

Millions of Iraqis march to demand expulsion of U.S. troops



Baghdad, January 24 (RHC)-- Iraqis have rallied in Baghdad in massive numbers to call for an end to U.S. military presence in the country following high-profile assassinations and airstrikes targeting anti-terror forces.

Sayed Sadiq al-Hashemi, the director of the Iraqi Center for Studies, said more than 2.5 million took part in the demonstrations on Friday. Since the early hours on Friday, huge crowds of men, women and children of all ages converged on the Jadriyah neighborhood near Baghdad University. The protesters were seen carrying banners and chanting slogans calling for the expulsion of U.S. forces. "Get out, get out, occupier!" some shouted, while others chanted, "Yes to sovereignty!"

On January 5, the Iraqi parliament voted overwhelmingly in favor of a resolution calling for the expulsion of all foreign forces after the US assassination of Iran's General Qassem Soleimani and his Iraqi trenchmate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

The massive rally came after influential cleric Muqtada al-Sadr called on Iraqis to stage "a million-strong, peaceful, unified demonstration to condemn the American presence and its violations." Sadr issued a statement on Friday calling for U.S. bases to be shut down and Iraqi airspace closed to US warplanes and surveillance aircraft. He warned that U.S. presence in the country will be dealt with as an occupying force if Washington does not agree with Iraqi demands to withdraw from the country.

In a message delivered through a representative at Friday prayer in the holy city of Karbala, top cleric Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani also urged Iraqi political groups to do what is needed to safeguard the country's sovereignty. He called on Iraqi groups to stand united, far from any foreign influence in countering the dangers which threaten the country.

On Thursday ahead of the planned rallies, Sadr called on Iraqis to mobilize and defend the country's independence and sovereignty. "Oh women, men and youth of the country, the time is now upon us to defend the country, its sovereignty and independence," Sadr said in a tweet.

"Spread the word of an independent future Iraq that will be ruled by the righteous; an Iraq which will not know of corruption nor aggression" he added, calling on Iraqis to expel the "tyrants."

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