

The PMF parades threatening Iraqi state

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Some of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) groups stormed Green Zone and shut entrances of the area which hosts foreign embassies and government buildings on May 26, it was like any other traditional coup there were forces been deployed and made people of Baghdad nervous. In the series of clashes and tensions between Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi and militias that happens from time to time was serious and dangerous development in the conflict between forces loyal to the state and non-state actors. And this happening at time the country is preparing itself for the snap elections.

This time the movement of these pro-Iranian militias was not a show of force as two month ago on March 25th Hizbullah brigades and Rab'alla did in Baghdad. Also was not like reactions and parade of the Sadr's Saraya al-Salam group on February 8, 2021. But this time the parade was to push release of the PMF commander Qasim Muslih who is commander of "al-tfuf" brigade and in charge Anbar front of PMF. Kadhimi based on article 4 of terror law ordered to arrest him.

Although the allegations against Muslih are terror charges but even in the official statements have not clarified what are these main allegations and was he really charged for. But according to the revealed information he is responsible for attacking Ain al-Assad base of Americans and assassinating activists of Iraqi protests especially prominent activist Eihab Wazni who was killed on May 9th in the center of Karbala. And therefore from May 25th the protests resumed in the south and protesters went back to Tahrir and Nsur squares in Baghdad and chanted this slogan "who killed me" and called their movement "revolution of Eihab Wazni" also they have asked Kadhimi's government to confront with militias and find perpetrators and bring them to justice. Amid this some of the Tishreen movements as anger and reaction have decided to boycott the snap elections, therefore the hope to make changes through democratic process and elections is backsliding.

Earlier and during the war on ISIS Qasim Muslih was commander of the brigade affiliated with PMF of Shrines (Atabat) known as (Altfuf) and before he changed side to the Iranian proxies' camp with his brother (Ali Muslih) have had bad reputation among the people due to oppressing protests, financial corruption, and money laundering of the PMF forces budget. Mother of Eihab Wazni in released video says that Qasim Muslih threatened my son and said "if had one day left in my life will kill you"

Some others believe that Muslih's actions are larger than just involvement in terror, taking money by force and intimidating people, because during Qasim Soleimani's presence (who was killed in January 2020) Muslih had become trusted man by the Iranian al-Quds force and became in charge of the security dossier in Anbar front which connects Iraq and Iranian Shia to Syria and also Anbar was ground for Al-Qaeda and ISIS in the past. This has made him one of the icons of Iranian backed PMF groups at the Iraq level and strengthened his position within PMF commission which this committee officially is belong to Iraqi government and its annual budget is more than two billion dollars. Those groups stormed green zone had masks on and they had no title and logo to recognize them, but clearly these groups through their statements and media supported them such Asaib, Hizbullah brigades and Nujabaa movement, these groups are backbones of Iranian proxies' project among the PMF. These groups by expressing their support of the military parade again proved that disobeying orders from PM and also means in reality the PMF commission is not belong to PM and not part of the state's security system.

Whether keep condemning Salih or release him (this is more likely to be released and now there is some informal sources that he has been released but not confirmed) does not change the reality we have noticed from the latest developments under shadow of uncontrolled guns and multi authority in directing these armed actors and did put the Iraqi state on the edge of death. After this development is impossible anyone can speak of sovereignty of state or control weapons in the hand of state, especially after that the armed men have seized presidency council of ministers and houses of senior Iraqi

officials. The rise of armed actors' position on the expense of state goes back to before emerging ISIS and formation of PMF officially in 2014. The previous governments under PM (Haider al-Abadi and Adil Abdul-mahdi) have lived with these armed actors and did not touch them. But Kadhimmi from time to time touch these issues and gets pressure from Tishreen movements on to face with these militias but each time these armed actors make another step forward to impose themselves on Iraqi government. These militias do not want to control the situation completely as they are not prepared and do not enough enough capacity to rule Iraq later, especially that now Iraq has collapsed economically and in need for help from US and Europe and these foreign relations now is under control of Kadhimmi. The beginning of open clashes between Kadhimmi's government and armed groups back to summer of 2020 when he arrested 14 Hizbullah members which they have been alleged for launching rocket attacks on the US bases and embassy. Then armed men of Hizbullah which they are toughest and most organized among other pro-Iran groups stormed the green zone and with mediation of former Iraqi PM Nouri al- Maliki and other Shia leaders that forced PM to release these Hizbullah members without taking any legal actions against them. And this was repeated in the end of 2020 when the Iraqi security forces arrested cadre of Asaib Ahl al-Haq (Hisam Zrijawi) on the allegation of he was involved in rocket attack on the US embassy, then Asaib armed men came to the street to make pressure to release him and then the case has been disappeared. Based on other two previous experiences in tensions between Kadhimmi and armed actors again PM won't be able to handle it and Qasim Salih will be freed.