

# 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. **The War in Gaza** (*March 18 onward, [NPR Reuters](#), [New York Times](#), [The New Arab](#)*)

The Gaza war has entered a new phase of devastation following the breakdown of the January 2025 ceasefire agreement. The agreement, brokered by the United States, Egypt, and Qatar, collapsed on March 18 when negotiations for Phase 2 reached a stalemate and Israel launched a military offensive. Reports indicate that discussions faltered when Israel insisted on additional hostage releases before commencing Phase 2 negotiations that would address Israeli troop withdrawal and a permanent cessation of hostilities- a proposal that Hamas refused. In an attempt to maintain peace, U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff presented a “bridge plan” designed to facilitate further hostage releases while maintaining a pause in fighting through the Ramadan and Passover periods. Hamas rejected this proposal but countered with an offer to release one Israeli-American hostage. Both Israeli and U.S. officials declined this limited offer, citing the need for a more comprehensive agreement.

Following the diplomatic impasse, Israel initiated a military operation described by officials as targeting Hamas infrastructure. Palestinian health authorities report that the offensive has resulted in more than 1,000 casualties since operations resumed. Hamas responded by launching three rockets toward Tel Aviv. According to Israel, one rocket was intercepted, while the others landed in uninhabited areas causing no reported casualties or damage. On March 31, the Israeli Defense Forces issued evacuation orders for residents of Rafah, Gaza’s southernmost city. Military analysts suggest this move indicates preparations for a ground offensive in the area, which currently shelters numerous displaced Palestinians from other regions of Gaza. Egyptian mediators have advanced a new ceasefire proposal, reportedly calling for Hamas to release five Israeli hostages weekly, with Israel agreeing to begin permanent peace discussions after the first exchange. According to media reports, Hamas has signaled acceptance of these terms.

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, however, has expressed preference for the Witkoff bridge plan with additional conditions, including Hamas disarmament and leadership exile. These terms have been characterised by Hamas representatives as unacceptable prerequisites for negotiations.

As the situation continues to deteriorate, regional tensions have also escalated, with growing concerns about the conflict spreading beyond Gaza’s borders and potentially drawing in other actors in the volatile Middle East region.

### 2. **U.S.-Houthi Conflict Intensifies with Airstrikes and Retaliatory Strikes** (*March 15 onward, [Times of Israel](#), [Middle East Monitor](#), [AlJazeera](#), [X/Osint613](#), [X/@CENTCOM](#)*)

The ongoing conflict between the United States and Yemen’s Houthi rebels has escalated significantly in recent weeks, marked by a series of intense airstrikes and retaliatory actions.

The United States launched a series of airstrikes against Houthi rebel targets in Yemen, citing the group’s attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea as the primary reason. These strikes, launched on March 15, have remained ongoing and are reportedly getting more intensive as they target high ranking officials as well as cities, along with Houthi strongholds and launching sites. The U.S. CENTCOM has also been given the authority to strike Yemen without any pre-approval from the White House.

The Houthis have responded with further attacks, targeting U.S. and allied military assets, and have vowed to continue their campaign until Israel lifts its blockade on Gaza. The group claims to have also targeted the U.S. Aircraft Carrier Harry S. Truman with missiles and drones.

The Houthis are also launching attacks on Israel, saying it is to show solidarity with Palestine. Media reports suggest that the rebel group has targeted Israel's Ben Gurion Airport with a hypersonic missile three times in 48 hours but Israel has managed to intercept them.

### **3. Tensions between Iran-U.S. on the rise over nuclear negotiations** ([Iran International](#), [Iran Wire](#), [Official website of President, Iran](#), [یوروهمج تیس ای آر](#), [Reuters](#), March 30, March 31)

Tensions between the United States and Iran have escalated sharply following a failed diplomatic outreach from Washington and an exchange of increasingly hostile rhetoric between the two governments.

On March 30, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian confirmed that Iran has responded to a letter from the U.S. President Donald Trump. In his letter, Trump had reportedly proposed negotiations over a new nuclear agreement and set a two month deadline for Iran to decide.

Pezeshkian said that Iran had rejected the offer for direct talks, citing deep skepticism of U.S. intentions, but signaled conditional openness to indirect engagement. He stressed that any future dialogue would be “entirely contingent on Washington’s conduct,” particularly its willingness to ease sanctions and demonstrate sincerity in negotiations.

The response drew a sharp rebuke from President Trump, who issued an ultimatum threatening secondary sanctions if Iran doesn’t agree to negotiations. He further warned of military action, stating that Iran could face “bombing the likes of which they have never seen before” if it continued to rebuff negotiations. The remarks carried added weight amid recent U.S. military deployments in the Gulf region.

In turn, Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei condemned the threats, and warned that any U.S. aggression would provoke a “strong and reciprocal blow,” reaffirming Iran’s resistance to what he characterised as foreign coercion. Khamenei also criticized Washington for what he described as an inconsistent and unilateral approach to diplomacy, particularly referencing the U.S. withdrawal from the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)—a multilateral agreement that placed limits on Iran’s nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief.

The current standoff takes place against a backdrop of regional instability, including the ongoing Gaza conflict, Israeli airstrikes in Syria, and heightened tensions in the Red Sea. The U.S. has increased its military presence in the region, redeploying naval assets and reinforcing air defenses. Meanwhile, Iranian-backed groups across the region have also issued warnings of retaliation should Iran be targeted.

