

Tourists throng Egypt pyramids after bombing, but future clouded

Author:

Sun, 2018-12-30 22:33

GIZA: Crowds of tourists stared in awe at the towering pyramids of Giza near Cairo on Saturday undaunted by a nearby bomb attack a day earlier that killed holidaymakers from Vietnam.

A roadside bombing ripped through a tourist bus killing three tourists and an Egyptian guide on Friday, as it traveled near the world-famous attraction.

The attack comes as Egypt's vital tourism sector has begun to recover after years of instability and militant violence that scared visitors away.

"I think terrorism can strike anywhere in the world," Somand Yang from South Korea told AFP.

"You have to be careful but it is also like luck." Security forces guarded the entrance to the sprawling site and Yang, 32, said she had no qualms about visiting.

"Lightning never strikes twice in the same place. So I figured it will be even safer today," she said.

Excited holidaymakers rode camels and queued to enter a tomb as they snapped pictures of the Great Pyramid, the only surviving structure of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Hawkers followed the tourists, doggedly trying to sell trinkets and souvenirs. Despite the steady flow of visitors, Egyptians working at the site said they were shaken by the attack – and concerned that it could hit their livelihoods.

"I knew the guide who died yesterday," said Dalia Sadaka, as she accompanied a group of sightseers.

"I completely broke down yesterday, but I had to get to work in the morning," she said, pointing to her visibly swollen eyes.

Earlier hit hard by a string of bloody attacks and unrest, visitor numbers to Egypt have more recently staged a partial recovery.

In October 2015, a bomb claimed by a local affiliate of Daesh killed all 224 people on board a passenger jet carrying Russian tourists over the Sinai peninsula.

That incident dealt a severe blow to Egypt's tourism industry, which was still reeling from the turmoil set off by the 2011 uprising that forced veteran leader Hosni Mubarak from power.

The official statistics agency says arrivals reached 8.2 million in 2017, up from 5.3 million the year before.

But that figure was still far short of the record influx in 2010 when over 14 million came.

“I fear yesterday’s incident may have an impact on our source of income,” said an elderly man who offers camel rides, declining to give his name.

“It is very regrettable,” he said. “We were finally happy that tourism started picking up a bit.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Egypt](#)

[Pyramids](#)

Egyptian forces kill 40 suspected militants after tourist bus bombed3 die as roadside bomb targets tourist bus near Pyramids in Egypt

[Syria’s regime on path to come in from the cold](#)

Author:

Sun, 2018-12-30 22:27

BEIRUT: Almost eight years into Syria's civil war, President Bashar Assad seems closer than ever to securing a comeback at home and in the Arab region, analysts say.

As 2018 ends, the Moscow-backed government in Damascus is in control of nearly two-thirds of Syria, after notching up a string of victories against fighters and militants.

And after a shock announcement by the US this month that it is to pull all 2,000 of its troops out of Syria, the regime also seems on track to regain influence in parts of the country under Kurdish-led control.

On Friday, Damascus sent troops to a northern area near the border with Turkey to stave off a long-threatened Turkish assault on the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) there.

It did so at the invitation of the Kurds, who feel exposed by the shock withdrawal announcement by the US, their principal backer.

The Kurds reaching out to the regime represented the latest in a string of achievements for Assad, said Mutlu Civiroglu, an expert in Kurdish affairs.

"He is consolidating his power day by day diplomatically and militarily," he said.

Assad had previously threatened to retake SDF-held oil-rich territory, whether through ongoing talks or by force.

"Rather than fighting with the Kurds, the government is now invited by the Kurds to enter these regions," Civiroglu said.

"There can be nothing better than this for Assad," the analyst added.

Aside from SDF-held northeastern Syria, the opposition-held region of Idlib remains beyond Assad's control, but is subject to a cease-fire deal.

The SDF are battling to expel the last Daesh militants from their eastern holdout near the Iraqi border. But the militants also retain a presence in the country's vast Badia desert.

Kurdish fighters have spearheaded the fight against Daesh in Syria, and the presence of US-led coalition members alongside the SDF in northern Syria had previously deterred Turkey from attacking.

The US announcement last week sparked renewed fears of an assault, after two previous Turkish incursions inside the war-torn country.

But President Donald Trump's pullout order has also sent a message to fellow Arab countries in the region, says Nicholas Heras, an analyst at the Center for a New American Security.

"Trump's decision to withdraw US forces from Syria sent the signal to the Arab states that they need to engage with Assad on their own terms and not

wait for US policy to come into focus," he said.

Even before any US troops pull out, a drive to bring Assad back into the Arab fold seems to have picked up momentum in recent weeks.

The United Arab Emirates Embassy in Damascus reopened on Thursday, 10 days after Sudanese President Omar Bashir made the first visit of any Arab leader to the Syrian capital since the start of the war.

