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## **IRAQ: LEAVE US OUT OF U.S.-IRAN TENSIONS**

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Iraq won't take part in any regional or international conflicts, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi told state TV on Saturday.

The comment came after Abadi had spoke in a phone call with U.S. President Donald Trump during which tensions with Iran were mentioned. The call was the first between the two leaders.

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A political commentator close to Abadi, Ihsan al-Shammari, said Abadi's comment addressed the U.S.-Iranian tensions.

Iran has close ties with the Shi'ite political elite ruling Iraq while Washington is providing critical military support to Iraqi forces battling the Islamic State militant group (ISIS).

"Iraq is very keen to preserve its national interests (..)and does not wish to be part of any regional or international conflict which would lead to disasters for the region and for Iraq," Abadi said, according to state TV.

Trump said on Friday that Iranian President Hassan Rouhani "better be careful" after the latter was quoted as saying that anyone who speaks to Iranians with threats would "regret it."

The White House on Friday said Trump and Abadi "spoke to the threat Iran presents across the entire region," in their first phone call since the inauguration of the U.S. president.

Abadi's office on Friday also gave a readout of the phone call that took place overnight Thursday, without specifically mentioning Iran.

Both readouts stressed the importance of their continued cooperation against ISIS, as the militants are being pushed back in Iraq and losing control over Mosul, the last major city stronghold under their control in the country.

The United States has more than 5,000 troops deployed in Iraq and is providing air and ground support in the battle of Mosul.

Iran has also played a major role in the fight against ISIS by arming and training Iraqi Shi'ite groups collectively known as Popular Mobilization.

"The Iraqi prime minister Dr. Abadi is stressing once again the policy of neutrality and to steer clear from conflicts," political commentator Shammari told state TV.

The Iraqi readout said Abadi asked Trump to lift the ban on people from his country traveling to

the United States.

U.S. courts suspended the restrictions announced end January on entries from Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. Trump has said he will keep trying to reinstate them.

Abadi resisted calls from influential pro-Iranian Shi'ite politicians to retaliate against the ban, at a meeting held on Jan. 29, citing Iraq's need for U.S. military support.

Washington last week ratcheted up pressure on Iran, putting sanctions on 13 individuals and 12 entities days after the White House put Tehran "on notice" over a ballistic missile test.

Iran's dominant influence in Iraqi politics was eroded after ISIS routed the Iraqi army commanded then by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, a close ally of Tehran, in 2014.

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Kaynak/Source: