

# US, UK warn against escalating sectarianism in Lebanon

Author:

Wed, 2019-08-07 22:44

BEIRUT: The US Embassy in Lebanon warned that “any attempt to exploit the tragic incident that took place in Kabreshmoun on June 30 to promote political objectives must be rejected.”

The statement comes during Lebanon’s escalating political crisis, which has been ongoing for more than two months.

The crisis has peaked during the last 48 hours, where efforts aimed at reaching a political consensus on the judicial measures for the Kabreshmoun shooting have failed.

There was open confrontation between the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) and the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), with the PSP including the Lebanese President Michel Aoun and the judiciary in its accusations.

“The US supports a fair and transparent judicial review free of any political influence. We clearly expressed to the Lebanese authorities that they are expected to handle the incident in a manner that achieves justice without inciting sectarian and regional conflicts with political backgrounds,” said the US Embassy.

“Lebanon’s stability is a priority to us,” said Britain’s Ambassador to Lebanon Chris Rampling as he visited Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri.

“We urge everyone to focus on economic development at this stage. The adoption of the state budget was an important first step but still needs a lot of work,” Rampling added.

The shooting took place when the head of the FPM, Gebran Bassil, visited the site of massacres between Christians and Druze during the civil war.

Supporters of the PSP staged protests to prevent the visit, triggering a shootout after the arrival of the minister of the displaced, Saleh Al-Gharib. Two of his bodyguards were killed.

Minister Al-Gharib is a member of the PSP’s rival party and an ally of Hezbollah and the Syrian regime.

The incident received significant political and judicial attention, which has paralyzed the government for over a month. The PSP accused the FPM of wanting to eliminate it by pressuring the military judiciary to manipulate the investigation.

Aoun affirmed his “commitment to the judiciary, which has the authority to act firmly and punish according to the laws,” as he received a youth

delegation on Wednesday.

Berri said that he “will not allow anything that could divide the Lebanese people,” and that “political, security and financial stability is required from everyone, as international financial institutions are concerned about Lebanon’s situation.

“A complete and comprehensive reconciliation is necessary to hold government sessions. There is no need for panic as it will vanish with the government’s first session.”

An international report on Lebanon’s financial classification is expected to be issued on Aug. 23, with the Lebanese Central Bank Gov. Riad Salameh rejecting suggestions that the country is bankrupt.



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[\*\*Qatari tycoon brothers and Doha Bank\*\*](#)

# sued for funding Syrian militants

Wed, 2019-08-07 21:12

LONDON: Two billionaire Qatari brothers and a Doha-based bank are being sued in a British court for channeling cash to Al-Nusra Front militants in Syria.

Moutaz and Ramez Al-Khayyat are accused of using their accounts at Doha Bank to fund the Al-Qaeda-affiliated group. They are being sued at the High Court in London by eight Syrians who say they lost homes and businesses, and suffered physical and mental harm, because of Al-Nusra's activities.

The Syrian claimants live in Europe, and have been granted anonymity by the court.

"The Khayyat brothers financed and/or assisted in financing Al-Nusra Front, including through accounts held by them and/or entities associated with them at Doha Bank," the lawsuit alleges.

The claimants say funds were sent through the bank to accounts in Turkey and Lebanon, where cash was withdrawn and taken across the Syrian border to the militants. "As a result of the defendants' actions, Al-Nusra Front was able to cause loss and damage to the claimants," the lawsuit says.

The claimants say Doha Bank and the two businessmen "knew (or ought to have known) that the funds that passed from them or through their accounts were intended for Al-Nusra Front," and that they had therefore "breached international and national laws."

A spokesman for Doha Bank said they were taking legal advice but believed the claim to be "groundless and without merit."

The Khayyat brothers run Power International Holding, one of Qatar's largest conglomerates, with interests in construction, property and dairy farming. One of their property developments is next to the Iranian Embassy in London.

Doha Bank's largest shareholder is the Qatar Investment Authority, the state's sovereign wealth fund, and its chairman is Sheikh Fahad bin Mohammad bin Jabor Al-Thani, a member of the ruling family.

The Anti-Terror Quartet of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain imposed a trade, travel and diplomatic boycott on Qatar in June 2017 because of Doha's support for extremist groups and funding of terrorism.



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## [Clashes erupt in Yemen's Aden, killing one](#)

Wed, 2019-08-07 19:19

JEDDAH: Southern separatists clashed Wednesday with presidential guards in Aden, the seat of Yemen's government, with one person killed and at least two badly injured, local officials and residents told Reuters.

The separatists and the internationally recognized government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi are united in their battle against the Iranian-backed Houthi militia but tensions have previously spilled over between the groups. The clashes Wednesday took place after hundreds of separatist supporters attended a funeral for some southern troops and a prominent commander.

The funeral took place near the hilltop presidential palace and shooting was exchanged between presidential guards and the crowd.

UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash called for calm, saying communication and dialogue, not violence, was needed.

The UAE, along with Saudi Arabia, is a member of the Arab military coalition supporting the internationally recognized government.

