

Iraqi PM's government facing collapse over Israeli airstrikes: Military and political officials

Author:

Tue, 2019-08-27 23:46

BAGHDAD: Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi's government could be toppled within weeks in the wake of a series of strikes on targets associated with paramilitary groups linked to Iran, sources claim.

Government officials, commanders of armed factions and observers told Arab News on Tuesday that recent bomb attacks have embarrassed the premier and robbed him of domestic and international support.

Iraq has seen 18 bombings and two airstrikes over the past three years, most of which have hit warehouses and headquarters of armed factions that have fought Daesh alongside the Iraqi government and which are mostly linked to Iran.

The latest bombings last week targeted three weapons stores near Baghdad belonging to Kata'ib Hezbollah-Iraq, an anti-US and pro-Iranian Shiite militia in Iraq, while a drone hit one of its headquarters in the border city of Qaim near the Iraqi-Syrian border on Sunday, killing two of its commanders.

Commanders of the Shiite armed factions have accused Israel of carrying out the attacks with US cooperation.

However, the Iraqi government said it did not have enough technical evidence to prove the claims despite acknowledging that the majority of the bombings were deliberate and carried out by external forces.

Last week a number of American officials revealed that Israel was involved in carrying out an attack on a military base north of Baghdad on July 19 which killed three of Kata'ib Hezbollah-Iraq's leaders, leaving Abdul-Mahdi facing criticism for failure to disclose the results of government investigations into previous similar bombings.

Leaders of the pro-Iranian armed factions have threatened to target US forces and American interests in Iraq as "they provide the required cover for the Israeli side and allow its aircraft to violate Iraqi airspace (which is under full US control)."

Hanine Al-Qadoo, a prominent lawmaker and one of the armed factions' leaders, told reporters on Tuesday: "The (Iraqi) government is embarrassed. Revealing the results of the investigations (of the bombings) and its leaders, means that the (Iraqi) government has to take action. It has just two options, fight the Zionist entity and cancel the (bilateral security) strategic

agreement with Washington.

“So, Washington will force the government to withhold the results of the investigation because it condemns the international coalition which is responsible for protecting Iraqi airspace according to the agreement.”

Iraqi President Barham Salih sought to calm the situation and contain the crisis by holding several meetings with concerned parties, the most recent on Monday in the presence of Abdul-Mahdi, the speaker of Parliament, militia leaders, and Faleh Fayyadh, head of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).

“The recent attacks on the PMF are partly an attempt to drag them and the national defense system away from its continuing important role in eliminating Daesh remnants and eliminating terrorism once and for all,” Salih said in a statement on Monday.

“These attacks are a blatant act of aggression targeting Iraq ... and Iraq will take, through the government and all active channels and international and regional organizations, all measures that will deter the aggressors and defend Iraq, its security and sovereignty.”

Iraq said it would file a complaint to the UN Security Council about the “flagrant aggression.”

“Attendees recognized Israel’s responsibility for some of these attacks, but the government wants more time to complete its investigation to obtain sufficient technical evidence to file a complaint at the UN Security Council,” a commander of one of the armed factions who attended Monday’s meeting told Arab News.

“The issue is purely technical, and the results of the investigations presented by Abdul-Mahdi to us proved nothing, so the statements did not name Israel. But everyone agreed to convey a clear message to the international coalition forces in Iraq that they bear responsibility for these violations because the Iraqi airspace is under their control.

“We cannot say that they are complicit because dragging the (Iraqi) armed factions into a battle with them now in Iraq is not in their interest. But they certainly fail to protect Iraqi airspace.”

Iraq has been a direct battleground between the US and Iran since 2003. Both countries are using all their human and technical resources inside Iraq to put more pressure on each other to get some concessions on Iran’s nuclear program.

Controlling the armed factions linked to Iran and preventing their involvement in any armed confrontation with the Americans inside Iraqi territory, is one of the biggest challenges facing the Iraqi government and threatens to undermine its efforts not to align with the parties to the conflict, Iran and America.

US confirmation of Israeli involvement in one of the attacks has given Abdul-Mahdi’s rivals “perfect justification” to attack the government and seek to

bring it down.

“All feedbacks that we receive about the performance of the government reflect dissatisfaction at home and abroad,” one of Salih’s senior advisers told Arab News. “The Americans refuse to receive Abdul-Mahdi or deal with him. His allies at home have shaken off around him and are working with the factions and his rivals to start an interrogation campaign at the Parliament for his ministers, which will begin next week to topple them.”

