

Replicas of Assyrian statues smashed by Daesh unveiled in Iraq's Mosul

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MOSUL: Two high-tech replicas of iconic Assyrian statues destroyed by the Daesh group in northern Iraq were unveiled on Thursday at the University of Mosul.

The real "lamassu" – massive statues of winged bulls with human faces – had adorned a royal throne room in the ancient city of Nimrud for centuries, and one was later exhibited in the Mosul Museum.

But extremists destroyed the originals after they swept across northern Iraq in 2014, blowing up Nimrud and filming themselves taking hammers to pre-Islamic artefacts they deemed heretical.

Iraqi troops recaptured Mosul in mid-2017, but the museum has remained shuttered and the lamassu in ruins.

Using 3D recordings of lamassu fragments, the Spanish Factum Foundation created copies, erected this week outside the student library at the University of Mosul.

"This gift is a message of hope that Mosul has returned to normal and its people must build their city," Spanish Ambassador Juan Jose Escobar said at the statues' unveiling.

Ahmad Qassem, a professor of history at the University of Mosul, said the lamassu's hybrid figure is highly symbolic.

"The head symbolizes wisdom, the wings speed, and the body – a mix of a bull and a lion – represent strength," he told AFP.

And Factum founder Adam Lowe told AFP the replicas now had their own meaning. "We want them to be here as a symbol, a demonstration of what's possible with technology when people work together to share cultural heritage, share understanding, and share our historical culture that links us all together," he said.

"Now they're sitting in front of the entrance to the student building and I hope they'll guard everyone for many years to come," said Lowe.

University student Ilaf Muhannad said she was elated to see her university house them.

"I'm so happy today to see the lamassu statues placed here, because it represents the civilization and heritage of Mosul. We demand the Iraqi government work on returning everything stolen from Mosul," she said.

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Iraqi security forces used 'excessive force' during protests that killed 157
-government inquiry

[Iran threatens international navigation in the Gulf: US defense secretary](#)

Thu, 2019-10-24 11:50

DUBAI: Iran targeted the Saudi facilities in Aramco in September, US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper said on Thursday, reiterating calls to deter the country's threats.

Esper, who was speaking at the German Marshall Fund in Brussels, referred to the drone attacks at several Aramco sites on Sept. 14, saying "Iran threatens international navigation in the Gulf."

He added the US "does not seek war with Iran, but we are prepared to do so if necessary."

Meanwhile, the Pentagon chief also lashed out at Turkey for its military assault on Syrian Kurdish fighters across the border into Syria, days after the US withdrew its troops from the war-torn country.

Esper says Turkey's unwarranted invasion into Syria jeopardizes security gains made in recent years as the US-led coalition and allied Syrian Kurdish forces battled the Daesh group.

President Donald Trump announced Wednesday that the US is lifting sanctions on Turkey after the NATO ally agreed to permanently stop fighting Kurdish forces in Syria. Esper was in Iraq Wednesday to discuss the withdrawal and the Daesh threat with Iraqi leaders and his military commanders.

(With Reuters)



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US Secretary of Defense Esper meets King Salman, asks NATO to protect Saudi Arabia from IranRouhani: New sanctions against Iran signals US 'desperation'

[Lebanese president vows reforms as protests engulf country](#)

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Thu, 2019-10-24 07:31

BEIRUT: Lebanon's president pleaded Thursday with tens of thousands of protesters who have blocked main roads and paralyzed the nation for days, urging them to back economic reforms proposed by the prime minister as the

“first step” toward saving the country from economic collapse.

The protesters, however, have already rejected the initiative and it didn't appear that President Michel Aoun would sway them.

In his televised address, Aoun pledged to exert every effort to implement radical reform, but also said that change can only come from within state institutions. He said freedom of transportation must be respected, urging demonstrators to remove roadblocks.

Lebanon has been engulfed by protests since last Thursday, a paralysis that has compounded the country's severe economic crisis and is threatening to plunge it into another cycle of chaos and instability.

The leaderless protests were triggered by new proposed taxes, and have escalated into a nationwide revolt against the country's sectarian-based leaders whom the demonstrators accuse of corruption and mismanagement.

Aoun's comments are his first since the protests started. On Monday, Prime Minister Saad Hariri announced a package of economic reforms the government hopes will help revive the struggling economy, but the protesters denounced it as empty promises designed to quell their movement. They have insisted on staying in the street until the government resigns. Some have called on the president to step down as well.

For Lebanon, these protests have also been the first of their kind, shattering taboos and openly taking aim at powerful sectarian leaders from their own communities.

As Aoun spoke, hundreds of people gathered in downtown Beirut listening to his speech through a giant speaker, shouted: “Come on, leave, your term has left us hungry.”

They later dismissed his speech, saying it offered nothing new.

“The (economic) reform paper that was adopted is the first step to save Lebanon and to distance the scepter of financial and economic collapse,” Aoun said.

The president promised the protesters' “call will not go unanswered,” adding he's ready for constructive dialogue.

