

THE EARLY PHOENIX

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

March 21, 2023

IRAN

1. [**New EU and UK Sanctions Against Iranian Officials**](#) (*Al Sharq News*).
The European Union has imposed sanctions on the Supreme Council for the Cultural Revolution and Iranian officials, while Britain has levied sanctions on an additional group of Revolutionary Guard officials. These actions are part of the latest series of measures aimed at freezing assets and prohibiting visas.
2. [**Leaked Documents Shows IRGC Losing Edge in Iran and Region**](#) (*Iran International*). The minutes of a meeting of senior clerics and Revolutionary Guard commanders with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, leaked to media last week, suggest that the economic and political situation in Iran has [deteriorated to the point that] the Islamic Republic's forces sell information about Quds Force operations to Israel.

GULF REGION

3. [**Oman to Allow Israeli Planes to Transit Airspace, but not Land on Omani Territory**](#) (*Khaleej Online*). The head of the Civil Aviation Authority in the Sultanate of Oman stated that the Sultanate would permit Israeli aircraft to traverse its airspace; however, it would not allow them to land on its territory.

IRAQ

4. [**Iraq Schedules First Provincial Elections in Over a Decade**](#) (*Al Arabiya*).
On Monday, the Iraqi parliament voted to schedule the provincial elections for November, marking the first time in over a decade that such elections have taken place. These elections will involve 15 out of 18 provinces, with three of them located within the autonomous region of Kurdistan.

5. [**Iraqi Prime Minister Visits Turkiye to Discuss Water and the PKK**](#) (***Al Sharq Al Awsat***). Iraqi Prime Minister Muhammad Shia al-Sudani is set to meet with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Tuesday to discuss the Turkish dams on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, along with the presence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in northern Iraq. This meeting represents al-Sudani's first visit to Turkey since taking office in October 2022.

YEMEN

6. [**Yemeni Government and Houthis Agree to Prisoner Exchange**](#) (***Al Arabiya***). The Yemeni government and the Houthis on Monday agreed to release 887 detainees, following 10 days of negotiations in Geneva, the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross said.

EGYPT

7. [**Egypt to Establish an Investment Company for Egyptians Abroad**](#) (***CNN Arabic***). The Egyptian government is attempting to alleviate the pressure on dollar demand by establishing new sources of foreign exchange. They aim to create a company that enables Egyptians living abroad to invest their savings. Additionally, the Egyptian government is working to secure dollar availability by finalizing commercial transactions with Russia in local currencies and expanding this mechanism to encompass China and India.
8. [**Sisi discusses Al-Dabaa Nuclear Reactor and Grain Supplies with Russian Officials**](#) (***Times of Egypt***). President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi held discussions on Sunday with the Russian Minister of Trade and the special envoy of Russian President Vladimir Putin. The talks focused on joint projects, particularly the construction of the Dabaa nuclear power plant, which Russia is building on Egypt's northern coast. They also addressed grain supplies, food security, and the establishment of a Russian industrial zone within the Suez Canal economic zone.

SYRIA

9. **Brussels Conference Yields Pledges of 950 Million Euros for Syria Earthquake Relief** (*Enab Baladi*). At Monday's Brussels donors conference dedicated to aiding those affected by the devastating earthquake in Syria and Türkiye, international donors pledged a total of seven billion euros. Of this sum, 950 million euros will be allocated to Syria in the form of grants, while 6.05 billion euros will be provided to Turkey as a combination of grants and loans.
10. **World Bank Says Syria's Earthquake Recovery Will Cost \$7.9 Billion** (*Al Arabiya*). On Monday, the World Bank reported that the earthquakes in February are anticipated to cause Syria's real GDP output to shrink by 5.5 percent in 2023. The recovery and reconstruction needs are estimated at \$7.9 billion over a three-year period. The Bank estimates that the earthquakes resulted in \$3.7 billion worth of physical damage within the country, along with an additional \$1.5 billion in economic losses, culminating in a combined damage impact of \$5.2 billion.

TURKIYE

11. **Turkish Border Guards Charged with 'Torture, Killing' of Syrian Refugees** (*Bianet*). Eight people from Syria who on March 11 crossed into Hatay, southern Türkiye, were beaten by border guards. Two of them were killed and two were put in intensive care in a hospital in Syria after their deportation. The Reyhanlı Chief Public Prosecutor's Office opened a murder investigation against the gendarmerie officers responsible for the incident, the lawyer who took up the case told *Bianet*. Two gendarmerie lieutenants and one first lieutenant were arrested.

ISRAEL AND PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

12. **Jordan Says Smotrich Violated Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty with Expanded Israel Map** (*Jerusalem Post*). Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich has violated the peace treaty between Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom and made "racist" remarks about the Palestinian people, Jordan's Foreign Ministry

charged on Monday. As Smotrich spoke, he stood at a podium adorned with a cloth that looked like an Israeli flag. Instead of the Star of David, there was a graphic that looked to the Jordanians like a map of the State of Israel but with expanded borders that included the West Bank, Gaza, and portions of Jordan.

13. **Likud Approves 'Softened' Judicial Reform Outline, but Opposition is Unimpressed** (***Ynet News***). The ruling Likud Party on Monday approved by an overwhelming majority a revised version of its proposal to overhaul Israel's judicial system that scales back some of the plan's more controversial clauses, but opposition parties were unfazed by the gesture.

