

THE EARLY PHOENIX

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

April 5, 2023

IRAN

1. [**Iranian Hunger Striker Again Urges UK PM To Proscribe IRGC \(Iran International\)**](#). [The Telegraph](#) reported in February that “Joe Biden’s diplomats are pressing the UK Government not to formally declare Iran’s Revolutionary Guard a terrorist group, despite the Home Office backing the move”...It added that the US is saying Britain should keep doors open in case of a need to be an interlocutor. Vahid Beheshti, an Iranian activist, has not eaten in 41 days and lost over 13 kg, or about 17% of his body mass. In the past few days, a group of other Iranians joined him and set up tents beside him.
2. [**After 8 Years, Iran Sends Its Ambassador to the UAE \(Al Maydeen\)**](#). On Tuesday, the Mehr news agency reported, quoting informed sources, that the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs will appoint Reza Amiri as its new ambassador to the UAE after the position was vacant for eight years.
3. [**Wary of US: EU in a Quandary Over China Ties \(Kayhan\)**](#). A flurry of European leaders has descended on Beijing in a push to get a dialogue going, with essential visits by French President Emmanuel Macron and EU chief Ursula von der Leyen scheduled this week.

IRAQ

4. [**Kurdistan Region Leadership Welcomes the Erbil-Baghdad Agreement on Oil Exports \(Kurdistan 24\)**](#). President Masoud Barzani, the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), on Tuesday in a phone call thanked Mohammed Shia’ Al-Sudani, the Prime Minister of the Iraqi Republic, according to a statement from Barzani Headquarters. President Barzani described the Erbil-Baghdad agreement to resume oil export from the Kurdistan Region as a historic step, the statement reads.

The information added that he thanked the Iraqi Prime Minister for his efforts to resolve this critical issue and reach a mutual agreement.

ISRAEL & PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

5. **Iran's Supreme Ruler Tweets About the Palestinian Resistance Gaining Strength** (*Twitter*). Khamenei wrote on his Arabic Twitter account that he received a [report](#) within 24 hours that Palestinians carried out 27 attacks in Israel.
6. **Several Major Israeli Universities Suffer Cyberattack** (*Israel 24*). The websites of several major Israeli universities were subjected to a cyberattack on Tuesday by a group of hackers calling themselves "Anonymous Sudan." The University of Haifa, the Weizmann Institute of Science, the Open University of Israel, and Reichmann University are among the inaccessible sites.

TURKIYE

7. **Erdogan's Political Fate May Be Determined by Turkiye's Kurds** (*CNN World*). Turkey's persecuted pro-Kurdish party has emerged as a kingmaker in the country's upcoming election, playing a decisive role that may just tip the balance enough to unseat two-decade ruler Recep Tayyip Erdogan. In a key setback to the Turkish president and leader of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party), the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) last month announced that it would not put forward its own presidential candidate, a move analysts say allows its supporters to vote for Erdogan's main rival...The HDP's decision not to field a candidate came just three days after the head of the Republican People's Party (CHP), Kemal Kilicdaroglu, Erdogan's main rival, visited the party's co-chairs. He told reporters that the solution to Turkey's problems, "including the Kurdish problem," lies in parliament," according to Turkish media.
8. **21 Captured In Operations Against Gulenists in Turkiye** (*Daily Sabah*). Police conducted an Istanbul-based operation against the Gülenist Terror Group (FETÖ) Wednesday leading to the detention of 21 suspects.

Four others with outstanding arrest warrants remain at large. Istanbul's organized crime and intelligence units raided several locations in Istanbul... The Gulenist organization (FETÖ) has been under more intense scrutiny since the July 15, 2016, coup attempt its infiltrators in the army carried out. The Ministry of National Defense announced last year that 24,387 Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) members were sacked since the coup attempt for possible ties to the group, while administrative inquiries are underway for 781 others.

9. **Turkish Opposition Media Slams Erdogan for Holding Ministerial Meetings with Assad Regime** (*Cumhuriyet*). President of the AKP, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, took a step back in his policy regarding Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, which he declared that he would not meet, saying he was a "murderer." After Erdogan gave the message that he could meet with Assad in the past months, the first contact at the ministerial level was established between the two countries.

EGYPT

10. **Egypt's Debt Crisis Has No Clear Exit. Worse is to Come** (*Middle East Eye*). Egypt is going through one of the most dramatic debt crises in history. As a direct consequence of the current government's debt-fuelled, militarized capitalism model, the pound has been devalued three times in the past year, losing half of its value by January, as core inflation reached a record high above 40 percent.

TUNISIA

11. **President Saied Will Appoint a New Ambassador to Syria** (*Middle East Eye*). Tunisian President Kais Saied has instructed the foreign ministry to "initiate procedures for appointing an ambassador of Tunisia in Damascus", according to an official statement, in the latest move towards Arab states' normalisation with the government of Bashar al-Assad. The statement, published on the presidency's Facebook page, stressed the "necessity of adhering to the principles of the foreign policy of the Tunisian

diplomacy" and said that the country's "positions abroad stem from the will of its people." Tunisia was among several Arab countries that severed their ties with Assad a decade ago in the aftermath of his brutal crackdown on anti-government protests during the pro-democracy uprisings of 2011. But Tunis returned a limited diplomatic mission to Syria in 2017.

