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## Iraqi VP demands action against U.S. soldier over Koran

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BAGHDAD (Reuters) - Iraq's Sunni Arab vice president called on the U.S. military on Monday to make an example of an American soldier who used a copy of the Koran for target practice, demanding he receive the "most severe punishment."

Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi said he had received an official apology from the top U.S. general in Iraq, General David Petraeus, in a meeting with Lieutenant-General Lloyd Austin, the number two U.S. military commander in Iraq.

The soldier was disciplined and removed from Iraq after a copy of the Muslim holy book was found pocked with bullet holes at a shooting range, the U.S. military said on Sunday.

Hashemi said he had raised what he called past "crimes" committed by U.S. troops, such as the destruction of mosques.

"This time I requested an official and written apology. I also asked for the U.S. military to carry out the most severe punishment so that this punishment will be a warning to all the other U.S. soldiers in the future," Hashemi told reporters.

"One of the guarantees I received from General Austin is that they are committed to showing respect to holy sites and traditions of the Iraqi people ... But I don't believe that is enough."

Such an act of desecration of the Muslim holy book could inflame anger against the U.S. military presence in Iraq, but an Iraqi community leader told Reuters an apology by senior American military commanders had helped calm tensions.

Besides being moved out of Iraq, it was not clear what other disciplinary action was being taken against the soldier. U.S. news television network CNN said he had been dismissed from his unit.

Hashemi said he told Austin that American soldiers should be required to sign an agreement to respect holy sites and the cultures and traditions of Iraq.

"I asked that this document is distributed today to American soldiers and officers and that they sign this document. So that if they violate this they will be held to account and face the most severe punishment in the future," Hashemi said.

Hashemi said Austin had reassured him the Koran incident was an isolated one and was not representative of the U.S. military.

Anti-American Shi'ite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr's political movement condemned the U.S. military and called on the Iraqi government to launch an investigation.

"Once more again, the occupiers proved their hostility for us through the targeting of one of our holiest things, which is the Book of God (Koran)," the movement said in a statement.

(Reporting by Michael Georgy; Additional reporting by Aws Qusay; Editing by Catherine Evans)

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