

# THE EARLY PHOENIX

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

May 17, 2023

## TURKIYE

1. [One Day After the Elections, 3 Turkish Soldiers were killed in Operation Against PKK Terrorists in Türkiye \(Daily Sabah\)](#). Three members of gendarmerie forces were killed, and a village guard was heavily injured during a counterterrorism operation in southeastern Türkiye, the Interior Ministry reported on Tuesday.
2. [Sinjar: Four PKK Members Killed, Injured in Turkish Airstrike \(Bas News\)](#). A Turkish army drone launched an airstrike on Tuesday, targeting the headquarters of a Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) affiliated armed group in Sinjar, with multiple casualties reported... the Kurdistan Region's Counter-terrorism Unit also confirmed the attack and explained the airstrike killed three members of the Sinjar Resistance Unit (YBS) and wounded another.
3. [Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu Faces an Uphill Struggle in Turkish Runoff \(Daily Sabah\)](#). His six-party alliance now needs to accomplish seemingly impossible electoral gymnastics to unseat Erdoğan, who needs a slight boost to extend his two decades in power, either as prime minister or president, to 2028.
4. [Turkish Corporate Bonds Fell to Lowest Level in 6 Months \(Asharq Business\)](#). Omotund Lawal, head of emerging market corporate debt at Barings, said the next five years would be very difficult for Turkey, saying, "There is a risk that the government will resort to measures such as restricting foreign exchange operations for individuals or companies, in an attempt to control in the exchange rate, making it difficult for companies with foreign currency liabilities to service their debts."

## IRAN

5. [Persian Gulf Countries Are Eager For Closer Transport Ties With Iran \(Tehran Times\)](#). Secretary-General of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council, Jassim Muhammad Al-Budaiwi, has said Persian Gulf nations are seriously willing to expand transport cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran.
6. [Exports to India Rise 12% in Q1 \(Tehran Times\)](#). Iranian exports to India increased by 12 percent in the first quarter of 2023 to reach \$188 million, up from \$168 million in the same period of 2022, according to the data released by India's Ministry of Commerce and Industry...The ministry data indicate that trade between Iran and the South Asian nation reached \$510 million in January-March this year, IRNA reported.
7. [Azerbaijan Arrests at Least Nine Suspected of Being Linked to Iran's Secret Services \(Al Arabiya\)](#). According to a joint statement by the interior ministry, security service, and the prosecutor general office, the group was plotting a "violent overthrow of the government and the assassinations of prominent personalities and senior officials."

8. [Silk Road to Be Revived, Iran Roads Minister Says](#) (*Tasnim News*). Iranian minister of roads and urban development wrote in a post on social media on Tuesday that good agreements were made in the 17th annual exhibition and conference of 'the Middle East Rail' held in Abu Dhabi regarding Iran's export of technical and engineering services and participation of Iranian companies in rail projects of regional countries as well as the investment of finance-credit associations of neighboring countries in Iran's rail and port projects.
9. [Iran Hosts Russian Navy Chief, Seeks to Boost China Triangle](#) (*Al-Monitor*). Russia's naval commander Adm. Nikolai Yevmenov visited Tehran on Tuesday, discussing boosting bilateral cooperation with his Iranian counterpart Shahram Irani. The Iranian navy chief called for a joint committee in training and technical fields. "The enemy is trying to disrupt the Iran-China-Russia triangle and block trilateral cooperation, but the three countries have managed to move forward together."
10. [Spokesman Refutes US' Anti-Iran Comments on Maritime Security](#) (*Tasnim News*). On May 13, NSC spokesman John Kirby said the US "will work to bolster" its "defensive posture" in the Persian Gulf after Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy seized two invading foreign oil tankers in the country's territorial waters in the Strait of Hormuz in recent weeks. The spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry dismissed baseless remarks by American officials against Iran about the safety of maritime navigation in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.

## ISRAEL & PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

11. [Israel Reveals Iran's Secret Underground Drone Base](#) (*Iran Intl*). An Israeli security think tank has uncovered a secret underground drone base of Iran's Revolutionary Guards (IRGC). The location in the southwest of Iran was revealed Monday by Alma Center, a non-profit research organization that focuses on the security challenges on Israel's northern borders. ACCORDING TO A VIDEO RELEASED BY ALMA, the UAV base is carved into the Zagros mountains near Shiraz, Fars province. The location is about 10km from Shiraz airbase, which also houses the air force's SU-24 jets of the 72nd tactical fighter squadron.
12. [Gaza: Dozens of Families Left Homeless by Israeli Air Strikes](#) (*Middle East Eye*). Israel's five-day bombing campaign destroyed 93 housing units in Gaza, partially damaged 1,820, and rendered 128 others uninhabitable.
13. [Palestinian Factions Threaten to Attack Israel on Jerusalem Day](#) (*i24*). Ahead of the Jerusalem Day flag march set for Thursday, Arab media on Monday reported that Palestinian armed factions threatened Israel with a renewed "powerful campaign" days after a ceasefire ended the escalation between the Israeli military and Gaza's Islamic Jihad terror group.
14. [Knesset Member Says 17 Million Official Documents Remain Classified, Unavailable to War Crimes Researchers](#) (*Al Sharq Al Awsat*). Ayman Odeh, a member of the "Arab Front for Change" bloc and head of the Science and Technology Committee in the Knesset (Israeli Parliament), revealed that state, military, and

