

## THE EARLY PHOENIX

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

March 28, 2023

### ISRAEL

1. [\*\*Netanyahu Pauses Judicial Overhaul to Allow Dialogue, but Vows Reform Will Happen\*\*](#) (*Times of Israel*). After immense public pressure that has seen 12 weeks of massive demonstrations, and, on Monday, the announcement of general strikes by the country's top labor federation and local councils, the prime minister said he was allowing for "a delay" to provide "a real opportunity for real dialogue," but stressed that "either way," a reform would be passed to "restore the balance" that he said had been lost between the branches of government in Israel.
2. [\*\*Tens of Thousands Descend on Israeli Supreme Court to Voice Support for Judicial Reform\*\*](#) (*Ynet News*). Tens of thousands of pro-government protesters descended on the Supreme Court building in Jerusalem Monday evening to voice their support of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his government's push to reshape the judiciary.

### IRAN

3. [\*\*Canada Sanctions More Iranian Officials over Drones and Protest Crackdown\*\*](#) (*Iran International*). The Canadian government is imposing sanctions on two more Iranian entities and eight individuals over human rights violations. This is the 10th round of sanctions imposed by Ottawa against Tehran since October 2022 targeting officials from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Law Enforcement Forces (LEF) for "gross and systematic human rights violations."
4. [\*\*Russia Supplies Iran With Cyber Weapons as Military Cooperation Grows\*\*](#) (*Wall Street Journal*). Russia is helping Iran gain advanced digital-surveillance capabilities as Tehran seeks deeper cooperation on cyberwarfare, people familiar with the matter said, adding another layer to a burgeoning military alliance that the U.S. sees as a threat. The potential for cyberwarfare collaboration comes after Iran has, according

to U.S. and Iranian officials, sold Russia drones for use in Ukraine, agreed to provide short-range missiles to Moscow and shipped tank and artillery rounds to the battlefield.

## **GULF REGION**

5. **[Saudi, Iranian Foreign Ministers to Meet During Ramadan](#)** (*Al Hurra*). On Monday, the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia and Iran agreed to hold a bilateral meeting during the current month of Ramadan. This will be the first meeting of its kind since the signing of a tripartite agreement in the People's Republic of China to restore diplomatic relations between the two countries.
6. **[Qatar is Mediating to Revive JCPOA Negotiations](#)** (*Al Khaleej Online*). On Monday, the Minister of State at the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mohammed bin Abdulaziz Al-Khulaifi, met with Iranian Foreign Minister Hussein Abdollahian and Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Shamkhani...The meeting discussed the latest developments in negotiations to return to the JCPOA and several regional and international issues of common concern. Meanwhile, the Russian delegate to the negotiations for reviving the nuclear agreement, Mikhail Ulyanov, stated that the negotiations **"have reached a dead end, but Western partners refuse to declare its demise."**
7. **[Aramco Signs \\$12.2 Billion Deal to Build Petrochemical Complex in China](#)** (*Arabi 21*). Saudi Aramco has signed an agreement with Chinese partners to construct an oil refinery and petrochemical complex. Additionally, the company announced its acquisition of a 10% stake in China's Rongsheng Petrochemical Company...Panjin Industrial Group, a partner in the project, stated in a release on Sunday that the project is anticipated to cost 83.7 billion yuan (\$12.2 billion).

## **IRAQ**

8. **[Iraq's Election Law Amended Amid Chaos in Parliament](#)** (*Al Arabi*). On Monday morning, the Iraqi Parliament approved an amendment to the Parliamentary Elections Law, reverting to the version in place before the October 2019 protests. This decision has angered independent and small parties who believe it favors larger parties. The overnight session was marked by chaos, as numerous independent MPs were expelled from the hall after voicing their opposition to the law, as shown in video clips recorded by the MPs themselves.

9. **[PUK Says They ‘Were not Informed’ of Kurdistan Parliamentary Elections Date \(Rudaw\)](#)**. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) had not been informed about the Kurdistan Region’s parliamentary elections date prior to the announcement from the region’s presidency, officials from the party told Rudaw on Monday. The Kurdistan Region’s Presidency announced on Sunday that the Region’s parliamentary elections will be held on November 18, after the legislature postponed the procedure and extended its term by a year in October due to continued disagreements.

## **LIBYA**

10. **[Libyan Agreement Paves Way for Unified Army and Government \(Al Sharq Al Awsat\)](#)**. The United Nations Mission to Libya confirmed that the Joint Military Committee (5 + 5) meeting, held in Tripoli with leaders of military and security units from the east, west, and south, as well as some leaders of armed militias in the western region under the supervision of UN envoy Abdullah Batili, is the largest to take place in Libya in a decade...Participants agreed to renounce fighting and violence in all forms across Libyan territory, continue working towards unifying military institutions through the chiefs of staff, unify security institutions and other state institutions, establish a unified government for all Libyan state institutions, and intensify efforts to address the issues faced by displaced individuals and those affected by wars.

