

THE EARLY PHOENIX

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

March 30, 2023

IRAN

1. [**IRGC Urges Palestinians to Take Advantage of Turmoil in Israel**](#) (*Iran International*). The spokesman of Iran's Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) has called on the Palestinians to take advantage of recent protests in Israel to destabilize the country. Brigadier General Ramezan Sharif said on Tuesday that "the occupied territories are the scene of confrontation of a movement within the Zionist regime that wants to stand against the totalitarianism of another wing."
2. [**A Russian-Iranian Agreement to Resume Negotiations to Revive the Nuclear Deal**](#) (*Al Arabiya*). At a press conference held on Wednesday in Moscow, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and his Iranian counterpart, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, urged for the resumption of negotiations aimed at reviving the 2015 nuclear agreement between Tehran and global powers... Abdollahian stated that defense collaboration is indeed among the topics on Tehran and Moscow's agenda; however, he emphasized that it "will not be against any party." Amir-Abdollahian further expressed readiness to [**sign a long-term agreement**](#) between Moscow and Tehran.

GULF REGION

3. [**GCC Condemns Israeli Settlers' Blatant Incursion into Al-Aqsa Courtyards**](#) (*Al Khaleej Online*). Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the Gulf Cooperation Council expressed their condemnation of the "flagrant" intrusion by Israeli settlers into the courtyards of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which occurred under the protection of Israeli occupation forces. In an official statement, the

Saudi Foreign Ministry asserted that the settlers' incursion into Al-Aqsa undermines peace efforts and contravenes international principles and norms concerning the respect of religious sanctities.

4. **As a Dialogue Partner, Saudi Arabia Joins the "Shanghai Cooperation Organization" (*Al Khaleej Online*)**. On Tuesday evening, the Saudi Cabinet approved to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which includes Russia and China among its members. The Cabinet approved a memorandum granting Saudi Arabia the status of a "dialogue partner" within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.
5. **Gulf Countries Allied with the West Covertly Supply Ammunition to Ukraine (*The New Khalij News*)**. The intelligence website "Intelligence Online" disclosed in a report that numerous countries, which are part of an alliance with Western nations and NATO, are clandestinely providing ammunition and military assistance to Ukraine... The information stated that the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar provided hundreds of "Mistral" anti-aircraft missile systems, which were delivered to Ukraine, thanks to the intermediary countries working for Kiev.
6. **For the First Time, China Pays in Yuan for Imported Liquefied Gas from UAE (*CNN Business Arabic*)**. The Shanghai Petroleum and Natural Gas Stock Exchange said on Tuesday that the China National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC) and Total Energies have completed China's first liquefied natural gas transactions that are settled in Yuan. It added, in a statement, that the transaction included about 65,000 tons of liquefied natural gas imported from the UAE.

7. [**Mohammed bin Zayed Appoints His Son as Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi**](#) (*Arabi 21*). Mohammed bin Zayed has appointed his son Khaled (41 years old) as the Crown Prince of the emirate...He appointed his brother Mansour bin Zayed as Vice President of the State, a position he will share with the ruler of Dubai, Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. Mohammed bin Zayed also issued a decree appointing his two brothers, Tahnoun bin Zayed and Hazza bin Zayed, as Deputy Rulers of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi.

IRAQ

8. [**International Arbitrators Oblige Turkey to Pay \\$1.5 Billion for Kurdistan's Oil**](#) (*Iraqi News*). An international arbitration panel obliged Turkey to pay 1.5 billion USD to Iraq for oil exports from Iraqi Kurdistan through Ceyhan port between 2014-2018 without Baghdad's approval. Iraq won a lawsuit against Ankara in the International Court of Arbitration of the International Chamber of Commerce in Paris.
9. [**Russia Lobbies Iraq to Open Airspace for Military Flights to Syria**](#) (*Middle East Eye*). Russia has asked Iraq's government to reopen its airspace to the Russian military, which wants to transport troops and equipment to its bases in eastern Syria, a diplomat and Iraqi officials told Middle East Eye. The proposed Russian-Syrian air corridor passing through Iraqi airspace would be the shortest and least costly route for Moscow, after Turkey closed its airspace to Russian civil and military aviation in April last year.
10. [**Russian-American Woman Kidnapped in Baghdad; Iranian Suspect Apprehended**](#) (*The New Arab*). Iraqi security sources in the capital, Baghdad, disclosed that an armed group abducted a Russian-American citizen in the city center. Subsequently, security forces apprehended an Iranian citizen suspected of

involvement in the incident. [**EDITOR'S NOTE: *The kidnapping victim is the prominent think tank researcher Elizabeth Tsurkov***].

EGYPT

11. [**Egypt Reduces Growth Targets to 4.1%, Increases Commodity and Fuel Subsidies**](#) (*Al Arabiya*). The Egyptian Cabinet has approved the draft budget for the upcoming fiscal year 2023-2024, which encompasses a 20% increase in subsidies for food commodities and a 24% increase in subsidies for petroleum products...The targeted growth rate for the fiscal year beginning in July has been adjusted to 4.1%, down from the previous 5.5%. Meanwhile, the budget estimates project an inflation rate of 16%.

SUDAN

12. [**Sudan's Army Withdraws from Civil-Military Reform Talks**](#) (*The New Arab*). On Wednesday, representatives of the Sudanese army withdrew from the security and military reform workshop, a critical component of the final stage in the political process between civilians and the military. Sources from Al-Araby Al-Jadeed reported that the army's withdrawal was prompted by an inability to reach consensus on all security and military reform issues during the workshop, which commenced on March 26. The army demanded an extension of the workshop, while civil forces expressed reservations and insisted on concluding the workshop with the participation of civilian forces, Rapid Support Forces, and international and regional sponsors of the political process.

SYRIA

13. [**United States Backs Formation of UN Entity to Monitor Detainees' Fate in Syria**](#) (*Syria TV*). The US Ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas Greenfield, announced that the United States endorses the proposal of

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to establish an independent entity to investigate the fate and location of individuals who are missing or detained in Syria.

14. [**Qatari-American Cooperation to Support "White Helmets" in Northern Syria**](#) (*Syria TV*). On Wednesday, the Qatar Fund for Development and the US Agency for International Development inked a financing agreement to bolster the White Helmets' essential operations, ensuring that life-saving services continue in northwestern Syria.

TURKIYE

15. [**Erdogan Says Türkiye Will Cut Power, Gas Prices, Hike Minimum Wage**](#) (*Daily Sabah*). President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on Wednesday announced that Türkiye would be cutting electricity and natural gas prices while also pledging an increase in the minimum wage. Electricity prices will be lowered by 15%, and gas prices for industrial users will be reduced by 20% in April, Erdoğan told the lawmakers from his ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) in Parliament.

ISRAEL

16. [**Netanyahu Downplays US-Israel Crisis, Says Ties 'Unshakable'**](#) (*Jerusalem Post*). Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu downplayed the US-Israel crisis as he insisted that “nothing could change” the “unshakable” relations between the two countries. “Israel and the United States have had their occasional differences,” he said Wednesday, one day after President Joe Biden explained to reporters that [**he opposed Israel's judicial reform program**](#) and would not invite Netanyahu to the White House in the near term.

17. **U.S. Says Israel Has Not Met Requirements to Join Visa Waiver Program**

(Ynet News). Israel has not met the eligibility requirements to join the U.S. Visa Waiver Program (VWP), the U.S. State Department said on Wednesday ...Israel is yet to grant free passage for Palestinian Americans at its airports and into the West Bank, which Washington says is required for Israel to meet the condition of reciprocity to join the program, which would allow Israelis visa-free access to the United States.

