

**1 Mar 30: Sistani and Sadr Refused to Meet with New IRGC-QF Commander Ghaani.** An anonymous senior Shi'a clerical source in Najaf told Al-Monitor that Iraq's highest Shi'a religious authority, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, rejected a meeting request from the new Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force (IRGC-QF) Commander Ismail Ghaani during Ghaani's March 30 visit to Baghdad. Nationalist Shi'a cleric Moqtada al-Sadr also canceled a pre-scheduled meeting with Ghaani, telling him that "there should be no foreign interference in Iraq's affairs." Both meetings likely would have taken place in Najaf. Ghaani also did not meet with Sunni or Kurdish politicians.

**2 Apr 08: Prime Minister-designate Zurfi Steps Down, Restarting Government Formation Process.** Adnan al-Zurfi, the prime minister (PM)-designate, rescinded his nomination for the premiership before Iraq's Parliament held the vote of confidence for his proposed government. Anonymous sources told Iraqi outlet al-Hurra that multiple unspecified Shi'a parties offered Zurfi a high-ranking position in the next government in exchange for stepping down. Zurfi failed to gain the momentum necessary to bypass attempts by Iran's political proxies to block his nomination.

**3 Apr 08: New Iranian Proxy Militia Releases Drone Footage of Base Housing US Troops.** Usbat al-Thairen (UT), a new Iranian proxy militia that announced its existence on March 15, released a propaganda video featuring drone footage of Ain al-Assad Air Base, which houses US troops in Anbar Province. The video warned that "our eyes monitor their movements." The Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) fired ballistic missiles at Ain al-Assad Air Base on January 8 in retaliation for the US killing of IRGC-QF Commander Qassem Soleimani.

**4 Apr 08-09: Another New Iranian Proxy Militia, Ashab al-Kahf, Claims Attack on US Convoy and Threatens US Bases.** Ashab al-Kahf (AK), another new Iranian proxy militia that announced its existence on March 21, released a statement and video claiming responsibility for detonating an improvised explosive device (IED) targeting a US logistic supply convoy travelling between Arbil and Baghdad Provinces on April 8 in Uswayat, Salah ad-Din Province. AK distributed a video claiming the attack on April 9. AK signed its statement "Islamic Resistance in Iraq - Ashab al-Kahf" referencing the umbrella organization for Iran's proxy network in Iraq. AK also released a poster on April 8 featuring a cache of 122 mm Katyusha rockets and warning that US bases are not safe.

**5 Apr 09: President Barham Salih Selects Mustafa al-Kadhimi as New PM-designate.** President Barham Salih selected Iraqi National Intelligence Service (INIS) Director Mustafa al-Kadhimi as the new PM-designate and invited him to attempt to form a cabinet within the constitutionally mandated 30-day timeframe. Kadhimi's Baghdad nomination ceremony demonstrated widespread political support for his candidacy. The ceremony was conducted by Salih and attended by prominent political leaders and officials, including Council of Representatives Speaker and Sunni Iraqi Forces Alliance leader Mohammed al-Halbousi, Wisdom Trend leader Ammar al-Hakim, Conquest Alliance and Iranian proxy leader Hadi al-Ameri, Victory Alliance leader and former-PM Haider al-Abadi, high-ranking Toward Reform representative Nassar al-Rubaie, President of the High Judicial Council Faiq al-Zaidan, and United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) head Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert. Shortly after his nomination, Kadhimi tweeted nationalist messages in English, Arabic, and Kurdish promising to put the demands of Iraqis ahead of foreign interests. Kadhimi is a political independent, holds a degree in law, published several books, and previously served as the Iraq Pulse editor for Al-Monitor.

**6 Apr 09-13: Another New Iranian Proxy Militia Warns US Troops to Leave Iraq.** Qadbat al-Huda, or "Fist of Guidance," a previously unknown militia group, announced its existence in a statement on April 9. The group claimed to have intelligence that the US is planning to attack the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, referring to Iran's proxy militia network. It also warned that if the US and British ambassadors to Iraq do not leave within 48 hours "we will expel you as dead." However, Qadbat al-Huda issued a second statement on April 13 updating its position, stating it will not target diplomats, but that the group will "fight the American, British, and Israeli forces." Qadbat al-Huda is the fourth new Shi'a militia group to emerge since the death of IRGC-QF Commander Qassem Soleimani on January 3, 2020.

**7 Apr 10: Key Iranian Proxy Kata'ib Hezbollah Calls Nomination of Mustafa al-Kadhimi a "Declaration of War."** Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH), a US-designated terrorist organization and key Iranian proxy, condemned the designation of Mustafa al-Kadhimi as PM. KH posted a statement to their website calling the designation "a declaration of war" against the Iraqi people. KH claimed the designation shows that unspecified political forces, likely Conquest Alliance and other Shi'a blocs, have submitted to the pressure of their enemies, likely the United States, and emphasized that KH refuses to be a part of the "conspiracy." KH previously accused Kadhimi of providing intelligence that helped the United States kill Qassem Soleimani and Popular Mobilization Commission (PMC) Deputy Chairman Abu Mehdi al-Muhandis.

