

British Daesh terrorists dubbed the 'Beatles' admit mistreatment of US aid worker

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Arab News

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LONDON: Two of the British Daesh terrorists dubbed the "Beatles" further incriminated themselves in mistreating Western hostages in Syria, including American Kayla Mueller.

The two men, Alexanda Kotey and El Shafee Elsheikh, for the first time admitted their involvement in the captivity of Mueller, an aid worker who was held captive and tortured and sexually abused before her death in 2015.

In interviews [obtained by NBC News](#), Kotey said: "She was in a room by herself that no one would go in."

Elsheikh got into more detail, saying: "I took an email from her myself," meaning he got an email address Daesh could use to demand ransom from the family. "She was in a large room, it was dark, and she was alone, and she was very scared."

Daesh demanded the Muellers pay €5m (£4.55m) and threatened that if the demands weren't met, they would send the family "a picture of Kayla's dead body."

In captivity, Kayla was taken to live with a senior Daesh official, and was raped by the former Daesh leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, US officials have said.

Kayla is believed to have died in 2015 in what Daesh said was a Jordanian airstrike

Kotey and Elsheikh are both in US military custody in Iraq amid questions over how and when they will face justice.

US and British authorities say the so-called Beatles were responsible for 27 killings, including the beheadings of Americans James Foley, Steven Sotloff and Peter Kassig, and British aid workers David Haines and Alan Henning.



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[Alexanda Kotey](#)

[El Shafee Elsheikh](#)

[Kayla Mueller](#)

Arab News profiles four Daesh extremists who became known as the 'Beatles Cell' Families of Daesh 'Beatles cell' welcome their capture

[Fighter jets intercept Iranian passenger plane over Syria](#)

Thu, 2020-07-23 22:56

BEIRUT: An Iranian passenger plane was intercepted by two fighter jets in Syrian airspace during a flight from Tehran to Beirut.

The pilot of the Mahan Air plane said two US jets approached the airliner forcing him to change altitude to avoid a collision, Iran's IRIB news agency reported.

Earlier, the agency said the Airbus A310 had been approached by a single Israeli jet.

#BREAKING: Pilot of Iranian plane had to change altitude quickly, injuring several passengers – Iranian news agency <https://t.co/rqULvmaHe0> pic.twitter.com/V0oLY0yGpQ

– Arab News (@arabnews) [July 23, 2020](#)

Aviation experts told Arab News that the plane, Flight 1152, landed at Rafic Hariri International Airport at 7.50 p.m. after flying from Tehran through the airspace of Iraq and Syria.

The two warplanes intercepted the plane at 6.14 p.m.

Fight tracking data showed the plane dive and then climb again.

"The pilot was forced to suddenly increase the altitude by 350ft to avoid the intercepting planes, which led to the state of turbulence inside the plane," a source from Lebanese Plane Spotters said.

Immediately after the plane landed, video circulated on social media showing the shocked passengers on board, a child with a bandaged head and another person with a head wound. The passengers' contents were scattered across

seats and along the floor. Some passengers were wearing life jackets. In another video passengers could be heard screaming and in panic. Photos claimed to show the two intercepted planes.

Initial ADS-B data regarding a reported incident involving an Iranian airliner today enroute to Beirut. <https://t.co/Lh7krY14Sc>
We are currently processing granular data.
<pic.twitter.com/38T7fA4J4w>

– Flightradar24 (@flightradar24) [July 23, 2020](#)

Ambulances were seen on the runway in Beirut transporting four injured passengers, including an elderly man, to hospital.

The US imposed sanctions on Mahan Air in 2011, saying it provided financial and other support to Iran's Revolutionary Guards

In a separate incident, Lebanese Army Command said an "Israeli enemy reconnaissance plane" entered Lebanese airspace in the morning over the town of Kafr Kila, and carried out a circular flight over southern Lebanon.

The military added that a similar enemy plane "violated Lebanese airspace" over the town of Aitaroun shortly after.

*With Reuters



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Iranian president calls Iraqi premier's visit 'turning point'
Turkey ramps up Iranian dissident extraditions

[Financial crisis, virus hit Lebanon's hospitals](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-07-23 02:13

BEIRUT: Lebanon's hospitals, long considered among the best in the Middle East, are cracking under the country's financial crisis, struggling to pay staff, keep equipment running or even stay open amid a surge in coronavirus cases.

Private hospitals, the engine of the health system, warn they may have to shut down. Chronically underfunded public hospitals, which have led the fight

against the virus, fear they will be overrun.

Across the country, hospitals and doctors are reporting shortages in vital medical supplies such as anesthesia drugs and sutures. With power cuts that run through most of the day, they pour money into fuel for generators, and many are turning away noncritical cases to conserve resources.

"The situation is really catastrophic, and we expect a total collapse if the government doesn't come up with a rescue plan," said Selim Abi Saleh, the head of the Physicians Union in northern Lebanon, one of the country's poorest and most populated regions.

