

## THE EARLY PHOENIX

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

March 23, 2023

### **ISRAEL AND PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES**

1. [\*\*Saudi Arabia Condemns Israeli Decision to Allow Resettlement in West Bank \(Sky News\)\*\*](#). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has conveyed the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's strong condemnation of the Israeli authorities' decision to permit resettlement in the northern West Bank areas within the State of Palestine. As reported by the Saudi Press Agency, the ministry denounced the decision, calling it a blatant breach of international laws and stating that it undermines regional peace efforts.
2. [\*\*UAE Foreign Minister Visits Israel Amid Reports Abu Dhabi May Reduce Its Diplomatic Representation \(Al Khaleej Online\)\*\*](#). The recent controversial remarks made by the Israeli Finance Minister, who claimed there is no Palestinian people, continue to have repercussions. A Hebrew newspaper reported that an Emirati delegation, led by Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed, visited Israel to condemn the statement. This comes amid reports of Abu Dhabi's intention to reduce its diplomatic representation..."Until we are sure that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has a government he can control, we will not be able to work together," UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan reportedly told Israeli officials.
3. [\*\*After Strong US Rebuke, PM Netanyahu Says No Plan for 'New' Settlements in Northern West Bank \(Times of Israel\)\*\*](#). Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was forced to issue a clarification on Wednesday that his far-right government would not build any new settlements in the northern West Bank after the US heavily criticized legislation by the Knesset this week that allows resettlement of evacuated areas.
4. [\*\*Knesset Set to Shield Netanyahu Against Forced Removal from Office \(Times of Israel\)\*\*](#). The Knesset was expected to pass Wednesday or Thursday a law that would protect Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from any potential court order to recuse himself. Sponsored by a member of Netanyahu's Likud party and backed by the government, the bill blocks the High Court of Justice or attorney general from ordering a prime minister to take a leave of absence. Once passed into law, there will only be two

ways for a prime minister to take a leave of absence: the premier can decide to recuse himself, or a three-quarters majority vote of government ministers can push a premier to take a temporary leave, but only for mental or physical health reasons.

## **IRAN**

5. **[Leaked Document Reveals Contention about Role of Khamenei's Son](#)** (*Iran International*). A recently-leaked document on a meeting of senior IRGC commanders and clerics with the Supreme Leader has revealed contention about the role of Khamenei's son Mojtaba...During the meeting, Yadollah Bouali, the Revolutionary Guard's commander in the southwestern province of Fars, criticized interventions by Mojtaba Khamenei and forces under his command, saying that such measures disrupt the security structure of the country.
6. **[Iranian Deputy FM Holds Nuclear Talks with European Officials in Oslo](#)** (*Al Arabiya*). Sources within the German Foreign Ministry have confirmed to Al-Arabiya/Al-Hadath that a meeting took place last week in Oslo between European diplomats from Germany, France, and Britain, and the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister, Ali Bagheri Kani...The meeting dealt with several files, the most important of which was the Iranian escalation in the nuclear file, and European diplomats expressed their concerns and the positions of their countries "clearly" to the Iranian side.

## **GULF REGION**

7. **[In a Unique Occurrence, Arab Countries and Iran Both Announce Thursday Will Mark The First Day of Ramadan](#)** (*Al Hurra*). The Gulf countries, Syria, Iran, Sudan, Egypt, Yemen and other Muslim countries have announced that Thursday is the first day of Ramadan.
8. **[UAE Invites Iranian Foreign Minister to Abu Dhabi](#)** (*The New Khaleej News*). Iran welcomed the improvement of its relations with the UAE and announced that its Foreign Minister, Hussein Amir Abdollahian, has received an official invitation to visit Abu Dhabi.

## **IRAQ**

9. **[Iraqi Shiites and Sunnis Have Rare Agreement on When Ramadan Officially Begins](#)** (*Al Nahar*). Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the highest Shiite authority in Najaf, Iraq, declared in a statement issued by his office on Wednesday that Thursday would mark the first day of the month of Ramadan. For the first time in years, this announcement aligns the beginning of Ramadan for both Sunni and Shiite sects.
10. **[Iraqi Court Sentences Two Men to Death for Kidnapping of Missing Activist](#)** (*Al Hurra*). On Wednesday, an official statement confirmed that an Iraqi court has issued two death sentences in absentia against the individuals accused of kidnapping a prominent activist during the October 2019 demonstrations in the city of Nasiriyah, southern Iraq. The activist, who is still missing, has yet to be located.

