

1 Mar 17-18: **Iran's Proxies and Other Shi'a Parties Declare Opposition to Prime Minister-designate.** Nouri al-Maliki, the former prime minister (PM) and the current leader of the State of Law Coalition, hosted a meeting at his home in Baghdad with representatives of his party and three others: the Conquest Alliance led by Iranian proxy leader Hadi al-Ameri, the National Contract bloc led by National Popular Mobilization Commission Chairman and Iraqi National Security Advisor Faleh al-Fayyadh, and the National Path bloc on behalf of the Islamic Virtue Party, a Shi'a Islamist party with a traditional power base in Basra that splintered from the Sadrist movement. The gathering issued a statement the following morning formally opposing PM-designate Adnan al-Zurfi and claiming that President Barham Salih unconstitutionally sidelined political parties when he unilaterally designated Zurfi.

2 Mar 18: **U.S. State Department Issues New Sanctions on Iranian Entities Funding Terror Attacks against the U.S. in Iraq.** The U.S. State Department sanctioned nine entities and three individuals in the Iranian petrochemical industry. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that these individuals and entities provide revenue to Iran to fund acts of terror such as the recent attacks on Iraqi and U.S.-led Coalition forces at Camp Taji in Iraq.

3 Mar 18: **Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq Leader Says PM-Designation of Zurfi "Endangers Civil Peace" and "Violates Religious Authority."** Qais al-Khazali, a U.S.-designated terrorist and the leader of Iranian proxy militia and U.S. designated terror group Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), addressed a tweet to Iraqi President Barham Salih condemning Salih's unilateral nomination of PM-designate Zurfi. Khazali claimed that protesters and Shi'a forces openly reject Zurfi and warned that these groups will not allow Zurfi to become prime minister. AAH's political wing, Sadiqoun, is a component of the Conquest Alliance, which signed the formal statement rejecting Zurfi.

4 Mar 18: **Pentagon Evaluating Options to Respond to Recent Iranian Proxy Attacks.** Pentagon spokesman Jonathan Hoffman said in a press release that the U.S. is still evaluating its options for a response to recent attacks by Iranian proxy militias. The U.S. launched retaliatory strikes on March 12 in response to the death of two Americans in a March 11 attack on Camp Taji. The U.S. has not yet retaliated for attacks on U.S.-led Coalition forces and U.S. personnel likely conducted by Iranian proxy militias on March 14, 16, and 17.

5 Mar 19: **U.S. Pauses Training and Begins "Planned" Drawdown from Three Bases in Iraq by withdrawing from al-Qaim Base in Anbar.** Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) officially transferred command of al-Qaim Base on the Iraqi-Syrian border in Western Anbar Province to unidentified elements of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), leaving approximately \$1 million-worth of equipment for the ISF. Iraqi Joint Operations Command Spokesperson Maj. Gen. Tashin Khafaji said the withdrawal is the first step of U.S. troops withdrawing from Iraq entirely. The removal of U.S. forces from this base is the first of three planned American consolidations announced on March 15. The U.S. will also withdraw forces from Qayyarah and K1 bases. CJTF-OIR spokesperson Col. Myles B. Caggins III stated that "we will see [the U.S.-ISF] partnership in the future from fewer locations and with fewer people, but our commitment remains the same." Meanwhile, CJTF-OIR announced a temporary suspension of training at the request of the ISF to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This suspension may lower the operational tempo of counter-ISIS raids, which depend on tactical Coalition enablers and assets. Neither group claimed responsibility for the attack.

6 Mar 19: **Kata'ib Hezbollah Claims U.S. Withdrawal from Qaim "Beginning of Defeat" for the U.S.** The de facto spokesperson for Iranian proxy militia and U.S.-designated terrorist organization Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH), Abu Ali al-Askari, declared the U.S. withdrawal from al-Qaim Base to be a "humiliating escape." Askari called on KH fighters to prepare for "strategic operations if the enemy insists on its occupation and violation of sovereignty." Askari instructed KH fighters to continue targeting Americans and Iraqis who worked with the U.S., including logistical support companies and security companies associated with U.S. forces.

