

The Early Phoenix

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

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EGYPT

1. [**Egyptian Foreign Minister Visits Syria and Turkey for the First Time in a Decade**](#) (*Al Quds Al Arabi*). Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry will visit Syria and Turkey for the first time in a decade on Monday, after a cooling of relations between Cairo and both countries, according to an Egyptian Foreign Ministry statement on Sunday. The statement quoted Foreign Ministry spokesman Ahmed Abu Zeid as saying that Shoukry will visit the two countries with the aim of “conveying a message of solidarity from Egypt with the two countries and their two brotherly peoples, following the disaster of the earthquake on the sixth of February.”
2. [**Egypt Once Again Borrowing from International Markets**](#) (*The New Arab*). The Egyptian government intends to offer more bond issues in the global markets this year, in an effort to obtain new loans while diversifying financing sources. Finance Minister Mohamed Maait did not rule out that other sovereign Islamic bonds will be offered this year, after offering Islamic bonds on the London Stock Exchange last week as part of a \$5 billion program. An official at the Egyptian Ministry of Finance also said Egypt intends to borrow through Panda bonds in Chinese yuan at the beginning of the new fiscal year 2023/2024.
3. [**First of Its Kind: Egyptian Prime Minister to Visit Qatar to Discuss Ways to Enhance Cooperation**](#) (*Al Masry Al Youm*). The Qatari capital, Doha, is witnessing this week the work of the Egyptian-Qatari committee between the two countries, in the presence of the prime ministers of Egypt and Qatar, representatives of the governments of the two countries, and a number of representatives of the private sector. The committee is discussing the signing of a

number of memorandums of understanding between the Egyptian and Qatari sides and increasing investments between the Egyptian and Qatari sides to enhance the volume of trade exchange.

IRAN

4. **[IRGC Commander Repeats Threat To Kill Trump, Pompeo \(Iran International\)](#)**. Iran has developed a cruise missile with a range of 1,650 km, a top IRGC commander claimed Friday, as he threatened to kill former US President Donald Trump. Amirali Hajizadeh, the head of the Revolutionary Guards aerospace force, said Iran did not intend to kill "poor soldiers" when it launched a ballistic missile attack on US-led forces in Iraq days after Iranian military commander Soleimani was killed in a US drone strike on January 3, 2020 in Baghdad. "God willing, we are looking to kill Trump, (Former Secretary of State Mike) Pompeo...and military commanders who issued the order (to kill Soleimani) should be killed," Hajizadeh said in the television interview.
5. **[Iran Experiencing New Strikes, Protests As Rial Keeps Falling \(Iran International\)](#)**. Iran witnessed another wave of daily protests and strikes Sunday, as its currency sank leaving ordinary people to wonder how they can afford minimum necessities. Bakers held a gathering in Tehran, while workers of Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane complex in the southwestern Khuzestan province, the Esfahan Steel Company in central Iran, and workers in several southern cities, where most of oil and gas companies are located, were on strike. The rial's plunge to 575,000 to the dollar on Saturday exacerbated chaos in several of Iran's major markets and brought many businesses to near standstill.
6. **[IRGC Acquires Millions of Dollars in the Name of "Resistance" Through Fake Companies in Iraq \(Iran International\)](#)**. Iran International obtained exclusive information about a money laundering network affiliated with the Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard (IRGC), referring to a series of

companies affiliated with IRGC leaders that acquire millions of dollars in the name of "resistance" and "strategic depth" through sham transactions. According to these documents, commanders of the IRGC-QF have set up a series of fake construction companies in Iran and Iraq, whose main goal is money laundering and financial support for terrorism. According to information received by "Iran International," the Quds Force's money laundering network is run under the supervision of Hamid Abdullah, commander of the 400th unit of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards that manages terrorist operations abroad...

7. **Smuggling Gold from Venezuela: An Iranian Path to Finance Hezbollah and Circumvent Sanctions** (*Al Sharq Al Awsat*). The Israeli Defense Minister, Yoav Gallant, issued an order to reveal the "secret path that Iran follows to finance the Lebanese (Hezbollah) by circumventing the sanctions regime," in which he claims that tens of kilograms of gold arrived from Venezuela to Europe and Syria, and were sold, and the proceeds went to Beirut. The document published the names of a number of personalities involved in the smuggling operation, led by the Iranian businessman Badr al-Din Naimi Mousavi, the owner of two real estate companies registered in Britain, "Lotus Universal" and "Stratton View Properties Limited," and the international trade company "Trading ACS" registered in Dubai.
8. **Burns Warns of Tehran's Progress in Uranium and Ballistic Enrichment** (*Al Sharq Al Awsat*). CIA Director William Burns warned that Iran could raise the degree of enrichment of uranium to the 90 percent purity needed to produce nuclear weapons within weeks, if it wanted to. In response to a question about whether Iran's leaders have taken a decision to seek nuclear weapons, he said: "As far as we know, we do not believe that the leader in Iran (Khamenei) has taken a decision to resume the (nuclear) weapons program, which we estimate was suspended or stopped at the end of 2003. But the enrichment programs are clearly progressing a lot." With regard to missile systems, Burns said, "Their

capabilities to deliver a nuclear weapon through these missiles have also advanced..."

GULF REGION

9. [**Saudi Foreign Minister Visits Ukraine and Announces \\$410 Million in Support**](#) (*Al Khaleej Online*). On Sunday, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan visited the Ukrainian capital, Kiev, and met with President Volodymyr Zelensky, in what is the first visit by a Saudi official since the start of the war nearly a year ago. He announced his country would provide two aid packages worth \$410 million to Ukraine. The director of the Ukrainian President's Office stated that his country is counting on Saudi Arabia's support for the peace process, and that Saudi Arabia had a mediating role in freeing 10 prisoners of war.
10. [**Israeli El Al Planes Begin Using Route over Saudi Arabia and Oman**](#) (*Al Nahar*). The Israeli airline El Al announced that its planes started on Sunday to use a new, time-saving route that passes through Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman, a decision taken after Muscat last week joined Riyadh in opening its airspace to Israel civil aviation.
11. [**Russia Proposes Partnership with Gulf States to Jointly Produce the SU-75 Fighter**](#) (*Defense Arabia*). Russian media reported that Russia will propose a partnership with the Gulf states to produce the latest generation of its Su-75 fighter jets, also known as Checkmate. The general manager of Rosoboronexport, a company that manages exports of Russian weapons and military equipment, said, "The company is studying joint production options with countries in the Middle East for modern, high-tech products, including the fifth-generation fighter."

SUDAN

12. **A "War of Words" Between the Sudanese Army and the "Rapid Support" Forces** (*Al Sharq Al Awsat*). The war of words escalated in Sudan between the two wings of the military establishment, namely the army, led by Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces, led by Lieutenant General Mohamed Daglo (Hamidti). According to several sources, the conflict between the two men revolves around the position of the "framework agreement" that the leaders of the two parties signed with the political forces with the aim of transferring power to civilians, while the military leave power and return to their barracks. One of the clauses of the "framework agreement" provides for the integration of the "rapid support" forces into the army, which was approved by the commander of those forces. However, a war of words broke out between the two parties recently, which made many in the country apprehensive that it would turn into armed clashes, despite the assertion of both parties that this is not possible.

IRAQ

13. **Kurdistan Region Delegation after Meeting PM Al-Sudani: We Reached an Initial Agreement on the Budget** (*Rudaw Arabia*). The delegation representing the Kurdistan Regional Government met with the head of the Iraqi government, Muhammad Shia' al-Sudani, and one of the members of the delegation announced that they had reached a preliminary agreement on the general budget. The Ministry of Finance and Economy in the Kurdistan Region announced in a statement that the meeting "discussed the Kurdistan Region's share of the country's general budget for the year 2023."

