

Demonstrators target US Embassy near Beirut

Author:

Mon, 2019-11-25 01:11

BEIRUT: A group of pro-Hezbollah protesters marched on Sunday to the US Embassy in Awkar, 11 km from Beirut, to protest "the US meddling in Lebanon's affairs."

The Lebanese Army prevented the protesters from advancing to the road leading to the embassy after setting up a security cordon. Young men from the Communist Party, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party and some Palestinian refugees participated in the demonstration. They said that they are "with the resistance and against the US meddling expressed by former US Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman."

The demonstrators burned US and Israeli flags. Some tried to cut the barbed wire to break through the security cordon, which led to riots and was dispersed by internal security forces with tear gas.

The demonstration coincided with a social media campaign accusing the civil movement in Lebanon of "receiving US funding and directives." A Twitter user replied: "Would you allow us to demonstrate outside the Iranian Embassy?"

Another Twitter user said: "We support demonstrating outside every embassy that meddles in Lebanese affairs and outside the Iranian Embassy, which finances Hezbollah and provides them with arms in Lebanon and all Arab countries. Down with all embassies, and the decision remains for the free and honorable revolutionists."

Peaceful protests were active on Sunday in Beirut, Tripoli and Sidon to "reject the confiscation of maritime property." On Saturday night, A peaceful protest took place for the first time in Beirut's inner neighborhoods. A number of residents from pro-Hariri neighborhoods were present.

The protesters, who raised the Lebanese flag and balloons, chanted slogans condemning the difficult living and economic conditions. They demanded the speedy formation of a government that responds to the demands of the civil movement.

The civil movement continued to infiltrate trade union elections. Civil society candidates won the elections of the Lebanese Dental Association and the Order of Physiotherapists. This development reflects the mood of the voters, who used to vote for party candidates according to completed regulations. The first independent association election victory was achieved last Sunday when civil activist Melhem Khalaf was elected as president of the Beirut Bar Association, a position that was previously limited to those loyal to parties in power.

Two boys, aged 12 and 19, were arrested by security services in the mountainous town of Hammama for taking down the Free Patriotic Movement banner. This act sparked widespread condemnation, forcing security forces to release them hours after their arrest.

Caretaker Minister May Chidiac denounced the arrest of the children and said: "Unbelievable! What is happening? Are some of the allies of Bashar's regime reproducing what he did in Daraa? Doesn't the example of the children of Daraa, which sparked the war in Syria, mean anything to them? Fear God and be humble."

While the bodies involved in the civil movement called for a general strike on Monday to step up the pressure on the government to speed up meeting the movement's demands, the social and economic pressure on the Lebanese people continues in the presence of two US dollar exchange rates and measures taken by banks to prevent overseas transfers.

The president of the General Confederation of Trade Unions, Maroun Al-Khouli, warned against the arbitrary lay-offs affecting workers in the absence of any protection from the Ministry of Labor. He said: "Employers are now taking advantage of the financial and economic situation as well as the developments in the country and deducting 50 percent of the salaries of workers who have not been laid off."

Al-Khouli called on Caretaker Prime Minister Saad Hariri to have the cabinet intervene to "rehire all of those who have been laid off since Oct. 17, the start of the protests, in their jobs."

He added: "The caretaker government can decide on all issues that are not of a crucial critical nature, such as international agreements and treaties and comprehensive and long-term development plans. It must take responsibility for making decisions to stop the social massacre of thousands of laid-off workers."



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Hezbollah MPs step up attacks on US over Lebanon 'meddling' Order Benjamin Netanyahu to step aside after indictment, watchdog asks Israel's top court

[Will Turkey's drilling activities trigger EU sanctions?](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-11-25 00:57

ANKARA: Amid a serious confrontation between Brussels and Ankara about the country's drilling program in the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey kicked off the fourth round of drilling in the region on Nov. 23.

"We will keep drilling until we find oil," the country's energy minister, Fatih Donmez, said.

But the zone, which is believed to have rich hydrocarbon reserves, mostly clashes with the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) declared by Turkish Cyprus.

Turkey's presence in waters off the south of Cyprus with its own drilling vessels has irked Brussels and is deemed "illegal" by Washington.

