

ALERT 55 BEIRUT

MASSIVE BEIRUT BLAST KILLS MORE THAN 70, INJURES THOUSANDS

05 August 2020. Civilians carry a victim at the explosion scene that hit the seaport, in Beirut Lebanon, Tuesday, Aug. 4, 2020. Massive explosions rocked downtown Beirut on Tuesday, flattening much of the port, damaging buildings and blowing out windows and doors as a giant mushroom cloud rose above the capital. Witnesses saw many people injured by flying glass and debris.

Lebanon's News Agency reported a fire breaking out in what it called **an explosives depot** at the port before the explosion.....

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BEIRUT (AP) — **A** massive explosion rocked Beirut on Tuesday, flattening much of the city's port, damaging buildings across the capital and sending a giant mushroom cloud into the sky. More than 70 people were killed and 3,000 injured, with bodies buried in the rubble, officials said.

The blast struck with the force of a **3.5 magnitude earthquake**, according to Germany's geosciences center GFZ, and it was heard and felt **as far away as Cyprus** more than 200 kilometres (180 miles) across the Mediterranean.

The sudden devastation overwhelmed a country already struggling with both the coronavirus pandemic and an economic crisis. For hours afterward, ambulances rushing in from around Lebanon carried away the wounded. Hospitals quickly filled beyond capacity, pleading for blood supplies, and generators to keep their lights on.

For blocks around the port, where the explosion took place, bloodied residents staggered through streets lined with overturned cars and littered with rubble from shattered buildings. Windows and doors were blown out kilometres (miles) away. Army helicopters helped battle fires raging at Beirut's port.

The cause of the blast was not immediately known, but initial reports suggested a fire had detonated a warehouse at the port.

Hours earlier, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned the Lebanese terror group, "*We hit a cell and **now we hit the dispatchers**. We will do what is necessary in order to defend ourselves. I suggest to all of them, including Hezbollah, to consider this,*" the Associated Press reported.

On Tuesday evening, Israel denied any involvement in the explosion.

Abbas Ibrahim, chief of Lebanese General Security, said it might have been caused by highly explosive material that was confiscated from a ship some time ago and stored at the port. Local television channel LBC said the material was sodium nitrate. Witnesses reported seeing a strange orange-coloured cloud like that which appears when toxic nitrogen dioxide gas is released after an explosion involving nitrates.

The explosion came amid ongoing tensions between Israel and the Hezbollah military group on Lebanon's southern border. **Many residents reported hearing planes overhead just before the blast**, fuelling rumours of an attack, though Israeli military overflights are common.

An Israeli government official said Israel *“had nothing to do”* with the blast. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the matter with the news media. Israeli officials usually do not comment on *“foreign reports.”*

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo extended his *“deepest condolences”* to the people of Beirut and said the United States is closely monitoring the situation. *“Our team in Beirut has reported to me the extensive damage to a city and a people that I hold dear, an additional challenge in a time of already deep crisis,”* Pompeo said in a written statement.

The blast was stunning even for a city that has seen civil war, suicide bombings and **bombardment by Israel.**

“It was a real horror show. I haven’t seen anything like that since the days of the (civil) war,” said Marwan Ramadan, who was about 500 metres (yards) from the port and was knocked off his feet by the force of the explosion.

Health Minister Hassan Hamad said the **preliminary toll was more than 70 dead and more than 3,000 wounded.** Emergency teams streamed in from across Lebanon to help, and the injured had to be taken to hospitals outside the capital. Hamad added that hospitals were barely coping and offers of aid were pouring in from Arab states and friends of Lebanon.

Beirut’s governor, Marwan Abboud, broke into tears as he toured the site, exclaiming, *“Beirut is a devastated city.”* Prime Minister Hassan Diab vowed that *“those responsible will pay.”*

Initially, video taken by residents [watch above] showed a fire raging at the port, sending up a giant column of smoke, illuminated by flashes of what appeared to be fireworks. Local TV stations reported that a fireworks warehouse was involved. The fire then appeared to spread to a nearby building, triggering a more massive explosion, sending up a mushroom cloud and **generating a shock wave.**

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