

Thursday, 25 April 2013

Iraq's Sunnis gear up against the country's army



Residents of a number of Sunni cities in Iraq have announced the formation of “military forces” to counter attack the Iraqi army and its crackdown against protesters calling for Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki –a Shiite –to step down, Al Arabiya reported on Thursday.

The announcements come after Sunni tribesmen were called to arm following a government sponsored military raid on a Sunni Muslim anti-government protest at a camp in Hawija, near Kirkuk, on Tuesday.

Dozens of people were killed and injured in the initial incident. It set off a wave of revenge attacks that hit five different Sunni-majority provinces, killing at least 110 people.

The violence is the deadliest so far linked to demonstrations that erupted in Sunni areas of the Shiite-majority country more than four months ago.

The Sunni-stronghold province of Anbar on Thursday has also announced the formation of its own “army” made from members from its local tribes.

“We have formed a tribal army that we named ‘The Dignity and Honor Army’ to defend ourselves against dirty militias,” Ahmed Abu Risha, head of the Iraq Awakening Movement in Anbar, told Al Arabiya.

The current Iraqi army is made of “sectarian militias,” and the “real Iraqi army” was the one that was dismantled by the “criminal” U.S. former official, Paul Bremer, Abu Risha said.

Bremer was the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority of Iraq after the toppling Saddam Hussein’s regime in 2003.

Abu Risha urged Iraqi army members, hailing from the mainly Shiite southern tribes in the country, to

Meanwhile, Al Arabiya's correspondent reported an explosion in the Shiite holy city of Najaf.

However, when asked about the latest blast report, Abu Risha said: "We are against all explosions and terrorism in Iraq."

There was also disintegration in the Iraqi army itself.

The Iraqi Member of Parliament, Sheikh Shaalan al-Karim, told Al Arabiya that there were members from the Iraqi army who have defected and joined tribes in the Sunni Saladin province.

The Sunni protesters have called for the resignation of Shiite Maliki and railed against the alleged targeting of their community by the authorities.

Clashes between Sunni protesters and Iraqi security forces heightened on Thursday.

Iraq declared a curfew on yet another Sunni province, Diyala, Al Arabiya reported.

The Iraqi police reported that about 41 people were killed in clashes between gunmen and police in northern Sunni city of Mosul.

The anti-government furor has also led to the destruction of a pipeline carrying crude from the city of Kirkuk to Turkey's Mediterranean coast.

The flow of oil has been halted, sources at Iraq's North Oil Company told Reuters.

The attack took place in the northern city of Shirqat.

Anger over the spiraling situation

The head of the Iraqi List, a parliamentary bloc, has criticized the government's decision to involve the army in the anti-government protest in Hawija on Tuesday.

Suleiman al-Gamili told Al Arabiya that the incident pitted the military against the Iraqi people.

Iraqi Parliament Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi also labeled the incident in Hawija a "catastrophe," adding that the army's action against the protesters was a "flagrant violation of the constitution."