Whether these renewed activities in waters off northeastern Cyprus may result in a wave of sanctions against Turkish companies is now the big question.

The sanctions consist of a travel ban to the EU and asset freezes on people and entities.

In early November, EU foreign ministers adopted a mechanism to sanction individuals or entities involved in "unauthorized drilling activities" in the Eastern Mediterranean.

In a bid to open five new deep-sea wells by next year, Turkey is currently conducting hydrocarbon exploration activities in the area with two drilling vessels, while Greek Cyprus recently allowed international energy companies, like France's Total and Italy's Eni, to extract gas in the same area with the full support of the EU and US.

As for the sanctions discussed by the EU in November, Gallia Lindenstrauss, research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv, said they were to target specific individuals and legal entities related to Turkish violations of the Cypriot EEZ.

"Such sanctions are not what you would call 'biting' sanctions, and I do not expect them to cause a reverse in the Turkish position," she told Arab News.

However, Nicolò Sartori, an energy and defense analyst at Rome's Institute for International Affairs, doesn't believe EU sanctions on drilling players – i.e. ship companies and owners – are likely to discourage Turkish activities, which are more politics-based rather than business and economic-based.

"I think that the only way to solve the issue is to find a political compromise on Cyprus, even though I am afraid that in these conditions a solution as such is quite unrealistic," he told Arab News.

The simmering Cypriot conflict is still a hot topic for any drilling attempt from the Turkish side.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is also trying to use his leverage. Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders will meet on Monday to restart reunification talks, and energy is set to be high on the table. Ankara does not support the talks.

Turkish Cypriots claim that the offshore hydrocarbon and oil resources of the island should be jointly owned by Greek and Turkish Cypriots, which will provide both communities with economic benefits.

For Lindenstrauss, "resolving the Cyprus issue has long been on the agenda of the international community, and there have been numerous unsuccessful attempts to resolve it. The good thing about these past attempts is that many of the parameters of resolving the conflict have been determined."

“Also, the more aggressive stance of Turkey might push the Greek Cypriots to compromise on the issue of the continued presence of small Turkish forces on the island – if Turkey is circling the island with its forces, and clearly the Turkish navy is ready to act at any time, the presence of Turkish forces on the island seems mainly symbolic. This will be a hard compromise for the Greek Cypriots, but this is an area in which the Turks have been very adamant,” she said.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan recently threatened to send captured Daesh suspects to Europe if Brussels adopted sanctions over drilling activities.

“You should reevaluate your approach toward Turkey, which has so many Daesh members in its prisons and also in Syria. These doors can be opened and Daesh people can be sent to you. Don’t try to intimidate Turkey about the developments in Cyprus,” he said.

There are believed to be 1,180 Daesh members in Turkish prisons.

Mona Sukkarieh, a political risk consultant and co-founder of Middle East Strategic Perspectives, said no designations have been made so far about potential sanctions, but the legal framework made adopting such measures possible in future.

Sukkarieh thinks the EU decision did not come suddenly, and some Europeans are indeed conflicted between protecting the rights of an EU member state and European interests in general, and their position vis-à-vis Turkey, which, despite everything, remains a NATO partner and an important player in the Levant.

“The EU has repeatedly warned Turkey over the past two years to stop exploratory activities offshore Cyprus, but Turkey is defiant and considers that it is acting within its rights,” she told Arab News.

Turkey’s measures do not come as a surprise for Sukkarieh, who underlined that Turkish authorities usually announce their intentions in advance.

“Since 2008, these measures have been gradual in nature and consistent with their announced objectives: Ankara started by sending warships to monitor, sometimes even harass, surveyors, then they moved to conducting seismic surveys.

“In 2018, the Turks prevented an Eni-commissioned drillship from reaching its drilling destination. And, more recently, they initiated drilling operations in areas that are either claimed by Turkey as being part of its continental shelf or in blocs awarded to Turkey’s main oil exploration company, Turkish Petroleum, by the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, some of which overlap with blocs delineated by the Republic of Cyprus.”



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[Lebanon's revolution: A many-splendored thing](#)

Mon, 2019-11-25 00:24

BEIRUT: As Lebanon's anti-government uprising enters its second month with no sign of losing momentum, downtown Beirut continues to wear a colorful, almost festive look.

