Beirut is in Ruins Once Again

A powerful explosion occurred in the vicinity of the Port of Beirut on 4 August in the evening. Many city blocks were damaged, and the echo from the explosion resounded across many hundreds of kilometers, even reaching Nicosia, journalists from Cyprus TV channels reported.

Beirut Governor Marwan Abboud declared that the consequences of the explosion are comparable to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during WWII. According to preliminary reports, more than 3,700 people were injured, and there were more than 100 casualties.

Because of the explosion in the Lebanese capital, half of the area with the city’s administration sustained damage, shop windows and display cases in many buildings around the port and downtown were blown apart, several residential buildings collapsed, and the presidential Baabda Palace incurred damage. The blast caused a power outage, and that is why rescue crews are experiencing difficulties searching for the wounded. The hospitals in Beirut wound up filled beyond their capacity, declared the Lebanese minister of health Mohammed Hassan, and the capital’s medical institutions cannot cope with the influx of injured, which is why he requested that the wounded be hospitalized beyond the boundaries of the Lebanese capital.

Lebanese authorities declared the capital the scene of a natural disaster.

Lebanese Prime Minister Hassan Diab, in the Twitter account for the country’s head of state, pointed to the presumed cause of the explosion in Beirut. According to him, the explosion occurred due to the fact that 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate have been warehoused at the capital’s seaport over the course of six years. Along with that, the hazardous explosive substance was located there without adopting any preventive safety measures, and posed a threat to public safety, added Diab. “I will not rest until we find out who is responsible for what has transpired, so that they can be held accountable,” he stated.

Five months ago, the Lebanese General Directorate of State Security launched an investigation upon finding a large quantity of ammonium nitrate in the Port of Beirut. The explosive substances were on board a vessel flying a flag of an African country that had been abandoned by its owners a few years ago due to a large amount of accrued debt. Following the investigation by the security services, it was determined that the substances in a hangar at the Port of Beirut presented an extreme hazard. Because of this, the country’s security services proposed setting up special conditions so that they could be stored.

The Lebanese government created a special committee to investigate the incident. The report should be ready within five days.

Owing to the explosion that took place in Beirut, the fact needs to be acknowledged that, following its defeat in the Yom Kippur War, Lebanon has once again become a theater of destruction. With an appreciable layer of the population being Christians, previously neutral Lebanon has continued to be a theater of military operations in recent years. Taking advantage of how weak the country’s government is, various organizations are putting together groups of militants and stockpiling huge amounts of weapons.

The first Lebanese war in Israel is called an invasion of the Jewish state’s armed forces into Lebanese territory in 1982 that had the aim of destroying Palestine Liberation Organization bases. Following these actions, Beirut was then occupied, the PLO formations were forced to relocate to Tunisia, and Israeli troops settled down in southern
Lebanon for a long time, leaving it only 18 years later. After they withdrew, the vacuum that formed was filled in by the radical Shia Hezbollah movement, which started to set up areas with fortifications along the Israeli border.

The second Lebanese war was preceded by the abduction of Israeli army corporal Gilad Shalit by Palestinian militants on 25 June 2006, and after that Israel launched an operation to free him, during which armored vehicles moved into the Gaza Strip, street battles started to rage, and the air force was brought in. On 14 August 2006, a cease-fire came into effect, ending the Second Lebanon War.

However, in recent years the intensity of the armed confrontation between Israel and Muslim militants has not become any weaker, and consequently certain areas of Israel have periodically received fire from Lebanese territory, and Israel, for its part, has used its weapons to carry out strikes on Lebanese territory.

That is why it comes as no surprise that the horrific explosion at the Port of Beirut immediately attracted the attention of many countries, and has generated all kinds of speculation on the causes of the explosion, as well as Israel’s potential complicity in it. People are recalling how in early July, as media reported, Israel detonated an explosive device at a nuclear facility in the Iranian city of Natanz that rocked Iran with a powerful explosion.

Many media outlets proclaim that recently the situation along the Israeli borders with Syria and Lebanon has been getting more and more tense. Israeli Defense Forces have increased their military presence in the country’s north, and have already carried out repeated airstrikes on Lebanon and Syria. The Times of Israel, citing data from a London-based NGO called the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), wrote that one of these attacks was executed by Israel on the morning of 4 August near the city of Abu Kamal in the eastern part of the Deir ez-Zor Governorate, near the Syrian-Iraqi border, and that at least 15 people were killed.

On 27 July, according to Jonathan Conricus, an official representative for the Israeli army, another armed conflict took place on the border between Israel and Lebanon, in the area of Mount Dov. It should be added that lately Israel has increased the number of incidents involving its violation of Lebanese sovereignty. The actions taken by the Jewish state prompted Beirut to file a complaint with the United Nations against it in April, after its warplanes used Lebanese airspace to strike “Iranian” targets in Syria. On 13 May, on the day US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made a visit to Israel, Lebanese media reported on another massive incursion made by Israeli warplanes into the Arab republic’s airspace.

Therefore, an active discussion about what actually caused the horrendous explosion in the Port of Beirut - a terrorist attack, fireworks, or a warehouse with weapons - has vigorously unfolded across many media outlets. The Qatari TV channel Al Arabiya, referring to statements made by representatives from various agencies, and relying on its own sources, has compiled the information available to date.

A missile strike could have been inflicted on Beirut, the Arab TV channel Al Hadat reports.

The Pentagon refutes claims that the explosion was an attack on Beirut. Nevertheless, US President Donald Trump considered the explosion in the Lebanese Port of Beirut to be an attack, despite the fact that the mainstream version for the explosion is not a terrorist attack, but an accidental detonation that set off some explosives. Trump did clarify that he met with various American generals that believe the explosion in Beirut to be an attack.

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