## **EGYPT**

11. **[World Bank Approves \\$7 Billion Partnership Framework with Egypt](#)** (*Al Hadath*). On Wednesday, the World Bank announced its approval of a new country partnership framework with Egypt for the fiscal years 2023-2027, providing Egypt with financing worth \$7 billion. According to the statement, the framework entails a \$1 billion annual allocation from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, along with approximately \$2 billion throughout the partnership period from the International Finance Corporation.

## **YEMEN**

12. **[Houthi Militia Passes Law Authorizing Seizure of Bank Deposits](#)** (*Al Hadath*). Despite concerns about the potential impact on the banking system, the Houthi militia passed a "dangerous" bill on Tuesday, granting themselves the authority to seize and control all bank deposits. The unrecognized "House of Representatives" in Sana'a approved the "Law to Prevent Usurious Transactions," which had previously been sanctioned by the militia government in September 2022.

## **ALGERIA**

13. **[Algerian President Says Relations with Morocco Have Reached "Point of No Return"](#)** (*The New Arab*). Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune said that the crisis with Morocco has reached a "point of no return," expressing his regret that the

relationship between Algeria and Morocco has reached this level, which indicates that a solution to the crisis between the two countries is not in the offing.

## **LEBANON**

14. **Lebanese Army Retiree Protest Turns into Riot in Beirut** (*Al Hadath*). As the economic crisis worsens and living conditions deteriorate following the 2019 crisis, coupled with chaos in the dollar exchange rate, the "retired military movement" staged a large-scale demonstration on Wednesday at Riad Al-Solh Square in the Lebanese capital, Beirut, amid heightened security measures. Retired soldiers and several protesters attempted to storm the Government House, prompting riot police to deploy tear gas. This action resulted in cases of suffocation and multiple injuries.

## **SYRIA**

15. **Representatives of 11 Countries, Arab League, and EU Meet in Jordan to Discuss the Syrian File** (*Enab Baladi*). Representatives of the European Union, the Arab League and 11 active countries held talks on the situation in Syria, in the presence of the UN envoy to Syria, Geir Pedersen.
16. **Israeli Army Confirms Downing of Drone in Syria** (*Syria TV*). On Wednesday evening, the Israeli army announced that one of its drones had crashed inside Syrian territory during a routine operation. This incident occurred hours after the Israeli airstrike targeting Aleppo International Airport...The Israeli army also said there is no risk of information leakage from the downed drone, adding that an investigation into the incident is currently underway.
17. **Armed Russian Jets Have Flown over a U.S. Base in Syria Nearly Every Day in March, U.S. Commander Says** (*NBC News*). Armed Russian jets have flown over a U.S. military garrison in Syria nearly every day in March, violating a 4-year-old agreement between the U.S. and Russia and risking escalation...Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich, combined forces air component commander for U.S. Central Command, told NBC News on Wednesday that the most recent Russian overflight of Tanf Garrison happened just a few hours earlier, and that Russian jets have violated the airspace roughly 25 times so far this month, compared to zero times in February and 14 in January.

## **TURKIYE**

18. **Pro-Kurdish HDP Decides Not to Nominate Presidential Candidate, Dealing Blow to Erdogan (Bianet)**. The third-largest election alliance in Turkey has decided not to nominate a candidate for the presidential election...At a press conference in Ankara, Pervin Buldan, co-leader of the Kurdish issue-focused Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), the leading party of the alliance, said, "We'll fulfill our historical responsibility against the one-man rule"....While she criticized the ruling party and the presidential system throughout her speech, she refrained from openly announcing support for the opposition candidate. Both the HDP and the six-party main opposition alliance have advocated a return to a parliamentary system.

## **JORDAN**

19. **Jordanian Parliament Urges Government to Expel Israeli Ambassador from Amman (Al Sharq Al Awsat)**. On Wednesday, the Jordanian Parliament voted in favor of a non-binding parliamentary proposal to expel the Israeli ambassador. The majority-backed recommendation is a popular response to a series of provocative actions by the Israeli far-right directed toward Palestinians and Jordan. Amman condemned and denounced [Israeli Finance Minister Smotrich's] statements, describing them as "reckless, inciting, and provocative."