The trappings of "Thawra" – revolution in Arabic – are hard to miss amid the chants against sectarianism and corruption: Tents, food stalls, flags of all sizes, walls covered with artwork, recycling areas and patriotic songs blaring from loudspeakers.

What began as a movement for political and economic change has morphed into something much larger. No matter how one chooses to describe the phenomenon,

it has undoubtedly generated a degree of harmony, cohesion, solidarity and love among Lebanese people that was unthinkable just a few months ago.

Week after stressful week, people across the country – men and women, young and old, Lebanese citizens and expatriates – have shown endurance, discipline and restraint in the face of violence and provocation.



Green initiatives. (AFP)

To many Lebanese, this has been at once the best of times and the worst of times, with tributes paid to a martyr of the “revolution” in cities across the country, the emergence of Melheme Khalaf as a glimmer of hope after he

won the presidency of the Lebanese Bar Association on merit, and the president advising citizens dissatisfied with the country's political leaders to emigrate.

Other initiatives have also sprung up – yoga and meditation, daily clean-ups by volunteers, speakers' corners, and couches and board games.

Supporters of Lebanon's free-form revolution are signaling their resolve to both make their country a better place and look after each other's well-being.

Muwatin Lebne (Lebanese Citizen), an initiative promoting regular morning clean-ups in downtown Beirut, has worked wonders for the image of the capital's commercial hub.

Activists said that thanks to the efforts of 5,000 volunteers in the revolution's first 10 days, 10.3 tons of waste was sorted, the number of trucks carrying waste to landfills fell by 90 percent, half a million cigarette butts were collected to be turned into paddleboards, and 2,500 pieces of winter clothing amassed and dispatched to NGOs.



Waste collection and recycling. (AFP)

“As Lebanese citizens, it is our civic duty to keep our streets clean and sort our garbage for the interest and well-being of our country,” said Timmy Jreissati, a member of Muwatin Lebne.

“With the revolution, the idea of building awareness about the importance of this issue took hold. The initiative was meant to show the true civilized image of the Lebanese people.”

On Nov. 3, volunteers cleaned the dirt-stained and graffiti-filled exterior walls of both the Mar Geryes church and the Mohammad Al-Amin mosque. “As part of our initiative, we want to restore and preserve our country’s beautiful sites and monuments,” Jreissati said.

“Muwatin Lebnene is a spontaneous collective action of individual Lebanese citizens that was driven by civic duty and social responsibility. The initiative acts upon the needs of the country and its citizens in all civic matters and issues. To make our country better, we want to raise awareness about all civic duties, and educate and help people when needed.”

Protesters won their first battle when Saad Hariri resigned as prime minister on Oct. 29, but their stated mission – an end to corruption and an overhaul of the political system – will not be accomplished until all politicians resign and make way for a new government of technocrats.

Given the political elite’s reluctance to meet their demands and the uphill battle that lies ahead, the Lebanese who have been taking part in the protests need activities that can keep them motivated and in high spirits.

Ana Larriu, a Spanish meditation teacher who used to teach mindfulness to executives in Beirut, has been offering meditation sessions to people protesting on the streets since last month.

“I was just so frustrated that I couldn’t do anything, so I said to myself that I have to go, sit there and show that there is a different energy happening,” she told Arab News.



An inspiration message for protesters. (AFP)

The effect of the meditation sessions is deeply felt, according to Larriu, who is married to a Lebanese national. Some participants found themselves weeping, regaining strength and, finally, expressing gratitude for an experience they found hard to describe in words.

“The exercise allowed a lot of things to happen, so people could express whatever they needed to without having to label them,” she said. “It’s a place of freedom. It was amazing when, in the first week after the clean-ups, mothers would come here with children and we would do active meditation for them.

“For me, the most amazing thing is to find out that a lot of people meditate in their own way.

“We need to be focused. The revolution’s energy can sometimes be very volatile and just up in the air, so we need to combine both energies – we need to be ready to fight and, at the same time, we need to be completely grounded.”

Larriu said that meditation can also make it easier for the protesters to develop compassion, both self-compassion and compassion for others. Accordingly, all the exercises she teaches involve transmitting “love to the south and north of the country.”



A street artist paints a protest graffiti in support of Lebanon’s “revolution”. (AFP)

From her daily lessons on Samir Kassir Square, Larriu expanded to cater for protesters who sleep in tents in Martyrs' Square.

"They came over and wanted to take part," she said. "I realize that those in tents asleep at 8 a.m. are really tired. So we do active release exercises, which are designed to them feel great. It takes a lot of body work, more than just meditation, to release and recharge."

Larriu said that she will continue her practice for "as long as the revolution goes on" – and as long as it is needed.

Further north in Tripoli, the long-forgotten and deserted Ghandour building was reborn as a new landmark of the "revolution" when it served as a canvas for graffiti artist Mohamed Abrashh in his rendering of the Lebanese flag as "Tripoli, City of Peace."

As massive crowds continue to gather every night with patriotic chants and celebrations of their achievements, conversations are taking place in the afternoons in Nour Square, in Tripoli, in order to come up with novel strategies for maintaining political pressure.



A protest artwork on a wall in Beirut cheers up participants of the ongoing "revolution". (AFP)

Beirut's public gardens and squares have witnessed similar discussions on topics as varied as legal mechanisms to fight corruption and recovering stolen public funds, psychological resilience in times of social change, political power and the constitutional tools needed to achieve the revolution's goals, the country's economy's direction, countering violence, and a feminists' march that took place on Nov. 3.

Early on in the uprising, as one group of citizens moved their couches, fridges, carpets, mattresses and board games to the middle of highways, turning the streets into the "House of the People," other groups drew up a plan to form Lebanon's longest human chain on Oct. 26 as a symbol of national unity.

“It is only when we wake up to our oneness that peace shall prevail,” said Cyril Bassil, one of the human-chain organizers.

“We hope that the human chain will always symbolize the moment the Lebanese people woke up and chose to hold hands to build a non-sectarian country and reinvent Lebanon by freeing themselves from fragmentation.”

Around 200,000 people held hands along the 171 km stretch of the coastal highway from Tyre in the south to Tripoli in the north, with towns such as Halba, in Akkar, Hasbaya and Baalbek participating.

“It was surreal,” Bassil said. “It is thanks to the Lebanese who made the human chain happen. All pacifist activities are necessary because we need to change our language and we need to learn to express ourselves from a place of love, not fear – the Lebanese proved, on that day, that the civil war was truly over.”



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Students burn history books as protests continue in Lebanon
Lebanon protesters block MPs as street battles erupt

Revolutionary Guards threaten to punish protesters for Iran unrest

Mon, 2019-11-25 00:49

GENEVA: A senior commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards has urged the country's judiciary to mete out harsh sentences to what he described as "mercenaries" involved in protests against a fuel price hike last week, the judiciary's Mizan news site reported.

"We caught all the mercenaries who openly confessed they were doing mercenary work for America and ... the judicial system of the country will give them maximum punishments," Rear Admiral Ali Fadavi, a deputy Guards commander, was quoted as saying.

Iran has blamed the US and Israel for stirring up unrest which has led to some of the worst violence in a decade.

Fadavi said several people were killed after being shot at from behind with a handgun from a close distance during the protests, which he said indicated the shooters were among the crowds.

Rights group Amnesty International said in a release earlier this week that security forces shot into crowds of protesters from rooftops and, in one case, from a helicopter.

Amnesty said at least 115 people have died in the unrest. Iran has rejected death toll figures as "speculative."

Iranian authorities have said about 1,000 demonstrators have been arrested.

The Center for Human Rights in Iran, a New York-based advocacy group, said on its website that a tally based on official figures and credible reports suggested that "a minimum of 2,755 people have been arrested with the actual minimum number likely being closer to 4,000."

Protests began on Nov. 15 in several towns after the government announced gasoline price hikes of at least 50 percent. They spread to 100 cities and towns and quickly turned political with protesters demanding top officials step down.



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Revolutionary Guards commander denies Iranian targets hit in Syria air strikes
Two Iran Revolutionary Guards killed in clash with militants

[As internet restored, online Iran protest videos show chaos](#)

Sun, 2019-11-24 21:45

DUBAI: Machine gun fire answers rock-throwing protesters. Motorcycle-riding Revolutionary Guard volunteers chase after demonstrators. Plainclothes security forces grab, beat and drag a man off the street to an uncertain fate.

