

Tehran fury as Iraq's Shiite leadership rejects Iranian 'interference'

Author:

Zaynab Khojji

ID:

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BAGHDAD: The mass demonstrations in Iraq have heightened tensions between Najaf's supreme religious authority, led by Grand Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Al-Sistani, and Iran's supreme religious leader Ali Khamenei, sources close to Sistani told Arab News on Saturday.

Baghdad and nine southern Shiite-dominated provinces have been witnessing mass demonstrations since Oct. 1 as people protest over corruption, unemployment and lack of daily basic life services.

Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi and his Iranian-backed allies led a brutal crackdown on demonstrations in its first week, killing around 150 protesters and wounding 7,000 others.

The demonstrations stopped for two weeks but returned last Friday after Abdul Mahdi vowed under local and international pressure not to use live ammunition. Despite this commitment, more than 250 demonstrators were killed and more than 6,000 wounded, mostly in Baghdad and Basra.

Most demonstrators in Baghdad and Basra were killed by tear gas canisters, while in the other provinces by gunfire of guards of political parties and armed factions, whose headquarters had come under attack from protesters. Demonstrators' demands increased to include the overthrow of the government and early national parliamentary elections preceded by a change in the election law and the appointment of a new election commission.

Iraqi political forces and armed factions backed by Iran would be the biggest losers if the demands of the demonstrators are met, top senior officials and politicians said.

Sistani is the leader of the world's Shiite community and is the most influential man in Iraq, considered the godfather of the political process since 2003. Although there are many religious and sectarian points that he and Khamenei share, Sistani does not adopt the theory of velayat-e faqih and does not recognize absolute right of the clergy to control the state.

The two men have been at odds over managing the situation in Iraq for years, but it turned into a rupture a year and a half ago, according to Sistani's associates.

The dispute resurfaced last Wednesday, when Khamenei demanded in a public statement that the demonstrations in Iraq and Lebanon end. Many Iranian clerics have accused Iraqi demonstrators of being in the pay of Israel, America and Britain during their sermons at Friday prayers in the past few weeks.

Sistani, in an open letter read by his representative, Sayyed Ahmed Al-Safi, in Friday prayers said that no one is a guardian of the Iraqis and that no

person or group or regional or international party has the right to impose their will on them or determine their choices regarding the management of their country or the reforms that they want.

Sistani's message "irritated Khamenei and worried his allies in Iraq," Iraqi politicians and sources close to Sistani told Arab News.

"The message was earth-shattering," a top senior Iraqi official said. "No one, especially Khamenei, expected that Sistani would announce his rejection of their intervention in this way.

"Iran threw all its weight behind Abdul Mahdi. They believe that this government is their government and they cannot allow it to fall.

"Any early election or amendment to the election law would mean losing the control of their local allies over the country, which they would not allow.

"They (the Iraqi forces backed by Iran) are currently rejecting any solutions to get out of the crisis and any activation of the constitutional procedures that can dismantle the crisis, means launching an endless cycle of violence because they they have weapons and power."

Gen. Qasem Soleimani, the commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards who runs Iran's operations in Iraq, arrived in Baghdad on Thursday and asked to meet Sistani on Saturday to discuss the latest developments and try to calm the situation between Najaf and Tehran, sources close to Sistani said.

"Sayyed Sistani's office agreed to his request to meet," the sources said.

"Sistani now has an interest in meeting him to tell him directly about their displeasure with Iranian positions.

"Although Sistani stopped meeting with any of Sayyed Khamenei's envoys more than a year and a half ago, now the country's interest requires his meeting Soleimani.

"Their groups (Iranian-backed forces) are ready to burn the country and the message must reach them clearly.

"The Iranians must take their hands off the demonstrators and curb their groups."



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[Grand Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Al-Sistani](#)

Representatives of top Shiite cleric Al-Sistani urge followers to join protests in IraqIran cleric says US, Israel behind Iraq unrest to disrupt Shiite pilgrimage there

[Hezbollah TV channel says Twitter accounts suspended](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

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Sat, 2019-11-02 18:42

BEIRUT: The television station of Lebanon's powerful Shiite movement Hezbollah protested Saturday that most of its Twitter accounts had been suspended.

Al-Manar accused the US-based social media platform of giving in to “political pressures.”

“Account suspended,” one such Arabic-language account, @almanarnews, read late Saturday.

“There is no place on Twitter for illegal terrorist organizations and violent extremist groups,” a Twitter spokesperson told AFP.

