

THE EARLY PHOENIX

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

April 7, 2023

EDITOR'S NOTE: ACLS sent out a special edition of the EARLY PHOENIX on the evening of April 6 to provide urgent updates on the ongoing Israel-Lebanon-Iran crisis; for reference, ACLS has included that special update at the bottom of this edition of the EARLY PHOENIX.

LEBANON

1. [Lebanese Media Claims Rocket Attacks Created “Hysteria” Among Israeli Settler Communities \(Lebanon 24\)](#). [Israeli] settlers entered a state of hysteria in the south and north of the Palestinian territories. They decided by themselves to open bomb shelters amid fears of an escalation with Lebanon and the Gaza Strip.
2. [Hezbollah Vows Solidarity with Palestinians After Al Aqsa Attacks \(Ahram Online\)](#). Lebanon's pro-Iranian armed movement Hezbollah said Thursday it would support "all measures" Palestinian groups may take against Israel after Israel's attack in Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque..."Hezbollah proclaims its full solidarity with the Palestinian people and the resistance groups. It pledges that it will stand with them in all measures they take to protect worshippers and the Al-Aqsa mosque and to deter the enemy from continuing its attacks"...The last major military confrontation between Israel and Hezbollah, in 2006, left more than 1,200 dead on the Lebanese side, mostly civilians, and 160 on the Israeli side, mostly soldiers.

IRAN

3. [Azerbaijan Expels Four Iranian Diplomats Amid Tensions \(Bas News\)](#). The move comes amid the increasingly strained relations between the two countries, fueled by Baku's growing ties with Israel, a primary adversary of Iran. Last week, Azerbaijan opened its embassy in Israel, and its improving relations with the Jewish state have angered Iran, which sees it as a betrayal. Azerbaijan has also suggested that Iran might have played a role in the recent assassination attempt of an Azerbaijani lawmaker, adding to the tensions between the two countries...In

a statement released on Thursday, Azerbaijan's foreign ministry said it had summoned Iran's ambassador to express "strong dissatisfaction with the recent provocative actions demonstrated by his country in relation to Azerbaijan." The ministry declared four Iranian diplomats "persona non grata" and gave them 48 hours to leave the country, as cited by Reuters.

4. [**Iranian Forces in Syria Suffer 50 Dead in Air and Ground Attacks in March Alone, but Still Expand Their Presence in Western Euphrates Region**](#)

(Syrian Observatory for Human Rights). The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights highlighted the critical development in areas dominated by the Iranians in March 2023. First, 19 militiamen were killed in US airstrikes on Deir Ezzor city and countryside, while 11 militiamen were killed in Israeli strikes. Three non-Syrian militiamen, including two members of the Lebanese Hezbollah, were killed by a landmine, while seven militiamen were killed in an explosion in a weapons warehouse in Deir Ez Zour...A commander of the "Saraya Al-Quds Movement," the military wing of Al-Jihad Al-Islami Movement, was assassinated in Rif Dimashq... Fourth, Iranian-backed militias, including Afghan "Liwa Fatemiyoun," were put on high alert over concerns about possible attacks on their military positions in the countryside of Deir Ez Zour.

5. [**Anti-Regime Demonstrations Return to Tehran After Weeks-Long Lull**](#)

(Orient TV). On Wednesday night, anti-regime protests were renewed in the capital, Tehran, after a lull that lasted for several weeks...[D]emonstrators chanted slogans against the Iranian regime and its symbols... Journalist Muhammad Majeed Al-Ahwazi published, on Twitter, video clips of the demonstrations in the month of Ziba, one of which shows a girl burning the flag of the Iranian regime in Tehran saying, "Death to the dictator... Khamenei, we will burn you like this."

IRAQ

6. [**Iraqi Politician Ammar Hakim Visits Assad in Damascus**](#) **(Bas News)**. Hakim stressed the importance of dialogue with Syria's leadership, stating that it benefits both countries and is necessary for all countries in the region. He further noted that the stability of Syria is critical to its neighboring countries, and Syria's exit from its crisis would have positive outcomes for the region.

THE GULF

7. [**World Bank Lowers Gulf Countries 2023 Growth Forecast to 3.2%**](#) **(Khaleej Online)**. In a report on the Middle East and North Africa, the bank said that double-digit inflation in food prices in the region this year will lead to a slowdown in growth to 3%, compared to 5.8% last year. As a result, in a report issued on

Thursday, the World Bank lowered its growth forecast for the GCC countries for 2023 to 3.2%, down from its previous forecast of 3.7% last October.