### **4. Senior Iran Politician says no choice but to get nuclear weapon if U.S. attacks** (*March 31, [Iran International](#), [Anadolu Agency](#), [Tehran Times](#)*)

Ali Larijani, a former chief nuclear negotiator and senior aide to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, issued a stark warning stating that Iran may have no choice but to pursue nuclear weapons if pushed by external aggression. His remarks were a direct response to recent threats from the U.S. President Donald Trump and Israel, who have escalated pressure on Iran over its nuclear program.

Larijani emphasized that while Iran does not currently seek nuclear weapons, escalating pressure could compel the country to reconsider its position. He highlighted that Iran’s commitment to refrain from nuclear weapon development is rooted in a fatwa (religious decree) issued by Khamenei, which prohibits the pursuit of nuclear arms. The fatwa holds significant weight, surpassing political or diplomatic considerations, he said.

“The U.S. is making a strategic mistake,” Larijani said, addressing the recent threats by Trump, who warned of bombings and secondary tariffs if Iran doesn’t agree to a new nuclear deal. “We have stated that there is both a fatwa and that we are working under the supervision of the IAEA, and we are not moving toward weapons. However, if you make a mistake regarding Iran’s nuclear issue, you will force Iran to take that step. You are creating this situation with your own actions. Iran does not want to pursue this path, but when you apply pressure, it creates a secondary justification, and Iran may have no choice but to respond to public demands for security.”

Larijani further emphasized that Iran’s nuclear program remains under the oversight of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the country has no intention of violating its commitments.

## **5. Syria’s Post-Assad Government Takes Shape with Diverse Cabinet Picks** *(March 29, [AlJazeera](#), [France24](#), [Shia Waves](#), [Middle East Eye](#))*

In a significant development for Syria’s political landscape, interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa has announced the formation of a transitional government aimed at steering the nation through its post-conflict reconstruction and governance reform. This 23-member cabinet- without a prime minister- was unveiled on March 29, 2025, and is viewed as a pivotal step in transitioning from decades of Assad family rule and improving Syria’s relations with the international community.

Al-Sharaa had previously been accused of appointing only his close friends to positions in the legislative cabinet. He has since been under pressure from the West and Arab nations to form a more inclusive government reflecting the country’s diverse ethnic groups.

Among the most notable appointments is Murhaf Abu Qasra, a former military commander of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), who will serve as the new defense minister. Asaad al-Shibani, a founding member of HTS, has been named foreign affairs minister, while Mohammed Yosr Bernieh has taken over as finance minister. Anas Khattab, a former prominent HTS figure, has been given the role of interior minister.

The transitional government has also made efforts to include representatives from Syria’s minority groups. Yarub Badr, an Alawite, has been appointed as transport minister, while Amgad Badr, a member of the Druze community, will oversee the agriculture ministry. In a landmark move, al-Sharaa appointed Hind Kabawat, a Christian lawyer and longtime opponent of Assad, as the minister of social affairs and labor. Kabawat, known for her advocacy for women’s rights and interfaith dialogue, is the first woman to be included in al-Sharaa’s cabinet.

The formation of this transitional government has been met with cautious optimism both domestically and internationally. Saudi Arabia, among other Arab nations, has welcomed the development, viewing it as a crucial milestone toward stabilizing Syria and reintegrating it into the regional fold. Europe has also reacted positively to the announcement. France and Italy have expressed support for the transitional government, calling it a step toward a more representative political system.

## **6. Trump to visit Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE in mid-May** *(March 31, [Axios](#), [Reuters](#))*

President Donald Trump confirmed that he will travel to Saudi Arabia in the coming weeks, marking his first foreign trip since returning to office. Speaking to reporters in the Oval Office, Trump said the visit will take place in May or “maybe a little bit later.”

According to U.S. officials, Trump’s itinerary will also include stops in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Qatar, and “other places,” reinforcing the administration’s close ties with Gulf nations. However, officials

confirmed that Israel is not currently on the schedule for this trip.

Trump has framed the visit as a major economic opportunity, stating that it will generate a “tremendous amount of jobs. According to media reports, his upcoming trip to Saudi Arabia aims to finalise a deal for investments exceeding \$1 trillion in the U.S. economy, which will include military equipment purchases. He also hinted at similar agreements being made with Qatar and the UAE.

Trump previously visited Saudi Arabia on his first foreign trip in 2017 when he secured major arms and business deals with the kingdom. Saudi officials reportedly prefer the visit to take place after progress is made on a Russia-Ukraine ceasefire, as Saudi Arabia has been actively mediating between Moscow and Kyiv, according to media reports. The U.S. is hinting at a mid-May timeline.

### **7. Trump Team’s Yemen chat leaks** (*March 24, [The Atlantic](#), [CBS](#), [Wall Street Journal](#)*)

The Yemen chat leaks—now dubbed “Signalgate”—have triggered a major political and security crisis in the United States. Between March 11 and March 15, 2025, senior national security leaders, including Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, Vice President JD Vance, and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, discussed military plans against Iran-backed Houthi forces in Yemen using the Signal messaging app. The group chat was unintentionally exposed when National Security Advisor Michael Waltz added journalist Jeffrey Goldberg, editor of *The Atlantic*, who later published a redacted transcript on March 24. The leaked messages contained operational details such as target locations, timing, sequencing of airstrikes, and weapon systems like F-18 fighter jets and MQ-9 drones. In a serious lapse, the identity of an undercover CIA officer was also revealed to the journalist, but has remained redacted from the public. Critics argue that using an unofficial platform violated federal records laws and potentially breached the Espionage Act. Although the Trump administration insists no classified information was shared, the leak has sparked bipartisan outrage.

U.S. allies have also raised concerns, fearing the breach could compromise joint operations and undermine confidence in American strategic reliability.

Media reports suggest Israeli officials are furious over the leak and complained to U.S. officials about Mike Waltz who set up the group chat. Israel reportedly provided sensitive intelligence from a human source in Yemen on a high ranking Houthi official. This intelligence was relayed in the chats, though the human source was not identified.

### **8. Red Flag 2025: U.S., UAE, Saudi Arabia, Turkey hold joint air force drills** (*March 21, [Nellis Air Force Base](#), [Saudi Gazette](#), [Stars & Stripes](#), [Turkiye Today](#)*)

The multinational air combat exercise Red Flag 25-2 wrapped up at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, after two weeks of intensive training. Held from March 10 to 21, the exercise had 15,000 participants from across the U.S. Air Force, Marine Corps, United Arab Emirates Air Force, Royal Saudi Air Force and the Turkish Air Force. The exercise provided high-intensity, realistic combat scenarios designed to improve coordination among allied air forces and featured a diverse lineup of aircraft, including the F-35, F-22, B-1B, and F-15SA.

The UAE Air Force, Turkish Air Force, and the Royal Saudi Air Force took part in complex air combat missions, working alongside American pilots to refine their tactics in air-to-air and air-to-ground operations. Saudi Air Force officials said they learned some key lessons during the exercise including the importance of flexibility and adaptability during challenging combat situations.

“The exercise emphasizes the need for precise communication, quick decision-making, and the ability to adjust tactics on the fly,” Lt. Col. Khaled Al-Nutafi, an exercise participant from the Royal Saudi Air Force said.

For Türkiye, this year’s exercise marked its return to Red Flag after nearly a decade. The Turkish Air Force deployed F-16 fighter jets, participating in large-scale operations alongside U.S. and Gulf allies. This was also the first time Türkiye used its ASELPOD targeting system in a major international drill, demonstrating its growing defense technology capabilities.

The ASELPOD system is equipped with advanced thermal and daylight cameras, allowing for high-resolution imaging and precise target identification in both aerial and ground combat operations.

Red Flag exercises take place three to six times per year in Nevada and Alaska, with the Nevada-based drills being the most extensive. Red Flag 2025 commemorates the 50th anniversary of the exercise.

### **IMEEC UPDATE: Egypt keen to join IMEEC** (March 19, [PTI](#))

Egypt says it has told India to consider including Egypt in the IMEEC project. Egypt's Investment and Foreign Trade Minister Hassan El-Khatib, positioning the country as a crucial link in the ambitious trade network, has expressed a keen interest in the IMEEC. El-Khatib stated, "We told our Indian friends yesterday (March 18): you need to look at this. Our infrastructure is already in place, connected to major ports like Alexandria, and it's ready." He emphasised that Egypt's position would make it a vital link in the trade network, aimed at boosting economic integration between South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. To complement the canal, Egypt said they have developed an inland road network connecting the Red Sea to the Mediterranean and is advancing a high-speed rail project with German technology.

Drawing parallels with India's economic goals, El-Khatib noted, "India aims for 8% GDP growth, while Egypt targets 6-7% in the next few years. We share the same aspirations to onshore industries, become export hubs, and leverage our competitive labor forces."

## **ISRAEL**

### **• Netanyahu's Coalition Secures Budget Approval, Avoiding Snap Elections Amid Political Tensions** (March 25, [Time Magazine](#), [Reuters](#), [AP News](#))

Israel's Knesset approved the long-awaited state budget for 2025, amounting to approximately 619 billion shekels (around \$168 billion). The budget passed with a vote of 66 in favor and 52 against, following extensive debates that began the previous evening. This approval was crucial, as failure to ratify the budget by March 31 would have led to the dissolution of the Knesset and triggered snap elections, casting a shadow on Netanyahu's uninterrupted tenure.

The budget allocates a record 110 billion shekels for defence, reflecting Israel's ongoing military engagements and security needs. Other significant allocations include 92 billion shekels for education and 60 billion shekels for health services. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich described the budget as a necessary response to the current war efforts, emphasizing investments in infrastructure and support for reserve soldiers.

However, the budget has faced considerable criticism. Opposition leaders condemned it as unfair and disconnected from the needs of the middle class,

Protests erupted outside the Knesset during the vote, with demonstrators demanding action on getting back hostages held by Hamas and expressing discontent over rising living costs. The approval of this budget marks a significant moment for Netanyahu's coalition, providing a temporary reprieve amidst ongoing political tensions.

### **• Israel's Knesset Grants Politicians Greater Power Over Judge Selections** (March 27, [All Israel News](#), [Times of Israel](#))

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition has passed legislation granting politicians greater control over judicial appointments, reviving a judicial overhaul effort that previously sparked mass protests. The legislation was approved 67-1 after an overnight debate, and was boycotted by opposition lawmakers, who walked out in protest.

The new law alters the composition of the Judicial Selection Committee, removing two representatives from the Israel Bar Association and replacing them with political appointees—one chosen by the ruling coalition and another by the

opposition. Previously, a seven-member supermajority was required to approve Supreme Court justices, but the new law lowers the threshold to a simple majority. It also grants the coalition and opposition veto power over lower court appointments while stripping Supreme Court justices of their influence in selecting new members. With politicians and their representatives now controlling six out of nine seats, critics argue the move politicizes the judiciary and weakens checks on executive power.

The law will only take effect in the next Knesset after Israel's scheduled elections in October 2026. However, opposition parties and legal watchdogs have already filed petitions against it, arguing that it undermines judicial independence.

• **Shin Bet Chief dismissed amid corruption investigations against Netanyahu** (*March 20, March 27, [Times of Israel](#), [The Guardian](#), [Middle East Monitor](#), [New York Times](#)*)

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's decision to dismiss Ronen Bar, the head of Shin Bet, Israel's internal security agency, has sparked widespread political and public controversy. Netanyahu cited an "ongoing lack of trust" in Bar as the primary reason for his removal, claiming the move was necessary to improve security and achieve Israel's war goals. However, Bar's dismissal has been viewed by many as politically motivated, given Shin Bet's active investigation into alleged financial connections between Netanyahu's aides and Qatar during the Israel-Hamas war.

The Israeli Cabinet unanimously approved Netanyahu's proposal to terminate Bar's tenure, but the Supreme Court intervened with an injunction to temporarily halt the dismissal until a hearing on April 8.

Bar's removal, along with other judicial decisions, triggered protests in Israel, with people taking to the streets to protest Netanyahu's "attack on democracy."

Despite the stay on Bar's dismissal, Netanyahu named former Navy Commander Eli Sharvit as the next head of Shin Bet. However, this decision has faced resistance from within the ruling coalition, with key political allies expressing concerns over Sharvit's suitability for the role. This backlash has prompted Netanyahu to reconsider the nomination, signaling potential uncertainty about the leadership of Israel's internal security agency.

• **Israel to begin building \$1.4 billion border with Jordan in June** (*March 31, [Times of Israel](#)*)

Israel is set to begin constructing a long-promised security fence along its border with Jordan in June 2025, a project expected to take three years and cost approximately NIS 5.2 billion (\$1.4 billion). The fence will extend from Hamat Gader in the Golan Heights to the Ramon International Airport north of Eilat, bolstering security along the porous border. A 30-kilometer stretch between Eilat and Ramon Airport has already been upgraded in line with similar border barriers built along Israel's frontiers with Egypt and Gaza in the 2010s.

The current border fence, a mix of chain-link fencing with sensors and simple barbed wire in some areas, leaves approximately 170 square kilometers between it and the actual border. Officials cite the fence's inadequacy as a contributing factor to rampant arms and drug smuggling, which, they claim, has fueled violence within Israel's Arab community and been exploited by Palestinian militant groups. Israeli authorities estimate that tens of thousands of weapons have been smuggled across the border over the past decade.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has long advocated for enhanced border security, previously suggesting a fence along the entire Jordanian border to prevent infiltration. The new Jordan border fence is expected to be a key part of Israel's broader efforts to strengthen national security.

## GAZA

### • **Gaza's Streets Erupt in Rare Protests as People Demand Change** (*March 25, [AP News](#), [YNet News](#), [Palestine Chronicle](#), [New York Times](#)*)

Thousands of Palestinians in Gaza have staged unprecedented protests against Hamas, demanding an end to the war with Israel and a change in governance. The demonstrations, with chants like “The people want the fall of Hamas,” have escalated from opposition to the war to direct criticism of Hamas’s leadership. Protesters accuse the group of prioritizing political and military goals over civilians’ welfare, as Gaza faces widespread destruction, over 50,000 deaths, and mass displacement.

Hamas has responded with violent repression, reportedly executing at least six protest leaders, including 22-year-old Odai al-Rubai, who was tortured before being returned to his family, barely alive. Others have been kidnapped, beaten, or shot in the streets as warnings. Despite these crackdowns, opposition to Hamas is growing, with some fearing the protests are being manipulated by external forces to justify further violence.

### • **Hamas issues Call to Arms** (*March 31, [The Jordan Times](#), [Saba Net](#), [Telegram](#)*)

As Netanyahu reiterated support for Trump’s plan for Gaza, Hamas issued a worldwide call to arms, urging “all those who can bear arms anywhere in the world to take action” against US President Donald Trump’s plan to displace Palestinians from the Gaza Strip. ““In the face of this sinister plan -- one that combines massacres with starvation -- anyone who can bear arms, anywhere in the world, must take action,” Sami Abu Zuhri, a senior Hamas leader said in a statement. “Do not withhold an explosive, a bullet, a knife, or a stone. Let everyone break their silence.”

These remarks come a day after reports that Netanyahu has proposed allowing Hamas leaders to leave Gaza if the group agrees to disarm. While Hamas has expressed willingness to relinquish administrative control of Gaza, it remains resolute that disarmament is a “red line” it will not cross. The group insists that keeping its weapons is essential for resistance and rejects any agreement that would strip it of its military capabilities.

## LEBANON

### • **Israeli airstrikes hit Beirut, twice in a week** (*March 30, [JNS](#), [The National](#), [Al Arabiya](#)*)

On March 28, 2025, Israel launched airstrikes on Beirut, marking its first attack on Lebanon’s capital since the ceasefire with Hezbollah in November 2024. The Israeli military targeted a Hezbollah drone storage facility in the southern suburb of Dahiyeh, a known Hezbollah stronghold. The strike caused significant damage, with a residential building in the Hadath area being flattened. Israel claims the attack was a retaliation to the rocket fire they received in Northern Israel from Lebanon. They promised strikes on Beirut would continue unless Lebanon’s government worked to ensure such attacks ceased. Hezbollah has not taken any responsibility for the rocket fire towards Israel.

During the early hours of April 1, the Israeli military said it had conducted another attack near Lebanon’s capital- the second one in a week. The latest strikes, Israel claims, targeted a Hezbollah operative who had helped Hamas plan a “significant and imminent attack” against Israel and posed an “immediate threat” to Israel.

The Lebanese prime minister spoke to his Army commander and instructed him to swiftly conduct investigations behind the rocket attacks from Lebanon.

