

## THE EARLY PHOENIX

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

**March 14, 2023**

### **IRAN**

1. [\*\*Iran-Saudi Deal to Resume Ties Stirs Controversy in Iran\*\*](#) (*Iran International*). Tehran's deal to resume relations with Saudis has stirred controversy in Iranian political circles as reform politicians and media expose the "hypocrisy" of hardliners. Hossein Shariatmadari, the hardliner editor of Kayhan, who has been harshly criticized for changing his positions on the issue of relations between Tehran and Riyadh, has accused reformists of not understanding the agreement... Social media users posted the screenshot of quotes from Raisi in a January 4, 2016 report one day after Iranian government-led vigilante groups attacked Saudi diplomatic buildings in Iran and set fire to them, that "Iran does not need relations with Saudi Arabia."
2. [\*\*Iran Has Pardoned 22,000 Arrested During Protests, Judiciary Chief Says\*\*](#) (*Al Arabiya English*). Iranian judicial authorities have pardoned 22,000 people who took part in anti-government protests, judiciary chief Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei said on Monday, according to the official IRNA news agency. State media reported early last month that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei had pardoned "tens of thousands" of prisoners including some arrested in the protests in a deadly crackdown on dissent...He did not specify over what period the pardons were granted or if or when the people had been charged.

## **TURKIYE**

3. **[Türkiye's Earthquake Death Toll Rises to 48,448](#)** (*Anadolu Agency*). The death toll from powerful earthquakes that struck southern Türkiye last month has risen to 48,448, the country's interior minister said on Monday. "6,660 of the dead were foreign nationals, and most of them are our Syrian brothers," Soylu said at a news conference in quake-hit Malatya province along with Culture and Tourism Minister Mehmet Nuri Ersoy. Debris removal work continues, he said, adding that 10,000 of a total of 56,000 damaged buildings have now been demolished and their debris removed.
4. **[Türkiye Halts Transit of Sanctioned Goods to Russia](#)** (*Daily Sabah*). Türkiye has appeared to halt the transit of sanctioned goods through its territory to Russia, the Russian business paper Kommersant reported Thursday, citing executives of Russian logistics companies. Kommersant reported that several managers said earlier this week that Turkish customs authorities had started rejecting the transit of goods to Russia and Belarus where declarations included customs codes of items named on a European Union list of sanctioned goods. The executives said that Turkish customs officials cited a government directive to halt transit, but there had been no formal public government announcement of any change in Türkiye's transit policy on goods going to Russia or Belarus.

## **GULF REGION**

5. **[Riyadh Denied an Israeli Delegation Visas to Attend International Event in Saudi Arabia](#)** (*Al Khaleej Online*). On Sunday, the US "Bloomberg" agency reported that the Saudi authorities refused to issue an entry visa to the Israeli special mission, which includes citizens from the Circassian village of "Kafr Kama," The agency indicated that Israeli citizens received an

invitation to participate in the special celebration honoring the United Nations after entering "Kafr Kama" to the special list of recommended tourist villages to be visited by the United Nations...The United Nations Tourism Organization had sent an invitation to the residents of the village and representatives from 22 countries to attend the event in the Saudi city of Al-Ula, but the Saudi authorities refused to issue an entry visa to the Israeli mission, despite UN officials asking the Kingdom to provide equal treatment to members of the organization.

6. **[Abu Dhabi Has Ceased Purchasing Security Systems from Israel](#)** (*Al Khaleej Online*). On Sunday evening, a Hebrew news channel reported that the UAE has decided to halt its purchase of security systems from Israel. The decision was reportedly made in response to the ongoing campaign of repression and incitement led by ministers in Benjamin Netanyahu's government. According to sources quoted by Channel 12, the UAE expressed its desire to discontinue purchasing security systems from Israel due to the actions of Israel's Minister of National Security Itamar Ben Gvir and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich.
7. **[Denmark Ends Arms Embargo on Saudi Arabia and UAE](#)** (*Arabi 21*). Denmark has lifted its ban on arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, citing its new foreign policy doctrine of "pragmatic realism." In an interview with local newspaper "Politiken" on Thursday, Danish Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen stated that the ban, which was imposed in 2018 and 2019 following the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi and the ongoing war in Yemen, has been lifted.

## **SYRIA**

8. **[U.S. Base in Eastern Deir Ezzor Comes Under Missile Attack](#)** (*Syria TV*).

On Monday evening, a missile struck a base of the International Coalition Forces in the eastern part of Deir Ezzor. No casualties were reported. In a statement on Twitter, the International Coalition confirmed that its forces were attacked by two 107 mm missiles. According to the local Khabour network, the targeted site was the Al-Omar oil field area.

9. **[UN Commision of Inquiry Criticizes UN Failure to Provide Earthquake Aid in Syria](#)** (*Arab News*).

The United Nations, as well as the Syrian government and other actors, are responsible for delays in getting emergency aid to Syrians after the earthquake, a UN-appointed commission of inquiry said on Monday. The allegations add to a growing chorus of criticism of the global body for its role in the immediate aftermath of last month's earthquake that killed some 6,000 people, mostly in the rebel-held northwest near the Turkish border. "Though there were many acts of heroism amid the suffering, we also witnessed a wholesale failure by the Government and the international community, including the United Nations, to rapidly direct life-saving support to Syrians in the most dire need," said Paulo Pinheiro, chair of the commission, in a statement.