YEMEN

8. [**United Nations Begins Rescue Mission for Oil Tanker Abandoned off Yemen's Coast In 2015**](#) (*Al Sharq Al Awsat*). The abandoned tanker *Safer* has a cargo of 1.1 million barrels of oil, four times what was leaked in the "Exxon Valdez" disaster in 1989, considered the worst environmental disaster in the world, according to the United Nations. Since the outbreak of the civil war in Yemen in 2015, *Safer* has been left deserted off the Houthi-controlled port of Hodeidah, an essential gateway for shipments into a country that relies heavily on emergency foreign aid. In March, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) bought the tanker "Nautica" to remove more than a million barrels of oil from the wrecked ship.

TURKIYE

9. [**Lavrov in Türkiye with a Broad Agenda; at Forefront is Normalization Between Ankara and Damascus**](#) (*Al Sharq al-Awsat*). The Russian Foreign Ministry stated that the agenda of Lavrov and Cavusoglu's two days of meetings included the situation in Ukraine, the South Caucasus, the Middle East, North Africa, and the Black Sea region, the grain agreement, and talks on normalizing Turkish-Syrian relations, as well as steps to assist Ankara and Damascus in this regard with Iran's participation in the quadruple formula, as the third guarantor country in the "Astana track" with Russia and Turkey.
10. [**Russian and Turkish Forces Conduct Joint Patrol in Northeast Syria**](#) (*Syrian Observatory for Human Rights*). Russian and Turkish forces ran a joint patrol in the northern countryside of Al-Hasakah. The patrol, which comprised four military vehicles of each side escorted by two Russian helicopters... is the 133rd patrol between the two sides in the region since the Russian-Turkish agreement on a ceasefire in north-eastern Syria.
11. [**Turkish and US Defense Chiefs Discuss NATO and Regional Security Issues**](#) (*Anadolu Agency*). Akar and Austin discussed NATO, the Black Sea grain deal, Finland's accession to NATO, bilateral and regional defense, and security matters... The Turkish defense minister also noted that Ankara supports "NATO's Open Door Policy, Finland's membership shows this once again, and it is hoped that Sweden will fulfill its commitments as soon as possible." For his part, Austin expressed the US' readiness to provide all kinds of support to Türkiye "to heal the wounds of the earthquake."

SYRIA

12. [**Iraq's Top Judge Faiq Zaidan Visits Damascus to Meet with Assad \(Al Watan \[Assad Regime Media Outlet\]\)**](#). An Iraqi judicial delegation headed by the President of the Supreme Judicial Council, Judge Faiq Zaidan, arrived in Damascus on Wednesday for a two-day visit, during which he will meet with senior Syrian officials and aims to develop judicial and legal cooperation relations between the two countries... Zaidan stressed the importance of the visit to enhance cooperation and mutual understanding between the two countries in the judicial field. Furthermore, it is a message of solidarity with the Syrian leadership and people.

IRAN-LEBANON-ISRAEL CRISIS UPDATE
EARLY PHOENIX SPECIAL EDITION

April 6, 2023

1. [**Hamas Launches Rocket Attacks from Lebanon against Northern Israel in Worst Escalation Since 2006 \(Axios\)**](#).
2. [**Israeli Iron Dome Shoots Down Most of the Rockets, But At Least Five Land on Israeli Territory \(Israel Defense Forces Twitter Account\)**](#).
3. [**In Emergency National Security Meeting, Israeli PM Netanyahu Vows Severe Response; Says Enemies "Will Pay a Heavy Price" \(Al Arabiya\)**](#).
4. [**From Lebanon, Hamas Chief Ismail Haniyeh Meets with Hizballah and Islamic Jihad, Warns Israel Hamas and its Allies "Will Not Sit Idly By" in Al Aqsa Mosque Crisis \(An Nahar\)**](#).
5. [**Lebanese Caretaker Prime Minister Mikati Condemns Any Military Attack Emanating from Lebanon \(An Nahar\)**](#).
6. [**Iranian-backed Islamic Jihad Movement Endorses Missile Strikes that Targeted Israel from Lebanon \(Fars News\)**](#).

7. [Jordan's Foreign Minister Says Lebanese Borders Situation is a Reaction to the Al-Aqsa Mosque Crisis](#) (*An Nashra*).
8. [Israel Begins Military Response, Striking Hamas Targets in the Gaza Strip; More Strikes Expected](#) (*Al Arabiya*).

PRELUDE TO THE CRISIS:

1. [Attacks Came on the Same Day Iranian and Saudi Ministers Met in China to Formalize the Normalization Agreement](#) (*Tasnim News*).
2. [Attacks Came One Day after the Israeli Defense Chief Said Israel Can Strike Iran Without US Help if Necessary](#) (*Al Arabiya*).
3. [Attacks Came A Day after Iran's UN Ambassador Informed UNSC Iran "Won't Hesitate to Act Against Israeli Threats"](#) (*Tasnim News*).
4. [Attacks Also Followed Iran's Announcement it Will Supply Syria with New Solid-Propellant Air Defense Missiles](#) (*Tehran Times*).