intelligence archives hold 17 million documents. Astonishingly, 97% of these are classified and remain inaccessible. Odeh emphasized that many military operations and massacres should be disclosed, even under Israeli law. However, he expressed concern that the authorities are exerting extensive efforts to maintain their secrecy.

## LEBANON

15. [France Issues Arrest Warrant for Lebanese Central Bank Chief](#) (*New Arab*) A French investigating magistrate on Tuesday issued an international arrest warrant for Lebanon's central bank chief Riad Salameh...His lawyer said Salameh failed to appear for questioning by French investigators who want to know how he amassed sizeable assets across Europe.

## SUDAN

16. [Death Toll From Sudan Fighting Rises to 822](#) (*New Arab*) On Tuesday morning, the Sudan Doctors' Syndicate announced that the number of civilian casualties from fighting between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitary group had risen to 822... "The continued clashes have led to more casualties in the capital Khartoum and several states," the syndicate said in a statement.
17. [Sudan Civilians Report Rape at the Hands of RSF, Unidentified Fighters Amid Continuing Violence](#) (*New Arab*) Civilians fleeing conflict in Sudan's capital Khartoum have reportedly been raped by armed men, according to a Sudanese government unit... An official at a specialist government unit told the UK *Guardian* that four women and three girls were currently being supported. However, the number of victims of sexual violence is likely higher due to underreporting.
18. [Mass Departure of Rapid Support Forces from Khartoum: Army Conducts Arrests](#) (*Al Arabiya*). Amid recurring confrontations between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces, a video was disseminated on Tuesday on social media depicting a large-scale withdrawal of the Rapid Support Forces from Khartoum, the Sudanese capital... On Monday, the "Eastern Nile" region, located east of Khartoum, and Omdurman, experienced skirmishes and aerial strikes, despite the initiation of ceasefire negotiations in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, just last week.
19. [Complete Shutdown of Sudanese Banking System](#) (*Al Sharq Al Awsat*). The banking system in Sudan, including the Central Bank, has been disrupted, with services grinding to a halt due to damage to their electronic systems. Initially caused by power outages, sabotage of control centers and central computer systems later exacerbated this. As a result, automated Teller Machines (ATMs) have ceased operation, and their equipment has been vandalized. Moreover, extensive looting has occurred, electronic payment applications have been halted, and direct banking transactions have been suspended. This has led to a severe liquidity crisis, with new opportunistic brokers emerging to trade under these fraught conditions.

## SYRIA

20. [US Congressional Committee Approves Anti-Normalization Bill on Expedited Basis](#) (*ACLS*). Today in the U.S. Congress, the House Foreign Affairs Committee gave its

approval to the "Assad Anti-Normalization Act of 2023," a new piece of legislation that will prohibit the US government from normalizing relations with the Assad regime, strengthen the sanctions in the Caesar Act of 2023, require investigations of the Assad regime's diversion of humanitarian aid, block the Arab Gas Pipeline initiative, and extend the period of the Caesar Act to the end of 2032. The Committee fast-tracked the legislation, voting on the bill only four days after it was submitted. The committee members voted almost unanimously for the bill, approving it on a voice vote and paving the way for the draft law to be submitted for a vote of the full House of Representatives in the coming weeks. The top Republican and Democrat on the committee, chairman Michael McCaul (R-TX), and ranking member Gregory Meeks (D-NY) voted in favor of the bill. The top Republican and Democrat on the Middle East subcommittee, Joe Wilson (R-SC) and Dean Phillips (D-MN), spoke in favor of the bill, as did committee member (and author of the Captagon Bill) French Hill (R-AR). The fact that the bill received broad bipartisan support makes its passage in both the House and the Senate more likely.

21. [\*\*American Envoy Meets Kurdish Parties in Syria \(\*Enab Baladi\*\)\*\*](#). The US Special Envoy to northeastern Syria, Nicholas Grainger, met with officials of the "Syrian Democratic Forces" (SDF) and the "Kurdish National Council" in light of the problems between the two parties, which recently led to the closure of the "Semalka" border crossing with Iraqi Kurdistan.
22. [\*\*German Foreign Minister After Meeting Al-Farhan: Al-Assad Should Not Be Rewarded for His Violations \(\*Syria TV\*\)\*\*](#) German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock warned Arab countries against the consequences of normalizing relations with the Syrian regime without preconditions.

## IRAQ

23. [\*\*US-Iraqi Business Council strengthens its partnership with Baghdad \(\*Iraqi News\*\)\*\*](#). The strategic meeting covered a range of subjects, including collaborations in the energy and environmental sectors between Iraq and the United States, as well as economic, financial, and health cooperation.
24. [\*\*UAE's Chamber of Commerce visits Baghdad \(\*Iraqi News\*\)\*\*](#). Iraqi Prime Minister Sudani stated a common intention to look into fresh prospects for cooperative economic activity and to fortify current alliances.
25. [\*\*Iraqi Kurdish Politician Survives Assassination Attempt \(\*Al-Monitor\*\)\*\*](#). Karwan Gaznaw, a member of the Kurdistan parliament for the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), tweeted on Tuesday that he "survived an assassination attempt" the night prior... The shooting occurred during significant tensions between the KDP and the PUK. Tensions between the two parties are not new but were raised significantly in October when PUK counterterrorism officer Hawkar Jaf was killed in a car bombing in Erbil.

## THE GULF REGION & YEMEN

26. [\*\*Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Egypt Leading Executioners in 2022 'Record Year': Amnesty International \(\*New Arab\*\)\*\*](#). The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region came in the lead of countries with the most executions in 2022, which reached a record high in five years, Amnesty International has said in a report ... Recorded figures of



people executed rose from 520 in 2021 to 825 last year in the MENA countries, mainly in the region's most notorious executioners such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Egypt.

27. [Prime Minister of Yemen Tells European Delegation the Houthi Militia is Not Ready For Peace \(Al-Arabiya\)](#). The Yemeni prime minister met in Aden the head of the European Union mission, Gabriel Vinales, and the ambassadors of several European Union countries accredited to Yemen.
28. [Saudi Aramco Considers an Additional Share Offering Back in Spotlight \(Al Sharq Business\)](#). Saudi Arabia's proposal to float an additional multibillion-dollar stake in Aramco is gaining renewed traction. The share sale would rank among the world's largest in recent years. As the world's preeminent energy firm, Aramco boasts a market capitalization of \$2.1 trillion.
29. [Saudi Arabia's Holdings of US Treasury Bonds Reach Highest Level in Three Years \(Al Khaleej Online\)](#). As of the end of March, Saudi investments in US Treasury bills and bonds saw a monthly surge of 4%, rising to \$116.2 billion from \$111 billion in February. As reported by the domestic publication, Al-Eqtisadiah, on Tuesday, the Kingdom funneled roughly \$4.5 billion into treasury bonds during March.
30. [Houthis Seek Funding to Complete the Sectarianism of Yemeni Schools Curriculum \(AL Sharq Al Awsat\)](#). As a result, over 3 million students enrolled in schools under the group's control are exposed to the peril of ideological distortion and extremism. This is a consequence of the constant alteration of educational curricula, the utilization of schools for military purposes, the manipulation and fabrication of historical facts, the politicization of historical narratives, the misinterpretation of Quranic verses and the Prophet's hadiths to label others as infidels, and the bestowing of religious sanctity upon the Houthi dynasty.

## **NORTH AFRICA**

31. [Egypt Refutes Diplomatic Breakthrough with Iran, Stresses Unchanged Position \(Abram\)](#). A well-informed source denied rapprochement with Tehran on Monday and emphasized that Cairo's position remains "unchanged." "Nothing is happening," the source told Ahram Online. Such discussions, the source explained, would require careful preparations and a checklist of engagements to be reviewed on the bilateral and regional levels, similar to what occurred with Turkiye.
32. [Two Political Detainees in Egypt Reportedly Die Over 24 Hours From Medical Negligence: Rights Group \(New Arab\)](#). Two political detainees allegedly lost their lives over 24 hours after being subjected to medical negligence inside Egyptian prisons, according to a local rights group... On Sunday, Madeen Hasanien, 63, a leader at Ansar El-Sharia Islamist group, died at Assuit hospital in southern Egypt while he was receiving treatment after his case deteriorated, the Egyptian Network for Human Rights (ENHR) reported in a statement the following day.
33. [Paris to Compensate More Relatives of Algerian Harki Fighters \(New Arab\)](#). Paris finally paved the way towards paying reparations to more relatives of Algerians who

sided with France in their country's independence war but were brutally held in deadly camps ... Over 200,000 Algerians, known as Harkis, fought with the French army in the bloody eight-year-long war against Algerian resistance fighters from 1954 to 1962.