- **Hezbollah warns of attacks if Israeli strikes continue** (*March 28, [JNS](#), [CBS](#), [The Mainichi](#)*)

Hezbollah's Secretary-General, Naim Qassem, has accused Israel of repeatedly violating the November 2024 ceasefire agreement and warned that if the Lebanese government fails to respond diplomatically, the group will take action.

In an interview with Al-Manar TV, Qassem stated that Israel's continued military strikes on Beirut and southern Lebanon violate the terms of the truce. "If Israel does not abide by the ceasefire and the government fails to achieve the desired results, we will have no choice but to consider other options," he warned.

His remarks followed Israeli airstrikes in Beirut, which targeted Hezbollah's drone storage facilities. The strikes came in retaliation to two rockets fired from Lebanon toward Israel, which Hezbollah did not claim responsibility for.

Qassem was scheduled to deliver a speech on Jerusalem Day, observed annually on the last Friday of Ramadan, but postponed it due to Israeli airstrikes on multiple locations in Lebanon, including a suburb of Beirut. He has also accused Israel of using pressure tactics to push Lebanon toward normalisation, saying Hezbollah rejects any deal allowing Israel to operate freely in Lebanese territory. "Israel must withdraw unconditionally, and the reconstruction process in Lebanon must continue without restrictions," he added.

- **Lebanon PM met Saudi King, discuss bilateral ties** (*March 30, [Saudi Gazette](#), [Arab News](#), [Bahrain News Agency](#)*)

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman met with Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam at Al-Safa Palace in Mecca, according to the Saudi Press Agency. During the meeting, the leaders exchanged Eid Al-Fitr greetings and engaged in discussions on bilateral ties and the latest developments in Lebanon and the wider region. Prime Minister Salam expressed appreciation for Saudi Arabia's role in facilitating discussions between Beirut and Damascus, acknowledging the Kingdom's efforts in addressing unresolved issues with Syria.

Following his discussions with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Salam highlighted Saudi Arabia's active involvement in resolving pending matters with Syria. He also reaffirmed his administration's commitment to asserting full control over Lebanon's territorial sovereignty.

The talks covered key aspects of Lebanon-Saudi relations, regional security dynamics, and collaborative efforts to promote stability. Salam commended the Crown Prince's leadership in advancing the demarcation of the Lebanese-Syrian border, emphasizing his government's focus on financial and institutional reforms.

The meeting took place shortly after a significant gathering in Jeddah, where Saudi Arabia hosted Syrian and Lebanese defense officials.

- **Lebanon, Syria sign border deal in Jeddah** (*March 28, [APA News](#), [Saudi Gazette](#), [Arab News](#)*)

Lebanon and Syria have signed a border security agreement following a high-level meeting in Jeddah, hosted by Saudi Arabia. The discussions aimed to enhance security cooperation and address military challenges along their shared border.

The meeting brought together Syria's Minister of Defense, Murhaf Abu Qasra, and Lebanon's Minister of National Defense, Michel Menassai, along with their security delegations. Saudi Defense Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman facilitated the talks, emphasising the importance of constructive dialogue in fostering stability.

As part of the agreement, both sides committed to forming legal and technical committees to oversee border demarcation and security coordination. They also agreed to hold a follow-up meeting in Saudi Arabia to further advance cooperation. Prince Khalid bin Salman welcomed the agreement, stating that it marks a new chapter in Syria-Lebanon relations built on mutual interests and security collaboration.

Both Syrian and Lebanese officials expressed their gratitude to Saudi Arabia for hosting the discussions and reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening regional security.

The meeting came against the backdrop of recent border tensions between the two nations.

## TURKEY

- **Putin and Erdogan Discuss Ukraine War, Syria, and Black Sea Deal** (*March 28, [The Moscow Times](#), [TRT](#), [Middle East Monitor](#)*)

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan discussed key issues including the Ukraine war, Russia-US relations, and regional stability during a recent phone call. Erdogan emphasized the need for Turkey and Russia to cooperate in preventing Syria's collapse and fostering a fair post-Assad government, also advocating for the lifting of sanctions on Syria.

The leaders also addressed the Black Sea Initiative, a 2022 deal that allowed Ukrainian grain exports amid the war. Erdogan reaffirmed Turkey's commitment to ensuring safe passage for grain and oil shipments, even as Russia withdrew from the initiative in 2023 due to sanctions on its own food and fertilizer exports.

The conversation took place shortly after European nations decided to impose further sanctions on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine. Erdogan reaffirmed Turkey's readiness to facilitate peace talks and reiterated its position of neutrality in the conflict, maintaining diplomatic ties with both Russia and Ukraine. Despite NATO membership, Turkey has not imposed sanctions on Russia, instead balancing its diplomatic and economic interests between the two sides.

- **Mass protests in Istanbul over arrest of popular opposition figure** (*March 29, [New York Times](#), [France24](#), [LeMonde](#)*)

On March 29, 2025, Thousands of people took to the streets to protest the arrest of Ekrem Imamoglu, the popular mayor of Istanbul and prominent opposition figure, highlighting the widespread public anger over Imamoglu's imprisonment, which many see as a politically motivated move by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government.

Imamoglu's arrest came after a controversial court ruling, which his supporters argue was designed to prevent him from running in the 2025 presidential elections. As a well-known critic of Erdoğan, Imamoglu has become a central figure in Turkey's opposition, and many see his arrest as part of an ongoing crackdown on political dissent and freedom of expression under Erdoğan's rule.

Protesters marched through central Istanbul, chanting slogans calling for justice and political reform. The rally is being seen as one of the largest demonstrations in recent years in Turkey, marking a significant moment in the country's political landscape. In a show of defiance, the opposition parties have announced Imamoglu as their candidate for the upcoming presidential election, further intensifying the political tension. His candidacy, however, has been made more complicated by his imprisonment, with many questioning whether his bid for the presidency will be allowed to proceed.

