
IRAN, US CONFLICT SPARKED PROTESTS IN BASRA: IRAQI TURKMEN LEADER

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Protests that have gripped Iraqs southern province of Basra since early July are part of a political ploy, Ershad Salihi, president of the Iraqi Turkmen Front, told Yeni Şafak daily in an exclusive interview.

This political game not only encompasses Basra, but will impact the whole of Iraq. Especially Kirkuk, because Kirkuk and Basra are two cities that are incredibly similar. Although both cities are petrol-rich, the locals never benefit from this, Salihi, who is also a Kirkuk MP and deputy president of the Human Rights Commission, said.

These incidents which have broken out in Basra are a result of the conflict between Iran and America. Attempts to run the Iraqi government and the enmity these two countries have for each other sparked the protests in Basra, he added.

Since July 9, Iraqs Shia-majority central and southern provinces -- especially Basra -- have been rocked by protests to demand better public services, more job opportunities and an end of government corruption.

Prominent Shia cleric Ali al-Sistani does not support either current Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi or former PM Nouri al-Maliki to lead Iraqs next government, according to a Monday statement carried by a website known to be close to al-Sistani. According to the Iraqi constitution, the largest bloc in parliament has the right to select the next prime minister. "Most of the public no longer believes that these individuals can improve the countrys situation and successfully wage the fight against corruption," the statement read. "A new personality -- someone competent, fair and courageous -- must be chosen instead, it added. Al-Sistani enjoys the respect of a large segment of the population, especially in Iraqs Shia-majority central and southern provinces. Formation of a new government has been stalled since May, when Iraq held a hard-fought parliamentary poll, the results of which were later subject to a recount.

Clash of the pawns

While Iran wants the Shiite party it backs to be in power, the U.S. also wants its own pawn, another Shiite party, to be in charge. Regardless of who takes the helms of the government, the Iraqi public will not benefit, Salihi said.

Protests were organized because of the issues surrounding water and electricity, which are basic

necessities. The Iranian consulate was burnt but there were also plans to attack the U.S. consulate. Great precautions were taken and this was prevented, he added.

Since the demonstrations erupted more than two months ago, at least 30 protesters have reportedly been killed -- and scores more injured -- in clashes with security forces.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi arrived in Basra on Monday in hopes of containing a wave of popular protest that has gripped the southern province since early July. According to a statement released by al-Abadi's office, the prime minister arrived in Basra early Monday at the head of a large delegation. A source close to Iraq's Council of Ministers told Anadolu Agency that, while in Basra, al-Abadi and members of his delegation hoped to oversee the application of several government resolutions aimed at easing the popular unrest. Daesh kills four civilians in Iraq's Diyala According to the source, al-Abadi is being accompanied on his visit by several top government officials, including the ministers of information, defense, the interior, health and water resources. Members of the delegation, the same source said, hope to directly oversee the launch of several new projects in Basra aimed at improving public services. Since July 9, Iraq's Shia-majority central and southern provinces -- especially Basra -- have been rocked by protests to demand better public services, more job opportunities and an end of government corruption. Since the demonstrations erupted more than two months ago, at least 30 protesters have reportedly been killed -- and scores more injured -- in clashes with security forces.

These incidents could put Iraq's territorial integrity in danger. A special federal government was requested to be formed for the Basra province. However, with the interference of Gulf states, internal disputes of the Shiite parties and their corruption, the people of Basra took a stand, Salihi said.

In this game, which was designed so that the incidents turn into Shiite-Shiite clashes, foreign powers will be the victors and the Iraqi public will lose yet again. We must be careful in the face of this matter, which could spoil our country's territorial integrity, he added.

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