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11 Iraqis Killed As Maliki Promises To Stop Autonomy Bids

By Margaret Griffis

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At least **11 Iraqis were killed and 17 more were wounded** as Iraqis seek reconciliation in the face of a growing threat of sectarianism. The latest blow to harmony between Iraqi's ethnic, religious and political groups came from the prime minister who threatened to quash any attempts at increasing regional autonomy; however former rival and recent ally Shi'ite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr moved forward with a Code of Honor that may tone down recent volatility.

While admitting Iraqi provinces have a constitutional right to seek greater regional autonomy, Prime Minister **Nouri al-Maliki** also promised that he would reject any bids for that change. He described the bids as reeking of sectarianism and asked, "What's the reason for a having a ruler in Baghdad?"

Two provinces recently began the process of transforming into semi-autonomous regions, **Salah ad Din** and **Diyala**, while officials Basra intimated they would reinstate plans they had put on hold a couple years ago. Officials in **Anbar** province have also increased their demands for better services, suggesting similar discussions are being held there. The **Turkmen** ethnic group itself demanded that **Kirkuk** province consider a status change as well or split the province so they may pursue their own bid. These changes would create new regions similar in make-up to **Iraqi Kurdistan**, which has its own separate government but remains somewhat subservient to Baghdad.

The arrest of hundreds of Sunnis under the guise of tamping down a **Ba'ath Party** threat triggered Salah ad Din's vote for autonomy, but the latest political conflict really began when

predominantly Sunni Diyala voted to start its own process. Shi'ite militiamen were sent to violently halt the attempt, forcing 18 of the 29 Sunni members of the council to flee to northern Diyala or Kurdistan. Shortly thereafter, members of the **Iraqiya** boycotted parliament over the arrests, the denial of bids, and other governmental mismanagement. Maliki, in turn, started accusing senior Sunni politicians of terrorist ties or ineptitude.

So far, the Maliki camp has issued a warrant for Vice President **Tareq al-Hashemi** — who had been one of the loudest voices against the crackdown — and asked parliament to dismiss the deputy prime minister, **Saleh al-Mutlaq**. He also hinted at a campaign against Finance Minister **Rafi al-Issawi**. Today, the finger pointing may be turning towards President **Jalal Talabani** who is Kurdish. Because Hashemi sought refuge at the president's home in Suleimaniya, an advisor to Maliki said it was the Talabani's responsibility to hand over Hashemi not Kurdish leaders. Talabani said the vice president would appear for court so long as it "where justice, investigation and trial are assured."

Some believe that Thursday's extensive bombings in the capital were a response to Maliki's campaign, especially the bombing of the anti-corruption agency. However, Hashemi said the scale of Thursday's attacks was too grand for **al-Qaeda** to have coordinated them. He suggested that the Iraqi security forces were behind them instead, intimating those under the control of the premier. Maliki said that at least four army officials were involved and ordered security personnel to keep watch for infiltrators. In what may be the first arrest, a security force from Baghdad fought police in Mussayab to gain access to one suspect.

In the meantime, Shi'ite cleric **Moqtada al-Sadr** held a conference today and then issued a 14-point peace proposal. The proposal rejects the recent violence and calls for respecting for all Iraq's ethnic and religious groups. Many officials have already agreed to and signed the proposal. Also, National Alliance leader **Ibrahim al-Jafari** is acting as a mediator in discussions between Maliki's State of Law party and Hashemi's Iraqiya party, but talks have failed so far. Also, Protests calling for the return of Hashemi took place in Karbala and Baghdad, just as day after anti-Maliki protests across the country.

Meanwhile, at least **11 Iraqis were killed and 17 more were wounded** in the latest bloodshed.

In **Mosul**, gunmen killed two soldiers and an officer. A civilian was found dead. Three policemen were injured in a sticky bomb explosion.

In **Kirkuk**, a primary school principal was killed in a sticky bomb explosion. The bodies of two kidnapped brothers were discovered bearing gunshot wounds. A K.D.P. official was wounded in a sticky bomb blast.

Two policemen were killed and four more were wounded in **Hawija** when a roadside bomb exploded.

An explosion killed a soldier and wounded two more in **Baaj**.

An army major was killed and his wife wounded when insurgents blasted his **Yathrib** home.

In **Baghdad**, a blast wounded a Baghdad TV announcer and her daughter.

A bomb targeting a train traveling through **Dujail** exploded and wounded the driver.

Three workers were wounded in a blast at a construction site in **Garma**.

Five homes were destroyed in **Inshaa** during a series of explosions.