## SAUDI ARABIA

### • **Crown Prince holds bilateral talks with Pak PM** *(March 20, [Dawn](#), [Arab News](#))*

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman held bilateral discussions with Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in Jeddah during Sharif's four day visit to the kingdom. The discussions encompassed a broad spectrum of areas, including economic collaboration, defense and security cooperation, and regional stability.

The Pakistani premier was accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir, and Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz. Sharif expressed appreciation for Saudi Arabia's commitment to increasing investments in key sectors of Pakistan's economy. This commitment is expected to significantly contribute to Pakistan's economic growth and stability.

Both leaders reaffirmed their dedication to strengthening defense and security cooperation, recognizing the importance of collaborative efforts in addressing regional security challenges. They agreed to work closely at all levels to promote a shared vision for peace, stability, and prosperity in the region..

In addition to the meeting with the Crown Prince, Prime Minister Sharif held discussions with Saudi Investment Minister Khalid Al-Falih and Mohammad Al-Tuwajri, head of the Joint Task Force for Economic Engagement. These talks focused on attracting Saudi investments and expediting joint initiatives in key sectors.

Sharif's four-day visit to Saudi Arabia comes as Islamabad looks to deepen trade and investment relations with key allies. Riyadh, in particular, has pledged a \$5 billion investment package, which Pakistan urgently needs to bolster its depleting foreign reserves and address its ongoing balance of payments crisis.

### • **Saudi Aramco CEO highlights investment opportunities in China** *(March 24, [Saudi Press Agency](#), [Upstream](#), [Asharq Al-Awsat](#))*

Saudi Aramco is ramping up its investment efforts in China, recognizing the country as a crucial pillar of its global expansion strategy. Speaking at the China Development Forum in Beijing, Aramco President and CEO Amin Nasser reaffirmed the company's commitment to strengthening its presence in key Chinese provinces, including Fujian, Liaoning, Zhejiang, and Tianjin.

Nasser highlighted Aramco's ongoing investments in these regions and emphasized the company's proactive approach to identifying new opportunities in energy, chemicals, and technology. He stressed China's growing role as the world's largest consumer and producer of petrochemicals, accounting for nearly half of global demand. Given this, Aramco sees China as a major hub for the chemical industry and a key driver of future industrial growth.

As part of its strategic vision, Aramco is investing in multiple projects aimed at enhancing China's energy security and chemical sector. These include developments in refining, petrochemicals, and marketing. Nasser noted that as China's oil consumption pattern evolves, there is a noticeable shift from transportation fuel toward petrochemical production. This transition is fueled by the increasing demand for plastics, synthetic fibers, and advanced materials critical to sectors such as renewable energy, automotive, aerospace, and construction.

Recently, China's Offshore Oil Engineering Company (COOEC) signed an MoU with Saudi Aramco aimed at establishing an offshore fabrication yard in Saudi Arabia.

By expanding its footprint in China, Aramco aims to align with the country's industrial priorities while ensuring a stable supply of essential raw materials.

- **Saudi- South Korea look to collaborate on water** (*March 29, Arab News*)

Saudi Arabia and South Korea are enhancing their collaboration to address water scarcity challenges through innovative wastewater treatment solutions. Khaled Al-Abdulkader, CEO of Saudi Arabia's National Center for Vegetation Cover Development and Combating Desertification, recently met with Moon Young-hak, chairman of the Saudi-Korean Society for Economic and Trade Promotion, in Riyadh to explore potential partnerships with Korean companies specializing in advanced greywater treatment and separation technologies for national parks.

The discussions emphasised leveraging Korean expertise in developing small-scale and mobile wastewater treatment systems. With over 400 national parks across Saudi Arabia and a projected increase in visitor numbers, implementing greywater separation and treatment technologies is crucial. These systems will enable the reuse of water for afforestation projects and the creation of artificial lakes, contributing to the Kingdom's environmental sustainability goals.

This collaboration builds upon previous agreements between Saudi Arabia and South Korea aimed at boosting renewable energy cooperation and developing eco-friendly technologies.

## JORDAN

- **Jordan's King Abdullah, UK PM Starmer Discuss Gaza Crisis During Phone Call** (*March 22, Anadolu Agency, Arab News, UK Government*)

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.

- **King Abdullah Begins Germany, Bulgaria Visit for Summit and Security Talks** (*March 31, The National News, Bulgarian News Agency, Bahrain News Agency, Jordan Times*)

Jordan's King Abdullah II departed for a working visit to Germany and Bulgaria. The visit begins in Berlin, where His Majesty will co-host the third Global Disability Summit (GDS 2025) alongside German leaders and the International Disability Alliance. The summit, which runs for two days, aims to refocus global aid toward disability inclusion, with a key pledge to allocate 15% of aid projects to people with disabilities by 2028. The National reported that the first impetus of the 15% pledge came from Jordan. During his time in Germany, King Abdullah is also scheduled to meet with President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Chancellor Olaf Scholz, members of the Bundestag, and leading German think tanks and business institutions. Following the summit, King Abdullah will travel to Sofia, where he will hold talks with Bulgarian President Rumen Radev. The leaders will co-chair a new round of the Aqaba Process, a security-focused dialogue involving regional and international actors. The forum aims to strengthen cooperation on counterterrorism, illegal migration, and radicalisation through improved regional coordination and informal, high-level dialogue.

