

US Treasury Targets Hezbollah finance official and shadow bankers in Lebanon

Author:

Tue, 2021-05-11 19:16

The US Treasury Department on Tuesday imposed sanctions on seven Lebanese nationals it said were connected to the Iran-backed militant Hezbollah movement and its financial firm, Al-Qard al-Hassan (AQAH).

The Treasury in a statement said it had blacklisted Ibrahim Ali Daher, the chief of Hezbollah's Central Finance Unit, as a specially designated global terrorist alongside six people it accused of using the cover of personal accounts at Lebanese banks to evade sanctions targeting AQAH.

"Hezbollah continues to abuse the Lebanese financial sector and drain Lebanon's financial resources at an already dire time," Andrea Gacki, director of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control, said in the statement.

The Treasury also blacklisted Ahmad Mohamad Yazbeck, Abbas Hassan Gharib, Wahid Mahmud Subayti, Mostafa Habib Harb, Ezzat Youssef Akar, and Hasan Chehadeh Othman in connection with Hezbollah and its financial firm.

The move freezes any US assets of those blacklisted and generally bars Americans from dealing with them. Those who engage in certain transactions with the designated individuals also risk being hit with secondary sanctions.



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Explained: How Hezbollah built a drug empire via its 'narcoterrorist strategy'
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[Iraq's protest leaders forced into hiding by pro-Iran militia death threats](#)

Tue, 2021-05-11 18:52

IRBIL/BOGOTA: Mustafa Makki Karim, 24, fled Baghdad for the relative safety of Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region last year following a spate of death threats by pro-Iran groups for his role in the protest movement that erupted against government corruption and incompetence in October 2019.

During the unrest that followed, the young activist earned the moniker

“Joker” for the clown mask he wore to hide his identity as he and his “Armored Division of Tahrir” defended their camp in Baghdad’s Victory Square.

“I left my life, my family, my friends, my future for my country and for the souls of the people we lost,” Karim told Arab News from the safety of his Irbil bedsit. He took a bullet in his leg and lost sight in one eye after Iraqi troops fired birdshot into the crowd.



Iraqi demonstrators wave national flags as they take part in an anti-government demonstration in the capital Baghdad’s Tahrir Square, on December 6, 2019. (AFP/File Photo)

Now Karim and others like him have been forced into hiding – nursing injuries he sustained in clashes with security forces and militia thugs, fearful for those who chose to remain behind.

Their fears are hardly unfounded. On May 9, Ihab Al-Wazni, a coordinator of protests in the Shiite shrine city of Karbala, was killed outside his home by men on motorbikes. A vocal opponent of corruption and Iran’s influence in Iraq, Al-Wazni was a key figure of the protest campaign.

October 2019 marked the beginning of the biggest grassroots social movement in Iraq’s modern history. Fed up with a corrupt ruling elite, seen as beholden to foreign powers, the young Iraqis who came of age following the fall of Saddam marched in their hundreds of thousands in cities across the country, demanding the overthrow of the post-2003 order.

THE 2019 ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS IN IRAQ

TRIGGERS

- Corrupt political system
- Deteriorating economy
- High unemployment
- Poor public services

DEMANDS

- New prime minister, Independent of current establishment
- Electoral reform
- End to Iranian Influence

2019

- Oct. 1** • Mass anti-government protests in capital and south
- Oct. 3** • Tanks on streets of Baghdad, Internet cut
- Oct. 6** • Government announces social reforms
- Oct. 24** • Protests start again. At least 63 killed in space of 2 days
- Nov. 17** • General strike
- Nov. 28** • Brutal military crackdown in south
- Nov. 29** • Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi resigns
- Dec. 26** • Fresh protests after leaders seek to nominate an establishment insider as next prime minister



Demonstrators carry symbolic coffins through Baghdad, Dec. 22, 2019

Source: AFP bureaux

ARAB NEWS

Scenes of defiance played out in Baghdad's Tahrir Square, with pitched battles between protesters and security forces on the adjoining bridges leading to the fortified Green Zone, where government officials and foreign diplomats watched with unease.