10. **[Russia Repatriated 56 Children from ISIS Camps in Northeast Syria](#)**.

(*Enab Baladi*). Russia has successfully retrieved 56 children from camps located in northeastern Syria, as part of an agreement to repatriate 200 Russian children back to their country. The camps are currently controlled by the "Self-Administration" via its military arm, the "Syrian Democratic Forces" (SDF).

## **IRAQ**

11. **[Sudani Says Baghdad Has Reached Budget Agreement with Erbil](#)** (*Al*

*Sharq Alawsat*). Iraqi Prime Minister Muhammad Shia al-Sudani announced

an agreement to resolve the oil revenue dispute between Baghdad and Erbil. The announcement came one day after the Kurdistan region's Ministry of Finance received 400 billion dinars from Baghdad to fund employee salaries. In addition, the Iraqi government has approved the federal budget for the next three years. The [\*\*total budget for Iraq is 197.828 trillion\*\*](#) Iraqi dinars, with a deficit of 63 trillion dinars. marking the first time the budget has been approved for three consecutive years (2023 to 2025). The budget has been referred to Parliament for discussion.

## **EGYPT**

12. [\*\*Sisi Says Egypt Won't Tolerate Water Shortages\*\*](#) (*Al Hadath*). Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi said that Egypt will not tolerate any water shortages, and a legal and binding solution is necessary regarding the filling and operation of the Renaissance Dam in agreement with Ethiopia. He emphasized that Egypt understands Ethiopia's need for development, but this should not negatively impact Egyptians.

## **YEMEN**

13. [\*\*Houthi Militias Actions Threaten to Confiscate the Deposits of a Million Yemenis\*\*](#) (*Al Sharq Al Awsat*). Yemeni banks and merchants in areas controlled by the Houthi militia face the risk of bankruptcy as the militia is insisting on confiscating over three billion dollars, which are the interests of the internal debt, under the pretext of preventing usury in commercial transactions and loans. Economic sources warn that this step will result in the confiscation of deposits of over a million people.
14. [\*\*Yemeni Prisoner Exchange Talks Commence in Geneva\*\*](#) (*Al Sharq Al Awsat*). Representatives of the legitimate Yemeni government and the Houthis

began talks on a prisoner exchange in Geneva on Sunday. The United Nations has urged both parties in the conflict to engage in "serious" negotiations. According to the United Nations, the talks in Geneva marked the seventh meeting aimed at implementing a prisoner exchange agreement that was concluded in Stockholm five years ago.

## **TUNISIA**

15. [\*\*Independent Press Barred as New Parliament Elects Speaker\*\*](#) (*Middle East Eye*). Independent and foreign members of the press were barred on Monday from attending the first session of Tunisia's new parliament, which has also not been recognised by the country's main opposition coalition. Journalists protested against their exclusion from the parliamentary session, gathering at the entrance of parliament and chanting: "Lawmakers, it is a shame; the press is under siege."

## **LEBANON**

16. [\*\*Lebanese Pound Continues its Collapse Against the Dollar\*\*](#) (*Sawt Beirut International*). The dollar's exchange rate in the parallel market remained at a record high, ranging from 95,500 to 96,000 Lebanese pounds per dollar on Monday. In an interview with the "Voice of Beirut International" website, financial and economic affairs researcher and writer Basil Al-Khatib stated that the current situation was predictable given the absence of any political or monetary measures, decision, or statement, as well as a lack of political progress.

## **ISRAEL AND PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES**

17. [\*\*US Investors Warn Netanyahu Overhaul May Dampen Cash Infusions from Abroad\*\*](#) (*Times of Israel*). Over 250 US-based financial investors warned Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that his government's planned judicial

overhaul could chill new infusions of cash into Israel, the latest signal of potentially devastating economic fallout should the controversial legislation go through. “Many leaders in the business community will feel compelled to reevaluate their reliance on Israel as a strategic destination for investment, sourcing talent, building engineering centers, and maintaining intellectual property,” read a letter signed by 255 investors, according to Channel 12 news, which first reported on the missive Sunday.

18. [\*\*Israel, US Launch Drills to Practice Long-Range Aerial Scenarios\*\*](#) (*Israel Defense*). The Israeli Air Force (IAF) is participating in “Red Flag,” an advanced aerial combat exercise led by the US Air Force, which started on Sunday. The exercise, which is held at the Nellis U.S. Air Force Base in Nevada, will take place over the course of two weeks and include a wide range of training drills, such as long-range aerial scenarios; achieving aerial superiority in the region; joint aerial strikes; area defense; interception of enemy aircraft; low-altitude flights ;and flights in areas abundant with anti-aircraft equipment.

19. [\*\*Israel Releases Oldest Palestinian Prisoner\*\*](#) (*Al Arabiya English*). The oldest Palestinian prisoner in an Israeli jail was released on Monday after serving a 17-year sentence for arms smuggling, an advocacy group and his son said. Fuad Shubaki, 83, was released from Ashkelon prison and is “on his way to Ramallah” in the occupied West Bank, a spokesperson for the Palestinian Prisoner’s Club said, which was confirmed by Shubaki’s son Hazem. As Shubaki arrived in Ramallah at the tomb of the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, to whom he was a close ally, Palestinian officials jostled to get close to the octogenarian draped in a Palestinian keffiyeh.