

CLAWS Newsletter



West Asia Dispatch | Volume II

by Aishwarya Airy



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.

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. Ceasefire after 40 years: Turning point in the Turkey-Kurdish conflict

([Firat News Agency](#), [AP](#), [EuroNews](#), March 1)

The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) declared an immediate ceasefire on March 1, saying they will not pick up arms until attacked. This decision comes after a 7-member delegation held a meeting with jailed leader Abdullah Ocalan on February 27. Ocalan, who has been imprisoned by Turkey since 1999, wrote a surprising letter calling for peace in the region asking all groups to “lay down their weapons.” The announcement comes amid increasing pressure on Turkey’s main pro-Kurdish political party, which has seen several of its mayors removed and replaced by government appointees in recent months. The PKK also called for Öcalan’s release from Imrali Prison, located in the Marmara Sea, so he can “personally direct and execute” a party congress aimed at full disarmament.

The ceasefire signals the first breaks in the four-decade long conflict and could ease tensions not just domestically in the Kurdish-majority areas of Turkey but also in Syria and Iraq where Kurdish forces play a major role.

2. Israel-Gaza navigate critical ceasefire juncture as phase 1 wraps

([BBC](#), [AP](#), [Tribune](#), February 28, March 1)

Negotiations in Cairo over the Gaza ceasefire remain uncertain as the first six-week phase expires on March 1. While the ceasefire has seen the release of 44 Israeli hostages and 2,000 Palestinian prisoners, talks on the second phase—focused on freeing all remaining hostages and Israel’s withdrawal from Gaza—have stalled. An Israeli delegation attended February 28 talks in Cairo but returned home that evening, with discussions expected to continue remotely. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held a rare late-night meeting with ministers and intelligence chiefs, signaling the gravity of the situation. Israel is pushing for an extension of the first phase, prioritising more hostage releases while keeping its troops in Gaza, particularly along the Philadelphi Corridor.

Hamas, however, refuses an extension without guarantees from U.S., Qatari, and Egyptian mediators that the second phase will proceed. The group insists on maintaining a presence in Gaza, even if governance shifts to the Palestinian Authority.

Public pressure in Israel is mounting, with protests demanding the return of the 59 remaining hostages—24 believed alive and 39 presumed dead. The Hostages and Missing Families Forum is urging the government to secure their release by day 50 of the deal.

With no consensus on Gaza’s future governance and Israel’s security concerns unresolved, many fear a return to war—potentially devastating for the region, especially for the two million Palestinians still struggling amid the destruction.

3. Arab Leaders Meet in Riyadh for a Gaza Plan, ahead of emergency summit in Egypt

([CNN](#), [Reuters](#), [NPR](#), [France 24](#), February 21)

Arab leaders met in Riyadh on February 21, for a high-level discussion to develop an alternative plan for

Gaza. The meeting, led by Saudi Arabia, included leaders from Gulf states, Egypt, and Jordan. According to Reuters, the discussions centered around an Egyptian proposal involving up to \$20 billion in Gulf and Arab funding over three years to support Gaza's reconstruction and Palestinian self-determination. However, there was no confirmation of a counter-plan to Trump's proposal of displacing Palestinians out of the strip and turning the area into the "Riviera" of the Middle East.

Beyond the Israeli-Palestinian issue, leaders explored avenues for economic partnerships and joint security initiatives to strengthen regional stability. The meeting underscored the growing urgency for Arab nations to establish a coordinated approach to international affairs, ensuring their collective interests are protected. By presenting a unified stance, the Arab world aims to maintain control over its geopolitical landscape and push for sustainable, regionally driven solutions to ongoing conflicts. The summit marked a crucial moment in defining the future of Arab diplomacy and regional cooperation.

Trump, on Truth Social, shared a shocking AI generated video revealing his vision for Gaza which sparked outrage amongst Palestinians

Arab nations will now meet on March 4 in Cairo for an emergency Arab summit on the issue.

4. Italy and the UAE sign historic \$40 billion investment deal as competition for IMEC's Europe segment builds

([Euractiv](#), [Reuters](#), [Oman Sustainability Weekly](#), 24 February, 2025)

Italy and the UAE have finalised a \$40 billion deal, solidifying their strategic relationship and boosting Italy's role as the UAE's top non-oil trading partner in Europe. The agreement was announced during UAE President Mohamed bin Zayed's state visit to Italy. Over 40 pacts were signed across sectors including energy, AI, telecommunications, defence, space exploration, and building economic partnerships with African countries to advance bilateral ties. The defence sector emerged as a key pillar of the new agreements. Italian Defence Minister Guido Crosetto signed a comprehensive defence cooperation pact with the UAE. Crosetto hailed the agreement as a "concrete step" toward strengthening Italy's defence industry footprint in the Gulf, emphasising shared commitments to security and stability.

The deals involved major Italian companies such as energy group Eni, lender Intesa Sanpaolo, telecoms operator Telecom Italia, arms maker Leonardo, and shipbuilder Fincantieri. Amidst growing competition among EU nations over the IMEC corridor, Italy's growing influence in the Gulf marks a significant geopolitical shift, with Rome positioning itself as a key partner in the region.

5. Middle East becomes middle ground: First Riyadh, then Istanbul holds U.S. Russia Peace Talks

([CLAWS](#), [Voice of America](#), [Radio Free Europe](#), [AP](#), [Reuters](#), [Kyiv Independent](#), February 18, February 27)

A meeting in Riyadh marked the starting point of a thaw in the U.S. Russian relations. Top U.S. and Russian officials met in Riyadh on February 18, to discuss ending the war in Ukraine. This was also the first direct interaction between the two countries since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The meeting, led by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, aimed at addressing mutual concerns and restoring diplomatic missions. Saudi Arabia is positioning itself as a key player in international diplomacy and, experts believe, hosting the talks between the U.S. and Russia allowed it to showcase its

geopolitical clout. The talks, some believe, also allow Saudi to repair its relationship with the United States after the Gulf nation rejected Trump's plan for Gaza.

After Riyadh, U.S. and Russian diplomats held a second round of talks on February 27, this time, in the Turkish city of Istanbul. The six hour interaction, stemming from the Riyadh meeting and a call between Trump and Putin thereafter, saw the officials discussing restoring diplomatic ties and normalising embassy operations. They focused on embassy staffing, banking access, and operational stability. The U.S. State Department labelled the talks in Turkey as "constructive."

6. Qatar Emir visits India after nearly a decade; key MoUs inked

([CLAWS](#), Feb 17-18)

Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani arrived in India for a two-day visit, underscoring Qatar's growing strategic importance for India. The visit saw both nations elevate ties to a strategic partnership, signing key agreements on trade, energy, and investment, including a \$10 billion Qatari investment pledge in Indian infrastructure, AI, and smart cities. Five Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) were signed, covering finance, business cooperation, youth and sports, and document management. A revised taxation agreement aims to streamline cross-border trade, while Qatar National Bank's integration with India's UPI payments system was officially welcomed. The visit also included discussions on food security, technology, AI, and semiconductor development, with Qatar's QIA planning to open an office in India to facilitate further investments.

7. Azerbaijan commits \$2 billion to Pakistan ahead of IMF review

([Azer News](#), [Voice of America](#), FirstPost, February 24, 2025)

Azerbaijan and Pakistan strengthened their partnership during Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's recent visit to Baku. The two countries signed key agreements and MoUs across energy and trade cooperation and Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev promised to invest \$2 billion in Pakistan. This monetary influx comes in time as Pakistan prepares for an IMF review of the three-year bailout program.

The two nations also focused on expanding their defence collaboration, and emphasised joint defence manufacturing to bolster mutual trust and enhance their strategic capabilities. Additionally, Azerbaijan's state-owned oil company signed several MOUs with Pakistan's oil trading and refining firms, including a significant agreement to complete a vital pipeline project in the South Asian nation.

8. Iran's nuclear stockpile up by 50% in three months: Report

([Wall Street Journal](#), [Dawn](#), [First Post](#), February 26)

Iran has significantly increased its stockpile of highly enriched uranium in recent weeks, raising global concerns over its nuclear ambitions. Latest reports warn of a sharp rise in Iran's uranium enrichment. Tehran now possesses 275 kg of uranium enriched to 60%—a level just below weapons-grade—marking a 50% increase in just over three months, a U.N. report accessed by the Wall Street Journal suggests. This gives it enough material for six nuclear weapons, it added. Despite global calls for de-escalation, Iran has intensified its uranium production, reaching 35-40 kg per month, dangerously close to the 42 kg threshold for a bomb. Mean-

while, Tehran refuses direct negotiations with Washington, citing continued U.S. sanctions. Instead, Iran has strengthened ties with Russia and China, complicating Western diplomatic leverage. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi made it clear that negotiations will not take place under the current scenario. The latest U.S. sanctions, targeting over 30 Iranian entities, including the state oil company, have further hardened Tehran's stance.

BONUS: Sliver of hope in Gaza

(Telegram, [Middle East Monitor](#), February 23)

Some students in Gaza returned to school on February 23. Gaza's education ministry said in a statement that students would attend classes at schools that remain standing or alternative learning spaces across the region. Data emerging in January revealed at least 15,000 school-aged children have been killed since the Israel-Hamas war began.

ISRAEL

1. Israeli Airstrikes Target Southern Syria

([The Hindu](#), [Reuters](#), [People's Dispatch](#), [Al Jazeera](#), February 25)

The Israeli military conducted air raids late on February 25, striking what it described as military bases and command centers in southern Syria and near Damascus. The attacks hit Kisweh, about 20km south of the capital, as well as the southern province of Daraa, according to residents, security sources, and local media. Damascus residents reported hearing aircraft flying low over the city, followed by a series of explosions. Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz emphasised Israel's new strategy to "pacify southern Syria" and prevent it from becoming "another southern Lebanon." He warned that any attempts by Syrian forces or armed groups to establish a presence in the area would be met with force.

The strikes came just hours after Syria's new government condemned Israel's actions and demanded its withdrawal during a national dialogue summit. The summit aimed to outline Syria's political roadmap following the toppling of President Bashar al-Assad in December. The attacks drew regional condemnation, with Jordan's King Abdullah denouncing Israel's actions in a meeting with Syria's interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa. Hamas also condemned the airstrikes as "a blatant attack on Syrian sovereignty."

2. Bus explosions in Israel

([Ynetnews](#), [Haaretz](#), [Al Jazeera](#), February 20)

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has ordered an "intense operation" against "terror hubs" in the West Bank following explosions on three parked buses in Bat Yam, near Tel Aviv. Five identical bombs with timers were planted on buses, with two failing to detonate, reports suggest. Authorities suspect a terrorist attack, though no injuries were reported. One device bore the inscription "Revenge from Tulkarm," hinting at involvement of Hamas' West Bank branch, as per local media reports. The Tulkarem Battalion, a fighting group based in the occupied West Bank city of Tulkarem, posted on Telegram: "We will never forget to take

vengeance for our martyrs as long as the occupation is on our lands.” However, the group did not appear to claim responsibility for the explosions. Israeli security agency Shin Bet has arrested three suspects in connection with the bus bombings in the Tel Aviv area. Authorities believe the attack was a failed terror plot. In response, Israel deployed additional IDF battalions to the West Bank and heightened security across public transportation.

3. Seven injured in ramming attack at Israeli Bus Stop

([Asharq Al-Awsat](#), [Arab News](#), [Times of Israel](#), [The Print](#), February 25)

A man rammed his car into a bus stop at Karkur Junction in northern Israel on February 25, injuring 13 people, including a 17-year-old girl in critical condition and a 76-year-old man with serious head injuries. Israeli police identified the suspect as 53-year-old Jamil Zayoud from Jenin, who was living illegally in Israel with his Arab Israeli wife. Authorities believe the attack was intentional and are treating it as an act of terrorism. The attack comes amid escalating Israeli-Palestinian violence in the West Bank, where Israel has launched a major military operation, deploying tanks in Jenin and Tulkarm for the first time in two decades. Over 40,000 Palestinians have been displaced since the offensive began.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

1. UAE-Pakistan sign five MoUs, discuss key projects during the crown prince's visit

([Dawn](#), [Abu Dhabi Media Office](#), February 27, 2025)

Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan was in Pakistan on February 27 for his first official visit. UAE and Pakistan signed five key MoUs to boost cooperation in banking, railways, mining, and infrastructure investment during this visit. Two significant MoU included one signed between Etihad Rail and Pakistan's Ministry of Railways to improve Pakistan's existing railway network and develop new connectivity projects and another between AD Ports Group and the Pakistan Board of Investment signed an MoU to explore the development of a Special Economic Zone near Karachi Port and Port Qasim. Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari also conferred the Nishan-i-Pakistan award, the highest civilian honour, upon the Abu Dhabi prince in “recognition of his services and unwavering support for Pakistan.”

2. UAE Groups invest in India:

- UAE-based Sharaf group announced a Rs. 5,000 crore investment to boost Kerala's shipping and logistics infrastructure. They have identified two locations but haven't disclosed them yet. Kochi is also speculated to be included in the India Middle East Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) project. ([The Hindu](#))
- UAE's NDMC group PJSC inked a MoU with the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority to invest Rs 21,000 crore in the Vadhvan port project. As part of the MoU, the UAE group will invest in developing the offshore land of Vadhvan coast, involving dredging, reclamation, and shore protection. Vadhvan is part of the proposed India UAE maritime corridor IMEC. ([Business Standard](#))

3. IDEX 2025

Abu Dhabi hosted the International Defence Exhibition and Conference from February 17–21, 2025. This was the largest edition to date with products across air, land and naval defence sectors on display. Key Highlights from IDEX 2025 include:

- EDGE Group emerged as the winner at IDEX 2025, concluding the event with \$2.9 billion in new sales with 16 major contracts and 32 international agreements. The group also signed Letters of Intent (LoIs) and agreements with US firm Lockheed Martin and multinational aerospace, defence and security company, Leonardo. IDEX 2025 solidified its standing as the Middle East's premier defence technology exporter. ([Janes](#), [Quwa](#), [Shepherd Media](#))
- EDGE's AL-TAIF and Turkish defence manufacturer FNSS signed an MoU to modernise UAE Armed Forces' infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) with advanced mechanical, electrical, and electronic upgrades for combat readiness. ([Army Recognition](#), [Emirates News Agency](#))
- Turkey unveiled its Marlin USV, a next-generation unmanned combat vessel available in monohull and trimaran configurations, designed for anti-surface, anti-submarine, and electronic warfare missions with advanced weaponry and navigation systems. With its modular weapon loadout, long endurance, and integration with UAVs, the Marlin USV reflects a shift towards autonomous naval combat. ([European Defence Review](#))
- China had one of the largest pavilions at the events with hundreds of weapons and military systems, from advanced stealth combat aircraft, drones, air defence missile systems, armoured vehicles and light weapons of all kinds on display. Top aviation equipment including the FC-31 fighter jet, the J-10CE fighter jet, the Y-20 transport aircraft, the Y-9E transport aircraft and the L15 advanced trainer aircraft and products like the Taihang engine and the AES100 engine were also seen at the expo. As U.S., EU, and Russian sales to the region drop, China is emerging as a key defence supplier for West Asia. ([China Military](#), [Global Times](#))
- As conflict in West Asia grows, demands for missiles are surging and China seems to be swooping in to fill the demand China Precision Machinery Import-Export Corporation (CPMIEC) presented the HQ-9BE long-range surface-to-air missile system and the HQ-17AE low-to-medium altitude, short-range surface-to-air missile system. ([South China Morning Post](#))
- Turkish defence contractor BayGalata is set to expand its footprint in the Gulf and Africa through a strategic partnership with Saudi firm METCO. The company's advanced defence products were showcased at IDEX 2025 in Abu Dhabi, marking the first step in the collaboration. Plans are underway to establish a production facility in Riyadh, targeting regional markets with unmanned systems, anti-drone technology, and jammers. ([Anadolu Ajansi](#))