THE GULF REGION

12. **[A Leap in Middle East Diesel Exports to Europe and Africa. What is the Reason? \(Sky News Arabia\)](#)**. Record flows of Russian diesel into the Middle East in March boosted the region's exports to Europe and Africa as traders took advantage of lower prices to stock up on fuel. The Middle East region is rapidly becoming a major supplier of industrial fuels to Europe and Africa, with the addition of stocks to Asia, as Russian imports increased the production of refineries in the region...A Reuters analysis revealed that ship tracking data from Refinitiv, Kepler, and Vortexa, Russia, showed that no less than 500,000 tons of fuel were unloaded in the region during March.
13. **[Saudi Arabia's Digital Dream: Silicon Valley For The Middle East \(Middle East Eye\)](#)**. Saudi Arabia is spending billions of dollars, and hopes to attract billions more, to become the digital hub of the Middle East, investing in data centres, metaverses and fibre optic cables. Global players Microsoft, Google, Oracle, Meta and Apple are all piling into the kingdom, attracted by its deep pockets, high internet usage and plans for the future...Saudi Arabia has joined ventures and partnerships with tech companies globally, including Huawei. It also hosts the Global Tech Hub, a joint venture between Russia and the kingdom.

JORDAN

14. **[Jordan Issues International Bonds Worth \\$1.25 Billion \(Reuters\)](#)**. Jordanian Finance Minister Muhammad Al-Issis said that on Tuesday, Jordan issued international bonds worth \$1.25 billion, with a yield of 7.5 percent. He said requests for the bonds exceeded supply six times, which

reflects the confidence of global investors in the country's financial and monetary stability.

LEBANON

15. **US Sanctions Two Lebanese Brothers Due to Corruption** (*Al-Nahar Al-Arabi*). The Rahme brothers have previously denied their connection to ZR Energy DMCC, one of two subcontractors to import fuel for Lebanese power plants that were found to be contaminated, prompting the Lebanese authorities to launch a wide-ranging investigation in 2020. Treasury said: “Raymond Zeina Rahme and his brother, Teddy Zeina Rahme, have used companies under their control — inside and outside Lebanon — to win numerous government contracts through a highly opaque public bidding process.
16. **Despite Scapegoating Rhetoric, Lebanon’s Crisis is not Caused by Syrian Refugees** (*NOW Lebanon*). Lebanese political leaders refuse to implement vital anti-corruption reforms necessary to initiate an \$860 million (USD) economic rescue plan from the International Monetary Fund while using refugees as a bargaining chip to pressure the international community to provide more support for Lebanon. “There is a widespread perception amongst the Lebanese that international organizations are giving Syrians money and, therefore, they’re better off,” Michael Young, senior editor at the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Centre in Beirut, told NOW Lebanon. “It’s shameful, but the reaction is not unexpected; the socio-economic situation in the country is a disaster.”

SYRIA

17. **Assad Regime Insists on Turkiye’s Withdrawal from Syria as Condition for Normalization** (*Syria TV*). Ayman Soussan, head of the Syrian regime's delegation to Moscow to discuss normalization with Turkey, said today, Tuesday, that “there are no positive indications regarding the withdrawal of Turkish forces from Syria, not combating and eliminating terrorism,” referring to the failure of the initial talks between

Ankara and the regime. Soussan, who holds the position of deputy foreign minister of the Syrian regime, accused Turkey of not even adhering to the understandings reached within the framework of Astana or with the Russian side...He stressed that announcing Turkey's withdrawal from the Syrian lands is "the gateway to re-establish communication between the two sides."

18. **[French Court Issues Order to Begin War Crimes Trials of Three Senior Assad Regime Officials](#)** (*Zaman Al Wasel*). The decision includes the director of the National Security Bureau, Ali Mamlouk, the former head of Syrian Air Force Intelligence, Jamil Hassan, and Abdul Salam Mahmoud, the head of the investigation branch of Air Force Intelligence at Mezzeh Military Airport.
19. **[Turkish Border Guards Shoot 3 Civilians and Arrest Another in Syria's Idlib](#)** (*North Press*). A security source from Azmarin said that the area's residents were informed that the Turkish border guards shot three young men near the border. According to the source, the Turkish border guards arrested a fourth person who may have been killed under torture, citing one of the injured people. A medical source of the hospital said that the border guards have recently increased their aggressions against the civilians, as this is the third case of its kind since March.
20. **[14 Foreign Investors Establish Vital Sector Companies in Syria](#)** (*Enab Baladi*). Documents published in the Official Gazette of Syria Issue [No 11](#) and [No 12](#) for 2023 announced the establishment of nine foreign companies in March. Foreign investors from New Zealand, England, China, Iran, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and the UAE have registered new companies with the government of Assad. New Zealand entrepreneurs are said to import and export spare parts for cars. The British Building Trade and Real Estate company's goal relates to the wholesale and retail sale of building materials and all their requirements. Tray for Oil Extraction is a Chinese company providing support activities for extracting oil and natural gas. An

Iranian company's diversified objectives include the import, export, and trade of motorcycles and their spare parts, the trade of all agricultural products and foodstuffs, transportation spare parts, cars, tires and their accessories, building materials, cladding, decoration and their accessories, office and home furniture, heating and cooling facilities, installation, operation, and maintenance. Emirates Trading is a company that will carry out all commercial activities to contract with the public and private sectors to carry out import and export activities and buy and sell materials to establish establishments, motels, and tourist hotels. An Egyptian company has the right to represent Arab, foreign, and local companies and agencies and enter into tenders and auctions related to importing and exporting plastic granules and selling them wholesale and retail. To import and export ready-made clothes, cosmetics, and perfumes of all kinds, wholesale and retail, an Iraqi company was also registered with the Assad government. The first Lebanese company will provide software applications, buy and rent offices, real estate, and the necessary means of transportation. The second Lebanese company will provide electronic marketing of Syrian products and services.