

US court finds Syria liable for journalist Marie Colvin's killing

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WASHINGTON: A US judge has ruled that Syrian President Bashar Assad's government is liable for at least \$302.5 million in damages for its role in the 2012 death of renowned American journalist Marie Colvin while covering the Syrian civil war.

US District Judge Amy Berman Jackson said in a ruling made public on Wednesday that the Syrian government "engaged in an act of extrajudicial killing of a United States national."

Colvin and French photographer Remi Ochlik were killed in the besieged Syrian city of Homs while reporting on the Syrian conflict.

The lawsuit filed by Colvin's family in 2016 accused officials in Assad's government of deliberately targeting rockets against a makeshift broadcast studio where Colvin and other reporters were living and working.

Jackson wrote that "a targeted attack on a media center hosting foreign journalists that resulted in two fatalities and multiple injuries ... is an unconscionable act." The judge ruled that compensatory damages to be awarded in addition to the \$300 million in punitive damages would be calculated at a later date.

A biographical film about Colvin, called "A Private War" and starring British actress Rosamund Pike, was released last year, bringing fresh attention to her career.



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Marie Colvin was 'assassinated' by Syrian government, say family members
Biopic tribute to slain war reporter Marie Colvin as journalism comes 'under attack'

[UN envoy 'deeply concerned' about Yemen hostilities](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-01-31 19:30

LONDON: The United Nation's Yemen envoy warned Thursday that he was deeply concerned about "recent hostilities" in Yemen where a precarious regional truce is under increasing pressure.

Martin Griffiths did not specify which hostilities, but the Yemeni government on Wednesday accused Houthi militants of attacking an explosives safety team

who were on their way to clear land mines from near a food store in Hodeidah.

The Arab coalition supporting the government also said Wednesday that it had shot down a Houthi drone over Saudi Arabia.

Griffiths traveled to Yemen this week to shore up the Hodeidah ceasefire deal signed in Sweden in December. Since the agreement, the coalition have accused the Houthis of dozens of violations and of failing to withdraw its troops from certain areas. They have also been accused of opening fire on the UN team sent to monitor the deal.

“Deeply concerned about recent hostilities in Yemen,” Griffiths tweeted. He called on all sides to “exercise utmost restraint and de-escalate tensions.”

On Wednesday, Anwar Gargash, the UAE minister of state for foreign affairs, said the Arab coalition is prepared to use “calibrated force” to push the Iranian-backed Houthis from Hodeidah as per the Sweden deal.

Gargash said the coalition struck 10 Houthi training camps outside Hodeidah governorate on Wednesday.



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Arab coalition to use 'calibrated force' in Yemen to drive Houthis out of Hodeidah
Houthis open fire on UN bomb safety team in Yemen

Lebanese leaders agree new government breaking months of deadlock

Thu, 2019-01-31 19:06

BEIRUT: Lebanese leaders reached a deal on Thursday to set up a new unity government ending months of wrangling that has added to concerns for the heavily indebted state.

Prime Minister-designate Saad Al-Hariri now faces a big challenge in delivering reforms needed to address the dire public finances and unlock billions of dollars in pledged aid and loans to boost low growth.

The new government will include most of Lebanon's rival factions, who have been negotiating over the make-up of the cabinet since a May 6 election in which allies of the Iran-backed Hezbollah group gained ground.

The government will be announced on Thursday, the sources said, as Hariri met President Michel Aoun at the presidential palace in Baabda. Media reports said he was later joined by Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri.

A senior official said Ali Hassan Khalil will stay on as finance minister, and a source familiar with the government formation talks said Hezbollah had chosen doctor Jamil Jabak, who is not a member of the group, as health minister.

By picking the health minister, the heavily armed Hezbollah will be moving beyond the more marginal role it has played in past governments: the ministry has the fourth-biggest budget in the state apparatus, the outgoing minister has said.

The United States regards Hezbollah as a terrorist organization and has put new sanctions on the group as part of a campaign against Iran.

Since the election, Hariri's last government, appointed in late 2016, has continued in a caretaker capacity.

Hariri lost more than a third of his lawmakers in the election but kept his status as the leading Sunni Muslim and so returns as premier, a position reserved for his sect under Lebanon's sectarian system of rule.