14. [Nearly 20 Islamic State Militants Killed in Anbar](#) (*Bas News*). Iraqi security forces on Sunday killed nearly 20 Islamic State (IS) militants, including a prominent leader, during an operation in the province of Anbar, according to an official. The operation was launched in the Akashat area jointly by the Counter-Terrorism Service, the National Intelligence Service, and the Joint Operations Command, according to Yehia Rasool, a spokesperson for the commander-in-chief of the Iraqi armed forces.
15. [Preparations for the Return of Another 156 Iraqi Islamic State families from Syria's Al-Hol Camp](#) (*Bas News*). Informed sources said on Sunday that a new batch of Iraqi refugees in Al-Hol camp in the Al-Hasakah countryside will be transferred to Iraq. The deputy governor of Nineveh for the affairs of the displaced, Ali Omar, previously told Bas News that the number of Iraqis in Al-Hol camp in Syria when the return process began in 2019 was estimated at 30,000 Iraqis out of the 70,000 people who lived in the camp.

SYRIA

16. [A Delegation from the "Arab Parliamentary Union" Meets Bashar al-Assad in Damascus](#) (*Syria TV*). On Sunday, a delegation from the "Arab Parliamentary Union" arrived in the Syrian capital, Damascus, and met with the head of the Syrian regime, Bashar Al-Assad . The delegation included the President of the Union, Iraqi Parliament Speaker Muhammad al-Halbousi, and the heads of the House of Representatives in the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Palestine, Libya and Egypt, in addition to the heads of the delegations of the Sultanate of Oman and Lebanon, and the Secretary-General of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union. A few days ago, the Syrian Network for Human Rights warned against the Syrian regime exploiting the earthquake disaster in order to restore political relations and escape punishment, under the pretext of delivering humanitarian aid to the afflicted.

17. [After the Drugs: A Bomb-Laden Drone Smuggles Weapons from Syria to Jordan](#) (*Syria TV*). The Jordanian army announced on Saturday that it had thwarted an attempt to smuggle weapons and hand grenades by means of a drone coming from Syrian territory...An official military source stated that after the search and inspection of the area, an American M4 rifle and 4 hand grenades were found, and it was found that the drone was prepared with a booby-trapped method in case it was seized by the border guards...

TURKIYE

18. [Death Toll from Powerful Twin Earthquakes in Southern Turkey Rises to 44,218](#) (*Cumhuriyet*). At least 44,218 people have been killed by two strong earthquakes that jolted southern Türkiye on Feb. 6, the country's disaster management agency said on Friday. The Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) said in a statement that the quakes, centered in the Kahramanmaraş province, were followed by 9,136 aftershocks.
19. [MİT 'neutralizes' Mastermind of Taksim Terror Attack](#) (*Hurriyet Daily News*). The National Intelligence Organization (MİT) has "neutralized" a member of the PKK organization who played a crucial role in the planning and execution of the attack on Istanbul's İstiklal Avenue last November, which claimed the lives of six people. Halil Menci directed the perpetrators of the attack, Ahlam Albashir Saleh and Bilal Hassan, and helped Hassan to flee abroad...Closely following Menci, MİT's special operation team neutralized the terrorist with a successful operation carried out in Qamishli on Feb. 22... "Neutralized" is a term used by the Turkish military and officials to indicate terrorists were either killed, wounded, or captured.

LEBANON

20. [US Says Key Hezbollah Financier Arrested in Bucharest](#) (*Naharnet*). A Lebanese and Belgian citizen considered a key financier of Hezbollah has been arrested in Bucharest, Romania's capital, U.S. federal authorities said. Mohammad Ibrahim Bazzi, 58, who was labeled a "global terrorist" by the United States in 2018 when \$10 million was offered for information about his whereabouts, has funneled millions of dollars to Hezbollah over the years, authorities said. U.S. Attorney Breon Peace in Brooklyn said the extradition of Bazzi and Lebanese citizen Talal Chahine, 78, was sought on charges contained in an indictment returned last month in Brooklyn federal court.

ISRAEL AND PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

21. [Aqaba Meeting: A Palestinian-Israeli Pledge to Reduce Escalation](#) (*Al Arabiya*). Palestinian and Israeli officials pledged at the conclusion of a meeting held Sunday in the coastal city of Aqaba, southern Jordan, to "reduce escalation on the ground and prevent further violence," according to the meeting's final statement. In the statement, the Israeli government and the Palestinian National Authority affirmed their joint readiness and commitment to immediate action to stop unilateral measures for a period of 3-6 months, provided that this includes an Israeli commitment to stop discussing the establishment of any new settlement units for a period of four months, and to stop approving any new settlement outposts for a period of six months.