

## THE EARLY PHOENIX

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

9 March 2023

### **TURKIYE**

1. [\*\*After 20 Years in Power, Will 2023 End the Reign of Turkey's 'Sultan' Erdogan?\*\*](#) (*Al Arabiya*). Despite the amount of power he has consolidated over the years, Erdogan faces an uphill battle in the upcoming presidential election. The conditions leading up to this election are unlikely to play in favor of another presidential term for him...Erdogan has faced strong criticism targeted at how his government has handled the [earthquake] disaster, including the slow rescue operations and how the government's personnel did not collaborate with relief agencies and local authorities. The six-party opposition alliance's chosen candidate to challenge Erdogan in the upcoming elections, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, fanned the fire of the public's anger. He said: "They failed in this as they failed in every other issue, they don't know how to manage the state. If there is anyone responsible for this process, it is Erdogan. It is this ruling party that has not prepared the country for an earthquake for 20 years."
2. [\*\*Cavusoglu: Quartet Meeting in Moscow to Discuss Syria\*\*](#) (*Anadolu Agency*). The Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, announced that a quadripartite meeting between Turkey, Russia, Iran, and the Syrian regime will be held in Moscow next week, as a precursor to a foreign ministers' meeting. Mevlut Cavusoglu made this announcement in response to a question during a joint press conference with his Iranian counterpart, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, held in the Turkish capital, Ankara, on Wednesday following talks between the two officials.

### **ISRAEL AND PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES**

3. [\*\*Protesters Gear Up for 'Day of Resistance' Throughout the Country Thursday\*\*](#) (*Times of Israel*). Demonstrators aim to disrupt PM's route to airport for

trip to Italy, as police warn of fines; plans for nationwide marches, strikes, and disruptions to traffic and train services. The protest movement against the government's judicial overhaul plans was set to conduct a second major campaign to disrupt daily life in Israel on Thursday, in what activists are calling a "day of resistance." The day notably includes plans to block roads around Ben Gurion Airport in an attempt to make it difficult for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to get there for his flight on an official visit to Italy. This in addition to marches, temporary workplace strikes, the blocking of main thoroughfares, disruption of train services and rallies outside the homes of top government officials.

4. [\*\*Smotrich Apologizes to IDF for Saying Israel Should 'Wipe Out' Huwara\*\*](#) (*Jerusalem Post*). Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich took to Facebook to issue a formal apology for his March 1st comments on the West Bank Palestinian town of Huwara – in which he said Israel should "wipe out" the town. Smotrich, who drew considerable ire for his comments, explained in his apology that a friend of his in the Israeli Air Force shared his anxiety about Smotrich's violent rhetoric – an anxiety he said is shared by many in the Israeli Air Force who fear having to carry out such a task. Two days ago, the Air Force protested actions by Israel's newest coalition government by refusing to attend training.

## **IRAN**

5. [\*\*US Sanctions Iranian Officials on International Women's Day\*\*](#) (*Iran International*). The United States on Wednesday imposed sanctions on Iranian officials and companies over serious human rights abuses, stepping up pressure on Tehran over its crackdown on protests. The US action came in concert with the European Union, [\*\*Britain\*\*](#) and Australia to mark International Women's Day. The US Treasury Department in a statement said it imposed sanctions on two senior Iranian prison officials it accused of being responsible for serious human rights abuses against women and girls. Washington also put sanctions on Iran's top army commander, a senior official in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and an official tied to the

Iranian government's efforts to block internet access. Also hit with sanctions were three Iranian companies and their leaders who have enabled law enforcement repression, according to the statement.

6. **[Iran's Alleged Ammunition for Russia's War in Ukraine: The Secret Journey of the Cargo Ships Accused of Supplying Invasion](#)** (*Sky News*). Iran has secretly supplied large quantities of bullets, rockets, and mortar shells to Russia for the war in Ukraine and plans to send more, a security source has told Sky News. The source claimed that two Russian-flagged cargo ships departed an Iranian port in January bound for Russia via the Caspian Sea, carrying approximately 100 million bullets and around 300,000 shells. Ammunition for rocket launchers, mortars, and machine guns was allegedly included in the shipments.
7. **[US, European Powers Express Alarm at Iran Enriching Uranium to 84 Percent](#)** (*Al Arabiya English*). The US and Europe's top powers on Wednesday expressed alarm at Iran having produced a tiny amount of uranium enriched to 84 percent purity, very close to weapons grade, and said Iran must explain how it happened...“With respect to the detected particles of uranium enriched to 83.7 percent, all Board members should be gravely concerned by this alarming development,” a US statement to a quarterly meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency's 35-nation Board of Governors said.
8. **[Family of US Citizen killed in IRGC Attacks Sues Iran](#)** (*Iran International*). The family of Omar “Chicho” Mahmoudzadeh, a US citizen who was killed in an Iranian ballistic missile and drone attack in Iraq, has sued the Islamic Republic in a US court. Mahmoudzadeh – along with at least 12 others -- was killed during the Revolutionary Guard's bombing campaign in late September, when the regime stepped up attacks on Iraq's Kurdistan region, presumably to pressure Iranian Kurdish opposition groups whom it accused of fomenting the unrest ignited by the death of 22-year-old Kurdish Iranian woman Mahsa Amini in police custody. The lawsuit,

which was filed Monday in the US District Court in Washington DC by Mahmoudzadeh's wife and daughter, seeks \$300 million in punitive and \$50 million in compensatory damages "for severe personal injuries and other irreparable harm" suffered as a result of his extrajudicial killing and alleged acts of terrorism by the Islamic Republic and its military arm, the Revolutionary Guards.

