

Turkey considering quitting treaty on violence against women

Author:

Thu, 2020-08-06 01:32

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling AK Party is considering whether to pull Turkey out of an international accord designed to protect women, party officials said, alarming campaigners who see the pact as key to combating rising domestic violence.

The officials said the AKP is set to decide by next week whether to withdraw from the deal, just weeks after the vicious murder of a woman by an ex-boyfriend reignited a row over how to curb violence against women.

Despite signing the Council of Europe accord in 2011, pledging to prevent, prosecute and eliminate domestic violence and promote equality, Turkey saw 474 femicides last year, double the number seen in 2011, according to a group which monitors murders of women.

Many conservatives in Turkey say the pact, ironically forged in Istanbul, encourages violence by undermining family structures. Their opponents argue that the deal, and legislation approved in its wake, need to be implemented more stringently. The row reaches not just within Erdogan's AKP but even his own family, with two of his children involved in groups on either side of the debate about the Istanbul Convention.

The AKP will decide in the next week whether to initiate legal steps to pull out of the accord, a senior party official told Reuters.

"There is a small majority (in the party) who argue it is right to withdraw," said the official, who argued however that abandoning the agreement when violence against women was on the rise would send the wrong signals.

Another AKP official argued on the contrary that the way to reduce the violence was to withdraw, adding that a decision would be reached next week. The argument crystallized last month around the brutal killing of Pinar Gultekin, 27, a student in the southwestern province of Mugla, who was strangled, burned and dumped in a barrel – the latest in a growing number of women killed by men in Turkey.

Opponents of the accord say it is part of the problem because it undermines traditional values which protect society.

"It is our religion which determines our fundamental values, our view of the family," said the Turkish Youth Foundation, whose advisory board includes the president's son Bilal Erdogan. It called for Turkey to withdraw from the accord.

"This would really break Turkey away from the civilized world and the consequences may be very severe," Gamze Tascier, a lawmaker from the main

opposition Republican People's Party, told Reuters.

The Women and Democracy Association (KADEM), of which Erdogan's daughter Sumeyye is deputy chairwoman, rejects that argument. "We can no longer talk about 'family'... in a relationship where one side is oppressed and subject to violence," KADEM said.

Many conservatives are also hostile to the principle of gender equality in the Istanbul Convention and see it as promoting homosexuality, given its principle of non-discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation.

Critics of the bid to withdraw from the pact say it would put Turkey further out of step with the values of the EU, which it has sought to join for decades.

"This would really break Turkey away from the civilized world and the consequences may be very severe," Gamze Tascier, a lawmaker from the main opposition Republican People's Party, told Reuters.

Turkey would not be the first country to move toward ditching the accord. Poland's highest court is to scrutinize the pact after a Cabinet member said Warsaw should quit the treaty which the nationalist government considers too liberal.

Turkish women's groups were set to protest on Wednesday to demand better implementation of the accord, taking to the streets after an online campaign in the wake of Gultekin's killing where they shared black-and-white selfies on Instagram.

Turkey does not keep official statistics on femicide. World Health Organization data has shown 38 percent of women in Turkey are subject to violence from a partner in their lifetime, compared to about 25 percent in Europe.

The government has taken measures such as tagging individuals known to resort to violence and creating a smartphone app for women to alert police, which has been downloaded hundreds of thousands of times.



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Author:

Thu, 2020-08-06 01:15

BEIRUT: The new glass-fronted buildings in the Beirut port area housed the offices of many media and business enterprises. But all that remained after Tuesday night's massive explosions were concrete mounds and twisted steel.

The final casualty figures are still unknown, with many missing and the wounded still not counted. The toll could have been much higher, but for two factors: Summer working hours and remote work.

Many employees finished work at 3 p.m. and many others were working from home as part of the precautionary and preventive measures against COVID-19. Those

who were in the vicinity have harrowing tales.

In one of those modern buildings, the editorial and technical support team of An-Nahar newspaper had gathered to launch their newest project, An-Nahar Al-Arabi.

“We were in a hall in the upper floor about to end the celebrations and editors of the newspaper’s print edition had started to enter the building when we heard the first explosion,” said journalist Rana Najjar, who suffered minor head injuries.