As Iran restores the Internet after a weeklong government-imposed shutdown, new videos purport to show the demonstrations over gasoline prices rising and the security-force crackdown that followed.

The videos offer only fragments of encounters, but to some extent they fill in the larger void left by Iran's state-controlled television and radio channels. On their airwaves, hard-line officials allege that foreign conspiracies and exile groups instigated the unrest. In print, newspapers offered only PR for the government or had merely stenographic reporting at

best, the moderate daily Hamshahri said in an analysis Sunday.

They don't acknowledge that the gasoline price hike Nov. 15, supported by its civilian government, came as Iran's 80 million people already have seen their savings dwindle and jobs scarce under crushing US sanctions. President Donald Trump imposed them in the aftermath of unilaterally withdrawing America from Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers.

Authorities also have yet to give any overall figures for how many people were injured, arrested or killed during the several days of protests that swept across some 100 cities and towns.

Amnesty International said it believes the unrest and the crackdown killed at least 106 people. Iran disputes that figure without offering its own. A UN office earlier said it feared the unrest may have killed "a significant number of people."

Starting Nov. 16, Iran shut down the Internet across the country, limiting communications with the outside world. That made determining the scale and longevity of the protests incredibly difficult. Some recycled days-old videos and photographs as new, making it even more difficult.

Since Saturday, Internet connectivity spiked in the country, allowing people to access foreign websites for the first time. On Sunday, connectivity stood nearly at 100% for landline services, while mobile phone Internet service remained scarce, the advocacy group NetBlocks said.

The restoration brought messaging apps back to life for Iranians cut off from loved ones abroad. It also meant that videos again began being shared widely. Recently released videos span the country. One video from Shiraz, some 680 kilometers (420 miles) south of Tehran, purports to show a crowd of over 100 people scatter as gunfire erupts from a police station in the city. One man bends down to pick up debris as a person off-camera describes demonstrators throwing stones. Another gunshot rings out, followed by a burst of machine gun fire.

In Kerman, some 800 kilometers (500 miles) southeast of Tehran, the sound of breaking glass echoes over a street where debris burns in the center of a street. Motorcycle-riding members of the Basij, the all-volunteer force of Iran's paramilitary Guard, then chase the protesters away.

Another video in Kermanshah, some 420 kilometers (260 miles) southwest of Tehran, purports shows the dangers that lurked on the streets of Iran in recent days. Plainclothes security forces, some wielding nightsticks, drag one man off by the hair of his head. The detained man falls at one point. "Look, (the agents) wear styles like the youth," one man off-camera says, swearing at them.

On Sunday, it remained unclear if and how widespread any remaining demonstrations were. The acting commander of the Revolutionary Guard, Gen. Ali Fadavi, repeated the allegation that America was behind the protests, without offering any evidence to support his claim.

"Why did (the Americans) get angry after we cut off the Internet? Because the Internet is the channel through which Americans wanted to perform their evil and vicious acts," Fadavi said. "We will deal with this, Islamic Republic supporters, and our proud men and women will sign up to make a domestic system similar to the Internet with operating systems that (the Americans) can't (control) even if they want."

That likely refers to what has been known as the "halal net," Iran's own locally controlled version of the Internet aimed at restricting what the

public can see. The system known as the National Information Network has some 500 government-approved national websites that stream content far faster than those based abroad, which are intentionally slowed, activists say. Iranian officials say it allows the Islamic Republic to be independent if the world cuts it off instead.

It looks like a scene taken from a Hollywood movie, but this is Iran.

Innocent people are being beaten, arrested and killed.

Iranian people need our support! They don't have a voice.
[#IranProtests pic.twitter.com/cdELrfTYYx](https://twitter.com/cdELrfTYYx)

– Hananya Naftali (@HananyaNaftali) [November 23, 2019](#)

But while Fadavi earlier said the protests were put down in 48 hours, he also acknowledged the scope of the unrest by comparing it to Operation Karbala-4, one of the worst military disasters suffered by Iran during its bloody 1980s war with Iraq.

That scope could be seen in one video. In the capital, Tehran, footage earlier aired by the BBC's Persian service shot from a car purports to show a tableau of violence on Sattarkhan Street, as anti-riot police officers clashed with protesters.

