

1 Apr 15: Prime Minister-designate Mustafa al-Kadhimi Completes his Cabinet, Claims He is Serious about Ending “Unjustified Foreign [US] Presence.” Mustafa al-Kadhimi, the prime minister (PM)-designate, participated in a press briefing in which he claimed his cabinet is complete and ready for parliamentary approval. Kadhimi told journalists that he believes many of Iraq’s current problems are caused by the political process put in place after the American invasion in 2003. Kadhimi stated he is serious about ending “unjustified foreign presence” and will engage in a “serious dialogue with the United States regarding the nature of their presence,” referring to the planned Iraqi-US Strategic Dialogue planned for June.

2 Apr 16: PM-designate Kadhimi’s Leaked Cabinet Favors Sectarian Quota System and Traditional Power Brokers. Unnamed sources revealed the ethno-sectarian breakdown of Mustafa al-Kadhimi’s proposed cabinet to Iraqi outlets. The breakdown identifies which parties secured the privilege to name cabinet appointees. The sources revealed that there are 22 minister positions, 11 of which will allegedly be reserved for Shi’a parties: three for nationalist cleric Moqtada al-Sadr’s Toward Reform, three for Iranian proxy Hadi al-Ameri’s Conquest Alliance, two for former-PM Haider al-Abadi’s Victory Alliance, one for former-PM Nouri al-Maliki’s State of Law, one for cleric Ammar al-Hakim’s Wisdom Trend, and one for the political wing of US-designated terrorist organization and Iranian proxy militia Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq, Sadiqoun. Six positions will go to Sunni parties, three to the Kurds, and two to other minorities. The sources provided no further details on which Sunni, Kurdish, and minority parties will receive positions.

3 Apr 16: US State Department Pledges \$25.6 Million in Aid to Iraq as Part of Global COVID-19 Response. The US State Department pledged \$25.6 million in aid to Iraq as part of the COVID-19 response. The US will be Iraq’s largest donor for COVID-19 assistance. \$19.1 million will provide health and disaster humanitarian assistance and \$6.5 million will help displaced communities in Iraq. The assistance to Iraq is part of a larger \$508 million global emergency assistance package distributed by the State Department and the US Agency for International Development (USAID)

4 Apr 17-18: US-sanctioned Sunni Politician Reportedly Forms New Sunni Bloc in Parliament. Hoda Jarallah, a Sunni MP, announced that 25 Sunni MPs formed a new parliamentary bloc called the Liberated Cities bloc, in a press conference covered by All Iraq News. Jarallah stated that most of the bloc’s 25 members defected from Speaker of the Parliament Mohammed Halbousi’s 40-seat Alliance of Iraqi Forces, the largest Sunni bloc. However, Maha al-Janabi, an Alliance of Iraqi Forces MP, denied both the formation of the Liberated Cities bloc and any defections. MP Khamis al-Khanjar, who will reportedly lead the new bloc, has also remained silent on its formation. Khanjar is closely aligned with the Iranian proxy Conquest Alliance bloc and was sanctioned by the US Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control for corruption at the expense of the Iraqi people in December 2019.

5 Apr 18: Unidentified Militants Target Chinese Oil Facility East of Baghdad. Unidentified militants launched two Katyusha rockets that struck the East Baghdad Oil Field in the Nahrawan area, approximately 30 km east of Baghdad. Chinese oil exploration and production company ZhenHua operates at the field. An anonymous security official told AP that the rockets were launched by an unspecified militia group following a failed business proposal. The attack caused minimal damage. This is the second attack on foreign oil interests in Iraq this month; on April 9, unidentified militants launched three Katyusha rockets targeting Zubair oil field in the al-Burjasiya area of Basra, where American and Italian oil companies operate.

6 Apr 18: Likely Iran-backed Units Use COVID-19 Curfews to Arrest Activists. Unspecified units of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) arrested several activists in Diwaniyah, Qadisiyyah Province, and raided homes of activists in Nasiriyah, Dhi Qar Province. Likely Iran-backed units arrested Mortada Naim and Karar al-Hayesh, two prominent protesters, in Martyr’s Square, Diwaniyah. Protesters released a video from the same square threatening to take action if the activists were not released within one hour. The activists do not appear to have been released and protesters have not yet taken action. Units also reportedly raided the houses of activists Sheikh Amer in the Gharraf district of Dhi Qar Province and Karar Yassin in Nasiriyah. Protesters released several videos again pledging to return to the Revolution once the COVID-19 curfew ends.

7 Apr 19: Iraqi Communications and Media Commission Bows to Criticism and Presidential Pressure, Lifts Suspension of Reuters’ License. The Iraqi Communications and Media Commission (CMC) lifted the suspension on British wire service Reuters’ media license in order “to allow transparent and impartial work by the media.” The CMC suspended the license for 3 months following an April 2 article accusing Iraqi officials of misrepresenting cases of COVID-19 in the country. Iraqi President Barham Salih had pressured the CMC to reverse its decision. Reuters issued a statement thanking the Iraqi authorities and the CMC for their promptness in resolving the suspension.

8 Apr 20: PM-designate Kadhimi Struggles to Please Shi’a and Sunni Parties with Cabinet Appointments. Shi’a and Sunni blocs are reportedly demanding new cabinet positions in exchange for support, creating new challenges for PM-designate Mustafa al-Kadhimi. An anonymous source told the Kurdish outlet Rudaw that the Iran-backed Conquest Alliance bloc and the Sunni Alliance of Iraqi Forces bloc each demanded security positions in PM-designate Kadhimi’s new government and that Kadhimi refused to grant them. The source claimed that Kadhimi wants to keep the position of the head of the Iraqi National Intelligence Service (INIS) open because he knows his position as PM would be only temporary, implying that Kadhimi would take back his original post.

9 Apr 20: Iraq Eases COVID-19 Curfew as Ramadan Approaches. The Crisis Cell, a federal body within the office of the Prime Minister tasked with issuing decisions regarding COVID-19, announced that curfew restrictions will be lessened across all provinces excluding the Kurdistan region in preparation for Ramadan. The curfew will remain in place from 7:00 pm until 6:00 am and a stay at home order will be imposed on Fridays and Saturdays. Shops will be allowed to open until 6:00 pm and government offices will open with reduced staff. Universities, malls, cafes, and wedding halls will remain closed. Citizens will be required to wear masks outside. The new curfew provisions will be applied April 21 through May 22. Ramadan begins on April 23.

10 Apr 21: Iranian Proxy Militias Seize Key Land in Baghdad’s Green Zone, Broadening Surveillance of the US Embassy. Armed members of Iranian proxy militias Kata’ib Hezbollah (KH), Sayed al-Shuhada, Saraya al-Khurasani, and Kata’ib Ansar Allah entered Baghdad’s fortified Green Zone and seized two areas near the US Embassy. KH is a US-designated terrorist organization. An unnamed Iraqi security source told Al-Hurra that Caretaker PM Adel Abdul Mehdi’s office granted “vast lands ... in strategic locations” within the Green Zone to Iran’s proxy militia groups. Mehdi’s office firmly denied these reports and threatened prosecution of those spreading the story. Mehdi’s advisor on Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) affairs, Iranian proxy Tahseen Abdul Matar Al-Aboudi, reportedly helped facilitate these land grants after assuming responsibility for Green Zone security in March 2020. The source stated that these land grants ensure a permanent militia presence within the Green Zone in order to surveil the US Embassy.

11 Apr 21: Caretaker PM Adel Abdul Mehdi Calls on Parliament to Compromise and Expedite Government Formation under PM-designate Mustafa al-Kadhimi. Caretaker Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mehdi wrote an open letter to the Council of Representatives (CoR) in which he emphasized the need to accept compromises and stressed the importance of expediting the confirmation of PM-designate Mustafa al-Kadhimi’s government. Mehdi called out unspecified political blocs for demanding certain ministries in Kadhimi’s new government, writing that a unified government is currently the most important thing for Iraq and is necessary to hold elections.

12 Apr 21: Iraq Cuts Gas and Electricity Imports from Iran by 75 Percent ahead of US Sanctions Waiver Deadline. The Iraqi Ministry of Electricity announced it cut its gas and electricity imports from Iran by 75 percent as Iraq moves toward self-sufficiency in generating electric power. Fadel al-Dabbas, an Iraqi businessman and former head of the Iraqiya Coalition, revealed to Iraqi news outlet Shafaq on April 17 that the United States strongly recommended that Iraq end its energy relationship with Iran and find a different country from which to import gas as soon as possible. The latest US sanctions waiver for Iraq, which provides relief from the impact of sanctions on Iran, is set to expire on April 26. The latest US waiver was the shortest ever issued at just 30 days, increasing the pressure on Iraq to diversify its energy imports.

13 Apr 21: [RUMINT] ISIS Leader Abu Ibrahim al-Qurashi Reportedly Enters Iraqi Territory. An anonymous Iraqi security source told Iraqi outlets that ISIS leader Abu Ibrahim al-Qurashi recently entered Iraqi territory and that unspecified Iraqi Security Forces are attempting to locate him. The US State Department’s Rewards for Justice program also tweeted a \$5 million reward for information on Qurashi, using several of his aliases. Anonymous security sources frequently claimed that ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was in Iraq when he was eventually found and killed in Syria’s Idlib Province.



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

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

Key Takeaway: Iraq’s political elites are conditioning their support for Prime Minister (PM)-designate Mustafa al-Kadhimi on the composition of his cabinet. The widening rift between Kadhimi and Iran-backed blocs has led Kadhimi to preserve the traditional system of ethno-sectarian quota filling, to marginalize protester demands, and to step up his comments about the “unjustified foreign [US] presence” in an attempt to mend ties. Behind the scenes, the US and Iran have continued their competition to influence Iraq’s future. Members of several Iranian proxy militias took over two areas in Baghdad’s fortified Green Zone near both the PM’s office and the US Embassy, placing additional pressure on Kadhimi to conform with Iranian political objectives as he rebuilds his cabinet. Meanwhile, the United States has announced a \$26 million aid package to help address COVID-19 in Iraq and successfully exerted pressure on the Iraqi government to reduce its dependence on Iranian energy imports.

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.

