
FEARS OVER NEW IRAQ FORCE TASKED WITH PROTECTING DEMONSTRATORS

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Baghdad - Fadhel al-Nashmi

A new Iraqi force tasked with protecting major social events, respecting the rule of law and promoting freedom of peaceful assembly, has been frowned upon over fears that the authorities would further clamp down on protesters.

This month, scores were killed and thousands were injured in clashes between police and protesters angry at unemployment, corruption and poor public services.

On Monday, the Iraqi Prime Ministers information office announced that the National Security Council, chaired by PM Adel Abdul Mahdi, decided to form the Command of law enforcement forces to perform the tasks of promoting freedom of peaceful assembly in an orderly manner as guaranteed by the constitution.

In addition, it said the force would protect major social events, enforce the law and protect the demonstrators and peaceful freedom of expression in all governorates, taking into account human rights, ensuring the functioning of public institutions, guaranteeing the flow of traffic, and preserving public and private property.

However, some Iraqi officials expressed fear that the new force would be used as a tool for a further crackdown on protesters.

Forming such a force at this time shall send a negative message to demonstrators and citizens, head of the security and defense parliamentary committee Mohammed Rida told Asharq Al-Awsat on Tuesday.

He said the new Command is closer to an anti-riot force rather than a force tasked with enforcing the law.

This move is unsuccessful, Rida said.

Raed Fahmi, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Iraqi Communist Party, told Asharq Al-Awsat that the move gives the impression that the government plans to restrict the right to peaceful protest.

He said the government should appease the Iraqi people by pledging to punish those involved in killing protesters and not by forming a new security force.

<https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1947856/fears-over-new-iraq-force-tasked-protecting-demonstrators>

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