“The port is opposite our offices and some of us had started to take pictures when we saw the fire. Then a huge explosion followed. Some of us ran under the desks or scrambled farther in search of safety. Others were stuck in their offices as the ceiling collapsed. Shards of broken glass injured many.”

The newspaper was still maintaining a limited-staff schedule because of the pandemic, according to Najjar.

“Casualties could have been much higher if all the employees were present in the building,” she told Arab News. “We could not head to the stairways and get out of the building right away because of the extensive damage. Once outside, we started helping the injured.”

Fifteen colleagues were seriously injured, with others suffering slight wounds, Najjar said.

“A security officer next to Al-Jurdiya building was seriously injured, while a Syrian man set out to search for his brother who was repairing the water tank on the rooftop. I stopped passing cars and motorcycles to send the wounded to the hospitals.”

Najjar found a colleague, Salwa Baalbaki, with a dislocated shoulder and serious hand injuries. “I stopped a motorcyclist and told him to take her to the hospital,” Najjar recalled. “I found an Ethiopian girl bleeding from the head and started helping her.”

The journalist then drove to the hospital emergency room in her own car to seek treatment for her own injuries.

Journalist Ibrahim Haidar, also of An-Nahar, who suffered injuries to the head and face, said he was at his desk writing when he heard the first explosion.

“I got up and went to report to the local desk what I saw,” he told Arab News. “As I was returning to my desk, another massive explosion tore everything apart.”

Once outside the building, a motorcyclist stopped to pick up Haidar. “I did not ride behind him because I started to get dizzy. Another man took me in his car to the AUB Medical Hospital, but it was full of injured people,” he said.

"I then went to CMC Hospital, which refused to treat my wounds. So I went to Khoury Hospital, where I found 200 people waiting for treatment. They stitched my head wounds and asked me to go home. Two hours later, I started bleeding again, so I went back to the hospital for more stitches."

Haidar said the newspaper management decided in March to let employees work from home because of the pandemic. "Two months ago, we returned to the office, but the website employees kept working from home. Hence they avoided this disaster," he said.

Amjad Iskandar, head of the Beirut office of Independent Arabia, said remote work saved many lives and protected completed assignments on home computers.

Ahmed Al-Maghrabi, also of Independent Arabia, was more emphatic: "Thank you, coronavirus."

Employees at companies that keep Lebanon's service economy ticking had similar experiences.

Medgulf Insurance Co., which employs 300 people, has offices in two buildings near the port. "We used to stay at work until 6 p.m. before the hours got reduced because of the pandemic," Ashraf Bakkar, the company's chief underwriter, told Arab News.

"Many of us work from home. Those in the office on Tuesday decided to leave work at 4 p.m., shutting down the server and keeping one employee on stand-by duty. Luckily for him, at the time of the explosion, he was in the bathroom. Had he been at his desk, he would be dead or at least seriously injured."

Twitter: @najiahoussari



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[Doctors on emergency duty describe horror of Beirut explosions](#)

Thu, 2020-08-06 01:04

DUBAI: Badly injured people began streaming into Beirut's Clemenceau Medical Center within hours of the explosion that devastated large parts of the capital on Tuesday night.

Some were hurt inside their apartments by shattered glass and falling objects; others suffered severe injuries while going up in elevators or climbing stairs; still others were bloodied by falling masonry and debris while they were out in the streets.

By late on Wednesday, the number of people hurt in the explosions in Beirut port had reached 5,000, with the death toll rising above 135.

"Blood was everywhere," Dr. Walid Alami, a cardiologist at Clemenceau Medical Center, told Arab News from Beirut, as he recounted the events of a night that began with the hospital asking all its off-duty nurses and doctors to report for duty immediately.

He said a large number of patients, many of them children, suffered eye injuries and loss of vision caused by broken pieces of glass.

“I am 58. I have lived through the civil war and treated patients during the 2006 invasion. I have never seen anything like this,” Alami said. “We have never had a bomb that caused destruction over a wider radius.”

He added: “We handled the crisis well given that we haven’t had to confront anything like this since the 2006 war (with Israel). We dealt with many casualties in a very short period of time.”

The explosions could not have come at a worse time for Lebanon’s health system, which has been ailing for months owing to the economic collapse, electricity shortages and a second wave of coronavirus infections.

