



# Iraq Calls for GCC, Iran and Iraq to Sign Counterterror Pact

By Awad Mustafa 3:32 p.m. EST November 7, 2015



(Photo: Carlo Allegri/AFP)

MANAMA and DUBAI — Speaking at the International Institute of Strategic Studies' Manama Dialogue, Iraq's minister of defense called for a counter-terrorism agreement to be signed between the Gulf states, Iraq and Iran.

Defense Minister Khaled Al-Obaidi said the agreement would be the cornerstone for the Middle East's future efforts to fight terrorism.

"Building a defensive posture in the Middle East cannot happen passively, and we understand that. But we also understand that there is an opportunity to do that," he said.

This opportunity, Al-Obaidi continued, focuses on the defeat of extremists with the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria.

"This can only happen with open communication between the militaries of the region and their national institutions to develop common strategic objectives, this has become a necessity and not a choice because we have to rip out the roots and not the branches of terrorism," he said.

Obaidi called for a holistic approach to tackle terrorism through combined exercises, command-and-control centers, intelligence sharing, border and marine management strategies as well as refugee management and rebuilding areas liberated from ISIS.

Al Obaidi's comments came just as the Iranian foreign minister and the Saudi foreign minister were pitted against each other during Syrian talks in Vienna.

Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir has stated that all points were agreed upon except two.

"In Vienna, we have not been able to reach an agreement yet. We, however, have agreed on how Syria should have a new constitution based on Geneva [Convention] principles, amongst other points, but two points remain in contention," he said. "No agreement on the timing of Assad's departure and on when foreign forces will leave Syria, especially the Iranian forces and their proxies like Hezbollah, which we view as occupying forces," he added.

Furthermore Al-Jubeir said in Manama that with regard to ISIS fight in Syria and Iraq, the "two white elephants" are "Bashar Al-Assad and the reforms in Iraq".

"So long as Bashar Al-Assad is in power he will act as a magnet for extremists to join ISIS, and any attempt to go after ISIS in Syria will be useless so long that Al-Assad is in power," he said. "As for Iraq once the reform are implemented the fertile ground for ISIS in Iraq will no longer exist and it will be easier to mobilize the country to destroy the terrorist organisation."

Despite Saudi Arabia's demands in Vienna, former member of the Iranian National Security Council and nuclear negotiator Dr. Seyed Hossein Mousavian stated that Iran and Saudi Arabia will be able to find a solution.

"The Saudis' first priority is Assad must go, and the Iranian first priority is the terrorists must go; here is the key difference. That's why Jubeir does not talk about the timeline for terrorists' departure from Syria," he said. "However, I believe that they will be able to bridge the gap."

To secure the Middle East, Mousavian suggested three paths Saudi Arabia and Iran can take to overcome their differences.

"The first is formal, official high-level talks between foreign ministers and other senior representatives of the respective governments. Unfortunately, the Saudi government does not appear receptive of this option at this stage," he published in a [recent op-ed \(http://www.huffingtonpost.com/seyed-hossein-mousavian/iran-saudi-syria\\_b\\_8432084.html\)](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/seyed-hossein-mousavian/iran-saudi-syria_b_8432084.html).

"Another alternative is for the two countries to engage in track one-and a-half or track-two diplomacy — contacts between former officials and prominent non-government figures and experts — to discuss a package to build trust and move towards official dialogue. There have been some efforts made on that front, but it is crucial that they be significantly expanded," Mousavian said.

The third way is for Saudi Arabia and Iran to confidentially exchange special envoys.

"These meetings would be strictly off the record and allow for the two sides to engage in high-level talks and more effectively hash out their differences. During the mid-1990s, I engaged in precisely this type of diplomacy with Saudi Arabia in my capacity as a senior diplomat and advisor to then-president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani," he said.

"I negotiated and agreed on a 'peace package' with then-Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, during that time. After four nights of intense negotiations, we reached agreements which paved the road for amicable relations between our countries that would last until the mid-2000s," Mousavian added.

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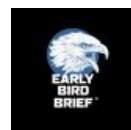
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