The accounts in English, French and Spanish were also not available, but the Twitter handles of specific television shows seemed to be functioning.

Iran-backed Hezbollah is designated a “terrorist” group by the United States and several of its officials are under US sanctions, but it is also a key political player in Lebanon.

The group held three ministerial posts and a majority with its Christian allies before Lebanon’s cabinet fell this week after 13 days of mass anti-graft protests.

Hezbollah is the only group not to have disarmed after Lebanon’s 1975-1990 civil war, and it fought Israeli troops who occupied southern Lebanon until 2000.

It has also been a key ally of Syrian President Bashar Assad in the neighboring country’s eight-year conflict.



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US and Gulf countries sanction individuals and businesses linked to Iran and

[Five candidates to run in Algeria's presidential election next month](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1572714751813288100

Sat, 2019-11-02 15:57

ALGIERS: Five candidates will run in Algeria's presidential election next month, including two former prime ministers, the head of the election authority said on Saturday, amid mass protests rejecting the vote. The authorities have repeatedly said the Dec. 12 vote would be the only way to get out of a crisis Algeria been facing since the resignation of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in April under pressure from protesters.

Candidates for the Dec. 12 election include former prime ministers Abdelmadjid Tebboune and Ali Benflis, former culture minister Azzedddine Mihoubi, former tourism minister Abdelkader Bengrine, and Abdelaziz Belaid, head of the El Mostakbal Movement party.

They were announced by Mohamed Chorfi, head of the election authority. Twenty-three candidates had applied to the election authority, but most failed to meet requirements which include collecting signatures from 25 of the country's 48 provinces. Those who were rejected will be allowed to file appeals.

Tens of thousands of protesters have been staging weekly demonstrations to reject the election, saying it will not be fair as some of former president Abdelaziz Bouteflika's allies are still in power.

Bouteflika ended his 20-year-rule in April after mass protests broke out on Feb. 22 demanding the removal of the ruling elite and the prosecution of people involved in corruption.

The army is now the main player in Algeria's politics, and its chief of staff Lt. Gen. Ahmed Gaed Salah has vowed transparency and fairness for the Dec. 12 vote.

The authorities also met some protesters' demands by detaining several former officials including two ex-prime ministers and several prominent businessmen over corruption charges.

Protesters now also demand the departure of the remaining symbols of the old guard including interim president Abdelkader Bensalah and Prime Minister Nouredine Bedoui.

Algeria had canceled a presidential vote previously planned for July 4, citing a lack of candidates.

"There will be full transparency in the handling of the presidential election," Chorfi said.



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Algerians in 'new independence' call on revolution anniversary
Algeria registers 22 candidates for presidential vote

[More pressure on Iran as US imposes new sanctions](#)

Sat, 2019-11-02 00:55

WASHINGTON: The US said on Thursday it had imposed sanctions on the Iranian construction sector and trade in four materials used in its military or nuclear programs, even as it waived sanctions to let foreign firms continue nonproliferation work in Iran.

The decisions announced by the US State Department reflect an effort to increase pressure on Iran by putting wider swaths of its economy under

sanctions, while leaving a door open to diplomacy by allowing work to proceed at Iranian nuclear facilities that makes it harder for Iran to develop a nuclear bomb.

US President Donald Trump's administration last year pulled out of the 2015 nuclear deal in which Iran agreed to limit its nuclear program in return for the lifting of sanctions that crippled its economy.

The administration has since restored and tightened US sanctions to try to force Iran to negotiate a broader deal that would also limit its ballistic missile program and regional activities.

The State Department said Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had determined Iran's construction sector was controlled directly or indirectly by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which Washington regards as a foreign terrorist organization.

As a result, the sale of raw and semi-finished metals, graphite, coal, and software for integrating industrial purposes will be sanctionable if the materials are to be used in Iran's construction sector, the department said in a fact sheet.

In a second determination, Pompeo identified four "strategic materials" as being used in connection with nuclear, military, or ballistic missile programs, making trade in them subject to sanctions.

The fact sheet identified the materials as: "Stainless steel 304L tubes; MN40 manganese brazing foil; MN70 manganese brazing foil; and stainless steel CrNi60WTi ESR + VAR (chromium, nickel, 60 percent tungsten, titanium, electro-slag remelting, vacuum arc remelting)."

In a separate statement, State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said the determinations gave Washington the ability "to prevent Iran from acquiring strategic materials for the IRGC, its construction sector, and its proliferation programs."

