



People, most wearing masks to help protect against the spread of coronavirus, walk along Istiklal street, the main shopping street in Istanbul on Oct 9, 2020. (AP)

# Tehran-backed militias offer truce for US pullout from Iraq

'No withdrawal will lead to resumption of attacks'

**BAGHDAD, Oct 12, (AP):** Iraqi militias backed by Iran have agreed to temporarily halt attacks targeting the American presence in Iraq, on the condition that US-led coalition troops withdraw from the country in line with a parliamentary resolution, three militia officials said Sunday.

The militia officials spoke to The Associated Press just hours after a roadside bomb targeted a convoy that was transporting equipment for the US-led coalition, damaging one vehicle, an Iraqi army statement said. The attack on a highway south of Baghdad prompted questions over whether such a truce could hold across all militia factions.

Roadside bombs and in particular rocket attacks targeting the US Embassy in Baghdad – located inside the heavily fortified Green Zone – have become a frequent occurrence and have strained ties between Washington and Baghdad. The militia factions of-

fered a truce and will refrain from targeting the US in Iraq, including the embassy, on the condition that all American-led forces withdraw within an "acceptable timeframe," said Mohammed Mohie, a spokesman for the powerful Iran-backed Kataib Hezbollah.

"If it does not withdraw, the resistance factions will resume their military activities with all the capabilities available to them," he said.

Two other factions from different Iran-backed groups echoed Mohie's comments, without specifying a length for the truce, and said it was open-ended. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to give statements.

Iraqi lawmakers voted in January on a non-binding resolution to oust US-led coalition troops from the country, following a Washington-directed drone strike that killed Iranian Gen Qassim Soleimani and Iraqi militia commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis outside Baghdad's international airport.

The militia factions' comments indicate some deescalation following weeks of tensions. The Trump administration has warned Iraq's leadership it would close the US Embassy in Baghdad if the militia groups were not contained. American officials have said that while it was a serious threat, it was not an imminent ultimatum. In September, the Trump adminis-

tration shortened a crucial sanctions waiver required for Iraq to import Iranian energy.

The US has blamed Iran-backed militia groups, in particular Kataib Hezbollah, for perpetrating attacks on the American presence in Iraq.

On Saturday, the Coordinating Body of the Iraqi Resistance – believed to include an array of Iran-backed militia groups such as Kataib Hezbollah, Asaib Ahl al-Haq and Harakat al-Nujaba – issued a statement announcing "the cessation of its operations against foreign, especially American forces and interests in Iraq."

Mohie, the militia spokesman, said: "The truce came after major personalities intervened and mediated in order to persuade these factions to stop the bombing operations until the end of the American election... These were messages that these personalities conveyed."

Last week, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, the UN envoy to Iraq, held a meeting with Abdulaziz al-Muhammadawi, known as Abu Fadak, the deputy head of the Popular Mobilization Forces and a commander of the Kataib Hezbollah. The PMF is a state-sanctioned institution encompassing an array of militia groups, some of which are Iranian-backed.

Two Iraqi militia commanders said it was during this meeting with Abu Fadak that an

agreement was reached for a cease-fire for at least two months, in return for a scheduled US withdrawal to be determined at a later date. The commanders spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not allowed to brief the media.

The militias' truce announcement coincided with an apparent shift in US rhetoric, after Iraqi officials have said any US Embassy closure would isolate Iraq from the world.

For the second day in a row, Iran shattered its single-day record for new deaths and infections from the coronavirus, with 272 people confirmed dead among more than 4,200 new cases on Monday.

Like in many other countries, the spiraling outbreak in Iran reflects the government's contradictory virus response. This month, as the daily recorded death toll reached the triple digits, authorities announced tighter restrictions for the hard-hit capital of Tehran. Recently reopened universities and schools, as well as libraries, mosques, cinemas, museums and beauty salons shuttered. On Saturday, the government mandated that all Tehran residents wear face masks outdoors and in public places, warning violators would be fined. Cabinet spokesman Ali Rabiei promised those who tested positive would be closely tracked.

## News in Brief

**RIYADH:** Saudi Ministry of Health on Monday reported 25 deaths and 348 cases of COVID-19.

The latest figures bring the Kingdom's total number of fatalities and infections with the deadly virus to 5,068 and 339,615 respectively, the ministry said in a press statement. (KUNA)

**DUBAI:** The United Arab Emirates, on Monday, confirmed one death (446 in total) and 1,064 new COVID-19 infections, taking the total number in the Gulf state to 107,293.

Meanwhile, the ministry pointed out that total recoveries climbed to 98,555 after 1,271 patients recovered from the disease. (KUNA)

**MANAMA:** Bahraini Health Ministry announced Monday 327 COVID-19 cases in the past 24 hours.

It added in a tweet that 441 patients have recovered in the past 24 hours (71,249 in total), estimating the number of active cases at 4,087. (KUNA)

**DOHA:** The Qatari Ministry of Health announced Monday 206 infections of COVID-19 over the past 24 hours.

This brings the Arabian Gulf country's total number of confirmed infections to 128,191, the ministry said in a press statement. (KUNA)

**BAGHDAD:** The Iraqi Ministry of Health on Monday reported 60 deaths due to COVID-19, taking the country's tally to 9,912.

In a press statement, the ministry also reported 3,107 more cases of the infectious respiratory illness, raising the overall count of confirmed cases to 405,437, including Kurdistan. (KUNA)

**RAMALLAH:** Palestinian Minister of Health Mai Al-Kaila announced Monday 10 deaths from COVID-19, as well as 395 cases in the past 24 hours.

The minister said in a statement that 312 recoveries took place as well. (KUNA)

**CAIRO:** The Egyptian Ministry of Health and Population on Sunday confirmed that 129 people tested positive for the novel coronavirus and 12 others succumbed to it over the past 24 hours.

The figures took the overall lab-confirmed cases to 104,516 and the death toll to 6,052, the ministry's spokesman Dr Khaled Mujahed said in a press release. (KUNA)

**TUNIS:** Tunisia's Ministry of Health said Sunday 1,297 people contracted the novel coronavirus over the past 24 hours, bringing the overall infections to 32,556.

Twenty-two patients succumbed to complications related to the illness, raising the death toll to 478, according to the daily press release of the ministry. (KUNA)

**ADEN:** Yemen on Sunday reported one new coronavirus infection in Hadramaut governorate and no fatalities in the past 24 hours.

The overall infections climbed to 2,052 and the death toll stood at 595, the country's committee tasked with combating the pandemic said in a statement. (KUNA)

**RABAT:** The Moroccan Ministry of Health on Sunday reported 33 deaths from the novel coronavirus and 2,563 new infections in the past 24 hours.

The figures pushed the overall infections and death toll to 152,404 and 2,605, respectively, the ministry noted in its daily statement. (KUNA)

**BEIRUT:** The Lebanese Health Ministry on Sunday announced four coronavirus fatalities and 1,010 more infections in the past 24 hours.

In its daily report, the ministry said that the overall contaminations and deaths climbed to 53,568 and 459 respectively. (KUNA)

**ANKARA:** At least 59 patients succumbed to the novel coronavirus and 1,502 people tested positive for the virus in the past 24 hours, Turkish Health Minister Fahrettin Koca said on Sunday.

The news pushed raised the death toll to 8,837 and the caseload to 335,533, Koca was quoted by Anadolu Agency as saying in a press statement. (KUNA)

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