

Two rockets target coalition troops in Iraq, no casualties

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FALLUJAH: Two rockets targeting a base in western Iraq hosting US-led coalition troops on Saturday crashed near the complex without causing casualties or damage, security sources said.

"Two rockets fell outside the Iraqi base of Ain Al-Asad," a security forces statement said, adding there were no "losses."

The base, controlled by Iraq, is located in the desert in the western Anbar province and hosts foreign troops from the coalition fighting the Daesh group.

A coalition official told AFP there was "no impact on the installation reported" and "no coalition personnel injuries reported."

A previously unknown group calling itself "International Resistance" claimed the attack on a pro-Iran channel of messaging app Telegram.

Rockets and drones frequently target the Ain Al-Asad base.

On April 8, the coalition said it shot down an armed drone targeting the facility, reporting no casualties or damage.

Dozens of rocket and armed drone attacks have targeted US troops and interests in Iraq in recent months.

Western officials have blamed hard-line pro-Iran factions for the attacks, most of which go unclaimed.

The coalition ended its combat mission in Iraq in December, four years after the Baghdad government declared victory over the jihadists.

But roughly 2,500 American soldiers and 1,000 coalition soldiers remain deployed in three Iraqi-controlled bases across the country, including Ain Al-Asad, to offer training, advice and assistance to national forces.



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[Ain al-Asad air base](#)

[Anti-Daesh coalition](#)

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Rockets fell in Iraq's Balad air base leaving no damage Tension soars in Iraq after new militia attack on US air base

[Iraq seizes more than 6 million captagon pills in drug bust](#)

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Sat, 2022-04-30 19:40

BAGHDAD: Iraqi security forces said Saturday they had broken up a drug trafficking ring and seized more than six million pills of the amphetamine-type stimulant captagon, making several arrests.

Iraq's northwestern neighbor Syria is the Middle East's main captagon producer.

Iraqi forces seized "around 6.2 million pills" from a warehouse in the southwest of the capital, the national security agency said in a statement,

adding that the drugs were set for distribution “in areas of Baghdad and other provinces.”

Three Iraqis and four suspects from other Arab countries were arrested in connection with the trafficking network, it added.

The statement said security forces broke up a second drug ring after an Arab national was arrested “in possession of six kilos (13 pounds) of hashish,” while two accomplices were also detained.

All 10 accused “admitted to links with international drug trafficking networks,” it said.

Drug trafficking convictions can be punishable by the death penalty in Iraq. Trade in captagon in the Middle East grew exponentially in 2021 to top \$5 billion, posing an increasing health and security risk to the region, a report said earlier this month.

Captagon was the trade name of a drug initially patented in Germany in the early 1960s that contained an amphetamine-type stimulant called fenethylamine used to treat attention deficit and narcolepsy among other conditions. It was later banned and became an illicit drug almost exclusively produced and consumed in the Middle East.

Captagon is now a brand name, with its trademark logo sporting two interlocked “Cs,” or crescents, embossed on each tablet, for a drug that often contains little or no fenethylamine and is close to what is known in other countries as “speed.”

The sale and use of drugs in Iraq has soared in recent years. Security forces have stepped up operations and make almost daily announcements of seizures or arrests.

In the first three months of this year, Iraqi security forces detained 18 suspected drug traffickers in the largely desert province of Anbar, which shares a long border with Syria, according to an official source.

More than three million captagon pills were seized in the same period.



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[drugs](#)

[drug smuggling](#)

Saudi authorities foil attempt by Umrah pilgrims to smuggle Captagon
Captagon trade spirals to top \$5 billion in 2021: report

[In Gaza, families enjoy iftar on the beach with cool breeze and fantastic view](#)

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Fri, 2022-04-29 23:53

GAZA CITY: Many families in Gaza gather on the beach for iftar meals during Ramadan, where they can breathe in the fresh air, enjoy the sound of the waves and watch the sunset.

Situated on the Mediterranean coast, the Gaza Strip has a population of about 2 million people. In recent years, cafeterias have started to appear close to the shore, where families can bring their own food and pay a small charge to use a table and chairs as they enjoy their meals with a sea view.

Muhammad Aidya, 45, and his family of seven sit at a table near the beach, waiting for the sun to set and the Maghrib prayer before breaking their fast. "This year, Ramadan came during relatively cold weather but in previous years, the weather was much warmer," he told Arab News.

