

# 3 radio stations and TV channel suspend broadcasting amid Lebanon fuel crisis

Author:

Sun, 2021-08-22 03:18

BEIRUT: Three radio stations and a TV channel in Lebanon have been forced to temporarily suspend broadcasting due to the country's fuel crisis, with a government minister saying she had requested support for media outlets but to no avail.

Information Minister Manal Abdel Samad said: "Even Radio Liban, which speaks on behalf of the state, stops broadcasting whenever the electricity is cut off from the transmission centers spread across all Lebanese territories, and the government-owned Télé Liban (TL) will gradually stop broadcasting. The TL administration said that broadcast is being suspended between midnight and seven in the morning in order to save on fuel."

She added that she had "sent letters to the minister of energy and the army commander, requesting support for official and private media institutions, but neither responded."

Radio Sawt El-Shaab, which is not affiliated with any political party, announced on Friday evening that it would temporarily suspend its programs due to the fuel crisis and because its guests could not reach its headquarters in Beirut.

Radio Al-Sharq and Future TV, both of which are affiliated with the Future Movement political party, also suspended broadcasting.

Radio Al-Sharq's director, Kamal Richa, told Arab News: "The radio station, which was established in 1994, has never stopped broadcasting. But we had to turn off our generators due to the shortage of diesel, and the broadcasting stopped a few days ago."

Both outlets are owned by former Prime Minister Saad Hariri. They faced a severe financial crisis years ago that led to a large number of employees being laid off and TV content being limited to shows from the archive, while 22 employees remain at the radio station.

Richa added: "The radio administration secured on Saturday a quantity of diesel and informed us that we can resume broadcasting on Sunday, starting at seven in the morning. However, we might have to stop broadcasting again, as nothing is guaranteed in Lebanon."

On Tuesday, Lebanese Army Command announced that "a three-day crackdown" carried out by units in various regions had resulted in the seizure of 4,392,725 liters of gasoline and 221,140 liters of diesel that had been stored for smuggling or for sale, either on the black market or at high prices after fuel subsidies were lifted.

"The owners of these quantities were obliged to either sell them at the subsidized price or they would be seized and given to hospitals, bakeries, and private generators that have stopped working or are about to stop," it said.

The Audio-Visual Media Workers Syndicate appealed to Abdel Samad “to seek with those concerned to find a special mechanism that allows workers to obtain gasoline, to facilitate the task of media professionals.”

## **HIGHLIGHT**

**Lebanese Army Command announced that ‘a three-day crackdown’ carried out by units in various regions had resulted in the seizure of 4,392,725 liters of gasoline and 221,140 liters of diesel that had been stored for smuggling or for sale.**

The minister said: “I seek to give priority to the media after the health sector, as we did in the COVID-19 vaccination campaign. But the crisis is too severe this time.”

Information International, a research firm in Beirut, said the lack of fuel and resorting to the black market or queuing for hours at stations had led to “a significant increase” in the cost of transport.

“It now costs 25 to 50 percent of the value of the worker’s monthly salary, depending on the distance between their residence and their workplace.”

A week ago, the percentage of employees and even military personnel who were able to make it to work decreased because of the fuel shortage. Darkness prevails in residential neighborhoods because of severe electricity rationing.

A source in the Ministry of Finance told Arab News: “Attempts are being made to maintain some subsidies, despite the parliament’s refusal to allow the Central Bank to use the mandatory reserve to subsidize fuel.

“There is a tendency to determine the pricing of fuel based on the rate of LBP8,000 to the dollar, instead of LBP3,900. This means (a 20-liter canister of) gasoline would cost approximately LBP150,000, provided that the Lebanese state bears the price difference between this price and the one based on the Central Bank’s Sayrafa platform rate of LBP16,000 to the dollar, i.e. an additional LBP8,000.

“This requires exceptional approval and a decree signed by the Ministry of Finance, the prime minister and the president. The cost of subsidies shall be covered by an advance to the Ministry of Finance, allocated in the 2022 budget. If this solution is achieved – despite the difficulties – quantities of fuel could be introduced by mid-next week, although it incurs more debts to the state.”



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## [Former head of Tunisia's Anti-Corruption Committee 'under house arrest'](#)

Author:

Sun, 2021-08-22 03:07

TUNIS: The former head of Tunisia's Anti-Corruption Committee has been placed under house arrest, he said on Facebook, hours after security forces took control of the commission's headquarters.

Chaouki Tabib was the head of the independent authority from 2016 until he was dismissed by former Prime Minister Elyes Fakhfakh in 2020.

"A security patrol stationed in front of my house informed me that a decision was issued to place me under house arrest ...in violation of my right

guaranteed by law and the constitution,” Tabib said on Facebook. Tunisian President Kais Saied last month dismissed the prime minister, froze parliament and assumed executive authority in a sudden intervention that his Islamist opponents have labeled a coup. The move won widespread popular support, but also raised concerns among some Tunisians about the future of the democratic system that the country adopted after its 2011 revolution that triggered the Arab Spring. Earlier on Friday, security forces cordoned off the headquarters of the Anti-Corruption Committee and evacuated its employees, in what appears to be an attempt by the authority to protect any corruption files. Saied, who was elected in a landslide in 2019 vowing to stand up against graft, has said gangs involved in corruption in all sectors must be held accountable. Last week, officials in the phosphate industry were arrested over suspected corruption.



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# Five evacuation flights from Afghanistan carrying American citizens leave Kuwait for US

Author:

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ID:

1629575844307183200

Sat, 2021-08-21 22:55

LONDON: Five flights carrying more than 850 Americans and employees from the US embassy in Kabul have left Kuwait on their way home.

The US ambassador to Kuwait Alina Romanowski thanked “our Kuwaiti partners, our dedicated diplomats and Department of Defense colleagues working around the clock to ensure US citizens and our partners get home safely.”

The US on Saturday urged its citizens in Afghanistan to avoid traveling to Kabul airport due to “potential security threats” near its gates.

“We are advising US citizens to avoid traveling to the airport and to avoid airport gates at this time unless you receive individual instructions from a US government representative to do so,” the US embassy alert said.

Conditions outside Hamid Karzai International Airport have been chaotic amid the crowds of people hoping to flee Afghanistan after the Taliban took control of the country a week ago.







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Thousands rally in London decrying Taliban takeover  
What the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan means for volatile Iraq

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# What the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan means for volatile Iraq

Sat, 2021-08-21 21:15

IRBIL, Iraq: It is perhaps just a matter of time before the volatile states of the Middle East begin to feel the reverberations of the Taliban's swift conquest of almost all of Afghanistan. The implications of the Sunni Islamist group's triumph will not be lost on non-state actors and violent extremists active in the countries where the US still has troops.

Afghanistan's US-trained and equipped military failed to hold the line against the Taliban's lightning offensive, as city after city fell in rapid succession. The government in Kabul quickly collapsed, paving the way for a second era of Taliban rule, just under 20 years after the end of the first.

The principal lesson other militant groups will likely draw from America's bungled withdrawal from Afghanistan is this: If they can hold out long enough against the enemy's superior technology and firepower, the latter will eventually grow weary and withdraw, leaving its client regimes to crumble.



The Taliban's military success in Afghanistan is reverberating across the region. (AFP)

If this is the thinking among some Shiite militia leaders in Iraq, who have long demanded the departure of US forces, it can hardly be dismissed as pure fantasy. After all, there is a fairly recent precedent of a swift insurgent

offensive quickly overwhelming the Iraqi military.

Daesh was able to conquer a third of Iraq, including its second city Mosul, in the summer of 2014. The Iraqi army, which was much larger and better equipped, withdrew without a fight.

Although Baghdad was able to recapture the bulk of these territories by 2017, with extensive US support, the campaign against Daesh gave rise to a new force, Al-Hashd Al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilization Forces), which could prove capable of toppling the Iraqi government.

