

Domestic violence doubles in Lebanon

Author:

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BEIRUT: The economic and financial crisis in Lebanon is responsible for the country's worsening domestic violence, according to women's rights groups.

Four women have been murdered over the past month by male relatives as Lebanon is in the depths of a dire economic situation, exacerbated by coronavirus lockdowns and a massive explosion that tore through Beirut last August.

"The reason behind this rise in violence is the economic and financial situation," Hayat Mirshad, the co-founder and co-director at FE-MALE, told Arab News.

"But the violence against women during the lockdown is the most dangerous and most common form of violence. Women are victims of their male relatives: fathers, husbands, or brothers. The lockdown prevents them from leaving their houses or even seeing other people, knowing that violence in Lebanon is the result of a patriarchal culture and mentality that blames women and justifies their aggressors' crimes."

In new figures shared with the Thomson Reuters Foundation on Wednesday, the Internal Security Forces (ISF) said domestic violence reports in Lebanese homes doubled last year, with 1,468 cases received in the past 12 months, up from 747 during the previous year.

An ISF official, who declined to be named because they were not authorized to speak to the media, said the number of women killed by domestic violence in Lebanon also increased but the exact figure has not yet been finalized.

The official figures reflect a similar trend noted by Resource Center for Gender Equality (ABAAD), a women's rights organization, which saw calls to its helpline triple to 4,127 in 2020, up from 1,375 in 2019.

"We have never witnessed this much violence against women," Lawyer Jaafar Mohammed Hashimi told Arab News.

Hashimi is representing a recent victim of domestic violence, Lara Chahine, whose husband was arrested after he allegedly beat her with sharp objects after she returned home from work on Tuesday. Chahine is being treated in the hospital for injuries to her lungs, liver and face.

"The case is classified as an attempted murder, not just an assault," Hashimi said. "The motive behind his crime is that Chahine has been seeking alimony for her and her five-year-old child. Her husband had refused to divorce her and filed an obedience and cohabitation lawsuit against her."

Lebanon outlawed sexual harassment and reformed its domestic violence law in December but it does not criminalize marital rape and personal laws

administered by religious courts to discriminate against women in matters like divorce and child custody.

The UN has described a global increase in domestic abuse during coronavirus lockdowns as a “shadow pandemic,” with a spiraling economic crisis worsening the violence.

“These kinds of crimes have significantly increased, especially under lockdown,” said Ashraf Al-Moussawi, a lawyer representing Zeina Kanjo, who was strangled to death by her husband before he fled to Turkey.

Al-Moussawi stressed that the motives behind the increasing crimes are economic, social and cultural but he also said: “The pattern of crimes has changed and has become more violent.”

In another case last month in Akkar, the ISF arrested a teenager after he confessed to stabbing his 52-year-old aunt to death after she had rejected his sexual advances. The teen later admitted to sexually assaulting her after she died. He also stole a gold ring from the victim, which was later recovered at his house by the ISF.

“Some resort to a certain party or militia to protect them from legal prosecution,” Mirshad said. “And despite all the awareness-raising sessions they receive, police officers still tell the abused women to solve their disputes with their husbands and not to come to them.”

The current infrastructure in Lebanon is fractured, Al-Moussawi said, as solutions to domestic violence need to start high up in the government.

“The disturbing unreadiness of security and judicial bodies and lack of trust in the Lebanese state are all factors that encourage murderers to commit their crimes,” he said. “When prosecutions last for years and the sentences are reduced, aggressors dare to beat their wives and their children as well.”



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[Iranian nuclear scientist killed by one-ton automated gun in Israeli hit – Jewish Chronicle](#)

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Wed, 2021-02-10 20:55

JERUSALEM: The Iranian nuclear scientist assassinated near Tehran in November was killed by a one-ton gun smuggled into Iran in pieces by the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad, according to a report by [The Jewish Chronicle](#) on Wednesday.

