
IRAQI SHIITE TURKMEN, KURDISH PESHMARGA AGREE TO WITHDRAW FORCES FROM TUZ KHURMATU AFTER CLASHES

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Senior Kurdish Peshmerga forces and Turkmen (Shiite Muslims) leaders agreed on Wednesday to withdraw their forces from a predominantly Kurdish town in Salaheddin province in Iraq's north in a bid to end violence that has killed more than 10 people in recent days.

The clashes in Tuz Khurmatu, 175 km (110 miles) north of Baghdad, marked the latest violence in the town since ISIS militants were driven back in 2014 by Kurdish peshmerga and Shiite militia.

Mayor Shalal Abdul said that under the deal, local police would take control of Tuz Khurmatu home to Kurds, mostly Shiite Turkmen and Sunni Arabs. □

A Kurdish official in the town, Karim Shkur, said the peshmerga and al-Hashd al-Shaabi (Shiite militias) would pull out once the police forces achieved a balance between the town's various ethnic and sectarian groups, estimating that would take around one month.

In the meantime, Tuz Khurmatu will be secured by a unit from each force coordinated through a joint operations room.

Previous agreements have broken down and residents of Tuz Khurmatu were skeptical the deal would be implemented.

Tensions in towns like Tuz Khurmatu risk further fragmenting Iraq, a major OPEC oil exporter, as it struggles to contain ISIS, the gravest security threat after toppled Saddam Hussein in 2003.

The Turkmen population of Tuz Khurmatu is primarily Shia Muslim; these civilians are

discriminated against for their ethnic and religious make-up.

Over the years, the Turkmen of Tuz Khurmatu have built a strong relationship with the Iraqi government and powerful paramilitary forces like Kataeb Hezbollah and Hashd Al-Shaabi.

Kaynak/Source: