

[US envoy to Yemen Lenderking meets Kuwaiti foreign minister](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-03-02 01:08

LONDON: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah met Tim Lenderking, the US special envoy for Yemen on Monday, the Kuwait News Agency reported.

Lenderking, who is touring the region, praised Kuwait for its political and humanitarian contributions to the efforts to restore security and safety to Yemen. He also briefed the minister on the latest developments in the crisis. Sheikh Ahmad reiterated Kuwait's desire to do all that it can to help and support the people of Yemen, and to assist with efforts to reach a political solution that restores the nation's security and stability. He added that his country also supports the role and work of the US and its envoy as part of the efforts to end the crisis.

Lenderking said Washington will continue to put pressure on the Houthi militia to halt attacks on civilian areas. He again condemned the repeated assaults by the Iran-backed group on targets in Saudi Arabia which, he said, "is a direct threat to Gulf and Arab national security."



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[Footage emerges of Iranian missile attack on US troops](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-03-01 23:58

LONDON: Footage has emerged of an Iranian missile attack on a US airbase in Iraq last year that could have brought the two countries to the brink of war.

On Jan. 8 last year, 11 missiles, each thought to have been carrying 1,000-pound warheads, hit Al-Asad airbase, which was home to some 2,000 US troops at the time.

The incident followed the assassination of Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, by a US drone in Baghdad on Jan. 3.

That strike was ordered after a spate of incidents targeting American personnel and facilities by Iran-backed forces in Iraq, culminating in an assault on the US Embassy in Baghdad on Dec. 31, 2019.

Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie, commander of US forces in the Middle East, told American TV network CBS that more than 100 troops suffered severe brain injuries due to the attack. He said there was a "retaliation plan" in place in the event that any US personnel were killed.

Half the personnel and most of the aircraft were evacuated from the base before the attack, with McKenzie saying if that had not been done in time, "I think we might have lost 20 or 30 airplanes and we might have lost 100 to 150 US personnel. We had a plan to retaliate if Americans had died."

When the retaliation for Soleimani's assassination came, McKenzie was stationed in Florida and monitored the attack remotely, joined by then-President Donald Trump and Secretary of Defense Mark Esper.

McKenzie said: "I've never been on one (call) like this where real missiles (were) being fired at our forces and where I thought the risks were so high."

An intelligence officer reportedly told senior figures that the "intention is to level this base and we may not survive." The missiles left vast craters and destroyed entire buildings.

Maj. Alan Johnson prepared a farewell video message for his son, urging him to "be strong" and to look after his mother, believing he might not survive the night.

He described the impact that the missiles had on detonation as being "like a freight train," telling CBS: "Words can't even describe the amount of energy that is released by these missiles."

He added that he and 40 other men at one point sought refuge in a bunker designed to house 10 people from much smaller ordinance blasts. "The fire was just rolling over the bunkers, you know, like 70 feet in the air," he said.

Sgt. Kimo Keltz, who was stationed inside a guard post to fend off any possible attack by ground troops during the missile barrage, said: "We got down and we protected our vital organs, our heads, and we waited. One of the closest (missiles) that had hit directly near us actually lifted my body about two inches off the ground."

Despite no fatalities, hundreds of troops started reporting headaches and other side effects, including vomiting, in the immediate aftermath of the attack.

Keltz described a two-week long concussion he suffered as being like "someone hitting me over the head with a hammer over and over and over."

Johnson was one of 29 soldiers awarded purple hearts for courage during the attack, but sustained severe head trauma that still affects him today.

"Headaches every day, horrible tinnitus or ringing in the ears, PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). I still have nightmares," he said.

Despite the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic since the exchange of

hostilities, and a change of US leadership, tensions between Tehran and Washington remain high.

Last week, US President Joe Biden launched an attack on pro-Iran militants on the Syrian-Iraqi border following an attack on the largest American base in Iraq on Feb. 15 by Tehran-backed forces.



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[Lebanon faced with darkness if a government is not formed to purchase fuel for electricity plants](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-03-01 23:38

BEIRUT: Lebanon "will enter total darkness by the end of this month" if a

government is not formed, a source in the Finance Ministry has told Arab News amid a growing electricity crisis.

Beirut has for a week been enduring a blackout. The city – which in recent years was exempt from the harsh rationing of electricity due to its role as the administrative, commercial, and hospital center for the whole country – used to experience no more than three hours a day of power outage.

However, in the last week, the blackouts have exceeded 12 hours a day. There is no clear explanation for these severe blackouts.

Several factors are being discussed, including not unloading shipments of fuel imported by sea.

Other suggestions are that there are administrative disputes over the financial transfers that the Ministry of Energy owes the fuel companies.

Elsewhere, some are arguing that the blackouts have a political background and the aim is to pressure Beirut and Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri, thus pushing him to step down, in light of his refusal to give the blocking third in the government to President Michel Aoun and the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM). The Ministry of Energy is part of the FPM's share in governing.

Angry protesters have been taking to the streets in Beirut neighborhoods. They have been blocking roads and setting tires ablaze to protest.

Lebanon is under constant electricity-related pressure for structural reasons and now also because of the scarcity of fuel, as its imports are linked to the dollar.

On Monday, the dollar exchange rate on the black market ranged between 9,675 and 9,725 Lebanese pounds.

Most residential neighborhoods and the commercial and industrial sectors depend on private electricity generators powered by diesel, which is a public health risk.

Owners of generators in residential neighborhoods charge exorbitant fees in exchange for providing electricity to subscribers, and they are called the "generator mafia."

They often do not adhere to the rates set by the Ministry of Energy, as they believe they provide a service to citizens that the government cannot provide, and therefore they exert corresponding pressure to maintain their profits.

The successive governments of Lebanon, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund have deemed "electricity reform a vital issue for reducing the debt, which equates to about 150 percent of the GDP."

Net transfers to the state-owned Electricité du Liban (EDL) per year are between \$1 billion and \$1.5 billion, most of which is spent on the purchase

of fuel. This is equivalent to about a quarter of the 2020 budget deficit.

The resigned government cannot spend resources on electricity infrastructure as state revenues are required to service the public debt.

The World Bank and investors had pledged at the CEDRE conference to invest \$11 billion in Lebanon's infrastructure, including electricity, but these investments are conditional on implementing reforms, including increasing electricity prices.

The EDL announced three days ago that despite the arrival of the two carriers loaded with fuel oil to the Lebanese territorial waters and their docking off the coast, it was not possible to unload the fuel due to the failure to open the required letters of credit and the difficulty in completing banking procedures.

This led to a decline in the stock of fuel oil to its lowest level, which neared depletion, and it resulted in a drop in the supply of the electric current by about 400 megawatts of the total energy produced, which is about 1,400 megawatts.

Caretaker Finance Minister Ghazi Wazni signed the opening of credits in favor of the EDL to meet the requirement of the shipment of fuel oil.

These credits, however, are in Lebanese pounds.

A source in the Ministry of Finance told Arab News: "The problem is that the Banque du Liban refuses to convert these credits into dollars at the official rate of 1,505 Lebanese pounds because the central bank suffers from a shortage of dollars."

The source pointed out that "the caretaker energy minister, Raymond Ghajar, was informed by a political authority that the solution is to form a government quickly."

They added: "The matter entered the bazaar of political pressure to form a government that was required to have been formed since last October."

MP Faisal Al-Sayegh expected "the street to explode soon."

He said: "Buying fuel after this month will require issuing a law to give EDL an emergency treasury advance of hundreds of millions of dollars.

"Moreover, the operation and maintenance of the two thermal power plants in Zouk and Zahrani collide with PrimeSouth's claiming for its receivables, which amount to tens of millions of dollars."

Al-Sayegh added: "The two Turkish steamboats that were hired by the Ministry of Energy to generate electricity are to withdraw from Lebanon because they did not receive their dues, which are about \$160 million."

Al-Sayegh said: "With the money that was paid for hiring the two ships, it was possible to establish two production plants, or at least buy two newer

and better ships.”

The EDL expects a “gradual improvement in the power supply as soon as the two carriers’ cargo is discharged if banking procedures are completed and the supplier issues the approval to unload.”

But the source in the Finance Ministry said that unless a government is urgently formed, Lebanon “will enter total darkness by the end of this month.”



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Lebanon reopens malls amid slow vaccination campaign
Lebanon facing coup threat, Maronite leader warns rally

[Jordanian officials lambast Israel over Al-Aqsa Mosque break-in](#)

Mon, 2021-03-01 03:14

AMMAN: Jordanian officials have denounced the Israeli government’s decision to allow 230 radical Jews to break into Al-Aqsa Mosque on Sunday. The radicals were celebrating the Jewish festival of Purim and had called the day earlier to hold “carnival” festivities on this holiday, which is often

celebrated with Jews wearing costumes and colorful outfits and masks. Others were filmed drunk and brandishing a wine bottle outside one of the mosque's gates.

Daifallah Al-Fayez, a spokesman from the Jordanian Foreign Ministry, said that the Israeli police allowed hundreds of radicals to enter into Al-Aqsa Mosque without coordination with the Jordanian Waqf (endowment) officials. The Jordanian spokesman called the Israeli action a "stark violation" of the historic and legal status quo as well as a violation of international law and commitments made by Israel.

