

1 July 08-14: Protests against Poor Electricity Provisions Accelerate in Southern Iraq. Protests against poor electricity provisions across southern Iraq dramatically expanded between July 8 and 14. The provinces of Maysan, Basra, Dhi Qar, and Qadisiyah saw particularly large and sustained protests. Protests remained peaceful, though several demonstrations resulted in the storming of local electricity distribution department buildings. Widespread power outages likely motivated these latest protests. Protesters in Diwaniyah, Qadisiyah Province, said that demonstrators were also frustrated with the “rampant” corruption stemming from political parties and “armed factions.” The Iraqi Ministry of Electricity released a document on July 12 that showed an 8-percent fall in electricity capacity across Iraq between 2019 and 2020. ISIS attacks and COVID-19 stay-at-home orders have recently increased strain on the grid, thereby worsening historically unreliable service provisions.

2 July 08: Kata'ib Hezbollah Spokesperson Threatens Escalation if Iraqi Prime Minister Continues Anti-Militia Campaign. A spokesperson for key Iranian proxy and US-designated terrorist organization Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH), Mohammed Mohie, told the Associated Press that “there will be an escalation” if “provocations” from Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi do not cease. Mohie claimed the July 4 test of the US Embassy’s Counter Rocket Artillery Mortar (C-RAM) system in Baghdad was another “provocation” that turned the Embassy into a “military base.” An anonymous Shi’a political official told the Associated Press that Shi’a militias fear Kadhimi plans to “liquidate” militia groups.

3 July 08: Controversial General Accused of Killing “Dozens” of Protesters Avoids Prosecution under Kadhimi Reshuffling. The military spokesperson for Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, Brigadier General Yahya Rasool, announced the transfer of General Jamil al-Shammari to the “Ministry of Defense’s command,” a move that is functionally equivalent to a suspension with pay. The announcement sparked widespread criticism from Iraqi analysts and bloggers. Shammari led a brutal crackdown on protests, also known as the “Nasiriyah massacre,” in November 2019 when he was the commander of the Dhi Qar Crisis Cell. The crackdown led to the resignation of former Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mehdi the next day. Iraqi activists and bloggers criticized Kadhimi’s decision to transfer Shammari as contradictory to his repeated promises to hold the protesters’ killers accountable. Shammari also lost his job as Basra Operations Commander after overseeing a deadly crackdown against protesters in 2018.

4 July 10: Likely Iranian Proxies Attempt to Fire One Rocket toward Green Zone. Baghdad Operations Command (BOC) announced that unspecified security forces found an unfired Katyusha rocket in al-Rusafa district in eastern Baghdad, approximately 4.38 km from the US Embassy and pointed toward Baghdad’s Green Zone. Likely Iranian proxies have repeatedly targeted US facilities and personnel since Prime Minister Kadhimi completed his cabinet on June 8.

5 July 11-12: Local Security Sources Confirm Iranian Proxy Attack on Logistics Vehicles Supporting US Forces Despite Pentagon Denial. Iranian proxy Saraya Thawra al-Ashreen al-Thaniya (STAT), one of the new proxy “shadow militias,” claimed that it attacked Iraqi vehicles transporting US military supplies near Diwaniyah, Qadisiyah Province, and circulated a video of the attack. The attack caused no casualties but caused material damage to at least three trucks. A Diwaniyah police spokesperson confirmed the attack and stated that the targets were trucks transferring logistics supplies from Basra Province to an unspecified US facility. A Pentagon spokesperson released a statement on July 12 claiming that the Department of Defense was not aware of any attacks targeting US interests in Iraq on that date. STAT has claimed responsibility for several unsubstantiated IED attacks on logistics convoys in Iraq since it announced its existence on May 15. This attack likely did take place and likely targeted a convoy carrying supplies to one of the bases where Iraqi Security Forces are co-located with US personnel. Abu Ali al-Askari, a de facto KH spokesperson, issued a statement via Twitter around the same time that the STAT claim was circulated in which he called for continued armed resistance against US forces in Iraq. The timing of this statement indicates that KH may have had knowledge of or played a role in the attack.

6 July 10: Kadhimi Orders Iran-linked Unit to “Retake” Diyala Border Crossings, but Likely Does Not Change Fundamental Control of Crossings. Prime Minister Kadhimi and Minister of Interior (MoI) Othman al-Ghanimi ordered the MoI Emergency Response Division (ERD) to seize the al-Mundhiriya and Mandali border crossings in Diyala Province. The ERD is a special forces unit under the command of an Iran-aligned Badr Organization member, Thamer al-Husseini. Kadhimi had previously authorized the Counterterrorism Service (CTS) to seize both Mundhiriya and Mandali border crossings on June 15, but the CTS ultimately did not retake either crossing. Iraq’s Joint Operations Command (JOC) claimed that unspecified elite forces would remain permanently stationed at the border to ensure government control. Border crossings across Iraq are under the de-facto control of Iranian-backed militia groups, including Badr. No arrests were reported and it remains unclear whether the ERD permanently ousted any Iran-backed militias from the crossings.

