

# CLAWS Newsletter



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## About us

The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS) is an independent think tank based in New Delhi, India, dedicated to strategic studies and land warfare in the Indian context. Established in 2004 and registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860, CLAWS operates as a membership-based organization governed by a Board of Governors and an Executive Council, under the Aegis of the Indian Army.

With a futuristic outlook and a policy-oriented approach, CLAWS focuses on national security issues, conventional military operations, and sub-conventional warfare. The Centre closely monitors regional conflicts and military developments within India's strategic frontiers, particularly in South Asia.

Committed to fostering strategic culture and informed policymaking, CLAWS disseminates its research to armed forces personnel, policymakers, members of the strategic community, and interested civilians. By facilitating in-depth studies and discussions, CLAWS contributes to shaping India's defense policies and military preparedness.

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The CLAWS Newsletter is a newly fortnightly series under the leadership of Dr. Tara Kartha, Director Research & Academics. The newsletter features insightful content curated by CLAWS researchers, each specializing in their respective verticals. This initiative aims to provide in-depth analysis, strategic insights, and updates on key issues.



## Top Stories This Fortnight

### 1. Sectarian violence breaks out in Syria; over 1,000 people reportedly killed ([Shafaq News](#), [Guardian](#), [Reuters](#), March 6)

A clash between security forces and loyalists of the Assad regime on the Mediterranean coast of Syria quickly unravelled into a week of bloodshed and violence.

On March 6, the transitional government of Syria headed by former HTS leader Ahmad al-Sharaa, began deploying forces to coastal cities like Baniyas, Tartous, Latakia and Jableh- popular strongholds of the former al-Assad regime. This was done to fight “regime remnants” or Assad loyalists who are concentrated in these areas.

In the afternoon hours of March 6, Assad loyalists ambushed Syrian government’s security personnel in the rural areas of Latakia. While this wasn’t the first incident of violence on the new security forces, it was one of the deadliest yet, [as reported by the New York Times](#). This became the flashpoint of the worst sectarian violence in Syria since the fall of the Assad regime in December.

War monitoring group Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said over 1,400 people have been killed in this violence, with Alawites constituting the majority of the deaths. Alawites, an offshoot of Shi’ite Islam, claim they were being attacked simply for belonging to the same religious group as deposed President Assad. As per local media reports, members of two Turkish backed factions- Abu Amsa and Hamzat divisions, are mostly behind the civilian killings.

The Syrian president has said the attacks threaten his mission of unity and promised an investigation into the attacks.

### 2. Arab leaders endorse Egypt’s plan for reconstruction of Gaza ([BBC](#), [Reuters](#), [Al-Jazeera](#), [JNS](#), March 4, March 12)

Members of the Arab League met in Cairo on March 4 and adopted Egypt’s plan for reconstruction of Gaza. The plan, detailed in a 112-page document by President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, aims to rebuild the war-torn Gaza Strip without displacing its 2 million plus residents. The proposal is divided into two key phases. The initial recovery phase aims to clear Gaza of landmines and debris while establishing temporary housing solutions, addressing the immediate humanitarian needs of the population.

The second phase focuses on the long-term rebuilding of essential infrastructure, including power grids, water systems, transportation networks, and communications facilities. The plan envisions projects such as a commercial harbour, a technology hub, beach hotels, and even an airport. Detailed maps and AI-generated visuals illustrate prospective housing developments, community centres, and green public spaces that intend redefine Gaza’s urban landscape.

Central to the initiative is the creation of an administrative committee composed of independent, professional Palestinian technocrats. This committee will oversee humanitarian aid distribution and manage daily affairs on a transitional basis until governance is restored to the Palestinian Authority.

The Arab plan came after Trump’s controversial remarks about turning the Gaza Strip into the “Riviera of the Middle East” and relocating Palestinians to neighbouring nations. While Hamas and the Palestinian authorities accepted the plan, Israel and the United States said it failed to address the realities in Gaza and

stood by Trump's initial plan.

However, Arab foreign ministers met with Trump's middle east envoy Steve Witkoff in Doha on March 12 and said they would continue to engage with him on Egypt's proposed plan.

