

Blair admits he 'may have been wrong' about Iraq, Afghanistan invasions

Author:

Sun, 2022-03-06 17:01

LONDON: Former British Prime Minister Sir Tony Blair has admitted that he "may have been wrong" about the decision to invade Iraq and Afghanistan but remained steadfast in his view that he thought it was "the right thing" to do.

In conversation with the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, as part of the BBC's "The Archbishop Interviews" series, Blair provided a defense of his decision to invade Iraq and Afghanistan in support of former US President George W. Bush.

"People often say over Iraq or Afghanistan that I took the wrong decision, but you've got to do what you think is right," the 68-year-old said.

He added: "Whether you are right or not is another matter. In those really big decisions, you don't know what all the different component elements are, and you've got to follow, in the end, your own instinct."

He told Welby that he "may have been wrong" but reaffirmed that he thought it was the right thing to do.

Blair's comments come after he was appointed a knight companion of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, the most senior chivalric honor in Britain, which is offered solely by the monarch, in the New Year's Honors list.

More than 1 million people have signed a petition online calling for the honor to be rescinded, with the organizer claiming that "Tony Blair caused irreparable damage to both the constitution of the United Kingdom and to the very fabric of the nation's society."

The petition specifically refers to his actions in the Middle East, writing: "He was personally responsible for causing the death of countless innocent civilian lives and servicemen in various conflicts. For this alone he should be held accountable for war crimes."

It added: "Tony Blair is the least deserving person of any public honour, particularly anything awarded by Her Majesty the Queen."



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Petition to strip Blair of knighthood reaches 1m signatures
Blair's defense secretary says he was ordered to burn crucial document ahead of Iraq war

[Yemen troops repulse 'major' Houthi attacks in Hajjah](#)

Sat, 2022-03-05 21:29

AL-MUKALLAH: Heavy fighting between government troops and Iran-backed Houthis broke out early on Saturday at flashpoint sites in the northern province of Hajjah, Yemen's Defense Ministry said.

Houthi counterattacks on government forces in the Abes and Haradh districts sparked fierce clashes that left dozens dead or wounded on both sides.

The latest Houthi attacks are part of continuing efforts by the militia to

retake strategic sites in the two districts controlled by government troops.

Major military reinforcements from Saada, the Houthis' heartland, and the other areas under the militia's control arrived in Haradh and Abes last week as the rebels prepared to launch their latest strike against government troops.

The Defense Ministry said that government troops repulsed the Houthi attacks, killing and wounding dozens of fighters.

Intense air raids by the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen struck the militia's locations, military vehicles and deployments of fighters.

The coalition said on Saturday that it carried out 17 airstrikes in the provinces of Hajjah and Marib that killed many Houthis and destroyed 11 military vehicles in the past 24 hours.

The latest round of fighting in Hajjah began early last month when government forces mounted an offensive to take control of the city of Haradh and surrounding areas close to the border with Saudi Arabia.

Clashes between government troops and rebel fighters on Saturday took place in contested areas south of the central city of Marib, local media reports said.

The Houthis have intensified attacks on Marib from the south after failing to breach government defenses to the north and west of the strategic city.

Rebel fighters have been attacking the city, the government's last major bastion in the northern half of the country, since earlier last year in a bid to take full control of Marib province, along with its oil and gas fields and a power station.

Yemeni officials and human rights activists condemned the Houthis for targeting civilians after a young engineer was shot and killed in the densely populated city of Taiz.

Abdul Basit Al-Baher, a military officer, told Arab News on Saturday that Mahfouz Dael was hit by a sniper's bullet outside his house in Al-Osifra, north of Taiz.

Dael, a petroleum engineer who had returned to Yemen from abroad to see his family, was killed while entering his house after being targeted by a Houthi sniper stationed on a hillside outside the city, Al-Baher said.

"He was an unarmed civilian, wearing a suit with a tie, who was killed on his doorstep while entering the house to greet his parents," Al-Baher said.



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Saudi Shoura Council speaker welcomes UN designation of Yemen's Houthis as terrorist group
Yemeni authorities destroy large quantities of hashish, pills linked to Houthi gangs in Hajjah

[Israeli PM Bennett meets Putin in Moscow to discuss Ukraine crisis](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Sat, 2022-03-05 20:15

JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin on Saturday to discuss the Ukraine crisis, his spokesperson said.

Israel, home to a substantial population of Russian immigrants, has offered to mediate in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, though officials have previously played down expectations of a breakthrough.

While Israel, a close ally of the United States, has condemned the Russian invasion, voiced solidarity with Kyiv and sent humanitarian aid to Ukraine, it has said it will maintain communications with Moscow in the hope of helping to ease the crisis.

Israel is also mindful of Moscow's military support for President Bashar Assad in next-door Syria, where Israel regularly attacks Iranian and Hezbollah military targets. Contacts with Moscow prevent Russian and Israeli forces trading fire by accident.

Bennett, a religious Jew, took a flight in violation of Sabbath law because Judaism permits this when the aim is to preserve human life, his spokesperson said.



