
IRAQ SECURITY FORCES DISPERSE OIL FIELD SIT-INS

31.07.2018

OilPrice.com (30 July 2018)

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Iraqs security troops have dispersed two sit-ins in southern Iraq, one at a key oil field, local media report. The field is West Qurna-1, one of the biggest in this part of the country.

Iraqi News cited an unnamed source as saying that protesters had gathered at the field and at the provincial council in Basra and had started preparing for sit-ins before the security troops interfered and forcibly dispersed them.

The sit-ins come a day after Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi announced on his Twitter account the firing of Electricity Minister due to poor performance. Blackouts are one of the reasons for the widespread protests that began three weeks ago in Basra and spread across Iraq. At least two previous electricity ministers, Deutsche Welle notes, have been accused of corruption.

Besides corruption, protesters have cited unemployment, poor governance, and alleged Iranian interference in Iraqs internal affairs. Earlier this month, protesters gathered at three fields in southern Iraq [REDACTED] West Qurna-1 and West Qurna-2 [REDACTED] were quickly dispersed by the police. Related: Coke, Meth And Booze: The Flip Side Of The Permian Oil Boom

The Basra province, where a lot of the protests are taking place, is home to Iraqs largest oil fields and accounts for more than 95 percent of the countrys state revenues thanks to oil exports. However, it is also as underdeveloped as most of the rest of Iraq, Al Jazeera notes in a recent overview of the protests, with chronic blackouts, lack of access to clean drinking water, and unemployment.

In fact, what sparked the protests was a sudden cut in Iranian electricity supplies to Basra in early July. The cut came during a heat wave that prompted thousands of locals to take to the street, also prompting them to share their other grievances. According to Al Jazeera, Iran cut exports to force Baghdad to pay its dues for electricity supplied. Since then, protests have been growing despite efforts by the government to quash them and its promise to address the grievances.

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