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**TURKMEN SLAM HASHD AL-SHAABI INVOLVEMENT IN TAL AFAR OP**

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Muhammed Ilhanli, head of the Turkmen Development Party in northern Iraq's Kurdish Regional Government, has criticized the expected participation of the Hashd al-Shaabi -- a Shia fighting force -- in a planned offensive to retake the northern Tal Afar district from Daesh.

Speaking to Anadolu Agency on Monday, Ilhanli alleged there was a political agenda behind the planned offensive to recapture Tal Afar, a majority-Turkmen district that Daesh overran in mid-2014.

If you look at the regions the Hashd al-Shaabi has captured, you'll notice that they never withdraw, he said.

A joint military assembly is essential for the planned offensive, he added. But Tal Afars Turkmen may not be able to return to their homes if those who wield military power there also assume political power.

According to Ilhanli, the planned operation should have been prepared in close coordination with Turkey and UN observers.

**-Changing demography**

Aydin Maruf, a lawmaker for the Iraqi Turkmen Front in northern Iraq's Kurdish parliament, for his part, said that no force with a sectarian background should intervene in the region, as this would likely adversely impact the local Turkmen population.

The Turkmen Front is absolutely opposed to the participation of the Iran-backed Hashd al-Shaabi in the planned [Tal Afar] campaign, he asserted.

Maruf went on to stress the district's historical Turkmen identity, saying Tal Afar must be rescued from Daesh, which was driven from Iraq's northern city of Mosul last month following a nine-month army campaign.

Recalling a promise by Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi in 2016 that the Hashd al-Shaabi would not participate in any operations in Tal Afar, Maruf said Iraq's Turkmen did not understand why he has broken his word.

Also alleging the existence of a political agenda behind the Hashd al-Shaabis expected participation in the planned operation, Maruf said: They aim to alter Tal Afars historical demography.

Late last month, al-Abadi announced that the Hashd al-Shaabi would actively participate in the upcoming campaign to liberate Daesh-held Tal Afar.

The terrorist group seized Tal Afar, located some 65 kilometers west of Mosul, in mid-2014.

The Hashd al-Shaabis expected participation in the campaign has raised fears of sectarian conflict in the ethnically-diverse region.

Formally incorporated into the Iraqi military last year, the Shia fighting force has faced accusations in the past of having committed atrocities in Sunni areas of Iraq to have fallen under its control.

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Kaynak/Source: