

# THE EARLY PHOENIX

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

May 18, 2023

## TURKEY

1. [Why the Kurdish Vote is Decisive in Turkiye's Election \(New Arab\)](#). With much of the Kurdish electorate throwing their support behind Erdogan's rival Kilicdaroglu, Turkey's largest minority group could sway the outcome of the crucial run-off election amid frustration with Erdogan's 21-year-long rule.
2. [Türkiye Announces the "Neutralization" of PKK Leadership North of Raqqa \(Enab Baladi\)](#). Today, Wednesday, May 17, the Turkish authorities announced the "neutralization" of leadership in the "Kurdistan Workers' Party" (PKK) and the "People's Protection Units" (YPG), in the areas controlled by the "Self-Administration" in northern Syria.
3. [Five Civilians Were Injured in a Turkish Airstrike on Ain Essa, North of Raqqa \(Ronahi TV\)](#). On Wednesday morning, the Turkish occupation army carried out intensive attacks on the countryside of Ain Issa district, causing civilian casualties, in addition to causing massive material damage... The director of the National Hospital in the city of Raqqa, Ibrahim al-Omar, talked about the health status of the injured and the operations performed for them, stressing that their condition is stable.

## IRAN

4. [Iran, Russia Ink Deal to Complete Major Transport Network \(The Moscow Times\)](#). Iran and Russia agreed to collaborate on constructing the final part of a commercial transport network linking to the Gulf and India while avoiding Western sea lanes..."The delivery of goods from Saint Petersburg (in Russia) to Mumbai (in India) will take about ten days, compared to the journey through traditional trade routes that take 30 to 45 days." Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak visited Iran on Tuesday and met with the Islamic Republic's oil minister to discuss "new projects" in oil and gas exploration.
5. [UK Government Split Over Calls For IRGC Terror Ban \(Iran International\)](#) The UK government is split over whether to proscribe Iran's Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) as a terror group, according to press reports... Home Secretary Suella Braverman and Security Minister Tom Tugendhat are both said to back the move and bring Britain in line with policy in the US. But Foreign Secretary James Cleverly is believed to be holding out against the change. Critics say he is being badly advised by civil servants, claiming he is "too closely led by officials".
6. [Iran-UK Trade Value Triples after Brexit \(Tasnim News\)](#). In its latest report, the British Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said the

value of trade exchanges between Iran and Britain tripled after Brexit and reached £696 million in 2022.

7. [\*\*Qatar Signs \\$10B Contract to Develop Joint Gas Field with Iran\*\*](#) (*Iran International*). Qatar Energy signed the deal with French-owned Technip Energies to develop the world's largest natural gas field. The Iranian part, South Pars, supplies 70% of Iran's gas. On Tuesday, QatarEnergy stated that the project would include two giant liquefied natural gas (LNG) production lines with an annual capacity of 16 million tons.

## ISRAEL & PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

8. [\*\*Israel Wins Nothing From Another Gaza Assault - But Netanyahu Might\*\*](#) (*Middle East Eye*). The bombing campaign will not stop another confrontation from starting soon, but it could give Netanyahu a political lifeline...Polls released by major Israeli channels after the ceasefire, which was signed on Saturday night, prove beyond doubt the operation achieved its main goal from the government's perspective: the popularity of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition was on the rise.
9. [\*\*Greek-Israeli Military Relations Increase with New Training Aircraft\*\*](#) (*Jerusalem Post*). Israel and Greece continued to elevate their military relations on Wednesday with Jerusalem delivering two critical M-346 advanced training aircraft at a special event involving top Greek security officials, IDF Air Force chief Maj.-Gen. Tomer Bar, top Israeli Defense Ministry officials and officials from Elbit Systems. Elbit Systems has been contracted by Greece both to provide virtual avionics for the M-346 aircraft and to create an International Flight Training Center.
10. [\*\*U.S. Wants Closer Saudi-Israeli Ties by the End of 2023\*\*](#) (*i24*). The report comes after the U.S. Ambassador to Israel told i24NEWS that Israeli-Saudi normalization was 'hugely important' for Washington. Washinton intends to conduct a diplomatic offensive in the next six months to bring Israel and Saudi Arabia closer together, Israeli media cited two U.S. officials as saying on Wednesday...the White House will try to push for a normalization agreement between the two states by the end of 2023, before the presidential campaign occupies U.S President Joe Biden's agenda.
11. [\*\*Tel Aviv Pressing Egypt Not to Repair Ties with Iran\*\*](#) (*Tehran Times*). Israeli delegates are covertly traveling to Cairo and attempting to persuade the government of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi not to take similar steps to reestablish ties with Tehran amid regional reconciliation, Yedioth Ahronoth reported on Wednesday.

