

# How Lebanon saw the 1984 killing of Middle East scholar and AUB President Malcolm Kerr

Wed, 2020-07-22 23:33

BEIRUT: On Jan. 18, 1984, Dr. Malcolm Kerr, president of the American University of Beirut (AUB), stepped into a hallway leading to his office on the sprawling campus in the Lebanese capital. It was a rainy Wednesday morning. The civil war had been raging in the country for nine years.

Suddenly two armed men appeared, as if from nowhere, and opened fire on 52-year-old Kerr. He was shot twice in the back of the head and died instantly. The killers fled and were never identified.

In a telephone call to news agency AFP, the Islamic Jihad Organization (IJO), a Shiite militia backed by Iran, claimed responsibility for the killing. It cited the US military presence in Lebanon as the reason. American soldiers were part of a four-nation peacekeeping force created in 1982 during a US-brokered ceasefire between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel.

Speaking to Arab News from southern California, Kerr's widow, Ann, recalled that terrible day, the events of which remain fresh in her memory after 36 years.

"The grief is an ongoing thing," she said. "You live with the loss and the loss assumes a place in your heart."

Ann met her husband while they were both students at AUB in the 1950s. She was on a study trip from Occidental College in Los Angeles, he was studying for a master's degree in Arabic studies. To them, AUB "represented the best of what the US had to offer," Ann said.

Her husband, an American citizen, was born and raised in Lebanon and educated in the US. His parents had taught at AUB, so it was close to his heart. He returned to Lebanon on many occasions, eventually taking up further studies and teaching assignments at the university. An authority on the Middle East and the Arab world, in 1982 he was offered the job of president at the prestigious institution.

Ann blames Iran and Hezbollah for his murder, as the IJO is said to have been the forerunner to Hezbollah, which was formed in 1985.



"It is pretty clear that (Hezbollah was responsible) because in those days they were targeting visible westerners (such as) journalists and professors," she said. "You might remember that David Dodge was kidnapped before Malcolm was assassinated."

Dodge, also an American citizen, held a number of positions at AUB, including acting president before Kerr was appointed. On July 19, 1982, he was abducted from the campus and held hostage by the IJO. He was released a year later to the day, after Syria intervened.

The IJO went on to claim responsibility for a number of kidnappings, assassinations and attacks, including the 1983 bombings of French and US Marine barracks and the US embassy in Beirut. Between 1982 and 1992, 104 foreign writers, priests and journalists were kidnapped in what came to be known internationally as the Lebanon Hostage Crisis. They included Associated Press reporter Terry Anderson, who was abducted on March 16, 1985 and held for six years and nine months, the longest time an American was held captive in Lebanon.

"Why was (Malcolm) assassinated and not kidnapped? That remains a question," Ann said. "But we understood that they (the IJO) had not perfected the art of kidnapping yet, and did not know where to keep (hostages)."

Though the circumstantial evidence points the finger of blame at the IJO, it was not only radical Islam that posed a threat to Kerr's safety. According to Ann, right-wing Lebanese Christian factions were "not happy" with his views on the Palestinian situation.

"At the time, everyone walked around with guns ... it was a civil war," she said.

News of Kerr's murder spread quickly. Local media – including Lebanese newspaper An-Nahar and magazine Al-Shiraa, and the French-language weekly La Revue du Liban – as well as international news outlets such AFP and the New York Times, linked the assassination to the kidnapping of Dodge.

The day before Kerr was killed, the IJO claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of Hussein Al-Farrash, the Saudi consul general in Beirut, and threatened to kill him. He was released 66 days later following the intervention of Nabih Berri, who at the time was Lebanon's justice minister and is now speaker of the parliament and head of the Amal Movement, an ally of Hezbollah.

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Two decades after Kerr's murder, his family called for a fresh investigation into the case and a trial, in light of new information that had come to light. In February 2003, they filed a lawsuit against Iran and Hezbollah at the US District Court for the District of Columbia. Though they did not seek damages at the time, it was reported that the court awarded them a settlement in 2018, the proceeds of which are being used to create a student endowment fund.