### 3. Iran rejects Trump's letter on nuclear talk; engages with China and Russia instead

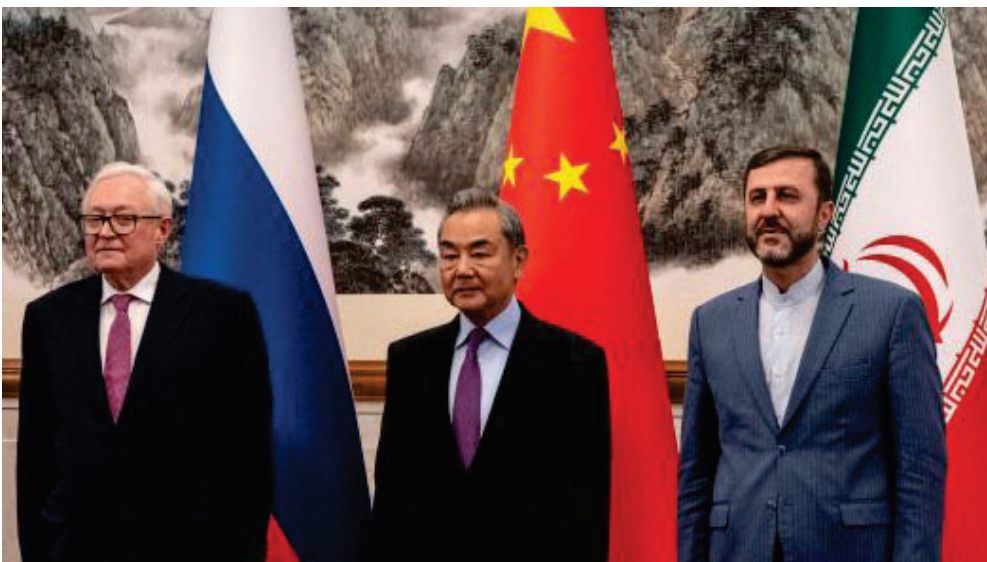
([Reuters](#), [AP](#), [Al-Jazeera](#), [Middle East Minute](#), [The New Arab](#), [BBC](#), [Ministry of Foreign Affairs China](#), March 5, March 14)

On March 5, U.S. President Donald Trump sent a letter to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei in an effort to restart talks over Iran's nuclear activities. While the text of the letter isn't public, in a television interview following the dispatch, Trump said he told Iran that he hopes they're going to negotiate, otherwise the U.S. will have to "go in militarily."

The letter was reportedly sent through a UAE diplomat and delivered to Iran's foreign minister.

Iran responded sharply. Both Ayatollah Khamenei and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian stated that Tehran would not enter negotiations with the United States under conditions of pressure. Iranian state media quoted Pezeshkian as saying, "It is unacceptable for us that they give orders and make threats. I won't even negotiate with you. Do whatever the hell you want," according to Reuters. In a separate statement reported by France 24, Khamenei remarked, "The US is threatening militarism. In my opinion, this threat is unwise," adding that Iran is "capable of retaliating and will definitely inflict a blow." The Iranian leader also dubbed these talks as deceptive and said negotiations would only "make the sanctions knot tighter."

Amid these developments, Iran engaged in discussions with China and Russia in Beijing on March 14 regarding its nuclear program. In a joint statement issued after the meeting, the three countries affirmed that Iran's right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy should be "fully" respected. The statement also said that all parties should "abandon sanctions, pressure and threats of force."



*Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, stands with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov, and Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Kazeem Gharibabadi, before a meeting regarding the Iranian nuclear issue at Diaoyutai State Guest House on March 14, 2025 in Beijing, China.*

*Source: Reuters*

This stalemate comes as recurring reports emerge of Iran being dangerously close to developing a nuclear weapon and Trump pursuing a policy of maximum pressure to get Iran to the negotiating table.

As far as the letter, local media said Iran has received the letter and a ministry spokesperson said they will decide on a response "after a thorough assessment."



#### 4. **Israel Hamas negotiations in limbo; U.S. proposes a “bridge” plan** ([Reuters](#), [The Times of Israel](#), [AP News](#), March 14, 15)

Negotiators have been trying to find a way to extend the first phase of the agreement which ended on March 1 but the ceasefire talks between Israel and Hamas seem to have reached a deadlock. The U.S. proposed a “bridge” plan which aims to extend the ceasefire in Gaza till April 19, beyond Ramzan and Passover, and includes further exchange of hostages and prisoners from either side. However, media reports suggest that Israel and Hamas disagree over key aspects of the deal.

On March 14, U.S. envoy for the Middle East, Steve Witkoff, dismissed a Hamas offer where the group offered to release a dual U.S.-Israeli citizen, and the remains of four other dual nationals. Witkoff accused Hamas of publicly showing flexibility while “privately making demands that are entirely impractical without a permanent ceasefire.” Israel too dubbed this offer as “manipulation and psychological warfare.”

Hamas told Reuters that the offer they made to release the dual citizen was contingent on starting the second phase of the ceasefire, opening crossings and lifting the Israeli blockade. Israel has rejected engaging in talks over the second phase of the deal since it would entail a permanent end to the war- a key demand by Hamas. Instead, Israel is looking to extend the first phase, as also proposed by Witkoff.

Hamas is also accusing Israel of a “blatant violation” of the ceasefire after a report by the Palestinian territory’s civil defence agency said Israeli strikes in northern Gaza killed nine people.

