
IRAQ'S PARLIAMENT DISMISSES FINANCE MINISTER

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Iraq's parliament dismissed the finance minister after a no-confidence vote on Wednesday linked to allegations of corruption and mismanagement, the assembly's spokesman said.

The removal of Hoshyar Zebari, a former foreign minister and prominent Kurdish politician, comes as Iraq is grappling with an economic crisis driven by low oil prices and the costs of battling the Islamic State group. Iraq is currently in negotiations with the International Monetary Fund to secure badly needed loans.

Zebari, who has denied any wrongdoing, has been the subject of weeks of political wrangling over the allegations. He is the second minister to be dismissed by parliament, which voted to fire the defense minister last month.

Parliament spokesman Emad al-Khafaji told The Associated Press that 158 members voted no-confidence in Zebari, more than the simple majority required to remove him from his post. Seventy-seven voted against the measure while 14 abstained.

He said Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi called the parliament speaker earlier on Wednesday from the U.N. General Assembly in New York, asking to postpone the vote given the economic crisis.

Sunni lawmaker, Dhafir al-Ani said the dismissal of Zebari and the defense minister were both politically-motivated and aimed at undermining al-Abadi's government. He said it could jeopardize the negotiations with the IMF by conveying an image of an unstable government that could not be trusted to pay its debts.

The dismissal of Zebari will derail long-sought economic reforms, he added.

Like other oil-reliant countries, Iraqs economy has been hit hard by plummeting prices since 2014. The crisis has forced al-Abadis government to introduce austerity measures by eliminating government posts, merging some ministries, halting spending on construction projects and imposing new taxes to pay for civil servants and fund the military.

In July, the IMF approved a three-year loan for Iraq of about \$5.34 billion to support the governments economic reform program. In return, Iraq needs to reduce public spending, improve collection of tax and customs revenues and fight corruption and money laundering.

Kaynak/Source: