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Iran

Digest

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IRGC claims ballistic missiles attacks in Erbil

On 13 March, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) took responsibility for a dozen missile struck near the US consulate in Erbil, capital of the autonomous Kurdistan region in Iraq. The IRGC fired 10 [Fateh ballistic missiles](#), including Fateh-11 missiles, which have a range of about 300 kilometres. As per the IRGC statement, missiles targeted an Israeli 'strategic centre of conspiracies,' in a warning that "any repetition of attacks by Israel will be met with harsh, decisive and destructive response." A month ago, Iranian media had reported an unexplained fire at the IRGC logistics centre in the western Kermanshah province, near Iran- Iraq border. In the wake of the IRGC strikes in Erbil, Israeli media claimed that the incident in Kermanshah was in fact an attack by six Israeli attack drones, which destroyed hundreds of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Other reports have noted that Iranian strikes were retaliation against a nascent plan by Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to [supply gas to Turkey and Europe](#) with Israeli help. Later in the month, following the meeting in Negev of foreign ministers of some Arab states, the US and Israel, the IRGC Chief [Hossein Salami](#), while visiting Abu Musa island – whose sovereignty is disputed between Iran and the UAE – warned the Gulf states against developing political and security relations with Israel.

Ayatollah Khamenei emphasises 'self-reliance' in his annual Nowruz address

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei in his annual Nowruz address on 21 March, which is widely seen as indicator of his thinking on foreign and domestic matters in the coming year, focused on the need for Iran to develop a knowledge-based economy.

This year's Nowruz slogan of "[The Year of Knowledge-based Production and Job Creation](#)" was in continuation with previous years slogans promoting the Leader's vision of a 'resistance economy' aimed at minimising the impact of the US sanctions by strengthening domestic capabilities and economic ties with neighbouring countries. In a nod to President Ebrahim Raisi's government, Ayatollah Khamenei said "the country's new policies have shown that the country's economy should not be tied to US sanctions." He referred to recent executions of prisoners in Saudi Arabia, which included Shi'is, as a 'grave oppression', and criticised the racial treatment of refugees in the wake of the Ukrainian war.

Iran and Azerbaijan agree on a transport corridor bypassing Armenia

On 12 March, Iran and Azerbaijan signed a MoU in Baku on developing a [transportation corridor](#) linking Azerbaijan to its exclave Nakhichevan bypassing Armenia through Iranian territory. From the Iranian side, the MoU was signed by transport minister Rostam Qassemi, who had earlier visited Azerbaijan in January for bilateral consultations on facilitating trade and transit, dialling down tensions after Baku sought to restrict the transit of Iranian trucks to Armenia via territories liberated by Azerbaijan in 44-day Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020. During the January visit, the two sides had signed a MoU to construct a new bridge over the [Astarachay River](#) running along Iran-Azerbaijan border. These slew of agreements are significant for transit in the South Caucasus, especially as both Armenia and Iran were not receptive to Baku's insistence on creating 'Zangezur corridor' across Armenia's southern Syunik province to Nakhichevan potentially cutting off Iran's access to Armenia. Iran, concerned by

Turkey's growing influence in the South Caucasus, has intensified its diplomatic engagement with Baku towards resolving transit issues and is keen on playing a role in the reconstruction of Azeri liberated areas along its northern borders.

Tehran releases two detained British-Iranian citizens

On 17 March, Iran's judiciary released two British-Iranian nationals Nazanin-Zaghari Ratcliffe, a charity worker and Anousheh Ashouri, an engineer detained on spying charges. The release came after the British government paid Tehran the debt of [390-million pounds](#), which goes back to 1976, when the former Shah of Iran made an upfront payment towards buying British military equipment. London had consistently claimed that the repayment of debt was held up because of the US sanctions on Iran. The timing of the release therefore, suggests that Washington likely gave [green light](#) for the deal as an agreement seems imminent on reviving the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran. Tehran, for its part maintains that the release of detainees was [not related to the payment](#) of debt and also disputed British Foreign Office's claim that the amount released has been 'ring-fenced' for humanitarian aid. Of note, [Oman played mediator](#) in negotiations leading to the release of the British citizens who had been detained for over five years.

Iran calls Kuwaiti-Saudi agreement for developing a Persian Gulf gas field 'illegal'

On 29 March, a week after Kuwait and Saudi Arabia signed an agreement for joint development Durra/Arash gas field without Tehran's participation, Iran's oil minister Javad Oji denounced the agreement as ['illegal'](#) and stated that Iran will begin its own drilling operations in the jointly owned gas field in the Persian Gulf. The field discovered in 1967 spans an area where

maritime borders are unclear. It has estimated [reserves of 20 trillion cubic feet](#) (ft³) of gas, enabling a potential daily output of 1 billion ft³ and 84,000 barrels of condensates. The recent deal between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait is part of 2019 bilateral agreement to resolve their longstanding dispute over oil output in their jointly-operated fields in the neutral zone. Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah has noted that the offshore Al-Durra field is [purely a Kuwaiti-Saudi field](#). These remarks came soon after he hosted French Foreign Minister [Jean-Yves Le Drian](#), who was on a regional tour to bolster diversification of Europe's energy supplies away from Russia.

Abdollahian attends the 3rd meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Afghanistan's neighbours in China

Iran's foreign minister Hossein Abdollahian attended the 3rd foreign ministers of Afghanistan's neighbours meeting hosted by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Tuxi, East China's Anhui province. During the meeting, Abdollahian called for establishing a [regional mechanism](#) and a monetary fund to support the people of Afghanistan as a necessity, while also reiterating the call for the formation of an inclusive national government. He called for the unfreezing of financial assets of Afghanistan in order to ameliorate the humanitarian situation in the country. He noted that a massive new wave of refugees from Afghanistan entered Iran in months before the collapse of the government in Kabul taking the number of Afghan refugees in Iran to five million and exacting heavy costs on Iran's economy. On the sidelines, Abdollahian held bilateral meetings with foreign ministers of Taliban, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and China also with his counterparts from Qatar and Indonesia, who were present at the meeting.