
IRAQI VICE PRESIDENT'S 'DESTROY' THREAT SPARKS OUTRAGE

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* The former prime minister was caught on video in a heated exchange with the man who complained about the lack of jobs

* The incident is not the first since campaigning began in which political leaders have appeared to behave above the law

BAGHDAD: Iraqi Vice President Iyad Allawi came under fire yesterday after he was filmed threatening a voter in northern Baghdad.

The veteran politician and leader of the Al-Wattaniya electoral list was caught on video in a heated exchange with the man before saying he would destroy him.

The exchange sparked outrage on social media with critics seizing on the remarks as typical of the political elites disdain for the Iraqi people.

The man did not raise a complaint with the police, but legal experts told Arab News that threatening a member of the public in Iraq could carry a seven-year prison sentence.

The video circulated on social media shows Allawi at a busy gathering of supporters in the Sunni-dominated district of Adhamiya.

The man, who has not been identified, is shown complaining to Allawi about the lack of jobs and the bad living conditions suffered by the Iraqi people.

I am an officer of the former Iraqi Army. I came to talk to you, because you are responsible for me and the people before God, the man tells Allawi. As he becomes increasingly animated, the vice president holds his hands in an attempt to persuade him to listen to him

There are no jobs, no industry, no agriculture. You destroyed people, the man continues.

Allawi's bodyguards, who were watching the situation, were quick to separate the two men. As Allawi walked away, he said: You destroyed us ... I swear in God, we will destroy you.

The incident on Sunday is not expected to significantly affect Allawi's popularity, but it contributed to a feeling among Iraqis that the political leaders are not interested in what voters think.

This behavior reflects the deep gap between the people and politicians, Marrwa Al-Mosoui, a junior

lawyer in Baghdad, told Arab News.

Even during their election campaigns, they abuse people and try to impose their opinions and interests on the voters in a rude way.

The incident is not the first since campaigning began in which political leaders have appeared to behave above the law.

Ammar Al-Hakim, the leader of Hikma, the dissident faction of the Shiite Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, was accused in media reports of beating a poet after he publicly criticized the cleric during an election rally in the south several weeks ago.

Hours after the incident, the poet returned to publicly apologize and kiss Hakims hand.

About 7,000 candidates are preparing for the May 12 poll, the fourth national parliamentary elections in Iraq since the 2003 US-led invasion.

Campaigning, which began on April 14, has been some of the fiercest in the country in the post-Saddam Hussein era, with candidates attempting to ruin rivals chances.

Allawi, a secular Shiite, is backed by many of the Sunni political parties and figures on his list.

A candidate from the State Alliance — led by the former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki — was shot dead on Sunday morning in what police described as a tribal conflict in eastern Baghdad.

He has been focusing on winning votes in the Sunni-dominated provinces, where he is seen as a potential prime minister who would better represent Sunni interests.

Walid Al-Shibibi, an Iraqi lawyer and legal adviser employed by the UN and the Electoral Commission, told Arab News that if a police complaint is raised against Allawi, he could be charged with committing an offense that threatens the public — a charge that could lead to seven years in prison.

Ali Wajiih, a well-known Iraqi intellectual and poet, told Arab News that not only Allawi but all the Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish political hierarchy do not see that they made any mistakes.

They see that we are the ones who destroyed their lives and we are the ones who made them tired and we are the ones who punished them by making their lives better, he said.

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