7 July 11: Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi Inspects Mandali Border Crossing and Announces Reopening. Prime Minister Kadhimi inspected the Mandali border crossing and held a press conference during which he repeatedly condemned “ghosts who blackmail businessmen” and announced that Mandali would reopen under the control of military forces. The crossing has been closed since March 3 due to COVID-19. An anonymous Lieutenant Colonel with the border guards in Mandali told the Associated Press that “ghosts” was a reference to armed pro-Iranian factions that operate in the area. Unspecified fighters from likely pro-Iran factions in the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) were present in the crowd at Kadhimi’s press conference, posing an implicit threat to Kadhimi as he denounced the presence of unregulated militias at border crossings. Unspecified fighters from likely pro-Iran factions in the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) were present in the crowd at Kadhimi’s press conference, posing an implicit threat to Kadhimi. Kadhimi appeared alongside CTS Commander Lieutenant Gen. Abdul Wahhab al-Saadi and Deputy JOC Commander Lieutenant Gen. Abdul Amir al-Shammari. Iraqi newspapers report that Kadhimi plans to seize more than six additional border crossings in the central and southern provinces of Iraq that are “under the control of armed groups.”

8 July 11-13: Iraqi Security Forces Launch Phase Four of Operation Heroes of Iraq Targeting ISIS Cells in Diyala Province with New Peshmerga Coordination. ISF, PMF, JOC, CTS, ERD, and Sulaymaniyah Province Peshmerga Forces launched Operation Heroes of Iraq - Phase Four in Diyala Province July 11. This ongoing phase targets ISIS hideouts in Diyala to stabilize regions near the Iranian border and areas disputed by the Iraqi Government and Kurdistan Regional Government. The operation also seeks to disrupt ISIS movements over the border between Diyala and Salah ad-Din provinces. The operations allegedly searched at least 53 villages over the first three days. The Iraqi government launched the first phase of Operation Heroes of Iraq targeting ISIS cells in Kirkuk, Diyala and Salah ad-Din Provinces on June 2. This phase marks the first reported cooperation between the Peshmerga and ISF in the Heroes of Iraq operations.

9 July 12: Iraqi Security Forces Deny Claims that a Clash with Protesters in Baghdad Resulted in Casualties. An unspecified Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) unit reportedly prevented busloads of demonstrators from entering Baghdad to protest unpaid government salaries. Some demonstrators claimed online that the ISF fired upon and killed several individuals during the encounter. A spokesperson for Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi refuted that claim and announced that “some protesters assaulted the security forces” who stopped the busses and that the ISF “repelled them” without using weapons or live ammunition. The spokesperson said the ISF prevented the buses from entering the city due to COVID-19 regulations. Ammar al-Hakim, the leader of the newly formed, pro-Kadhimi Iraqis Alliance in Parliament, said that the clash resulted “in a number of casualties” and called for an investigation.

10 July 12: Parliamentary Speaker Orders Sadrist to Lead Corruption Investigation into Ministry of Electricity Misconduct. Mohammad al-Halbousi, the speaker of Iraq’s parliament, the Council of Representatives (CoR), directed the formation of a parliamentary committee to audit and investigate corruption within the Ministry of Electricity on July 12. The committee will be chaired by Deputy Speaker Hassan al-Kaabi, who is also a member of nationalist Shi’a cleric Moqtada al-Sadr’s Toward Reform bloc. The committee will review ministry contracts between 2006 and 2020. Amjad al-Aqabi, a member of Toward Reform and the parliamentary energy committee, had called for the minister of electricity to be questioned before Parliament on July 8. Sadr will likely leverage the investigatory position to cast his political bloc as a reformist power holding the government accountable, attempting to reclaim some popular support as protests over electricity shortages inevitably worsen during the hot summer months.

11 July 13-14: Kadhimi Reshuffles Iraqi-Saudi Coordination Council as it Looks to Implement Bilateral Agreements to Accelerate Iraqi-Saudi Trade and Improve Relations. Prime Minister Kadhimi issued a series of new appointments to the Iraq-Saudi Coordination Council, a government body tasked with improving bilateral Iraq-Saudi relations, on July 13. Kadhimi named his close confidant, Finance Minister Ali Allawi, as chairman of the council. Other appointments included the Iraqi Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, the governor of Iraq’s Central Bank, and individuals from most government ministries. Allawi announced on July 14 that Iraq and Saudi Arabia would continue their cooperation to implement bilateral agreements in the oil, energy, industrial, agricultural, and commercial sectors. The council also discussed the reopening and utilization of the Arar border crossing to jumpstart trade between Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Former Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi set up the Iraqi-Saudi Coordination Council in 2017 to reestablish severed relations between the neighboring countries.



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

Graphic by Katherine Lawlor and Brandon Wallace
©2020 by the Institute for the Study of War

Key Takeaway: Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi’s political maneuverability is increasingly constrained by resistance from Iran’s militia proxies and from protesters demanding better government services. Kadhimi directed elite forces to retake border crossings, advancing his campaign to reclaim Iraq’s border crossings from Iranian-backed militias with limited success. These security operations have not resulted in arrests or the permanent ousting of any militia groups to date but do signal to the United States that Kadhimi is taking the most aggressive actions he can without triggering violent retaliation from Iran’s proxy militias. Meanwhile, mass demonstrations broke out across the Shi’a-majority south to protest a lack of electricity service provisions after a months-long, COVID-19-induced downturn. Kadhimi continues to pursue new energy partnerships with Iraq’s neighbors, especially Saudi Arabia, but will be unable to provide the immediate jump in electricity supplies needed to quell the protests.

To learn more about the situation in Iraq and other international issues, see ISW’s new podcast, **Overwatch**, available on Spotify, Sticher, iTunes, and all your favorite podcast apps.