

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

Author:

Wed, 2020-08-05 00:34

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

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Family, Labor and Social Services Minister Zehmet 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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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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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 Recep 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. Fırat 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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[18 killed in clashes in northwestern Syria](#)

Mon, 2020-08-03 23:44

BEIRUT/JERUSALEM: Clashes between opposition groups and pro-Assad fighters in northwestern Syria on Monday thwarted regime’s advance and left 12 pro-regime

men dead, a Britain-based war monitoring group said. Another 17 pro-regime fighters were wounded while on the opposition-led side six fighters died, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The forces loyal to Bashar Assad had launched an attack with artillery and heavy gunfire in Syria's last major opposition bastion, said the war monitor. But the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) alliance, headed by ex-leaders of Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate, and their allies reportedly thwarted the advance. Four HTS and two other opposition fighters were killed in the clashes in a rural area of Latakia province, the monitor said. The HTS-led alliance also controls large areas of Idlib province and slivers of territory in neighboring Aleppo and Hama. The region they hold is home to some 3 million people, nearly half of whom have been displaced from other parts of the country. Syria's 9-year-old war has killed more than 380,000 people and displaced nearly half of the country's pre-war population. The opposition-held area is a regular target of attacks by regime forces and their Russian and Iranian allies. A Russian-backed regime offensive between December and March displaced nearly a million people in the region. A Moscow-backed cease-fire agreement in March has reduced violence in the area, but shelling and airstrikes by the regime and its backers continue. Russian airstrikes on the town of Binnish in Idlib province killed three people from the same family on Monday, according to the Observatory. An AFP photographer saw plumes of smoke rising from the site of the attack.

Golan Heights Activity

The Israeli military said it thwarted an infiltration attempt from Syria early on Monday staged by four suspected militants it accused of trying to plant explosives. Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus, a military spokesman, said Israeli troops earlier spotted "irregular" activity in the Golan Heights. Israeli troops opened fire on the suspected militants, some of whom were armed, after observing them placing the explosives on the ground, Conricus said.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Forces loyal to Bashar Assad had launched an attack with artillery and heavy gunfire in Syria's last major opposition bastion.**
- **The opposition-held area is a regular target of attacks by regime forces and their Russian and Iranian allies.**

There was no official confirmation that the four suspected attackers were killed but a grainy video released by the army shows four figures walking away from barbed wire marking the frontier. The four then disappear in a large explosion that engulfs the area.

The Israeli military has not said if the four are suspected of ties to Iran or Hezbollah, two Syrian allies. However, Conricus said Israel held the Syrian regime responsible for the incident.

Addressing Likud party lawmakers, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Monday that Israel “thwarted an attempted sabotage on the Syrian front” and would continue to “harm all those who try to harm us and all those who harm us.”

The incident comes amid heightened tension on Israel’s northern frontier following a recent Israeli airstrike that killed a Hezbollah fighter in Syria. Following the airstrike, the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights was hit by explosives fired from Syria and Israel responded by attacking Syrian military positions and beefing up its forces in the area.

Israel has been bracing for further retaliation and last week it said it thwarted an infiltration attempt from Lebanon by Hezbollah militants, setting off one of the heaviest exchanges of fire along the volatile Israel-Lebanon frontier since a 2006 war between the bitter enemies.



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Israeli military strike likely kills 4 militants from Syria
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'hostile targets' above Damascus countryside

Mon, 2020-08-03 23:23

DAMASCUS: Syria's air defenses on Monday intercepted 'hostile targets' above Damascus' southwestern countryside, state media reported.

No details were immediately available and there were no initial reports of damage or casualties.

Earlier, Israel launched air strikes on Syrian military targets in southern Syria late Monday, after thwarting an attack near the Israeli-occupied sector of the Golan Heights.

In Damascus, the state-run news agency Sana said Israeli helicopters rocketed Syrian army positions near Quneitra in the south but caused only material damage. It also said air defenses had gone into action near the Syrian capital.

The Israeli army said its fighters jets, attack helicopters and other warplanes struck Syrian army positions in retaliation for the attempt to lay explosives in the Golan Heights.

"The targets struck include observation posts and intelligence collection systems, anti-aircraft artillery facilities and command and control systems in SAF (Syrian Armed Forces) bases," the army said in statement.

"The IDF holds the Syrian government responsible for all activities on Syrian soil, and will continue operating with determination against any violation of Israeli sovereignty," it said.

Tensions are already high between bitter rivals Israel and Syria.

Last month, Israeli army helicopters struck military targets in southern Syria in retaliation for earlier "munitions" fire toward Israel.

Israel did not directly blame Syrian forces for the munitions fire, but said it held the Damascus government responsible.

And earlier Monday, the Israeli army said it had killed four men laying explosives near the Israeli-occupied sector of the Golan Heights.

"They were inside Israeli territory but beyond the fence," military spokesman Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus told journalists in a telephone briefing.

He said an Israeli commando unit lying in wait attacked the intruders shortly after 11 p.m. Sunday (2000 GMT) with assault rifles and sniper fire backed by air strikes.

"Our estimate is that all four were killed," Conricus said in English, adding that there were no Israeli casualties.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement Monday that "the army thwarted an attempted attack on the Syrian front."

"We don't let our guard down," he said, recalling an incident at the Lebanese border last week that prompted Israeli artillery fire across the frontier, as well as rocket fire Sunday evening from the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip which led to retaliatory Israeli air strikes.

Israel will "strike anyone who attacks us or tries to attack us," he added.



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Israeli military strike likely kills 4 militants from Syria
Israeli drone crashes in Lebanon amid tensions with Syria