7 Mar 19: **Maliki's State of Law Coalition Claims to have Parliamentary Majority in Opposing PM-designate Zurfi's Government.** A spokesperson for former-PM Nouri al-Maliki's State of Law bloc, Bahaa al-Din al-Nuri, told the Iraqi outlet Shafaq that Ammar al-Hakim's Wisdom Movement has agreed to join the Conquest Alliance, the State of Law Coalition, the National Contract bloc, and the National Path bloc in rejecting PM-designate Adnan al-Zurfi. Nuri claimed that as many as 170 out of 329 members of parliament plan to reject Zurfi's cabinet. If true, Zurfi will be unable to garner the 165 parliamentary votes necessary to form a government.

8 Mar 18-24: **Shi'a Pilgrims Defy COVID-19 Curfews.** Shi'a pilgrims gathered at the Khadimiya Shrine in northern Baghdad for several days to observe the anniversary of the death of the seventh Shi'a Imam Musa al-Kadhim in Twelver Shi'ism on March 21, thereby defying curfew and public gathering restrictions intended to control the spread of COVID-19. Shi'a pilgrims also visited the shrine of Abbas Ibn Ali in Karbala.

9 Mar 20: **Caretaker PM Adel Abdul Mehdi Bans All Gatherings and Inter-City Travel as Iraqis Violate COVID-19 Curfews.** Caretaker Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mehdi announced a total ban on gatherings and movement between cities during the COVID-19 curfew, including visitors to holy shrines and participants in marches or demonstrations. Mehdi ordered the Baghdad Operations Command and the Joint Operations Command to enforce the curfew. Police across the country urged residents to stay inside their homes and issued fines to violators. Meanwhile, Iraq's COVID-19 Crisis Cell extended all Baghdad restrictions, including the suspension of flights, through March 28 and indefinitely suspended the collection of fines and levies in Baghdad until further notice to ease the financial burden on residents.

10 Mar 21: **Shi'a Parties Close to Hadi al-Ameri Discuss Alternative Candidates to Current PM-designate.** Hadi al-Ameri hosted an unspecified number of Shi'a political blocs at his home in Baghdad to discuss alternative PM candidates. The group discussed three alternative candidates from academic backgrounds according to Iraqi Kurdish outlet Rudaw. The candidates reportedly included President of Karbala University Munir al-Sa'adi, former President of the Technological University Ahmed al-Ghaban, and former President of Kufa University Mohsin al-Dhalimi.

11 Mar 22: **Iranian Quds Force Plants Story to Undermine PM-designate Zurfi.** The Kuwaiti newspaper Al-Jarida published an article wherein an anonymous source in the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps - Quds Force claimed the U.S. was planning a military coup in Iraq and had informed its allies in the region. The source claimed that Iranian intelligence intercepted communications between Sunni and Kurdish Iraqi parties and Washington regarding "American plans." The article is likely part of a disinformation operation to undermine current Iraqi PM-designate Zurfi and frame his selection as an American conspiracy.

12 Mar 23: **First Sunni Bloc Announces Support for Prime Minister-designate.** Haider al-Mulla, a spokesperson for Parliamentary Speaker Halbousi's Sunni Alliance of Iraqi Forces bloc, stated that the bloc supports PM-designate Zurfi. The party holds 32 seats in Parliament. Other Sunni blocs, such as the National Axis Alliance, have not yet announced a position on Zurfi.

13 Mar 24: **Ministry of Oil Announces New Contract with Chinese Company for Majnoon Oil Field in Basra.** The Iraqi Ministry of Oil announced that the China Petroleum Engineering & Construction Corp. (CPECC) won a \$203.5 million contract to build a processing facility for sour gas at Majnoon Oil Field in Basra. The contract's provision for a new facility will allow for 4.39 million cubic meters of high-sulfur natural gas to be processed per day. Iraq produces approximately 27.6 million cubic meters of natural gas daily.



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

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Key Takeaway: U.S. forces began one of three planned withdrawals from small bases in Iraq, two of which have been targets of frequent Iranian-proxy mortar attacks. The Pentagon described the withdrawal as a planned consolidation of forces. Iran's proxies are framing the consolidation as the beginning of defeat for U.S. forces in Iraq. The political wings of Iran's proxies are also organizing opposition to Prime Minister-designate Adnan al-Zurfi, who received tacit U.S. approval and is attempting to form a government with support from Sunnis, Kurds, and minor Shi'a parties. Meanwhile, Iraq's COVID-19 crisis is deepening. The caretaker Iraqi government failed to enforce curfews as Shi'a pilgrims convened in large crowds to observe the martyrdom of the seventh imam in Twelver Shi'ism from March 18-20.

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