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Maliki Moves Against ‘Coup,’ US Backs Ouster

By Jason Ditz

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Accusing President Fuad Masum of plotting a “coup” against his continued rule, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has ordered large numbers of special forces and military loyal to him deployed across the capital city of Baghdad.

Troops and tanks were moving across Baghdad overnight, with significant numbers centered around the Green Zone, where government buildings are located. Troops were also reported outside of the presidential palace in Baghdad.

The dispute between Masum and Maliki appears to have begun with the adjournment of parliament earlier Sunday. President Masum was supposed to have appointed a PM-designee to try to form a new government, and with Maliki’s State of Law Party having the plurality, Maliki believes that should be him.

But Masum didn’t appoint anybody, as the Iraqi National Alliance did not present a consensus Shi’ite candidate. Maliki insisted that the failure to appoint him was tantamount to a coup against him.

Having reneged on all power-sharing deals after losing the last election, Maliki has retained the positions of Defense Minister and Interior Minister, meaning effectively all troops in the country

are under his direct command, and the most loyal of those are the ones who were deployed into Baghdad this evening.

Where this will lead remains to be seen, but parliament is not scheduled to meet again for at least nine days, and Maliki's latest show of force is only going to add to the growing disquiet about his continued rule.

At the same time, the US State Department has issued statements announcing US backing for President Masum, as well as for the ouster of Maliki, with deputy spokeswoman Marie Harf saying the US wants a prime minister who will build a "national consensus" instead of the divisive Maliki.

The US has made clear in the past its preference for Maliki's replacement, but this is the most direct comment yet suggesting their desire to see his immediate ouster from power, and will add international intrigue to the growing political battle.