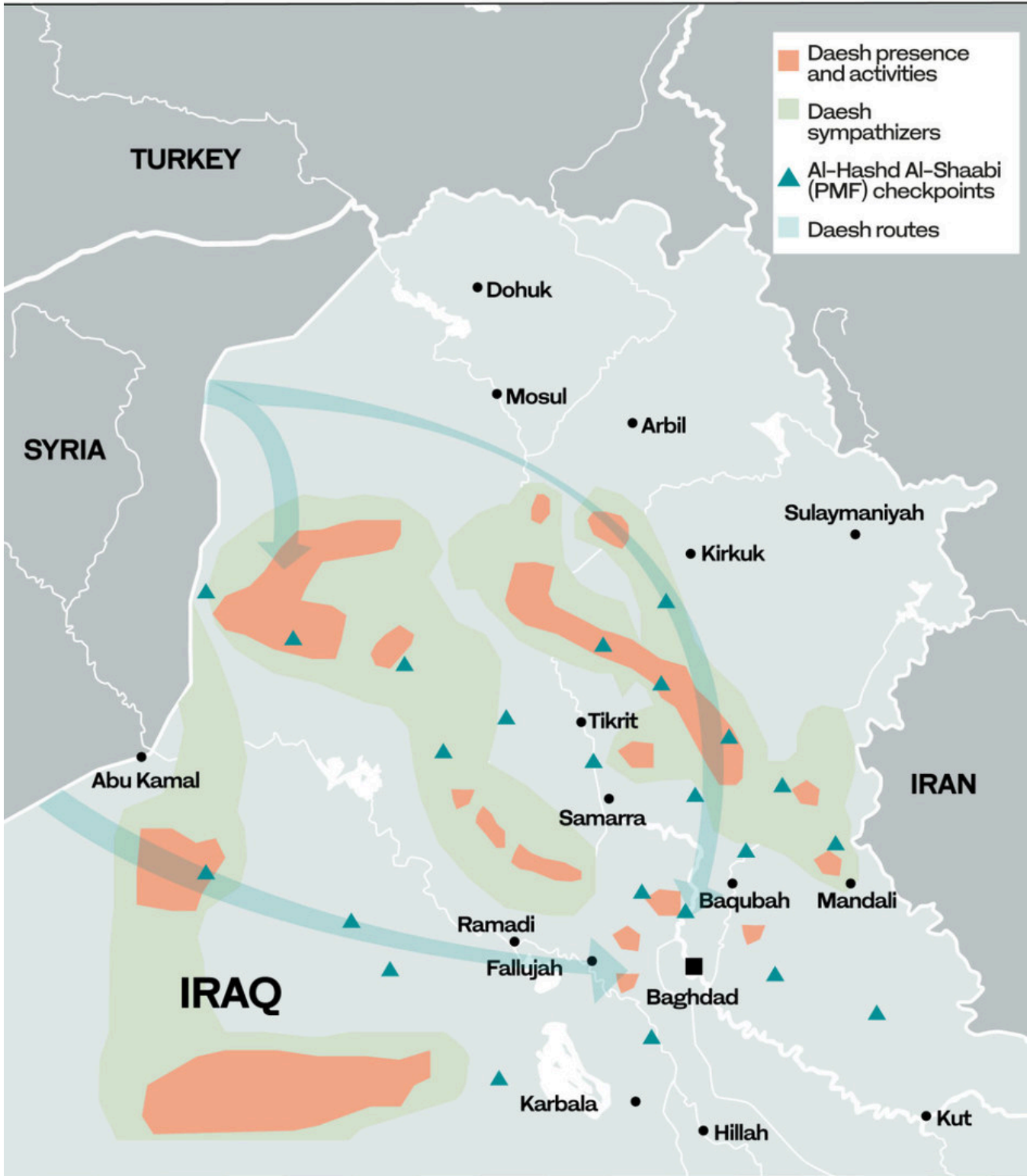
Hashd Al-Shaabi was formed in 2014 to help fight Daesh after the army's notorious failure to defend Mosul. The umbrella organization of predominantly Shiite militias went on to liberate large swathes of Iraq's predominantly Sunni regions, and was later incorporated into Iraq's security apparatus.

However, some of the more powerful factions within the Hashd have long been equipped and financed by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to advance Iran's military and political objectives in the region.

Iraq watchers fear these factions may outgun the regular Iraqi army and morph into a powerful state within a state, resembling Hezbollah in Lebanon.

# AL-HASHD AL-SHAABI CHECKPOINTS IN IRAQ

Militia's economic and military movements overlap with those of Daesh



Source: Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy

ARAB NEWS

They have at their disposal large stocks of Iran-supplied surface-to-surface missiles and armed drones, some of which have been used in recent years to attack US military targets within Iraq.

Fortunately for the Baghdad government, burdened with the task of balancing the interests of both its American and Iranian patrons, the Biden

administration does not look to be in as much of a hurry to withdraw from Iraq as it was from Afghanistan.