Moqtada Al-Sadr, who controls the largest parliamentary bloc and one of the biggest armed factions, on Monday demanded a further investigation under international supervision before taking any decision.

Salih’s adviser said: “The pressures are very large, and the situation is inflamed and does not bear more procrastination and silence. This issue must be handled wisely before the situation in Iraq explodes.”



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Iraq’s leaders condemn deadly drone attack blamed on Israel
Finding homes in ruin, destitute Iraqis return to camps

Istanbul's new opposition mayor cuts funding to some pro-government groups

Author:

Tue, 2019-08-27 23:45

ANKARA: Istanbul's new opposition municipality cancelled the transfer of more than 350 million lira to some pro-government foundations, Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu said on Tuesday, in one of his first moves against Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan since his election.

Imamoglu, of the main opposition Republican People's Party, won a decisive victory in a June 24 re-run vote, ending a 25-year rule by Erdogan's AK Party (AKP) and its predecessors in the country's largest city and commercial hub. Throughout his election campaign, Imamoglu vowed to uncover what he said was the wasteful transfer of millions of lira to pro-government foundations by previous administrations.

"As of now, we have completed the cancellation of a total of 357 million lira (\$62 million) of resources that were given or transferred to foundations," he told reporters on Tuesday, adding that this figure included 56 million lira of "food support" and a 165 million lira of building.

"It's incredible. On what are you spending the people's money?" he said.

"This is only the beginning."

The municipality also annulled its protocol agreements with five foundations receiving transfers.

One of the five was the Turkey Youth and Education Service Foundation (TURGEV), which Erdogan founded when he was mayor of Istanbul in the 1990s. Its board includes Erdogan's daughter, his communication director's wife, and a former AKP mayor.

Other foundations that had protocol agreements annulled and fund transfers cancelled include the Turkish Youth Foundation (TUGVA), the Ensar Foundation, the Aziz Mahmut Hidayi foundation, and the Daru'l Funun Theology foundation. The move comes after Turkish authorities last week replaced Kurdish mayors in three southeastern cities with state officials and detained more than 400 people for suspected militant links, sparking sharp criticism from the opposition.

Erdogan has said his government would take similar measures in other parts of the country if needed. But Imamoglu said such remarks were "saddening" and meaningless.

"Istanbul is in safe hands. Istanbul is being managed by a mayor who received close to 50% of the votes of Istanbulites," Imamoglu said.



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Istanbul's new mayor Ekrem Imamoglu faces tough road ahead after landslide win 20 years after deadly quake, Istanbul ill-prepared for 'Big One'

[Trump would meet Iran's President Rouhani if 'circumstances' were correct](#)

Mon, 2019-08-26 17:38

BIARRITZ, France: US President Donald Trump said he was prepared to meet his Iranian counterpart Hassan Rouhani in the next few weeks after talks over Tehran's nuclear program at a G7 summit in France.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif made a surprise appearance on the sidelines of the summit in Biarritz on Sunday at the invitation of French President Emmanuel Macron.

Macron said that the “conditions for a meeting” between Trump and Rouhani to take place “in the next few weeks” had been created through intensive diplomacy and consultations.

“If the circumstances were correct, I would certainly agree to that,” Trump said at a joint press conference with Macron.

Macron also said that both he and Trump believed Iran should not have a nuclear weapon and should not destabilize the Gulf region.

Asked by reporters if he thought the timeline proposed by his French counterpart sounded realistic, Trump replied: “It does,” adding he thought Rouhani would also be in favor.

“I think he’s going to want to meet. I think Iran wants to get this situation straightened out,” Trump added.

Trump has put in place a policy of “maximum pressure” on Tehran over its disputed nuclear program via crippling sanctions that are seen as raising the risk of conflict in the Middle East.

The US president last year unilaterally pulled out of a landmark 2015 international deal that placed limits on Tehran’s nuclear activities in exchange for trade, investment and sanctions relief.

Rouhani defended Zarif’s Biarritz visit in a speech aired live on state television on Monday.

“I believe that for our country’s national interests we must use any tool,” he said.

But hard-liners have criticized the initiative, with the ultra-conservative Kayhan newspaper saying the trip was “improper” and sent “a message of weakness and desperation.”