#### 5. **CENTCOM commander conducts senior level engagements in the Middle East** ([x/@CENTCOM](#), March 5 to March 8)

Commander of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), General Michael Erik Kurilla, concluded a series of senior-level meetings in Israel, Jordan, Syria, and Saudi Arabia from March 5 to 8. As per the CENTCOM statement, the discussion focused on reinforcing military partnerships and addressing regional security challenges. During his visit to Israel on March 5 and 6, Gen. Kurilla attended the Israeli Defence Force change of command ceremony, where Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir assumed the role of Chief of Staff, succeeding Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi. In meetings with defence officials, he discussed the current security situation and explored ways to enhance interoperability between U.S. and Israeli forces. Kurilla then went to Jordan where he met with Maj. Gen. Yousef Al-Hnaity, Chairman of the Jordan Joint Chiefs of Staff, to review evolving security concerns and the progress of U.S.-Jordan military cooperation. In Syria, Gen. Kurilla consulted with U.S. military commanders and representatives of the Syrian Democratic Forces to assess ongoing efforts against ISIS and measures to prevent its resurgence. The visit concluded in Saudi Arabia where he engaged with Gen. Fayyad bin Hamed Al-Ruwayli, Chief of General Staff of the Saudi Arabian Armed Forces, and Lt. Gen. Sagheer Hamoud Ahmed Aziz, Chief of Staff of the Yemeni Armed Forces. Discussions there centred on regional security threats, joint military readiness, and the recent U.S. decision to designate the Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organization.

“These face-to-face meetings are imperative to building and maintaining effective relationships with our partners in the region,” Gen. Kurilla said as per the statement, noting that understanding the region from multiple perspectives is essential for addressing its unique challenges and ensuring stability.

## 6. Houthi rebels acquired key component to boost drone capability: Report

( [New York Times](#), [Yemen Online](#), [Straight Arrow News](#), March 13)

A new report by Conflict Armament Research reveals that Yemen's Houthi rebels are moving to revolutionise their drone warfare capabilities by smuggling in advanced hydrogen fuel cell components. These systems could dramatically extend drone flight ranges—potentially tripling the current 750-mile limit achieved with traditional gas engines or lithium batteries—while significantly reducing heat and noise signatures that conventional sensors rely on for detection.

The fuel cell components allegedly produced by Chinese firms—were discovered on a boat intercepted by Yemeni forces in August, alongside other sophisticated weaponry. Experts warn that this emerging supply chain may boost the Houthis' self-sufficiency and operational capabilities, potentially altering the balance in regional maritime conflicts.

This report comes as the rebel group renews its attacks on Israeli and American ships in the Red Sea.

## 7. Iran, China, and Russia conclude 5th Maritime Security Belt Exercise at Chabahar port (China Military, [Moscow Times](#), [Tasnim News Agency](#), [AP News](#), March 12)

China, Russia, and Iran concluded their fifth Maritime Security Belt 2025 naval drills in the Gulf of Oman, focusing on maritime security, counter-piracy, and emergency response operations. The exercises, held near the Strait of Hormuz, a critical global energy transit route, involved live-fire drills, search-and-rescue missions, and coordinated naval manoeuvres, according to official statements.



*The China-Iran-Russia "Security Belt 2025" naval exercise concluded at Iran's Chabahar Port. Source: China Military*

Russia's Pacific Fleet participated with the corvettes Rezky and Aldar Tsydenzhapov, supported by the tanker Pechenega. China deployed the guided-missile destroyer Baotou and a supply vessel, while Iran hosted the exercises at Chabahar Port, mobilising both its regular navy and the elite Revolutionary Guard forces.

According to Iran's Tasnim News Agency, the exercises aimed to enhance regional security and deepen military collaboration among the three powers.

Observers from Oman, Pakistan, the UAE, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, South Africa, Qatar, and Sri Lanka attended, reflecting growing regional interest in China-Russia-Iran military cooperation. The joint exercise highlights deepening mutual trust amongst the three nations.



## IMEEC UPDATE ([X/IndembAbuDhabi](#), [Maritime Gateway](#), March 3)

An Indian delegation led by the Secretary of the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Mr. T.K. Ramachandran, engaged with HE Mohamed Juma Al Shamisi, CEO of Abu Dhabi Ports. The Indian delegation also featured the Ambassador of India to the UAE, Sunjay Sudhir, CMD of RITES, Rahul Mithal, and Chairman of the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority, Unmesh Wagh.

The two sides engaged in discussions on the virtual trade corridor (VTC), MAITRI (Master Application for International Trade and Regulatory Interface), and on integrating the trade platforms of both countries through MAITRI to give a boost to IMEEC and bilateral trade. They also held consultations with stakeholders including terminal operators, shipping lines, and customs.



*Indian delegation led by Secretary of the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Mr. T.K. Ramachandran, met HE Mohamed Juma Al Shamisi, CEO of Abu Dhabi Ports. Source: X/IndembAbuDhabi*

## ISRAEL

### • **New IDF Chief of Staff takes over; vows victory over Hamas at the handover ceremony** ([The Times of Israel](#), March 5)

Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir officially assumed command of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) on March 5, replacing Lt Gen Herzi Halevi, who resigned in the wake of the October 7 Hamas attack. At a ceremony in Tel Aviv, Zamir vowed to lead the IDF to victory against Hamas and to bring home remaining hostages. He also spoke about drafting members of the ultra-Orthodox community into the military.