Moreover, according to political analysts, there are several major distinctions between the two cases that strongly suggest a Taliban-style takeover in Iraq by pro-Iran militias is probably not on the cards – at least not any time soon.

First and foremost, these factions have a lot to gain from maintaining the status quo. “The pro-Iran Hashd factions do not want to take over the government. Their goal is to join the ruling parties and get their cut of the state, both legal and illegal,” Joel Wing, author of the online blog Musings on Iraq, told Arab News.

“They are already an official part of the security forces, which means government funding. They want more fighters on the payroll. They want contracts and graft.”



Iraq's Hashd militias are an official part of the country's security forces and are funded by the government. (AFP)

Alex Almeida, an Iraq security analyst at energy consultancy Horizon Client Access, is also skeptical that Hashd will attempt a takeover.

“Barring a repeat of 2014, or some sort of militia coup scenario or a siege of the international zone (in Baghdad), it's highly unlikely we will see a similar situation develop in Iraq, primarily because with the militias we would be dealing with would be a rogue faction of the Iraqi state rather than an external takeover by an insurgent force,” he said.

Rodger Baker, senior vice president of strategic analysis at Stratfor at RANE, agrees and points out that many Hashd groups “are integrated into the security forces of Iraq, and not merely outside insurgents” like the Taliban fighters were in Afghanistan.

## **INNUMBERS**

2014 Year Hashd Al-Shaabi was formed.

40 Groups under Hashd Al-Shaabi umbrella.

128,000 Strength of Hashd Al-Shaabi.

“They do not hold territory in the same way the Taliban did in Afghanistan, even if they operate in relatively defined geographic areas,” Baker said. “They have close alliances with elements of the Iraqi parliament.

“In short, at least with many of the larger Hashd groups, they are integrated into the Iraqi political and security infrastructure. Thus, they are not necessarily seeking the overthrow of the regime, but rather the assertion of their (and often Iran’s) interests in Iraq.”

Baker is also more confident about the capabilities of the Iraqi armed forces compared with the Afghan security forces, noting that Iraq’s military has “undergone a significant transformation since it largely collapsed amid the early Daesh offensive” in 2014.



Fortunately for Baghdad, the Biden administration does not appear to be in a hurry to withdraw from Iraq. (AFP)

“After that failure, the Iraqis and the US military underwent a significant

reform of training and leadership in the Iraqi security forces, and these forces largely proved their mettle several years later in their routing of Daesh from key cities and areas,” he said.

“There is today much more cohesion and sense of common purpose among the Iraqi security forces than there was among the Afghan security forces.”

There is another crucial difference between the current Iraq and (pre-Taliban takeover) Afghanistan situations. It is no secret that Pakistan’s powerful military intelligence agency, the ISI, has long supported the Taliban, often to the detriment of US strategic objectives.

However, unlike the ISI’s comparatively laissez-faire approach, Baker believes Iran holds its Iraqi militia proxies on a far shorter leash, dictating the limits of their activities.

“Iran’s support of the Hashd groups is much stronger than Pakistan’s support for the Taliban – likely stronger even than Pakistan’s Taliban support in the late 1990s,” Baker said.



A Hashd fighter walks past a poster depicting late Iraqi commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis (R) and Iranian IRGC commander Qasem Soleimani in Baghdad. (AFP)

Besides arming and training them, Iranian officials openly meet with elements of Hashd groups in Iraq. “This also may constrain the actions of the larger Hashd groups, as Iran is not necessarily seeking the overthrow of Iraq’s (government), and is definitely not seeking more destabilization,” Baker said.

“Rather, these groups are part of a collection of elements that Iran uses to maintain influence and protect its strategic interests in Iraq.”

Nevertheless, Baghdad should draw some broad lessons from events in Afghanistan to ensure it does not suffer a similar fate as Kabul, analysts say.

“Perhaps the most significant lesson is the importance of rooting out corruption in the government at all levels, and of ensuring cohesion among various ethnic, regional and sectarian groups in the government,” Baker said.

Afghanistan’s lack of internal cohesion was plain for all to see in the hours before Kabul fell. Several top officials, including President Ashraf Ghani, opted to flee the country, while others sought to negotiate with the approaching Taliban. Others still, such as Ahmad Massoud, armed themselves and headed for the mountains to launch another phase of resistance.

