

## **Uproar at Threat to Kill Extremist Sympathisers**

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Sunnis urge resignation of defence minister who threatened to target those who shelter insurgents.

A political storm continues to rage over the Iraqi defence minister's recent threat to kill people helping insurgents and destroy their properties.

Sadun al-Dulaimi earlier this month said the security forces would "demolish the homes of people sheltering terrorists and kill all owners of the houses ... including women and children", provoking a wave of Sunni Arab anger and condemnation.

Dulaimi's controversial remarks came as he announced a new military operation in the largely Sunni Anbar province. He said the measures would help eliminate terrorism and violence in Iraq.

Furious Sunni political leaders said his comments were inflammatory and likely to fuel violence.

Some said it was a cynical ploy to both secure a post in the next government and find favour with the US whose forces have linked up with Iraqi troops to launch attacks on insurgent strongholds in western Iraq.

"Dulaimi's statement calls for violence - imagine if it is put into action," said Sami al-Jibury, a lawyer and human rights activist.

Jibury predicted that "many Iraqis will be killed" following the minister's declaration.

Sunni Arab groups have largely boycotted Iraqi politics following the US occupation and have shown little enthusiasm for the new Iraqi political system that many of them argue will sideline their community.

The Sunni Iraqi National Dialogue Conference condemned Dulaimi's comments and called for his resignation.

"We ask that prime minister Ibrahim al-Ja'afari to remove him from his post and appoint a minister who loves Iraq and does not enjoy hearing children cry," the party said in a statement.

Ja'afari has continued to support Dulaimi, who did not apologise for the comments and continues to defend them.

The Iraqi Islamic Party, the only Sunni group currently participating in Iraqi politics, said in a statement that Dulaimi was "following the wrong path set by the government, which pursues innocent people who are powerless".

The party said the government's policies exacerbated the security situation.

Iraqi Islamic Party politburo member Ala al-Maki said Iraqi leaders may claim they fight terrorism but actually launch attacks on "our Sunni Arab sons and families ... driving them away from participating in politics".

He and many others have said they do not believe it a coincidence that US and Iraqi forces launch major operations in Sunni areas shortly before elections and referendums, suggesting such actions are meant to limit turnout in the regions. US and Iraqi forces have maintained that they attempt to secure insurgent strongholds prior to elections so that voters can safely go to the polls.

Voter turnout in Anbar, a centre of fighting between the Sunni Arab insurgency and US and Iraqi forces, was only 32 per cent in last month's constitutional referendum. Parliamentary elections will be held on December 15.

"Deep from my heart, I hope that Anbar and the rest of Iraq will stabilise in terms of security, and I hope that the people of Anbar will participate in the upcoming elections," Dulaimi said during a follow-up press conference last week.

Dulaimi, himself a Sunni Arab, supported anti-terrorism legislation recently passed by parliament that allows the state to execute those who help extremists.

"Who determines that this is terrorism and that is not?" questioned Sheikh Mahmoud al-Mashadani, a member of the Iraqi National Dialogue Conference. "This is a new campaign against the Sunni Arabs to destroy their houses and kill their women and children under the pretext of fighting terrorism ... What they do now is terrorism itself."

Nasir Kadhim is an IWPR trainee journalist in Baghdad.

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