

Measured support for end of UN mission in Iraq

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Online Desk :

Several members of the UN Security Council, including Russia and China, on Thursday backed Baghdad's request for the world body's political mission in Iraq to shut down by next year — but Washington did not immediately offer its support. Last week, in a letter to the council, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohamed Shia al-Sudani called for the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), which has been operational since 2003, to end by December 31, 2025. Iraq's deputy UN envoy Abbas Kadhom Obaid Al-Fatlawi reiterated the request before the council on Thursday, saying: "The mission has achieved its goals."

Russian envoy Vasily Nebenzia shared that view, saying "Iraqis are ready to take responsibility for the political future of their country." "The remaining problems should not become an excuse for UNAMI to stay in the country indefinitely," he added. Within the framework of the mission's annual renewal, due at the end of May, the council should "propose a plan... in order to ensure its gradual drawdown and smooth transition toward an ultimate withdrawal," noted China's deputy UN envoy Geng Shuang. Given that UN missions can only operate with the host nation's consent, Britain and France also voiced support for a transition in the partnership between Iraq and the United Nations.

The United States was more vague, with ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield saying UNAMI still had "important work to do," and making no mention of Baghdad's request. She emphasized the mission's key role on several important political issues, such as support for organizing elections and promoting human rights, even though Iraq has clearly asked that the mission focus more squarely on economic issues. In an evaluation requested by the council, German diplomat Volker Perthes said in March that UNAMI, which had more than 700 staff as of late 2023, "in its present form, appears too big."

Perthes called on the mission to "begin to transition its tasks to national institutions and the United Nations country team in a responsible, orderly and gradual manner within an agreed time frame." Without commenting on Baghdad's request, mission chief Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert painted a picture of an Iraq that "looks different to the country to which UNAMI was first deployed some 20 years ago."

"Today we are, so to speak, witnessing an Iraq on the rise," she said, while noting multiple challenges yet unresolved, such as corruption and armed groups operating outside state control. But she added: "I do believe it is high time to judge the country on progress made, and to turn the page on the darker images of Iraq's past."