In the video, a woman's scream rises over the shouts of the crowd as plainclothes security forces wearing white surgical masks accost one man, who puts his hands up to his face and hunches over to shield his body. Men walk backward to watch the chaos amid police with batons and riot shields, then run.

A woman in a green headscarf argues with one anti-riot police officer in front of a car.

"What do you say?" the police officer asks.

"He kicked my car," she responds.

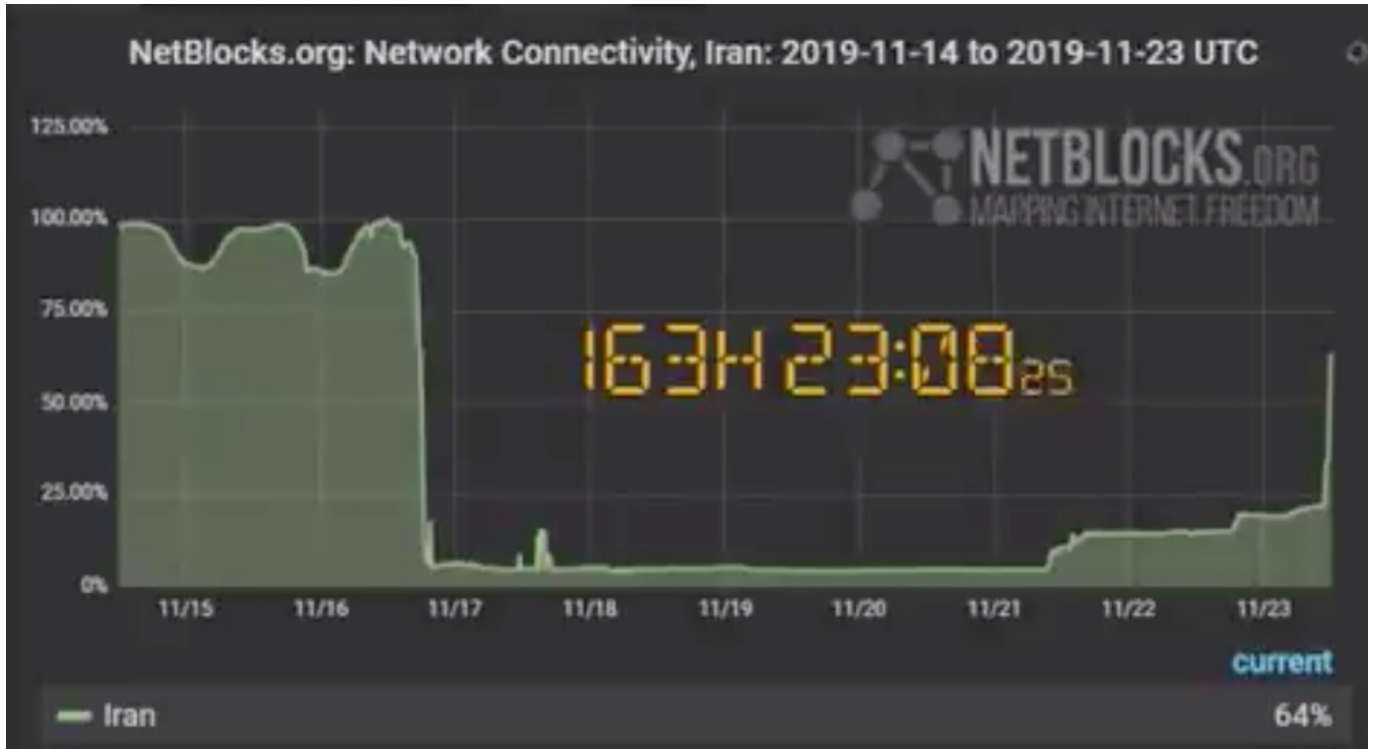
"Move," the police officer orders. "Whom do you want to blame in this situation?"

Someone chases a man in front of a bank as people curse. The car makes a right-hand turn onto another street. A police officer off-camera shouts:

"Come here!"

"Go, go, go!" a woman in the car cries out.

The car speeds away, passing burning debris. The clip ends. It lasts only 35 seconds.



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US urges social media platforms to block Iran officials
Iran warns regional states of consequences if they stoked unrest