

Iraqis gather in Baghdad to mark anti-government protests anniversary

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Thu, 2020-10-01 18:29

BAGHDAD: A few hundred Iraqis gathered in Baghdad's central Tahrir square on Thursday to mark the anniversary of anti-government unrest that erupted last year and to put pressure on the authorities to meet their demands.

Protesters waved the Iraqi flag and chanted "free revolutionaries, we will continue the path."

Some sang patriotic songs while clapping.

"We are here to start the revolution again...We haven't forgotten about the blood of the martyrs," said Abbas Younis, 25, wearing an Iraqi flag as a cape and a surgical mask.

More than 560 people, mostly unarmed demonstrators but also some members of the security forces, have been killed since a spate of popular unrest began on Oct. 1, 2019, with both security forces and unidentified gunmen shooting people dead.

London-based Amnesty International called on the Iraqi government on Thursday to do more to "deliver justice to the hundreds killed in the course of exercising their right to peaceful assembly.

"Find the missing, deliver justice for lives lost," it said.

Protesters, most of them young, are demanding an overhaul of a political system they see as profoundly corrupt and keeping most Iraqis in poverty.

The protests have shaken the country out of two years of relative calm following the defeat of Islamic State insurgents.

Infighting between political parties clinging to power has fueled the crisis and threatens to kindle more unrest.

Last year's protests caused the resignation of Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, who was replaced in May by Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, who pledged to investigate the deaths and incarceration of hundreds of protesters.

Demonstrators on Thursday gave the government until Oct. 25 to meet their demands by Oct. 25 or face a general strike.

"Our demands are simple and legitimate...We demand the killers of the protesters be prosecuted," said Mustafa Makki.

Dressed in combat trousers and wearing a shirt with an image of a slain protester and a necklace made out of an empty tear gas canister, the 24-year-old said he had four bullet wounds, and one of them had cost him his vision in his left eye.

Later on Thursday, dozens took to the streets in the southern cities of Diwaniyah and Najaf, waving the Iraqi flag and carrying photographs of demonstrators killed last year.

Kadhimi in July called an early general election for June 6, 2021, roughly a year ahead of when it would normally be held, a central demand of the protesters. But Iraqi's parliament must still ratify the election date and

amend the election law.

Kadhimi and President Barham Salih pledged to meet the demands of the protesters. "We affirm our loyalty to our people and to the roadmap imposed by the blood and scarifies of its youth," Kadhimi said in a statement.



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US says 'can't tolerate' attacks by Iranian-backed militias in Iraq

[Lebanon asks Interpol to detain 2 Russians over port blast](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-10-01 22:05

BEIRUT: The lead investigator into the August blast at Beirut's port that killed and wounded many people issued two arrest warrants Thursday for the

captain and owner of a ship that carried thousands of tons of ammonium nitrate to Beirut seven years ago, the state-run National News Agency said. Nearly 3,000 tons of ammonium nitrates stored at Beirut's port exploded on Aug. 4, killing 193, wounding about 6,500 and causing damage worth billions of dollars.

The news agency said judge Fadi Sawwan referred the case to the state prosecution that asked Interpol to detain the two Russian citizens. NNA did not give the names of the two men but Boris Prokoshev was the captain who sailed the MV Rhosus from Turkey to Beirut in 2013. Igor Grechushkin, a Russian businessman residing in the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, bought the cargo ship in 2012 from Cypriot businessman Charalambos Manoli. Grechushkin has been questioned by police on request of Interpol's Lebanon office in August.

More than two dozen people, most of them port and customs officials, have been detained since the blast which is considered to be one of the biggest non-nuclear explosions ever recorded.

The Rhosus set out from the Georgian Black Sea port of Batumi carrying 2,755.5 tons of ammonium nitrate destined for an explosives company in Mozambique. It made an unscheduled detour, stopping in Beirut on Nov. 19, 2013.

In October 2014, the ammonium nitrate was moved into the port's Warehouse 12, which holds impounded materials. The ammonium nitrate remained at the warehouse until it exploded while the Rhosus never left the port and sank there in February 2018, according to Lebanese official documents.



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Israel's Netanyahu says Hezbollah has 'arms depot' in Beirut
Lebanon army surveys 85,000 building units post-Beirut blast

[UAE, US and Israel will develop joint strategy in energy sector](#)

Thu, 2020-10-01 21:32

CAIRO: The United Arab Emirates, the United States and Israel issued a joint statement on Thursday about developing a joint strategy in the energy sector, Emirates News Agency (WAM) reported.

The statement, issued by energy ministers, also stressed that the countries will seek solutions for energy challenges the Palestinian people face by developing energy resources, technologies, and related infrastructure.



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US will continue to sanction Lebanese individuals allied with Hezbollah: State Department

'Worst debate ever' – US expats lament lack of substance in Trump-Biden bust-up

Wed, 2020-09-30 23:18

DUBAI: Americans living in the Gulf looked on, aghast, as personal insults flew back and forth between the two men who aspire to lead the US.

