

Protesters storm Bahraini embassy in Baghdad in protest against US 'deal of the century'

Thu, 2019-06-27 23:02

BAGHDAD: Dozens of Iraqi protesters stormed the Bahraini embassy in Baghdad on Thursday night to protest against Bahrain's participation in the US-led economic "deal of the century" plan for Palestine, witnesses and security officials said.

Iraqi authorities deployed additional troops to disperse the demonstrators and secure the embassy, which sources said appeared to have been targeted by Kata'ib Hezbollah, one of the most powerful pro-Iranian Shiite armed factions in Iraq.

The protesters burned US and Bahraini flags outside the embassy in Mansour, western Baghdad, before entering the inner courtyard, taking down the Bahraini flag and replacing it with a Palestinian flag. The gesture seemingly symbolized their rejection of US President Donald Trump's recently unveiled economic plan to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Bahraini capital Manama this week hosted a two-day "Peace to Prosperity" workshop to discuss the plan, which was attended by Jared Kushner, Trump's adviser. Palestinian authorities rejected the proposal, which does not address the two-state solution, and refused to participate in the workshop.

Although shots were heard ringing out in the vicinity of the embassy for about eight minutes, no casualties were immediately reported. Iraqi security forces in Baghdad were put on high alert and roads leading to the embassy were closed to prevent more protesters gathering there.

Iraqi Interior Minister Yassin Al-Yassiri went the embassy in an attempt to “calm the situation” and security was heightened in nearby areas, according to security sources.



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[Palestinian shot dead by Israel police in Jerusalem](#)

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Thu, 2019-06-27 19:24

JERUSALEM: Israeli police shot and killed a Palestinian man in occupied East Jerusalem Thursday.

The Palestinian health ministry said the man, identified as Mohammed Obeid, 20, died of his injuries.

Israeli police claimed Obeid had set off fireworks at officers during unspecified "police operations" in the Issawiya neighborhood.

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa said that Palestinians had clashed with the police who had entered Issawiya.

Four other Palestinians were injured, it said, adding that Obeid had served time in Israeli prison in the past.

"He was shot, injured critically as a result of firing fireworks directly at officers putting them in a life-threatening situation," police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said.

Rosenfeld said that fireworks, lashed together in bundles and fired from a tube, were often fired at Israeli security forces.

"Within a certain range, they're life-threatening," he said.

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*With AFP



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Thu, 2019-06-27 00:47

MANAMA: Jared Kushner's "workshop" aimed at securing economic prosperity for Palestine closed with optimistic forecasts from President Donald Trump's special adviser that it could be the basis for a forthcoming political deal with Israel.

Kushner told journalists at a post-event briefing: "I think that people are all leaving very energized, very pleasantly surprised at how many like-minded people they see. It is a solvable problem economically, and the reason why we

thought it was important to lay out the economic vision before we lay out the political vision is because we feel we need people to see what the future can look like.

“The Palestinian people have been promised a lot of things over the years that have not come true. We want to show them that this is the plan, this is what can happen if there is a peace deal.”

The next stage, before a political deal is attempted, will be to get feedback from the event and agree to commitments for the \$50 billion package for Palestine and other regional economies.

“I think you need \$50 billion to really do this the right way, to get a paradigm shift,” Kushner added.

US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said: “I could not be happier how this has gone,” adding that he was “highly confident we will soon have the first \$4 billion. It’s going to be like a hot initial public offering.”

Most of the attendees at the event in Manama, Bahrain, gave Kushner’s economic proposals a serious hearing and agreed it was a useful exercise. Mohammed Al-Shaikh, Saudi minister of state, said: “Can it be done? Yes it can, because it was done before. In the mid-1990s to about the year 2000 there was a global coordinated effort by the US and other countries. I was at the World Bank at the time. I saw it. If we could do it then with significantly less money we can do it again.”

Others warned, however, that there was still a long way to go on the political aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian relationship. Tony Blair, the former British prime minister and Middle East peace envoy, said a political deal was essential.



“This is an economic plan that, if it is implemented, is going to do enormous good for the Palestinian people. But it isn’t a substitute for the politics. There will be no economic peace. There will be a peace that will be a political component and an economic component. The economy can help the politics and the politics is necessary for the economy to flourish.

“The politics has got to be right in this sense as well. The obvious sense people talk about is how do you negotiate the contours of the boundaries of a Palestinian state in a two state solution,” Blair said.

Christine Lagarde, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, highlighted the work the fund has done in conflict situations. “We had an exceptional result in Rwanda, and a good economic outcome in Mozambique,” she said. But she contrasted this with disappointing results in other African conflicts.

Lagarde said that the aim of the economic plan should be to create jobs. “The focus should be on job-intensive industries, like agriculture, tourism and infrastructure.”

Willem Buiter, special economic adviser to US banking giant Citi, said there were obstacles to the Kushner plan succeeding. “Necessary conditions for any progress are peace, safety and security. And there must be high-quality governance and the rule of law in Palestine,” he said.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Jared Kushner believes the conflict is a ‘solvable problem economically.’