SAUDI ARABIA

1. Saudi Defence Minister meets U.S. Defence Secretary at the Pentagon

(Al Arabiya, U.S. DoD, February 25)

U.S. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth hosted Saudi Defense Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman at the Pentagon to discuss strengthening bilateral ties and regional security. A key focus was countering Iran's influence, with Hegseth reaffirming U.S. commitment to preventing Iran's nuclear ambitions and eliminating Houthi threats. Both leaders emphasised expanding military interoperability, intelligence-sharing, and counterterrorism efforts against ISIS and al-Qaeda. Saudi Arabia's role as a Gulf leader was highlighted as crucial in stabilising the Middle East. The meeting underscored deepening defense cooperation as a cornerstone of U.S.-Saudi relations.

2. Saudi Arabia Deploys First THAAD System Ahead of Schedule, Enhancing Air Defense Capabilities

([Janes](#), 25 February)

The Royal Saudi Air Defense Forces (RSADF) have officially begun deploying their first Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system, a year ahead of schedule, marking a significant milestone in the kingdom's air defense capabilities. Initially, the first Saudi THAAD battery was expected to be operational by 2026, with full deployment across seven sites by 2028. But, in a video released by the Saudi Ministry of Defense, RSADF commander Lieutenant General Mazyad Sulaiman al-Amro, was attending the Air Defense Forces Institute's annual graduation ceremony in Jeddah, where he was shown a poster saying the THAAD began deployment on either 2 or 3 Shaban 1446 (the Arabic numerals for 2 and 3 are difficult to tell apart), a Hijri date that corresponds to 1 or 2 February, as per Janes. This deployment comes soon after the graduation of Saudi THAAD operators from Fort Bliss, Texas, in late 2024. Developed by Lockheed Martin, THAAD intercepts ballistic missiles in their terminal phase, enhancing regional security. Additionally, Saudi Arabia has integrated the Thales Ground Master 200 radar and RapidRanger short-range air defense system, confirming the first delivery of Thales' ForceShield system to the kingdom.

3. Saudi Arabia and AIIB Sign Framework to Boost Sustainable Infrastructure Development

([Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank](#), February 17)

The Asian Infrastructure Bank signed a joint declaration with Saudi Arabia to boost investment cooperation and promote sustainable development across the region. The agreement focuses on financing key infrastructure projects, including energy, transport, water, and urban development. It also aims to expand AIIB's operations in the MENA region through public-private partnerships.

4. Growing Saudi-China ties:

- **Governor Pan Gongsheng Hosts the Third China-Gulf Cooperation Council Central Bank**

Governor Pan Gongsheng of the People's Bank of China (PBOC) hosted the Third China-GCC Central Bank Governors' Meeting in Saudi Arabia, marking the first in-person engagement between PBOC and Gulf central banks. Discussions focused on global economic trends, financial challenges, and deepening cooperation in trade, investment, and financial stability. China, the GCC's largest trading partner, aims to expand local currency collaboration, strengthen financial market ties, and enhance payment system connectivity. The meeting also addressed central bank digital currencies and anti-money laundering. On the sidelines, Pan held bilateral talks with key Gulf and IMF officials, reinforcing China's commitment to global financial cooperation and reform. ([The People's Bank of China](#), [China Arab Expo](#), 16, February)

- **New Cooperation between China, Saudi Arabia strengthen economic ties**

Chinese and Saudi companies signed multiple cooperation agreements during a business roundtable in Riyadh, which also promoted the upcoming China International Supply Chain Expo (CISCE). Officials highlighted progress in aligning China's Belt and Road Initiative with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, strengthening economic ties. Chinese and Saudi representatives emphasized the expo's role in fostering industrial and supply chain collaboration. Saudi businesses expressed interest in participating in the third CISCE, scheduled for July 16-20 in Beijing, which will focus on advanced manufacturing, clean energy, smart vehicles, and more. Both sides pledged to enhance trade, investment, and business environment improvements. ([China Daily](#), 28 February)

- **Saudi-Chinese foreign ministers meet**

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud in Johannesburg on February 20, 2025. Saudi Arabia emphasized its strong strategic partnership with China and expressed interest in deepening cooperation, particularly on political and economic issues. Faisal praised China's principled stance on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and hoped for China's continued support in Middle East peace efforts. Wang Yi highlighted the rapid advancement of China-Saudi relations and reaffirmed China's commitment to expanding collaboration in trade, investment, and technology. ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China](#), February 29)

5. Saudi border forces accused of killing 'hundreds of Ethiopian migrants'

([The Guardian](#))

Ethiopian migrants attempting to cross from Yemen into Saudi Arabia between 2019 and 2024 have shared harrowing accounts of violence, with reports of deaths, injuries, and sexual assault at the Saudi border, according to a report by the Guardian. The testimonials shared in the report align with a 2023 Human Rights Watch Report which detailed similar instances of violence. The author of the HRW report said that there's a culture of "impunity and unaccountability" at the border.

LEBANON

1. Beirut airport authorities seize \$2.5 million meant for Hezbollah

([Khabar agency](#), [Asharq Al-Awsat](#), 28 February)

Lebanese authorities seized \$2.5 million in cash from a traveller arriving from Turkey, the finance ministry announced on February 28. According to three sources quoted in local media reports, the funds were intended for Hezbollah, though the group has not commented. One source noted that this was the first known seizure of its kind. The finance ministry stated that the detainee and the confiscated money would be handed over to the General Security's investigation division but did not mention Hezbollah in its statement.

2. Israeli troop continue to stay in five key locations in southern Lebanon after ceasefire deadline expires

([Al Arabiya News](#), [France 24](#), 17 February, 27 February)

Israeli troops continue their presence across five key locations in southern Lebanon. Under the extended ceasefire deal, Israel was to withdraw from southern Lebanon by February 18 and Lebanese troops were to take over the region and begin rebuilding it. However, when the deadline came, Israel insisted it will stay on in five strategic locations, citing security concerns. While initially Israel insisted the presence was temporary, Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said they will remain there indefinitely. While Lebanon has rejected Israeli presence on Lebanese soil, Katz said he has received a green light from the United States to stay in the "buffer zone" indefinitely. Tensions continue to build with escalating Israeli strikes in the region.

3. Hundreds of thousands gathered in Beirut for the funeral of Hezbollah's former leader

([AP](#), [Al Jazeera](#), February 23)

Hundreds of thousands people attended Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah's funeral in Beirut, nearly five months after his death in an Israeli airstrike. The massive turnout, estimated between 450,000 and 1.4 million, signalled Hezbollah's enduring influence despite military and political setbacks. Nasrallah's successor, Hashem Safieddine, also killed in an Israeli strike, was honoured alongside him. Mourners threw flowers and personal items at the coffins, seeking blessings. While some analysts argue Hezbollah is weakened, others see its grip on Lebanon as unshaken, making disarmament unlikely. Despite Israel's military campaign and Syria's shifting landscape disrupting Hezbollah's supply routes, the group remains strong. New leader Naim Kassem vowed continued resistance, reinforcing Hezbollah's defiance. The funeral, marked by Israeli airstrikes and jet flyovers, highlighted escalating regional tensions.

