

1 Feb 13: Kata'ib Hezbollah is Likely Responsible for New Rocket Attack against U.S. Forces in Kirkuk. Unidentified militants launched a rocket that struck an open area on the K1 military base in Kirkuk Province, which houses U.S. forces. Unidentified Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) discovered a launch pad north of the base loaded with 11 unfired missiles. The attack is the first strike on the K1 base since Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH) killed a U.S. contractor there on December 27, 2019. The February 13 strike is the fifth rocket attack on various U.S. targets since Iran's ballistic missile attack on al-Asad airbase January 8, 2020. KH is likely probing U.S. response thresholds. The U.S. has not retaliated to any of these five attacks.

2 Feb 13: NATO Plans to Expand the Training Mission in Iraq. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg stated that the NATO Defense Ministers agreed "in principle to enhance" the training effort in Iraq. NATO agreed to adjust the status of hundreds of trainers participating in the U.S.-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS to the authority of the NATO mission in Iraq. The transfer will not make NATO responsible for all training but will expand the training mission to at least three more bases in central Iraq. NATO forces' legal mandate excludes forward combat operations, unlike the U.S.-led global coalition.

3 Feb 13 - 14: Agreement between Protesters and Security Forces in Baghdad Breaks Down before Friday Protests. Unidentified Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) used tear gas, rubber bullets, and smoke bombs to disperse protesters in Watbah and Khalani Squares as well as on the Sinak Bridge in central Baghdad. Protesters returned to these locations hours after some protesters reached an agreement with the Baghdad Operations Command to withdraw.

4 Feb 13- 16: Nasiriyah Activist Dr. Alaa al-Rikabi Emerges as Potential National Protest Leader. Dr. Alaa al-Rikabi, an activist from Nasiriyah, Dhi Qar Province, asked for demonstrators gather in public squares across the country to show whether or not they support him for the position of prime minister. Al-Rikabi issued the request on February 13 in a video shared widely on social media. According to the Iraqi Kurdish news agency Rudaw, "hundreds" of Iraqis, many carrying pictures of al-Rikabi, demonstrated in Karbala and Nasiriyah in response. An assassination attempt previously targeted al-Rikabi on February 5. It is unclear if Rikabi holds any previous political affiliation.

5 Feb 14: Iranian Proxy Commander Akram al-Kaabi Announces Shift to the "Offense" against the U.S. while in Iran. Akram al-Kaabi, leader of Iran's proxy Harakat al-Nujaba and a U.S. Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT), stated that the "resistance" has shifted from "defensive to offensive." Kaabi made the remarks during a ceremony in Tehran attended by senior Iranian officials, including Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Deputy Commander Rear Admiral Ali Fadavi. Kaabi is responsible for multiple attacks against U.S. and Coalition forces since 2008.

6 Feb 14: Secretary Pompeo Discusses the Need for Sustained U.S. Troop Presence in Iraq with Kurdistan Regional Government Prime Minister. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met with Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Masrour Barzani at the Munich Security Conference. Pompeo thanked Barzani for the KRG's commitment to the security of U.S. personnel and facilities in Iraqi Kurdistan. Pompeo and Barzani agreed on the need for continued cooperation consistent with the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Framework Agreement, according to a State Department readout. Pompeo likely urged Barzani to support PM-designee Allawi's government formation process.

7 Feb 15: Moqtada al-Sadr Announces Humanitarian Initiative to Support Protesters. Nationalist Shi'a cleric Moqtada al-Sadr announced via Twitter a "humanitarian initiative" calling for support for protesters and for Iraqis to donate to the wounded. Sadr previously announced on February 11 that he dissolved organized units of his supporters referred to as "blue hats" who had begun beating and killing protesters.

8 Feb 16: Rocket Attack Hits US Embassy Compound in Baghdad but Causes no Casualties. At least three rockets landed on an unidentified part of the U.S. Embassy compound in the Green Zone of Baghdad. The attack caused only minor infrastructural damage.

9 Feb 16: Iraqi Kurds and Sunnis Align to Condition Support for PM-Designee Allawi's Government on Continued U.S. Basing Rights. Masoud Barzani, the former KRG president and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) leader, met with Mohammed al-Halbousi, the speaker of the federal Parliament, as well as members of the Sunni Alliance of Iraqi Forces party in Arbil. The attendees reportedly agreed to require continued authorization for U.S. and coalition troop presence as a condition for supporting PM-designee Allawi's government formation process.