Bahrain has announced it will re-open its diplomatic mission.

Syria's war has killed more than 360,000 people and displaced millions since it began with the brutal repression of anti-Assad protests in 2011.

The UN estimates the conflict has cost the country close to \$400 billion (€350 million).

Heras said the president would be seeking deals with wealthy Gulf states to help rebuild.

"Assad will look to build on his success in 2018 by scoring deals with the Arab states, especially the Gulf, to kick start the reconstruction of Syria," he said.

Syria was suspended from the Arab League in November 2011, as the death toll was escalating and several regional powers bet on Assad's demise.

Most Gulf states closed their embassies in 2012.

An Arab diplomat in Beirut who did not want to be named spoke to AFP about an unprecedented Arab "openness toward Damascus."

And a high-ranking Iraqi official has told AFP Baghdad was helping to mediate a restoration of ties between Damascus and Qatar, a country in a bitter feud with its Gulf neighbors.

These efforts come ahead of the next Arab League summit to be held in Tunis in March.

On Jan. 19 and 20, the Arab Economic Summit in Beirut could provide a further opportunity to discuss Syria's possible attendance at the Tunis event.

Several sources say Egypt is playing a key role in efforts toward Assad's comeback on the Arab scene.

On Dec. 22, Syrian intelligence chief Ali Mamluk, a key regime figure, visited Cairo for talks with Egyptian officials.

A Lebanese diplomatic source who asked to remain unnamed told AFP "there is a project to reactivate Syria's membership" at the Arab League.

"Egypt is supporting it," this source said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Syria](#)

Syria's Assad authorizes Iraqi forces to strike Daesh in Syria
US commanders want Kurdish fighters in Syria to keep weapons

[30 Daesh suspects arrested in Ankara](#)

Sun, 2018-12-30 22:11

ANKARA: Turkish security forces on Sunday arrested 30 Daesh-linked suspects, all foreign nationals, in the capital Ankara.

The operation's timing is significant ahead of New Year's Eve celebrations, as the suspects were allegedly plotting terror attacks.

Meanwhile, authorities in Istanbul have stepped up security precautions in busy parts of the city, including the iconic Taksim Square, where celebratory gatherings have been banned.

As of Dec. 21, police had conducted more than 1.5 million identity checks in Istanbul, arresting more than 4,000 people on various charges.

A Daesh-linked lone gunman attacked a nightclub in Istanbul on Jan. 1, 2016, killing many foreigners (including Saudis) as well as Turks.

In another development, Australia has stripped a fighter held in Turkey of his citizenship due to his ties to Daesh.

The US announcement of its planned withdrawal from Syria has put Turkey, which Washington expects to wipe out the remnants of Daesh in Syria, at the forefront of the terror group's potential targets.

Major operation

The Turkish military is preparing another major operation against terror groups, including Daesh, in Syria.

FASTFACTS

As of Dec. 21, police had conducted more than 1.5 million identity checks in Istanbul, arresting more than 4,000 people on various charges.

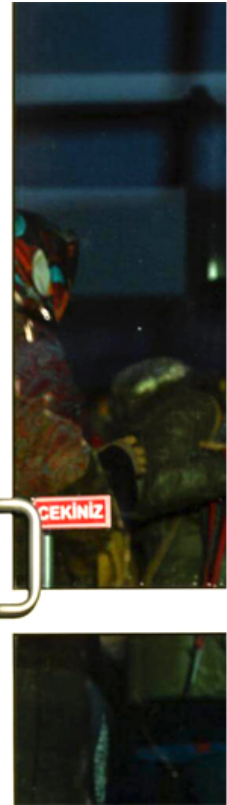
The nightclub attack was a turning point in terms of increased security precautions by Turkish authorities against potential Daesh attacks ahead of New Year's Eve celebrations.

Erol Bural, a former military officer and a terrorism expert at the 21st Century Turkey Institute, said the threat from Daesh has not been eliminated completely.

"Among European countries, Turkey has been hit hardest by Daesh attacks. The terror group decides on its acts in line with regional dynamics," Bural told Arab News.

Experts say the nightclub attack was a turning point in terms of increased security precautions by Turkish authorities against potential attacks by Daesh militants ahead of New Year's Eve celebrations.

"More than 1,100 operations were conducted against Daesh in 2018 throughout the country, and two large Daesh attacks were prevented before they occurred. Security measures were also increased at the border crossings between Turkey and Syria," Bural said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Turkey](#)

[Daesh](#)

Russia, Turkey to coordinate on Syria after US pullout
Turkey probes prominent TV anchor

[Four killed after rescue helicopter strikes zip line in UAE's Ras Al-Khaimah](#)

Sat, 2018-12-29 20:37

DUBAI: A rescue helicopter crashed in Ras Al-Khaimah in the United Arab Emirates on Saturday evening killing all of the crew, the country's civil aviation authority said.