*New IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir (right), outgoing chief Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi (left) at a handover ceremony at the military's Kirya headquarters in Tel Aviv, March 5, 2025. (Source: Israel Defense Forces via The Times of Israel)*

Zamir, 59, most recently served as the director general of the Defence Ministry and was tapped by the Israeli prime minister and defence minister for the new appointment. He joined the military in 1984 and has become the country's first military chief to have started his service in the Armoured Corps. He has extensive military experience, including leading the IDF Southern Command. He now faces the ongoing war against Hamas in Gaza, rising tensions with Hezbollah in Lebanon, and broader regional threats, as pointed out by the country's defence minister Israel Kats.

"The security challenges around us do not leave the new chief of staff 100 minutes of grace. In fact, Eyal, you don't have even one minute of grace," he said.

His predecessor, Halevi, used his farewell speech to call for a state commission to investigate the failures leading to October 7, a move likely to generate political debate. The head of the United States Central Command Gen. Michael Kurilla was present at the ceremony.

• **The United States bypasses congressional approval to fast track \$4 billion in military assistance to Israel** ( [New York Times](#), [Al Mayadeen English](#), [Defense Security Cooperation Agency](#), March 1)

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio signed a declaration to use emergency authorities to expedite the delivery of approximately \$4 billion in military aid to Israel, bypassing the Congress. This marks the second time in six weeks that the Trump administration has bypassed Congress to fast-track arms sales to Israel.

This will include over 35,000 2,000-pound bombs, worth about \$2 billion and other military equipment including bulldozers, GPS-guidance kits and other bombs.

## GAZA

• **Israel blocks electricity to Gaza, desalination plant affected** ([BBC](#), [New York Times](#), March 9)

Israel's Energy minister Eli Cohen announced that they will cut electricity to the Gaza Strip. The decision, reportedly a tactic to apply pressure on Hamas, severely impacted essential services, notably water desalination. The shutdown of Gaza's main desalination plant has reduced its capacity by 85%, leaving approximately 600,000 residents without access to safe drinking water.

This action exacerbates an already dire situation, as Israel has also halted the delivery of food and humanitarian aid to the enclave. The United Nations has warned that these measures endanger civilians, with the Red Cross reporting dwindling aid supplies. The blockade has led to critical shortages, with nine out of ten people in Gaza lacking access to safe water, as per reports. Residents describe the situation as untenable, stating, "No electricity, no water, no life."

## TURKEY

• **Turkey could send troops to Ukraine if necessary** ([Reuters](#), [The Kyiv Independent](#), [Bloomberg](#), March 6)

Turkey, NATO's second-largest military power after the United States, is exploring the possibility of deploying troops in Ukraine as part of a multinational peacekeeping force. A Turkish defence ministry source told Reuters that any decision on troop involvement would be contingent upon a ceasefire agreement between Ukraine and Russia, with initial deployments likely to focus on non-combatant roles to monitor the truce. The source emphasised that the concept remains in its early stages, with further consultations needed before any concrete action is taken.

Bloomberg reported that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan raised the possibility in separate meetings with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in February. According to Bloomberg, Turkey would only participate if it were directly involved in all consultations and preparations for the mission. While Moscow has publicly opposed NATO troop deployments in Ukraine, it has not given Turkey a definitive response regarding the proposal. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov previously voiced concerns about discussions on peacekeeper deployments among NATO countries.



- **Turkey-Iran tensions rise** ([Middle East Eye](#), [Amwaj Media](#), [Hawar News Agency](#), March 5, March 15)

Tensions between Turkey and Iran have intensified following Ankara's criticism of Tehran's alleged support for Kurdish militias in Syria. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan recently warned that Iran's actions in Syria could backfire, leading to instability within its own borders. This diplomatic discord has led both nations to summon each other's ambassadors, highlighting the growing strain in their relationship. Iranian officials have expressed outrage over Turkey's warnings, perceiving them as threats to Iran's internal stability. Tensions were further exacerbated as Turkey recently detained five individuals accused of allegedly operating a spy ring for Iranian intelligence and gathering information on Turkish military bases and strategic areas.

- **Turkey plans inroads into Africa as France withdraws** ([RFI](#), March 11)

France's recent military withdrawals from the Sahel and West Africa have created a security vacuum that Turkey is looking to fill. The French pullout includes handing over its sole base in Côte d'Ivoire and a complete withdrawal from Chad, with the last soldiers leaving the Abéché base on January 11, 2025. These actions are part of a broader reduction of French military presence in the region, driven by local states demanding a decrease in traditional foreign engagement.

Turkey has significantly increased its influence in Africa over the past two decades, reportedly quadrupling its embassy presence across the continent. Its growing military and diplomatic footprint is complemented by defence and cooperation agreements with several Sahelian countries. Reports indicate that Turkish military advisers and drones have been deployed at Chad's Abéché base, while recent high-level meetings in Istanbul have strengthened military ties with Senegal and other regional states.

- **Turkey kills 26 Kurdish militants in Iraq, Syria** ([Reuters](#), [Munsif Daily](#), March 6)

Turkey's defence ministry announced that its armed forces have killed 26 Kurdish militants in Iraq and Syria over the past week, despite a recent ceasefire declaration by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The PKK, designated as a terrorist organisation by Turkey and its Western allies, declared a ceasefire after its imprisoned leader, Abdullah Ocalan, called for the group to lay down arms and dissolve. However, Turkish authorities have continued military operations, stating that all PKK-affiliated groups must disband and cease terrorist activities. The Turkish defence ministry emphasised that operations will persist until no terrorists remain.

## SYRIA

- **Syria adopts a temporary constitution** ([New York Times](#), [Arab Weekly](#), March 14)

Syria's new government has adopted a temporary constitution that establishes Islamic jurisprudence as the cornerstone of its legal system. This framework sets a five-year transitional period during which significant authority will be concentrated in the hands of President al-Sharaa. Under the new arrangement, the president will directly appoint one-third of the legislative body, while the remaining seats will be filled through an electoral commission supervised by a committee also appointed by him.

The constitution guarantees essential freedoms, including those of opinion, expression, information, publication, and the press. It also aims to secure women's rights by affirming their access to education, participation in the workforce, and political involvement.

The announcement of the new constitutional framework coincided with a visit to Syria by Turkey's foreign minister, defence minister, and the head of the MIT intelligence agency, highlighting Turkey's continued engagement in the region.

- **Syria vows to destroy remaining Assad-era chemical weapons** ( [Guardian](#), [Strat News](#), March 5)

Syria's foreign minister has pledged to eliminate the remaining chemical weapons left over from Bashar al-Assad's regime and is seeking international assistance for the task. Speaking at closed-door meetings at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague, Asaad Hassan al-Shibani became the first Syrian foreign minister to address the disarmament agency.

Following the 2013 sarin gas attack that claimed hundreds of lives, Syria joined the OPCW under a U.S.-Russian agreement, and 1,300 metric tonnes of chemical weapons and precursors were destroyed. However, investigations by a joint UN-OPCW mechanism, the OPCW's own team, and a UN war crimes probe found that forces loyal to Assad used nerve agents like sarin and chlorine barrel bombs during the civil war, resulting in thousands of casualties.

The Syrian government has initiated plans to dismantle any remaining chemical weapons. Al-Shibani stressed that while rapid action is needed, the process must be thorough, and international technical, logistical, and resource support will be critical to achieving these goals. OPCW chief Fernando Arias described Syria's political shift as a historic opportunity to obtain clarification on the extent and full scope of Syria's chemical arsenal.

- **Kurdish SDF signs an agreement to merge with state in Syria** ( [BBC](#), [Middle East Eye](#), [France 24](#), March 10 )

The Syrian government announced on Monday that the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a Kurdish-led alliance controlling much of northeastern Syria, has signed an agreement to integrate its military and civilian institutions into the state apparatus. The memorandum was signed in Damascus by SDF commander Mazloum Abdi and interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa.

Under the agreement, the SDF will cease hostilities and transfer control of key border posts, airports, and vital oil and gas fields to the Syrian government. The deal also provides for the integration of all SDF-run institutions into state structures and includes measures for the return and protection of displaced Syrians. It recognizes the Kurdish minority as an integral part of the Syrian state and guarantees equal rights and participation in the political process for all citizens.

The agreement follows months of negotiations and aims to strengthen Syria's state institutions in the resource-rich northeastern region and to contribute to the country's broader efforts to unify its territory following the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad.

Notably, the agreement comes nearly two weeks after jailed PKK founder Abdullah Ocalan called on his militant group to lay down its weapons and disband. Although the SDF maintains that it is independent from the PKK—which has waged a decades-long insurgency against Turkey—it is dominated by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which Ankara regards as an offshoot of the PKK.

- **Syrian jihad group supervises training of army** ( [MEMRI](#), [X/MalhamaOfficial](#), March 7)

Malhama Tactical, a Syria-based jihadi group has been actively involved in training new recruits for the Syrian armed forces, as per a media report.

Malhama Tactical's social media accounts showcased images of their masked fighters supervising the training of Syrian army recruits. One post highlighted the continuous influx of fighters into the Syrian Ministry of Defence, emphasizing the group's commitment to preparing soldiers to confront various adversaries.

Malhama Tactical has historically collaborated closely with Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) and other jihadi factions in Syria, focusing on military training and operational coordination. Their involvement in training Syrian army recruits underscores the complex and evolving dynamics within the region's armed groups.



## • Syrian president meets with delegation of the International Union of Muslim Scholars

([Syria Times](#), [MEMRI](#), [SANA](#), March 12)

Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa received a delegation of the International Union of Muslim Scholars. Al-Sharaa met the IUMS delegation at the People's Palace in Damascus. It has been [previously reported](#) that the IUMS was formed in 2004 mostly by clerics belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood and this has sparked comments about the Syrian leader's affiliations with the Muslim Brotherhood.

The delegation, headed by IUMS President Sheikh Ali al-Qaradaghi, included nine members- IUMS Vice Presidents Essam al-Bashir from Sudan, Mohammad al-Hasan al-Dido from Mauritania, and Muhammed Gurmaz from Turkey; Secretary-General Ali al-Sallabi from Libya, Assistant Secretary-General Sultan al-Hashmi from Qatar, Grand Mufti Osama al-Rifai of Syria, board member Mohammed al-Sagheer from Egypt, and Muhammad al-Yafei from Qatar. Senior HTS religious officials 'Abd al-Rahim 'Atoun was also present.

