

[Interactive map exposes shocking scale of Hezbollah's global crimes](#)

Wed, 2020-08-05 01:49

NEW YORK: The shocking extent of Hezbollah's covert and illicit activities around the world is revealed in an interactive map created by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

It includes about 1,000 incidents and activities spanning more than four decades, including a thwarted plot in Cyprus, a bus bombing in Bulgaria and the group's role in the Syrian Civil War.

LOOK: [Interactive map of Hezbollah's criminal activity](#)

"Hezbollah invests a lot of time and effort in its media campaigns to publicize (what) it wants you to know about: politics, social, charitable and educational activities, (and) its NGOs," said Matthew Levitt, the Fromer-Wexler Fellow and director of the Reinhard Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence at the institute.

"But Hezbollah invests at least as much time, effort and money trying (to) obfuscate its covert activities – criminal enterprise, money laundering, military (and) terrorist activity – in Lebanon, in the region and around the world."

For decades, academics, officials and policymakers have had difficulty accessing comprehensive information about the party's global activities. Its golden rule, according to details that emerged during the trial and conviction in New York last year of Hezbollah operative Ali Kourani, is "the less you know, the better."

"This project aims to poke a big hole in that rule," said Levitt. "(It) will hopefully enable people to have a more robust conversation about the sum total of Hezbollah's activities."

The map is the result of several years of work by Levitt. He has been studying Hezbollah since the 1990s, focusing on its terrorist activities, weapons procurement, money laundering, drug trafficking, and other illicit financial schemes. While compiling the information for the map, he interviewed people around the world, and obtained court documents and government reports.

The result is the world's largest repository of open-source documents on Hezbollah. Searchable by category, location, timeline and keywords, the multi-media tool lays bare the scope of Hezbollah's activities, from the aliases its operatives use and the routes they take when traveling to more complex themes relating to the nature of the organization and its relationship with state sponsors.

"Hezbollah is intimately connected to Iran," said Levitt. "It always has been

at an ideological level, and at an operational level ever since Hezbollah sent some 1,500 Quds Force officers to the Bekaa valley to help bring a motley crew of disparate Shiite militant groups together into one party of God: Hezbollah. There's a lot of declassified CIA material from that period.

"It's also true (that) while Hezbollah and Iran are very close, Iran gives Hezbollah some significant freedom of decision-making within Lebanon itself. The way I describe this is (that) even within a good marriage there are ups and downs. There's a strong marriage between Iran and Hezbollah. Ever since the Syrian war – with Hezbollah and Iran fighting together in the trenches, and together overseeing the rest of the Shiite militias – they have become much, much closer."

In addition to collecting and organizing information that was already known, the map project reveals other details that were not common knowledge.

"There are entries with brand new information, such as the name of the Lebanese-French academic who bought Hezbollah a safe house (in which) to stock explosives in Cyprus," said Levitt.

"There is a lot of declassified intelligence material about previously unreported incidents. In the late 1990s, for example, Hezbollah, together with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, was plotting to target Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union and the synagogue in Warsaw, according to the CIA.

"And then (there are) simply more mundane things, just making more public things that have already been disclosed. For example, (Hezbollah parliamentarian) Mohammed Raad was planning, together with Hezbollah's senior security official Wafiq Safa, to identify Hezbollah operatives who could obtain foreign citizenship and then be deployed abroad on Hezbollah operations."

According to Levitt, the map debunks the myth that Hezbollah's military wing is a disparate entity within the wider organization.

"What this map is trying to do is present information that has not been in the open-source domain at all or not easily accessible, and certainly not all available in a one-stop (location) to people so that they can have this conversation," he said.

"I think that's going to put pressure on Hezbollah because of the fact that, while it has not been super well-reported, Hezbollah does engage in a very, very wide range of illicit and violent activities that often have nothing to do with its position in Lebanon or its hatred of Israel."

Visit www.washingtoninstitute.org/hezbollahinteractivemap to view the map. It is an ongoing project that will continue to be updated with new information and documents.



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Massive explosions devastate Beirut, killing scores and injuring thousands
Saudi Arabia, Gulf countries express solidarity with Lebanon over Beirut explosion

[Egyptian churches open doors to visitors](#)

Wed, 2020-08-05 00:43

CAIRO: Coptic Orthodox churches in Egypt are accepting visitors after a four-month closure to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The decision to shut the churches came during a Standing Committee meeting with the Holy Synod headed by Pope Tawadros on March 21.

The reopening on Aug. 3 coincides with the birthday of the late Pope Shenouda III.

