

# Lebanon complains to UN over gun battle on border

Author:

Wed, 2020-07-29 02:25

BEIRUT: Lebanon is to complain to the UN Security Council over an "Israeli attack" on its southern border.

President Michel Aoun on Tuesday condemned Israel's action as "a threat to the stability of the south of Lebanon."

He said the strike on Monday was especially alarming because the Security Council is scheduled to discuss the renewal of the mandate of the UN force in Lebanon, which expires at the end of August.

Israel said its troops opened fire with small arms and artillery after Hezbollah militants armed with assault rifles crossed the border into the disputed Shebaa Farms area. No casualties were reported on either side. Lebanese Prime Minister Hassan Diab described Israel's claim as "lies," and said the exchange of gunfire was "a dangerous military escalation."

He added: "The enemy is trying to change the rules of engagement with Lebanon. We should be very careful in the coming days because the enemy is reiterating its attacks and there are fears that things might get worse in light of rising tensions on our borders with Palestine."

The Future parliamentary bloc, led by former Prime Minister Saad Hariri, said it was "surprised that the government response to Monday's events came 24 hours later."

Israeli forces have been on alert along the border in anticipation of Hezbollah retaliation for the killing of one of its members a week ago in an Israeli attack on the edge of the Syrian capital, Damascus.

Visiting Israel's northern military headquarters on Tuesday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israeli forces would continue to take action "to prevent Iranian military entrenchment in the region."



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## [Lebanon reinstates lockdown measures after virus rebound](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-07-29 02:12

BEIRUT: The Lebanese government agreed on Tuesday to reinforce coronavirus lockdown measures after a spike in new cases threatened to overwhelm the crisis-hit country's health care system.

Lebanon, a country of some 6 million people, has recorded a total of 3,879 cases of COVID-19, including 51 deaths.

Activists on social media shared a video of a Lebanese man in his car arguing with security forces after being fined for failing to wear a face mask.

Authorities decided to shut down the country again following an alarming increase in the number of COVID-19 cases. Ministers on Tuesday were tested for the virus before taking part in ministerial session at the Presidential Palace.

President Michel Aoun called for "stricter application" of the lockdown order to limit the "negative repercussions on citizens and residents," criticizing "people's disregard for the preventive measures."

Minister of Health Hamad Hassan said: "People are not abiding by the preventive measures, and people traveling to Lebanon are not respecting the isolation period."

From Thursday, the country will shut down for five days with another five-day lockdown next week.

Bars, pubs, night clubs, malls, pools, gyms, churches, mosques and game centers will be closed, and all sports competitions, events and religious gatherings will be canceled. People over 65 will be told to stay at home and avoid social activity.

Security forces have arrested two Syrians who allegedly forged PCR tests showing a negative result for sale to Syrians wishing travel to their homeland.

Meanwhile, Iran reported 235 new deaths, a record toll for a single day in the Middle East's hardest-hit country.

"We have lost 235 of our compatriots due to COVID-19 in the past 24 hours," taking the overall toll to 16,147, said a health official.



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Lebanon to impose two-week coronavirus lockdown Lebanon 'botched virus response', say health advisers; return to tough lockdown urged

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## Relics of its golden past, Mosul's trains left to rust

Author:

Wed, 2020-07-29 02:09

MOSUL: Nearly a century ago, Iraqis and Westerners stood here with tickets to Berlin, Istanbul or Venice. Today, the rusting tracks and overturned carriages of Mosul's train station betray the city's isolation.

Battered by sanctions against the old regime of Saddam Hussein, back-to-back conflicts and little investment, the once grandiose train station in the Iraqi city's western half is a shadow of its former self.

The first train rumbled into Mosul station in 1940 from the capital Baghdad, then roared out to Istanbul to join the celebrated Orient Express – taking passengers as far as Paris, 4,400 km away.

In the 1950s, novelist Agatha Christie arrived at Mosul station, which later featured in her detective stories.