The delegation congratulated al-Sharaa and expressed support for enhancing stability and unity. Later that day, al-Sharaa hosted an iftar banquet for the delegation during which symbolic gifts were exchanged and offers were made to assist in developmental, economic, and social projects.

## UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

### • 300 long range missiles included in UAE's Rafale package ([Bulgarian Military](#), March 9)

UAE finalised details of the arms package that will accompany its acquisition of France's Rafale F4 fighter jets. Media reports suggest that the package will include 300 long-range Meteor missiles and 600 Mica-NG medium and short-range missiles. Some of the Meteor missiles will be locally produced in partnership with MBDA, a European missile manufacturer, while all of the medium and short range missiles will be manufactured entirely in the UAE. The package is also set to include AASM Hammer smart bombs and laser systems, set to be locally produced through a Franco-Emirati collaboration.

This acquisition is set to significantly bolster UAE's military capabilities, positioning it as a leading air power in the Middle East, media reports suggest.

### • Bilateral meetings:

- **UAE- Sweden** ([The Print](#), March 14): Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, met with Benjamin Dousa, Sweden's Minister for International Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade. They discussed bilateral relations and opportunities for collaboration in economy, trade, and investment, and explored strategies to expand mutual cooperation. The meeting witnessed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the UAE Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Swedish Trade and Investment Council, aimed at boosting investment and business prospects between the two nations.

- **UAE- Iran** ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Iran](#), March 1): UAE and Iran held the first meeting of the joint political consultation committee. Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs, Majid Takhte Ravanchi, and his UAE counterpart Ms. Lana Nasibah headed the delegations of the two countries. They discussed various aspects of bilateral relations, including political and economic matters.

- **UAE - Denmark** ([Arab News](#), [Emirates News Agency](#), [Solar Quarter](#), March 13): UAE Deputy PM and Minister of Foreign Affairs H.H. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Lars Løkke Rasmussen, Denmark's Minister of Foreign Affairs signed a MoU on cooperation in sustainable agricultural and food systems during the UAE deputy PM's visit to Denmark. Al Nahyan also met Danish King Frederik X at the start of his working visit. The meeting, held at the Royal Palace, focused on further strengthening bilateral ties, enhancing cooperation, and fostering prosperity through

collaboration.

- **UAE -Saudi** ([Arab News](#), March 13): A delegation led by Deputy Commander of the UAE Joint Operations Maj. Gen. Awad Saeed Al-Ahbab was received by Saudi Arabia's Commander of Joint Forces Lt. Gen. Fahd bin Hamad Al-Salman at the Armed Forces Officers Club in Riyadh. The two leaders discussed areas of cooperation

## SAUDI ARABIA

### • **L&T to build desalination plant in Saudi Arabia** ([The Times of India](#), [Chemical Industry Digest](#), March 13)

Larsen & Toubro (L&T) announced that it has signed an agreement with ACWA Power, a prominent Middle East developer, to build the Ras Mohaisen Desalination Plant in Saudi Arabia. The project will be executed in a joint venture with Spanish company Lantania as part of L&T's Water and Effluent Treatment (WET) division. The seawater reverse osmosis facility will deliver 300,000 cubic meters of potable water daily to the Makkah Al-Mukarramah and Al-Baha regions, benefiting approximately one million people.

The contract covers the comprehensive project scope, including design, procurement, construction, testing, and commissioning. Key infrastructure components include intake and outfall facilities, advanced process units, pumping stations, a 600,000 cubic meter potable water storage system, and specialized electrical systems. In addition, state-of-the-art automation and instrumentation, along with a Solar PV plant, will support sustainable operations.

This agreement marks L&T's second desalination project in Saudi Arabia and reinforces its growing presence in the Middle East. The contract, valued between Rs 2,500-5,000 crore, further positions L&T as a key player in the region's water infrastructure sector, aligning with its strategy to expand across strategic geographies and enhance its expertise in water treatment solutions.

### • **Saudi Arabia strengthens role as Ukraine-Russia mediator** ([The Conversation](#), [Saudi Gazette](#), March 14 )

Saudi Arabia has been playing a crucial role as a neutral ground for Ukraine-U.S.-Russia negotiations. On March 10, the Saudi Crown Prince held separate talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and a U.S. delegation led by Secretary of State Marco Rubio and National Security Advisor Mike Waltz. On March 11, Saudi Arabia hosted face to face talks between the American and Ukrainian delegations which resulted in a U.S. proposal for a 30-day ceasefire which is currently being discussed in Moscow. The Saudi cabinet said that hosting the Ukraine-U.S. talks reflects the kingdom's balanced relationship with the various stakeholders and its leading role in global security and peace.

On March 14, the Saudi crown prince made a phone call to Russian President Vladimir Putin where he reaffirmed Saudi commitment towards facilitating dialogue and achieving a solution to the crisis in Ukraine. The Russian leader thanked the Saudi prince for his efforts and the two also discussed bilateral cooperation.

