

# Diplomats: Roadside bombing targets British convoy in Iraq

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Tue, 2020-09-15 13:12

BAGHDAD: A roadside bombing targeted British diplomatic vehicles in Baghdad on Tuesday, the British Embassy and Iraqi officials said. There were no injuries but the attack is fueling concerns of armed groups outside of the state's control.

The attack targeted an embassy convoy on a Baghdad highway close to the Umm Al-Tabool Mosque, the British Embassy and Iraqi security officials said. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the bombing.

The roads and the area of the attack, between the airport and the heavily fortified Green Zone, are often used by diplomatic missions, the Iraqi official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media.

The Green Zone is home to the seat of Iraq's government and also many foreign embassies, including the British and the US

"The safety and security of our staff is of paramount importance and we are in close touch with the Iraqi authorities," said a statement from the British Embassy.

The attack is the first in months to target a diplomatic convoy and comes amid near daily rocket attacks aimed at the Green Zone and Iraqi army bases hosting US troops. Rocket attacks have rarely led to significant losses. Tuesday's bombing is the third attack in the last 24 hours against foreign missions.

Two rockets were fired at the Green Zone late on Monday but caused no casualties; one was intercepted by the US embassy's C-RAM defense system, two Iraqi security officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity under regulations.

Earlier on Monday, a roadside bomb targeted a convoy of vehicles carrying equipment for Americans on the main highway in Babylon province, south of Baghdad.

The rocket attacks surged at an alarming pace when Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi traveled to the US last month to conclude strategic talks. They have put pressure on his administration, which has promised to rein in armed groups acting outside of state authority.

The recent attacks come as Al-Kadhimi introduced sweeping administrative changes, including naming a new governor of Iraq's Central Bank, which provoked criticism from some political blocs.



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## [Egypt supports Saudi efforts to solve Yemeni crisis](#)

Author:

Mon, 2020-09-14 23:44

CAIRO: The Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs affirmed the country's full support for the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen against Iranian-backed Houthi militias.

The ministry condemned the militias' targeting of civilian installations in the city of Marib with ballistic missiles, which has resulted in the injury of many civilians.

Egypt also confirmed its alignment with Saudi Arabia in its efforts to advance a political solution in Yemen, and to implement the ceasefire between the legitimate government forces and the Houthis.

Ahmed Fouad Abaza, deputy chairperson of the Arab Affairs Committee in the Egyptian Parliament, affirmed that Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi stood by the Kingdom in its rejection of external interference in the affairs of Arab countries, to protect Arab and Gulf national security.

Yemeni Prime Minister Maeen Abdulmalik, Abaza said, had spoken with El-Sisi about Yemen's national security.

Abaza praised Abdulmalik's assertion that Egypt would be present in everything related to the Yemeni crisis. He said that the Yemeni crisis would not be resolved as long as Iranian support for the Houthis continued, and that the demolition of national states such as Iraq contributed to the emergence of armed militias.

Abaza appealed to the Yemeni people to stand united behind the legitimate institutions inside their country to prevent Iranian interference, accusing the international community of negligence in confronting Turkish and Iranian interventions in Yemen, and also in Libya.

Mohammed Sadiq Ismail, director of the Arab Center for Strategic Studies, said that Yemen needed to be a pillar of stability for Arab national security.

He explained that Yemen was currently facing multiple problems, politically, economically and socially, as a result of the Houthi control of Al-Hudaydah (Hodeidah), and the lack of humanitarian aid entering the country.

On Sunday, the Yemeni government announced that it considered the Hodeidah Agreement, also known as the Stockholm Agreement, signed between it and the Houthis, to be functionally useless.

Yemen's Foreign Minister Mohammed Al-Hadhrami confirmed during a meeting with UN Envoy Martin Griffiths that the agreement had been rendered futile by the Houthi's exploitation of it, and that their actions were unacceptable.



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## [UN human rights experts slam Iranian wrestler's execution](#)

Mon, 2020-09-14 22:09

LONDON: Experts from the UN Human Rights Council have condemned Iran's sudden execution of a young wrestler over the weekend.

"It is deeply disturbing that the authorities appear to have used the death penalty against an athlete as a warning to its population in a climate of increasing social unrest," UN Special Procedures experts said in a statement issued to Arab News.

Navid Afkari, 28, was executed suddenly over the weekend after being accused of killing a security guard during anti-government protests in 2018. He strongly and repeatedly denied this charge.

“The execution of Afkari, the second execution in connection to protests in the last two months, together with the alarming frequency of death penalty sentences handed to protesters, raises concerns about the authorities’ future response to protests and to any expression of opposition or dissenting opinion,” the UN experts said in the statement.

