

## THE EARLY PHOENIX

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

**3 March 2023**

### **IRAN**

1. **[Iranian Teachers Unions Accuse Khamenei of "Biological Terrorism" in Response to Claims of Poisoned Students](#)** (*Iran International*). The Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers Syndicates has called for protests on March 7th against the poisoning of female students, which they have described as "biological terrorism." The Teachers' House has held Ali Khamenei and the institutions under his control responsible for the incident...Despite surveillance cameras in most cities, no effective measures have been taken to find those involved.
2. **[IAEA's Grossi to Travel to Iran, Seeking Breakthrough on Cooperation](#)** (*Al Arabiya English*). UN nuclear watchdog chief Rafael Grossi will travel to Iran for "high-level meetings," as the agency attempts to persuade Tehran to cooperate with an investigation into uranium traces found at undeclared sites. Iran's refusal to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency's investigation into uranium traces found at three undeclared sites led the IAEA's Board of Governors to pass a resolution in November ordering Iran to cooperate urgently with the probe. The IAEA has criticized Iran for failing to inform it beforehand of changes made to the two cascades of advanced centrifuges enriching uranium to up to 60 percent purity at its Fordow plant.

3. **[MEP Weimers Calls for Creation of Fund to Support Strikes in Iran \(Iran International\)](#)**. EU member of Parliament Charlie Weimers has called for the creation of a fund to support the Iranian labor movement using blocked Iranian assets. At a press conference with exiled Prince Reza Pahlavi, Weimers discussed the need to help Iranian workers who are facing difficult working conditions in entities owned by the IRGC. Weimers further suggested seizing the IRGC's assets abroad to create the strike fund, stating that it could help the Iranian people put an end to the current regime.
  
4. **[US issues more Iran sanctions amid stalled diplomacy; New measures target Iranian oil and petrochemical sales, as US says it is committed to reducing Iran's energy exports \(Al Jazeera\)](#)**. The United States has imposed a new round of Iran sanctions, targeting the country's oil and petrochemical sales, as diplomacy between Washington and Tehran continues to stall...“The United States is committed to significantly reducing Iranian energy exports and will sanction those facilitating Iran's petroleum and petrochemical trade,” the State Department said. The sanctions hit a Vietnam-based company, two firms based in China, two others in Iran and one in the United Arab Emirates, accusing them of involvement “in the transport or sale” of Iranian oil and petrochemicals.

## **GULF REGION**

5. **[Saudi Arabia Thwarts the Smuggling of 5 Million Narcotic Tablets Hidden in a Shipment of Cables \(Al Khaleej Online\)](#)**. A spokesman for the Saudi General Directorate for Narcotics Control, Major Muhammad Al-Nujaidi, has announced that an attempt to smuggle more than 4,900,000 amphetamine tablets inside shipping cables was thwarted...He explained that “the accused is a Syrian who violated the border security system” and that he was referred to the Public Prosecution after legal measures were taken against him.

6. **"Double Strike" Thwarts Smuggling of 34 Million Narcotic Tablets** (*Emarat Alyoum*). Dubai Customs has successfully prevented two attempts to smuggle 34 million narcotic tablets through two customs centers affiliated with the Department of Maritime Customs Centers. The operation, named "double strike," involved the seizure of 32.8 million narcotic psychotropic tablets concealed in a commercial shipment of foodstuffs and medical equipment from an Asian country to the Emirates via the Jebel Ali port. Additionally, inspectors at the Deira Port customs center successfully intercepted an attempt to smuggle 1.2 million Captagon pills weighing 227.88 kilograms hidden in a marine vehicle from an Asian country.
  
7. **UAE Canceled Netanyahu's Visit Last January, Fearing Tensions with Iran** (*The New Arab*). The UAE canceled a scheduled visit by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu last January due to concerns that it would anger Iran, according to a report by Israeli website Walla. Netanyahu's office had previously stated that the visit was postponed for logistical reasons. However, three unnamed Israeli officials have revealed that the UAE was afraid that Netanyahu would make anti-Iranian statements during the visit, which would have increased tensions.

## **YEMEN**

8. **Sources in Sanaa Reveal New Houthi Regulations to Ban the US Dollar** (*Yemen Window*). The Houthi militia in Yemen, which is backed by Iran, has refused to hand over money transfers to citizens in US dollars, instructing exchange shops to distribute the funds in Yemeni riyals instead. This has caused problems for Yemeni citizens who receive money transfers in dollars, as exchange shops refuse to give them the currency.

## **EGYPT**

9. **[Egypt Implements Wage and Pension Increases, but Offsets Benefits with Fuel Price Hike](#)** (*Asharq News*). Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has ordered an increase in the minimum wage for state workers and a 15% raise in pensions for retirees...The minimum wage will be raised according to job grade, with the lowest increase being 1,000 pounds per month. The minimum income for employees of the sixth grade and its equivalent is 3,500 pounds per month, and for holders of a PhD degree, it is 7,000 pounds per month. Meanwhile, the Egyptian Ministry of Petroleum announced a hike in the prices of gasoline products due to fluctuations in Brent crude prices and the exchange rate of the pound against the dollar.

## **TUNISIA**

10. **[Ennahda Movement Urges Peaceful Demonstrations in Tunisia on Sunday](#)**. (*Al Jazeera*). The Tunisian opposition National Salvation Front and the Ennahda movement have urged their supporters to hold demonstrations on Sunday despite the authorities' decision to ban them. The governor of Tunisia city refused to allow the Front to organize protests on Sunday, citing charges of "conspiring against the security of the country" against some of its leaders. The authorities have recently arrested three leaders of the opposition Salvation Front. The Tunisian General Labor Union, the country's largest labor organization, will organize a demonstration on Saturday in the Tunisian capital before the upcoming protest. Tunisian authorities prevented Marco Perez Molina, a Spanish trade unionist responsible for cooperation with Africa and Asia, from participating in the protest, considering him an "undesirable" person.

## **LIBYA**

11. **Libyan State Council Approves Constitutional Amendment to Prepare for Elections** (*Al Jazeera*). The High Council of State in Libya has voted in favor of accepting the 13th amendment to the "constitutional declaration," which would provide a basis for holding parliamentary and presidential elections. This comes after the House of Representatives recently approved the amendment, which is hoped to end the ongoing political crisis in the country. Currently, two governments are fighting for power in Libya, with one assigned by the House of Representatives and the other recognized by the United Nations. The unity government led by Abdul Hamid al-Dabaiba, recognized by the UN, is refusing to hand over power unless it is to a government assigned by a newly elected parliament.

## **IRAQ**

12. **Iraq Prepares to Sign Agreement with Iran to Secure the Quantities of Gas Required for the Summer** (*Iraqi News Agency*). The Iraqi Minister of Electricity, Ziyad Ali Fadel, announced on Thursday that there will be a significant change in energy production during the upcoming summer season. He disclosed that the ministry is seeking to sign a gas agreement with Iran to meet the stations' needs and provide an additional 7,000 megawatts to the energy system. The minister stated that they require 35,000 megawatts of energy to provide 24-hour electricity to citizens in the coming summer.
13. **UN Secretary-General Stirs Controversy by Photograph with US-Sanctioned Iraqi Militia Leaders** (*Al Hurra*). A photo of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres with Iraqi faction leaders, who are included in US sanctions lists, has caused an uproar in Iraq. The photo shows Guterres standing between Qais al-Khazali, leader of the Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq militia, and Rayan al-Kaldani, leader of the Babylonian militia. The US Treasury imposed

sanctions on Khazali and his brother in December 2019 for their role in human rights violations in Iraq and the killing of demonstrators.