- The senior adviser vows to lay out political plans at the right time.
- Expert urges external funding in the form of grants or equity, rather than loans.

He also suggested external funding should be in the form of grants or equity, rather than loans. “We should not burden a country trying to escape from its past with high debts,” he added.

Some attendees warned of the risks to investor funds in the current political situation in the Middle East.

But Khalid Al-Rumaihi, chief executive of the Bahrain Economic Development Board, said: “Risk is not new to the region. We’ve tackled it for the past 30 to 40 years, but that has not stopped investment flowing in.

“Investors trade risk for return, and the Middle East has learned to cope with risk and conflict. There are pockets where the risk is high and Palestine is one of them. But I remain positive. The return in the region is higher to compensate for the risk,” he added.

At a session of regional finance ministers, Mohammed Al-Jadaan of Saudi Arabia said: “The region is in desperate need of prosperity and hope. There is a way forward, but you need political commitment.”

UAE Finance Minister Obaid Al-Tayer added: “We are decoupling politics from economics. If it’s the only initiative on the table we should all give it a chance.”



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'Arab world needs heroes like Salah and Malek,' Bahrain workshop told

Thu, 2019-06-27 00:34

MANAMA: The Arab world needs heroes, and football and the film industry can help provide them, the US-led "Peace to Prosperity" workshop in Bahrain was told.

In a plenary session at the event, titled "the power of sport and entertainment," Thomas Barrack, an American financier and one of US President Donald Trump's closest advisers, said: "We in the Arab world do not create our own heroes, we've done a bad job at creating role models for Arabs. But football and film have been roads to doing that in the rest of the world."

Gianni Infantino, president of the international football governing body FIFA, told delegates at the gathering in the Bahraini capital Manama, that the game could help inspire youngsters, and singled out the Egyptian player Mohamed Salah as an example of a new hero in the Middle East.

"Half of the world watches the World Cup. We have got to give hope, dreams and a smile to the world," he said.

Argentinian film producer Fernando Sulichin, responsible for several Hollywood blockbuster movies, highlighted the success of Oscar-winning "Bohemian Rhapsody" film star Rami Malek, of Egyptian descent, as an example of the kind of success Arab actors could enjoy.

On White House adviser and Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner's plan to revive the economy of Palestine and surrounding regions, Sulichin said: "Here is this plan. It is a script. I'm a producer, so now let's get it done."

He also noted the recent "renaissance" in moviemaking in Saudi Arabia as an example of how film could complement positive social change.

The FIFA boss also called for a program to build more football pitches in Palestine, where he said there were only 25 playing areas for a population of 5 million people.



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Bahrain diary: Karma, and calmer, in Manama Empowering Palestinians means delivering on promises

[Bahrain diary: Karma, and calmer, in Manama](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-06-27 00:25

MANAMA: What a difference eight years make. I had not been to Bahrain since the dark days of 2011, when civil strife ruled the streets and some parts of Manama were virtually inaccessible because of barricades and demonstrations.

In 2019, attending the “Peace to Prosperity” workshop in the presence of US President Donald Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner, the place is unrecognizable from the rather hazy memory I have of those days.

The airport has had a complete makeover. Transport away was fast and efficient, and instead of the tang of tear gas in the air, as there was in 2011, there was the balmy aroma of bougainvillea. It was, as one participant said, karma, and calmer, in Manama.

Back then, I stayed at the Crowne Plaza hotel, which was located pretty much on its own in Manama's diplomatic area. This time, as I checked in there again, what struck me immediately was the amount of development that had gone on all around the area: New residential buildings, more hotels and big flyovers.

The Financial Harbour, which used to be the center of town, has given way to a whole new area – Bahrain Bay – on reclaimed land nearer the airport. At the heart of the new district is the Four Seasons hotel, where the workshop took place. It is a five-star luxury property, as you would expect, and is a good venue for a forum such as the one that just finished there. It was opened in 2015 as the centerpiece of the new reclamation project.

According to the hotel brochure, it “offers you an urban oasis experience with endless views of the Arabian Gulf on one side and the infamous (sic) Manama skyline on the other.” I can vouch for that. The facilities are good. The main plenary hall, rather than an old-fashioned stage and audience setup, is a circular arrangement where the speakers and panelists were in the center and visible from all around.

At least, I have to assume they were visible everywhere in the room. I, as a member of the media distinguished by a yellowy green wash to my lanyard badge, was not allowed into the main hall. Media were confined to a side room with half a dozen TV screens beaming live coverage of the proceedings.

One quirky thing was that there was no sound from the screens, so the huddled hacks had to use headsets to hear what was being said by the eminent thought leaders speaking just next door. It made tape recording very difficult indeed. Media members were isolated from the rest of the workshop during mealtimes too, with access to the main dinner and lunch gently but firmly denied by door wardens.

If the idea behind this segregation was to prevent news-hungry hacks from door-stepping the eminent sources in attendance at the workshop, it was a failure. The hotel lobby, sweeping corridors and marina-facing terraces were all perfect locations for a bit of good, old-fashioned news networking.



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