They highlighted Afkari’s inability to access due legal process throughout his time in detention as a particularly egregious element of his case.

“If Afkari was guilty of murder, why was the trial conducted behind closed doors and through the use of forced confessions extracted under torture?” they asked.

“The execution of Navid Afkari was summary and arbitrary, imposed following a process that did not meet even the most basic substantive or procedural fair trial standards, behind a smokescreen of a murder charge.”

Afkari, the statement said, was tortured, beaten and suffocated during his detention. The experts said they were “appalled at these serious allegations of torture.”

Since the 2018 anti-government protests that Afkari participated in, Iran has regularly been convulsed by civil unrest.

Anti-government sentiment boiled over in November 2019 and January 2020 when protests against the entirety of Iran’s leadership swept across the country, before being violently suppressed by security forces.

Afkari’s execution, and his inability to access due legal process throughout his detention, have been widely condemned as cruel and unjust by rights groups, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.



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## [Netanyahu arrives in US for UAE-Israel peace signing ceremony](#)

Author:

Mon, 2020-09-14 20:30

WASHINGTON: Benjamin Netanyahu arrived on Monday in Washington ahead of a signing ceremony for the UAE-Israel peace deal. The Israeli prime minister will join UAE foreign minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed at the White House on Tuesday to ink the agreement, which was brokered by US President Donald Trump and announced last month. Bahrain announced its own agreement with Israel on Friday and is also expected to attend the ceremony.

“On our way to bring peace in exchange for peace,” Netanyahu tweeted before departing from Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv, where Israeli, US, UAE and Bahraini flags adorned the aircraft’s entrance.

On Sunday, Netanyahu told cabinet ministers: “We now have two historic peace agreements with two Arab countries within one month. I am sure that we all praise this new age... I want to promise you that each and every one of you through your ministries will be a part of it, because this is going to be a different peace.

“It will be a warm peace, an economic peace in addition to a diplomatic peace; a peace between nations.”

Sheikh Abdullah arrived in the US capital a day earlier, heading a delegation of several senior Emirati officials and ministers, as well as the UAE’s permanent representative to the United Nations Lana Nusseibeh.

The UAE deal to establish full relations included an Israeli promise not to annex occupied Palestinian land in the West Bank.

Bahrain will be the fourth Arab country to set up relations with Israel.

Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad is in the US and is expected to hold talks with Trump on Monday.

Egypt and Jordan already established relations with Israel in 1979 and 1994 respectively.

Oman, Sudan and Morocco welcomed Bahrain’s announcement, prompting Israeli media to report that they are among the next countries that the US is in talks with to follow suit.

The peace deals with the UAE and Bahrain have been widely opposed by Palestinian factions.



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## **Beirut blast aid faces an obstacle course in Lebanon**

Mon, 2020-09-14 20:16

DUBAI: No sooner had the explosion of Aug. 4 devastated Beirut than the Lebanese diaspora came to their home country's rescue.

The extent of the damage to homes and infrastructure was still not clear, but no one was under any illusion about the blast's severity given that the shockwaves were felt more than 200 km away in Cyprus.

By the morning of Aug. 5, Impact Lebanon, a non-profit based in London, had collected close to £1.5 million (\$2 million).

Since then the organization, which was founded by a group of UK-based Lebanese when anti-government protests erupted in Lebanon in October last year, has built up an impressive \$8.23 million.

But as fundraising activities by diaspora communities continue worldwide, a concern that looms large over them is how Lebanese civil-society groups will be able to access the money.

One of the biggest challenges the Lebanese people face, as they pick up the pieces after last month's explosion in Beirut, is the country's troubled financial system.

A complex set of regulations that govern transactions involving dollar bank accounts in Lebanese banks meant that Impact Lebanon was able to begin transferring the funds it had raised from Aug. 25 – three weeks after the blast.

The transfers were made in small instalments in order to reduce the risk of

loss while navigating a corrupt banking system.

Under a scheme known as “fresh money,” individuals outside the country can transfer dollars into a “fresh money” account in Lebanese banks.

But access to such an account is granted only to those who can prove they are the recipients of dollar transfers from abroad.

How long the scheme will last is open to question, though, which partly explains why Impact Lebanon volunteers decided against a lump-sum transfer of the funds it had collected.



Fundraising activities by diaspora communities continue worldwide, but concerns loom large over about how Lebanese civil-society groups will be able to access the money. (Supplied: Mariana Wehbe)

“Money will be sent in different instalments to the 15-20 different NGOs the fund is supporting inside the country,” said Maya Hodroj, co-founder and director of Impact Lebanon.

