

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.”

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Fear of food shortages after Beirut explosion hits grain reservesLebanon in 'state of emergency' as Beirut blast death toll climbs

[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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The Beirut Chernobyl

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](#)

[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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