Mosul was an essential stop in the Iraqi Republic Railway system, which for decades linked Baghdad to 72 locations every day via 2,000 km of tracks.

“Every day, there were either passenger trains or cargo trains,” recalled Amer Abdallah, 47, who worked as a train conductor in Mosul up until a decade ago, when the last train pulled out of town.

At the bombed-out station, the father of five caressed a rusting locomotive, his face contorting into a grimace. “My darling,” he said, his nickname for this train engine.

Abdallah and others have fond memories of trips west to Syria or south to Basra, bridging cities and peoples that now feel brutally blocked off from one another.

“For just 1,000 or 2,000 dinars (around \$1), we could go to Baghdad or elsewhere in Iraq,” said Ali Ogla, a father of seven who used to take the train regularly.

“It was a comfortable way of traveling for sick or handicapped people. When it comes to the cargo, we'd be sure it would arrive on time and in good shape,” Ogla said.

The station was more than just a transport hub: It was Mosul's economic engine and a source of national pride.

“The station hosted one of Mosul's oldest hotels, coffee shops, gardens, a garage for horse-drawn carriages and later, for cars,” said railway engineer

Mohammed Abdelaziz.

Railway and station employees, businessmen, restaurant and cafe owners and taxi drivers all made a living from the train traffic through Mosul, Abdelaziz said.

King Faisal II, toppled in the bloody coup of 1958, had his own reception room within the station.

Egyptian musical diva Umm Kulthum passed through it and in 1970, the station agreed to silence its bells and whistles during a concert by Lebanese singer Sabah.

But in the 1990s, crippling international sanctions made it hard to get parts to maintain the trains and in 2003, the US-led invasion opened the door to a wave of bombing then sectarian violence across the country.

Still, trains roared out of the Mosul station every week, either 400 kilometers south to Baghdad, west to Syria or north to the Turkish border city of Gaziantep.

On May 31, 2009, a truck bomb destroyed much of the station and in July 2010, the last train left Mosul on a one-way trip to Gaziantep.

But things got even worse: In June 2014, Daesh overran the city and declared it the Iraqi capital of its so-called "caliphate." The station, until then left rusting in the sun, became a battlefield. "Eighty percent of it was destroyed," said Qahtan Loqman, deputy head of Iraq's northern railway.



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UN: Reconstruction of landmark Mosul mosque to begin in 2020 Amid security worries, gun sales thrive in Iraq's Mosul

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## Third Iraq protester dies of tear gas canister wound this week

Author:

Wed, 2020-07-29 02:06

BAGHDAD: An Iraqi protester died on Tuesday after being shot with a tear gas canister in overnight skirmishes with police in the capital, medical and security sources said.

The clashes came just hours after Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi instructed security forces not to "fire a single bullet" at demonstrators, following the deaths of two other protesters Monday morning in Baghdad.

But by Monday evening, the confrontations in the capital's main anti-government protest camp of Tahrir Square had started anew.

"He was shot in the head and chest, and more than a dozen others were wounded. He was in intensive care and died this morning," a medic said.

The protests began Sunday night in Baghdad and several southern cities, expressing fury at poor public services as temperatures topping 50 degrees Celsius (122 Fahrenheit) have swelled demand for air-conditioning and overwhelmed dilapidated power grids. The protests quickly turned violent in the capital, with two men dying on Monday morning after being hit directly by tear gas canisters that are otherwise fired in arced and less powerful trajectories to disperse protesters.

The deaths threaten to reignite an unprecedented protest movement against government graft and incompetence that erupted across Baghdad and southern Iraq in October.

Violence at those grassroots rallies had left around 550 people dead and more than 30,000 wounded, and prompted the resignation of then-premier Adel Abdul Mahdi.

Abdel Mahdi was widely criticized for failing to hold security forces to account and Kadhimi, who came to power in May, vowed to be different.

He pledged to carry out a probe into protester deaths and promised dialogue with the movement, which had largely died down following a surge in

geopolitical tensions and amid the coronavirus pandemic.