## United Arab Emirates

### • **Sheikh Tahnoon Bin Zayed visits U.S.; inks deals worth billions** (March 18-March 24 [UAE Embassy](#), [The National](#), [WSJ](#))

Sheikh Tahnoon Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the National Security Advisor of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), recently concluded a significant visit to the United States, where he met with President Donald Trump and other key officials. This visit, which took place from March 19 to March 25, 2025, resulted in a landmark commitment from the UAE to invest \$1.4 trillion in the U.S. over the next decade.

During the visit, Sheikh Tahnoon was hosted by President Trump for dinner at the White House, where they discussed enhancing the longstanding strategic partnership between the UAE and the U.S. The discussions centered around expanding economic ties and exploring investment opportunities in crucial sectors such as artificial intelligence (AI), advanced technology, infrastructure, energy, and healthcare. In addition to his meeting with Trump, Sheikh Tahnoon engaged with several senior U.S. officials, including Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick and National Security Advisor Michael Waltz. These meetings focused on accelerating investments and addressing regional developments that align with both nations' interests.

The highlight of Sheikh Tahnoon's visit was the announcement of a 10-year investment framework amounting to \$1.4 trillion. This substantial commitment aims to significantly enhance existing UAE investments in the U.S. economy, particularly in AI infrastructure and semiconductor manufacturing. The framework is expected to create numerous jobs and foster technological advancements in both countries.

As part of this investment strategy, notable initiatives were unveiled, including a \$25 billion joint venture between Abu Dhabi's ADQ and U.S.-based Energy Capital Partners aimed at enhancing energy infrastructure and data centers across America. Additionally, XRG, a branch of ADNOC (Abu Dhabi National Oil Company), announced plans to support U.S. natural gas production through investments in liquefied natural gas export facilities.

Additionally, Nvidia and xAI also joined the AI Infrastructure Partnership (AIP), an investment fund led by BlackRock, Global Infrastructure Partners (GIP), a part of BlackRock, Microsoft, and Abu Dhabi's MGX to expand AI infrastructure in the US.

### • **UAE-U.S. presidents discuss Gaza during recent call** (March 26, [Khaleej Times](#), [Reuters](#))

United Arab Emirates (UAE) President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and U.S. President Donald Trump engaged in a telephone conversation to address the escalating conflict in the Gaza Strip. The discussion, as reported by the Emirati state news agency WAM, centered on efforts to establish a ceasefire and provide humanitarian assistance to the affected Palestinian population.

During the call, President Sheikh Mohammed emphasized the necessity of delivering aid to Gaza's residents and reiterated support for a two-state solution as a pathway to enduring peace. The conversation also touched upon contrasting visions for Gaza's future. In early February, President Trump proposed a plan involving the displacement of Palestinians and the transformation of Gaza into a "Middle East Riviera," a proposal that has faced widespread condemnation from global leaders. In contrast, Arab states, including the UAE, have endorsed an Egyptian-led reconstruction initiative valued at \$53 billion, which aims to rebuild Gaza without necessitating the displacement of its Palestinian inhabitants.

- **UAE-Russia discuss diplomacy, peace and trade in recent call** (*March 24, [Kremlin](#), [WAM](#)*)  
UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Russian President Vladimir Putin held a phone conversation to discuss strategic cooperation, regional developments, and recent mediation efforts by the UAE in the Russia-Ukraine prisoner exchange. During the call, President Putin expressed gratitude to the UAE for its instrumental role in facilitating detainee exchanges between Russia and Ukraine, the most recent of which saw 175 prisoners from each side released. Sheikh Mohamed reaffirmed the UAE's commitment to humanitarian diplomacy and supporting initiatives that contribute to conflict resolution. The two leaders also addressed the renewed dialogue between Russia and the United States, aimed at de-escalating the Ukraine conflict and normalizing bilateral relations. Additionally, they discussed furthering the strategic partnership between the UAE and Russia across trade, economic, and humanitarian sectors. Both leaders emphasized the importance of strengthening coordination within the OPEC+ framework to maintain global energy market stability. President Putin extended Ramadan greetings to Sheikh Mohamed and the people of the UAE, highlighting the cordial relations between the two nations.

## SYRIA

- **Leftover landmines kill hundreds returning home to Syria** (*March 17, [The Guardian](#)*)  
The landmine crisis in Syria has reached a devastating peak. Many displaced people are trying to return to their homes in the region and are being left scarred by the crisis. Over 200 people have lost their lives after stepping on landmines while attempting to return home, following the fall of Assad's regime in Syria. The ongoing risk of landmines continues to pose a significant threat to civilians, as large swathes of Syria remain contaminated by explosive devices planted by both opposition and government forces during the civil war. Despite the relative stability brought by the Assad regime's military success in reclaiming territory, the remnants of the war continue to kill and injure those attempting to rebuild their lives. The international community has expressed deep concern over the safety of civilians, with several calls for greater efforts to clear landmines from affected areas. Despite ongoing demining operations, the scale of the task remains overwhelming, and many areas remain too dangerous for people to return.
- **New government can't satisfy everyone: Al Sharaa** (*March 29, [Rudaw](#), [Asharq al-Awsat](#), [Arab News](#)*)  
On March 29, 2025, Syrian President Ahmed Al-Sharaa announced the formation of a new transitional government, marking a pivotal moment in the country's post-Assad era. The 23-member cabinet, sworn in at the Presidential Palace in Damascus, aims to reflect a mix of religious and ethnic backgrounds as part of efforts to rebuild Syria after years of conflict. However, Al-Sharaa acknowledged that the government may not be able to satisfy all factions within the deeply divided nation.  
"We certainly won't be able to please everyone, and any steps we take won't reach consensus," Sharaa told a crowd at the presidential palace in Damascus after Eid al-Fitr prayers. "However, we must agree to the minimum extent possible." The remarks come amid increasing tensions within Syria and the broader Middle East, where the aftermath of the decade-long civil war still casts a long shadow over the nation's future. Despite regaining control of much of the country, Assad's government is struggling to reconcile the diverse political, ethnic, and regional factions that make up Syria's complex social fabric.

