settlements in the West Bank. [\*\*The Gulf Cooperation Council \(GCC\) countries declared that they had submitted an appeal to the US Secretary of State\*\*](#), condemning the remarks made by an Israeli minister who denied the existence of the Palestinian people.
  
7. [\*\*Israel-UAE Free Trade Agreement Takes Effect\*\*](#) (*Al Hurra*). On Sunday, the Israeli government announced a free trade zone agreement with the UAE that would decrease customs tariffs on most products, ultimately enhancing trade between the two countries. According to a government statement, the agreement, signed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Foreign Minister Eli Cohen, and UAE Ambassador Mohammed Al Khajah, is the final step in a trade agreement that reduces tariffs on

almost 96% of products, leading to lower living costs and new employment opportunities in Israel.

8. **US, Saudi Arabia Complete First Counter-Drone Exercise** (*Al Arabiya*). The US and Saudi Arabia completed their first joint counter-drone exercise last week at the new Red Sands military testing center in Riyadh, according to the head of the United States Central Command (CENTCOM). The exercise was the first of its kind between the two militaries, and US officials hope to replicate this with other armies in the region.
9. **Next Arab League Summit to be Held in Saudi Arabia on May 19** (*Arab News*). The 32nd Arab summit is expected to be held in Saudi Arabia on May 19, a statement by the League of Arab States said on Sunday. The summit will be preceded by several meetings over the period of five days between senior officials and ministers.

## **IRAQ**

10. **Iraq Wins International Arbitration Case, Halting Oil Exports from Kurdistan** (*Al Sharq News*). On Saturday, the Iraqi Ministry of Oil announced its collaboration with Turkiye and the Kurdistan region to reach an agreement that ensures the rights of all parties in oil and gas exports. This follows Baghdad's victory in a lawsuit concerning the export of the region's oil through Turkiye...An Iraqi official informed Reuters that Iraq has ceased crude oil exports of around 450,000 barrels per day through the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan and Kirkuk fields in the north of the country. This was following their triumph in a lengthy arbitration case against Turkiye.
11. **Iraqi Army Moves to Fill Security Gaps on Syrian Border** (*Al Sharq Al Awsat*). Following a missile attack on an American base in eastern Syria's Deir Ezzor Governorate, Iraqi army forces have begun moving towards the border areas with Syria. Their objective is to fill the security gaps and strengthen security measures between the two countries... An official source in the local Al-Anbar Governorate, which borders Syria in western Iraq, reported that army forces have initiated field reconnaissance operations in border strip areas with Syria.

## **YEMEN**

12. **[Yemini Defense Minister and Army Chief of Staff Survive Houthi Drone Attack](#)** (*Al Hadath*). On Saturday, Yemini Defense Minister Mohsen Al-Daari and Army Chief of Staff Sagheer bin Aziz survived a drone attack launched by the Houthi militia. The attack targeted their convoy in the Al-Kadha area, south of the city of Taiz. According to military sources, the Houthi-led attack resulted in the death of one soldier and left three others wounded, according to initial figures...The Houthi terrorist militia has increased its threats to resume the war, as evidenced by recent statements made by its leaders and movements on the ground.
13. **[Houthi Militias Restrict Flights of International Organizations via Sana'a Airport](#)** (*Al Hadath*). The Houthi militia has declared limitations on the flights of all international organizations operating in Yemen via Sana'a International Airport. These restrictions went into effect on Saturday in response to the Yemeni Airways Company's decision to stop selling tickets for its flights in areas of the north under Houthi influence. According to pro-Houthi media sources, the group's controlled General Authority of Civil Aviation has decided to permit international organization flights to land at Sana'a International Airport only on Fridays starting from March 31.

## **LEBANON**

14. **[Daylight Savings Dispute Leaves Lebanon with Two Time Zones](#)** (*Nabar Net*). The Lebanese government's last-minute decision to delay the start of daylight savings time by a month until the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan resulted in mass confusion Sunday. With some institutions implementing the change while others refused, many Lebanese have found themselves in the position of juggling work and school schedules in different time zones — in the same tiny country.

## **EGYPT**

15. **[Egyptian Court Extends Muslim Brotherhood's Inclusion on Terrorist Lists for Additional Five Years](#)** (*The New Arab*). On Sunday, the Egyptian Al-Waqi' newspaper released a new court verdict, which extended the Muslim Brotherhood's listing as a terrorist entity, and prolonged the inclusion of 169 Egyptians on the terrorist list for another five years...[T]he Muslim Brotherhood's defense committee confirmed that they were not notified of the...ruling, did not attend the sessions to extend the decision to be included in the terrorist lists, and did not know anything about it until now.

## **ISRAEL**

16. **Netanyahu Fires Defense Minister Gallant for Calling to Pause Judicial Overhaul** (*Times of Israel*). Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu fired Defense Minister Yoav Gallant on Sunday evening, his office said, a day after the Likud member called to pause legislation of the government's judicial overhaul. In a brief statement, the Prime Minister's Office said Netanyahu had decided to transfer Gallant from his post. It was unclear what other position he would be given, if any, but he still would remain a member of Knesset. His likely replacement is seen as Agriculture Minister Avi Dichter.
17. **Israel Sees Night of Fiery Protests and Riots Following Gallant Sacking** (*Ynet News*). Following the dismissal of Yoav Gallant from the position of defense minister by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, thousands of people poured into the streets in droves throughout Israel to protest Gallant's ouster, with some protesters lighting fires across Ayalon Highway, one of Tel Aviv's main thoroughfares.
18. **Israeli Army Chief Warns of Curbed Military Ops Amid Absent Reservists** (*i24 News*). Israel's army Chief of Staff General Herzl Halevi has reportedly warned his government that the military could possibly reduce the scope of operations due to reservists refusing to report for duty in protest of the controversial judicial overhaul. On Friday, 200 reservist pilots and 100 reservist military doctors said they would halt service due to the legislative push, which would give the Israeli government full control over judicial appointments and ban the High Court of Justice from reviewing Basic Laws.

## **TURKIYE**

19. **Twitter Schemes Raise Meddling Concerns Ahead of Turkish Polls** (*Daily Sabah*). Social media giant Twitter is back in the spotlight for its "complex" algorithm that is enabling a covert psychological operation aimed at boosting opposition voices with less than two months until Türkiye's May 14 vote, stoking concerns that an electoral intervention is on the agenda. It is known that Twitter...has long collaborated with the U.S. government to conduct psychological warfare operations, burying and censoring certain topics while amplifying the visibility of others...There is now a growing fear in Türkiye that one such operation...is targeting the integrity of the

upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections, broadly described as the most critical vote in the country's recent history.

20. [Türkiye, Armenia to Reopen Borders after Decades](#) (*Daily Sabah*). Türkiye and Armenia are planning to permanently open the land borders between the two neighbors for the first time in over three decades, Armenian officials said Friday. The land border will initially open only for diplomats and citizens of third countries until the beginning of the tourist season, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan said.