Around 600 people were killed as a result of their association with the protest movement – many on the streets during rallies, others targeted on their doorsteps away from the rallies.

According to Amnesty International, the global human rights monitor, hundreds of people were killed by live ammunition, military-grade teargas canisters and other weapons deemed inappropriate for civilian crowd control. Many soldiers and police officers were wounded by lumps of concrete and petrol bombs thrown by protesters.

"I started to protest to end this corrupt political class," Karim told Arab News. "My life was totally changed by the protests. I was a university student. I celebrated graduation in Tahrir Square. I used to go from Tahrir to my university to do my exams and then go back to the demonstrations."



An Iraqi demonstrator draped in his country's national flag stands next to burning tyres during ongoing anti-government protests in the southern Iraqi city of Nasiriyah, on February 12, 2020. (AFP/File Photo)

The iconic clown mask, popularized by the 2019 US crime thriller "Joker" starring Joaquin Phoenix, has cropped up in protests across the world as a symbol of rebellion against indifferent and sneering elites.

Pro-Iran media outlets in Iraq even labeled the young protesters "joker gangs" and accused them of receiving support from the US to overthrow the Iraqi state. The reality of course was that key branches of the Iranian regime had unleashed their paramilitary proxies on the protesters to maintain their stranglehold over Iraq.

"I used to hide my identity. For a few months, no one knew I was the Joker. But my uncle told the militias about me. He was with Saraya Al-Salam," Karim said, referring to the Mahdi Army, the erstwhile militia led by the Shiite cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr.



Demonstrations erupted in October 2019 in Iraq's capital Baghdad and across its Shiite-majority south, railing against government graft and a lack of jobs. (AFP/File Photo)

"Suddenly I was a wanted man at checkpoints and there is a court case against me by Asaib Ahl Al-Haq," he added, alluding to an Iran-backed militia known to have deployed fighters to Syria in support of the Assad regime.

"The names and pictures of me, my brother, and my cousin were on the street. They were placed there by Asaib Ahl Al-Haq. Our house was attacked with bullets."

IRAQ: AT A GLANCE

- * 30 – Activists who have died since October 2019.
- * 12.83% – Unemployment rate.
- * 25.17% – Youth unemployment rate.

Source: Statista

Rather than back down, Karim removed his mask. "I took the decision to reveal my identity on TV. I told them who I am and what I do. I and others were on the front line to stop forces who wanted to break into Tahrir Square."

After initial successes, including the resignation of then-Prime Minister

Adel Abdul-Mahdi, and having earned widespread international sympathy, the movement began to fragment.

Bereft of clear leadership, divided on strategy, and intimidated by heavy-handed policing and political assassinations, the final nail in the movement's coffin was the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.



