
BALLOT BOXES TARGETED AGAIN IN IRAQ

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Baghdad- Hamza Mustafa

In less than a month, a second incident targeted storage areas of the Independent High Electoral Commission in Kirkuk. A suicide car bomb went off near a storage site housing ballot boxes from a May national election, two days before a manual recount was due to begin.

Commission spokesman Abdul Basit Darwish confirmed the explosion injured 20 people, 18 members of the compounds security, stressing that the ballot boxes were not damaged.

This is the second incident of its kind, where the warehouses of ballot boxes in Rusafa, Baghdad, were set on fire on June 10, in an attempt to influence the electoral process, including challenging the results announced by the Electoral Commission, before the parliament decided to freeze its work and appoint judges from the Supreme Judicial Council.

The judges announced the start of counting and partial counting of the polls as of Tuesday, angering the parliament that struggled on the last day of its mandate to vote on the fourth amendment to the elections law on counting and sorting by hand, however, it failed to achieve a full quorum.

Meanwhile, former MP and deputy head of Turkmen Front, Hasan Turan, told Asharq Al-Awsat that the attack was carried out by terrorists who launched a missile attack on an anti-terrorism unit in charge of the sites security. The suicide bomber used a booby-trapped car similar to police cars in the attack.

Turan explained that the attack did not cause damage to the ballot boxes given that it occurred at the outer entrance to the site.

For her part, Kurdistan Coalition MP Tafka Mahmoud accused certain political parties, which she did not name, of the attack. She said that attack was not terrorist but was done by a certain political party trying to disrupt the counting process, as was the case of the fire incident on Rasafa ballot boxes.

Governments spokesman Saad al-Hadithi asserted that protecting polling stations and ballot boxes is the governments duty. According to an official statement of which Asharq al-Awsat received a copy, security forces have been able to thwart the attack on one of the polling stations of the Commission in the province of Kirkuk and prevented any damage to the boxes.

Hadithi confirmed: Protecting electoral centers and ballot boxes is a governmental and security obligation." He pointed out that Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi has already ordered the security forces in all provinces to ramp up security measures to ensure that no harm or aggression will target these centers.

Kirkuk governor, Rakan Saeed al-Jubouri, newly-elected MP, called upon the Electoral Commission to take the necessary and immediate measures to complete the manual counting and sorting process.

Jubouri asserted that it is imperative to take necessary and immediate measures to complete the process to stop those trying to use terrorism to hamper the Commissions procedures.

Furthermore, the spokesman of the Independent High Electoral Commission, Judge Laith Jabr Hamza said in a statement that the task assigned by the Board of Commissioners under the third amendment of the election law is not just re-calculation of votes, but include the re-counting and manual sorting according to legal process as described by acting laws and regulations.

He explained that it is required to consider and review all appeals and complaints submitted to the Board of Commissioners, currently suspended from work.

He pointed out that results announced can be appealed before the elections judiciary committee of the Federal Court of Cassation and after these appeals are sorted, a list of winners will be sent to the Federal Supreme Court for approval per the Constitution.

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