The District Court ruled that IJO was a name used by Hezbollah to conceal its identity. The verdict provided some degree of closure for Ann.

"The value of the trial was that it brought some resolution to my family. I think it was better to close the case," she said.

The sense of loss, however, is something Ann continues to contend with every day.

"Each person, (especially) in a close family such as ours, responds to things differently," she said.

“For me, I was satisfied going on with my work, which always involved international education. For my son Steve, he was starting out in his basketball career.”

Steve Kerr, who has two brothers and a sister, was born in Beirut in 1965. He is an eight-time NBA champion, winning five titles as a Chicago Bulls player and three as head coach of the Golden State Warriors.

“From birth, practically, he had a ball in his hand,” said Ann. “For him, the spirit of competitive sports was his resolution.”

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[@Leila1H](#)



In Memory of

MALCOLM HOOPER KERR  
1931 - 1984

He lived life abundantly

We are proud that our dad and husband came to A.U.B.

Ann Susan John Stephen and Andrew Kerr

## MALCOLM H. KERR



*In Memory of Malcolm Hooper Kerr, 1931-1984  
Sign made by Susie Kerr.*

Under a big banyan tree between College Hall and the chapel, there is an oval garden with a lovely view of the sea. As students, Malcolm and I used to walk by it on our way to class. He told me how he loved to climb that banyan tree as a child and how he had carved his initials in its upper branches.

For a marker stone, we went to the campus museum and chose a Corinthian capital which was perched against a wall in the garden. All this happened in a very unplanned and spontaneous fashion. I couldn't help laughing a little to myself when I thought of the disparaging comments Malcolm loved to make about archaeological ruins. "The pyramids are nothing but a pile of rocks," he would say when I tried to get him to visit ancient monuments in Egypt. I wondered what sardonic remark he would have made about the Corinthian capital.

ANN KERR  
COME WITH ME FROM LEBANON

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Warriors coach Steve Kerr recounts life in Lebanon with his father, slain AUB president Malcolm Kerr

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## **Travellers arriving at UAE airports will be required to undergo PCR testing for COVID-19**

Wed, 2020-07-22 22:47

DUBAI: All travelers arriving at UAE airports will have to undergo a test for COVID-19.

The test is mandatory for citizens, residents, tourists and transit travelers, regardless of the country they are coming from, the National Emergency, Crisis and Disasters Management Authority said Wednesday.

All departures via the country's airports who are headed to the European Union, Britain and countries that require a COVID-19 test, must do the test before boarding.

Children under 12 years of age and children with severe and moderate disabilities are exempt from the test.

All tourists and visitors are required to present a negative COVID-19 test report, not older than 96 hours.



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## [Israelis urge Netanyahu to quit over coronavirus, corruption charges](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1595359890256267100

Tue, 2020-07-21 18:31

JERUSALEM: About 2,000 Israelis rallied outside Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's residence in Jerusalem on Tuesday as protests mounted against him over his handling of a worsening coronavirus crisis and alleged corruption. Wearing protective masks, the demonstrators marched from Netanyahu's official residence to Israel's parliament, holding up signs that read "Crime Minister" and calling on the five-term premier to step down.



Reimposed coronavirus curbs after a rise in new COVID-19 cases have prompted Israelis demanding better state aid to take to the streets in almost daily demonstrations.

Public anger has been also been fueled by corruption alleged against Netanyahu, who went on trial in May for bribery, fraud and breach of trust – charges he denies.

Netanyahu has announced numerous economic aid packages. But frustrated by red tape and a slow pace, many Israelis say the aid is coming too little, too late.

“It’s humiliating and insulting. You pay social security and taxes for thirty years and then have to beg (the authorities) in order to make ends meet. I’m here to protest, so that this evil government quits,” said Doron, 54.

He asked not to give his full name and said he has been on unpaid leave for three months.

As part of the protest, restaurant owners set up a free buffet for the demonstrators, demanding their businesses keep open or else receive compensation.

Israel lifted in May a partial lockdown that had flattened an infection curve. But a second surge of COVID-19 cases and ensuing restrictions has seen Netanyahu’s approval ratings plunge to under 30% and employment soar to 21%. Police did not provide a figure for the number of demonstrators. A Reuters cameraman estimated that about 2,000 people rallied. Israeli media said the protest drew thousands from across the country.

