

**1 July 15: Protesters Surround Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi's Hotel during His Visit to Basra.** Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi convened Iraq's cabinet, the Council of Ministers (CoM), in Basra Province in southern Iraq as part of an ongoing public relations effort to hold cabinet meetings in all of Iraq's provinces. Kadhimi discussed several large public projects. However, demonstrators surrounded the Basra International Hotel as Kadhimi conducted the cabinet meeting inside. Protesters condemned the government's failure to distribute salaries, provide sufficient electricity, and hold security forces and militias accountable for killing protesters. Protesters surrounding a building with Kadhimi inside represents the first direct challenge by demonstrators to Kadhimi.

**2 July 15-16: Kadhimi Continues Campaign to Reclaim Iraqi Border Crossings from Militias.** Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi ordered unspecified Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) units under the command of the regional Basra Operations Command to seize the Safwan Border Crossing between Basra Province and Kuwait and the Shalamchah Border Crossing between Basra Province and Iran. Separately, Kadhimi also directed the Iraqi Naval Forces to impose control over three seaports in the vicinity of Umm Qasr City on the southern Basra coast. Kadhimi fired at least four officials from their director-level roles in the Umm Qasr port system. The purported seizures are the third and fourth border crossings captured at Kadhimi's direction since he took office. Kadhimi promised to retake such crossings from corrupt groups upon taking office in May 2020. Kadhimi has achieved few successes in this campaign due to resistance and threats from militias.

**3 July 15-17: ISIS Assassinate Iraqi Brigadier General near Tarmiyah, Salah ad-Din Province.** ISIS fighters attacked a convoy carrying Brigadier General Ali Hamid, the commander of the 59th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division, near Tarmiyah District, 25 km north of Baghdad. ISIS militants targeted the moving convoy while an ISIS sniper staged nearby killed the general. ISIS likely planned the attack as retribution for the killing of the former wali (governor) for ISIS in northern Baghdad and two of his associates by unspecified Iraqi intelligence units on July 15.

**4 July 16-20: Saudi King's Hospitalization Derails First Official Visit from Iraqi Prime Minister.** Prime Minister Kadhimi's office announced on July 20 that it postponed a planned visit to Saudi Arabia after Saudi King Salman was admitted to the hospital due to gallbladder inflammation. Iraqi Finance Minister Ali Allawi originally confirmed the official visit would occur on July 20 and indicated the two countries expected to sign multiple unspecified agreements. The trip would have been Kadhimi's first official trip outside Iraq since becoming prime minister. The cancellation resulted in Saudi Arabia's regional rival, Iran, hosting Kadhimi's first foreign visit on July 21.

**5 July 16: Iranian Proxy Militia Warns that the Targeting of US Forces Will Escalate Daily.** Nasir al-Shammari, the spokesperson for the US-designated terrorist organization and Iranian proxy group Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba (HHN), warned that "the resistance," referring to a collection of Iranian proxy militias in Iraq self-titled "the Islamic Resistance in Iraq," will escalate its targeting of US forces daily. Shammari told the Lebanese satellite television channel al-Maydeen that the Iraqi government has no authority to stop anti-US attacks and that HHN blesses anti-US attacks.

**6 July 16: Iraqi Government Eases Coronavirus Restrictions Despite Continued Surge in Cases.** An Iraqi federal body responsible for COVID-19 response, the Higher Committee for Health and National Safety, reduced national curfew hours and set a reopening date for Iraqi airports of July 23. The Iraqi Ministry of Health (MoH) separately announced that the nighttime curfew will be lifted following Eid Al-Adha, an Islamic observance expected to begin on July 30. However, the MoH also recorded 2,281 new cases of COVID-19 on the same day, as cases in Iraq have trended upward since late May 2020.

**7 July 16: US, Iraq, and Gulf States Issue Statement of Electricity Cooperation Indirectly Aimed at Iran.** The US Department of State, the Iraqi Government, and the Gulf Cooperation Council issued a joint statement renewing full support for the Gulf Cooperation Council Interconnection Authority (GCCIA), a project to connect the electricity grids of Iraq and the GCC. The statement is likely a recognition of support for Kadhimi, who has prioritized energy agreements with Gulf partners since the start of the US-Iraqi Strategic Dialogue on June 11 at the expense of Iranian domination of Iraq's electricity supply.

**8 July 16-18: Iraqi Minister Warns of Mass Water Shortage Crisis Due to Turkish Damming.** Mehdi Rashid al-Hamdani, Minister of Water Resources, told the Associated Press that Iraq is facing a major water shortage crisis if the country does not reach an agreement with Turkey as soon as possible. Hamdani claimed that water flows downstream in the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers from Turkey have decreased by 50 percent since 2019. The Turkish Ilisu Dam, completed in May 2020, is a major restriction on water flow.

**9 July 17-21: Ninth and Tenth New Shi'a Militia Groups Announce Their Existence and Frame Their Core Mission as Anti-Ba'athist.** A new Shi'a militia group calling itself Kata'ib al-Shabaniyah issued a statement declaring its existence and its intent to target members of the majority-Sunni Ba'ath Party. The group's imagery features a raised fist grasping an assault rifle in the same style as the imagery of Iranian proxy groups like Hezbollah. However, the group is different from previously announced shadow militias in that it did not list specific anti-US objectives. Instead, the group vowed "retribution" for those who suffered under the Ba'athist regime of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. Liwaa al-Muntaqimun (LM) or "The Avengers Brigade," announced its existence on Telegram on July 21, declaring that it will carry out "acts of vengeance" against Ba'athists. LM added that the group will also strive to target the "foreign occupation" in Iraq. Kata'ib al-Shabaniyah and LM are the ninth and tenth ostensibly new shadow militias that have emerged in Iraq since the January 3 US killing of IRGC-QF Commander Qassem Soleimani.