Lebanon imposed a two-week lockdown on July 30 after the health minister warned that the pandemic was taking a “dangerous turn.” But on Tuesday, Beirut’s hospitals faced a totally unexpected health emergency.

Among those who suddenly found themselves on the front line was Dr. Ramzi Alami a surgeon at the American University of Beirut Medical Center.

“Like most hospitals in Beirut, we were completely inundated last night,” he told Arab News. “We had to turn so many people away, which was one of the biggest challenges for our staff. We kept the corridors open so that we could bring in the seriously injured.

“I don’t know how to describe what we were doing last night. We were treating patients in the hallways, on the floor – all over the place. There was a power cut early on, so we were treating patients in the dark. It’s indescribable what we experienced and what we saw.”

He said the most serious cases involved internal head injuries, including brain trauma.



Marwan Tahtah

“Due to the intensity of the explosion, people got thrown from different positions or tossed into the air or hurled against walls. There were lots of lacerations, cuts and bleeding from shattered glass.”

In total the medical center had 55 major cases admitted overnight. People with less serious injuries were sent to smaller hospitals in the vicinity or elsewhere.

The explosions left some hospitals in Beirut cut off from the power grid and unable to get damaged generators up and running.

Dr. Samir Challita, based in Byblos, said patients began arriving from Beirut, 30 km away, when its hospitals began to run out of capacity.

Lebanon has not been abandoned in its hour of need. Planes carrying aid from GCC countries have begun arriving at Rafic Hariri Airport. The EU has said it will send about 100 firefighters and other search-and-rescue support.

President Donald Trump said the US was “ready to assist Lebanon,” while Israel, with which Lebanon is technically still at war, said it would support its neighbor with “humanitarian and medical aid.”

However, many Lebanese say that the politicians and bureaucrats responsible for the disaster should face a reckoning.

“The scale of the destruction is unprecedented, even by Beirut’s sad history of explosions,” Nasser Saidi, a former economy and trade minister and founder of Nasser Saidi & Associates, told Arab News from Beirut.

“On a global scale, this was the most powerful explosion after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and more devastating than Halifax (1917) and Texas City (1947) where 2,300 tons of ammonium nitrate exploded,” he said.

“The resulting loss of life and injuries to residents has generated deep anger. The ammonium nitrate had been in storage at Beirut port since 2014, posing a clear danger. It was a disaster waiting to happen.

“This is a case of criminal neglect by the authorities and management in charge of the port, customs, the security and judicial authorities and governments. Warnings were given, but they went unheeded. There must be justice and accountability.”

Saidi warned the explosions will deepen the economic, banking and financial meltdown, currency depreciation and soaring inflation. The destruction of the port will hit Lebanon’s imports of food, medicines and essential goods.

“International aid is required not only to address humanitarian needs but to push for political reform,” he said. “The Diab government cannot continue blaming the accumulations of past bad governance.”

Twitter: @rebeccaaproctor



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Pompeo says US to call UN vote on Iran arms embargo extension

Wed, 2020-08-05 22:53

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration will press ahead with efforts to extend a United Nations arms embargo on Iran despite widespread opposition to such a move at the world body, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Wednesday. The decision sets the stage for a potential crisis at the UN Security Council amid rising tensions in Middle East.

Pompeo said the US would call for a Security Council vote next week on a US-drafted resolution to extend the embargo that is due to expire in October. The resolution is widely expected to fail, as the other members of the Security Council have signaled their opposition.

"The Security Council's mission is to maintain international peace and security," Pompeo told reporters. "The council would make an absolute mockery of that mission if it were to allow the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism to buy and sell weapons openly."

If the vote fails, Pompeo suggested the US would invoke the so-called "snapback" mechanism that would restore all UN sanctions on Iran. Snapback was envisioned in the 2015 nuclear deal in the event Iran was proven to be in violation of the accord, under which it received billions of dollars in sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program.

"One way or another we will ensure that the arms embargo will be extended," he said. "We're not going to let the arms embargo expire on October 18. We're deeply aware that snapback is an option that is available to the United States."

Trump pulled out of the nuclear deal in 2018 and has steadily reimposed US penalties on Iran, leading Iran to step up uranium enrichment and heavy water production outside the allowed limits. Disputes over those violations remain unresolved.

