

Syrian war being forgotten in UK as poll shows growing apathy

Author:

Wed, 2021-02-24 22:45

LONDON: The civil war in Syria is being forgotten by the British people as apathy toward the decade-long conflict grows, according to a UK-based charity.

The [results of a YouGov survey, released on Wednesday](#), showed only a little more than half (58 percent) of those polled were aware the war was still going on. A spokesman for Syria Relief said Britons have “turned off their minds” to what is happening in the country.

The poll, which marks the upcoming 10th anniversary of the start of the conflict, found 38 percent of 1,753 people questioned in the UK were not sure of the current status of the war, while four percent believed it had ended.

Public awareness of the conflict was higher in August 2019, when a survey found that 77 percent people knew about the conflict, according to [Syria Relief](#).

“I believe that after 10 years the UK has become fatigued about the Syrian crisis because of its protracted nature,” Charles Lawley, head of communications and advocacy at Syria Relief, told Arab News. “They are accepting that this is a place where tragedies happen on a daily basis, so they turn their minds off to it – and this is a great tragedy.

“I think it is a symptom of British society becoming less concerned about issues beyond our own borders and, to be frank, it is almost as if the suffering of Syrians is boring them.”

This year also marks 10 years since the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad targeted 10 schools and a hospital in attacks that claimed the lives of more than 20 people, more than half of them children, something that would not be tolerated in the UK, Lawley said.

“If this would have happened in Britain it would have been treated akin to our 9/11: a national tragedy that would be remembered for generations,” he said. “Yet because it happened in Syria, no one knows about it.

“We wouldn’t tolerate children being bombed as they sit in the classrooms of British schools so why on earth do we tolerate it in Syria or anywhere else in the world?”

Extensive media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit negotiations has meant that UK national news updates on the Syrian conflict have been increasingly rare in the past few years, which makes the efforts of charities to help the victims of the conflict much harder, Lawley said.

"It is so difficult for organizations like Syria Relief to get the UK or the world to care about suffering and death in Syria," he said. "When we just allow Syria to be a place where bombs can be dropped on schools or hospitals, we devalue the lives of Syrians.

"But, tragically, our apathy to the plight of the Syrian people compounds their suffering as there is no pressure on governments to act to stop warring parties in the conflict from committing crimes against humanity.

"Ultimately, the British people need to remember that Syrians are people too. Their lives are just as valuable as any human life; the only difference between them and (us) is where they were born. They didn't ask for this."

While the UK has pledged billions of pounds in aid for Syria since 2012, politicians and the media in the UK need to do more to shine a light on the conflict and the suffering of ordinary Syrians, Lawley said, especially after the government's recent announcement of cuts to the aid budget.

"The UK government is the third-biggest donor to the Syrian humanitarian aid response and should be proud about the enormous amount of good it is doing to help the people impacted by the conflict," he said.

"However, with the recent announcement of the government about plans to cut the aid budget, this is making us at Syria Relief, and many of our colleagues in the (nongovernmental organization) community very concerned about what this could mean to the Syrian people – many of whom are some of the most vulnerable people on the globe.

"I think the government should be shouting from the rooftops about the incredible things that the UK aid budget has achieved. If it had, I think there would have been more opposition from the public about the announcement to cut the budget.

"Being a global leader in helping the world's poorest and most vulnerable people should be worn as a badge of national pride, not treated like a dirty little secret."

The war in Syria began in 2011 amid pro-democracy protests in Deraa. Tensions escalated after the Assad regime crushed dissenters who staged a "day of rage" on March 15, which ultimately led to more people flooding city streets demanding the president step down.



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Syrian chemical weapons expert 'was on CIA payroll for 14 years'

[Jordan reimposes Friday curfew as virus surges](#)

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AMMAN: Jordan has reimposed an all-day curfew on Fridays to stem the spread of coronavirus as cases rise, officials said Wednesday.

"Starting this week, the government is imposing a curfew throughout the kingdom from 10 p.m. (2000 GMT) Thursdays until 6 am Saturdays," Information

Minister Ali Al-Ayed said in a statement.

Walking to a mosque for Friday prayers, however, is permitted, he said.

An existing nightly curfew will begin at 10 p.m. instead of midnight, while from Sunday a maximum of 30 percent of public-sector employees will be allowed at their workplace.

The toughening of Covid-19 restrictions returns Jordan to rules imposed in March last year, and which were only eased last month.

“The kingdom has witnessed a rapid spread of Covid in recent weeks. This is why swift and strict measures are needed,” Health Minister Nazir Obeidat said.

Jordan, which began vaccinations last month, has officially recorded more than 376,000 novel coronavirus cases and over 4,600 deaths out of a population of 10.5 million people.



