

Iraqi government distanced itself from U.S. accusations towards Iran

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Iraq backs off allegations on Iran as violence continues apace

The Iraqi government seemed to distance itself from U.S. accusations towards Iran Sunday saying it would not be forced into conflict with its Shiite neighbor. And Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki ordered the formation of a committee to look into foreign intervention in Iraq.

As the government appeared to back down from its hardening stance against Iran, in Anbar, four Marines were killed in the deadliest attack in the Sunni province in months.

The government spokesman, Ali al-Dabbagh, told reporters Sunday that a committee was formed to find “tangible information” about foreign intervention, specifically Iran’s role in Iraq rather than “information based on speculation.”

“We don’t want to be pushed into any conflict with any neighboring countries, especially Iran. What happened before is enough. We paid a lot,” Dabbagh said, referring to the eight years war between the two nations in which an estimated 1 million people died.

While the Iraqi government has long said they would not be used for a proxy war between the U.S. and Iran at odds over Iran’s nuclear aspirations, the statement came as the Iraqi government had taken tough stances towards Iran in the past week. This included sending a delegation last week to Iran to urge them to stop the flow of weapons and to refrain from funding to Shiite militias battling Iraqi Security Forces.

U.S. official in Baghdad rejected allegations made Saturday by a senior Iranian official who, according to Iranian state media, accused the United States of attacking Iraqi civilians.

U.S. Embassy spokesman Armand Cucciniello said that the remarks by an unnamed Iranian official “align the Iranian government with these very extremists and criminal elements and against the Iraqi government and people.

“The only appropriate response...to the concerns raised by the government of Iraq is for Iran to immediately cease providing funding, training and arms to extremist militias in Iraq.”

In Sadr City, the battle continued with overnight U.S. airstrikes in the northeast Shiite slum and stronghold of cleric Muqtada al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army.

While al-Maliki said he would not stand for enemy “gangs” in Iraq, al-Sadr officials said they

were open to negotiation.

Baha al-Araji, a Sadrist lawmaker, condemned attacks on the heavily fortified Green Zone where the U.S. Embassy and Iraqi government offices are located and said that disbanding the Mahdi Army was a legitimate request. The Green Zone has come under heavy rocket fire for over a month.

“There are actions that Islam does not accept including random strikes coming out of Sadr City and into the Green Zone,” al-Araji said. “The government requested the disbanding of the Mahdi Army and this is a legitimate request to establish a state of law. But the law should be implemented upon all parties including the militias that entered the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior and still take their orders from their parties.”

Al-Araji refers to the military wing of their Shiite rival the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, the Badr Organization along with other party militias. The Badr Organization was largely absorbed into the National Police but is known to still take orders from their party.

But he added that the Iraqi government provoked the Mahdi Army after nearly a year of peaceful overtures from al-Sadr, including twice freezing armed activity by his militia. He said he realized during visits to the slum of Sadr City, estimated to have more than 2 million people, how unpopular all political parties, including the Sadrists, had become.

“I believe (al-Sadr) had the idea that he wanted to create a situation in which to disband the Mahdi Army in the southern provinces,” al-Araji said. “But what’s happened lately caused a mixing of the cards and we returned to square one.”

IRAQ IN CHAOS

In Sadr City, a day after a U.S. missile strike landed near a major hospital, officials said that the main water supply was badly damaged and the hospital may have to close if it isn’t repaired within days.

Sadr Hospital is operating on a backup water supply that wasn’t expected to last longer than 48 hours. On Sunday afternoon, a main street outside the hospital was flooded as workmen tried to repair a series of underground pipes that ruptured when the missiles targeted what U.S. military officials described as a militia outpost a few yards from the hospital.

“If there are no more attacks, we might be able to fix it. We don’t know,” said a hospital security official who gave his name as Abu Sajjad. “Otherwise, in two days we will run out of water and the hospital can’t go on.”

The official said that the U.S. strike also damaged 15 ambulances and forced many hospital staff to flee. Not everyone returned to work Sunday, leaving a Spartan emergency ward nearly empty of doctors.

The U.S. military said they were unsure when the more than monthlong battle in Sadr City would end. U.S. soldiers are living in abandoned buildings on the edge of the Baghdad district, attempting to build a wall to stem the flow of rockets but are being slowed by sniper fire. Ministry of Interior officials said that 321 persons were killed in Sadr City in April alone, and 834 were injured.

“They are firing at us every single day,” said Lt. Col. Steve Stover, spokesman for the

Baghdad command. "When it ends is up to the Special Groups," he said referring to Shiite militias.

Also Sunday Iraq's first lady Hiro Talabani survived a roadside bomb attack as she traveled to the National Theatre in Baghdad. Across the capital, mortar and rocket attacks continued. In Mosul, Sarwa Abdul Wahab, a journalist and lawyer, was assassinated.

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