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Tillerson: Iraqi Shi'ite Militias Must Leave Iraq

10/22/2017

The US narrative that the Shi'ite militias fighting alongside Iraq's Shi'ite government are "Iranian militias" seems to be spilling over into policy diktats from US officials, with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson demanding over the weekend that the militias all go home to Iran.

In the course of fighting against ISIS, the Iraqi government enlisted the help of Shi'ite militias, including some from neighboring countries, to fight alongside the military. The militias at this point, however, are formally already structured into the Iraqi government's security forces, and there is a government ministry that manages the militias.



Tillerson is demanding that the militias "go home," and that any members who are Iraqis join the Iraqi military, which isn't how the Iraqi government has been managing the militias at all, nor is it likely what they even want.

Iran-based militias have an important role in the Iraqi government, with Prime Minister Abadi and many other top officials part of the Badr Brigade, one of the bigger such militias. Iraqi

officials seem to prefer to keep these militias as auxiliary fighters for their respective political movements.

The US interest in disbanding the militias is likely to prevent them being used against Iraqi Kurdistan, as already the militias have participated in military offensives against Kurdish towns. Once again, what the US wants and what Iraq intends to have happen aren't necessarily the same thing.