

1 Feb 25: ISIS Demonstrates Tactical Proficiency against CTS Raid in Northern Iraqi Mountains. An ISIS cell ultimately failed to repel a raid by the Iraqi Counterterrorism Service (CTS) but resisted the attack in Mount Khanuqah, 40 km north of Baiji in Salah ad-Din Province, for more than 10 hours. The CTS defeated the ISIS unit and killed 39 militants, including a mufti and a military leader, and discovered two tunnels full of explosives, computer equipment, and financial documents. Coalition aircraft destroyed the tunnels after the raid. The Hamrin Mountain Range north of Baiji is a key support zone for ISIS.

2 Feb 26 - Mar 03: Coronavirus Spreads to Baghdad, Wasit, and Maysan. The Health Ministry announced new cases of COVID-19 (coronavirus) in Baghdad, Wasit, and Maysan Provinces, bringing the total number of cases in the country to 31. Iraq's fragile healthcare system faces understaffing and shortages of drugs and equipment, making further spread of the virus likely.

3 Feb 26: U.S. Designates Kata'ib Hezbollah Leader as a Terrorist. The U.S. State Department sanctioned Ahmad al-Hamidawi, the new leader of Iran's proxy Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH), as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT). The State Department stated, "KH remains actively engaged in plotting terrorism against U.S. forces, our partners, and innocent Iraqi civilians."

4 Feb 26: PM-designee Allawi Reveals Partial List of Proposed Cabinet Appointees. PM-designee Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi revealed a list of names for 19 out of 24 cabinet positions. Allawi left five positions vacant and did not assign any Kurds to ministerial posts, signaling to the Kurdish blocs that he would be willing to pass a partial cabinet and revisit negotiations for appointees after securing parliamentary approval. Allawi also did not name an appointee to head the powerful Interior Ministry. Caretaker PM Adel Abdul Mehdi similarly passed a partial cabinet in October 2018 without a defense or interior minister.

5 Feb 27: Iraqi Parliament Fails to Meet Quorum to Vote on PM-designee Allawi's Cabinet. The Iraqi Council of Representatives (CoR) failed to meet a quorum during an extraordinary session to vote on PM-designee Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi's proposed cabinet. Only 105 members of parliament attended, well short of the 165 required for a quorum. Unconfirmed reports suggest the parties which boycotted the vote included the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the Sunni Alliance of Iraqi Forces and National Axis Alliance blocs, the Shi'a Victory Alliance, and elements of the Iran-backed Shi'a Conquest Alliance bloc including former-PM Nouri al-Maliki's State of Law Coalition. The breadth of these parties indicates that Allawi faces widespread opposition across the political spectrum.

6 Feb 27-28: Religious Leaders Urge Followers to Heed Coronavirus Warnings. Nationalist Shi'a cleric Moqtada al-Sadr issued a statement via Twitter on February 27 warning followers not to attend Friday prayers or religious gatherings due to the risk of spreading coronavirus. During his usual Friday sermon, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq's highest Shi'a religious authority, avoided politics but encouraged his supporters to remain calm, listen to health officials, and avoid panic.

7 Feb 29: Kata'ib Hezbollah Issues "Final Warning" to Iraqis Cooperating with U.S. Forces. Kata'ib Hezbollah issued a "final and irreversible" warning to groups with logistical, diplomatic, security, or economic connections to U.S. forces. KH instructed these groups to "terminate their contracts" no later than March 15. It specified that these groups include Iraqi transportation and security companies, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Defense, and the Iraqi Counterterrorism Service. KH did not specify what actions it would take against organizations that continue to cooperate with the U.S. after the deadline.

8 Mar 01: Security Forces Block Protest near Green Zone before Parliamentary Vote. Unidentified units in the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) closed Baghdad's Green Zone in anticipation of protests during expected parliamentary voting. Thousands of protesters intended to gather in the Green Zone to voice opposition to Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi's proposed cabinet. Protesters from southern Iraqi provinces bussed into Baghdad for the protest but did not organize near the Green Zone due to the security precautions.

