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Subject: Iraq sends delegation to Syria for crisis talks (Reuters)

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - Iraq has sent a delegation to meet Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government and his opponents in an attempt to help end months of violence in its neighbour, a senior government official said on Saturday.

Iraq's Shi'ite-led government has resisted Arab League calls for sanctions against Assad, and Iraqi leaders are worried that unrest in Syria will spill across the frontier and upset Iraq's own delicate sectarian balance.

Earlier this month, Arab League Secretary General Nabil Elaraby said he has asked the Iraqi government to help influence Syria to agree to an Arab League-proposed peace plan.

"We are going to meet government officials. The approval is there from both parties," Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's media advisor Ali al-Moussawi told Reuters.

"The delegation will meet representatives of the Syrian opposition inside Syria. And we ready to meet members of the opposition outside Syria," he said of the visit headed by Iraq's national security advisor.

State-owned Iraqiya television said that the delegation would meet with Assad. But Moussawi did not confirm that. Iraq has said it would be willing to use its close ties to the Assad government to help negotiate an end to the turmoil.

Already hit by economic sanctions imposed by the United States and Europe, Syria now faces further sanctions from neighbouring Arab nations in response to its violent crackdown on protests against Assad. The United Nations says more than 5,000 people have been killed by security forces in the unrest.

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