One of the country's oldest and most prestigious university hospitals, the American University Medical Center, laid off hundreds of its staff last week citing the "disastrous" state of the economy and causing uproar and concern.

Medical facilities have let go of nurses and reduced salaries, their finances running dry in part because they can't collect millions owed to them by the state. Nearly a third of Lebanon's 15,000 physicians aim to migrate or already have, a doctors' union official said, based on the number who have sought union documents they can use abroad to prove their credentials.

So far Lebanon has kept a handle on its pandemic outbreak, through strong lockdowns, aggressive testing and a quick response, largely by public hospitals. The country has reported fewer than 3,000 infections and 41 deaths.

But with cases rising, many in the field fear the health sector can't hold up under a surge and a financial crisis worsening every day.

Lebanon's liquidity crunch has crippled the government's ability to provide fuel, electricity and basic services. The shortage of dollars is gutting imports, including medical supplies and drugs.

Prices have spiraled, unemployment is above 30 percent and nearly half the population of 5 million now live in poverty.

Private hospitals, which make up around 85 percent of the country's facilities, emerged dominant after the country's brutal 15-year civil war to become the pride of Lebanon's system, drawing patients from around the region with specialized services and advanced surgeries.

But the entire health sector, like much of the country, has also run on political jockeying and patronage in Lebanon's sectarian system. Medical practitioners say political considerations determine the size of state funds and financial caps to private hospitals, while public facilities suffer from understaffing and neglect.

The insurance system, with multiple health funds, is chaotic, making collection difficult and coverage patchy. For years, state insurance funds failed to reimburse hospitals. Private hospitals say they are owed \$1.3 billion, some of it dating back to 2011.

"We can't fight COVID and at the same time keep looking behind our backs to see whether I have enough financial and material resources," said Firas Abiad, director general of Rafik Hariri University Hospital, the public hospital leading the coronavirus fight.

Abiad, who has won praise for his transparency in handling the pandemic, is getting by with stop-gap measures. When he raised alarm this month that the hospital was running out of fuel, a rush of private donations flowed in. The government pledged to provide fuel for public facilities.

"I doubt anybody has any long-term strategy," Abiad said. "We are doing it one fight at a time, and we are surviving one day at a time."

Financing must be priority, he said. "Generators can't run on empty, without fuel. Hospitals can't run without financing."

Minister of Health Hamad Hassan told The Associated Press Monday he was counting on government support to keep hospitals as a "red line." But he urged hospitals to do their part to push through the crisis.

"Hospitals have invested in this sector for 40 years. Whoever has invested that long should have the courage to invest for six months or a year to help his people and not give up on them," he said.

Private hospitals' struggles are compounded by a banking sector crisis that has locked down foreign currency accounts and complicated imports and the issuing of letters of credit.

In the northern village of Majdalaiya, the state-of-the-art, 100-bed Family Medical Center hospital stood nearly empty last week. Its owner, oncologist Kayssar Mawad, said he had to shut down one of the five floors to save costs.

Mawad has had to refuse patients with state insurance. The government already owes him millions of dollars, he said.

"It has to be a life or death situation," Mawad said. "This is not sustainable."

He said in recent weeks, he admitted 20 patients at most, while treating others as outpatients to save costs. His facility is prepared to deal with COVID-19 patients but he said it won't because it is too expensive.

"We don't want to get to a Venezuela-scenario where we diagnose the patient but ask them to bring their own medicine, food, and sheets," he said. "I hope we don't get there."

There was only one baby in the hospital's 13-bed neonatal unit. On the adults' floor, there were three patients.

One of them, an 83-year-old man recovering from arterial surgery, had to pay out of pocket because his private insurance won't cover the room or the stent. If a brother hadn't come from Germany to cover the costs, "he would have died," said his daughter, Mayada Qaddour.

The 32 public hospitals won't be able to fill the place of private hospitals threatened with closure, said Ahmad Moghrabi, chairman of Orange Nassau, Lebanon's only government-run maternity hospital.

Moghrabi, now in his 70s, rebuilt the hospital in the northern city of Tripoli from scratch since he took it over in 2003, almost totally through foreign donations. Still, it relies on state funds and insurance payments – both minimal – so it has never been able to operate at full capacity of 5,000 births a year.

Now desperately short of funds and fuel, the hospital has to juggle priorities. It suspended its neonatal unit to keep life-saving dialysis running.

“In 2020, (a hospital) can't do without a neonatal unit,” Moghrabi said. “With the current circumstances in Lebanon, we are going back to the 1960s, even further.”



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How Lebanon saw the 1984 killing of Middle East scholar and AUB President Malcolm Kerr
France to the rescue of private French-speaking schools in Lebanon

Egypt's homeless children hit hard by pandemic scourge

Author:

Thu, 2020-07-23 02:05

CAIRO: Wandering Cairo's bustling streets, Zeinab was struggling to survive by selling tissues when the coronavirus left her even more vulnerable, along with thousands of other homeless people and street children.