“I heard lots of calls for bringing down the regime,” he said. “The regime cannot be changed in the squares... this can only happen through state institutions.”

Both Hariri and Aoun have warned that a government resignation would lead to another vacuum, at a time the country desperately needs a government to enact reforms to help the struggling economy.

Aoun invited the protesters to send representatives to meet with him.

“I am ready to meet your representatives who will carry your worries and specify your demands, and you can listen to our concerns about an economic collapse,” he said. “We should work together to achieve your goals without causing a collapse.”

“Dialogue is the best way for salvation. I am waiting for you,” he added.



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London's Lebanese sympathize with protests, struggle to send money
Lebanese protesters unbowed as army vows to open roads

[Afghan Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani tenders his resignation](#)

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Thu, 2019-10-24 20:19

KABUL: Afghan Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani tendered his resignation on Wednesday following differences with President Ashraf Ghani, who Rabbani accused of sidelining him.

His departure may not affect Ashraf's already weak government because Rabbani was disqualified from office by Parliament three years ago, and served as acting minister on the basis of an order by the president.

Rabbani is an ally of Chief Executive Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, who shares power with Ghani and is the president's election rival.

Rabbani's resignation comes weeks ahead of the possible formation of a new government if an election winner is announced.

"During my time, the working environment in the National Unity Government was not good from the start," he wrote in his resignation letter.

"I witnessed parallel structures being created and have seen essential institutions – key pillars of the system – pushed to the side."

The presidential palace had no immediate comment about Rabbani's resignation or his allegations, which according to his supporters include being barred from attending conferences and events overseas that fall under his remit.

Part of Rabbani's differences with Ghani surfaced openly earlier this month when Rabbani's office welcomed Pakistani efforts regarding the Afghan peace process, which included a warm reception in Islamabad to a visiting Taliban delegation. The Afghan presidential palace openly opposed Pakistan's warm welcome of the delegation.



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Pakistan's hosting of Taliban leaders angers Afghanistan

[London's Lebanese sympathize with protests, struggle to send money](#)

Author:

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Wed, 2019-10-23 16:42

LONDON: In common with millions of other Lebanese living abroad, London restaurateur Moufid Shamms is unable to send cash back to support his family – in his case daughters studying at school.

Banks back home have remained shut for five working days as hundreds of thousands have taken to the streets to protest against Prime Minister Saad

Al-Hariri's government.

That is a problem for Shamms, who usually makes transfers via Western Union, and also for Lebanon's small economy. Remittances are a lifeline for families and important source of financing for the economy, funding almost half the trade deficit.

"I have my two eldest daughters living in Lebanon and now I can't send them money," the 49-year-old, says sitting outside his restaurant in Edgware Road, a bustling Arab heartland in the British capital.

Lebanese nationals overseas have an outsize influence on their native country's fortunes.

After many fled from civil war between 1975-1990, estimates now put Lebanon's diaspora as high as 14 million – more than twice the size of its domestic population.

Britain is among the top ten countries of origin for remittances to Lebanon. A 2011 census recorded more than 15,000 Lebanese living in Britain.

Having left in 1989, sick of the violence and corruption back then, 49-year-old Shamms sees ongoing graft as a prominent issue in the latest upheaval.

"The corruption in Lebanon is why I left," he says, puffing on a shisha.

"Everyone has a right to protest and all Lebanese agree with what they're asking but we all know nothing is going to be changed because you know Lebanon."

Globally, flows to Lebanon have faltered recently.

One reason for that is concern from some expatriates about the risk of a looming economic collapse back home, say economists. Another is the Gulf, where hundreds of thousands of Lebanese work, but softening oil prices have hurt the job market.

Having peaked at \$9.6 billion in 2014, remittances from the diaspora fell to \$7.7 billion in 2018 and may dip to \$6.5 billion next year, estimates Institute of International Finance's Garbis Iradian.

S&P Global warned last month that waning inflows from non-residents were contributing to an accelerated drawdown of foreign currency reserves that would test Lebanon's ability to maintain its currency peg to the US dollar. While the closure of banks has provided a practical barrier to sending money, some expatriates also voiced worry about the impact a potential devaluation of the Lebanese currency and further financial instability could have on their savings and investments.

"The first income in Lebanon is from people outside. If they stop sending money then that's the end of the country," says Ali Sahir, 50, who sends money to support his wife in Lebanon's south.

London-based public relations professional Roni Sinno has family in Canada, Germany, United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Belgium – all sending money back to relatives.

"There is no work in Lebanon," she says. "My nieces and nephews finished universities and couldn't work. One stayed in Lebanon five years unemployed until he found work in Qatar. Meanwhile, the children of the politicians are living luxury lives in London and Paris."

One driver of the demonstrations has been the large sums of money, they say, siphoned out of Lebanon's economy through corruption.

"Lots of money has been stolen from the government for the last 30 years," says Ali Abbas, 35, who moved to London in 2007 after graduating and now works in a shop. "The main thing that will help the country will be bringing

this money back to the country.”



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Lebanon's protests move from spontaneity to organization
Lebanon struggles to restore normality amid protests