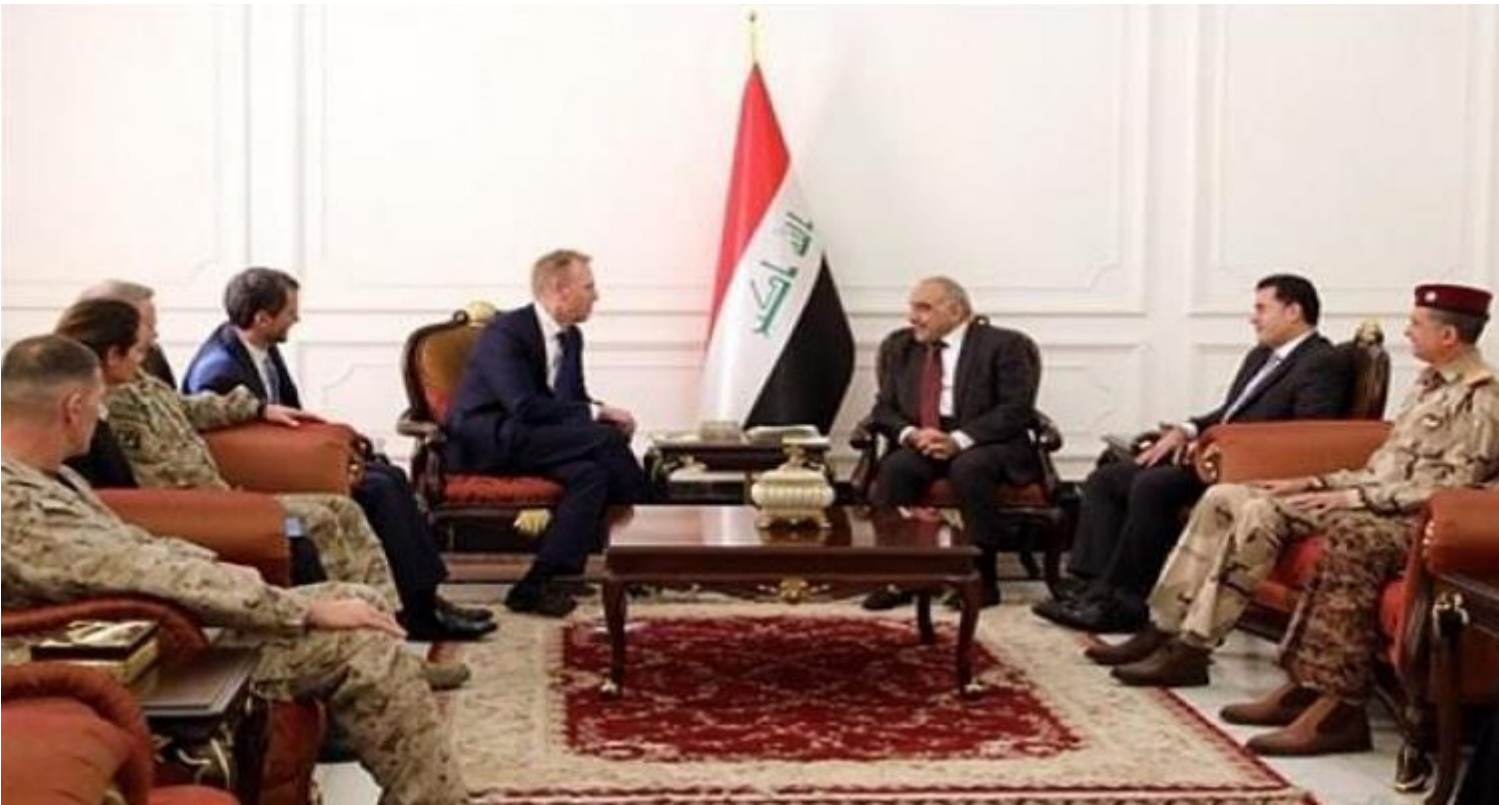


Iraqi prime minister says no foreign bases will be allowed on Iraqi soil



Baghdad, February 14 (RHC)-- Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi had told the visiting U.S. defense chief that his country will accept no foreign military bases on its soil, just as it will not take dictates from outsiders.

In a meeting with Acting U.S. Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan in Baghdad, Abdul-Mahdi said that Iraq-U.S. relations must be based on the “basic agreements” existing between the two sides, which merely deal with fighting terrorism and training Iraqi forces, and “nothing else,” the Iraqi News reported.

Iraq makes “independent” decisions and will not be influenced by foreign pressure or dictates, he noted, reiterating Baghdad’s objection to the presence of foreign military bases on Iraqi territory.

Abdul-Mahdi also hailed Iraq’s achievements in restoring stability after defeating the Daesh terrorist group, and urged international support for the ongoing reconstruction process. The prime minister said Iraq was open to enhanced cooperation and relations with Arab and regional states in line with national interests.

Back in 2014, Daesh launched a campaign of attacks and vicious acts of bloodshed that resulted in Iraq losing a third of its territory. Iraqi army soldiers and allied fighters fought back fiercely until they managed to recapture the lost territory three years later.

In December 2017, Iraq finally declared the end of Daesh reign of terror, thanks to Iran's military advisory support. The U.S., however, has kept up its military presence in the Arab country.

President Donald Trump sparked a wave of condemnations in Iraq earlier this month when he said he intended to keep U.S. troops there to keep a close eye on Iran. Reacting to those remarks days later, Abdul-Mahdi insisted that his country could in no way be used for action against others. Iraq's most senior Shia cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani also rejected propositions that Iraq would serve as a launching pad to harm other countries.

The American president also raised the ire of Iraqis by making a surprise visit in late December to US forces deployed to Anbar Province, with no stop in Baghdad. The move prompted calls for the expulsion of U.S. troops.

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