The remaining participants in the 2015 nuclear deal have said the US no longer has standing to invoke snapback. Administration officials and Iran hawks argue that as a permanent member of the Security Council, the US remains party to the separate UN resolution that endorsed the deal and still has the legal grounds to call for the reimposition of sanctions. Under the nuclear deal, the UN arms embargo against Iran will expire Oct. 18 if Iran is in compliance with the agreement. For several months, Pompeo and other US officials have been lobbying for the indefinite extension of the embargo, saying its expiration would allow Iran to import weapons at will and further destabilize the Middle East.

The European participants in the nuclear deal, Britain, France and Germany, have said they have concerns about Iran's ability to import and export weapons but have also pointed out that it was envisioned by the agreement. China and Russia have threatened to veto any attempt to extend the embargo. But a snapback of UN sanctions would not be subject to veto, due to the unusual way the provision was worded. The other members of the Security

Council could, however, simply choose to ignore a US invocation of snapback, which would create a crisis of credibility in the UN's most powerful body.



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Wed, 2020-08-05 02:27

BEIRUT: Beirut is a devastated city. No other word could describe the city after the nuclear-like blast that rocked it on Tuesday afternoon wiping out almost everything after nearly three tons of highly explosive and dangerous chemicals destroyed everything at a 1-km radius and the damages covered a 15km radius.

Shortly before midnight, the Higher Defense Council in Lebanon declared the capital a disaster-struck city and recommended that the cabinet calls for a state of emergency.

Only one word can describe the size of damage that has spread across the Lebanese capital: Catastrophic.

The eastern part of Port of Beirut is completely destroyed and the view is worse than that of the 2006 Israeli aggression against Lebanon.

Military sources told Arab News the explosive chemicals were confiscated few years back, and were irresponsibly stored at Beirut's port under the orders of the judiciary at a close proximity to residential and commercial areas.

What is more dangerous, was the toxic cloud that shrouded the city following the explosion, with health officials warning against inhaling the smog. Ammonium nitrate, as per warnings received on mobile phones, could well stay in the air overnight till the next day.

Yet people casually wandered across downtown area, with some not even donning masks to protect them from Covid-19, let alone toxins taking photos as if nothing would harm them.

One would say with one crisis after the other, the population has grown indifferent to catastrophes.

Ambulance sirens could still be heard throughout the night as paramedics and volunteers rushed to move thousands of injured persons as well as dead bodies.

Several hospitals close to Beirut's downtown area, especially in Beirut's Eastern suburb of Achrafieh were completely shattered by the blast, leaving scores of dead and injured bodies among the patients and nearby residents.

The least critical cases were moved to nearby parking lots while the critical cases were rushed to other hospitals elsewhere outside Beirut, under the strict orders of the Health minister Hamad Hassan that everyone be treated on the expense of the state.

Shortly before midnight, the death toll reached 73 persons.

The number may rise, according to Health officials as missing persons "are turning up dead or critically injured under the rubble of houses and offices that were wiped out by the blast."

The blast was heard over 60km down south, and the impact was recorded by nearby countries with Jordan's seismic center saying the explosion recorded 4.4 on Richter's scale.

Government buildings including the Cabinet's seating The Grand Serail, the Finance Ministry and the Telecoms Ministry have suffered massive damages, while offices at the information ministry, 7 km away from the Port, had its window pans completely shattered by the blast.

The Prime Minister's daughter and wife, who live at the Serail, were treated from mild injuries, but his health advisor, Petra Khoury was moved to the hospital for stitch ups.

And despite the disaster, the Lebanese politicians refused to put disputes aside.

As the Lebanese President Michel Aoun and Prime Minister Hassan Diab called for immediate investigation into this catastrophe to determine who was responsible and what needed to be done to help out, opposition parties initiated a blame game targeting the recently-formed government.

The heads of Arab and foreign states showed solidarity by calling to offer help in an urgent manner. The country, after all, can barely stand on its feet after being battered one month after the other with the accumulation of decades of corruption and mismanagement.

Lebanon, which has been hard hit by a collection of crisis since last October, be it financial, economic, social and health crisis, has now a new crisis to add to the lot: Chemical blasts.





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Massive explosions devastate Beirut, killing scores and injuring thousands
Interactive map exposes shocking scale of Hezbollah's global crimes