## **EGYPT**

11. **[Egypt Grapples with \\$5 Billion Gulf Deposit Repayment Due in 6 Months \(Al Hadath\)](#)**. The Central Bank of Egypt stated in a report on the debts owed by Egypt in the coming months that it might, by next April, pay two billion dollars, half of the Kuwaiti deposit, which amounts to a total of \$4 billion. Meanwhile, the second half, worth two billion dollars, will be due next September. A portion of a \$2 billion Emirati deposit is due to be paid next month, along with another \$1 billion due in July 2023.
12. **[Egypt Simplifies Entry for Tourists from Israel, Iran, and Turkey \(The New Khaleej News\)](#)**. Egypt’s Tourism Minister announced: "Mandatory entry visas will be granted at airports for tourists from China and India with Gulf Cooperation Council residencies, and eased entry will be provided for tourists from Algeria, Israel, Morocco, and Iran through compulsory visas at select Egyptian airports." Additionally, entry procedures will be simplified for tourists from Turkey, excluding certain groups.

## **SYRIA**

13. **NGO Says 2,887 Detainees from Arab Countries, Including Saudi Arabia, Remain in Assad's Prisons** (*Syria TV*). The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has documented at least 2,887 detainees with Arab nationalities, including 19 children and 28 women, held in Syrian regime prisons. The SNHR told Syria TV that among the detainees, 58 Saudi nationals remain under arrest or forcibly disappeared by the Syrian regime forces from March 2011 until March 2023. The Wall Street Journal revealed that Riyadh plans to address the issue of Saudi detainees who had previously joined "jihadist groups" in Syria.
14. **IRGC-Affiliated "Ghaliboon Brigade" Claims Responsibility for Attack on US Forces in Eastern Syria** (*Enab Baladi*). On Sunday, March 26, the "Ghaliboon Brigade" militia claimed responsibility for an attack on an American base in eastern Syria. They shared a video showing the moment the attack was launched. The faction's statement cited the operation and future ones as a "natural and legitimate response" to the targeting of their leaders and comrades, as well as the "brutal and terrorist crimes" committed by American occupation forces in their country and region. The statement also conveyed their intent to carry out more "precise" operations against US troops using constantly evolving weapons, adding that security will not be possible in and outside Iraq until the complete withdrawal of US forces.

## **LEBANON**

15. **Lebanon Will Reinstate Daylight Savings Time as of Midnight Wednesday** (*Nahar Net*). Lebanon's caretaker Cabinet on Monday reversed a controversial decision to postpone the country's observation of daylight savings time by one month, caretaker PM Najib Mikati said. In a televised address, Mikati announced that daylight savings time will now begin at the midnight of Wednesday/Thursday, explaining that the 48 hours will be needed to "address some technical issues created by the previous memo...The problem is not summer time or winter time...The problem is the presidential vacuum," Mikati said, blaming "religious and political leaders" [for the impasse over the country's vacant presidency].

## **TURKIYE**

16. **Türkiye , Syria, Russia, and Iran to Resume Meeting in Moscow in Early April** (*Bianet*). The deputy foreign ministers of Türkiye, Syria, Russia and Iran will meet in Moscow in early April, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov has announced, according to RIA Novosti. The meeting previously scheduled for March 15-16 was postponed "to an indefinite date." On these dates, Syria's President Bashar Assad visited Moscow to meet his counterpart, Vladimir Putin. The quadripartite summit was postponed due to this Assad-Putin meeting, some reports suggested.
17. **Nearly 60,000 Syrian Refugees Return Home from Türkiye after Quake** (*Hurriyet Daily News*). About 60,000 Syrian refugees have returned to their homeland after the Feb. 6 earthquakes devastated their homes in Türkiye, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said on March 27...Refuting claims that there is an influx of refugees from Syria to Türkiye, Akar stressed that the Turkish border with Syria was strictly protected against illegal crossings.
18. **Türkiye Summons French Envoy over "Awarding" of YPG Terrorists** (*Daily Sabah*). Türkiye's Foreign Ministry on Monday summoned the French Ambassador Herve Magro to Ankara to convey "strong condemnation" of two PKK/YPG terrorists being awarded medals of "honor" at the French senate last Saturday. The French senate has hosted members of the PKK's Syrian wing, the YPG, and awarded medals of "honor" despite the repeated security concerns and warnings of its NATO ally Türkiye.