

## THE EARLY PHOENIX

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

March 22, 2023

### **IRAN**

1. [\*\*US Treasury Issues New Sanctions Against Iran's Drone Program\*\*](#) (*Iran International*). The US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), in coordination with the Federal Bureau of investigations (FBI), targeted a network in Iran and Turkiye for involvement in the procurement of equipment, including European-origin engines for drones on behalf of Iran's defense ministry and Armed Forces Logistics (MODAFL), which is already designated by the US.
2. [\*\*Protests in Iran's Kurdish Areas Met with Violence amid Nowruz Holiday\*\*](#) (*Iran Wire*). Iran's armed forces have used shotguns and tear gas to disperse anti-government protests in multiple western Kurdish towns and cities, wounding dozens of people, as Iranians celebrated the Persian New Year. Violent clashes occurred across Kurdistan province late on March 20, including in Mahabad, Saqqez and Dehgolan, as residents attended cultural and traditional events to mark Nowruz amid heavy security presence, sources told IranWire.
3. [\*\*Supreme Leader Khamenei Denies Involvement in Ukraine War, Accuses US of Starting Conflict\*\*](#) (*Al Arabiya*). Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei on Tuesday rejected accusations that his country is involved in Russia's war on Ukraine, and instead accused the United States of starting the conflict and being its "biggest profiteer." "(The West) falsely claims that Iran is involved in the war in Ukraine. There is no such thing," Khamenei said in a speech to mark Nowruz, the Iranian new year.

### **GULF REGION**

4. [\*\*Emirati Envoy Visits Israel to Voice Concerns over Smotrich's Remarks\*\*](#) (*Al Kaleej Online*). On Tuesday an official Emirati envoy arrived in Israel to protest the racist statements of the Israeli Finance Minister, Bezalel Smotrich. Israeli Army Radio stated that "Khaldoun Al-Mubarak, an official envoy of the Emirati president, arrives in Israel later today, Tuesday, where he will meet with Israeli President Isaac Herzog" ...Al-Mubarak carries with him a strongly worded message of protest to Israel

against the background of the statements of the extremist Minister of Finance, in which he denied the existence of the Palestinian people.

5. [\*\*Prominent Saudi Islamic University Opens a Department of Cinema and Theater\*\*](#) (*New Khalij News*). Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, has commenced lectures for a program designed to offer a bachelor's degree in cinema and theater. This development is part of the Kingdom's recent shift in direction, which has been moving away from conservative traditions since Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman took office.
6. [\*\*Saudi Arabia Releases American Citizen after Dropping Terrorism Charges\*\*](#) (*Al Kaleej Online*). Saudi authorities have released American citizen Saad Ibrahim Al-Madhi from prison; however, he remains subject to a travel ban...Last year, a criminal court sentenced Al-Madhi (72 years old) to 16 years in prison...Al-Madhi, a Saudi-American citizen who had been living in Florida following his retirement, was arrested upon his arrival in Riyadh in November 2021. He faced multiple charges, including financing terrorism and working to destabilize the kingdom.

## **TURKIYE AND IRAQ**

7. [\*\*Erdogan Vows to Reduce Iraq's Water Scarcity\*\*](#) (*Iraqi News*). Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan pledged Tuesday to step up the flow of water along the Tigris River to drought-stricken Iraq for one month. Baghdad accuses Ankara of withholding water in dams that choke the Tigris and Euphrates rivers near their point of origin in Turkiye. The issue has gained added urgency as the entire region is gripped by a years-long drought that has emptied water reservoirs and threatened food security for millions of people.
8. [\*\*Türkiye Urges Iraq to Designate PKK as Terrorist Group\*\*](#) (*Daily Sabah*). President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called on the Iraqi people to recognize the PKK as a terrorist organization, as he welcomed Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani in Ankara on Tuesday. Noting that terrorist groups PKK, Daesh [ISIS], and the Gülenist Terror Group (FETÖ) pose a threat to Türkiye and Iraq's security, President Erdoğan said the two countries reaffirmed their commitment to fighting all forms of terrorism.

## **YEMEN**

9. **World Health Organization Announces Outbreaks of Measles and Polio in Yemen** (*Al Jazeera*). The UN agency announced on its Twitter account that Yemen is currently experiencing outbreaks of measles and polio. It reported that over 80% of children affected by measles did not receive the vaccine. The organization emphasized the urgent need for vaccination efforts in Yemen.

## **TUNISIA**

10. **Tunisian President Rejects Borrell's Statements Concerning Tunisia's "Collapse"** (*Al Sharq News*). On Tuesday, the Tunisian Foreign Ministry expressed its disapproval of the remarks made by European Union foreign policy official Josep Borrell, who voiced concerns over a potential "collapse of conditions" in Tunisia. Meanwhile, Tunisian President Kais Saied reiterated his opposition to what he described as "interference in the country's affairs," emphasizing that Tunisia is "not under mandate or tutelage."

## **LEBANON**

11. **Lebanon's Banks Will End Their Strike on Wednesday** (*Al Nahar*). The Association of Banks in Lebanon announced on Tuesday that it will suspend its strike beginning Wednesday. Banks will resume their operations as usual...Banks have been witnessing intermittent strikes for more than a month in response to what they describe as judicial decisions draining their remaining reserves of foreign currencies, amid a financial crisis that the authorities left to fester for years.

## **SYRIA**

12. **An Israeli Missile Strike Bombed Aleppo and Nairab Military Airports** (*Sky News*). Local media outlets quoted Syrian security Sources saying that Israeli planes raided at dawn on Wednesday the Aleppo and Nayrab military airports in northern Syria.
13. **Killing of Kurds in Northern Syria Sparks Protests, Tensions** (*Arab News*). On Tuesday, thousands of Kurds gathered in the earthquake-stricken Syrian town of Jinderis to protest the killing of four men who were lighting a fire to celebrate Nowruz, the Kurdish new year, the previous night. The attack on the Kurdish men reignited

tensions between the Turkish-backed armed groups controlling the area and the Kurdish residents.

14. [\*\*Military Police Arrest Suspects in JinderIs Killings\*\*](#) (*Enab Baladi*). The Military Police department in the countryside of Aleppo announced the arrest of three people involved in the killing of four Kurdish civilians in the city of Jenderes, after a verbal altercation during the celebration of “Nowruz” in the region...[T]he arrest took place in cooperation with the forces of the “Liberation and Construction Movement” of the “Syrian National Army” supported by Turkey.
15. [\*\*UN Warns Emergency Response Stocks in Syria Are About to Run Out\*\*](#) (*Halab Today TV*). Yesterday evening, the United Nations warned that the stock of emergency response supplies in Syria had been depleted, indicating that this could potentially lead to the suspension of its activities...The healthcare system, which was already overburdened before the earthquake, is also at risk of collapsing in some areas. This would leave people who need life-saving medical services unattended.

## **ISRAEL AND PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES**

16. [\*\*Protesting Reservists Threaten Mass Refusal to Serve over Judiciary Shakeup\*\*](#) (*Times of Israel*). Leaders of a protest group representing reserve soldiers and officers said on Tuesday that they would be escalating their actions against the government’s plans to radically curtail the power of the judiciary. The group, known as Brothers in Arms, said they would begin to sign reservists on to a declaration of refusal to serve, which would be implemented should the government move ahead with the judicial overhaul.