The only good news was that, amid the pandemic fears, physical violence against the destitute has declined, Zeinab told AFP at a mobile shelter for the poor in Abbassiya, a working-class district.

"People attack us less because they are afraid," she said.

But with fewer people in the streets, "we have less work and less money," added the young woman, while keeping an eye on her 1-year-old son, Abdallah.

Young people and children who roam the streets are among the poorest and are regularly exposed to verbal, physical and sexual violence and exploitation.

The novel coronavirus, which has killed nearly 4,000 people and infected around 83,000 more in Egypt, has compounded their vulnerability, as the country battles an economic downturn and access to support is reduced due to lockdown measures.

"They are isolated, the population at large avoids them ... and their meagre income has been hit hard," said Youssef Bastawrous, manager of the French civil society group Samusocial International, which works with street children in Egypt.

In 2014, authorities estimated Egypt had around 16,000 youngsters and children living rough on the streets.

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) believes this a massive "underestimation" of actual numbers, said its communications head in Egypt Jonathan Crickx.

The problem of compiling reliable figures on street children is compounded because many are from families long trapped in poverty and without stable housing who may not be listed in civil status registries.

In 2016, Egyptian authorities launched the national program "Atfal bala ma'wa" (Children Without a Home) with the aim of "integrating" street children and helping them "abandon street behavior," said Mohamed Shaker, head of the program at the Ministry of Social Solidarity.

The program deploys 17 mobile units throughout the country, providing a place to rest, food and games as well as medical, social and psychological support

to street children.

“The aim is to build a relationship with the homeless children and help them build trust between each other,” said Salma Ismail, communications officer at a nongovernmental group Bannati.

At the Abbassiya mobile unit, Karim tentatively approached and grabbed a snack on offer.

He said he was 12 years old but staff cautioned that most of the children who use the services do not know, or prefer not to disclose, their real ages.

Karim said he sleeps in a local park and earns his living by cleaning car windshields.

He said he was attending a public school before authorities shut them down in late March as part of efforts to stem the spread of the virus.

“I come here to play,” Karim told AFP. “I miss school.

“Since it has been closed, I have forgotten everything. Before, I used to learn how to read and count.”

The economic impact of Egypt’s lockdown measures has stretched already overextended aid offered to street children.

With the financial crunch, some charities have concentrated efforts on health and sanitation to help children protect themselves against the disease.

“We make them aware of health issues, we distribute masks and explain to them how to wash their hands,” said Samusocial International’s Bastawrous.

The lifting of a three-month curfew in late June brought some reprieve for street children, who could again sell trinkets and tissues or beg for money as people returned to cafes and restaurants.

Restrictions have also been partially lifted on mosques and churches, which have long provided sanctuary for street children.

At some mosques, the bathrooms usually used by worshippers to perform their ablutions act as a one-stop shop for the children’s hygiene needs.



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Egypt extends operating hours of cafes, restaurants until midnight from July 26 -statementEgypt's tourist hotspots record zero COVID-19 cases

[Turkey, Russia seek lasting cease-fire in Libya](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-07-23 01:50

ANKARA: Turkish and Russian delegations met on Wednesday in Turkey's capital to discuss the war in Libya and agreed to press ahead with efforts for a lasting cease-fire in the North African country, Turkey's Foreign Ministry said.

A joint statement released after the meeting said the sides – who back rival parties in the conflict – had agreed to work together and encourage Libya's opposing factions to create “conditions for a lasting and sustainable cease-fire.” They also agreed to joint efforts to advance a political dialogue.

Turkish-backed forces allied with the UN-supported government in Tripoli, the

capital, are mobilizing on the edges Sirte and have vowed to retake the Mediterranean city, along with the inland Jufra air base, from rival forces commanded by Khalifa Haftar. Haftar's forces are based in the east.

The Turkish and Russian delegations will consider creating a joint working group on Libya and were scheduled to hold more consultations in Moscow "in the near future," according to the statement.

The meeting between Turkish and Russian officials comes amid heightened tensions between powers supporting the rival factions in the Libyan conflict.

This week, Egypt's Parliament authorized the deployment of troops outside of the country in a move that threatened to escalate the spiraling war and bring Egypt and Turkey into a direct confrontation.

Libya was plunged into chaos when a NATO-backed uprising in 2011 toppled longtime dictator Muammar Qaddafi, who was later killed.

Drawn by Haftar's anti-Islamist stance, foreign powers have provided his forces with critical military assistance. Russia has also emerged as a key supporter of Haftar, sending hundreds of mercenaries through the Wagner Group, a private military company.



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Turkey-Russia cease-fire negotiations for Libya: Any hope for

durability?Turkey, US agree to work to ensure 'lasting stability' in Libya