

'Iraq to reject US defense pact'

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Iraqi Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi **Iraqi Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi has declared his country's opposition to a proposed security agreement with the United States.**

Al-Hashemi who wound up his five-day visit to Jordan on Monday said that "There is an Iraqi national consensus to reject the draft agreement" which is being discussed by Baghdad and Washington, DPA reported.

He was responding to questions about a draft agreement that was reportedly reached between the Iraqi government and the United States for regulating the US military presence in Iraq after 2008.

The Iraqi vice president's opposition to the pact comes as the proposed pact has been under fire by religious and political leaders in Iraq.

Iraq's most revered Shia cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani also objected to the security accord and reiterated that he would not allow Iraq to sign such a deal with "the US occupiers" as long as he was alive.

Iraqi anti-American cleric Moqtada al-Sadr said the proposed pact was "against Iraqi national interests", calling on Iraqis to protest and demonstrate after every Friday prayers until the agreement is cancelled.

"Iraq will not accept any formula that undermines its sovereignty and runs counter to the Iraqi interests," al-Hashemi said in a speech to the Jordanian Society of Sciences and Culture in Amman on Monday.

Noting the country is "facing dangerous challenges," he said Arab countries "can play an effective role in helping Iraq to come out of its present plight and to forge a national reconciliation there".

During his visit, the Iraqi vice president held talks with King Abdullah II and Prime Minister Nader Dahabi and apparently convinced them to send an ambassador to Baghdad to reopen the Jordanian embassy.

US Arab allies in the region have so far failed to open embassies in Baghdad, despite Washington's requests.

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