

**1** May 20: **Demonstrators in Diyala Province Cut Off Major Road to Protest Deteriorating Security Conditions Due to ISIS Attacks.** Demonstrators organized protests in the Baquba, Muqdadiah, and Khanaqin districts of Diyala Province to protest poor security conditions due to increased ISIS activity in the province. Dozens of protesters reportedly blocked a major road between Muqdadiah district and Khanaqin district. Protesters carried banners accusing security officials of negligence and called for the replacement of provincial security officials.

**2** May 20: **Foreign Oil Workers Evacuate from Basra after Iraqi Oil Workers Protest for Salaries.** Approximately 60 foreign nationals working with the Basra Gas Company evacuated Iraq on private planes due to growing protests against salary delays. The Basra Gas Company is a joint venture between the Netherlands-based Shell, Japan-based Mitsubishi, and the state-owned South Gas Company. All staff will continue to work remotely and production will not be impacted, according to a Shell spokesperson. Protests demanding salary payments have sprung up across southern Iraq as energy companies and the Iraqi government have delayed paychecks for contractors in the face of depressed global oil prices and months of lost revenue in the first two quarters of 2020.

**3** May 21: **Authorities Arrest Baghdad Gang Leader Accused of Extorting Foreign Contractors, Possibly on Behalf of Iranian Proxy Militia Saraya al-Khorsani.** Iraqi authorities in Baghdad arrested gang leader Maitham Al-Okaili on terrorism charges relating to his kidnapping and extortion of foreign contractors in Iraq. The Federal Police previously raided Okaili's farm on April 28 to rescue two Chinese contractors held for ransom by Okaili's gang in the al-Mada'in District of Baghdad. The raid led to the seizure of a "large quantity" of weapons and four armored vehicles used by the gang and killed at least one gang member. Activists and observers accused Okaili of being affiliated with the Iranian proxy militia Saraya Talia al-Khorasani (STaK) and extorting tens of thousands of dollars.

**4** May 21-22: **Sixth New Shi'a Militia Group "Revenge of Muhandis Brigade" Claims Two Attacks on US Forces.** A previously unknown Shi'a militia group calling itself the "Revenge of Muhandis Brigade" circulated a statement on Telegram claiming the May 6 rocket attack on US and Iraqi forces near Baghdad International Airport. The statement also claimed that the group carried out a previously unreported and likely failed attack on a US Chinook helicopter with two surface-to-air missiles in the southeastern Baghdad belt on April 17. The group released two videos the next day purporting to show the two attacks. One shows the use of a shoulder-mounted surface-to-air missile launcher. This is the sixth ostensibly new Shi'a militia to announce its presence since the January 3 death of IRGC - Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani and de facto Popular Mobilization Forces leader Abu Mehdi al-Muhandis, after whom the group is named.

**5** May 22: **Foreign Relations Committee MP Describes Focuses of US-Iraq Strategic Dialogue.** Ala Talabani, the head of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) bloc in the Iraqi Parliament and a member of the parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee, issued a press statement in which she claimed that the upcoming US-Iraq strategic dialogue would cover five areas: military and security coordination, the future of the American presence in Iraq, the training and equipping of the Iraqi army, economic considerations, and cultural issues. Talabani stressed that the current Iraqi policy is to maintain a balance of relations between the United States and Iran in a way that serves Iraqi interests.

**6** May 22: **Prime Minister Kadhimi and US Secretary of State Pompeo Discuss Economic Crisis and Strategic Dialogue.** US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo spoke to Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi to discuss Iraq's economic crisis and the upcoming US-Iraq Strategic Dialogue. Pompeo encouraged Kadhimi to work toward "real reforms" and pursue financial assistance from international institutions, according to a State Department readout. A statement from Kadhimi's office said that they discussed the "preparations to start the [June] Strategic Dialogue."

**7** May 23-25: **Kadhimi Discusses Energy Investments with Chinese Ambassador and Russian President.** Prime Minister Kadhimi met with China's ambassador to Baghdad, Zhang Tao, on May 23. The two discussed oil prices, ways to increase Chinese investment in Iraq, Chinese support for counterterrorism, and coronavirus prevention in Iraq, according to a statement from Kadhimi's office. Kadhimi also discussed bilateral relations and economic opportunity in a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin on May 25. Kadhimi and Putin reportedly covered topics including Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the COVID-19 pandemic, and the security situations in Iraqi and Syria. Putin said in a statement following the meeting that Russia intends to double its current investments in Iraq's energy sector.

**8** May 23: **Protesters Set Fire to Asaib Ahl Al-Haq Headquarters in Amarah, Maysan Province.** Protesters in Amarah, Maysan Province set fire to the provincial headquarters of Iranian proxy militia and US-designated terrorist organization Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq (AAH). AAH spokesperson Jawad al-Tulaibawi blamed the attack on the United States.

