

## THE EARLY PHOENIX

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

**Mar 31, 2023**

### **IRAN**

1. [\*\*Iran Condemns Fresh Israeli Attacks on Syria\*\*](#) (Tasnim Agency). In a statement on Friday, Nasser Kanaani vehemently condemned the attacks that the “aggressive Zionist regime” has conducted against several sites in Damascus and its suburbs on Thursday and Friday morning.
2. [\*\*The ICJ Ruled in Favor of Tehran, OR World Court Rejected Tehran's Bid to Free Assets Frozen in the US\*\*](#) (*Tehran Times* & *Iran International*). Tehran Times said The ICJ ordered Washington to pay compensation, announcing the amount to be determined later. Washington's freezing of funds belonging to several Iranian individuals and companies, including \$1.75 billion from the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), was “manifestly unreasonable,” the ICJ stated. On the other hand, Iran International said The International Court of Justice (ICE) rejected Tehran's legal bid to free up \$1.75 billion of the Islamic Republic's assets frozen by US court rulings on Thursday. In a 10-5 majority decision, judges said the UN International Court of Justice did not have jurisdiction to rule on the Iranian claim linked to the assets of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) that were blocked to be paid in compensation to victims of a 1983 bombing in Lebanon and other attacks linked to the Islamic Republic. The CBI's frozen assets of \$1.75 billion in bonds, plus accumulated interest, are held in a Citibank account in New York.

3. **[Iran & Russia Finalize Draft Agreement on Strategic Cooperation](#)** (*Tasnim Agency*). Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian unveiled plans to finalize the draft agreement on comprehensive and strategic cooperation with Russia within the next month.
4. **[Exclusive: Iranian Intelligence Officer Confesses to Tehran's African Terror Efforts](#)** (*Iran International*). In a video clip obtained by "Iran International," the interrogation of Hamid Reza Mohammad Abraha, an officer of Unit 853 of the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence in Tanzania, revealed the Iranian regime's infiltration of Africa through economic cooperation, intending to exploit the Baluch ethnicity to execute terrorist acts.
5. **[Israeli Defense Minister Warns of Iran's "War of Attrition" Against His Country](#)** (*CNN Arabia*). During an event with Shin Bet security officers, the Defense Minister stated, "We are currently in a difficult security period where Iran is waging a war of attrition against Israel while simultaneously preparing its plans to acquire military nuclear weapons. The potential exists in these areas to ignite a conflagration in the region and inflame other areas."

## **GULF REGION**

6. **[Air Traffic Between Israel, Bahrain, and UAE Temporarily Suspended](#)** (*Al Khaleej Online*). The Hebrew newspaper Haaretz reported that air traffic between Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain had been suspended for two weeks following the Israeli government's decision to increase weekly flights to Dubai. Haaretz noted that no Israeli planes

have taken off toward either of the two countries... The newspaper suggested Abu Dhabi and Manama appear displeased with Prime Benjamin Netanyahu.

7. **Saudi Arabia Plans to Establish Space Force** (*Arabi 21*). The US Central Space Forces Commander revealed that several US Middle Eastern military allies had shown interest in establishing their space forces... He stated, "The inaugural space cadre in the Saudi Air Force has completed the 'Space 100' course." He further added, "Saudi Arabia is merely one example."

## **IRAQ**

8. **China's Oil Companies Top Iraqi Crude Buyers in February** (*Bas News*). According to SOMO's official website, seven Chinese firms were among the 35 companies that purchased Iraqi oil during the month. India's Hindustan Petroleum was ranked second with six buyers, followed by American, South Korean, Italian, Japanese, and Greek companies with varying numbers. Companies from the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Russia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Spain, Turkey, and France also purchased Iraqi oil.
9. **Iran's Quds Force Commander in Baghdad on Unannounced Visit** (*Bas News*). The commander of Iran's Quds Forces, Ismail Qaani, arrived in Baghdad on an unannounced visit on Thursday evening. During his stay, Qaani is expected to hold meetings with Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani and other key political figures to discuss various political and security issues, Iraqi sources said.