Local media reported that the helicopter struck a zip line before crashing and bursting into flames. Video circulated on social media showed the helicopter spinning before it crashed into the mountain.

[#UAE](#)'s National Research and Rescue Center ([@NCEMAUAE](#)) is searching

for the bodies of 4 people killed in a helicopter crash in [#rasalkhaimah](#) near the world's largest [#zipline](#) in [#jebeljaish](#)<https://t.co/EotGook3u0> pic.twitter.com/HkrLmswf00

– Arab News (@arabnews) [December 29, 2018](#)

The dead include three Emiratis and a foreigner.

“An Agusta 139 helicopter in a rescue mission crashed in Jebel Jais area in the Emirate of Ras Al-Khaimah,” state news agency WAM quoted the UAE’s General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA) as saying.

Ras Al-Khaimah’s ruler, Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al-Qasimi, ordered an urgent investigation into the helicopter’s crash.

He also ordered “a comprehensive investigation of the security and safety requirements in place to determine the cause of this painful incident,” WAM reported.



The Agusta 139 helicopter was operated by the UAE’s National Search and Rescue Center. (File photo: WAM)

The statement added that the helicopter crashed at about 5:55 p.m. local time (1:55 p.m. GMT).

An official said the helicopter from the National Search and Rescue Center was on a mission to airlift an injured man from Jebel Jais but the helicopter crashed before reaching the man.

Jebel Jais, the highest mountain in the UAE, is home to the world’s longest zipline.



Jebel Jais, the highest mountain in the UAE, is home to the world’s longest zipline. (Shutterstock)

The zipline, measuring 2.83 kilometers long, opened in February as part of an effort by the emirate of Ras al-Khaimah to attract more tourists and residents from neighboring emirates like Abu Dhabi and Dubai.







Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Ras Al-Khaimah](#)

[UAE](#)
[United Arab Emirates](#)
[helicopter crash](#)

Leicester City helicopter crash caused by mechanical fault, say investigators
Mexican governor, senator killed in helicopter crash -reports

[Russia, Turkey to coordinate on Syria after US pullout](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1546098137402679700

Sat, 2018-12-29 15:33

MOSCOW: Russia and Turkey on Saturday agreed to coordinate ground operations in Syria after the shock announcement of a US military withdrawal, Moscow's top diplomat said.

President Donald Trump's move has already hastened a shift in alliances with Syrian troops deployed Friday in support of Kurdish forces around a strategic northern city. The Kurds, under threat from Ankara, had been supported by US forces.

"Of course we paid special attention to new circumstances which appeared in connection with the announced US military pullout," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said after talks with Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu. The Syrian deployment pleased ally Russia but upset Turkey ahead of Saturday's talks in Moscow.

"An understanding was reached of how military representatives of Russia and Turkey will continue to coordinate their steps on the ground under new conditions with a view to finally rooting out terrorist threats in Syria," Lavrov said.

Cavusoglu confirmed the two countries would coordinate Syria operations, adding they also discussed plans to help refugees to return home.

"We will continue active work (and) coordination with our Russian colleagues and colleagues from Iran to speed up the arrival of a political settlement in the Syrian Republic," he said in remarks translated into Russian.

"We have the common desire to cleanse Syrian territory of any terrorist organization, Cavusoglu added.

Lavrov said he was "optimistic" following the talks which included Russian and Turkish defense ministers Sergei Shoigu and Hulusi Akar.

Trump last week said he was pulling all 2,000 troops from Syria, declaring that Washington had achieved its objective as Daesh had been "knocked" out. The extremist movement has lost nearly all its territory, although thousands of its militants are thought to remain in war-battered Syria.

Nearly eight years into Syria's deadly conflict, the US pullout has led to

another key step in President Bashar Assad's Russian-backed drive to reassert control over the country.

The Syrian army announced its return to Manbij, a strategic city close to the Turkish border where Kurdish forces have been deployed since 2016 and where US-led coalition forces are also stationed.

A US withdrawal will leave them exposed to an assault by Turkey, which has thousands of proxy fighters in northern Syria and wants to crush Kurdish forces it considers terrorists.

The Syrian army's arrival creates a regime buffer arching across northern Syria that fully separates the Turkish army and its proxies from the Kurds. Ankara reacted to the deployment by warning "all sides to stay away from provocative actions."

On Friday, Russia said it would host a three-way summit with Turkey and Iran on the Syrian conflict early next year following their last such meeting in September.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Turkish, Syrian forces edge close to each other in Manbij
UAE reopens Syrian embassy in Damascus