"I came for iftar here by the sea at least 10 times during the month ... the air is fresh and my family is happy, my children play, and (we enjoy) delicious food that we bring from home."

At a nearby table, a young couple with a three-year-old child are setting out their meal in anticipation of breaking their fast.

"It's nice weather today so we decided to eat outside," said Rawiya Tafesh, 25, a housewife. "We bought a takeaway from a restaurant and we brought it here to eat together, while our son plays around."

The Tafesh family cannot afford to dine in luxury restaurants, so they opted to get more affordable takeaway food and eat it in the scenic seashore surroundings.

"Our monthly income is limited," Tafesh said. "We don't deny ourselves the

enjoyment but we can't pay big money for food ... we don't eat in those fancy restaurants; we enjoy it here more than there."

Restaurants in the Gaza Strip, especially those at the luxury end of the scale, organize daily iftar buffets but for the most part they are affordable only to the rich and some middle-class residents.

Hamdi Al-Owaili, 39, owns a cafeteria on the beach in Gaza.

"During Ramadan, we rent tables and chairs on the beach for iftar," he said.

"There is less demand this year than last year because of the cold weather.

"The cost is low here; the family pays about 10 to 20 shekels (\$3 to \$6), depending on their number. They can bring their food and all their belongings and sit until dawn if they want, and this is available and possible for most of the residents of the Gaza Strip."

Some families organize feasts for many of their relatives at the beach, renting a place to eat and bringing food from home so that they can spend some quality time together.

"My wife and I decided to invite my brothers and sisters during Ramadan and as a result of the large number of people, we decided to organize the feast outside instead at home," said Abdullah Al-Saadi, 47.

"This is an opportunity to enjoy a family atmosphere in an open space.

Children can play in this place and there is less noise compared with being inside the house with (so many people), and the women enjoy talking to each other and also walking on the beach in a nice atmosphere.

"Ramadan is an opportunity to meet loved ones, in addition to doing good deeds. During Ramadan, members of a large family meet each other, eat food, sweets and do other Ramadan activities, which we cannot do except in Ramadan."



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Palestinians share rituals of last 10 days of Ramadan
Demand for local Saudi dish balila rises during Ramadan

[Palestinians share rituals of last 10 days of Ramadan](#)

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Fri, 2022-04-29 23:52

RAMALLAH: Ramadan will end in just a few days, and Palestinians share their rituals of how they spend the last 10 days of the holy month. During the last 10 days of Ramadan, Duha Asous, a sexagenarian from Burin

village near Nablus, makes cakes with dates, walnuts and cinnamon to distribute to neighbors and the poor. "Now, if you walk in the streets of Burin, you can smell the cake from a meter's distance," Asous proudly tells Arab News.

Asous reminisces about the Ramadan of 40 years ago when they would bake breads and potatoes with chicken in a wood-burning oven, the flavor of which she misses today.

On Friday, Asous visits Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem with her friends and family to perform Friday prayers.

"It is an opportunity as we cannot reach Jerusalem throughout the year, except in the month of Ramadan."

Sheikh Talib Al-Silwadi, one of the most prominent Islamic preachers and guides in Ramallah, told Arab News that he urges fasting people during his Friday and daily sermons to pay Ramadan charity and zakat, annual charity money, to poor people so that they can buy what they need to celebrate Eid. Al-Silwadi also advises people to do more good deeds and worship, especially in the last 10 days of Ramadan, to obtain double reward from God.

Hundreds of people also sit for I'tikaf either in Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem or nearby mosques to pray in seclusion until the Eid crescent is sighted. Many Palestinians also go to perform Umrah to Makkah; and this year has been different as for the first time in two years, since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, Palestinians have traveled for Umrah.

Then there is Al-Musaharati, where young people wake up people for sahoor and wish families a blissful Ramadan, and in return get cash or gifts as an appreciation for voluntarily keeping the centuries-old tradition alive.

There is also a lot of hustle and bustle in the market after dinner until sahoor as people excitedly prepare for Eid Al-Fitr.

The streets are decorated with colorful lights and lanterns, and there are numerous stalls selling delectable corns, beans and boiled chickpeas dishes, in addition to tea and coffee.

Ramallah's two famous ice cream shops – Rakab Ice Cream and Baladna Ice Cream – treat adults and children to their famous product. Some people also treat themselves to shawarmas and falafel sandwiches after binging on heavy traditional dishes for almost a month.

On Saturdays, Palestinians with Israeli citizenship who live in Jil, Triangle and the Negev go shopping to the West Bank markets, where goods can be bought at a lower price than in Israel.

