

**Iraq court hears testimony linking VP to killings**  
**By Ammar Karim (AFP)**  
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BAGHDAD — The trial of Iraq's fugitive Sunni Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi resumed on Tuesday, with the court hearing testimony that silencers were found in raids on his house and that of his son-in-law.

Lawyers for Hashemi, who has been accused of running a death squad and is being tried in absentia, also officially returned to the trial after withdrawing in May.

Five police testified before the Central Criminal Court of Iraq that they found silencers in Hashemi's home in Al-Yarmuk in west Baghdad, and in the home of Ahmed Qahtan, his son-in-law and personal secretary, in Zayouna in the capital's east.

Silenced weapons are a favourite of gunmen who have assassinated officials in Baghdad.

And an intelligence officer testified that the number of assassinations with silenced weapons had decreased significantly since the arrest of "the network linked to Hashemi."

Hashemi's lawyers, who had walked out of a May 20 session of the trial after a judge refused to accept their evidence, were back in court on Tuesday.

"We consulted with him and he approved our return to the sessions," the head of the defence team, Muayad al-Izzi, told AFP.

"The regular attendance of the trial sessions and presenting requests may affect the case," Izzi said.

During the previous session on May 31, the lawyers sat with spectators, but continued to speak directly to the judge and present requests.

On Tuesday, Hashemi's lawyers again sought to have high-ranking Iraqi officials testify, a request that was rejected for a second time by the three-judge panel hearing the case.

Last month they requested that Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, former vice president Adel Abdel Mahdi, Talabani's chief-of-staff Nasser al-Ani and four MPs from the Iraqiya bloc testify.

Izzi told AFP at the time that they intended to use the officials as character witnesses.

The trial was adjourned until July 8.

Previous hearings have seen Hashemi's bodyguards and other officials testify they were offered money, or were coerced, into carrying out attacks on the vice president's orders.

Hashemi, one of Iraq's top Sunni Arab officials, was accused in December of running a death squad and, along with his staff and bodyguards, faces around 150 charges. He insists the accusations are politically motivated.

After the initial charges were filed, he fled to Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region, before embarking on a regional tour that has taken him to Qatar, Saudi Arabia and now Turkey. Ankara has said it will not extradite him to Iraq.