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Israel's PM Bennett concludes historic visit to Bahrain to deepen ties Israeli TV channel airs 'Star Wars' spoof as Ukraine conflict footage

Jordan exerting 'intensive' effort to get citizens out of Ukraine

Author:

Sat, 2022-03-05 19:22

AMMAN: Jordan on Saturday said that it is exerting "intensive" diplomatic efforts to ensure a safe evacuation of its citizens in the Ukrainian cities of Kharkiv and Sumy.

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Haitham Abu Al-Foul said that are around 145 Jordanians with their families are still in the northeast of Ukraine, which has been reportedly witnessing fierce battles between Russian and Ukrainian forces.

The spokesman's remarks followed reports claiming that Ukrainian forces are holding about 5,000 foreigners hostage, including 200 Jordanians, as human shields in Kharkiv and Sumy.

Al-Foul told Arab News that many Jordanians have already left Kharkiv to neighboring countries, without giving exact figures about how many have fled and how many are still trapped in Ukraine's second-largest city, which also has been witnessing heavy fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces.

The official said that Jordan is exerting intensive diplomatic efforts through its embassies in Moscow and Ankara and relief organizations working in Ukraine to create corridors to evacuate Jordanians from the war-hit country.

He also said that a total of 810 Jordanians have been evacuated from Ukraine since the beginning of the conflict on Feb. 24.

Al-Foul said that around 2,600 Jordanians were in Ukraine before the conflict. "But this figure was provided by the Ukrainians, and it is not exact since many probably left before the war," he added.

Russian authorities said on Saturday that Ukrainians were holding about 5,000 foreigners hostage to use them as human shields.

Russia's National Defense Control Center Col. Gen. Mikhail Mizintsev was quoted in international press as claiming that "militants of Ukrainian nationalist battalions continue holding hostage about 5,000 foreigners as human shields."

The Russian official claimed that the Ukrainian side has refused proposals to open humanitarian corridors in Kharkiv and Sumy.



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Ukrainian crisis hits Jordanian students, imports Nearly 1.37 mn people flee Ukraine war

[Lebanese bank closes over 30 British-held accounts after UK ruling-depositors' group](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Sat, 2022-03-05 18:39

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Bank Audi has closed more than 30 accounts belonging to UK

nationals or their close relatives since a London court ordered it to transfer funds stuck in the crisis-hit banking sector to a British client, a depositors' union said.

The Feb. 28 order requiring Bank Audi and its peer SGBL to transfer \$4 million is the first UK ruling obliging Lebanese banks to transfer dollars out of the paralyzed financial system, potentially encouraging similar claims.

A Bank Audi official told Reuters the bank was "asking that the UK residents apply the terms applicable to anyone opening a new account: no international transfers, no cash withdrawals."

"If this is not accepted, then the bank has no choice but to close the account."

More than \$100 billion remains stuck in a banking system paralyzed since 2019, when the economy collapsed due to decades of unsustainable state spending, corruption and waste.

In the absence of formal capital controls, banks have largely blocked dollar withdrawals and transfers abroad, sparking numerous legal challenges, with mixed results.

Since the UK order, Bank Audi, one of Lebanon's biggest, has told dozens of clients their accounts had been closed and a cheque issued for the balance at a notary public, lawyer Dina Abou Zour of the Depositors Union told Reuters. They were told the accounts could be reopened if they signed a form waiving the right to make international transfers or to withdraw dollars in Lebanon, and accept that a cheque was due payment of the balance. Abou Zour said the total amounts involved were in the tens of millions of dollars.

Banks have already closed many dollar accounts by issuing cheques which cannot be cashed and instead change hands in the market, currently at about a quarter of their face value.

"FAILING ECONOMY"

Bank Audi has said it intends to comply with the UK order but will consider its options on an appeal.

British passport holder Maliha Badr Raydan said she got a call from a Bank Audi employee on Monday saying her account had been closed and a cheque issued for the balance. A second UK citizen said the bank told him the same on Wednesday.

"They said it's because I have British passport," Raydan said, adding that money had been earmarked for the education of her two children after the death of her husband.

She was told she could open a new account if she signed a form waiving some of her rights. She declined to do so.

"I didn't steal this money, I did nothing wrong, it's the labor of my late husband over all these years and the future of my children and the other people I support."

A copy of the form seen by Reuters sets terms for opening new accounts, including accepting that only Beirut courts have jurisdiction in any legal dispute.

The Bank Audi official said the bank had not asked clients to waive the right to bring lawsuits.

Bank Audi says the UK order will lead to unequal treatment among depositors, with wealthy savers who are UK residents able to get all their funds at the expense of others who cannot bring such cases.

Many Lebanese have protested against unfair treatment by banks throughout the crisis, with influential clients able to make withdrawals and transfers abroad and ordinary people unable to send even small sums to children studying abroad, for example. Banks have been calling for a capital control law.

A British embassy spokesperson said: "This unfortunate situation is symptomatic of Lebanon's failing economy and underlines the urgency of Lebanon's government adopting comprehensive economic reforms."



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