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## **IRAQ SENDING TEAMS TO TEHRAN, WASHINGTON TO TRY TO CALM TENSIONS - PM**

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By Reuters

BAGHDAD

Iraq will send delegations to Washington and Tehran to help "halt tension" amid fears of a confrontation between the United States and Iran in the Middle East, Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi said on Tuesday.

He said there were no Iraqi groups that wanted to push towards a war, two days after a rocket fired in Baghdad landed close to the U.S. Embassy, the latest in a series of regional attacks the United States believes may have been inspired by Iran.

No one has claimed responsibility for the rocket fired on Sunday into the heavily fortified Green Zone, which houses government buildings and diplomatic missions. U.S. government sources said Washington strongly suspects Shi'ite militias with ties to Tehran were behind the rocket attack.

Iran has rejected allegations of involvement in attacks.

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Monday Iran would be met with "great force" if it attacked U.S. interests in the Middle East.

U.N. Iraq envoy Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert told the U.N. Security Council on Tuesday that Iraq could "be a stabilizing factor in a turbulent region and instead of an arena for conflict" the country could offer a space for regional reconciliation, paving a path for a regional security dialogue.

"At the same time, we cannot ignore that Iraq faces serious challenges in preventing its territory from becoming the theatre for different competitions. So, to all those feeling challenged: placing a further burden on Iraq is truly the last thing it needs," she warned.

Without naming countries, deputy Russian U.N. Ambassador Vladimir Safronkov told the Security Council that the escalation of tensions in the Gulf had to stop and "confrontation should be replaced by dialogue."

"Attempts to draw the country (Iraq) into an artificially stoked confrontation with the Islamic Republic of Iran are absolutely counterproductive and will only have a negative impact on the situation within Iraq and the region as a whole," he said.

(Reporting by John Davison, Ahmed Rasheed, Raya Jalabi, additional reporting by Michelle Nichols

at the United Nations; Editing by Janet Lawrence and Jonathan Oatis)

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