“The lack of cohesion and perception of corruption left many of the Afghan citizenry unable to trust the government. The same could be said about the bureaucracy and security forces,” Baker said.

Perhaps the most critical distinction between the two cases is that the US does not plan a complete withdrawal from Iraq anytime soon.

“The recent US-Iraq talks show that Washington is not planning on withdrawing from Iraq,” Wing said. “Attacks by pro-Tehran factions are complicating that because the Americans are focusing on protecting themselves rather than assisting the Iraqis right now. But even then, there’s no sign they want to end the mission.”



Placards denouncing the Hashd are shown during a demonstration by Iraqi Kurds outside the US consulate in Irbil, the capital of autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan.  
(AFP file photo)

Almeida believes the disastrous retreat from Afghanistan “will make the Biden administration a lot more cautious about how it handles the mechanics of a further US withdrawal in Iraq, particularly drawing down to a small diplomatic footprint without in-country military support.”

For his part, Baker thinks the decision to leave Iraq “will be based more on the US strategic realignment of priorities than on the political fallout from the Afghan withdrawal, particularly as Iraq is in a much stronger shape than the Afghan government was.”

“The larger risk for Iraq is long-term regional and sectarian differences, and demands for greater federalism or distribution of power,” he said.

“Economic resources are spread unequally across Iraq, and these geographic differences will continue to shape the future security and stability environment.”

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## [Arab coalition airstrikes kill Iranian expert in Yemen's Marib](#)

Author:

Sat, 2021-08-21 20:14

ALEXANDRIA: Arab coalition airstrikes have killed an Iranian military officer who was an adviser to the Iran-backed Houthis during their deadly offensive on the central province of Marib, Yemen's Information Minister, Muammar Al-Eryani, said on Saturday.

The advisor, Haidar Serjan, and nine other combatants were killed on Friday night in the coalition's airstrikes during fighting in Marib's Serwah district.

Serjan first offered military advice to the Houthis during battles along the country's western coast till June 5, 2012. He was sent to the Marib battlefields to replace Hezbollah military expert Mustaf Al-Gharwi, who was killed in another airstrike, Al-Eryani said.

"Iran has sent hundreds of Revolutionary Guards experts, led military operations in the field and smuggled various types of weapons, including ballistic missiles and drones, confirming the nature of the battle as an extension of Iranian expansionist and influence project in the region," the minister said on Twitter.

He demanded more international pressure on Iran to stop fueling violence in Yemen.

"We urge the international community, UN, and permanent Security Council members to adopt a firm stand against Iran's blatant interference in Yemeni affairs, its role in escalating military operations and undermining peace efforts, responsibility for bloodshed, and exacerbation of humanitarian suffering of Yemenis," Al-Eryani said.

Thousands of Houthis and many foreign fighters and advisers have been killed since February when the rebels resumed an offensive to capture the oil-rich city of Marib.

Even before the Houthi takeover of power in late 2014, the Yemeni government

accused the Iranian regime of sending arms shipments, funds and military experts to shore up the Houthis.

In November last year, the Yemeni army announced that two Hezbollah military experts were killed after Arab coalition warplanes targeted a training camp outside Houthi-held Sanaa.

The Houthis, who have long denied receiving military support from Iran, recently admitted they received some military know-how from Iranian military experts.

“We benefited from Iranian experiences in the military field. We do not deny that. We thank Iran for that support,” Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdul-Salam told Iran’s Al-Alam television early this month.

Yemeni military analysts and commanders who are battling the Houthis on the ground said that Iran has supplied the Yemeni militia with advanced weapons, drones, ballistic missiles and even light weapons and ammunition.

Col Abdul Basit Al-Baher, a Yemeni army spokesman in the southern city of Taiz, told Arab News that Iran appointed a Revolutionary Guard official as its envoy in the Houthi-controlled areas, provided them with smart weapons, communication technology, reconnaissance and espionage systems, funds and even sought to spread its ideologies in Yemen.

“Iran supplied the Houthis with experts and all weapons from rifles to ballistic missiles and drones,” Al-Baher said.



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Coalition airstrikes kill Hezbollah military experts in YemenArab coalition reiterates support for Yemeni government as battle for Marib continues