

# Iran's top Al-Quds officials in Baghdad to support Abdul Mahdi

Author:

Sun, 2019-11-10 00:40

BAGHDAD: Qassim Suleimani, the commander of Iran's Quds Force and field commander in charge of Iran's operations in Iraq, has been in Baghdad for 11 days to manage the crisis and provide direct support to Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, two of Suleimani's associates told Arab News on Saturday. Baghdad and nine southern Shiite-dominated provinces have witnessed anti-government mass demonstrations since Oct. 1. More than 300 demonstrators have been killed and 15,000 wounded, mostly in Baghdad, with tear gas and live bullets used by Iraqi forces to quell the protests, while scores of activists and journalists have been arrested.

Suleimani and his deputy, Maj. Gen. Hamed Abdollahi, are in Baghdad "to provide the necessary moral and logistical support" to Abdul Mahdi, whose dismissal has become the first demand of the protesters, a prominent Shiite leader told Arab News.

The general, or Abu Duaa, as his closest allies call him, attends almost daily meetings in Baghdad with leaders of Iranian-backed political forces in an attempt to dismantle the crisis and prolong the time Abdul Mahdi remains in office.

"Abu Duaa has been in Baghdad for 11 days. He is here to provide the necessary support to Abdul Mahdi," one of the top Iraqi Shiite leaders told Arab News.

"The demonstrations will end soon in one way or another. There is money spent generously to get some engines (organizers of demonstrations) out of the scene, at the same time there are other means (arrests and kidnapping).

"The carrot and stick policy has been operational for weeks and is beginning to bear fruit."

The dismissal or resignation of Abdul Mahdi, which has become one of the most important demands of the demonstrators, is not put forward as one of the solutions for Suleimani and his allies, and the military solution is also not on the table.

Suleimani's ally said some Iraqi military leaders were demanding military intervention to end the demonstrations, especially in Tahrir Square where most demonstrators are gathering in Baghdad.

"They demanded the intervention of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMU), but Suleimani rejected this option in principle.

"He clearly said that this is an American trap to drag the PMU factions to clash with the demonstrators and then demand their dissolution."

## **NUMBER**

300 – demonstrators have been killed and 15,000 wounded, mostly in Baghdad.

The PMU factions have not intervened as combat troops, "but that does not mean it (PMU) did not intervene as intelligence or security support," the ally said.

Suleimani's ally said that the solutions offered do not include the dismissal or resignation of Abdel Mahdi, although everyone knows that the cause of the current problem is him and his private office manager Abu Jihad.

"Our problem with the Americans, Sadr and Najaf is caused by Abu Jihad," he said.

"Adel Abdul Mahdi has not taken any real decision since he became prime minister and all the decisions were made by Abu Jihad.

"Those two (Abdul Mahdi and Abu Jihad) are protected and their protector (Suleimani) insists that there is no real problem worth sacrificing them.

"He (Suleimani) does not deal with Iraq as a single country, but rather as part of a system that includes Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Palestine, so any suggested solutions that exclude Adel or Abu Jihad are not acceptable (by Suleimani).

"The Iranians are not like Americans. They do not give up their ally easily, so they will continue to support Abdul Mahdi until the very last moment."

The solutions proposed by Suleimani and agreed by the majority of key political players include a ministerial change involving more than half of the Cabinet, and to gradually vote on a number of important laws, accelerate the adoption of constitutional amendments to be ready for a referendum in April, vote to reduce the number of members of the Parliament to half, the abolition of the provincial councils, "which represent the vicious circle of corruption in the provinces," change the election law "to allow the rise of individuals and small lists" and change the High Electoral Commission, the source said.

Changing the system from parliamentary to presidential may be included in the constitutional amendments but will not be passed as the Kurds, Sunnis and Najaf reject this system "because it is the key to sliding into dictatorship."

"Now we are worried about Najaf (Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani) because it is really upset. This is really our last chance. (If not taken) then people will come out in an armed revolution," Suleimani's ally said.

"I'm not optimistic because the tools are the same. Real solutions mean big losses and no one is willing to take any losses.

"The situation will calm down and people (demonstrators) will return to their homes, but they will return to the street later."



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Iran able to enrich uranium up to 60%, says atomic energy agency spokesman  
Petrol pumps shut down in protest-hit Lebanon over dollar shortage

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## [Iran able to enrich uranium up to 60%, says atomic energy agency spokesman](#)

Sat, 2019-11-09 20:51

TEHRAN: Iran has the capacity to enrich uranium up to 60 percent, a spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) said on Saturday, far more than is required for most civilian uses but short of the 90 percent needed to make nuclear bomb fuel.

"The organization has the possibility to produce 5 percent, 20 percent and 60 percent, and has this capacity," AEOI spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi said during a news conference at the underground Fordow nuclear plant, the official IRIB news agency reported.

"At the moment, the need is for 5 percent," he added.