**10 July 19: Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif Meets with Kadhimi and Senior Iraqi Officials in Baghdad to Discuss Expanding Bilateral Relations.** Prime Minister Kadhimi received Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif and discussed broad bilateral cooperation between Iran and Iraq. Zarif told Kadhimi that Iran looks forward to a "new phase" of cooperation between the two countries. Kadhimi emphasized his desire for Iraq to play a "balanced role" in the region. Zarif stressed his desire for expanded bilateral relations in separate meetings with Parliamentary Speaker Mohammed al-Halbousi, President Barham Salih, and Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein. Zarif also met separately with key Iranian proxies Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) Chairman Faleh al-Fayyadh and Badr Organization leader Hadi al-Ameri to discuss bilateral security cooperation and counterterrorism. Additionally, Zarif met with Iranian proxy and Head of the High Judicial Council Faiq al-Zaidan to discuss an investigation into the January 3 US killing of IRGC Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani and de-facto leader of the PMF Abu Mehdi al-Muhandis, which Zaidan called a "criminal act." Zarif then traveled to Arbil and met separately with Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Nechirvan Barzani, KRG President Masrur Barzani, and prominent Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani. The KRG delegations largely emphasized their desire for increased trade and medical cooperation with Iran.

**11 July 19: Likely Iranian Proxy Fires Three Rockets at US Embassy during Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif's Visit to Baghdad.** Unidentified militants fired three projectiles, which various sources described as mortars or rockets, at the US Embassy in Baghdad during the day. The rockets landed approximately 1 km from the Embassy in the al-Zawiyah area. Sabareen News, a Telegram channel populated by Shi'a extremists, attributed the attack to Iranian proxy militia Usbat al-Thairen. Unnamed Iraqi security sources told AFP that the rocket attacks took place at the same time as Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif was meeting with top Iraqi officials in Baghdad.

**12 July 19-20: Iraqi-Saudi Coordination Council Delegations Sign New Agreements in Riyadh Despite Cancellation of Prime Minister Kadhimi's Official Visit.** The Iraqi-Saudi Coordination Council, a government body tasked with improving Iraq-Saudi Arabia bilateral relations, commenced a series of meetings beginning on July 19 aimed at enhancing bilateral cooperation and developing a "partnership" between the private sectors of Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Iraqi Finance Minister Ali Allawi led the Iraqi delegation in a visit to Riyadh on July 19. Delegates signed investment agreements on "energy and sports" during the official visit, which took place despite Kadhimi's cancellation of his planned trip. The Saudi Press Agency reported that the council signed a memorandum of cooperation focused on efforts to combat COVID-19 and provide medical assistance to Iraq. Former Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi originally formed the Iraqi-Saudi Coordination Council in 2017 as part of his effort to resume relations between the neighboring countries. Prime Minister Kadhimi revitalized the council on July 14, 2020, by appointing all new membership and directing the group to work to implement agreements.

**13 July 20-21: Iranian Proxy Militants Likely Responsible for Kidnapping of Foreign Activist.** Armed men, likely Iranian proxy militants, kidnapped a German national, Hella Mewis, outside the Beit Tarkib Art Center on Abu Nawas Street in Central Baghdad where she worked as an art curator and activist. Anonymous security officials described Mewis as an ardent support of Iraq's protest movement. Abu Ali al-Askari, de-facto spokesperson of the US-designated terrorist organization and Iranian proxy Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH), attempted to deflect blame launched at KH, the most likely culprit of the kidnapping. Askari issued a statement propagating a conspiracy that Prime Minister Kadhimi orchestrated the kidnapping to "pit public opinion against the ardent sons of Iraq" and frame KH.

**14 July 21: Iran Hosts Prime Minister Kadhimi's First Foreign Visit, Stresses US Presence in Iraq as Malign.** Kadhimi travelled to Iran for his first official foreign visit. Kadhimi met with key regime officials including Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, President Hassan Rouhani, and First Vice President Eshagh Jahanjiri. During the meeting, Khamenei framed the US presence in Iraq as inherently detrimental to Iraq, arguing the US "does not support an independent, powerful Iraq." Khamenei also told Kadhimi that Iran is determined to retaliate against the US for the killing of IRGC Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani in January 2020, according to the supreme leader's website. President Rouhani framed the visit as a "turning point" for Iraqi-Iranian relations, suggesting that the Iranian regime sought to convince Kadhimi to abandon his anti-Iranian policy objectives during the official visit.



- Iraqi Security Forces
- Anti-ISIS Coalition
- Iranian Proxy Militias
- ISIS
- Religion Figures
- Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)
- Iraqi Council of Representatives
- Iraqi Prime Minister and Cabinet

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**Key Takeaway:** Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi's efforts to preserve Iraqi sovereignty by shifting its regional relationships away from Iranian domination have been met with a mix of successes and setbacks. The hospitalization of the King of Saudi Arabia forced Kadhimi to cancel his symbolically important first planned foreign visit to Saudi Arabia on July 20. Iran capitalized on the cancellation, dispatching its foreign minister in a pre-planned visit to Baghdad and then hosting Kadhimi in Tehran for meetings with Iran's Supreme Leader as Kadhimi's de facto first foreign trip. The United States continued to pressure Gulf countries to increase their energy cooperation with Iraq even as Prime Minister Kadhimi faced domestic and foreign resistance from neighboring Iran. Demonstrators are holding Kadhimi responsible for Iraq's insufficient electricity supply, diluting his popular support. Continued criminal activity by Iran-backed groups, including the kidnapping of a German activist in Baghdad and repeated threats toward Iraqi allies, will also damage Kadhimi's ability to secure buy-in from regional and global partners.

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