Macron has urged the US administration to offer some sort of sanctions relief to Iran, such as lifting sanctions on oil sales to China and India, or a new credit line to enable exports.

In return, Iran would return to complying with the 2015 deal.

Commenting on the talks about Iran at the G7, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said: “It’s a big step forward. Now there is an atmosphere in which talks are welcomed.”



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Iran says tanker, its oil pursued by US sold to unnamed buyer Trump caught off guard as Iranian foreign minister Zarif flies in to G7 summit

[Iraq begins probe into deadly drone attack near border](#)

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Mon, 2019-08-26 10:50

BAGHDAD: Iraq's military said Monday it has launched an investigation into a purported Israeli strike that killed one paramilitary fighter and severely

wounded another near the country's western border with Syria.

The attack on Sunday hit a position near the border town of Al-Qaim held by Brigade 45, a unit belonging to the powerful Hashed Al-Shaabi paramilitary force.

"An investigation is ongoing now to determine what happened with the strike," Iraq's military spokesman Yehya Rasool told AFP.

The Hashed blamed Israel on Sunday, saying Israeli drones targeted the position with US air cover.

"As part of the string of Zionist attacks on Iraq, the evil Israeli crowds have returned to target the Hashed Al-Shaabi, this time with two drones inside Iraqi territory," the statement said.

The attack killed Kazem Mohsen, Brigade 45's "logistical support chief" and a member of its rocket squad, also known by his nom de guerre Abu Ali Al-Dabi. Hundreds mourned at a funeral procession for him in Baghdad on Monday morning, including Ahmad Assadi, a member of parliament and spokesman for the Hashed's parliamentary bloc "Fatah."

"We will work in the coming days to hold an emergency parliamentary meeting to discuss this issue and take the appropriate decisions," he said in a video published by the Hashed.

The attack was the latest in a string of blasts and drone sightings at Hashed bases across Iraq, for which no one has claimed responsibility.

The Iraqi government has carried out investigations into some of those incidents, blaming an unidentified drone for at least one and saying another was a "premeditated" act without making specific accusations.

Meanwhile, a powerful bloc in Iraq's parliament is calling for the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq following the series of airstrikes.

The Fatah Coalition said on Monday it holds the United States fully responsible for this Israeli aggression, "which we consider to be a declaration of war on Iraq and its people."

The coalition is a parliament bloc representing Iran-backed paramilitary militias known as the Popular Mobilization Forces.

The statement adds that US troops are no longer needed in Iraq.

(With AP and AFP)



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Israel reduces Gaza fuel supply after rocket attack
Israel's Syria assaults kill Hezbollah men, Iranian

[Erdogan says Turkish troops will enter planned Syria safe zone "soon"](#)

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Mon, 2019-08-26 10:44

ANKARA: Turkish ground troops will enter a planned safe zone in northern Syria "very soon," President Tayyip Erdogan said on Monday, after a joint operation center with the United States opened at the weekend. Turkey and the United States agreed earlier this month to set up the joint center for the planned safe zone along Syria's northeastern border, but gave

few details on the size of the zone or the command structure of the forces to operate there.

“We are slowly making progress in our efforts to establish a safe zone,” Erdogan said. “Just like many other issues some saw as untouchable, we are putting the east of the Euphrates issue on track,” Erdogan said.

Turkey has repeatedly said that it would not tolerate any delays to the agreement by US officials, warning that it will mount a cross-border offensive on its own to clear its borders from the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia if necessary.

On Monday, Erdogan said progress was being made on plans to establish the safe zone, but added that Turkey had made all preparations to carry out its own plans if its expectations are not met.

“Our priority is dialogue and cooperation. If we are pushed to a road that we don’t want or face stalling, our preparations are ready and we will implement our own plans,” he said. “Our UAVs and helicopters have entered the region. Very soon, our ground troops will also enter the region.”

The comments come two days after Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said the joint US-Turkey center became fully operational. Akar also said some YPG positions in the region had been destroyed by US troops as part of the deal. Speaking on Monday, Akar said that talks were underway for Turkish and US soldiers to begin joint patrols in the planned safe zone area “soon.”

Ankara and Washington have been at loggerheads over a host of issues including conflicting policies in Syria. US support for the YPG has enraged Turkey, which views the militia as a terrorist organization linked to Kurdish insurgents inside the country.



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Syrian Kurds say will help implement US-Turkey 'safe zone'
Damascus rejects Turkey-US plan, Kurds give guarded welcome