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Bahrain sends delegate to Qatar for first time since ending rift

Author:

Wed, 2021-02-24 22:27

CAIRO: A delegate from the Bahraini foreign ministry visited Doha on Wednesday in the first visit of its kind since an agreement last month to end a rift with Qatar.

The ministry sent a a correspondence aimed at renewing an invitation to send an official delegation to start bilateral talks between both countries “regarding outstanding issues and topics,” read a statement on the state-run news agency BNA.

The message was delivered by the ministry’s Undersecretary Ambassador Waheed Mubarak Sayyar.

The step comes as part of an implementation of the provisions of the Al-Ula agreement which was agreed in Saudi Arabia last month.

Delegations from Egypt and UAE have met Qatari delegates in in Kuwait over the past few days for the first time since the al-Ula agreement.

Since the agreement, air and travel links have resumed between Qatar and the four states – Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt.



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Egypt and Qatar hold first meeting since AlUla Declaration
UAE, Qatari delegations meet in Kuwait to follow up on AlUla Declaration

Tensions rising between Athens, Ankara

Author:

Wed, 2021-02-24 21:22

ANKARA: While Turkey and Greece came together to resume talks over their maritime disputes, the decades-long tension between the countries has resurfaced again.

Ankara claimed four Greek F-16 jets harassed a Turkish research vessel in the Aegean Sea on Tuesday by dropping a flare two miles away from the ship near the Greek island of Lemnos – an accusation that was quickly denied by Athens.

Greece's Air Force was conducting an exercise in the Aegean Sea at the time, but allegedly far away from the Turkish vessel.

In a press briefing, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said his country responded with the "necessary retaliation in line with the rules. While we are carrying out scientific work, harassment is not correct. It doesn't fit in our good neighborly ties."

The Greek Defense Ministry insisted their jets never harassed the Turkish vessel.

Turkey's new research vessel, the TCG Cesme, conducted annual hydrographic survey work last week in international waters between the two countries, stirring Athens' anger.

The Greek Foreign Ministry criticized the presence of the Turkish vessel in the area, describing it as "an unnecessary move that doesn't help positive sentiment."

In retaliation, Ankara accused Greece of conducting similar military exercises in the Aegean Sea near islands that are supposed to be non-militarized by international and bilateral agreements.

The incident triggered, once again, the unresolved bilateral dispute over maritime zones as both countries continue to pursue energy resources in the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

The second round of exploratory talks was expected to be held in Athens in early March. It was scheduled ahead of the EU Summit on March 25-26, during which Brussels will decide on possible sanctions on Ankara over its energy exploration missions in the eastern Mediterranean.

"It is important that the resumption of exploratory talks between Greece and Turkey does not elicit hopes for a breakthrough," George Tzogopoulos, a senior fellow at the International Center of European Formation, told Arab News.

"The two countries interpret dialogue in different terms and employ relevant political communication strategies. New tensions concerning the research ship Cesme are nothing new in the modern history of bilateral relations, but they further deteriorate an already toxic climate."

Turkish-Greek relations have already been tested with the Cyprus conflict as Ankara ruled out discussing a federal system to reunify the divided island.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Feb. 10 that Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis "will get to know the crazy Turks as well."

The harsh rhetoric illustrates Turkey's anger about the bizonal and bicommunal federation offer from Greece, and it did not stop there.

"Exploratory talks were supposed to be held in Athens but Mitsotakis challenged me," Erdogan said in the Parliament. "How can we sit down with you now? Know your place first."

According to Tzogopoulos, without a positive agenda, long-term solutions are unlikely.

"For now the best we can hope for is avoiding a military accident, while experienced Greek and Turkish diplomats continue their work," he said.

Tzogopoulos said that from a European perspective, a model of selective engagement with Turkey is being studied in Brussels.

"This will continue despite new tensions," he said. "From a NATO perspective, deconfliction remains a priority and this goal has been met until now."



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Turkey and Greece resume talks to resolve maritime disputes Turkey, Greece set for historic East Med talks

[Houthi demands delay mission to assess decaying tanker off Yemen: UN](#)

Wed, 2021-02-24 20:54

LONDON: There are new delays in deploying an expert mission to assess the condition of the Safer tanker and conduct initial repairs due to a new list of requests from the Houthis related to “logistics and security arrangements,” the United Nations said on Wednesday.

The tanker has been moored near Ras Issa oil terminal for more than five years. The UN previously warned that it could leak four times as much oil as was spilled during the 1989 Exxon Valdez disaster off the coast of Alaska.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and the Security Council have

repeatedly called on the Houthi militia in Yemen to grant access to the tanker for a technical assessment and emergency repairs.

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