Ahmed Latif Taher, an Iraqi youth forced to flee to the Kurdistan region

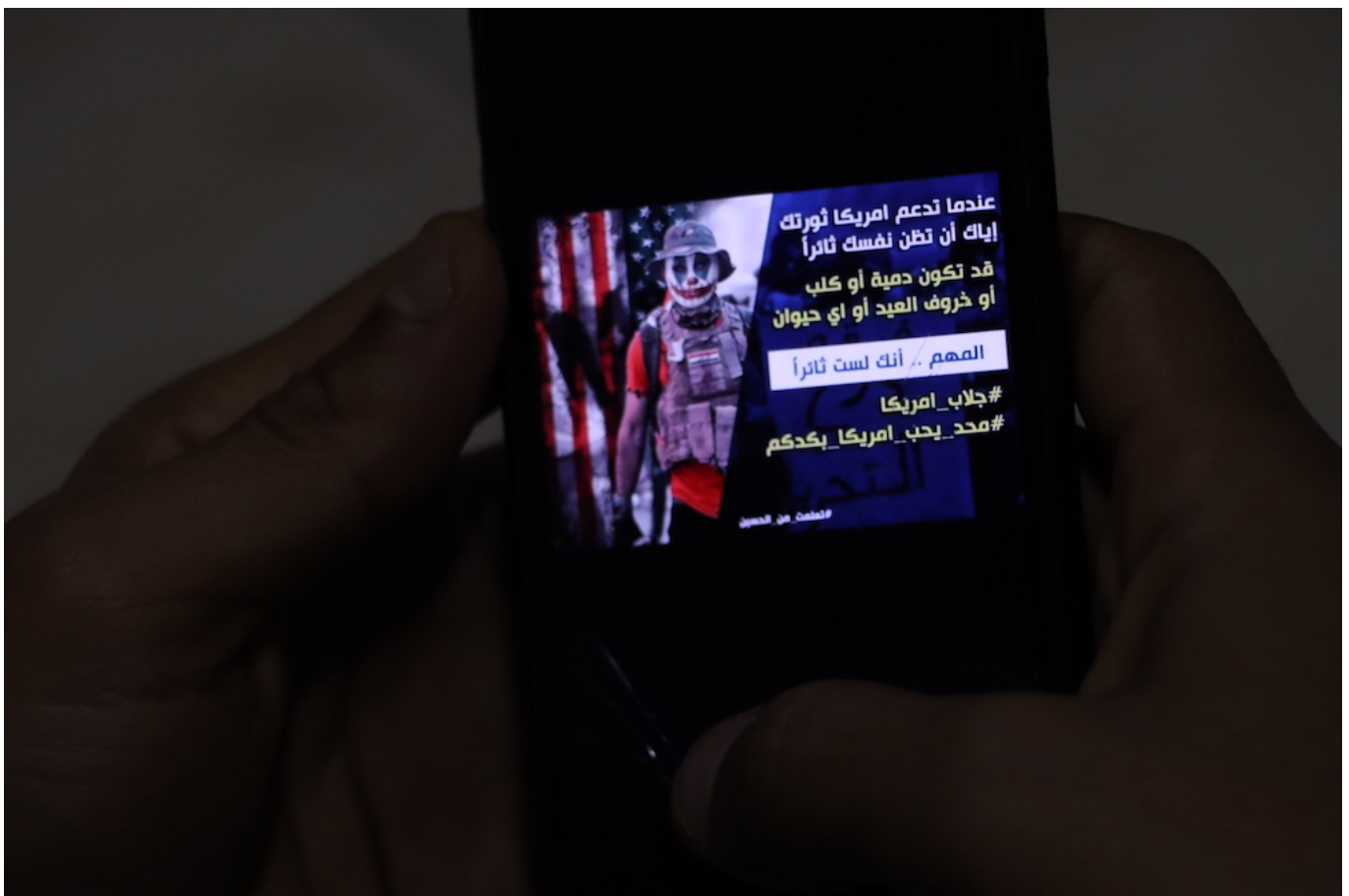
following pro-Iran militia threats for his role in the protest movement. (AN Photo/Kareem Botane)

On the first anniversary of the “Tishreen revolution” in October 2020, Karim and other activists still camped out in the square attempted to re-energize their dwindling movement. But their attempts to march on the Green Zone were foiled by security forces who retook Tahrir.

With the rebellion quashed by pro-Iran forces and an elite determined to hold onto power at any cost, those who had taken part and openly criticized the all-powerful militias now faced retribution.

As assassins picked off the protest leaders one by one, Karim knew he had to flee. Even his family were forced to move to a different city to avoid collective punishment.

“The militias have called for my death. There is no way I can go back to any Iraqi cities outside Kurdistan,” he said. “I don’t have any future here in Iraq. All militias are chasing me, specifically Kataib Hezbollah and Asaib Ahl Al-Haq. They want to kill me.”