A chaotic 90 minutes of insults, temper tantrums, endless interruptions and attacks on an opponent's family turned the first televised debate between Donald Trump and Democratic challenger Joe Biden into the most acrimonious televised presidential head-to-head in US history.

Expatriates in the Middle East set their alarms for the early hours to watch what turned out to be a "dumpster fire" of a debate, as some commentators described it, unfold in Cleveland, Ohio.

"This debate completely lacked in substance, so how could an expat understand anything about Biden (or Trump's) positions," said Liberty Jones, who is from Washington D.C. and has lived in Dubai for eight years. "Aside from a quick discussion on how Trump is handling COVID, it was devoid of any depth on their approaches."

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

The debate was the first of three between the two candidates in the run up to election day on Nov. 3. Any attempt at substantive exchanges about the six main issues – the Supreme Court, COVID-19, race and violence in US cities, the economy, and the integrity of the election – were drowned out by acrimony.

"You're the worst president that America ever had," Biden told Trump. "In 47 months I've done more than you have done in 47 years," Trump responded.

The moderator, Chris Wallace of Fox News, had to raise his voice on several occasions to demand that Trump respect the two-minute time allocated for uninterrupted answers to questions and let Biden speak. Biden also provided fuel for the fire with a series of personal attacks, calling Trump a liar and a racist.

Then there was Biden's "inshallah" moment, which lit up Twitter across the Arab world. It came after Trump promised to release his still-hidden tax returns, some details of which were published by the New York Times last

week. Biden sarcastically asked, "When?" followed by a word that many viewers thought sounded like "Inshallah," meaning "God willing."

Whether or not he actually uttered the familiar Arabic expression remains a mystery but it certainly caught the attention of American expats in the Gulf, some of whom feel distanced from the core issues of the election.

"As expats, we are naturally not as close to the candidates and their platforms," said Jones, who is a public relations director for luxury retailer Tiffany & Co. "While we can consume news, we don't have the benefit of our community and families sharing their perspectives on the candidates. This places greater weight on the debates to help expats understand the platforms and policies of the respective candidates."

James Erazo Ruiz, a healthcare company director who lives in Abu Dhabi and describes himself as a Republican, said: "The American people are the losers of this debate.

"History tells us that presidential debates are not decision-making events. I hoped this one would be different but all we saw was name-calling and an insulting debacle that served no purpose.

"The debate was light on policy, issues and solutions. Quite frankly, it was the worse debate I have ever seen. It was a joke."

Brian Raggott, who has worked in Dubai for nine years for an American IT company, said the debate reinforced the negative image of America outside of the US.

"America needs someone who can bring the country back together again and last night we didn't see it," he said. "As an American outside of the US, you want to bring American ideals wherever you go – and right now it's a tough time."

Ali Khalaf, who has lived in Dubai since 2007, sounded a slightly more optimistic note for the future of American politics. He said that he hopes the "disturbing" nature of the debate will shock more people into greater engagement with the political process.

"The hope that can be drawn from these debates is that we emerge from these elections with the desire to invest more in our nation's choices," he added.

The last topic of the debate, the integrity of the election, in particular struck a chord with Americans in the Gulf, many of whom said that despite submitting a request weeks ago they are still waiting to receive their absentee ballots.