Al-Fayez stressed that the Jerusalem Waqf department is the only legal party responsible for the management of the mosque, including deciding who can enter.

Al-Fayez said that Israel must respect the status quo and the authority of the Jerusalem-based waqf officials.

The Israeli action comes at a time when the country's media has claimed that Israel's Defense Minister General Benny Gantz held an unannounced meeting with the Jordanian monarch last Friday. Jordan has not commented on the issue and the Jordanian media has been relatively silent, except for some platforms republishing Israeli media reports.

Gantz, the leader of the Blue and White party, reportedly told his party members earlier that he was conducting secret meetings with top Jordanian officials. Gantz publicly criticized Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for failing to improve relations with Jordan.

"I think our relationship with Jordan could be 1,000 times better.

Unfortunately, Netanyahu is an unwanted figure in Jordan, and his presence harms the two countries' relations," Gantz said.

Jordan's king has been unhappy with the way Israel is violating an understanding reached in Amman in 2014 in the presence of then-US Secretary of State John Kerry, Netanyahu and Jordan's king, in which they had agreed that Al-Aqsa Mosque is for "Muslims to pray and for all others to visit."



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[Lebanon reopens malls amid slow vaccination campaign](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-03-01 02:19

BEIRUT: Lebanon entered the third week of its coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccination campaign on Monday, with stores and malls reopening for the first time since the closure on Jan. 21.

But warnings about reopenings are being heard from the country's medical experts. The director of the Hariri Governmental University Hospital, Dr. Firas Al-Abyad, said "we are fooling ourselves because the reality is different."

Statistics published by the Ministry of Health show that the average number of daily recorded cases remains above 3,000 and the average number of deaths is hovering above 40. The total number of recorded COVID-19 cases in Lebanon

was 372,792 as of Saturday, while 4,652 deaths were recorded during the same period.

Medical professionals have claimed that the vaccination campaign is going as slow "as a turtle." The vaccination of 11 MPs at the parliament, which was not in line with the vaccination process taking place at hospitals, was another violation that has sparked outrage among the public.

Health Ministry adviser Mohammed Haidar said that "the slow vaccination process is due to the small number of vaccines that arrive every week and that need to be distributed to all the hospitals. Around 100,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine have arrived in Lebanon so far, while 300,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine are expected to arrive this month."

Lebanon received a loan from the World Bank to purchase 2.2 million doses, of which 28,080 doses arrived in the first week, 31,590 doses arrived in the second week, and 41,300 doses arrived on Saturday.

The health minister had revealed that "Moderna had notified Lebanon a while ago that it will not be able to conclude any agreement in order to provide the country with its products because it had previous commitments to marketing its products in five countries only. However, it is ready for its agreement to take effect starting January 2022."

The ministry believes that the 2,730,000 vaccine doses that have been reserved will be enough to vaccinate 20 percent of Lebanon's population. According to the national plan, 249,000 are expected to be used during the first quarter of the year, while the remaining doses are to be divided into three batches to cover the rest of the year.

However, the number of those who were vaccinated during the first two weeks based on the national platform, meaning the medical and nursing staff along with the elderly over the age of 75, constitute less than 3 percent of the targeted group.

SPEEDREAD

Statistics published by the Ministry of Health show that the average number of daily recorded cases remains above 3,000 and the average number of deaths is hovering above 40.

According to the American University of Beirut's coronavirus observatory, 2,858 vaccine doses were given out on a daily basis, while the daily capacity of the vaccination centers is 14,000 doses.

Dr. Abdul Rahman Bizri, head of the National Committee for the Administration of the Coronavirus Vaccine, decided not to resign after the scandal that involved the vaccination of MPs in the parliament building. He confirmed that the vaccination process will go on, noting that "gambling with people's lives is unacceptable. Instead, we should count on the continuation of the vaccination process, while ensuring its absolute transparency and justice in giving the vaccine without any discretionary exceptions."

He said: "I understand the calls of the medical staff, nursing staff and paramedics, who are most exposed to virus and have not yet received the vaccine," adding that "everyone is at risk with the pandemic's outbreak, but the problem is that the number of vaccines is not enough. We have to bear

three additional weeks for larger vaccine quantities to arrive and move forward with the desired immunization process.”

Dr. Firas Al-Abyad called for “the restoration of public trust and the better implementation of safety measures across society, as it is hard to know if the public behavior will change due to the lack of a proper awareness campaign that explains the plan to people, their role in it and the repercussions of its failure.”



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