**8 Apr 10-11: State Department Offers Reward for Senior Lebanese Hezbollah Official Operating in Iraq.** The US State Department announced a reward of up to \$10 million for information on the activities, networks and associates of Muhammad Kawtharani, a senior Lebanese Hezbollah official and US-designated Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) who handles Iraqi affairs for the organization. Kawtharani is a member of the Hezbollah Political Council and promotes Hezbollah's interests in Iraq. A photo of Kawtharani meeting in the al-Jadiriya neighborhood of Baghdad with Shibl Zaydi, the leader of Iranian proxy militia Kata'ib al-Imam Ali, emerged on April 11, but it is unclear when the photo was taken.

**9 Apr 10: Unnamed US Officials Announce Missile Defense Systems are Operational in Iraq.** Anonymous US officials told the Associated Press that a Patriot missile system is now operational at Ain al-Asad Airbase in Anbar Province and that another short-range rocket defense system is operational at Camp Taji, north of Baghdad.

**10 Apr 12: Badr Organization Rejects Strategic Dialogue with US, Threatens "Military Option."** Karim Alaiwi, an MP representing the Iranian proxy Badr Organization on the Security and Defense Committee, told the Iraq News Network that "there is no intention to accept any dialogue that will lead to keeping American forces in Iraq." He said that the strategic dialogue announced by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on April 7 will aim to keep US forces in the country. Alaiwi insisted on the removal of US forces "even if it is necessary to use force and the military option."

**11 Apr 13: Hadi al-Ameri Hosts Meeting of Shi'a Leaders to "Test" Possible Cabinet Picks.** An anonymous source in the Conquest Alliance bloc told Iraqi media outlets that Conquest Alliance leader and Iranian proxy Hadi al-Ameri hosted a meeting at his home with prominent Shi'a parties and PM-designate Mustafa al-Kadhimi in which the parties insisted that Kadhimi make his cabinet decisions with the approval and participation of the political blocs. State of Law Coalition leader and former PM Nouri al-Maliki, Wisdom Trend leader Ammar al-Hakim, Toward Reform MP Nassar al-Rubaie, and National Security Advisor and PMC Chairman Faleh al-Fayyadh attended the meeting. Participants reportedly floated specific potential cabinet members to "test" their viability among the other Shi'a blocs.

**12 Apr 14: President Salih "Working with Legal Team" to Revoke Reuters License Suspension.** President Barham Salih participated in an exclusive interview with CNN in which he stated that the Communications Media Commission (CMC) decision to revoke the media license of British wire service Reuters was "regrettable" and that he was working with a legal team to revoke the suspension because it is not conducive to creating a transparent media environment. The CMC suspended Reuters' license for three months and imposed a \$21,000 fine following an April 2 report in which Reuters revealed that the Iraqi government may be underreporting COVID-19 cases. Salih said there is no evidence of deliberate falsification of COVID-19 case records.

**13 Apr 14: IMF Projects Iraq's Current Account Balance Will Face the World's Largest Drop in 2020.** In its April World Economic Outlook report, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected that Iraq's GDP would drop by 4.7 percent in 2020 and that Iraq's current account balance would decline by 21.7 percent, the greatest projected current account balance drop in the world. The current account balance is a country's trade balance plus net income and direct payments. However, the same report projects that, assuming that the world economy overcomes the shock inflicted by COVID-19, Iraq's GDP will increase by 7.2 percent in 2021.



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**Key Takeaway:** The United States, Iran, and most of Iraq's political elites agreed to support Iraq's new prime minister (PM)-designate, Iraqi National Intelligence Director Mustafa al-Kadhimi, following Iran's successful political proxy campaign to sink the PM-designation of Adnan al-Zurfi. Most of Iran's political and militia proxies fell in line behind Kadhimi but conditioned their support on the rapid expulsion of US forces from Iraq. However, key proxy militia Kata'ib Hezbollah maintains its firm anti-Kadhimi stance and may escalate to violence if the government formation process does not favor Iran's preferred outcomes, including key cabinet appointments and 2020 budget allotments. Iran's proxies are conducting an information operation consisting of rhetorical threats to shape Kadhimi's proposed cabinet and to increase Iraqi political support for ending the US force presence ahead of a US-Iraq strategic dialogue slated for June. Meanwhile, Iran's proxy militias created a fourth new Shi'a militia group to increase rhetorical and kinetic pressure on US forces.

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