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From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
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Subject: Fw: VP Hashemi blames Iraq blasts on govt factions -BBC (Reuters)

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Subject: VP Hashemi blames Iraq blasts on govt factions -BBC (Reuters)

LONDON, Dec 24 (Reuters) - Iraq's Sunni Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi has accused factions within Iraq's government of being complicit in this week's deadly bomb attacks in Baghdad and said the Shi'ite prime minister was trying to get rid of his political rivals.

More than 70 people died in the blasts on Thursday, just days after the last U.S. troops left Iraq and the first attacks since the Shi'ite-led government was engulfed in a crisis that could split the country along sectarian and ethnic lines.

Hashemi, who has taken refuge in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region after Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki accused him of organised assassinations and bombings, said the prime minister was using the security forces to target his political opponents and allowing would-be bombers to roam free.

"What happened yesterday (Thursday) is an organised crime," Hashemi told BBC Persian television in an interview broadcast late on Friday. "I am sure that (some)body inside the government manipulated all these explosives and damages. Nobody else could be qualified for it at all."

"And it is not the first time. This style of terrorist attack, it's well beyond even al Qaeda to do it ... It's well organised. The people who planned all these explosives, they went freely without any obstacles."

The BBC website quoted him as saying: "After Americans decided to pull out, time comes for him, he felt himself free to try to get rid of his political rivals and opponents and critics - this is why he started with me, in due course he will continue with others."

Hashemi, who said "security in the government" must have had some part in the bombings, said he was innocent of any charges cited by Maliki and blamed the prime minister for triggering the political crisis.

"People are very much worried about the future," he said. "Maliki put my country into an unknown future and he's the only one who can be held responsible for what happened, what does happen to my country and my people."

No group has claimed responsibility for the attacks, but analysts say an al Qaeda group, who are Sunni, was probably targeting Shi'ite areas to stir up sectarian divisions and to remind people that it was still a force to be reckoned with.

Iraq's power-sharing government, in which Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurdish blocs share out positions in a system

marred by infighting, is straining under the weight of its worst turmoil since forming a year ago.

Maliki's hard line against senior Sunni politicians has fanned sectarian concerns because the Sunni minority fear the prime minister wants to consolidate Shi'ite domination over the country.

Several thousand Iraqis in Sunni Muslim strongholds protested on Friday against Maliki.

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