10 Feb 18: Assistant U.S. Secretary of State Meets with Outgoing Caretaker PM Mehdi, President Barham Salih, and Speaker Halbousi. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs David Schenker met with Iraqi Caretaker PM Adel Abdul Mehdi, President Salih, and Speaker Halbousi in Baghdad to discuss the U.S. partnership with Iraq. Schenker highlighted the continued need for a "strong [U.S.] partnership with the Iraqi Security Forces to safeguard Iraqi sovereignty..." Schenker also condemned the use of violence against peaceful protesters. Schenker did not meet with PM-designee Allawi.

11 Feb 18: Sunni Speaker of Parliament Hosts Kurdish Politicians in Follow-on Meeting in Baghdad. Council of Representatives (CoR) Speaker Halbousi held a meeting at his home in Baghdad with Sunni and Kurdish politicians. Mohammed al-Karbouli, a Sunni member of parliament for the Alliance of Iraqi Forces, confirmed the meeting took place in a Twitter statement.

12 Feb 18: Pro-Sistani PMF Brigades Demand PMF Administrative Positions. Falih al-Fayyad, the Chairman of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), reportedly met with a representative for Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, as well as the leaders of four Sistani-loyal militias: Abu Fadl al-Abbas Brigade, Firqat al-Imam Ali al-Qitaliyah, Liwa Ansar al-Marjaiyah, and Liwa Ali al-Akbar. The pro-Sistani brigades presented a list of senior PMF positions they wish to hold, including secretary of the PMF, as well their demands for operational authority over the Middle Euphrates, Ramadi, and Mosul regions. The pro-Sistani brigades are much smaller than the Iranian proxy militias in the PMF. However, politicians loyal to the religious establishment in Najaf, such as Ammar al-Hakim's National Wisdom Trend, support the pro-Sistani brigades and may agree to support PM-designee Allawi's cabinet in exchange for an increased role of the pro-Sistani brigades in the PMF.

13 Feb 18: Talabani Family Consolidates Control over PUK Leadership. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) General Leadership Council officially announced the appointment of Bafel Talabani and Lahur Sheikh Jangi Talibani to the newly established co-presidency. Bafel is the son of former Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, and Lahur is the former head of the PUK counterterrorism forces and the nephew of Jalal Talabani. The General Leadership Council voted on February 11 to install a co-presidential system to lead the party. The General Leadership Council had not unified around a single office since the death of Jalal Talabani in 2017.

14 Feb 19: Fayyadh Travels to Kurdistan amid Government Formation. National Security Advisor and Chairman of the PMF Falih al-Fayyadh met with unspecified Kurdish leaders in Arbil reportedly to discuss security coordination between the Iraqi Security Forces and the Kurdish Peshmerga. Fayyadh may have negotiated for changes in the PMF's military deployments or operations in disputed areas in exchange for Kurdish support shaping the cabinet of PM-designee Allawi.

15 Feb 19: PM-Allawi Calls for Extraordinary Session in Parliament to Approve Cabinet. PM-designee Allawi announced he has finalized his cabinet selections and called on the CoR to hold an extraordinary session on Monday, February 24, to vote on his cabinet. Allawi said, if his government wins a confidence vote, that he would immediately investigate the killing of protesters and hold the culprits accountable. He promised to hold early elections that will exclude "the influence of money, weapons, and foreign interference." The line is a direct quote from a February 7 sermon by Grand Ayatollah Sistani and was likely intended to rebuke the Iranian proxy network.

16 Feb 19: Caretaker PM Warns He will Vacate Office by March 2, Increasing Public Pressure behind Allawi's Call for Emergency Parliament Session. Outgoing Caretaker PM Adel Abdul Mehdi sent a letter warning the CoR that he will vacate the office of PM if the constitutionally designated 30-day deadline to install a new government fails. Mehdi said in the letter, which he likely later leaked to the press, that he has "no recourse" but to leave office. Mehdi likely intends to help Allawi generate public pressure to hold a February 24 session and provide confidence in Allawi's cabinet.



- Major Cities
- Iraqi Security Forces
- Demonstration
- Iranian Proxy Militias
- ISIS
- ✈ Possible Israeli Airstrikes
- Religious Figures
- Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)
- Iraqi Council of Representatives
- Iraqi Prime Minister and Cabinet

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Key Takeaway: Iran's proxy network is escalating its anti-U.S. campaign. The proxy network is likely responsible for a rocket attack on February 13 that targeted the same military base in Kirkuk Province where Kata'ib Hezbollah killed a U.S. contractor in December 2019. An Iranian proxy leader and U.S.-designated terrorist, Akram al-Kaabi, announced during a speech in Tehran on February 14 that all of the "resistance" has shifted to an offensive phase of anti-U.S. operations. The United States directly intervened in the process of Allawi's cabinet formation by sending high-level officials to meet or urge competing Iraqi power brokers – Sunni, Kurdish, and Shi'a – to force consensus in support of Allawi's premiership.

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