Experts believe that if a deal is reached to end the Ukraine-Russia war, it will be inked in Saudi Arabia.

### • **Saudi Air Force concludes participation in UK's Exercise Cobra Warrior** ([Forces News](#), [X/Saudi Gazette](#), March 14)

The Royal Saudi Air Force participated in Exercise Cobra Warrior, the largest air exercise conducted by the Royal Air Force, and debuted the F-15SA multi-role combat aircraft. This was Saudi Air Force's first time flying the highly advanced jet, the Saudi deputy commander said.

The exercise held from February 24 to March 14 saw participation from countries like France and Turkey as well.



## LEBANON

- **Lebanon appoints new army commander, announces other high ranking appointments** ([The National News](#), March 13 )

The Lebanese government on Thursday appointed Brigadier General Rodolphe Haykal as the new army commander, filling the vacancy left by President Joseph Aoun's election as head of state in January. In a televised statement following a Cabinet meeting, Information Minister Paul Morkos also announced additional high-level security appointments. Brigadier General Hassan Shqeir has been named head of General Security, Brigadier General Raed Abdallah as chief of Internal Security Forces, and Brigadier General Edgard Lawandos as head of State Security.

Morkos said that the appointments were based on expertise and competence, and noted that the Cabinet has approved the phased recruitment of 4,500 new soldiers to bolster the armed forces. These significant changes come amid political and institutional reforms in a country grappling with severe economic challenges, further complicated by recent hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel.

- **Israel strikes Hezbollah facility Eastern Lebanon** ([Shafaq News](#), [Middle East Eye](#), [Munsif Daily](#), March 14)

Lebanese authorities reported heightened tensions in the Beqaa region following an Israeli airstrike targeting a Hezbollah weapons facility. The strike, carried out by Israeli fighter jets, hit a site in eastern Lebanon that is reportedly used by Hezbollah for the manufacturing and storage of strategic weapons. Lebanese media noted that this latest attack is part of a broader pattern of Israeli airstrikes in the region, with targets also identified in Qusayyā and the Sha'ra-Janta areas of the eastern Beqaa mountain range.

The incident further exacerbates the long-standing tensions in the region, fuelling fears of escalation and impacting the daily lives of communities in eastern Lebanon.

- **Assad commander allegedly exploiting porous border as Syrians flee to Lebanon to escape sectarian violence** ([Arab News](#), [The New Arab](#), March 12)

Lebanese authorities report that hundreds of Syrian refugees are fleeing sectarian violence near the Lebanese border. Over 350 families have crossed the Nahr El Kabir River in recent days, seeking safety from militants targeting the Alawite community in Syria's coastal region. Eyewitnesses described scenes of chaos as gunfire erupted in villages near the border, forcing residents to wade through knee-high waters with children and belongings. Local Lebanese from nearby Alawite villages have been providing assistance to the desperate evacuees emphasised the urgent need for security along this volatile border area.

At the same time, concerns are growing over reports that Miqdad Fatiha, a former Assad Republican Guard commander and leader of the neo-Baathist Coastal Shield Brigade, is using Lebanon's porous border to move fighters and weapons. Fatiha is reportedly exploiting smuggling routes near Hakr al-Dahr to launch incursions into Syria's Latakia, Tartous, and Hama regions, fuelling sectarian violence that has claimed over 1,000 lives, mostly among Alawites.

Lebanese officials are calling for enhanced border security and international support to address the threat posed by militants operating from Lebanese territory, as the region braces for further instability.

• **Israel to stay in five key points in Lebanon: Israel defence minister** ([The Times of Israel](#), March 14)

Israel's defence minister Israel Katz said that the Israel Defense Forces will remain deployed indefinitely at five strategic points in southern Lebanon, regardless of ongoing border negotiations. Speaking after an assessment with IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir and other top military officials, Katz emphasised that maintaining control of these points is essential for protecting northern residents. He ordered that the positions be further fortified and maintained for the long term. Earlier in the month, Israel and Lebanon engaged in direct talks aimed at resolving border disputes, and Israel returned five Lebanese detainees as a goodwill gesture to President Joseph Aoun. Additionally, Lebanon has approved the recruitment of 4,500 soldiers to reinforce troops in the south alongside UN peacekeepers, as part of the ceasefire agreement.

## JORDAN

• **Arab Quad summit on Syria** ([Hawar News Agency](#), [The Jordan Times](#) March 9)

Turkey, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon participated in the "Syria and Neighbouring Countries Meeting" held in Jordan. Diplomatic sources told Reuters that foreign ministers, defence ministers, intelligence chiefs, and military leaders from the participating nations attended the meeting, which was convened to address Syria's security and regional stability. Following the discussions, the leaders emphasised the importance of regional dialogue and coordinated action. Jordan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi stressed that lifting sanctions on Syria was crucial for its economic recovery, as it would aid in reconstruction and strengthen institutional resilience. Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad Hassan Al Shibani also called for easing sanctions to enable sustainable development. Turkey's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan noted that the challenges in Syria could not be addressed in isolation and warned that without a multilateral approach, instability would worsen.