4. Lebanon's new government wins confidence vote in parliament

([Al Jazeera](#), [AP](#), The New Arab, [Jordanian Times](#), [The Arab Weekly](#), 27 February)

Lebanon's new government, led by Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, won the vote of confidence in the Lebanese parliament with 95 out of 128 lawmakers voting in support of the new government. The vote came after a speech by Salam pledging economic and financial reforms and a promise of starting negotiations with the IMF. Despite the Hezbollah bloc not backing the Salam government initially, they too expressed their support in a statement two days prior. They expressed their willingness to cooperate with the government to achieve stability and reforms.

JORDAN

1. Jordan's King hosts Syrian President

([Jerusalem Post](#), [Al-Monitor](#), [Al-Arabiya](#), 24 February)

Jordan's King Abdullah II hosted Syrian President Ahmad Al-Sharaa in Amman for a pivotal meeting focused on border security and regional stability. Jordan and Syria share a long border that has sporadically raised security concerns, punctuating the relationship between the two countries with periods of tension and reconciliation. Their discussions centred around strengthening ties and tightening security measures along their shared border. Jordan also reaffirmed its commitment to support Syria's reconstruction efforts. Al-Sharaa's visit—his third international trip after Turkey and Saudi Arabia—underscores Syria's bid to rebuild regional ties. During the meeting, the Jordanian monarch condemned Israeli airstrikes on southern Syria, reaffirming support for Syria's territorial integrity.

2. Jordan's crown prince discusses bilateral ties with Turkish President

([Anadolu Ajansı](#), [Arab News](#), 25 February)

Jordan's Crown Prince Hussein met Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara and discussed bilateral ties and regional issues, particularly Gaza. The leaders condemned plans to relocate Palestinians and stressed the urgency of Gaza's reconstruction. They also addressed West Bank tensions pledging continued coordination through the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the Arab League Contact Group. Both leaders emphasized strengthening bilateral cooperation in trade, education, tourism, military coordination, and counterterrorism.

IRAQ

1. The U.S. Secretary of State and the Iraqi PM speak about Iran, energy, US business investments

([Arab Weekly](#), [U.S. State Dept.](#), 26 February)

On February 26, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio engaged in a significant dialogue with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohamed Shia al-Sudan during a phone call on February 26.. The leaders discussed pivotal issues concerning Iran, energy, and U.S. business investments. There was emphasis on the need for Iraq to open the Iraq-Turkey pipeline and honor contracts with US companies to attract further investment. Both parties acknowledged the potential for increased American investment, particularly in the energy sector. They discussed strategies to create a more conducive environment for foreign businesses, including regulatory reforms and infrastructure development, to attract and retain U.S. companies in Iraq.

2. Key findings in Iraq's first census in 40 years

([Indian Express](#), [Anadolu Anjasi](#), 24 February)

After nearly four decades, Iraq conducted its first census in November 2024. The results revealed on February 24, share crucial insights into the demographic and society of the heart of the Middle East and, as per the Iraqi Planning Minister Mohammed Tamim, allows them to identify gaps for fairer resource allocation and better governance. The census findings revealed a population of 46.1 million, highlighting rapid urbanization, with 70.17% living in cities and 84.57% in the Kurdish region. Employment rates are 46% in the Kurdish region and 41.6% in federal Iraq. National illiteracy stands at 15.31%, slightly higher in the Kurdish region. Primary school enrolment is 93% in the KRG and 88% in federal Iraq. Federal Iraq reports higher home ownership and better infrastructure.