Iran's highest political authority, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said last month that the country had never pursued the building or use of nuclear weapons, which its religion forbids.

Iran said on Thursday it had resumed uranium enrichment at Fordow, stepping further away from its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers after the United States pulled out of it.

The pact bans production of nuclear material at Fordow, a highly sensitive site that Iran hid from UN non-proliferation inspectors until its exposure in 2009.

Inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will visit Fordow on Sunday, Kamalvandi said.

Since May, Iran has begun to exceed limits on its nuclear capacity set by the pact in retaliation for US pressure on Tehran to negotiate restrictions on its ballistic missile program and support for proxy forces around the Middle East.

Iran says its measures are reversible if European signatories to the accord manage to restore its access to foreign trade promised under the nuclear deal but blocked by the reimposition of US sanctions.



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# Strikes on Syrian medical facilities appear deliberate: UN

Author:

Sat, 2019-11-09 01:16

IDLIB: More than 60 medical facilities have been hit in Syria's Idlib province in the past six months, including four this week, and appear to have been deliberately targeted by government-affiliated forces, a UN rights spokesman said on Friday.

Idlib in Syria's northwest, the target of a Russian-backed offensive launched this summer to capture it and surrounding areas, is part of the last major rebel bastion in Syria's 8 1/2-year war.

Since April 29, 61 medical facilities have been hit there, including some that were struck several times, UN human rights spokesman Rupert Colville told journalists.

"We can't determine if every single attack is deliberate but the large scale of these attacks ... strongly suggests that government-affiliated forces conducting these strikes are, at least partly, if not wholly, deliberately striking health facilities," he said at a Geneva news briefing.

"They can't possibly all be accidents," he told Reuters later. He said that, if it is proven that any or some of these were deliberate, they would amount to war crimes.

Damage was reported at the Kafr Nobol hospital on Nov. 6 – which had also been hit in May and July – and two air strikes also directly hit the Al-Ikhlās hospital in southern Idlib, incapacitating it this week, Colville said.

## **BACKGROUND**

Idlib in Syria's northwest, the target of a Russian-backed offensive launched this summer to capture it and surrounding areas, is part of the last major rebel bastion in Syria's 8 1/2-year war.

Syria's war has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands and forced 13 million people from their homes, half of whom have left their wrecked country.

Since a Turkish-led offensive across Syria's northern border a month ago to push out Kurdish YPG fighters, at least 92 civilians have been killed in northern and northeastern Syria, Colville added.

That offensive displaced 200,000 people, of whom nearly half of them remain displaced are dispersed across camps and shelters, Najat Rochdi, Senior Humanitarian Adviser to the UN Special Envoy for Syria, said on Friday.

A UN-backed panel is meeting in Geneva this week, with delegates from the government, opposition and civil society, in what the United Nations says is

an important step in the long road to political rapprochement in Syria.



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Turkish-Russian patrols pelted by residents in north Syria  
Turkish patrol kills protester amid shaky truce in northeastern Syria

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## [Turkish-Russian patrols pelted by residents in north Syria](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-11-09 00:52

IDLIB/TURKEY: Local residents on Friday pelted with shoes and stones Turkish and Russian troops who were conducting their third joint patrol in northeastern Syria, under a cease-fire deal brokered by Moscow that forced Kurdish fighters to withdraw from areas bordering Turkey. The patrols are aimed at allowing Turkey to ensure that the Syrian Kurdish groups have evacuated the border zone. The agreement with Russia – and a separate one with the US – halted the Turkish invasion of Syria last month that targeted groups it considers a security threat for their links to a Kurdish insurgency inside Turkey.

The pelting of the Turkish-Russian patrol occurred east of the border town of

Qamishli, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, and the Kurdish Hawar news agency. Videos from the area showed men, women and children pelting armored vehicles as they drove near a cemetery before speeding away.

There was no immediate comment from the Russian or Turkish military about the incident that appears not to have caused damage to the vehicles.

Turkey's Defense Ministry said the troops were patrolling a region between Qamishli and Derik, east of the Euphrates River. It said the patrols were being supported by drones, but provided no further details.

## **NUMBER**

**92** – civilians have died so far as a result of Turkey's incursion into northern Syria, according to the UN.

An Associated Press journalist saw four Turkish armored personnel carriers cross into Syria to join the Russian forces.

Mutafa Bali, a spokesman for the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), tweeted that Turkish troops fired tear gas on protesters in Derik, injuring 10 people. The town is controlled by SDF and American forces, but the Turkish troops were passing through on the patrol.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan complained this week that Syrian Kurdish fighters were still present in areas along the border, despite the separate agreements with Russia and the US.

Erdogan also said Turkish troops were being attacked by some Syrian Kurdish fighters from areas they had retreated to, adding that Turkey would not "remain a spectator" to these assaults.

The UN said on Friday that 92 civilians have died so far as a result of Turkey's incursion into northern Syria. Rupert Colville, a spokesman for the UN human rights office, said the death toll was based on "verified incidents" that included to Nov. 5.

Also in northern Syria, the Observatory and the Thiqa news agency, an activist collective, said on Friday a suicide attacker detonated a truck outside a police station in the northern town of Rai that is controlled by Turkey-backed opposition fighters.

The Observatory said the blast killed three people, while Thiqa reported two civilian deaths.

Bombings in areas held by Turkey-backed opposition fighters in northern Syria are not uncommon. Last week, 13 people were killed in a blast in the town of Tal Abyad, which Turkish troops and opposition fighters they back captured last month.



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Daesh-linked Albanian child arrives home to Italy from Syria camp  
Turkish patrol kills protester amid shaky truce in northeastern Syria

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## [Lebanon facing 'major health disaster' as economic, political crisis deepens](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-11-09 00:49

BEIRUT: Experts on Friday warned of a pending "major health disaster" in Lebanon with hospitals turning away patients and stocks of medicines and medical supplies predicted to run out in one month.

The alert came a day after international confidence in Lebanon's crisis-hit economy was dealt another serious blow after credit rating company Moody's downgraded the country's top three banks.

As anti-government protests entered their 23rd day with no sign of political moves to start the process of forming a new Lebanese administration, the news plunged the debt-ridden nation into further financial meltdown.



A joint statement issued on Friday from a syndicate of Lebanese hospitals, doctors, and medical equipment dealers, said: "Hospitals are no longer able to receive patients due to a shortage of financial liquidity caused by delays of payment by guarantor institutions.

"The current stock of medicines and medical supplies is sufficient for one month, and we might head toward a major health disaster if the situation is not immediately rectified through facilitating the transfer of funds for dealers to US dollars. Within one week, hospitals will stop receiving patients except for emergency cases," the statement added.

A report by Moody's, published by Reuters on Thursday, said Lebanon's "poor creditworthiness" was behind the agency's decision to downgrade its ratings for Audi, Bloom and Byblos banks to the higher risk level of Caa2.

Economist Issam Jurdi told Arab News: "Lebanon is sick and suffering. There is no money in the state's treasury or budget, and the Banque du Liban (Lebanon's central bank) has exhausted its free reserves. It can no longer support the lira (Lebanese pound) or fund strategic items such as fuel, hydrocarbons, medical supplies, and wheat."

Moody's downgrade also meant Lebanon would not be able to obtain foreign credits at the same interest rates, he added.

Meanwhile protesters continued to stage demonstrations throughout the country against political corruption and the imposition of new taxes.

Former Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and ex-Minister of Interior Nohad Machnouk were among the demonstrators' targets for abuse, and protests were held outside the Ministry of Interior offices and the home of caretaker Energy Minister Nada Boustany. Crowds also headed to the home of Walid Jumblatt, leader of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) and one of the Lebanese politicians sharing power.

Despite the recent resignation of Lebanon's Prime Minister Saad Hariri, efforts to form a rescue government have run into a political block.

Development expert, Dr. Nasser Yassin, said: "Lebanon needs an immediate government that can give back confidence through trustful personalities that could elaborate plans to salvage the economic situation."

Jurdi said: "The central bank has absorbed all US dollars available in the local market and is treating it as if it is its own free reserve, while in reality it is the Lebanese peoples' deposits.

## **FASTFACT**

The alert came a day after international confidence in Lebanon's crisis-hit economy was dealt another serious blow after credit rating company Moody's downgraded the country's top three banks.

"The danger lies in the fact that there are state financial benefits and deposits tied to a year. If depositors want to withdraw their US dollars at maturity, they are asked by the bank to procure this from the market or convert their deposits into US dollars and freeze them in the bank. This means that 20 days ago we were transformed into a bound economy.

"The crisis is due to the \$17 billion deficit in the balance of payment, and the trade deficit in the trade account which is estimated at 25 percent of the Lebanese GDP. The budget deficit for 2019 was estimated at 7.6 percent, while the 2020 deficit would rise due to the current crisis, especially as Lebanon did not prepare its 2020 budget within the constitutional deadline," he added.

"In the 1970s and 1980s, during the civil war there was a financial surplus in Lebanon as the war was funded by foreign powers. Now Lebanon is left to rely on the Gulf countries and the international community.

"We need to pray, as there are no miracles in economy, however there could be miracles in politics. We need internal and external rescue plans."

Jurdi claimed that the on-going crisis in Lebanon was "an attempt to circumvent the people and put down their revolution."

Yassin said: "At the beginning of the current crisis, people withdrew their bank deposits due to a loss of confidence in the state. The total amount withdrawn was estimated at around \$1 billion. No one would dare to invest a dime in Lebanon at a time when politicians are still negotiating partaking power."

He added that protesters in Lebanon would "not accept the return of old faces to power, nor the old way of running state affairs. Prompt measures are needed to regain trust. We do not have the luxury of time."



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Women and students are at the heart of Lebanon's protests