
SALIH: IRAQ WILL NOT BE A STARTING POINT TO HARM ITS NEIGHBORS

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Iraqi President Barham Salih reiterated on Thursday his rejection to turn the country into a "starting point" for any action against its neighbors.

Salih called for reducing tensions in the Middle East while highlighting the importance of combating terrorism, during a meeting with Iranian Ambassador to Iraq Iraj Masjedi.

The president stressed that "Iraq would not accept to be a starting point for any action that would harm its neighbors or strain the regional situation," underlining the need for mitigating tensions in the already troubled region.

He also underpinned the importance paid by Iraq to reinforce bilateral ties with Iran, out of respect to social and cultural ties, and economic and security interests.

Commenting on his discussions with Iraqi officials on Thursday, Masjedi told reporters that he took the opportunity to convey Tehran's stance on Washington's "unwise" and "stupid" move against the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC).

Besides Salih, Masjedi also met with leader of Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq Ammar Hakim and ex-president Fuad Masum.

"It was necessary for us to let the Iraqi side and our friends know about our views and stance as well as our expectation from them," the diplomat said. Iran is "surprised that the fate of a country like the United States has fallen into the hands of an individual who is committed to no policies or regulations."

Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has called on Iraq to make sure that US forces leave the country as soon as possible. In response, Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant-General Othman al-Ghanemi said US troops would stay in Iraq, but he reassured the Iranian side that their presence is part of training Iraqi forces.

There is no accurate data on the economic activity of IRGC in Iraq but Abdullah Abdullahi, former Commander of Khatam al-Anbiya (the economic arm of IRGC), said during a meeting with Khamenei in Sep. 2016 that the Guards investment in Iraq, especially in Najaf, exceeds USD1 billion.

Back then, Abdullahi revealed IRGCs intention to implement 30 projects in Iraq worth more than

USD2 billion.

The IRGC founded Khatam al-Anbiya Construction Headquarter in 1988 and its role increased during the presidency of former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. It has up to 800 active firms in the Iranian economy, around 135,000 full-time workers and 500,000 contract workers.

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