Citing intelligence sources, the British weekly said a team of more than 20 agents, including Israeli and Iranian nationals, carried out the ambush on

scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh after eight months of surveillance. Reuters was not immediately able to confirm the report, which was published on the website of the London-based newspaper. Iranian media said Fakhrizadeh died in hospital after armed assassins gunned him down in his car. Shortly after his death Iran pointed the finger at Israel, Foreign Minister Javad Zarif writing on Twitter of “serious indications of (an) Israeli role.” Israel declined to comment in November and on Wednesday night an Israeli government spokesman responded to the latest report by saying: “We never comment on such matters. There has been no change in our position.” Fakhrizadeh, 59, was long suspected by the West of masterminding a secret nuclear bomb program. He had been described by Western and Israeli intelligence services for years as the mysterious leader of a covert atomic bomb program halted in 2003, which Israel and the United States accuse Tehran of trying to restore. Iran has long denied seeking to weaponize nuclear energy. According to the Jewish Chronicle’s report, Iran has “secretly assessed that it will take six years” before a replacement for him is “fully operational” and that his death had “extended the period of time it would take Iran to achieve a bomb from about three-and-a-half months to two years.” Giving no further details of its sourcing, the world’s oldest Jewish newspaper said the Mossad mounted the automated gun on a Nissan pickup and that “the bespoke weapon, operated remotely by agents on the ground as they observed the target, was so heavy because it included a bomb that destroyed the evidence after the killing.” It said the attack was carried out “by Israel alone, without American involvement” but that US officials were given some form of notice beforehand.



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Suspected Iranian nuclear mastermind Fakhrizadeh assassinated near TehranIran producing uranium metal, further violating 2015 deal: IAEA

[A new study on the Middle East takes the wraps off Iran's militia doctrine](#)

Wed, 2021-02-10 21:27

LONDON: As the smoke cleared on another Houthi terrorist attack in Saudi Arabia, this time a drone attack on the Kingdom's Abha airport, new details emerged about the extent of Iran's campaign of violence across the Middle East.

The Houthis claimed to use four drones in Wednesday's attack, which followed days of escalating aggression from the Iran-backed terror outfit. Meanwhile, a new report from the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (TBI) has warned that Iran-backed militias throughout the region are growing in size, scale and lethality.

The paper – titled “The View from Tehran: Iran's Militia Doctrine” – exposes the vast network of violent organizations supported by the regime.

With new evidence and a sweeping analysis, it details the militias supported by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the fastest-growing form of Tehran-backed proxy terrorist outfits in the Middle East.

It goes on to argue that militias supported, trained and supplied by the IRGC pose the greatest threat to regional stability.



This fervent ideological and religious affiliation means that Tehran can expect undying dedication to its deadly causes from groups aligned with the IRGC. (AFP)

One of the report's co-authors, Professor Saeid Golkar, a senior fellow at the TBI and an assistant professor in the department of political science and public service at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, said that the IRGC-backed militias pose a unique danger to the Middle East.

Unlike the relationships between Tehran and its grassroots militias, which tend to be limited to shared tactical and material interests, the IRGC's links with its proxies are rooted in a radicalized shared worldview, with these groups fully adopting Tehran's ideology of Wilayat Al-Faqih, which grants Iran's supreme leader absolute authority over Shiite Muslims.

This fervent ideological and religious affiliation means that Tehran can expect undying dedication to its deadly causes from groups aligned with the IRGC.

To consolidate these links, Tehran uses the IRGC to heavily invest in the radicalization and indoctrination of militants, gathering resources and support from the regime's so-called soft-power institutions in the diplomatic, humanitarian, educational and cultural areas.

In Yemen, where the Iran-backed Houthis are waging war against the internationally recognized government, there is evidence that the IRGC's Quds Force – the branch that deals with unconventional warfare, psychological operations and military intelligence – is training Yemeni Shiite Muslims into adopting its worldview.

In 2014, the Quds Force deployed advisers, mostly from its Lebanese and Iraqi militia groups, to boost the Houthi efforts in consolidating power. Tehran has struggled to bring its authority and teachings over the group, but this has not reduced its efforts.

While the Houthis may not have yet adopted Iran's interpretation of Wilayat Al-Faqih, they are still following the same pipeline that has led to the creation of some of Tehran's most-powerful terrorist assets, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Asaid Al-Haaq in Iraq.

One of the TBI's analysts and a co-author of its new report, Kasra Aarabi, told Arab News that Iran has brought hundreds of Yemeni students from Houthi tribes to study at "soft power" institutions in Tehran like Al-Mustafa International University.



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According to the report, some of the students have explicitly displayed loyalty to Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader.

Aarabi told Arab News that this worrying trend could signal a growth in the IRGC's influence over Yemen's Shiite Muslims, leading to further terrorist operations in the troubled country.

