

# *Iraq will not join anti-Iran maritime mission, rejects Israel's involvement*

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Baghdad, September 19 (RHC)-- The Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs says Baghdad will not join a U.S.-led mission in the Persian Gulf purportedly seeking to protect maritime navigation, warning that such a military force will “complicate the political and security situation” in the Middle East region.

The ministry’s spokesman, Ahmed al-Sahaf, warned in a statement on Thursday that the U.S. State Department’s plan for the formation of a military force to allegedly protect the strategic water body will only escalate tensions in the region.

Sahaf further opposed Israel’s possible participation in that coalition, stressing that ensuring security in the Persian Gulf was the responsibility of its littoral states.

The remarks came on the same day that the United Arab Emirates followed Saudi Arabia in joining the U.S.-led Persian Gulf force. The UAE’s official Emirates News Agency (WAM) reported Abu Dhabi’s decision to become a member of the so-called International Maritime Security Construct on Thursday – a day after Riyadh said it was joining the alliance.

It quoted Salem al-Zaabi of the Emirati Foreign Ministry as saying that the UAE's accession to the US-led coalition is meant "to secure the flow of energy supplies to the global economy and contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security."

The state-run Saudi Press Agency (SPA), citing an unnamed official source in the country's Defense Ministry, reported on Wednesday that Riyadh had decided to be a member of the military coalition, which operates in the Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, the Sea of Oman and the Persian Gulf.

It also claimed that the U.S.-led coalition is meant to "protect merchant ships through providing safe navigation" and safeguard the interests of the alliance's member countries.

Washington announced the decision for a military coalition in the Persian Gulf after a series of attacks on oil tankers near the Strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Oman, which Washington blamed on Iran. Tehran rejected the allegations, describing the attacks as suspicious.

Back on August 12, Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohamed Ali al-Hakim expressed his country's opposition to the Israeli regime's possible involvement in the US-led maritime force in the Persian Gulf, warning that the presence of foreign forces, including Western countries, in the strategic water body will be fueling tensions.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohamed Ali al-Hakim says the presence of Western forces in the Persian Gulf is fueling regional tension.

"Iraq rejects the participation of Zionist forces in any military force to secure the passage of ships in the [Persian] Gulf. The [Persian] Gulf littoral states can together secure the transit of ships," Hakim wrote in a post published on his official Twitter page.

"Iraq is seeking to reduce tension in our region through peaceful negotiations," he said, warning that "the presence of Western forces in the region will increase tension."

Iran has also called into question the US motive for such a coalition, saying the United States seeks to sow insecurity in the Persian Gulf and the strategic Strait of Hormuz to use it as an excuse to form a maritime force in the region.

Tehran has also scoffed at the idea of Israel's participation in such a coalition. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said in August that the Israeli regime is not even capable of securing the areas it has occupied let alone that of the Persian Gulf. The Israelis "should try providing security where they are if they are really capable of doing that," Rouhani said at a cabinet meeting.

U.S. Marine General Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said on July 9 that the U.S. was proceeding with plans to assemble the coalition purportedly aimed at ensuring freedom of navigation in waters off Iran and Yemen. "We're engaging now with a number of countries to see if we can put together a coalition that would ensure freedom of navigation both in the Straits of Hormuz and the Bab el-Mandeb," Dunford said.

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