The United Nations special envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, said he was "alarmed by the military escalations in Aden, including reports of clashes in the vicinity of the Presidential Palace."

I call on the parties involved to abandon violence and engage in dialogue to resolve differences. I also urge all those with influence to de-escalate the situation and ensure the protection of civilians. <https://t.co/NsSDERtP5F>

– OSE\_Yemen (@OSE\_Yemen) [August 7, 2019](#)

"I am also deeply concerned by the recent rhetoric encouraging violence against Yemeni institutions," he said.

*(With Reuters and AFP)*



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## [Turkey, US to set up 'joint operation centre' for north Syria: ministry](#)

Wed, 2019-08-07 17:00

ISTANBUL: Turkey and the United States said they agreed on Wednesday to establish a joint operation centre in Turkey to coordinate and manage a planned safe zone in northern Syria.

After three days of talks in Ankara, the two countries said the safe zone on Syria's northeast border with Turkey should be a "peace corridor," and that every effort would be made so that Syrians displaced by war can return to their country.

The agreement was announced in separate statements issued by Turkey's Defence Ministry and the U.S. Embassy in Ankara.

Neither statement said whether they had overcome two main points that had divided Washington and Ankara: how far the proposed safe zone should extend into Syria, and who would command forces patrolling the area.

Turkey's lira strengthened after the announcement, which followed warnings from Turkey that it could launch unilateral military action in northern Syria if Ankara and Washington failed to reach agreement on the safe zone. The lira stood at 5.478 at 1413 GMT, up nearly 1% on the day.

Turkey and the United States, allies in NATO, have been deadlocked for months over the scope and command of the zone, given the presence of Kurdish YPG militia that fought alongside U.S. forces against Islamic State militants, but which Ankara sees as terrorists who pose a grave security threat.

Ankara has accused Washington of stalling on setting up the safe zone, which would extend hundreds of kilometres along Syria's northeastern border, and has demanded that the United States sever its ties with the YPG.

Defence Minister Hulusi Akar had said earlier that the United States was shifting closer to Ankara's views on the proposed safe zone, adding that Turkey's plans for a military deployment there are complete.

"Our plans, preparations, the deployment of our units in the field are all complete. But we said we wanted to act together with our friend and ally, the United States," state-owned Anadolu Agency quoted him as saying.

#### IMMINENT INCURSION

Washington has proposed a two-tiered safe zone, with a 5-kilometre demilitarised strip bolstered by an additional 9 km cleared of heavy weapons – stretching in total less than half the distance into Syria that Turkey is seeking.

Turkey has also said it must have ultimate authority over the zone, another point of divergence with the United States.

Three Turkish officials who spoke to Reuters this week had expressed impatience that the talks have yet to yield results, and warned that Ankara was ready to act on its own.

Turkey has twice sent forces into northern Syria in the last three years, citing security concerns caused by Syria's eight-year-long civil war, and President Tayyip Erdogan said on Sunday a third incursion was imminent, targeting YPG-controlled territory east of the Euphrates river.

U.S. President Donald Trump announced last year that U.S. forces would leave Syria and began an initial withdrawal, a decision applauded by Ankara, and the two NATO allies agreed to create the safe zone.

On Tuesday, a U.S. Defense Department report warned about a revival of Islamic State in Syria's northeast, saying U.S.-backed Kurdish groups were not equipped to handle the resurgent jihadist cells without U.S. support. "The partial (U.S.) drawdown (has) occurred at a time when these fighters need additional training and equipping to build trust with local communities and to develop the human-based intelligence necessary to confront resurgent (Islamic State) cells and insurgent capabilities in Syria," the report said.



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## [Turkish court orders closure of independent news site Bianet](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-08-06 21:49

ISTANBUL: A Turkish court has ordered the blocking of news site Bianet, known for its human rights coverage, on “national security” grounds, according to a decision published on Tuesday.

The decision also targeted 135 other online addresses including YouTube and DailyMotion videos, as well as the Twitter account of Kurdish Member of Parliament Oya Ersoy.

The court in Ankara said the decision – which followed a police request – would “protect ... national security and public order,” without explaining how.

Founded in Istanbul in 1997, Bianet is well-known in Turkey for its articles on human rights, violence against women and its exhaustive coverage of trials linked to freedom of expression. Its articles are published in Turkish, English and Kurdish.

“The decision has not even been transmitted to Bianet, we found out by chance,” the site’s lawyer, Meric Eyboglu, told AFP.

“We were able to confirm that the decision covers the entirety of the website – it will be totally blocked. The closure of the site could happen at any moment,” she said.

An article on Bianet said more than 200,000 of its articles would be lost by the shutdown.

The local chapter of Reporters Without Borders (RSF) decried the decision as “scandalous” and “totally arbitrary,” calling for it to be overturned.

Rights groups have regularly criticized the erosion of free speech in Turkey under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, especially since a failed coup attempt in 2016 triggered a massive crackdown on government critics in the press and beyond.

Turkey is the only country apart from China to block Wikipedia, and was ranked 157th out of 180 countries for freedom of the press in the most recent RSF list.



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