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## [Hezbollah playing with fire: Netanyahu](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-07-28 00:59

BEIRUT: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Hezbollah was “playing with fire” after border clashes on Monday. The Lebanese Shiite group denied all involvement.

Netanyahu said that Hezbollah and the Lebanese government “bear responsibility” for the attempt by gunmen to infiltrate Israeli territory, which resulted in an exchange of gunfire but no reported casualties.

“Hezbollah is playing with fire and our response will be very strong,” the Israeli premier said.

His remarks came as the head of the UNIFIL mission, Maj. Gen. Stefano Del Cole, urged both the Lebanese and Israeli sides to exercise maximum restraint after the Hezbollah attack on Monday, which reportedly targeted an Israeli military patrol.

Hezbollah's operation was in response to the Israeli airstrike south of the Syrian capital, Damascus, on July 20, killing Ali Kamel Mohsen Jawad, a member of Hezbollah.

Jawad was the first Hezbollah fighter to die in Syria since the group's secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah warned in August 2019 that "the death of any Hezbollah fighter in Syria will cause a response from Lebanon."

Lebanese reporters stationed along the southern border for days in an anticipation of a response from Hezbollah said that "a Kornet missile attack targeted an Israeli vehicle, while gunfire targeted an Israeli car in the Ruwaysat Al-Alam region in the Shebaa Farms."

A spokesman for the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), Avichay Adraee, said: "The Israeli army thwarted a sabotage operation planned and carried out by a Hezbollah cell of 3 to 4 members who advanced a few meters into a sovereign Israeli area. No casualties were recorded among Israeli soldiers, while the health condition of the infiltrators remains unknown."

Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz had said on Sunday that "Israel does not seek escalation but will firmly respond to any attack targeting it."

The Israeli artillery responded by shelling Lebanese border areas with the Lebanese National News Agency (NNA) saying that "155 millimeter shells targeted the eastern heights of the town of Kafr Shuba and the Ruwaysat Al-Alam area for an hour, causing fires."

Ruwaysat Al-Alam has a Lebanese Army base and a UNIFIL base.

Extensive overflights were carried out by Israeli fighters, reconnaissance aircrafts and helicopters at a low altitude in the region.

"An artillery shell fell on the house of citizen Fawzi Abu Alwan in the town of Habariyeh as a result of the Israeli shelling of Lebanese villages in Al-Arqoub area," the NNA reported.

Israeli reconnaissance aircrafts were continuously present in the Lebanese airspace throughout the weekend, while an Israeli drone was shot down inside the Lebanese territory.

Netanyahu said that he was following up on what is happening on the northern borders, stressing that "the army is ready to deal with all scenarios."

"Our policy is clear. We will not allow Iran to have a military foothold along our borders with Syria" Netanyahu said on social media. "We set this policy years ago and we are committed to it. Lebanon and Syria bear the responsibility for any attack launched from their territories against us."

Prime Minister Hassan Diab spoke to President Michel Aoun, Speaker Nabih Berri and Lebanese army commander Joseph Aoun to follow up on the latest developments.

Lebanese Foreign Minister, Nassif Hitti, told Sky News that “Lebanon has the right to defend itself against any Israeli aggression on its territory,” noting that “Israel’s history in the region is an aggressive one.”

Hezbollah denied any involvement in the fighting: “Everything the enemy’s media has claimed about thwarting an infiltration operation from Lebanon into occupied Palestine and the death and injury of Hezbollah members in the shelling that targeted the area surrounding sites controlled by the occupying army in the Shebaa Farms area is completely false. It is an attempt to create imaginary and fake victories,” it said.

“The Islamic Resistance did not clash or shoot during today’s events. It was rather a one-sided incident carried out by the fearful, anxious and tense enemy.

“Our response to the killing of Ali Kamel Mohsen, who died in an attack in the vicinity of Damascus International Airport is coming. Zionists can only wait to receive the punishment for their crimes. The shelling of Habariyeh today, which hit a civilian home, will not be tolerated.”



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Lebanese frontier