10. **Iraq Generates over \$7 Billion from Oil Exports in February** (*Bas News*). The State Oil Marketing Organization, also known as SOMO, reported on Monday that Iraq earned more than seven billion dollars from its oil sales in February. In the previous month, Iraq sold over 92 million barrels of oil, and each barrel was priced at \$76.55, the marketing organization pointed out in a statement. The statement confirmed that Iraq earned \$7.062 billion from oil sales, mainly from the central and southern oil fields. However, the Kurdistan Region releases its oil data independently.
  
11. **Oil Companies Suspend Production in Iraqi Kurdistan** (*Iraqi News*). At least three oil companies operating in the Kurdistan region of Iraq suspended or reduced their oil production on Wednesday following the suspension of oil exports from a pipeline in northern Iraq, with more disruptions expected in the future. The storage tanks are expected to reach maximum capacity within days as talks continue between Turkey, Baghdad, and the KRG to resume exports.
  
12. **Oil Company Official Expects Pressure to Increase Regarding KRG Oil** (*Rudaw*). Dr. Mathew Zais, Vice President of HKN Energy, told Rudaw on Thursday that he expects the global pressure to increase regarding the recent halt of the Kurdistan Region's oil exports to Turkiye... Dr. Zais noted, "Turkey is a loser in the situation Iraq itself is [as] it is losing a significant amount of revenue, particularly right after a Baghdad-Erbil budget was made."

13. **[Iraqi Parliament Member Exposed for Corruption Worth \\$1 Billion \(Iraqi News\)](#)**. On Thursday, a member of the Parliamentary Integrity Committee, Sarwa Abdul Wahed, revealed “a waste of public money and suspicions of corruption” in several projects in Basra Governorate. According to documents issued by Abdul Wahed, “the waste of public money in several projects in Basra amounted to 123 billion dinars, related to contracts for the purchase of machinery for projects in the province.” It is noteworthy that the governor of Basra is one of the frameworks.
  
14. **[Yezidi Community Calls for Representation in KRI Parliament \(Bas News\)](#)**. In an open letter, Yezidis addressed to Kurdistan Region’s authorities on Thursday asked for five quota seats in the Region’s national assembly as efforts to amend the current electoral law gain momentum ahead of the parliamentary vote. The Kurdistan Region is home to nearly 320,000 Yezidi IDPs currently living in camps ..., and they are unwilling to return to their hometown because of the instability and Insecurity caused by multiple armed militia groups operating in the area.

## **EGYPT**

15. **[Interest Rates in Egypt Increased to 18.25% for Deposits and 19.25% for Lending \(The New Arab\)](#)**. On Thursday, the Monetary Policy Committee of the Central Bank of Egypt decided to implement a 200 basis point (2%) increase in interest rates for overnight deposits as part of the bank’s efforts to curb inflation, which has been on the rise due to the significant depreciation of the local currency and the widening gap between its official and parallel market rates against

the US dollar... **As a result, the Egyptian pound experienced a decline** of approximately 15% in a similar market compared to the official rate as the country grapples with increasing pressures stemming from a severe liquidity crisis.

## **LEBANON**

16. **Qatari Delegation to Meet Hezbollah in Bid for Presidential 'Normalization' (Nabar Net)**. A Qatari delegation will visit Beirut next week to meet with Speaker Nabih Berri, caretaker PM Najib Mikati and Hezbollah officials. In addition, the delegation will meet with “Hezbollah’s leadership” to bid for “presidential normalization” with the party to meet the Arab and international aspirations regarding the needed salvation roadmap for Lebanon.
17. **The series of Protests Continues, And There Are Threats of Escalation (Al Hadath)**. The United States Deputy Secretary of State, Ms. Barbra Leaf, said the Lebanese leaders lack the urgent necessity to bring their country out of the harsh political and economic situation. She added that Lebanon’s only option for economic recovery is to contract with the IMF. She noted that the recent Saudi-Iranian reconciliations might benefit the entire region. Meanwhile, protests in the country continued on a massive scale because of the currency’s exponential depreciation.