9 Mar 01: Prominent Nasiriyah Protest Leader Travels to Baghdad's Tahrir Square. Dr. Alaa al-Rikabi, a nationally recognized protest leader from Dhi Qar Province, led southern protesters to join demonstrations in Baghdad ahead of the expected parliamentary voting. Rikabi visited Tahrir Square in Baghdad, the epicenter of the popular protest movement. Rikabi may attempt to position himself as a national representative of the demonstrators.

10 Mar 01: PM-designee Allawi Steps Down. Allawi withdrew his candidacy for Prime Minister after a special CoR session failed to reach quorum for a second time to vote on his proposed cabinet. Only three additional parliamentarians attended the session, indicating the same blocs that boycotted the February 27 vote again boycotted the March 1 session. Allawi released a statement following the session in which he withdrew his candidacy and accused political parties of not being serious about reform. President Barham Salih has 15 days to nominate another candidate according to Article 76 of the Iraqi Constitution.

11 Mar 02: Kata'ib Hezbollah Likely Responsible for New Rocket Attack near U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. The Iraqi Security Media Cell announced that two Katyusha rockets landed in the Green Zone near the U.S. Embassy without causing any damage. Unidentified militants launched the rockets from Baghdad's eastern Zayouna neighborhood, according to the statement. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack. However, KH is likely responsible. The strike was likely retaliation for the U.S. designating KH's new leader as a terrorist.

12 Mar 02: Caretaker PM Mehdi Resumes Duties despite Previous Resignation Threats. Caretaker PM Adel Abdul Mehdi released a letter addressed to President Salih and CoR Speaker Mohammed al-Halbousi in which Mehdi announced that rather than vacate his office as threatened, he will observe a "voluntary absence from his role" and delegate daily responsibilities to unspecified ministers. Mehdi proposed snap parliamentary elections to be held on December 4, 2020, and called on Parliament to hold an extraordinary session to finalize electoral districts and the electoral commission, two key components of the election law passed on December 24, 2019. Mehdi previously threatened on February 19 to quit entirely if Allawi could not form a government.

13 Mar 02-03: Kata'ib Hezbollah Attempts to Discredit Iraqi Intelligence Chief as Potential PM. Abu Ali al-Askari, a KH security official and de facto spokesperson, issued a tweet denouncing Iraqi National Intelligence Service Director Mustafa al-Kadhimi. Askari issued a tweet on March 2 accusing Kadhimi of assisting the U.S. in killing Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi Popular Mobilization Commission Deputy Chairman and KH leader Abu Mehdi al-Muhandis. The Iraqi National Intelligence Service responded by issuing a statement threatening to prosecute Askari for "abuse" and "false accusations." Twitter then suspended Askari's account. Members of Ammar al-Hakim's Wisdom Trend party previously raised Kadhimi's name as a potential PM in mid-December 2019. Kadhimi rejected his candidacy at that time, but his name continues to circulate as a possible nominee.

14 Mar 03: Protesters Accuse Moqtada al-Sadr of Orchestrating Attacks on Activists in Baghdad. Protesters on Twitter accused Moqtada al-Sadr of orchestrating attacks on anti-government activists who opposed Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi as PM after unidentified assailants attacked prominent activist Hussein Rahm with a knife in Baghdad's Tahrir Square. Rahm survived the attack.



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Key Takeaway: Iraq's newly designated prime minister (PM), Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi, withdrew his nomination after failing to gain parliamentary approval for his cabinet appointments despite U.S. support for Allawi's candidacy. Allawi's withdrawal at this point in the government formation process is unprecedented. Caretaker PM Adel Abdul Mehdi, who resigned in November, stated that he will remain in office but will delegate his PM duties to an unspecified minister. Mehdi's Council of Ministers remains in place and continues to perform basic government functions without clear legal authority. President Barham Salih is now constitutionally required to restart the government formation. Salih must identify a new PM-designee within 15 days.

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