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Iraqi Cabinet Wants Security Agreement Altered

The Iraqi government's spokesman, Ali al-Dabbagh, issued a statement saying, "The Council of Ministers has unanimously agreed that there are necessary amendments which need to be made to the current draft in order to raise the agreement to a nationally acceptable level." He did not say what the amendments were, but some government ministers reportedly demanded changes to language that grants immunity from prosecution for U.S. soldiers in Iraqi courts and that would allow U.S. troops to stay beyond 2011 if both the United States and Iraq agree.



"The Iraqis want to find a specific formula regarding the withdrawal that closes the door and doesn't leave all the windows open," said Sheikh Jalaluddin al-Saghir, of the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, the largest party in the governing Shiite coalition.

Saghir proposed that Iraq seek from the UN a renewable six-month or one-year Security Council extension of the mandate providing the world body's authorization for the presence of U.S. forces. Presumably, U.S. and Iraqi officials could resume negotiations when the next U.S. president takes office next year.

"When there is a new administration, there will be new options, new conditions," said Saghir.

On October 21, Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, issued a solemn warning to the Iraqis to reconsider rejection of the existing agreement. Mullen said that Iraqi Army and police forces would not be able to counter insurgent and terrorist violence after December 31 without assistance from the U.S. military. The admiral said the Iraqis, "will not be ready to provide for their own security."

However, the next day, Iraqi government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh indicated that the Iraqis had taken umbrage with Mullen's remarks. "Iraqi government is deeply concerned by the statement of Admiral Michael Mullen," said al-Dabbagh. "Such a statement is not welcomed by Iraq. All Iraqis and their political entities are aware of their responsibilities and are assessing whether to sign the deal or not in a way that it is suitable to them."

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