12. [Tensions between Israel and Russia: The Main Factor - Iran](#) (*N12*). The relationship between the two nations has also soured due to Israel's support for Ukraine. Israeli authorities are perturbed by Russia's intention to transfer nuclear technologies to Iran and are attempting to halt this action. Concurrently, Russia has halted efforts to assist Israel in locating missing IDF personnel in Syria.

## LEBANON

13. [Iraq Extends Agreement Supplying Lebanon With Fuel](#) (*Iraqi News*). The Iraqi Council of Ministers agreed to secure Lebanon's total needs of oil derivatives needed to operate power stations...The agreement extended between both countries under the same previous conditions includes an increase of 50 percent in the quantities exported to Lebanon annually, to be 1.5 million tons, the Lebanese National News Agency (NNA) reported.

## SUDAN

14. [Sudan Aid Needs Surge, UN Says as Fighting Rages in Khartoum](#) (*UN News*). The United Nations said on Wednesday that more than half of Sudan's population now needed aid and protection as civilians sought shelter from air strikes and sporadic clashes between rival military factions in the Khartoum area.
15. [US Accuses Fighters of Sexual Violence in Sudan](#) (*The National*). Local group Hadrhreen said it documented 10 cases of rape by the Rapid Support Forces. "We have seen horrific reports of sexual violence at the hands of armed actors across Sudan. The United States is firm in its condemnation of conflict-related sexual violence," US Ambassador to Khartoum John Godfrey said in a tweet on Tuesday.
16. [The Situation in Sudan is Turning into a Regional Crisis](#) (*Al Arabiya*). The United Nations predicted that the number of refugees fleeing the country would reach one million this year. They announced that \$3.03 billion is needed to provide urgent aid to people in the conflict-torn country.

## SYRIA

17. [Expected Participation of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in the Arab Summit in Jeddah after Isolation That Lasted for More Than a Decade](#) (*France 24*). The 32nd Arab League summit will kick off on Friday in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, with the expected participation of President Bashar al-Assad, Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal al-Miqdad confirmed on Wednesday.
18. [Germany Criticizes Normalization with Assad Without Release of Detainees and Other Steps](#) (*Enab Baladi*). German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock reiterated that the UN resolutions concerning Syria cannot be ignored,

stressing the need to secure humanitarian access to the Syrian people, release political detainees, and launch a political process based on equal and reciprocal steps...[In response,] the Qatari foreign minister said, “Our assessment in Qatar is that the only solution to normalizing relations with the Syrian regime, at least for us, is to find a just and comprehensive solution to the issue in Syria.”

19. [\*\*In Jeddah, Syrian Foreign Minister Calls on the Arab States to Rebuild Syria as a Condition for the Return of Refugees \(Syria TV\)\*\*](#). At the meeting of Arab foreign ministers in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on Wednesday, the Foreign Minister of the Syrian regime, Faisal al-Miqdad, called for an Arab role in reconstruction as a condition for the return of Syrian refugees to their country.
20. [\*\*Following Arab League, Russia Aims to Reinstate Al-Assad in Organization of Islamic Cooperation \(Syria TV\)\*\*](#). As reported by the Russian agency "Sputnik," Ramzan Abdulatipov - Russia's permanent representative to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation - affirmed that "Moscow would support the decision to reinstate the Syrian regime within the organization."

## THE GULF REGION & YEMEN

21. [\*\*Jordan Extradites Dissident to UAE Despite Fears of Torture \(New Arab\)\*\*](#). Human Rights Watch warned that al-Romaithi is "at serious risk of arbitrary detention, unfair trial, and possibly torture" if he was to be extradited to the UAE.
22. [\*\*Grundberg: "I Call on the Yemeni Parties to Release Those Arbitrarily Detained" \(Al Arabiya\)\*\*](#). The UN Special Envoy to Yemen, Hans Grundberg, called on the parties to the conflict to take "decisive" steps towards a peaceful and comprehensive solution in the country, calling for the release of all arbitrarily detained persons.

## NORTH AFRICA

23. [\*\*Human Rights Watch Accuses Egypt of 'Detaining and Torturing' Female Relatives of ISIS Militants in North Sinai \(Human Rights Watch\)\*\*](#). Egyptian authorities have arbitrarily detained women and girls related to suspected members of the Islamic State (ISIS) affiliate in North Sinai, some for months or years ... Some were themselves victims of abuses by the ISIS-linked group, including rape and forced marriage, and were detained after they escaped and sought help from the authorities.
24. [\*\*Italian Defense Minister Says Egypt Plays Vital Role Regional Stability \(Al Ahram English\)\*\*](#) Italian Minister of Defence Guido Crosetto noted in a meeting with President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi in Cairo on Wednesday that “Egypt plays a key role in maintaining stability in the Middle East and

Mediterranean regions,” according to a statement released by the Egyptian presidency.