9. **[Iran Issues Serious Warning against Israel's Presence in Caucasus](#)** (*Tehran Times*). Speaking at a joint press conference with his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu in Ankara, Iranian Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian urged countries in the Caucasus region to act vigilantly in the face of Israel and not to provide an excuse for its presence in the region. "The presence of Israel in the Caucasus is one of the important concerns, and Iran warns all sides to act vigilantly toward Israel and don't provide an excuse for the presence of Israel in the Caucasus," the Iranian foreign minister insisted.

## **IRAQ**

10. **[Iran-Backed Militia Kata'ib Hezbollah: We are not Bound by any Understandings between Baghdad and Washington](#)** (*Al Arabiya*). The spokesman for the Iraqi Hezbollah militia, Abu Ali al-Askari, has commented on the recent visit of US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin to Baghdad and his meeting with Prime Minister Muhammad Shia Al-Sudani. Al-Askari stated that the militia is not bound by any understandings between Iraqi political parties and the American forces. He added that the militia does not require permission from anyone to confront the US forces.

## **EGYPT**

11. **[Amidst Dollar Crisis, Egypt Offers Citizenship for Foreign Investors](#)** (*Al Hurra*). On Wednesday, the Egyptian government decided to provide facilities for granting Egyptian nationality to foreign investors in exchange for purchasing facilities, investing in companies, or depositing dollar sums of money. The decision is part of an

effort to attract more hard currency into the country...One of the most significant new facilities is the reduction in the required amount to purchase a property owned by the state or a public legal entity in exchange for obtaining citizenship. The amount has been decreased from \$500,000 to \$300,000, and there is no longer a requirement to transfer the amount from abroad. Instead, it can be paid within the country as long as it has entered through a customs port, with supporting evidence.

## **GULF REGION**

12. **[Saudi Arabia and Bahrain Participate in Largest Naval Maneuver in the Middle East](#)** (*Al Khaleej Online*). The largest naval maneuver in the Middle East was launched on Tuesday in Bahrain and Jordan with the participation of Saudi forces. The primary objective of the exercise is to secure global shipping lanes and deter potential threats. The Saudi Ministry of Defense confirmed the launch of the International Mixed Multinational Maritime Exercise (IMX/CE23) in Bahrain and Jordan. The Saudi Navy is among the participating forces in the exercise.
13. **[Qatar Energy Launches New \\$8.5 Billion Project in Texas](#)** (*Al Khaleej Online*). Qatar Energy and Chevron Phillips Chemical Company jointly laid the foundation stone for the "Golden Triangle" polymer project in Orange County, Texas. The construction cost of this project is \$8.5 billion. The new project, which is located 180 km east of Houston, includes an ethylene unit with the world's largest capacity of 2.08 million tons per year, and two units for the production of high-density polyethylene with a total capacity of two million tons per year. These units are set to become the largest of their kind in the world, according to Qatar News Agency (QNA) reports on Wednesday.
14. **[Saudi Arabia Leads Arab Quartet Meeting to Track Iran Crisis](#)** (*New Khalij News*). On Wednesday, the Quartet Arab Ministerial Committee, comprised of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt, convened a meeting chaired by Saudi Arabia to follow up on the developments of the crisis with Iran and discuss methods to address

Iran's interference in the internal affairs of Arab countries. The meeting took place on the sidelines of the 159th session of the Council of the League of Arab States at the ministerial level, held at the headquarters of the Arab League General Secretariat in Cairo.

## **SYRIA**

15. **American Drones Targeted Iranian Weapons in Deir ez Zour** (*Al Arabiya*). On Wednesday, the Deir ez-Zour region in eastern Syria was targeted in a drone attack that killed four individuals in an area controlled by Iranian-backed factions. According to Al-Arabiya/Al-Hadath, Western sources have revealed that the attack, which targeted Iranian weapons, was carried out by the United States in coordination with Israel...Rami Abdel Rahman, the director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, noted that the warehouse is situated in a residential area, underscoring the recurring issue of trucks entering Syria from Iraq and smuggling weapons to Iranian-backed militias under the guise of food shipments and other items.
16. **US Defense Official: We Will not Change our Approach in Syria, and Drug Trafficking Threatens the Entire Region** (*Syria TV*). The United States has stated that its policy towards Syria remains unchanged and that drug smuggling across the Syrian-Jordanian border poses a threat to the region as a whole. During her visit to Amman, Dana Stroul, the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Middle East Affairs, emphasized that Washington will neither alter its approach to Syria nor normalize its relations with the Assad regime, as reported by Jordanian media.
17. **UN Human Rights Council Supports Establishment of an Institution to Investigate Fate of Syrian Detainees** (*Syria TV*). The United Nations Human Rights Council has expressed its full support for establishing an institution to investigate the fate of Syrian detainees and emphasized the need to hold all perpetrators of violations in Syria accountable. This position was conveyed to the United Nations

High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, during his first briefing on the global human rights situation since he assumed the office in late 2021.

