

THE EARLY PHOENIX

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

Mar 29, 2023

IRAN

1. **[Austin: Iran and Its Proxies Launched 83 Attacks on American Interests since Biden Took Office](#)** (*Al Arabiya*). A senior US cabinet official admitted Tuesday that the Biden administration should have notified lawmakers earlier than it did about a deadly drone attack on American forces in Syria last week. “We should have notified you earlier,” Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin told a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on Capitol Hill ... Al Arabiya English was the first to report that the US had only responded to **three of 83 Iran-backed attacks** on US troops since January 2021.
2. **[Mossad Says It Helped Foil Planned Iranian Attack on Jewish Targets in Greece](#)** (*Times of Israel*). The Mossad spy agency says it aided Greek authorities in foiling an attempt by two Pakistanis to carry out an attack against Israeli and Jewish targets in Greece...The Mossad says the investigation revealed that the two Pakistanis were part of a “wide Iranian network that operates from Iran and out of many countries.”
3. **[Ukraine Says a Dozen More Iranian Drones Downed in Kyiv](#)** (*Iran International*). Ukrainian military officials say 12

more Iranian-made drones were shot down in the latest Russian attack on the capital city, Kyiv. On Monday, Serhiy Popko, head of the Kyiv city military administration, said that the debris from a drone fell on a residential building in an area west of the capital. It caused significant damage, and a fire was put out quickly, but no casualties were reported.

GULF REGION

4. **[At Least 20 Pilgrims Killed, 29 Injured in Bus Crash Heading to Mecca](#)** (*Al Arabiya*). Local media reported that twenty pilgrims were killed, and another 29 were injured in a fiery bus crash while on their way to perform the Umrah pilgrimage in Mecca on Monday, local media reported. The death toll may increase. The pilgrims included Saudi nationals and residents of different nationalities.

5. **[Jews and Christians Cultivate Palm Trees in Medina for the First Time in 1,400 Years](#)** (*The New Khalij News*). In a first-of-its-kind event in nearly 1,400 years, a Saudi farmer invited a group of British Christians and Jews to plant palm trees on his farm in Medina, one of the two holiest sites for Muslims. Non-Muslims were prohibited from entering the city until just a few years ago. So London Jewish banker Rick Sofer led a group of Christians, Muslims, and British Jews to visit the farmer's orchard and plant palm seedlings.

6. **Highest Economic Growth in Bahrain in a Decade** (*The New Khalij News*). On Monday, the Bahraini Cabinet announced that the gross domestic product (GDP) would grow by 4.9% in 2022, marking the highest annual growth rate since 2013. In a statement, the council noted that the non-oil sector's contribution to the GDP at constant prices reached 83.1%, a historical high for Bahrain.

7. **UAE: Hedges from International Sanctions for Money Laundering** (*The New Arab*). In recent days, the United Arab Emirates has announced a series of stringent control measures to combat money laundering and terrorist financing. These measures come after the Middle Eastern financial hub was placed on a list of countries subject to intense scrutiny. On February 28, the UAE's Executive Office to Combat Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism acknowledged for the first time that it had received over 200 international requests to investigate money laundering crimes. The state is currently investigating money laundering in approximately 270 cases.

IRAQ

8. **Iraq Expresses Support of Kurdistan Region Oil Exports** (*Iraqi News*). The Oil, Gas and Natural Resources Committee in the Iraqi Parliament revealed that federal oil and gas law will be agreed upon soon, the Iraqi News Agency (INA) reported... The Iraqi MP mentioned that the law will oblige Kurdistan to deliver

its oil revenues of approximately 500 thousand barrels per day to the public treasury. Baghdad, Erbil and Ankara are working to reach new understandings to regulate oil exports from Iraqi Kurdistan to the Turkish port of Ceyhan, based on the final ruling issued in favor of Iraq in Paris.

9. **Iraq Ordered to Pay Compensation to Ankara in Arbitration Case** (*Al Arabiya*). On Tuesday, Turkey's Energy Ministry said that Iraq had been ordered by the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) to compensate Ankara in a longstanding arbitration case related to oil exports from northern Iraq via Turkey...However, the Turkish statement said the ICC had recognized most of Turkey's demands without saying how much compensation Iraq had been ordered to pay.