• **World Bank considers \$900M in funding to Jordan** ([The Jordan Times](#), March 13)

The World Bank is considering a new \$900 million financing package to support Jordan's economic and social development. This funding would align with the Country Partnership Framework (2024–2029) and aims to boost economic growth, social protection, and private-sector investments. Of the total, \$400 million is earmarked for strengthening Jordan's social protection system, which benefits 34% of the population. Another \$400 million would promote job creation and private-sector-led growth. Additionally, \$5.6 million may be allocated to enhance education and vocational training under the "Masar" program, with grants supporting school feeding and teacher training. A proposed \$50 million would fund startups and SMEs, building on Jordan's success in venture capital funding. The World Bank is also planning an extra \$7.5 million for Jordan's reform management program, extending support through 2028.



## IRAQ

- **Iraqi forces kill ISIS chief with U.S. assistance** ([DW News](#), [BBC](#), [AlJazeera](#), [X/CentCom](#))

A senior leader of the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria has been killed in a coordinated operation by Iraqi security forces with support from the US-led anti-ISIL coalition, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani announced. Abdallah Makki Muslih al-Rufay'i, also known as Abu Khadija, was described as "one of the most dangerous terrorists in Iraq and the world." The operation, conducted in Iraq's western Al Anbar province, involved a precision airstrike by US Central Command that targeted Abu Khadija and another IS operative. Both individuals were found with unexploded suicide vests and multiple weapon, as per reports. DNA evidence collected during an earlier raid, from which he had narrowly escaped, confirmed his identity.

US President Donald Trump commended the operation on his social media platform, emphasising the efforts of coalition forces in tracking the militant. Iraqi officials noted that while Iraq declared victory over ISIL in 2017 and the group lost its territorial hold by 2019, sleeper cells remain active and sporadic attacks continue.

- **US refused renewal of Iraq's electricity waiver** ([Amwaj Media](#), March 10)

The United States has declined to renew Iraq's waiver to import electricity from Iran, a decision that could deepen Baghdad's energy crisis. The waiver, which previously allowed Iraq to purchase Iranian electricity without violating U.S. sanctions, expired as part of Washington's ongoing pressure campaign against Tehran.

Officials in Baghdad are reportedly looking to Qatar and Oman as potential suppliers and are exploring deals to import liquefied natural gas (LNG) through a floating terminal from the UAE.

With power cuts already a regular issue in Iraq, the loss of Iranian electricity could spark further unrest, increasing pressure on the government to swiftly secure alternatives. Meanwhile, Tehran may seek to leverage the situation to strengthen its influence in Iraq, complicating U.S. efforts to isolate Iran economically.

- **Iraq caught in ripple effect of Syria's violence** ([The New Arab](#), March 11)

The fallout from recent violence on Syria's coast is beginning to affect Iraq, heightening security concerns and fuelling tensions over the presence of Syrian refugees. In response to the unrest, Iraq has ramped up scrutiny of Syrian refugees, with growing calls for their expulsion. Iraqi security forces have reportedly detained several Syrian nationals on charges of spreading extremist propaganda. These developments have left the refugee community in Iraq—already facing economic and political challenges—under increased pressure.

## Across the Middle East:

- **Qatar to finance and supply natural gas to Syria via Jordan** ([Reuters](#), [Rigzone](#), [Anadolu Agency](#), March 13)

Qatar has started supplying natural gas to Syria via Jordan, marking a significant boost to Syria's interim government. The supply, approved by Washington, will provide 2 million cubic meters of gas per day, contributing up to 400 megawatts to Syria's power grid. This is expected to increase average power supply from two to four hours a day, addressing severe energy shortages. Jordan's energy ministry confirmed that Qatar is fully financing the supply, while the UN Development Program will oversee implementation.

Syria's Oil and Mineral Resources Minister, Ghiath Diab, welcomed the initiative, calling it crucial support during a challenging time. He highlighted that the gas supply would help stabilise Syria's electricity sector and improve economic conditions. The move signals growing international recognition of Syria's new rulers, as Western countries, including the UK, have recently removed sanctions on Syrian financial institutions and energy firms.

- **New report accuses Qatar of anti-Israel bias in U.S. K-12 classrooms** ([ISGAP](#), March 13)

A new report by the Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy (ISGAP) has accused Qatar of covertly influencing the U.S. K-12 education through Brown University's Choices Program. The curriculum, used in over 8,000 schools nationwide, has allegedly received undisclosed funding from Qatar Foundation International (QFI) and systematically distorted historical facts to delegitimise Israel, as per the report.

- **Azerbaijan and Armenia ready for a peace deal** ([Reuters](#), March 13)

Armenian and Azerbaijani officials announced that they have finalised the draft of a peace agreement to end nearly four decades of conflict in the South Caucasus. The breakthrough follows bitter disputes and wars dating back to the late 1980s. Armenia's Foreign Ministry stated that the agreement is ready for signing and that consultations on timing and venue will begin soon. Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry expressed satisfaction over concluding negotiations. However, Azerbaijan insists that Armenia amend its constitution, which it claims implicitly supports territorial claims—a point Armenia denies.



## About the Author

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