

# Iraq extends curfew in Baghdad to contain disease

Author:

Mon, 2020-03-23 01:32

BAGHDAD: Iraq's government has extended a curfew on travel in and out of Baghdad until March 28 as part of strict measures to prevent the coronavirus from spreading, it said in a statement.

It said it had also decided to extend a ban on all inbound and outbound flights from the country's airports until March 28.

Under the curfew imposed on March 17 no persons can travel into or out of Baghdad.

At least 230 cases of coronavirus have been confirmed so far in Iraq, the Health Ministry said on Sunday, and 20 people have died.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, Jordan earlier ordered all shops to close and all people to stay off the streets until at least Tuesday, when it plans to announce specific times for shopping.

Authorities have already arrested 392 people accused of violating the curfew, said Amer Sartawi, a spokesman for the Public Security Directorate.

He warned that anyone violating the orders would face legal action.

Several countries in the Middle East have closed schools, universities and nonessential businesses.

Many are threatening fines or jail time to those caught violating the decrees. Egypt announced that all museums and archaeological sites, including the famed pyramids at Giza, would be closed from Monday until the end of March.

## **BACKGROUND**

**At least 230 cases of coronavirus have been confirmed so far in Iraq, the Health Ministry said on Sunday, and 20 people have died.**

Mostafa Waziri, head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, said authorities would disinfect all sites during the closure.

Egypt also announced the temporary suspension of Friday prayers and other congregations in all mosques.

The Coptic Orthodox Church canceled all services and wedding parties, and said funeral processions would be limited to family members of the deceased.

The most populous Arab nation is home to more than 100 million people.

Cairo, the capital, is one of the most densely populated cities on earth, with more than 20 million residents. Most people only experience minor flu-like symptoms from the coronavirus and recover within a few weeks, but the virus is highly contagious and can be spread by those who appear well.

It can cause severe illness, including pneumonia, in some patients, particularly the elderly and those with underlying health problems.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iraq](#)

[Iran](#)

[Syria](#)

[Sahel](#)

Will the ravaging disease slow world's conflicts – or intensify them? Lebanon told to 'prepare for the worst' as virus cases rise

---

## [French charity MSF deploys treatment center in Iran](#)

Mon, 2020-03-23 01:25

PARIS: Medical charity MSF is setting up a 50-bed emergency center to treat severe COVID-19 cases in Iran, the French organization said.

A team of nine MSF intensive care medics will staff the facility on the grounds of the Amin hospital in the central province of Isfahan, the charity said, as Iran grapples with the worst outbreak of coronavirus in the region. "The size of the COVID-19 epidemic in Iran is particularly worrying," MSF said.

France is already contributing to a package of medical aid for Iran alongside Britain and Germany, amid signs that the global fight against the coronavirus could help ease some diplomatic tensions.

In recent days, Tehran freed a French academic in a prisoner swap that also saw the release of an Iranian engineer held in France.

Iran on Sunday announced 129 new deaths, raising to 1,685 the official death toll in one of the worst-hit countries along with Italy and China.

Health Ministry spokesman Kianouche Jahanpour said more than 1,028 new cases had been recorded in the past 24 hours and a total of 21,638 people had now tested positive for the virus.

The US offer to help Iran in its fight against the new coronavirus pandemic is strange, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a televised speech on Sunday.

Washington has offered humanitarian assistance to the Middle Eastern country most affected by the coronavirus.

Tensions between the two countries have been running high since 2018, when US President Donald Trump exited Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with six world powers and reimposed sanctions that have crippled the Iranian economy.

"Several times Americans have offered to help us to fight the pandemic. That is strange because you face shortages in America. Also you are accused of creating this virus," said Khamenei, an anti-US hard-liner who has the final say in Iran.

## NUMBER

**1,685 – Iran on Sunday announced 129 new deaths, raising to 1,685 the official death toll in one of the worst-hit countries along with Italy and China.**

"I do not know whether it is true. But when there is such an allegation, can a wise man trust you and accept your help offer? ... You could be giving medicines to Iran that spread the virus or cause it to remain permanently." Frictions increased when Trump ordered a US drone strike that killed the top commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, Qassem Soleimani, on Jan. 3. Iran retaliated by hitting US targets in Iraq on Jan. 8.

"Our No. 1 enemy is America. It is the most wicked, sinister enemy of Iran ... its leaders are terrorists ... Liars and charlatans," said Khamenei. Iranian authorities have blamed US sanctions for hampering its efforts to curb the outbreak and President Hassan Rouhani has urged Americans to call on their government to lift sanctions as Iran fights the coronavirus.