## **SYRIA**

18. **Israel Strikes Iran-Linked Militia Sites in Syria for the Second Time in Less Than 24 Hours** (*Syria TV*). The Syrian regime has reported that Israel fired several missiles at the outskirts of the capital city, Damascus, resulting in the injury of two soldiers and some material damage...Sources said the first raid targeted an air defense base near Damascus and a moving target on the southern highway, believed to be a convoy of a foreign figure allied to the Syrian regime...**The second one targeted military sites** of the regime forces and militias loyal to Iran in the southwest of Damascus.
19. **Washington Enlists Local Companies for New Prison Project in Northeastern Syria** (*The New Khalij News*). According to sources, the United States plans to finance the construction of a new detention center in northeastern Syria. The US Department of Defense requested a new detention center near Rmeilan on March 15th. Over the next two years, it will cost between \$25 million to \$100 million.
20. **Ukraine Ends Economic Agreements with Syrian Regime** (*Syria TV*). The Ukrainian Cabinet has approved a draft law to terminate the intergovernmental agreement on trade, economic, and technical cooperation between Ukraine and Syria...On its official website, the government said, "Ukraine ends its cooperation with the aggressor country and Russia's vassal states. " We will respond firmly to hostile actions against our country," the statement noted.
21. **Iran-backed Militias Bring Reinforcements to Deir Ezzor, Hasakah** (*Bas News*). The five vehicles carrying dozens of militiamen entered the city on March 27th from Hatla village and other areas in



Deir Ezzor and Raqqa countrysides, SOHR reported on Sunday. Despite recent setbacks, the latest deployment suggests the Iranian Militias continue bolstering their regional presence. However, human rights groups have documented numerous human rights violations committed by these militias, including torture, forced disappearances, and extrajudicial executions.

22. [Six US Troops Suffer Traumatic Brain Injuries In Syria Attack](#) (*Iran International*). The disclosure further raises the human toll among American forces from strikes and counterstrikes in Syria last week to 12 US troops wounded. The attacks also killed an American contractor and injured another.

## **TURKIYE**

23. [Erdogan Accuses 6-Party Opposition Coalition of Being Led by Pro-PKK Parties](#) (*Daily Sabah*). The six-party opposition coalition has been led from the beginning by the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the pro-PKK Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said late Wednesday. In an interview on ATV's A Haber in the capital Ankara, Erdoğan noted, "In fact, the CHP and HDP have been leading this table right from the beginning, while others are mere supporters."
24. [Finland's NATO Membership Accepted in the Turkish Parliament](#) (*Daily Sabah*). Türkiye's Parliament approved Finland's NATO accession bid, becoming the last nation after Hungary to greenlight the Nordic country's membership in the military bloc. For a new country to join NATO, each of the alliance's



existing members must give formal approval. All 276 lawmakers present voted unanimously in favor of Finland's bid.

25. **Vice President of CHP, the Opposition leader Party, Vows to Cancel Two Nuclear Plants** (*Yeni Safak*). Gülizar Biçer Karaca, Deputy Chairman of the CHP, argued that Türkiye is facing the consequences of wrong policies implemented over the past 16 years. In her statement, Karaca indicated that if her party comes to power, they will cancel all nuclear power plant projects in Türkiye... **Meanwhile, Erdoğan said his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin** might travel to Türkiye on April 27 to attend the inauguration ceremony of the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant.

## **ISRAEL**

26. **Right-wing Supporters of Judicial Overhaul March in Tel Aviv** (*Ynet News*). Tens of thousands of supporters of the government and its planned judicial overhaul gathered for what they called “a Freedom March” on Thursday in Tel Aviv after calls from ministers for the right-wing public to take to the streets in response to mass demonstrations held for the past three months by opponents of the plan.
27. **Israel Conducts Mediterranean Naval Drill with Five Other Countries** (*Jerusalem Post*). The Israel Navy and five other countries completed an international joint drill this week; Naval Squadron 32 Cmdr. Steven Gordon told The Jerusalem Post. “We led this international drill for three weeks, including Greece, Cyprus, Italy, the US, and France,” he said. “This was one of the bigger drills. We

went all over the Mediterranean Sea and along the various coast points of Israel.”