Since it is still to be registered as a charity in the UK, Impact Lebanon used crowdfunding platform JustGiving for fundraising and partnered with Lebanese International Financial Executive, a non-profit organization with branches in Lebanon, the UK, the US and Switzerland, to distribute the money among a mix of Lebanon-focused NGOs.

Currently, despite the web of restrictive banking regulations, aid is getting channeled through civil-society and international aid organizations, including many in-kind donations of food, personal protective equipment,

sanitary items and other goods, particularly from Gulf Cooperation Council member states such as the UAE, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Disruptions, however, continue to affect humanitarian work, such as the huge fire that broke out on Sept. 10 at a warehouse in Beirut port where the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) stores food parcels.

## Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

Recently, the Trump administration said it would not be sending aid to the Lebanese government for fear it might end up in the hands of the Shiite Lebanese party Hezbollah, which is a US-designated terror group. Aid from the US will thus have to be sent through alternative channels.

Immediately after the blast of Aug. 4, residents of Beirut had no choice but to take care of themselves. The sense of helplessness prompted the rapid formation of a number of organizations by young Lebanese.

Their goal, in the immediate term, was to help the wounded, homeless and traumatized and, in the long term, to rebuild Beirut.

“In the absence of government support, the Lebanese people had to fend for themselves, fixing the country and the people mentally and physically,” said Nancy Gabriel, co-founder along with Mariana Wehbe of Bebw Shebbek, an organization dedicated to repairing or replacing blast-damaged doors and windows of 80,000 homes.



Beb w Shebbek is an organization dedicated to repairing or replacing blast-damaged doors and windows of 80,000 homes. (Supplied: Mariana Wehbe)

“Beb w Shebbek is exactly like other Lebanese organizations born after the explosion. We had to create this initiative to help others because the government is totally absent,” Gabriel added.

“Three weeks after the explosion, most people are still living with open windows and doors. Their homes are totally destroyed. They have nowhere else to go.”

After the end of the civil war in 1990, foreign aid emerged as a key pillar of Lebanon’s financial and economic stability.

Since the blast, donor countries have pledged close to \$300 million in aid. Additionally, the UN is trying to raise more than \$500 million for Lebanon.

But some of the slogans heard on the streets of Beirut since Aug. 4 oppose more international assistance to the country.

Many Lebanese not only have little faith in aid reaching the right recipients, they are convinced that the country’s political elites are the ultimate beneficiary of the economic model.

“Many Lebanese government officials and advisors are paid with the millions allocated by programs such as those managed by the UNDP (UN Development Programme),” said Gino Raidy, a Lebanese activist and blogger.

“There’s a lack of trust right now in some international aid organizations, including the UN. It’s not about just giving money, but finding long-term

solutions that will put an end to the corruption, instead of inadvertently encouraging it like we've seen for decades."

Activist Mouin Jaber told Arab News from Beirut: "We're actually playing the role of the Lebanese government, which stayed silent and remained inactive during the first two weeks of the disaster."

He drew attention to the eyebrows raised by the sight of Lebanese military officers handing out aid to citizens three weeks after the disaster.

"Right now, the Lebanese Army is distributing food boxes to people, with camera crews documenting the propaganda," said Jaber.

"They've been extremely incompetent and inefficient in providing aid to their citizens. It's a joke."

Jaber and his friends got in touch with four youth organizations and NGOs formed during the October protests to deliver relief kits to people affected by the explosion.