Waiver renewal

Reuters reported on Wednesday that the US planned to allow Russian, Chinese and European companies to continue work at Iranian nuclear facilities to make it harder for Iran to develop a nuclear weapon.

The Trump administration would let the work go forward by issuing waivers to sanctions that bar non-US firms from dealing with the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI).

A source familiar with the matter said on Thursday that the State Department had indeed renewed the waivers for 90 days.

The work to continue includes redesigning Iran's heavy water Arak research reactor to render it unable to make bomb-grade plutonium under normal operation and modification of centrifuges at Iran's Fordow fuel enrichment plant, the source said.

The waivers also cover support for Iran's existing nuclear reactor at Bushehr, the provision of enriched uranium for the Tehran Research Reactor and the transfer of spent and scrap nuclear fuel out of Iran, the source added.

Chinese state-owned China National Nuclear Corp. has done non-proliferation work at Arak, and Russia's Rosatom has done it at Fordow as well as provided uranium fuel to Iran.

Responding to Reuters' story that the waivers were to be renewed, a China National Nuclear Corp. spokesman said by email that it was "starting to cooperate with the Iranian side under guidance from Beijing on seeking a positive solution to the Iran nuclear problem." It did not give further details.

When Trump abandoned the 2015 nuclear deal last year, he began a "maximum pressure" campaign designed to force Iran to return to the negotiating table.

Iran has demanded the US first resume complying with the 2015 deal.

France has sought to bring the two into talks but has so far failed, suggesting neither is willing to abandon core elements of policy – the US belief that pressure will bring Iran to its knees, and Iran's refusal to capitulate to US duress.



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Saudi Arabia remains South Korea's top oil supplier after Iran sanctions
US will enforce Iran sanctions: Pompeo

[Iraqis defy protest curbs after cleric calls for 'end to chaos'](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-11-02 00:43

BAGHDAD: Iraqis have defied a crackdown to stage their biggest protests yet after the country's leading Shiite cleric warned the government against the use of violence to curb demonstrations.

The number of protesters on the streets of Baghdad and Iraq's southern provinces more than doubled in the past 24 hours, security officials and eyewitnesses told Arab News.

On Wednesday two people died in clashes between security forces and protesters who ignored a curfew in the capital.

Almost 150 demonstrators have been killed and another 7,000 injured since Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi and his allies led a brutal crackdown on the demonstrations.

Protests were halted for two weeks, but resumed on Friday after the government promised live ammunition would not be used against demonstrators.

Public anger at corruption, unemployment and lack of basic daily services in the country have left Abdul Mahdi's political future in limbo. Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, leader of the world's Shiite community and Iraq's most influential cleric, urged the Iraqi government and its allies not to involve troops in dealing with protesters.

In an open letter read by his representative Sayyed Ahmed Al-Safi during Friday prayers, Al-Sistani said: "The blood that has flowed over the past few weeks is precious to us all. It is necessary to work to prevent further bloodshed and never allow the country to slide into internal fighting, chaos and devastation.

"The Marjiya (Al-Sistani) urges the concerned authorities not to involve any combat forces in dealing with demonstrators and sit-ins for fear of being drawn into further violence."

The cleric also sent "a powerful and clear message" to Iraq's regional and international allies, and to Iran's supreme religious leader, Ali Khamenei, who called for an end to demonstrations in Iraq and Lebanon on Wednesday.

“Respecting the will of the Iraqis to determine their political and administrative system of their country by holding a referendum on the constitution and the periodic elections for the Parliament – this is the principle that the religious authority has committed to since the change of (Saddam’s regime).

“Today it also affirms that reform, although inevitable, is the choice of the Iraqi people,” Al-Sistani’s letter read.

“No person, group, or regional or international party has the right to confiscate the will of Iraqis and impose their opinion on them,” it added.

In Baghdad, hundreds of families joined protesters in Tahrir Square on Friday, while others shared their food with demonstrators on the sidewalks.

Iraqi intelligent officials told Arab News that the number of protesters grew after Friday sermons with women and the elderly making up the bulk of the newcomers, especially in the capital.

“These demonstrations will not end soon and it is very difficult for the government to use force to end them anymore,” a senior intelligence official said.

“No sane person can ignore these people, especially after Al-Sistani’s comments,” he added.



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Iraqi Kurds boycott Turkish goods after Syria assault
Representatives of top Shiite cleric Al-Sistani urge followers to join protests in Iraq