## **MOROCCO**

14. **Morocco and the European Union Intend to Expand Partnership to Include Israel** (*Alburra*). Morocco and the European Union have expressed their interest in expanding their partnership to include Israel. Moroccan Foreign Minister, Nasser Bourita, and European Union Commissioner for Neighborhood Policy, Oliver Varhelyi, made the announcement after a meeting in Rabat. They plan to develop "triple regional cooperation" between Morocco, the EU, and Israel in areas of common interest.

## **SYRIA**

15. **After the Earthquake, Displaced People in Northwest Syria Increased to More than Two Million** (*Syria TV*). The "Syria Response Coordinators" team has reported that the number of displaced and internally displaced persons in camps and shelters in northwestern Syria now exceeds two million after an earthquake on February 6...The number of internally displaced people in northwestern Syria increased by 10.1 percent, with a total of 2,016,344 displaced persons within camps and shelters.
16. **The Death of the Syrian Oppositionist, Basma Kodmani, After a Struggle with Illness** (*Syria TV*). Basma Kodmani, the Syrian opposition figure and professor at the French Institute of International Relations, died after a struggle with illness on Thursday, as Syrians mourned her on social media.
17. **UN Chief Urges Nations to Repatriate Citizens from Syria Camp** (*Al Arabiya*). UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Thursday called for the

swift repatriation of foreigners held in Syria's infamous al-Hol camp which houses relatives of extremists. The sprawling and overcrowded Kurdish-run al-Hol camp in northern Syria is home to more than 50,000 people, including family members of suspected ISIS militants as well as displaced Syrians and Iraqi refugees. Nearly half of the camp's population is under the age of 12... "I have no doubt to say that the worst camp that exists in today's world is al-Hol, with the worst possible conditions for people and with enormous suffering for the people that have been stranded there for years," Guterres said.

## **ISRAEL AND PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES**

18. **Senior Minister Smotrich Says Israel should 'wipe out' Palestinian Town of Huwara** (*Times Of Israel*). Far-right minister Bezalel Smotrich has suggested that Israel should "wipe out" the Palestinian town of Huwara in the West Bank. Smotrich, who is the finance minister and a minister in charge of civilian affairs in the West Bank, made the remark following an attack by a terrorist from Huwara that killed two Israeli brothers. Extremist settlers responded by rampaging through the town, resulting in one Palestinian being shot dead and several others badly hurt.
  
19. **Israel Fears Russia to Supply S-400 Air Defense Missiles to Iran** (*Y Net News*). Bloomberg reports that Russia is offering "unprecedented defense cooperation" to Iran, including in the areas of missiles, electronics, and air defense. The S-400 air defense system, which can hit air targets up to 155 miles away, could create a "red zone for high-altitude aircraft," according to experts. While Russia has not yet confirmed if it will supply the weapons, its growing closeness with Iran has raised concerns.



20. **Israel Looks to Fly Palestinian Pilgrims to Saudi to Quell Tensions** (*Y Net News*). Sources report Israel is considering allowing Palestinians from the West Bank to fly directly from the Ramon Airport to Saudi Arabia for the Muslim Hajj pilgrimage in Mecca. The initiative is being examined amid a recent spike in violence, but its approval would depend on the cooperation of the Saudi government. Israel's internal security service and the IDF's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories have recommended approving the move.

## **TURKIYE**

21. **Lavrov and Cavusoglu Discuss Normalizing of Relations between Ankara and the Syrian Regime** (*Syria TV*). Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, and Turkey's Mevlut Cavusoglu discussed normalizing relations between Turkey and the Syrian regime at the G20 ministerial meeting in New Delhi. The Russian Foreign Ministry stated that they were focusing on the work of the countries in the region to normalize Turkish relations with the Syrian regime while also making joint efforts to eliminate terrorist threats.
22. **Turkish Parliament Unanimously Votes to Create Earthquake Investigation Commission** (*Anadolu Agency*). The Turkish parliament has voted unanimously to establish a committee to investigate the aftermath of the Kahramanmaraş earthquake that occurred in early February. The committee aims to investigate all aspects of the earthquake's consequences, including the establishment of earthquake-resistant buildings and measures to increase the efficiency of the urban transformation project.