Mustafa Makki Karim, 24, fled Baghdad for the relative safety of Iraq’s semi-autonomous Kurdistan region last year following a spate of death threats by pro-Iran groups for his role in anti-government protests. Now in Irbil, he swipes through photos of himself in his Joker mask during more hopeful days in Tahrir Square. (AN Photo/Kareem Botane)

And the threats are very real. Thaer Karim Al-Tayeb from Al-Diwaniyah, a town just east of Iraq’s shrine city of Najaf, was mortally wounded by a car bomb

for his role in the movement.

“His dream was to have a job with the ministry of oil and to get married to his girlfriend,” Al-Tayeb’s brother Malik told Arab News. “But the militias assassinated him with an explosive device that was put in his car on Dec. 14, 2019.

“He stayed in hospital for nine days before he died. We don’t know who targeted him. We don’t have evidence of who did this. I even met with the prime minister, the minister of interior and the governor of Diwaniyah and security commanders. There were no results. Only fake promises. Instead, I received threats.”

Justice for Al-Tayeb, it seemed, was simply out of reach. “After the death of my brother, a man with his face covered approached me on a motorbike,” said Malik. “He told me that I needed to stop pursuing the case of my brother’s death.”



Thaer Karim Al-Tayeb, from Al-Diwaniyah, a town just east of Iraq’s shrine city of Najaf, was mortally wounded by a car bomb on Dec. 14, 2019 for his role in the movement. His brother is still searching for justice. (AN Photo/Kareem Botane)

Few doubt an Iranian intelligence connection to the campaign of suppression and intimidation, which uses the tactics deployed by Tehran against protesters when they dare rebel.

“Militias and the countries that support them want to create chaos in the country,” said Ahmed Latif Taher, another Iraqi youth forced to flee to the

Kurdistan region. “We know the government and the militias are the same.”

But fighting the pro-Iran militias head-on would prove disastrous, he told Arab News. Instead, he wants the international community to keep up the pressure on the Iranian regime so that it ceases its extraterritorial activities in Iraq and elsewhere in the region.

“We don’t want to have an armed revolution in any way that will destroy the country. It will be another Syria here. We don’t want that,” Taher said. “They have enough weapons to exterminate the people. They would kill to stay in power. We need a UN intervention to pressure Iran to take its hands off the region.”



A 23-year-old unemployed Iraqi man, wearing face-paint modeled after DC comic book and film character “The Joker,” poses for a picture with a makeshift riot shield bearing text in Arabic reading “Tahrir Shield Division,” during an anti-government demonstration in the capital Baghdad in November 2019.

(AFP/File Photo)

As Iraq grapples with a fresh COVID-19 wave, with an economy and infrastructure left shattered by decades of war and mismanagement, the grievances of the protesters remain unaddressed.

“I do not regret my participation in the demonstrations,” Karim said as he scrolled through photographs of his masked alter ego on his phone, decked out in body armor in Tahrir Square.

“There is more awareness among people in Iraq after the demonstrations. Day after day we win people over to our side. Even people who work for the

militias.”



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Iraqi protesters dig in heels despite new PM-designate
Iraqi activist's killing sparks protests against impunity

Arab League Council holds urgent session to discuss attack on Jerusalem

Author:

Mon, 2021-05-10 22:10

CAIRO: The League of Arab States held an urgent session of the League Council among Arab foreign ministers on Monday, at the request of Palestine, which was supported by a number of Arab countries.

The session aimed to discuss the Israeli attacks in the occupied city of Jerusalem, the Islamic and Christian holy sites, especially Al-Aqsa Mosque, and plans to force Palestinian families out of their homes, particularly in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood.

Hossam Zaki, assistant secretary-general of the Arab League, said that it was decided to upgrade the meeting to the ministerial level from that of the permanent delegates level.

Diab Al-Louh, Palestinian ambassador to Cairo and Palestine's permanent representative to the Arab League, said that the urgent meeting was to discuss the seriousness of the brutal attacks on worshipers at Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Al-Louh said a request for an urgent meeting was submitted based on the directives of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, and the directives of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Riyadh Al-Maliki.