He warned that "sanctions relief will not be enough to stop IRGC-aligned groups. Their fighters are radicalized, they will fight regardless of access to material reward. We need to counter these groups the same way that we would when facing Sunni Islamist extremists."

Aarabi added that only a "full-scale hearts and minds approach with counterinsurgency strategies" will deal with these militias. Military solutions are not enough, he argued, governments will also need to challenge the ideology behind them.

"You need to adopt this approach to properly constrain them, starting from the root of the problem and pushing back the ideas that drive the violence," he said.

Golkar shared his fellow report author's view, arguing that the dominant Western approach to countering IRGC-supported groups has been insufficient.

"There is a popular joke in Iran," Golkar told Arab News, "that a couple are sleeping at home, they hear a noise in their apartment, the woman asks him to check what is happening, but the husband is scared of dealing with the reality and he says 'inshallah, it is just a cat, go back to sleep' – this has been the dominant approach of Western policymakers dealing with the IRGC."



Report: Militias supported, trained and supplied by the IRGC pose the greatest threat to regional stability. (AFP)

He added: "They are scared of what is happening, so they just say 'it is a cat', and that the IRGC is just a conventional military. But they are wrong. We need an approach that deals with the IRGC, the Quds Force and its militias by recognizing the reality of the extent of their reach."

Golkar said perceptions had to change in the West to understand the extent of the IRGC's influence. "Understanding the reality is vital, if you deny what is happening you cannot deal with it," he said. "The second approach is the tactical response. We have to know how these militias are aligned with Tehran and how much they comply with the regime."

Aarabi said "the militia doctrine has been designed to outlive the regime in Tehran. Even if the Islamic Republic collapsed, the IRGC has built an infrastructure across the region and this militia doctrine can go into a full insurgency mode. It can outlive the Islamic Republic, and this needs to be considered when policymakers design strategies to stem the problem."

The extent of Iran's nexus of evil is vast. The TBI identified 194 IRGC operations across 51 countries and five continents since 1979. With the first interactive tracker of the IRGC's global footprint, analysts can for the first time observe a total depiction of Tehran's wide-reaching violent operations.

Golkar and Aarabi challenged the view that Tehran is only supporting these groups as a deterrent. Aarabi said: "The argument goes that if relations

improve with the US and if sanctions are lifted, then the regime will feel less threatened and it will reduce its support for these groups.

“But our research totally contradicts this view. Many of these militias have embraced the IRGC’s ideology; they do not even recognize the territorial borders of Iran.”

He added: “These are not conventional forces defending the state of Iran. They are for the division of the world between the land of Muslims and the land of infidels.

“Easing sanctions will not work. Just 13 days after the nuclear deal was signed, Khamenei rejected the idea that any material incentive would cut Iran’s support for regional militias. As sanctions were being eased, we saw a surge in the militias and the manufactured IRGC groups.”



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Iran producing uranium metal, further violating 2015 deal: IAEA

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Wed, 2021-02-10 20:09

VIENNA: Iran has started producing uranium metal, the UN nuclear watchdog said Wednesday, in a fresh breach of the limits laid out in Tehran's 2015 deal with world powers.

The latest violation of the deal aimed at preventing Tehran from developing nuclear weapons comes days after US President Joe Biden made clear he would not lift sanctions against Iran unless it first adheres to agreement's commitments.

The Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said in a statement seen by AFP that on February 8 it "verified 3.6 grammes of uranium metal at Iran's Fuel Plate Fabrication Plant in Esfahan".

IAEA director general Rafael Grossi informed member states of the new violation, the statement added.

Iran has previously said its research on uranium metal production was aimed at providing advanced fuel for a research reactor in Tehran.

But the topic is sensitive because uranium metal can be used as a component in nuclear weapons.

The deal says that after 10 years Iran would have been allowed to initiate research on producing uranium metal-based fuel "in small agreed quantities" but only if the other parties – the US, China, Russia, Germany, France and Britain – had given approval.

The new violation comes a month after Iran announced it had stepped up its uranium enrichment process to 20 percent purity, far above the 3.67 percent level permitted by the deal, but far below the amount required for an atomic bomb.

In 2018 US President Donald Trump dramatically withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal and reimposed crippling economic sanctions on Tehran. The following year Tehran announced it would start breaking the deal's limits on nuclear activity.

Trump's successor Biden is seeking to revive the agreement, but the two sides appear to be in a standoff over who acts first.

"If they want Iran to return to its commitments... the United States must entirely lift the sanctions, in practice and not on paper," supreme Iranian leader Ali Khamenei said Sunday.

When Biden was asked on Sunday whether he would halt sanctions to convince Iran to return to the bargaining table, Biden offered a clear reply: "No."



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A new study on the Middle East takes the wraps off Iran's militia doctrine. In a secret recording, Iran's FM says downing of Ukraine flight could have been intentional.

[Turkey's Syria strategy in doubt after US policy shift](#)

Wed, 2021-02-10 21:47

ANKARA: The US announcement that it will focus on fighting Daesh remnants in Syria rather than guarding oil fields in the region could force Turkey to rethink its strategy in the war-racked country, analysts believe.

In a break from the Trump-era policy, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby on Tuesday said that about 900 US military personnel and contractors had been "disengaged" from Syrian oil fields since last August.

The move follows a deal between a US firm, Delta Crescent Energy, and the US-allied Syrian Kurds to develop and export the vast crude oil reserves in northeast Syria.

US forces in the region “are not authorized to provide assistance to any other private company seeking to develop oil resources in Syria,” said Kirby, adding that the responsibility for the protection of civilians justifies the presence of US forces around the oil fields.

With Washington’s focus now on defeating Daesh, the main question is whether this policy shift under the Biden administration will push Turkey to redesign its Syria policy.

Navvar Saban, a military analyst from the Istanbul-based Omran Center for Strategic Studies, believes the US move will have wide-ranging implications.

“The US is now there to secure the area against Daesh by supporting the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). US support is limited to military backup for the SDF,” he told Arab News.

In its latest quarterly report, released on Wednesday, the Pentagon said that clashes between Turkey and the SDF near Ayn Issa have undermined the force’s fight against Daesh.

“Coalition forces continued to advise the SDF on its independent operations against Daesh. However, the SDF, which has no air assets, relied on coalition air support, including for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, and partnered with coalition forces during most of its operations,” it said.

However, Ankara is critical of Washington’s cooperation with the SDF, which it considers a terror organization. Turkey also fears that further support may encourage the Syrian Kurds to seek greater autonomy and also inspire their supporters in Turkey.

According to Saban, strengthening the SDF will lead to Turkey’s line of control being redrawn, and will eliminate joint patrols between the Russians and Turks in the east.

“There have been a lot of statements from Turkey about their advance into the area because of the terror threat. Now, after the Pentagon statement, it is crystal clear that such an advance will no longer happen,” he said.

According to Caroline Rose, senior analyst at the Center for Global Policy in Washington, the switch in US policy away from guarding Syrian oil fields is a sign that the Pentagon is adopting “a new phase of force projection,” narrowing its focus on combating Daesh enclaves in the northeast and cooperating with local forces such as the SDF.

“This development is taking place parallel to the US draw-down in Iraq, where the Pentagon has withdrawn from eight bases and reduced its force to 2,500 personnel,” she told Arab News.

While increased cooperation between the US and SDF will be viewed unfavorably

in Ankara, Rose believes it is unlikely Turkey will be compelled to launch a military campaign against SDF elements similar to Operation Peace Spring in 2019 or Operation Olive Branch in 2018.

Turkey will likely seek to strengthen its control of the strip of territory it controls in the region – the so-called “peace corridor” – as a counterweight to its rivals in Syria and as a launch point for future influence, Rose added.

Joshua Landis, director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Oklahoma, doubts the latest Pentagon announcement will force a change in Turkish policy.

Ankara will be reluctant to make any bold moves against the US in northeastern Syria that could antagonize the new administration until it gets a better feel for Biden’s policy in the region and toward Turkey, he said.

The US goal in northeastern Syria may have shifted away from “protecting Syria’s oil,” but the underlying strategy remains the same, Landis said.

“The US is not about to allow Damascus or Ankara to exploit Syria’s oil reserves in that area.”

He added: “This is an optics operation for the White House, which does not want to be associated with Trump’s crass economic imperialism.”

Landis said that for several years the US presence in the region has been explained as an attempt to gain leverage against and to weaken Assad, Russia and Iran. That effort has not changed.

“The US continues to support Kurdish quasi-independence and supremacy in northeast Syria, which includes the exploitation of the region’s oil riches in cooperation with the US-based company,” he added.



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US-backed fighters seize major Syrian oil field