

Terrorist attack at Iranian embassy in Lebanon kills 23, wounds 140

Keith Jones
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At least 23 people were killed and over 140 injured Tuesday in a suicide bomb attack targeting Iran's embassy compound in Lebanon. Most of the dead were passersby in the predominantly Shiite southern Beirut neighborhood of Janah, where the embassy is situated. Iran confirmed the death of its embassy's cultural attaché.

An al-Qaeda affiliated group, the Abdullah Azzam Brigade, claimed responsibility for the attack in a tweet by its "spiritual mentor," Sheikh Sirajeddine Zuraiqat. The Brigade has reportedly vowed to continue such attacks until Iran and Hezbollah, an Iranian-allied Lebanese Shiite militia, cease militarily supporting Syria's government.

Tuesday's atrocity aimed to escalate tensions in the region, while the US and its allies carry out high-level talks with Iran over its nuclear program, and with the Syrian regime to arrange a diplomatic settlement with the US-backed, Al Qaeda-linked Syrian opposition.

Today Iran will resume negotiations in Geneva over its nuclear program with the so-called P-6: the United States, Great Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany. Earlier this month, Iran and the P-6 nearly struck an interim agreement according to which Tehran would suspend its nuclear program in exchange for a partial easing of US and European sanctions against Iran. This agreement would reportedly return only \$5 billion of the tens of billions of Iranian oil revenues currently frozen in foreign bank accounts.

Several US allies in the region with ties to Al Qaeda, including Israel and Saudi Arabia, have indicated that they are adamantly opposed to these talks. They insist the sanctions must remain until Iran's civilian nuclear program has been completely dismantled. Their demands, cloaked behind unsubstantiated charges that Iran is developing nuclear weapons, reflect their fear

that a rapprochement between the US and Iran would reduce their importance as US allies.

The claiming of responsibility for the bombing by an Al Qaeda-linked group suggests that the atrocity was likely carried out with support from these US allies. Saudi Arabia in particular has longstanding ties to Al Qaeda, whose first leader, Osama bin Laden, came from one of the kingdom's wealthiest families. Saudi Arabia has, along with Qatar, emerged as one of the main backers of the Al Qaeda-linked Syrian opposition forces.

Janah residents themselves blamed the Saudis for the bombing. A *New York Times* report said a local woman could be heard near the site of Tuesday's bombing shouting, "May God send Bandar to hell! This is the Saud family." Prince Bandar Bin Sultan is the Saudi intelligence chief and the organizer of its financial and military support for its Islamist proxies in Syria.

Speaking in Rome, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif blamed the bombing on the rise of Al Qaeda-linked militias in Syria. These militias have been armed and supported by the United States and its allies.

"We already see the consequences of the extremist forces in Syria," Zarif said. "The same organizations are killing people on the streets of Baghdad. ... It is a very serious problem, and I believe once we see a flare-up of the tension that is boiling in Syria, there will be hardly a possibility of stopping it at the Syrian border [and] even within the Middle East."

While not directly accusing Saudi Arabia of being behind Tuesday's atrocity, Syria's Foreign Minister said it was an outcome of the Saudi and Qatari monarchies' support for Al Qaeda-aligned militias.

Tuesday's bombing underscores the extreme tensions and the threat of war that has now spread throughout the region, for which US imperialism is principally

responsible. Over the past decade, it has waged a series of illegal wars to shore up its strategic dominance in the world's most important oil exporting region. It invaded and occupied Iraq, mounted a "humanitarian" war for regime change in Libya, fomented a Sunni Islamist-led insurgency in Syria and has repeatedly threatened Iran with war.

Little more than two months ago, Washington was on the verge of launching a direct attack on Syria. Amid rising divisions within the US foreign policy establishment over the advisability of full-scale war—due to the role of Al Qaeda in Syria, warnings from Iran and Russia of a wider war as they supported Assad, the Pentagon's reluctance to enter into such a war without first launching a full-scale assault on all its potential enemies, and deep popular discontent with US war threats—the Obama administration pulled back from war at the last minute.

It carried out a tactical shift in its policy, opening negotiations with both Syria and its main regional ally, Iran. Washington aims to force Iran to accept US hegemony in the Middle East, throw open its economy to the US transnationals, and secure Tehran's cooperation in stabilizing the region—from Afghanistan to the Eastern Mediterranean—under US hegemony. If it cannot secure these predatory objectives via diplomacy, Washington can as abruptly return to the path of war as it turned to talks in September.

The sudden shift stunned and angered Israel and Saudi Arabia, who are vocally seeking to break up the negotiations and lay the ground for war.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly accused the Obama administration of preparing to deliver Tehran the diplomatic victory of the century. He sent senior officials to Washington to lobby for the US Congress to impose still harsher sanctions on Iran, and proclaimed that Israel will not necessarily be bound by any deal signed by the P-6—an implicit threat of a unilateral Israeli military strike on Iran.

In an interview with the *Financial Times* published Sunday, Netanyahu's former national security advisor Yaakov Ami'ror boasted that Israel has the military capacity to halt Iran's nuclear program "for a very long time." He then added that if Hezbollah retaliated against an Israeli attack on Iran, Israeli ground forces would "go into (Lebanon's) urban centers"—i.e. would

mount a full-scale invasion of Lebanon.

To show its displeasure at the Obama administration's "diplomatic opening" to Iran and its failure to launch a war against Syria, Saudi Arabia recently refused to take a UN Security Council seat it spent years lobbying for.

Saudi Arabia also recently offered to assist an Israeli attack on Iran. In addition to allowing Israeli jets to fly over Saudi airspace, Riyadh has reportedly offered to supply tanker planes, helicopters and drones. A diplomatic source told the London *Sunday Times*, "Once the Geneva agreement is signed, the military option will be back on the table. The Saudis are furious and are willing to give Israel all the help it needs."

Tuesday's bombing is also aimed at further drawing Lebanon into the Shia-Sunni sectarian bloodletting the United States and its allies have stoked in Syria and helping derail the proposed US-Russian-led talks over Syria. It is the latest in a series of bombings targeting Lebanese Shiite neighborhoods stretching back to the beginning of the summer.

Already both Hezbollah and its US-allied Sunni rival, the Future Movement, are ranged on different sides in the Syrian conflict, with sections of the Sunni elite organizing and financing Lebanese Sunni Islamists to join the Syrian conflict. The Future Movement solidarized itself with the Al Qaeda forces that attacked the Iranian embassy, saying the bombing was Hezbollah's fault because of its support for the Syrian government.



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