Churches in Cairo and Alexandria accepted worshippers for prayers, while those in cities where the outbreak was limited, such as Luxor, reopened in

June. Churches have taken steps to ensure the safety of visitors and staff, including regular cleaning and monitoring of visitors' health and adherence to guidelines.

When visitors enter churches, body temperatures are checked and there is a disinfection process. Shoes are cleaned with a piece of chlorine-soaked cloth and ethyl alcohol is used to wash hands. Each visitor must bring their own handkerchief. All worshippers must wear face masks and maintain safe distances from one another.

The Egyptian Ministry of Awqaf said the regulations for the gradual return of Friday prayers will only be announced after they are discussed by the Council of Ministers.

In a bid to stop the spread of misinformation surrounding the plans, the ministry said the only accurate source of official information is through its website.

The ministry denied rumors that precautionary measures would include cutting the length of Friday sermons to 10 minutes.

Abdullah Hassan, spokesman for the Ministry of Awqaf, said that no official announcement on the return of Friday prayers has been made.

Hassan added that there have been several meetings on the issue of Friday prayers. The findings will be presented to the coronavirus crisis management committee following the Eid Al-Adha holiday.

Hassan urged Egyptian media outlets to ensure the accuracy and truthfulness of news. He added that people should report individuals who makes false claims.



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Virus-free month lifts Egypt tourism hopes Egyptian icon Bahiga Hafez gets

Turkish women's anger as doubts grow over domestic violence treaty

Author:

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ANKARA: Only days after the sixth anniversary of the Istanbul Convention – the European legal framework to combat domestic violence – Turkey's government has postponed a crucial meeting on a threatened withdrawal from the treaty.

Turkey was the first country to ratify the convention and spearheaded the drafting of the legal text, but recently threatened to withdraw despite rising domestic violence rates in the country.

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) central executive was expected to discuss a possible pullout from the convention on Wednesday, but postponed the meeting to Aug. 13 amid plans by women's groups to stage protests over what they claim is an attack on their rights and a threat to their safety. Among those lobbying for the withdrawal are ultra-conservative sections with traditional pro-government leanings.

However, in a surprise move, KADEM – a women's NGO whose deputy chair is Sumeyye Erdogan, daughter of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan – recently gave its full support to the convention.

"At a time when there is no connection between the Istanbul Convention and the rise in the number of women's murders, it is not rational to declare the convention, which aims to prevent women's murders, as a scapegoat," KADEM said in a statement.

Critics of the convention claim that it threatens the financial and moral integrity of families by empowering women legally, socially and economically. According to recent figures, 155 Turkish women have been murdered in the first seven months of the year. In July alone, 32 women were murdered, with two more killed during Eid Al-Adha. More than 470 women were killed last year, with women's rights advocates saying they were "hunted like birds."

FASTFACT

Critics of the convention claim that it threatens the financial and moral integrity of families by empowering women legally, socially and economically.

Family, Labor and Social Services Minister Zumrut Selcuk has stayed silent despite the rising tide of violence against women.

Women's groups say that many abusers are set free without proper punishment

or with reduced jail terms “because men wear neckties and suits during their court appearances.”

The Istanbul Convention was triggered by a 2009 European Court of Human Rights case that highlighted the failure of Turkish authorities to protect a Turkish woman and her mother from the husband’s domestic violence, resulting in the mother’s killing.

Duygu Koksak, a human rights lawyer, said the treaty is “one of the main tools against ‘discriminatory judicial passivity’ in preventing and combating violence against women.”

Despite laws to protect the family and prevent violence against women, this mentality needs to be constantly challenged, she said.

“The government should show strong political will and refuse to step back and prevent any backsliding.”

In recent weeks, Turkish women posted symbolic black-and-white photos on social media platforms in support of the convention and to show that they might be next to be murdered.

The campaign, dubbed “Challenge Accepted,” drew support from celebrities including Demi Moore, Christina Aguilera and Jessica Biel.

Melek Onder, spokesperson for the We Will Stop Femicide advocacy platform, said there is a clear choice between “supporting women’s right to live decently or turning a blind eye to their brutal murder.”

She told Arab News: “After the isolation process due to the coronavirus outbreak, violence against women increased sharply in Turkey. The latest debates about the potential pullout from the convention added another layer to this downgrading, and monthly death rates rose to about 30 because men became encouraged to kill women without accountability.”

Onder rejects any interim solution. “You either implement it or pull out from it. There is no other option, there is nothing to negotiate,” she said.

“The existence of this convention doesn’t solve all problems, it is just a guarantee for taking protective and proactive measures regarding violence and crime,” she said.



