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Beirut on edge after Sheikhs assaulted



Tensions rose in Beirut late Sunday evening following attacks against Sunni Sheikhs in Shiite neighborhoods, sparking anger as

protesters cut roads and armed men appeared on the streets of Beirut's Tariq al-Jedideh neighborhood.

Two Sheikhs, identified as Mazen Hariri and Ahmad Fakhran, were beaten in the central Beirut neighborhood of Khandaq al-Ghamik while walking from Downtown Beirut's Mohammad al-Amin Mosque, the National News Agency reported.

Meanwhile, another two Sheikhs, Adnan Imama and Hassan Abdel Rahman, were assaulted in the South Beirut suburb of Shiyah, Lebanon's state agency added.

Following the incident, protesters in Sunni areas of Lebanon's capital began cutting roads, as tension rose in the city.

Sunni Sheikh Ahmad al-Assir checked up on two of the wounded Sheikhs in the Makassed Hospital in Beirut's Tariq al-Jedideh neighborhood, as hundreds of young men with Islamist flags gathered outside the building to protest against the attack.

The protesters then marched to the nearby Imam Ali Mosque, where a number of them started firing their weapons into the air, an eyewitness told NOW.

Following the gathering and prayers, the angry Sunni youths rushed to the Kola roundabout and began burning tires and garbage dumpsters. Smoke rose into the air all across the Kola roundabout that links the Sidon-Beirut highway to the central areas of Lebanon's capital.

Armed men could be seen roaming the streets of Tariq al-Jedideh, the eyewitness said, adding that traffic was at a minimal.

As the night wore on, the Lebanese army deployed to on the western side of the Kola roundabout across from Tariq al-Jedideh and by morning the thoroughfare had been reopened.

Local media outlets reported that roads had also been cut in Beirut's Tayouneh neighborhood as well as in Sidon.

Amid the growing tension, the Lebanese army announced in a statement that it had raided the homes of men suspected in the attacks, arresting five of them.

Lebanon's top Sunni cleric, Grand Mufti Mohammad Rashid Qabbani, called for "self-restraint" following the incident.

Meanwhile, Lebanese Premier Najib Miqati wrote late Sunday night on his Twitter account, "May God protect Lebanon from these [agitations] and aggressors from any party will be held accountable."

Lebanese Interior Minister Marwan Charbel also visited the Makassed Hospital in Tariq al-Jedideh, saying afterward that he had spoken with Speaker Nabih Berri—the leader of the Shiite Amal Movement—who stressed security forces need to take action against the perpetrators of the Sheikhs' assaults, MTV reported.

Hezbollah and the Amal Movement condemned the attack on the Sheikhs in Khandaq al-Ghamik, saying the incident aimed to incite strife.

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