3. Iraq and BP Landmark Deal to Boost Oil Production and Enhance Energy Infrastructure

([Reuters](#), [The New Arab](#), [Rig Zone](#))

In a landmark agreement, oil giant BP has agreed to redevelop four key oil and gas fields in Iraq's Kirkuk region. These are Bai Hassan, Kirkuk, Jambur, and Khabbaz. The deal includes petroleum production, facility rehabilitation, natural gas capture, and potential exploration. It also covers the construction of a 400-megawatt power plant. BP's involvement will generate over three billion barrels of oil equivalent, with remuneration based on production, price, and costs. The project aims to increase oil output to 500,000 barrels per day from 350,000 bpd. Additionally, it will target reducing gas flaring, a major environmental concern and a top priority for the Iraqi government. This will also boost Iraq's natural gas production to reduce reliance on Iran. All factors combined, this marks a breakthrough moment for Iraq. BP is expected to spend up to \$25 billion over the lifetime of the project, a senior Iraqi oil official told Reuters in early February.

4. Iraq signs key deals with Russia

([Middle East Monitor](#), [Iraq's MOFA](#), [LBC International](#), 27 February)

Iraq signed four key MoUs and agreements with Russia for strengthening bilateral cooperation in various fields, especially in the energy sector. The deals include a maritime transport agreement, healthcare collaboration, trade and investment initiatives, and a protocol between Gazprom and Iraq's Central Oil Company. These agreements emphasize Russia's growing role in Iraq's energy sector, with Russian investments totalling \$19 billion. The two countries are also in talks about Russia's involvement in Iraq's Nasiriyah oil field project. Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein noted that discussions also addressed the resumption of oil exports from the Kurdistan Region to Türkiye, which have been halted since 2023, costing Iraq over \$23 billion in lost revenue.

5. US Forces on alert at Ain al-Assad Base

([Middle East Online](#), 26 February)

US forces at Iraq's Ain al-Assad base imposed a state of semi-alert on Tuesday, closing entrances and deploying Apache helicopters. This heightened security, the first in weeks, coincided with the arrival of a large cargo plane, raising speculation about the presence of a high-ranking delegation or important equipment. The alert follows a period of calm after recent tensions in the region.

SYRIA

1. Syria Launches National Dialogue to Shape Post-Assad Future Amid Challenges

([Al Jazeera](#), February 25)

Syria's interim leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa, has launched a national dialogue conference in Damascus to shape the country's political future following the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime. Discussions focus on institutional reforms, rebuilding infrastructure, and forming an inclusive government. Proposals from the dialogue include drafting a temporary constitutional declaration and establishing an interim legislative council. However, challenges remain, including concerns from minority communities and security threats from external forces.

2. Egyptian President invites Syria's Al-Sharaa to emergency Arab summit

([Shafaq](#), 24 February)

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi has invited Syrian leader, Ahmad Al-Sharaa, to attend an emergency Arab League summit in Cairo on March 4, 2025. The invitation marks a significant step in reestablishing Syria's ties with the Arab world following the fall of Bashar al-Assad.

3. U.S. Says Killed A Senior Member Of Syria Al-Qaeda Affiliate

([CENTCOM](#), [NDTV](#), 22 February)

The U.S. military carried out an airstrike in northwest Syria, killing Wasim Tahsin Bayraqdar, a senior member of Hurras al-Din, an al-Qaeda affiliate, reports suggest. According to U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), Bayraqdar played a key role in planning and facilitating attacks against U.S. interests and allies. His death is expected to disrupt the group's operational capabilities and limit its ability to coordinate future attacks. This latest operation comes amid growing scrutiny over the continued U.S. military presence in Syria. While Washington argues that these strikes are necessary to prevent terrorist threats, regional actors have raised concerns about sovereignty and the long-term impact of foreign military interventions. As tensions persist, the strike on Bayraqdar underscores the ongoing challenges in counterterrorism efforts and the fragile security situation in Syria.

4. EU Temporarily Eases Some Sanctions on Syria to Support Reform Efforts

([BBC](#), [Al Jazeera](#), 27 February)

The European Union has announced a temporary suspension of select sanctions on Syria to encourage democratic development and political reform. This move aims to support civil society, humanitarian efforts, and economic stabilization in regions not controlled by the Assad regime. EU officials emphasize that this does not signal normalization with the Syrian government but seeks to foster conditions for a political transition.

About the Author

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