

Lebanon arrests gunman following attack on U.S. embassy in Beirut

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Lebanese army forces deploy near the U.S. embassy in Beirut [Joseph Eid/AFP]

Beirut, June 5 (RHC)-- A gunman who fired on the Embassy of the United States in Beirut has been arrested after he was injured in return fire. The attack on the embassy on Wednesday morning was

carried out by a Syrian national, according to the Lebanese military. The incident comes amid heightened tensions across the region as Israel continues its war in Gaza.

The assailant, who was wounded in a gunfight with soldiers, has been arrested and taken to hospital.

The army said in a statement on X that the attacker was a Syrian citizen and that it was investigating the incident. It offered no further details, but a photo being circulated on social media shows a bloodied man wearing a vest with “Islamic State” written on it in Arabic and the English initials “I” and “S”.

Reporting from outside the embassy, Al Jazeera’s Zeina Khodr noted the “heavy security presence,” with the Lebanese army not allowing people through to the compound.

The embassy, which sits in the city’s northern suburb of Awkar, said “small arms fire” had been reported at 8:34 a.m. (05:34 GMT) “in the vicinity of the entrance” to the building. It added that the embassy staff were “safe.”

Local media reported that the gunfight lasted almost half an hour. A member of the embassy’s security team was reportedly wounded, while the army was combing the area in search of any other possible attackers, according to a security source speaking to the Reuters news agency.

Lebanese security sources have suggested that the detained attacker may not have been acting alone, Khodr said. Authorities have stated that up to four other gunmen were involved in the attack.

The embassy lies north of Beirut in a highly secured zone with multiple checkpoints along the route to the entrance. It moved there following a suicide attack in 1983 which killed 63 people. Tension has been high in Lebanon since Israel’s war in Gaza started in October. Iran-linked armed group Hezbollah has been engaged in mutual attacks with Israel over the country’s southern border.

In September last year, a gunman opened fire at the U.S. embassy, without causing casualties. The Lebanese police had then said the attacker was a delivery driver seeking revenge for his perceived humiliation by security personnel. That shooting coincided with the anniversary of a deadly September 1984 car bombing outside the U.S. embassy annexe in Beirut that killed at least 20 people, which Washington blamed on Hezbollah.

In October last year, scores of protesters gathered outside the embassy to demonstrate in the early days of the Gaza war, and Lebanese security forces used tear gas and water cannon to repel them.

Iran-linked groups in Syria and Yemen have also maintained low-level conflict with Israeli forces.

“It’s too early to say [what were] the motives behind the attacks. There hasn’t been any claim of responsibility,” Khodr said. “Ever since the war on Gaza happened in October, we’ve seen violent protests in this area, people trying to make their way to the embassy, people venting their anger towards the US administration,” the correspondent noted.

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