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UN chief urges Israel to exercise restraint as more clashes erupt in East Jerusalem

[Medical profession protests 'unfair'](#) [Lebanon court ruling in favor of girl](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-05-10 21:52

BEIRUT: All Lebanese doctors have stopped working from Monday until the end of the week in protest against a court verdict.

The medical profession in Lebanon is protesting against the judicial decision to pay high compensation to Ella Tannous, who had her limbs amputated due to a medical error six years ago.

The protesting doctors have been joined by private hospitals, which have stopped receiving patients, except in emergency cases.

The girl's father Hassan Tannous, however, praised the "honest judiciary."

Many doctors, including the head of Lebanese Order of Physicians, Dr. Sharaf Abu Sharaf, and the head of the Syndicate of Private Hospital Owners, Suleiman Haroun, staged a sit-in in front of the Palace of Justice in Beirut, calling the ruling "unfair."

The Tannous case goes back to February 2015, when she was admitted to Hôpital Notre Dame des Secours in Jbeil due to her high temperature.□

Ella was diagnosed with a cold at the time, but her condition deteriorated and the child suffered septic shock, which led to gangrene that caused the amputation of her limbs.

The girl's father had taken her to the Hotel Dieu Hospital, which refused to receive her.

He transferred her to the American University of Beirut Medical Center, where doctors decided to save her life by amputating her four limbs.

The tragedy led her parents to file a complaint in March 2015 before the Lebanese Order of Physicians against the doctor who examined her and Hôpital Notre Dame des Secours in Jbeil, on charges of neglecting the child's health and not providing her with the necessary care.

More than one doctor was arrested and released on bail.

Those involved in the case exchanged accusations for years. The girl's family objected to a medical report issued by the medical committee of the Lebanese Order of Physicians two months after the incident, calling it a "distortion of the facts."

The final ruling, issued unanimously at the end of last week, by the Beirut Appeals Court, headed by Tarek Bitar, gave the girl's family a positive surprise, while the Lebanese medical profession reacted to the ruling in a state of amazement and condemnation.

The ruling obligated the American University of Beirut Medical Center in Beirut, Hôpital Notre Dame des Secours in Jbeil and the two doctors – Essam M. and Rana Sh. – "to pay in joint and several liabilities to the child Tannous an amount of LBP 9 billion (\$5.9 million) for damages, in addition to a monthly income for life estimated at four times the minimum wage."

The ruling also stipulated "obliging the convicts to pay in joint and several liabilities an amount of LBP 500 million to the father of the child and LBP 500 million to her mother in exchange for damages."

Medical errors committed against patients have often resulted in settlements. Some cases are still pending in the courts.

The head of the National Health Authority, Dr. Ismail Sukkarieh, told Arab News that the judicial ruling "is based more on emotions than wisdom, justice and scientific facts."

Sukkarieh added: "The judiciary focused on the tragedy of the child's condition, which cannot be compensated with money, without checking the stages of the disease and the accumulation of its causes."

He said: "Hôpital Notre Dame des Secours in Jbeil was not equipped with intensive care for children. As for the doctors who saved the child through the amputation, they were spiritually affected."

Hassan Tannous said that although the ruling "does not compensate for the loss of Ella to her limbs, it is a moral compensation."

The father said the ruling "is a very strong message in the face of the perpetrators of medical errors, that there is an honest judiciary capable of restoring the rights of the owners."

The girl's family moved to France for her rehabilitation but continued to pursue the lawsuit until the end.

"It is a public rights issue to protect all Lebanese children from medical neglect," said Hassan.

During the sit-in at the Palace of Justice on Monday, Dr. Abu Sharaf said: "There are complications that occur as a result of the medicines, and mistakes happen sometimes, but the doctors have no criminal intent. After today, no doctor will dare to work on difficult and rare cases."

Dr. Ashraf called for "work to remove the effect of the judicial decision, and to establish a body specialized in medical matters in the judiciary to study medical problems."

Hotel Dieu Hospital de France announced that it would stop receiving patients in all its departments and private clinics.