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Flights between Turkey, Iraq suspended over coronavirus
UAE official tells Turkey to stop meddling in Arab affairs over Libya

[Record temperatures, pending deals inflame Iraq's power woes](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-08-05 00:30

BASRA: In Iraq's oil-rich south, the scorching summer months pose painful new choices in the age of the coronavirus: Stay at home in the sweltering heat with electricity cut off for hours, or go out and risk the virus.

This is Zain Al-Abidin's predicament. A resident of Al-Hartha district, in Basra province, Al-Abidin lost his job due to pandemic-related restrictions. During the day he listens helplessly to his four-month-old daughter cry in the unbearable heat, too poor to afford private generators to offset up to eight-hour power cuts.

"I have no tricks to deal with this but to pray to God for relief," he said. As temperatures soar to record levels this summer – reaching 52 degrees Celsius in Baghdad last week – Iraq's power supply has fallen short of demand yet again, creating a spark for renewed anti-government protests. Iraq has

imposed a strict lockdown and 24-hour curfew. So families have to pump fuel and money into generators or, if they can't, suffer in stifling homes without air conditioning.

State coffers were slashed because of an economic crisis spurred by falling oil prices and the pandemic, leaving little for investment to maintain Iraq's aging electricity infrastructure. Importing additional power is tied up in politics. On one side, Iranians demand overdue payments on energy they already provided Iraq. On the other, the US is pushing Baghdad to move away from Iran and strike energy deals with Gulf allies, according to three senior Iraqi government officials. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

Power cuts, coinciding with stay-at-home restrictions and scorching temperatures have extended into Lebanon and Syria, two countries also teetering on the brink of economic collapse.

In Lebanon, residents suffer from power cuts lasting up to 20 hours a day in Beirut even as humidity climbs to above 80 percent, adding to public outrage over the country's severe financial crisis. Neighborhood generators have had to switch off to give their engines a break and to ration fuel, causing a run on candles and battery-operated lamps.

Like Iraq, blackouts in Lebanon have been a fixture of life, largely because of profiteering, corruption and mismanagement, ever since the 1975-1990 civil war.

In Syria, nearly a decade of war has left infrastructure in shambles and electricity cuts are frequent. Last week, power was off for hours even as temperatures in Damascus reached a record-breaking 48 degrees Celsius.

In Baghdad, the roar of generators punctuates daily outages like clockwork. Iraqis find short-lived respite by using public showers set up on the street. The heat was blamed for an explosion at a federal police weapons depot.

"We bring our children downstairs and spray them with a hose to cool them down," said Ahmed Mohamed, in Baghdad.

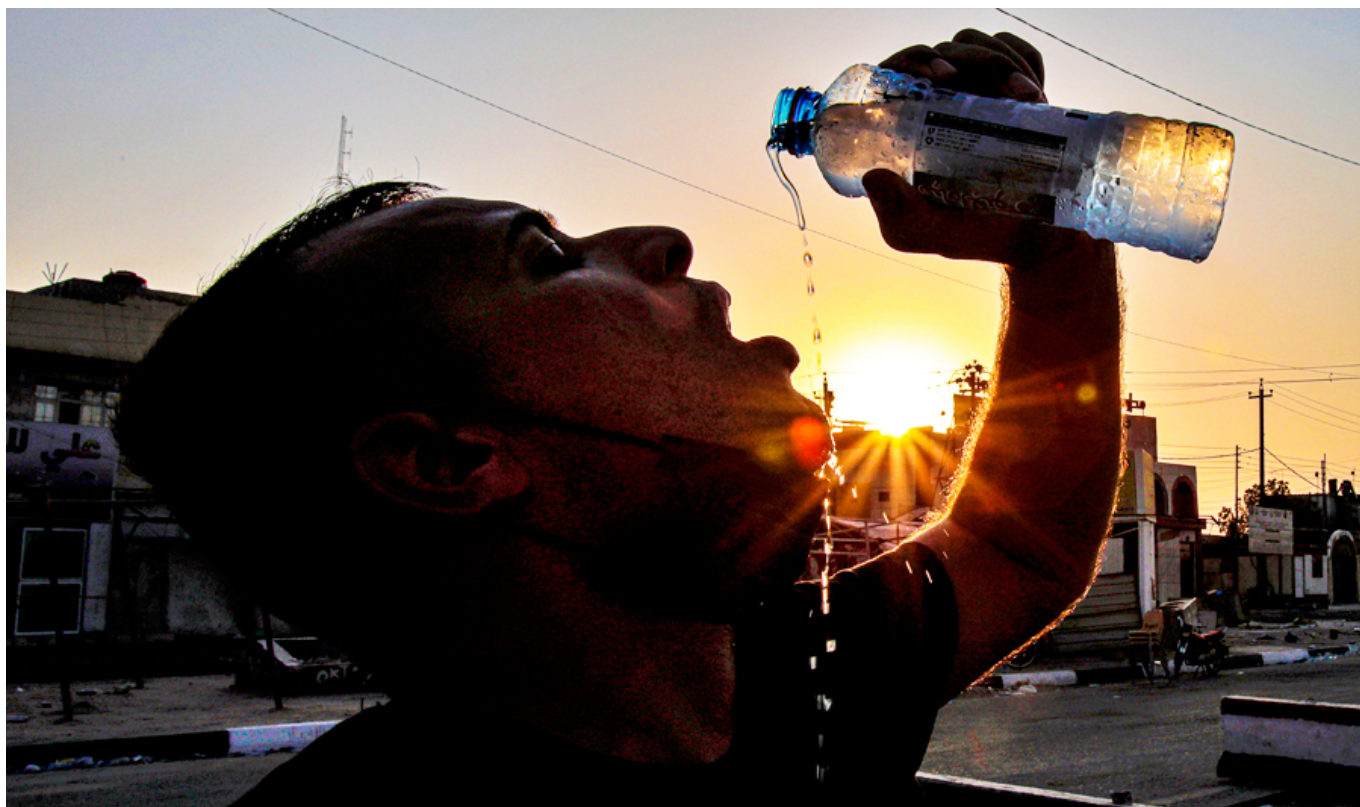
Reforms in the electricity sector have been stymied by protests and the vested interests of private generator companies, some with connections to political figures. Public reluctance to pay the state for electricity has long flummoxed Iraqi officials.