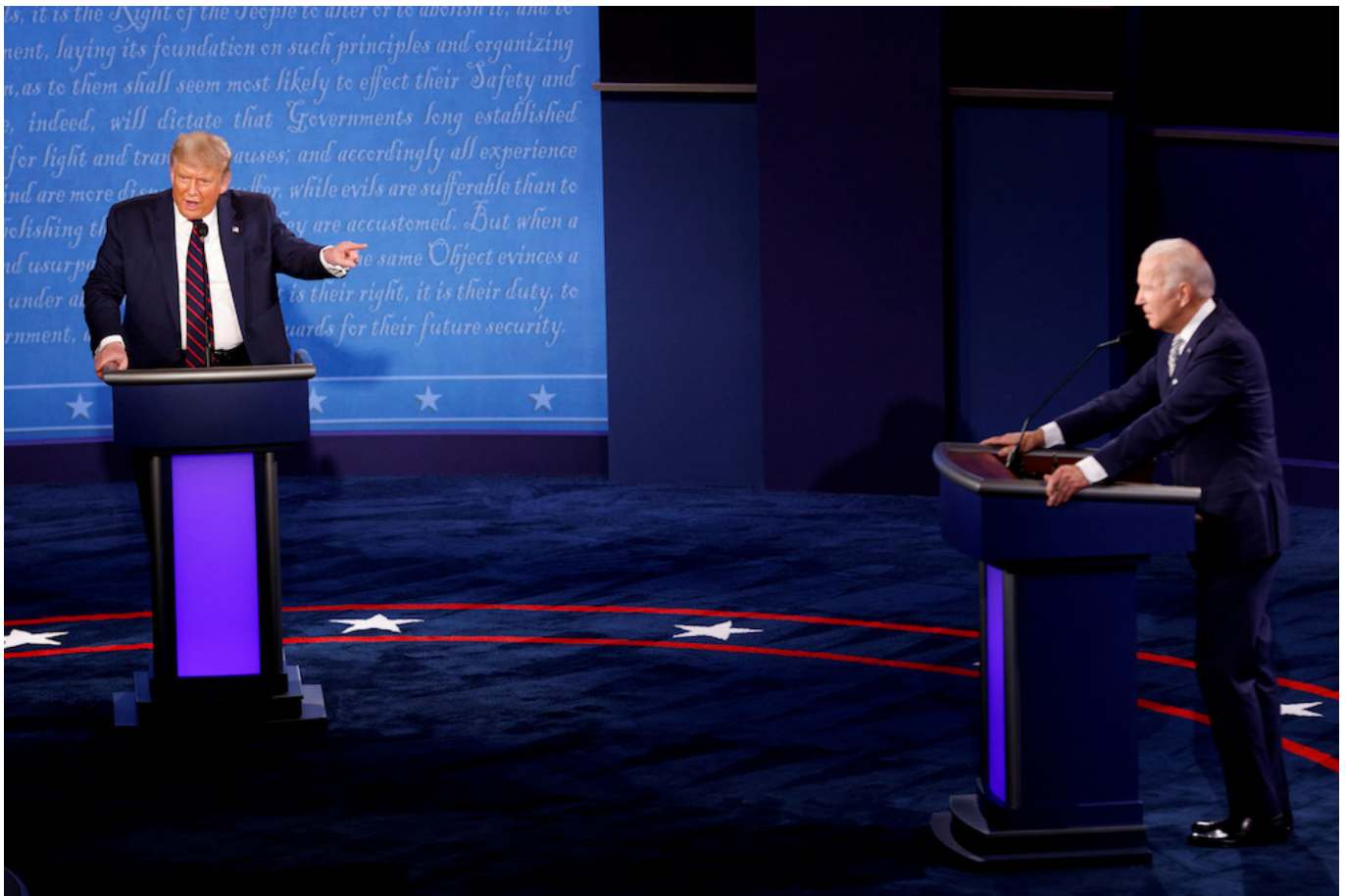
Approximately 9 million Americans live overseas, according to 2016 figures from the US State Department. If they were considered to be a US state, it would rank as the 12th largest in population size, so they represent a powerful block of votes.

An anonymous US citizen living in Dubai, who declined to be named, said: "Americans abroad deserve to feel confident that our votes are accurately

counted and protected from fraud. It's strange to wait this long for a ballot – and then when it comes and we mail it in, can we trust that it will be counted appropriately?"

"Our votes absolutely count," said Jean Candiotte, a creative director, writer and producer who has lived in Dubai for almost seven years. "This has the potential to be a close election, which means that every single vote is important.

"As Americans, we get to take our home country with us when we live overseas; we file and pay our home country's taxes and we maintain the right to vote, and it's important to exercise that right – it's who we are as a nation."



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'Just shut up, man' – Biden and Trump trade personal insults in first presidential debate
Did Biden just 'Inshallah' Trump on his taxes during the US presidential debate?

Iraq says 'not happy' with 'dangerous' US pullout threat

Author:

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Wed, 2020-09-30 12:02

BAGHDAD: Baghdad is "not happy" with a "dangerous" threat by Washington to pull its troops and diplomats out of Iraq, Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein said Wednesday.

Several political and diplomatic sources have told AFP that US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo issued an ultimatum last week that all US personnel would leave Iraq unless the government puts a stop to a rash of attacks against them.

"A US withdrawal could lead to further pullouts" by members of the US-led coalition fighting holdout extremists, which would be "dangerous, because the Daesh group threatens not only Iraq but the whole region," the minister said. "We hope that the United States will rethink its decision," which at the moment is only "preliminary," Hussein added.

"Some people in Washington make parallels with Benghazi but it's a faulty analysis, just as this is a faulty decision," he said, referring to Libya's second city.

Four US personnel, including the ambassador to Libya, were killed in Benghazi in 2012, when Islamist militants among a crowd of protesters stormed the US consulate.

Between October 2019 and July this year in Iraq, around 40 rocket attacks have targeted the US embassy or bases housing US troops.

Since Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi was received in the White House amid great fanfare in August, the frequency of such attacks has increased significantly.

In the space of just two months, another 40 attacks have taken place, targeting not only the embassy and military bases, but also the supply convoys of Iraqi contractors for Washington and its allies.

"Attacks on foreign embassies are attacks on the government, which has responsibility for protecting them," the Iraqi minister said.

Recent attacks have mostly been claimed by little known factions among the array of Shiite armed groups equipped and trained by neighboring Iran during the war against the Sunni extremists of Daesh.

The armed groups have been locked in a tug-of-war with Kadhemi, who is seen as more pro-American than some of his predecessors.

Underlining the risks, a rocket attack targeting Baghdad airport hit a nearby home on Monday evening, killing five children and two women from the same family.

The US still has hundreds of diplomats in its mission in the high-security Green Zone in Baghdad and around 3,000 troops based in three bases across the country.



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