China, a party to Iran's nuclear deal, has urged the US to lift sanctions on Iran immediately amid Tehran's response to the coronavirus outbreak.

But the US sent Iran a blunt message this week: The spread of the virus will not save it from US sanctions that are choking off its oil revenues and isolating its economy.

Khamenei, who canceled his annual speech for Persian new year from Mashhad on March 20 because of the outbreak, said Iran would triumph over the virus.

Iran "has the capability to overcome any kind of crisis and challenges, including the coronavirus outbreak," said Khamenei, who called on people to stay at home. While many Iranians avoided traveling during the Persian new year holiday, police said millions have defied warnings issued by officials to avoid unnecessary trips aimed at curbing the spread of the virus.

The office of Tehran's governor said all shopping centers will be closed in the capital from Sunday.

"Only pharmacies and shops that provide essential goods will remain open in Tehran," Iranian state TV reported.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Doctors Without Borders \(MSF\)](#)

[Medical charity MSF](#)

Will the ravaging disease slow world's conflicts – or intensify them? New curbs in West Bank as first Gaza virus cases confirmed

---

## [Will the ravaging disease slow world's conflicts – or intensify them?](#)

Mon, 2020-03-23 01:22

NEW YORK: Syria, Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan, the Sahel ... with the great powers focused intently on the COVID-19 virus, will armed conflicts across the world decrease in severity or intensify? Experts as well as diplomats at the UN say there is a serious risk of the latter.

For guerrilla fighters and extremist groups, "it's a clear godsend," said Bertrand Badie, a specialist in international relations at France's Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po).

When the “powerful become powerless,” he said, one can see “the revenge of the weak over the strong.”

In recent days, some 30 Malian soldiers were killed in an attack in northern Mali blamed on terrorists, without drawing any sharp reaction from the Security Council.

In Libya, and Syria’s Idlib region – the object of intense diplomatic attention before the coronavirus stole the spotlight – fighting continues. Evoking the “potentially devastating impact of #Covid-19 in #Idlib and elsewhere in Syria,” the UN undersecretary-general for political affairs, Rosemary DiCarlo, called on Twitter for all parties to show restraint. “If anyone – incredibly – still needed a reason to stop the fighting there,” she added, “this is it.”

Up to now, these countries have not been afflicted by Covid-19 on the scale seen in China, South Korea or Europe. But the virus carries the potential, once it reaches into poor and conflict-ridden countries, of having a devastating impact.

In the absence of concerted assistance from abroad, the UN fears “millions” could die.

The pandemic will not necessarily favor any particular group of belligerents, one diplomat noted, because the ravaging disease has been “uncontrollable.” “The pandemic could lead to a worsening of conflicts, with the risk of exacerbating the humanitarian situation and population movements,” he said. But the pandemic might also sap the will of the belligerents and their ability to fight in coming months, some experts said.

“Throwing their troops into battle will expose both states and violent nonstate groups to contamination, and thus to potentially catastrophic losses of human life,” said Robert Malley, president of the Washington-based International Crisis Group.

He believes that the virus “will very certainly diminish the capacity and will of states and of the international system – the UN, regional organizations, refugees, peacekeeping forces – to dedicate themselves to the resolution or prevention of conflicts.”

It will also throw up a whole set of new obstacles, he said, complicating access to conflict zones, making it harder to organize negotiations in neutral countries, and diverting financial investments to the fight against the coronavirus.

“What government would want to invest in the pursuit of peace in Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan, the Sahel or elsewhere when it is facing an economic, social and political crisis almost without precedent?” he asked.

With the news media obsessively focused on Covid-19, Malley said, “these conflicts, however brutal and violent they may be, will for many people become unseen and unheard.”

At the UN, which has been struggling to respond as best it can, diplomats insist that their efforts to monitor regional crises and conflicts will continue, even if the international organization has sharply curbed its schedule of meetings.

“We intend to ensure that #UNSC plays its vital role in maintaining global peace and security,” Britain’s interim ambassador to the UN, Jonathan Allen, wrote on Twitter. “Covid-19 is the major global focus, but we have not forgotten about Syria, Libya, Yemen.”

But Richard Gowan, a New York-based specialist in UN matters, expressed some

doubt.

“Security Council diplomats say that it is hard to get their capitals to focus on UN issues,” he said.

Among non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dealing with human rights issues, like Human Rights Watch, concern is growing that whole areas of action are falling by the wayside.