SYRIA

10. **UK Says Maher Al-Assad Oversees Captagon Smuggling Out of Syria** (*Syria TV*). Rosie Diaz, the British government spokeswoman for the Middle East and North Africa, stated that Maher al-Assad, brother of the Syrian regime leader, oversees the Captagon trade outside Syria. In a series of tweets on her official Twitter account, Diaz noted that the regime's Captagon trade generates approximately \$57 billion annually, accounting for 80 percent of the global supply.

11. **Joint US-British Sanctions Targeting Assad's Captagon** (*Enab Baladi*). In conjunction with the United Kingdom, the US Treasury Department imposed sanctions on individuals and companies responsible for the production and export of "Captagon" in Syria...These penalties are being implemented under the "Caesar" law, highlighting the significant role of Lebanese drug smugglers, some with ties to Lebanese "Hezbollah," in facilitating Captagon exports...Samer Kamal al-Assad and Wassim Badi al-Assad, cousins of Syrian regime leader Bashar al-Assad, were included in the US-British sanctions list.

YEMEN

12. **Yemeni Leaders Vow to resist Renewed Houthi Assault** (*Arab News*). Yemen's presidential council has promised to confront the "terrorist" Houthis and called for resistance as international envoys criticized the militia's renewed assault. The commission, chaired by Rashad Al-Alimi, said the latest Houthi attacks, primarily in Marib and Shabwa, demonstrated that the militia had no wish to end the war... The Houthis have made minor advances in Shabwa and Marib since early last week, targeting government forces with heavy weaponry and explosive drones.

NORTH AFRICA

13. **The US Unveils 10-Year Plan to Strengthen Influence in Libya and Africa** (*Al Nahar*). The United States is dedicated to resolving the Libyan crisis and has presented a draft plan to

Congress to establish security and stability within a decade through the election of a new authority... In addition, US President Joe Biden has submitted a new strategy to Congress for "conflict prevention and stability promotion" in six African countries, led by Libya. The White House stated that its strategy on Libya consists of a "10-year long-term initiative developed after extensive consultations with local stakeholders."

TURKIYE

14. **Turkish Presidential Candidates Finalized for May 14** (*Daily Sabah*). It is now final that four candidates will be competing in Türkiye's upcoming elections on May 14, according to the list released by the Supreme Election Council (YSK) on Monday. "As a result of consultations, by alphabetical order, Mr. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, Mr. Muharrem İnce, Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Mr. Sinan Oğan have been determined as the presidential candidates for the May 14, 2023, Presidential and Parliamentary Elections," the head of the YSK, Ahmet Yener, announced as the application window for candidates nominated by voters came to a close.

15. **PKK Extends Unilateral Ceasefire with Turkey Until after Elections** (*Bas News*). The leadership of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has extended their order to suspend military activities against Turkey until after the country's presidential elections, which are scheduled for May this year. The PKK first issued the order in the wake of the powerful earthquakes in early

February, which caused massive death and destruction in the country.

16. **PKK Implicitly Voices Support for CHP's Kılıçdaroğlu for Elections** (*Daily Sabah*). The PKK's umbrella organization's "co-chair," Bese Hozat, said during an interview on Monday with a PKK-affiliated channel that it supports the stance of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). "We find the HDP's stance of supporting the Nation Alliance valuable, important, and meaningful. It will directly affect the outcome of the elections. Therefore, we support this stance," Hozat said. Saying that the upcoming elections will be of critical importance, Hozat noted that it wants the current government down.

ISRAEL

17. **The Netanyahu-Led Coalition and Opposition Hold First Talks on Judicial Overhaul with President Herzog** (*Times of Israel*). Representatives from coalition and opposition parties gathered at the President's Residence in Jerusalem on Tuesday evening to begin negotiations over the government's highly controversial judicial overhaul plans, a first face-to-face meeting between the sides after three turbulent months of a legislative blitz and nationwide mass protests.
18. **IDF Pilots End Strike Threat but will 'Keep an Eye out'** (*Jerusalem Post*). The IDF Air Force reserve pilots will return to the regular training schedule, a representative of the pilot's protest

against the government's judicial reform plans announced Tuesday after Prime Minister Netanyahu announced a legislation freeze on Monday evening.

19. **Biden: Israel ‘Cannot Continue Down this Road’; No Netanyahu Invite in ‘Near Term’** (*Times of Israel*).

WASHINGTON — US President Joe Biden issued his gravest warning yet over the judicial overhaul being advanced by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government, saying Tuesday that Israel “cannot continue down this road.”