With a population of 9 million, Israel has reported more than 50,000 coronavirus cases and 422 deaths.



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## [Khamenei threatens US with 'reciprocal blow' over Soleimani strike](#)

Author:

Amir Havasi | AFP

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1595353843455844200

Tue, 2020-07-21 17:42

TEHRAN: Iran's supreme leader told Iraq's visiting premier on Tuesday that Tehran will not interfere in Baghdad's relations with Washington, but warned that the US presence next door to the Islamic republic was a cause of insecurity.

Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi of Iraq met Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in the Iranian capital during his first trip abroad since taking office.

"Iran will not interfere in Iraq's relations with America but expects Iraqi friends to know America and realize that their presence in any country causes corruption, ruin and destruction," the Iranian leader said, according to his official website.

"The Islamic republic expects... (the Iraqi) parliament's decision to expel the Americans to be adhered to since their presence is a cause of insecurity."

Khamenei pointed to the US killing of Iran's top general Qasem Soleimani in a January drone strike in Baghdad, after which parliament voted to expel US troops.

"They killed your guest in your house and blatantly confessed to it."

Iran "will never forget this and will certainly deal a reciprocal blow to the Americans," Khamenei said.

Iran retaliated for Soleimani's death days after by firing a volley of missiles at US troops stationed in Iraq, but US President Donald Trump opted against responding militarily.

While the attack on the western Iraqi base of Ain Al-Asad left no US soldiers dead, dozens suffered brain trauma.

According to Khamenei, Iran was opposed to "whatever may weaken the Iraqi government" in contrast to the US, which he said did not want "an independent, strong Iraqi government elected by popular vote."

Kadhemi had been scheduled to visit Saudi Arabia as his first trip abroad, then quickly follow it up with a trip to Tehran.

The Saudi leg was postponed after King Salman was hospitalized on Monday.

Kadhemi rose to the premiership in May after serving as head of Iraq's National Intelligence Service for nearly four years. He formed close ties to Tehran, Washington and Riyadh during that time, prompting speculation he could serve as a rare mediator between the capitals. His trip to Tehran comes after he received Iran's top diplomat Mohammad Javad Zarif in Baghdad on Sunday. Relations between the two countries were not always close – they fought a bloody war from 1980 to 1988. Tehran's influence in Baghdad grew after the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq toppled the government of Saddam Hussein. Iran now has significant leverage over many of Iraq's Shiite political groups. Iraq's delegation includes the ministers of foreign affairs, finance, health and planning, as well as Kadhemi's national security adviser, some of whom also met their Iranian counterparts. Kadhemi also held talks with President Hassan Rouhani to discuss closer trade ties, fighting the novel coronavirus and efforts to ensure regional stability, state television said.



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## Ethiopia, Egypt reach 'major common understanding' on Nile dam

Tue, 2020-07-21 20:38

JOHANNESBURG: Ethiopia's prime minister says his country, Egypt and Sudan have reached a "major common understanding which paves the way for a breakthrough agreement" on a massive dam project that has led to sharp regional tensions.

The statement by Abiy Ahmed's office Tuesday night came as new satellite images show the water level in the reservoir behind the nearly completed dam is at its highest in at least four years.

Ethiopia has said the rising water is from heavy rains, and the new statement says that "it has become evident over the past two weeks in the rainy season that the (dam's) first-year filling is achieved and the dam under construction is already overtopping."

Ethiopia has said it would begin filling the dam's reservoir this month even without a deal as the rainy season floods the Blue Nile. But the new statement says the three countries' leaders have agreed to pursue "further technical discussions on the filling ... and proceed to a comprehensive agreement."

Ethiopia says the colossal dam offers a critical opportunity to pull millions of its nearly 110 million citizens out of poverty and become a major power exporter. Downstream Egypt, which depends on the Nile to supply its farmers and booming population of 100 million with fresh water, asserts that the dam poses an existential threat.

Years of talks with a variety of mediators, including the Trump administration, have failed to produce a solution. These new talks were mediated by the African Union.



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