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## **ABADI SLAMS US VP PENCE'S UNANNOUNCED VISIT TO IRAQ**

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Baghdad is the capital of Iraq, not Erbil, read a Saturday statement by the Victory Alliance, a political grouping led by Abadi, after Pence arrived in the capital of semi-autonomous Kurdistan, Press TV reported.

The statement said Pences visit to Erbil, which came after his presence in Ain al-Assad base in Anbar province in western Iraq, was a blow to Iraqs sovereignty and territorial integrity as it showed that the American officials wanted to disrespect and ignore the central government in the capital Baghdad.

It said it was better for the Americans to cancel the trip by Pence if they could not include meetings with officials in Baghdad.

Reports said Pence had spoken on phone with Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi after he landed in Ain al-Assad.

That comes less than a year after US President Donald Trump made a similar visit to the American military base and shunned officials of the central government.

Pences visit comes at a critical time for Iraq as the country has just emerged from weeks of massive protests on the streets.

Media reports said Pence had recommended Abdul-Mahdi to avoid repression in dealing with the protesters and try to listen to them.

He also sought to convince the Iraqi PM that the Arab country should try to disassociate itself from Iran, the neighboring country to which Iraq has developed some strong bonds over the past years.

That comes as senior Iraqi government officials have repeatedly dismissed similar calls from the US, saying ties to Iran should grow despite problems between Tehran and Washington.

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