Some people go out for long walks to enjoy the last nights of Ramadan while others host friends and families and for iftar meals before the holy month ends.



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Why many non-Muslims in Saudi Arabia chose to fast this Ramadan
British Umrah pilgrim expresses joy at returning for Ramadan post pandemic

[Lebanon halts passport renewals as fears of exodus grow](#)

Author:

Fri, 2022-04-29 23:08

BEIRUT: Lebanese authorities have stopped accepting applications for passport renewals, saying they are unable to keep up with demand, as the country's worsening economic crisis pushes people to leave the country.

The Lebanese General Security has said that it will suspend passport renewals from this week and that its stock of passports will cover only current

applicants.

The announcement has sparked fears that authorities are determined to stop people leaving Lebanon, limiting their freedom of movement.

Maj. Gen. Abbas Ibrahim, director-general of General Security, said: "The passport application platform has scheduled appointments until April 2023, and passports will be delivered to all those who have already applied until that date."

Lebanese have been rushing to get biometric passports since 2020, with requests for renewals 10 times higher than in previous years.

Locals anticipated a rise in passport fees, so rushed to get new documents, while expats took advantage of their vacations in Lebanon to renew their passports for about \$35, avoiding the \$200 or \$300 payment required at Lebanese embassies abroad.

A study by the General Directorate of General Security found that 69 percent of people obtained passports without using them, and that about 20,000 citizens renewed their passports in 2021, although they had two more years before their documents expired.

The study also found that more than 15,000 passports were processed, but were never claimed by their owners.

The General Security said: "As of 2020, our main and regional centers had 10 times more passport applications than previous years, which affected our passport inventory."

Brig. Gen. Mounir Akiki, from General Security, told Arab News that the rising number of applications and dwindling stock forced authorities to act.

New conditions were issued in February for renewing passports that some believed were impossible to meet.

Requirements included having a valid residency abroad, a valid visa affixed to the passport to be renewed, an embassy appointment within a month of the date of submitting the application, or evidence of continuing studies abroad, or medical reports if the purpose of renewing the passport is to continue treatment abroad, or to show a signed work contract and necessary documents if the purpose is to work abroad.

In addition, the biometric passport fee was raised from 300,000 Lebanese pounds (\$200) to 600,000 Lebanese pounds (valid for five years) and from 500,000 Lebanese pounds to 1.2 million Lebanese pounds (valid for 10 years).

Akiki said that issues with passport were also behind the General Security's decision.

"In 2021, we realized the repercussions of the economic crisis in Lebanon and signed a contract with the French company that prints Lebanese passports worth \$12 million in return for printing 1 million passports, but the company

requested to transfer a certain amount as a documentary credit to start printing, and according to the Code of Money and Credit in Lebanon, contracts must be signed in Lebanese pounds and not in dollars.”

He added: “When we signed the contract with the French company, the dollar exchange rate was based on the official rate, i.e. 1,500 Lebanese pounds to the dollar, and there was no exchange platform affiliated with the Central Bank that sets rates in accordance with financial market movements.”

This affected the continuity of the work. Akiki claimed that Ibrahim urged several politicians to end the crisis, but without success.

According to Akiki, there will be no passports available after April 2023 if the issue is not resolved by then.

Discussing the possibility of renewing old passports as an alternative, Akiki said: “We cannot do that. The old passport has been canceled and can no longer be used. This decision is made by the International Civil Aviation Organization.”

Akiki said that the contract with the French company was worth around 22 billion Lebanese pounds, based on the official exchange rate.

But he said the value increases to around 300 billion Lebanese pounds as per the central bank’s Sayrafa platform rate (around 22,000 Lebanese pounds to the dollar).

The Lebanon Crisis Observatory at the American University of Beirut has predicted a wave of emigration from Lebanon in coming years.

A key indicator is that 77 percent of young people are considering emigrating, while specialists and professionals are also leaving in search of better working conditions and income.

Thousands of Lebanese, including teachers, doctors, nurses and university graduates, left the country two years ago, and the number of departures increased after the Beirut port explosion.

The World Bank estimates that Lebanon will need at least 12 years to return to 2017 gross domestic product levels.

This will pressure hundreds of thousands to leave the country in order to invest, work, study and retire abroad, the bank said.



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Lebanon's energy transition from no electricity to renewables
Standoff with Lebanon banks could derail IMF deal, minister says