One example: diplomats say the much-awaited and repeatedly delayed publication of a UN summary report on the bombing of hospitals in Syria – originally due at the beginning of the year – is now not expected before April, at the earliest.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[China Coronavirus](#)

[COVID-19](#)

Germany's Angela Merkel in quarantine after meeting doctor who tested positive for coronavirus  
Quake strikes north of Zagreb, damages buildings

---

## [Lebanon in 'race against time' as coronavirus cases soar](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-03-22 02:49

BEIRUT: Lebanese Prime Minister Hassan Diab asked the security forces on Saturday to enforce stricter measures to keep people indoors and prevent gatherings to curb a coronavirus outbreak.

In a speech, Diab said this would include patrols and checkpoints, calling on the Lebanese to stay home and only go out if “absolutely necessary.” Lebanese officials called for tougher emergency measures, including curfews, after the number of coronavirus cases in the country surged to 230 on Saturday, with four victims believed to be in a critical condition. The Ministry of Health urged people to “adhere to complete domestic quarantine,” and warned that those who ignore repeated government warnings could face criminal prosecution.

Dr. Assem Araji, head of the Parliamentary Health Committee, demanded that emergency measures be stepped up “because people have not adhered to the domestic quarantine.”

As the number of coronavirus cases in Lebanon continued to climb, it was revealed that a former minister, Mohammed Safadi, had also contracted the virus.

“The result of the laboratory examination is positive. He is now in good health and will soon join the list of those recovering from coronavirus disease (COVID-19),” said his wife, former minister Violet Safadi.

Meanwhile, local police issued warnings to people breaching home quarantine and raids were carried out on businesses ignoring the ruling. Penalties were imposed on shop owners defying the government measures.

Municipalities used loudspeakers to warn residents against renting out homes to Lebanese or Syrian families from outside towns and villages “for fear of spreading the virus and to maintain health security.” Syrian residents were also told to refuse visits by relatives or acquaintances.

The warning reached the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, which closed their entry and exit points.

“We are worried about the lack of medical facilities to treat the disease,” an official at Ain Al-Hilweh, the largest Palestinian camp in Lebanon, told Arab News.

Medical and health teams with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, together with Palestinian security forces, began checking people entering or leaving the camp, and disinfecting vehicles and other machinery.

## **FASTFACTS**

- **The number of cases reached 230 on Saturday.**
- **Mohammed Safadi, a former minister also tested positive for coronavirus.**
- **Authorities urge people to adhere to ‘complete domestic quarantine.’**

About 4,000 Lebanese Red Cross volunteers are helping to transport those infected with the virus to hospital.

George Kettana, director general of the Lebanese Red Cross, said: “We receive many calls from all regions and we respond to every possible case.”

Kettana called on people to “be honest and frank so that we do not expose volunteers to danger.”

Some supplies, including protective clothing, had started to run out and international aid organizations are ready to help, he said.

President of the Syndicate of Private Hospitals, Suleiman Haroun, warned that “trying to reduce the number of daily cases is important because it is a race against time.

“If the number of daily cases reaches hundreds, we will not be able to receive all cases. Hospitals capacity is limited and hospitals were not initially prepared to face such a pandemic,” he said.

Former Prime Minister Saad Hariri said: “The pandemic is a treacherous enemy. Please stay in your homes. The quarantine is the only safety line.”

Walid Jumblatt, head of the Progressive Socialist Party, said: “The disease is spreading rapidly because people refuse to stay in their homes.”

“People should be forbidden at any cost from wandering around,” he said.

Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Latif Derian called for a “general amnesty for prisoners, so that we will not face a tragedy in light of the outbreak of the coronavirus, despite all the precautionary measures.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[China Coronavirus](#)

[COVID-19](#)

Egyptians' 'negligence is fueling coronavirus threat' Proposed UK law to shut door on historic war crimes cases

---



# Proposed UK law to shut door on historic war crimes cases

Author:

Sat, 2020-03-21 22:45

LONDON: New legislation proposed in the UK could lead to changes in the prosecution of serving and former service personnel, which could hamper efforts to bring those accused of war crimes to justice.

The UK government is seeking to install a five-year limit on prosecutions for alleged crimes committed abroad while on active service, which could only be exempted in "exceptional circumstances."

Among other things, it would render almost impossible any proposed cases against members of the UK's armed forces for crimes supposedly committed while deployed during the occupation of Iraq or the US-led war in Afghanistan.

"This package of legal measures will reduce the unique pressure faced by personnel who perform exceptional feats in incredibly difficult and complex circumstances," said Johnny Mercer, the UK's minister for veteran affairs, who served three tours in Afghanistan with the British Army.

"This important next step has gone further than any other government before to protect military personnel who put their life in jeopardy to protect us."

Peter Glenser QC, a barrister with extensive experience of cases involving UK personnel, said the legislation is being introduced against a backdrop of public sympathy.