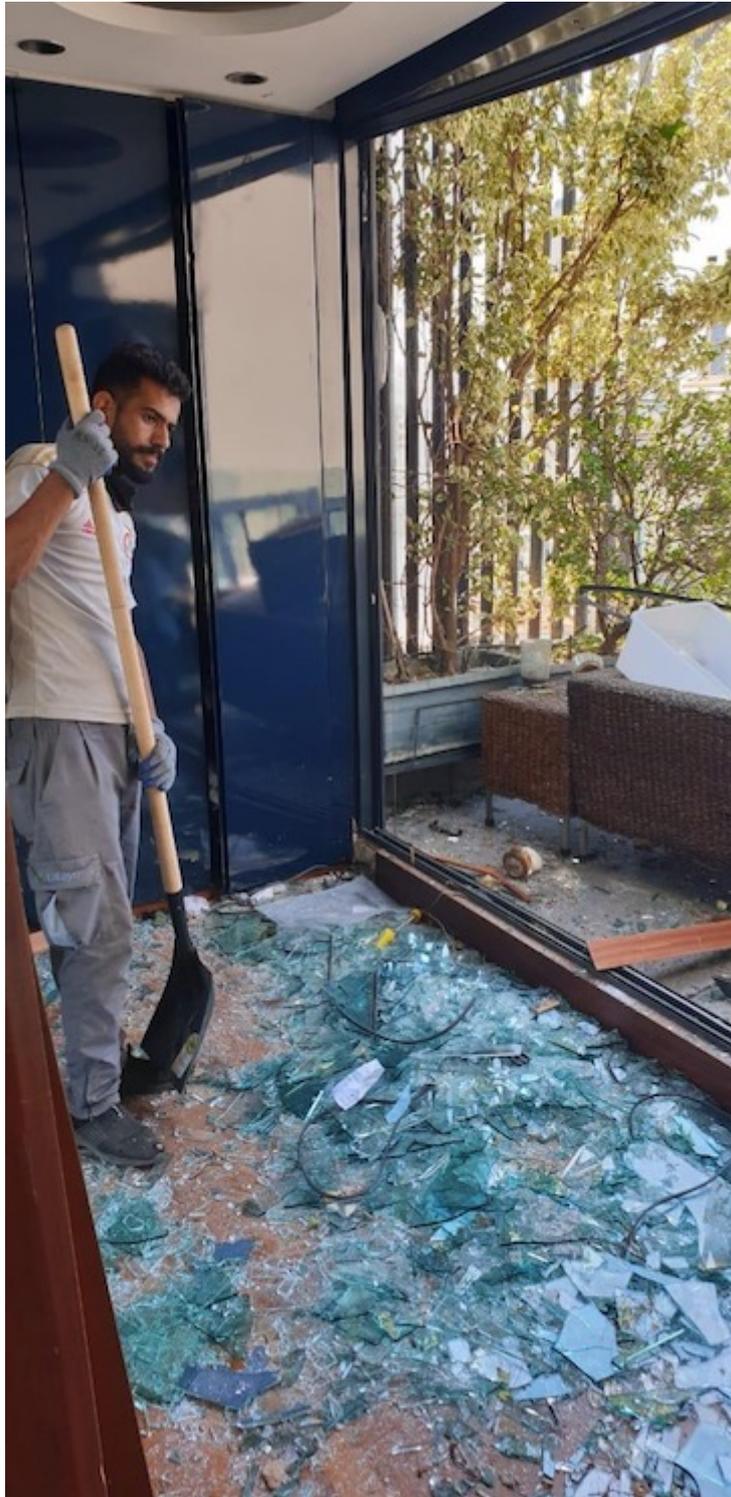
These include Minteshreen, a youth-led group that has been distributing food boxes during the coronavirus pandemic; Baytna Baytak, an NGO providing alternative housing to patients suffering from COVID-19 who could not go back to their homes, and is now arranging accommodation for those who lost their homes in the blast; Muwaten Lebne; and Embrace Lebanon, a mental-health clinic.

"We assembled a team of engineers to assess damage to homes, and provided people with temporary solutions until long-term plans for rebuilding can be finalized," said Jaber. "This is all voluntary work. No one is being paid."

Some volunteers have set up an informal base camp for better coordination of aid and relief operations being managed separately by dozens of local NGOs.

"Instead of sending relief to these big organizations, it would be better to send money to reconstruction companies that have bank accounts abroad so that they have full access to the money," said Jaber.

"This would be better than sending to third-party intermediaries because you never know where the money will go when it arrives in Lebanon."



Beb w Shebbek is an organization dedicated to repairing or replacing blast-damaged doors and windows of 80,000 homes. (Supplied: Mariana Wehbe)

That said, fears expressed by some Lebanese on social media about NGOs encountering difficulty in getting aid into the country and relief supplies being mishandled by the government may have been overblown.

Nabih Jabr, under-secretary-general at the Lebanese Red Cross, said his teams received relief items and distributed them to those in need. "The problem was that we received too many in-kind donations too soon," he told Arab News from Beirut.

"Some of them didn't cater to the immediate needs of the affected population,

and we rapidly ran out of space in nearby warehouses, so we took some of these items for processing in our warehouses all over the country,” he said.

“It always happens with in-kind donations that some end up sold in stores. People receive in-kind aid but need the cash, so some sell it to be able to get what they really need, and this is exactly why in-kind aid isn’t always the best aid.”

Jabr said in-kind donations can harm the local economy. “Small local businesses are already in trouble, and soon they’ll be in even more trouble if people don’t start buying again,” he added.

Jabr said the next step for the Lebanese Red Cross is handing out direct cash assistance. “This will start very soon,” he added. “This is the best and most efficient way to help people as long as there’s still a functioning local economy.”

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