The Earthquake in Iraq: An Iranian Nuclear Test or a Natural Event? Iraqis Divided Between Speculation, Fear, and Joking

By Ahmed al-Tayyar Baghdad
Translation by Maya Hardimon
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The earthquake that hit Iraq the night of Sunday, November 12, 2017 became a controversial matter on social media sites, with some saying fearfully that it was a punishment from God because of the widespread injustice and corruption in the country while others made use of ridicule and humor. A third group went further, believing that the earthquake was caused by Iran testing out an experimental nuclear bomb 30-40 kilometers below earth’s surface.

Woes of the Jokers

Social media in Iraq divided its citizens into three sections. Some considered the earthquake to be a divine punishment for the injustice and corruption that has swept Iraqi cities; they’ve posted Quranic verses while mosques increased their reading of the Quran and prayers to reassure people.

Sheikh Laqin al-Qaisi, head of the Salafi Dawa Association in Iraq, wrote on his official Facebook page: “Earthquakes, floods, volcanoes, wind, rain, erosion, sinkholes, slander, murder, disease, and plagues – these are the lashes of God, his punishment and his anger.”

Activists shared the cleric’s view of the earthquake. Activist Ali al-Naimi wrote: “It is mentioned in the Hadiths about the end of days that random messages will be left, and repentance and forgiveness will intensify.”

Meanwhile, others used the earthquake as a source of joking and sarcasm. They spread jokes against Iraqi politicians and parties involved in the political process, and they used sarcasm about the Iraqi reality in a way known in Iraq as “tahsheesh.”

Writer Anwar al-Qasim sarcastically said on his official page: “It’s not the earthquake that’s important; what’s important is coexisting with the earthquake.”

Others have posted pictures and videos under the “tahsheesh” hashtag with humor and laughter, which they consider their way to deal with natural disasters.

Nuclear Test?

However, some activists and writers have gone even farther than this “tahsheesh.” They have said that the earthquake that hit Iraq was caused by Iran setting off an experimental nuclear bomb underground on its border with Iraq.

On his official page, writer Abdel Kadhum Alaboudi published a brief article on the earthquake, “Did Iran do it? Was it an earthquake or an underground Iranian nuclear test with aftershocks felt across Iraq?”
Even more strangely, a number of Iraqi pages have published a video clip that they say is from a few hours after the earthquake when a bright light appeared near the sun, which is considered by some to be the result of the underground Iranian nuclear test.

At the same time, the official Facebook page of the Iraqi Air Force published a news story saying that “the earthquake resulted from the United States Fifth Fleet detonating an experimental nuclear bomb in the Persian Gulf which caused severe aftershocks.” However, the page deleted the post after a few minutes, which surprised its followers.

On Monday, the Seismic Observatory Department of the Iraqi Air Force revealed that there were 100 additional aftershocks after the earthquake, and surveillance cameras showed panic among citizens in malls and cafes.

**Panic and Emergency**

At approximately 9:25 pm on Sunday, November 12, a violent earthquake measuring 7.2 on the Richter scale according to the US Geological Survey hit the Iraqi cities of Sulaymaniyah, Dohuk, Erbil, Kirkuk, Mosul, Saladin, Diyala, Baghdad, Babylon, Karbala, Nasiriyah, Maysan, Kut, Basra, and Anbar. The earthquake’s impact extended to neighboring countries Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait.

Residents of most Iraqi cities rushed into the streets, fearing the collapse of houses and residential buildings due to the strength of the earthquake, which in most locations lasted between 20 and 40 seconds and caused material and human damage to most regions of the country, especially in the city of Sulaymaniyah.

The Iraqi Civil Defense Corps announced on Monday that 6 people had been killed and 53 injured in 4 Iraqi provinces: Sulaymaniyah, Kirkuk, Erbil, and Diyala.

Five people were killed and fifty injured in the towns of Darbandikhan and Kalar in the province of Sulaymaniyah. Three people were injured in Erbil province, and in Diyala one person died due to high blood pressure because of the earthquake.

Ambulances and Civil Defense Corps teams began to roam the streets of Iraqi cities in anticipation of any emergencies. Meanwhile, families left their homes and gathered in the streets and public squares, where most of them stayed until Monday morning.