"There has been significant public concern over repeated investigations into allegations made against Her Majesty's Forces, sometimes many years after the events complained of have taken place, especially when there has been no new and compelling evidence," he told Arab News.

"Concerns have been expressed over the credibility and reliability of evidence and witness statements that may be decades old, and the reopening of investigations that had already concluded," he added.

"There may be a debate to be had about the length of the time limit, but the erosion of evidence over time presents difficulties. I don't think this will impact international law, which requires a domestic investigation in the first place."

Despite support from swathes of UK society for the new rules, they have still proved controversial, on both sides of the aisle.

Nicholas Mercer, the British Army's chief legal advisor in Iraq during the 2003 invasion, said the move has even caused division within the ranks of the army itself, as it could incentivize human rights abuses and war crimes in

future.

“Discipline and accountability are absolutely essential on the battlefield, and anything which might undermine this must be resisted,” he said.

“Officers are concerned that, not only do the proposals undermine international law, but also potentially encourage other rogue nations to follow suit,” he added.

“The British Army does not need or require any special protection from the law. A professional army complies with the rule of law, rather than circumvents it.”

Nicholas said there are other reasons to oppose the legislation. “If it’s known on the battlefield that British soldiers will not be held to account for crimes they have committed, then enemy combatants might be less inclined to hand themselves over as prisoners,” he added. “It will increase their resolve to fight.”

Cases brought against British soldiers in the UK have been rare, but they have commanded a significant amount of public interest in the past.

The case of Sgt. Alexander Blackman, pseudonymously referred to as “Marine A” during his trial, grabbed headlines in the national press when he was convicted in 2013 of the murder – later reduced to manslaughter on grounds of diminished responsibility – of a wounded Taliban fighter in Afghanistan’s Helmand province in 2011.

Even where no case has been brought, investigations have tended to be prolonged, leading to suggestions that UK personnel have been unfairly treated by the process.

Prominent human rights lawyer Phil Shiner, meanwhile, was struck off as a solicitor in 2017 after a disciplinary tribunal found him guilty of misconduct in pursuing cases against UK service personnel for allegations of wrongdoing – such as torture and mutilation – in Iraq, including knowingly bringing false claims and paying Iraqi middlemen to find people to provide fictitious eyewitness accounts.

At the time, Johnny referred to Shiner as a “modern-day traitor,” while former army chief Lord Richard Dannatt called for him to face criminal prosecution.

Leading UK tabloid The Sun reported Shiner’s case with the headline “Good riddance,” while the Daily Telegraph claimed he “ruined people’s lives.”

Shiner’s defenestration led to the closure of the UK’s Iraq Historic Allegations Team (IHAT) in 2017, as well as Operation Northmoor, which investigated historic allegations from the war in Afghanistan. But despite the scandal, there remains plenty of evidence of wrongdoing in both countries.

The “Marine A” case was just the latest, at the time, in a litany of

allegations made against UK personnel that turned out to be true, including the murder in 2003 of Iraqi hotelier Baha Mousa.

He was apprehended and tortured by British soldiers in the city of Basra, before dying in what an inquest into his death called an “appalling episode of serious gratuitous violence.”

In 2017, a judge ordered the UK Ministry of Defense (MoD) to pay compensation to Abd Ali Hameed Ali Al-Waheed after he was detained and tortured by British soldiers in Iraq in 2007.

Several former soldiers, including in a book co-written by The Sun’s Political Editor Tom Newton Dunn, alleged that the British Army had “relaxed” the rules of engagement to allow the shooting of unarmed civilians suspected of being “dickers” (spotters) running surveillance on them, which, they said, led to the deaths of children and teenagers.

The soldiers were instructed, they said, that they would be protected from prosecution as long as they claimed that they believed their lives were at risk. The shooting of spotters is permitted in international law only when they engage in combat.

A joint investigation by The Times of London and the BBC’s “Panorama” documentary program in November 2019 claimed that the Shiner tribunal had been used as a pretext to close IHAT and Operation Northmoor prematurely.

A senior detective told “Panorama”: “The MoD had no intention of prosecuting any soldier of whatever rank he was unless it was absolutely necessary, and they couldn’t wriggle their way out of it.”

The MoD did not immediately respond to a request from Arab News for comment. The International Criminal Court, meanwhile, is currently conducting a preliminary inquiry into the conduct of British personnel in Iraq suspected of war crimes, with a view to opening a full investigation.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iraq](#)

[UK](#)

[war crimes](#)

International court approves Afghanistan war crimes investigation UN probe highlights Russia, Turkey roles in Syria 'war crimes'