- **U.S. welcomes Syrian Government but says too early for sanctions relief** (*March 31, [Arab News](#)*)

The United States has expressed cautious optimism regarding the Syrian government's recent diplomatic engagements, but has made it clear that it is too early to discuss the potential lifting of sanctions. While the U.S. acknowledged Syria's increasing efforts toward regional engagement and political reforms, officials emphasized that the country must meet specific criteria before any sanctions relief could be considered.

State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce acknowledged the hardships endured by the Syrian people under Assad's authoritarian rule, expressing hope that the transition would pave the way for an inclusive and representative government. However, she stressed that Syria's interim leadership must take firm action against terrorism, prevent foreign militants from holding positions of power, and block Iran and its proxies from using Syrian territory for their activities.

Bruce also urged Syria's new administration to commit to eliminating Assad's chemical weapons stockpile, facilitate efforts to locate missing U.S. and foreign nationals, and safeguard the rights of religious and ethnic minorities.

"Any potential adjustments to U.S. policy toward Syria's interim government will be strictly based on verifiable progress in these areas," she stated.

While the European Union has signaled a possible softening of sanctions, Britain and Canada have already lifted certain restrictions. However, Washington remains firm in its stance that meaningful reforms must precede any policy changes.

## Across the Middle East

- **Iraq Renews Fuel Deal with Lebanon to Help Ease Power Crisis** (*March 29, [The New Arab](#), [Reuters](#), [Anadolu Agency](#)*)

Iraq has renewed its fuel supply agreement with Lebanon for another six months in a bid to ease Lebanon's worsening electricity crisis. The announcement followed a phone call between Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani and Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri on March 29. Berri thanked the Iraqi premier for supporting Lebanon and its sovereignty and stressed his keenness to maintain communication with Iraq across various sectors.

The fuel deal, first signed in 2021, allows Lebanon to receive Iraqi heavy fuel oil in return, Lebanon providing Iraq with services such as healthcare. The agreement has become a lifeline for Beirut, where power production has plummeted amid severe economic turmoil. The Iraqi gesture comes at a crucial time, as the country navigates post-conflict reconstruction efforts and mounting pressure on its energy infrastructure. Iraqi officials had previously expressed support for expanding the agreement, possibly increasing fuel volume to two million tons annually.

- **World Bank Approves \$173.5 Million Loan to Boost Azerbaijan's Renewable Energy Transition** (*March 28, [Aze.media](#)*)

The World Bank has approved a loan of \$173.5 million to Azerbaijan to support the development of renewable energy projects in the country. This loan is aimed at accelerating Azerbaijan's transition towards cleaner and more sustainable energy sources, as part of its broader efforts to diversify its energy sector and reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

The loan will be utilized for the expansion of the country's renewable energy infrastructure, particularly focusing on solar and wind energy projects. Azerbaijan, which has traditionally been dependent on oil and natural gas exports, is increasingly turning to renewable energy as part of its long-term economic and environmental strategy. The World Bank's financial support is expected to significantly boost Azerbaijan's renewable energy capacity, which has the potential to not only meet domestic energy needs but also contribute to regional energy security.

The loan will help finance critical infrastructure projects, including the construction of renewable energy plants, energy storage systems, and grid enhancements to integrate renewable power into the national grid, as per reports. In addition to supporting renewable energy development, the loan is also expected to create new job opportunities in the green energy sector and improve the overall economic resilience of the country.

- **Azerbaijan officialy a full member of D-8** (*March 24, [Aze.media](#)*)

Azerbaijan has officially become a full member of the D-8, an international organization aimed at fostering economic cooperation among developing countries. The D-8, founded in 1997, currently includes Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Turkey. Azerbaijan's membership is seen as a strategic move to strengthen its economic ties with these countries and expand its influence within the region.

This development marks a significant milestone for Azerbaijan as it joins a group of nations with shared economic interests and a commitment to enhancing bilateral trade and economic growth. As a full member, Azerbaijan is now poised to contribute to the D-8's initiatives, which focus on various sectors, including energy, trade, agriculture, and technology. The country's inclusion is expected to provide new opportunities for Azerbaijani businesses to engage with emerging markets and access new investment channels. Azerbaijan's membership also highlights the country's broader foreign policy goals of enhancing regional cooperation and improving its economic position through strategic partnerships.

- **Bahrain's 'Al Munther' Satellite Successfully Enters Orbit** (*March 31, [Bahrain News Agency](#)*)

The Bahrain Space Agency (BSA) has provided an update on the initial operational phase of the national satellite "Al Munther," which was successfully launched on March 15 from the Vandenberg Space Force Base in the United States. The satellite was deployed into orbit aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket as part of an international mission carrying multiple payloads. Following its deployment, the technical team confirmed that the first signals from "Al Munther" were received upon reaching its designated orbit. Multiple signals have since been received through the ground station, with data confirming that the satellite remains stable and its key systems are functioning as expected. Dr. Mohammed Al Aseeri, Chief Executive of BSA, emphasized that "Al Munther" represents a significant milestone for Bahrain, reflecting advancements in national space capabilities. He noted that the success of the satellite's initial phases is a testament to the expertise and dedication of the project team, paving the way for further developments in the country's space sector. While the Al Munther satellite has successfully reached its orbit, continued monitoring and system checks will ensure its long-term functionality.

## About the Author

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