But the election produced a parliament tilted in favor of Hezbollah thanks to gains by groups and individuals that support its possession of a major arsenal. Together, they won more than 70 of the 128 seats.

While Lebanon's economy and financial system have shown resilience during previous periods of political paralysis, investor concerns have been reflected of late in bond prices and the costs of insuring against debt default.

Hariri, speaking earlier on Thursday, said the new government would be forced to "take difficult decisions" to reduce spending.



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[Arab coalition to use “calibrated force” to drive Houthis out of Hodeidah: Gargash](#)

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Wed, 2019-01-30 23:46

DUBAI: The Arab coalition is prepared to use “calibrated force” to push the Iranian-backed Houthi militia to withdraw from Yemen’s Hodeidah port city under a UN-sponsored deal, the UAE’s minister for foreign affairs said on Wednesday.

Yemen’s warring parties have failed to pull troops from the country’s main port under a month-old truce, reviving the threat of an all-out assault on Hodeidah that could unleash further famine.

The Houthis control Hodeidah while Yemeni government factions backed by the coalition trying to restore the internationally recognized government are massed on its outskirts.

Gargash said the coalition struck 10 Houthi training camps outside Hodeidah governorate on Wednesday.

“The Coalition us prepared to use more calibrated force to prod Houthi compliance with Stockholm Agreement,” he tweeted.

“To preserve cease-fire & any hope for political process, UN and international community must press Houthis to stop violations, facilitate aid convoys, and move forward on withdrawal from Hodaida city & ports as agreed,” he added.

UN envoy Martin Griffiths has been shuttling between the parties to rescue the deal, the first major diplomatic breakthrough of the nearly four-year-old war that has killed tens of thousands of people and pushed Yemen to the verge of starvation.

Gargash tweeted: “Houthi militia hinder the mission of observers and are preventing relief ships from entering the port.”



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[US security aid to Palestinians ends today; envoys seek workaround](#)

Author:

Wed, 2019-01-30 22:29

RAMALLAH: US security aid for the Palestinian Authority was set to dry up on Thursday after it declined the money over concerns it could increase its exposure to US anti-terrorism lawsuits.

The loss of the some \$60 million in annual funding would mark another tear in ties between the Trump administration and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, and potentially undermines his security cooperation with Israel in the occupied West Bank.

Diplomatic sources said Palestinian, US and Israeli officials were seeking a way to keep the money flowing despite Abbas’s decision to turn it down as of a Jan. 31 deadline set by Congress’ Anti-Terrorism Clarification Act (ATCA) of

2018.

The Act empowers Americans to sue foreign aid recipients in US courts over alleged complicity in "acts of war."

Abbas's administration, long accused by Israel of stoking Palestinian militant attacks, worries about such legal exposure. It denies encouraging any such acts.

"We do not want to receive financial aid, including aid provided to the security forces, so as not to be subject to the anti-terrorism law approved by Congress," one Palestinian official told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

"The US administration was surprised by the Palestinian decision, and said it wanted to find a solution in order to continue aid to the Palestinian security services."

Such a solution may include finding alternative funds within the CIA budget or amending US legislation, he said. Israeli officials declined to confirm or deny there were workaround talks.

But sought to offer reassurance that Israel could manage security in the West Bank, which it captured in the 1967 Middle East War, even without Palestinian help.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu may also be disinclined to signal worries about the West Bank ahead of his bid to stay in office in an election in April as the Palestinians' goal of an independent state is rejected by many of his fellow Israeli rightists.

"Israel cannot save the failing leadership of the Palestinian Authority," Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely told Reshet Channel 13 TV when asked about the cut in US funding.

"The most we can do is say to them, 'since this is our land, if you cannot govern, then we can.'"

The Palestinian Authority is an interim self-government body set up following the 1993 Oslo peace accords. The peace process, aimed at finding a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has been stalled for several years.

The Palestinians have also been boycotting the US since it recognized disputed Jerusalem as Israel's capital in December 2017.

The Trump administration has cut hundreds of millions of dollars to humanitarian organizations and UN agencies which aid the Palestinians as it seeks to pressure Abbas to come back to the negotiating table.



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US aid cuts hit Palestinians, further dimming hope for peace
Palestinians: US aid cut looks to pressure Jerusalem stance