
IRAQI PM REJECTS PRESENCE OF FOREIGN MILITARY BASES IN IRAQ

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BAGHDAD

Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi on Tuesday met with acting U.S. Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan in Baghdad and expressed the rejection to any permanent foreign military bases on the Iraqi territory.

Abdul Mahdi's comment came during a meeting with Shanahan in Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone, where the two sides discussed "the development of relations between the two countries, the war against terrorism and developments in the region," a statement by Abdul Mahdi's media office said after the meeting.

Abdul Mahdi confirmed that the relations between the two countries "must abide by the basic agreements," asserting that his country "will not accept any foreign bases on the Iraqi territory," according to the statement.

The prime minister also said that "the Iraqi decision is independent and is not affected by any influence or dictates from any party," the statement said.

For his part, Shanahan expressed "his country's pride in the relations of cooperation with Iraq and satisfaction with its security and stability," according to the statement.

He confirmed that "the task of the U.S. forces is to combat Daesh (Islamic State group), train and support the Iraqi forces to eliminate the remnants of Daesh," the statement added.

Earlier in the day, the acting Pentagon chief arrived in the Iraqi capital on an unannounced visit with the aim of meeting with Iraqi officials and visiting U.S. troops stationed in the country, according to the Iraqi NINA news agency.

Foreign media reports said that the goal of Shanahan visit to Iraq was to consult with American military commanders and Iraqi government leaders on the future U.S. troop presence in the country.

"I want to hear first-hand from them about concerns, the political dynamics that they are facing and then based on that we will obviously factor that into our planning," Shanahan told reporters traveling with him.

Shanahan was also scheduled to discuss the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria with U.S. commanders, the media reports said.

Shanahan, 56, officially took over the Pentagon early in January as acting U.S. secretary of defense after his predecessor James Mattis resigned on Dec. 20 over policy disagreements with U.S. President Donald Trump, including whether to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria.

Over 5,000 U.S. troops were deployed in Iraq to support the Iraqi forces in the battles against the extremist IS militants, mainly providing training and advise to the Iraqi forces.

The troops were part of the U.S.-led international coalition that has also been conducting air raids against IS targets in both Iraq and Syria.

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