"It is unacceptable for doctors to pay the price for a health policy that does not exist in the first place," said Elias Shallal, head of the hospital's medical committee.

"It is unacceptable to applaud doctors for their role in the fight against coronavirus and after the Beirut Port explosion, and then attack them because of a medical error."

The administration of Hôpital Notre Dame des Secours in Jbeil described the ruling as "unfair."

It stopped receiving patients except in emergency cases.

The American University Medical Center in Beirut closed its clinics until further notice and stopped receiving patients, except for emergency cases.



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Lebanon's tourism sector seeks relief to recover from lockdown
Lebanon's security forces pursuing smugglers, says interior minister

[Israel defies international community as conflict with Palestinians continues](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-05-10 21:45

AMMAN: Despite calls from the international community for an end to the hostilities between Israeli security forces and Palestinians, clashes continued in Jerusalem on Monday, with violence erupting at Al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam's third holiest site, for the second day in a row.

Over 300 people have reportedly been injured, with the Red Crescent saying half a dozen Palestinians are in a critical condition.

On Friday, May 7, US State Department spokesman Ned Price called on both sides to show restraint, saying Washington was “extremely concerned about ongoing confrontations in Jerusalem, including on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and in Sheikh Jarrah,” condemning an attack on Israeli soldiers and “reciprocal attacks on Palestinians.”

US-based outlet Axios, meanwhile, said the White House had pressed Israel to restrain Monday’s planned Jerusalem Day celebrations, marking the capture of East Jerusalem in 1967, so as not to stoke further tension in the city, but that Israel had rebuffed these advances.

Former Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) executive committee member Hanan Ashrawi challenged the US and European leaders to “grow a backbone” and “translate their words into action,” over restraining Israel against Palestinian worshippers.

She said: “Americans must learn to grow a backbone and work hard to enforce their position and to use their financial and political power. This is not a big deal to ask to ensure freedom of religion.

“This is the language that the Israelis understand; if they are being rewarded, nothing will happen,” she continued. “There has to be a cost and this is a test of the Biden administration. Americans must say enough is enough.”

Ashrawi added that what is happening is a “crime” and a clear case of multiple human rights violations, including targeting civilians, vandalizing holy sites, and using excessive power against worshippers.

Protests at the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, meanwhile, drew the presence of right-wing Israeli members of the Knesset and a large number of Palestinians and their supporters.

The UN secretary-general and senior world leaders were among those to condemn the violence, and express their concerns over the evictions in Sheikh Jarrah.

Jordan summoned the Israeli chargé d’affaires in Amman, and threatened to recall its ambassador in Tel Aviv. There were also loud demonstrations outside the Embassy of Israel in Jordan calling for its closure.

Former Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad told Arab News that Jerusalem is the symbol of the Palestinian cause.

“The reunification of the homeland and its national institutions requires the full (cooperation) of all Palestinians regardless of where they are,” said Fayad.

“Such reaction is the strongest response to the Israeli aggression and the terror of its army and settlers against our holy places and our people in Jerusalem,” he added.

Fayyad continued that the basic right of people to live in their homes and homeland was fundamental “to allow our people to extract their right to self-

determination.”

Hazem Kawasmi, a Jerusalem civil society activist, told Arab News that what is happening in Sheikh Jarrah was the continuation of the last 70 years of evictions of Palestinians from their homes and land across the country.

“Trying to evict 28 families from their houses in Sheikh Jarrah is a clear case that (shows) the Israeli apartheid regime and transfer policy to implement their ‘Judaizing’ of the city, emptying it of its indigenous Palestinian population,” Kawasmi said.

“Not surprisingly, the international community are watching and doing nothing to stop the rogue state of Israel from practicing its ethnic cleansing policies.”

There are fears that Israel’s actions in Jerusalem could also provoke wider problems beyond the city. Senior Hamas figure Salah Aruri warned that “by playing with fire in Jerusalem, the occupiers (Israel) will witness a burning response on their heads.”



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Saudi and Egyptian foreign ministers condemn Israel for undermining
Palestinian rights