**9** May 23: **Two Powerful Iranian Proxy Militias Call for Terrorist Attacks in Saudi Arabia to Retaliate for Terrorism in Iraq.** The deputy secretary general of Iranian proxy militia and US-designated terrorist organization Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba, Nasr al-Shammari, issued a statement via Twitter in which he accused Saudi Arabia of being behind the recent increase in terrorism in Iraq. Shammari vowed revenge against the country and used an Arabic hashtag meaning "Saudi Arabia Source of Terrorism." The de facto spokesperson for US-designated terrorist organization Kata'ib Hezbollah, Abu Ali al-Askari, wrote on Twitter that previous attacks on Saudi Aramco are proof that Iran's proxies can "move the battle" into Saudi Arabia. He wrote that "You [Iraqis] won't be safe ... unless Jihadi operations are transferred to Saudi Arabia." He also accused Saudi Arabia of being "one [with] ISIS."

**10** May 21-25: **Finance Minister Ali Allawi Reportedly Convinces Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to Decrease Oil Production, Allowing Iraq to Keep Its Current Levels.** New Iraqi Finance Minister Ali Allawi flew to Saudi Arabia as an envoy of Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi on May 21. Amer al-Fayez, the chairman of the Iraqi-Gulf Relations subcommittee of the parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee, told Iraqi newspaper al Mada that the goals of the visit were to borrow three billion dollars from Saudi Arabia, to improve energy partnerships between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, and to reduce Saudi and Kuwaiti shares of oil production so as to not alter Iraq's production. The Foreign Ministry denied that Allawi was seeking to borrow money and said that Allawi was instead seeking an increase in Saudi investment in Iraq. Allawi reportedly agreed to allow Saudi companies to invest in Iraq's largest gas field, the Akkas gas field in western Anbar Province near the Iraq-Syria border. Allawi also led a delegation to Kuwait on May 24, where he met the Kuwaiti prime minister, finance minister, oil minister, and deputy foreign minister. Allawi discussed the rescheduling of Iraq's compensation payments to Kuwait. Fayez claimed that Saudi Arabia and Kuwait agreed to reduce their oil production so that Iraq might keep its production levels steady. Iraq has not yet met OPEC's required production cuts.

**11** May 25: **Prime Minister Reappoints Lieutenant General Qais al-Muhammadawi as Head of Baghdad Operations Command.** Security sources told several Iraqi news outlets that Prime Minister Kadhimi reappointed Lieutenant General Qais al-Muhammadawi as head of the Baghdad Operations Command (BOC), replacing recently hospitalized Major General Abdul Hussein al-Tamimi. Tamimi replaced Muhandadawi as BOC head in December 2019 after Muhandadawi reportedly suffered an unspecified health problem following the so-called al-Sinak massacre, during which militias shot dozens of protesters in central Baghdad. Muhandadawi is a career army officer who previously served as head of the Middle Euphrates Operations Command.

**12** May 26: **Kadhimi Pledges to Investigate Violence against Protesters following UN Report.** Prime Minister Kadhimi's media office responded to a May 23 United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI) report that claimed unspecified actors killed 490 protesters and kidnapped at least 25 between the beginning of the October 2019 protest movement and March 21, 2020. Kadhimi's media office issued a statement saying that the government of Iraq is "committed to an impartial and independent investigation into all the events mentioned in the report."

**13** May 26: **MP for Iranian Proxy Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq's Political Wing Condemns Improving Iraqi-Saudi Relations, Accuses Saudi Arabia of Financing Iraqi Terrorism.** Hassan Salem, a member of parliament for the political wing of Iranian proxy militia Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, Sadiqoon, issued a statement condemning Finance Minister Ali Allawi's visit to Saudi Arabia to discuss economic ties. Salem accused Saudi Arabia of supporting al Qaeda and ISIS and questioned whether Saudi energy investments were worth "the blood of Iraqis."

**14** May 21-23: **Qais al-Khazali Gives Anti-Israel Speech, Makes First Public Appearance in Months.** US-designated terrorist Qais al-Khazali, the leader of US-designated terrorist organization and Iranian proxy militia Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, gave a speech over video to commemorate Quds Day on May 22. In the speech, Khazali accused Israel of making the decision to launch the strike that killed Iranian IRGC Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi de facto Popular Mobilization Forces commander Abu Mehdi al-Muhandis, arguing that "it is not in America's interest to have undertaken this operation and place its forces and interests in Iraq and the region at risk." Khazali also made his first public appearance in months with a visit to the grave of Muhandis on Eid al-Fitr, May 23. His official Twitter account published photos of the visit.



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

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**Key Takeaway:** Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi is seeking to develop closer energy relationships with Iraq's Gulf neighbors, particularly Saudi Arabia, to demonstrate to the United States that Iraq is making progress in divesting from Iranian energy reliance and renewing relations with all of its neighbors before the June US-Iraq Strategic Dialogue. Delegations to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait likely secured new investments in Iraqi energy infrastructure that will enable some divestment from Iranian energy imports. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait also reportedly agreed to reduce their own oil production to allow Iraq to produce quantities above those established by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, potentially averting another hit to Iraq's already depressed government revenues. Immediately after the delegation to Saudi Arabia, Iranian proxy militias issued statements condemning Saudi Arabia as a source of terrorism in Iraq and promising vengeance. Iran will likely attempt to prevent energy divestment; Iraqi imports of Iranian energy are a key economic driver for Iran.

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