In the summer of 2018, poor service delivery prompted destabilizing protests in Basra. The following year, mass anti-government protests paralyzed Baghdad and Iraq's south, as tens of thousands decried the rampant corruption that has plagued delivery of services, including electricity.

Two protesters were killed by security forces in Baghdad last week while demonstrating against power cuts.

Crumbling power lines mean there is 1,000 megawatts less power this summer. Supply now falls 10,000 megawatts short of demand, a senior official in the Electricity Ministry said.

"You have to work very hard just to stand still," said Ali Al-Saffar, the head of the Middle East a division of the Paris-based International Energy Agency.



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US-Iraqi beauty mogul Huda Kattan to appear in new Quibi series 'About Face'
Mountain lovers wed above clouds in Iraq

[Court testimony claims Turkish general killed after discovering Qatar extremist funding](#)

Tue, 2020-08-04 01:17

LONDON: A Turkish general killed during a failed coup was executed after he found out Qatar was funneling money to extremist groups in Syria through Turkey, according to explosive courtroom claims.

Brig. Gen. Semih Terzi was shot dead in July 2016 during an attempt by some military officers to overthrow the government of Recip Tayyip Erdogan. The alleged plotters were accused of being followers of the exiled cleric Fethullah Gulen.

According to a courtroom transcript obtained by the anti-Erdogan Nordic Monitor website, Terzi's killing was ordered by Lt. Gen. Zekai Aksakalli, the

then head of Turkey's Special Forces Command.

The website claims the testimony came from Col. Firat Alakus, who worked in the intelligence section of the Special Forces Command, during a hearing at the 17th High Criminal Court in Ankara in March, 2019.

Alakus said Terzi had discovered that Aksakalli was working secretly with the Turkish intelligence agency (MIT) in running illegal operations in Syria for personal gain.

"[Terzi] knew how much of the funding delivered [to Turkey] by Qatar for the purpose of purchasing weapons and ammunition for the opposition was actually used for that and how much of it was actually used by public officials, how much was embezzled," Alakus said.

He added that Terzi's knowledge of Aksakalli's murky dealings was the real reason Aksakalli ordered his execution.

Terzi was killed after Aksakalli ordered him back to Ankara from a border province as the failed coup attempt unfolded, Alakus said.

Other accounts say Terzi was one of the main coup plotters and was killed leading an attempt to capture the special forces headquarters in the capital.

Along with the Qatari claim, Alakus said Terzi also knew the details of Turkey's involvement in oil smuggling from Syria and how government officials aided extremist militant commanders.

He also objected to Turkish intelligence supplying weapons and training to extremist Syrian factions who were passed off as moderate opposition fighters.

"[Terzi's murder] had to do with a trap devised by Zekai Aksakalli, who did not want such facts to come out into the open," Alakus said.

Alakus was jailed for life in June 2019 after being convicted for taking part in the coup.



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