Iraq Situation Report: March 4 - 10, 2020


2. Mar 02 - 03: Iraqi National Intelligence Service Chief Arrests Kidnap Harbel Hashim Members for Subverting His Reform Effort. The Iraqi National Intelligence Service (INIS), led by former prime minister (PM) candidate Mustafa al-Kadhimi, launched a series of arrests against officials in the Iraqi protest movement. The moves were taken due to concerns that INIS Head Kadhimi could harm the INIS’s credibility in the eyes of Iraqis. The moves were also aimed at maintaining control over protest leaders. The move was a sign of the government’s increasingly authoritarian tendencies.

3. Mar 04: Kassem Hadi Spreads Disinformation Regarding Iraqi Intelligence Chief. KHI posted a statement to its website alleging that INIS Director Kadhimi helped the U.S. government. On March 5, Gen. Solomini and PM Deputy Chairman Mahandis asserted that KHI’s claims were false. INIS Head Kadhimi directly.

4. Mar 04 - 10: Iraqi Government Further Restricts Gatherings following First COVID-19 Deaths. The Health Ministry announced the country’s first COVID-19 deaths on March 4. On March 7, the Ministry announced the closure of all schools until March 21. The Ministry also announced that official working hours for all government offices would be cut in half for the month. The Ministry’s Crisis Cell released new guidelines on March 10 emphasizing the importance of avoiding large gatherings and sporting events. The Ministry has mandated a 14-day quarantine for all returning from any affected country. As of March 10, Iraq has confirmed cases in every province except Ninewa, Duhok, Dhi Qar, and Salah ad-Din.

5. Mar 05: Iranian Proxy Leader Hadi al-Amiri Hosts Meeting of Shi’a Political Blocs to Discuss PM Designation. Hadi al-Amiri, an Iranian proxy leader and leader of the Conquest Alliance, brought together the leaders of the Kudüs and Al-Abbas blocs to discuss the possibility of a PM nomination. The meeting was held in Arbil.

6. Mar 05: Iraqi Proxy Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba Threatens U.S. Forces in Kirkuk. In a statement, the Al-Shahba front and Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba (HHN) threatened any American forces in Kirkuk with the group’s brand of terrorism. HHN, led by former ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Iranian proxy Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba (HHN), issued a tweet threatening American soldiers in Kirkuk Province. Shanna described U.S. troop movements in the province and warned, “We are closer to you than you think.” HHN leader Alamin Al-Kaabi, a Specifically Designated Global Terrorist, previously announced a shift of his group’s operations from “defensive to offensive” in a speech on February 14.

7. Mar 05: Iraqi Proxy HHN May Be Responsible for Rocket Attack Directed against U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. Unidentified militants launched three Katyusha rockets towards the U.S. embassy in the Arbil neighborhood, 6 km east of Baghdad’s Green Zone. Two rockets landed near the U.S. Embassy compound and one rocket landed 3 km to the west near a federal Police building in the Mansour neighborhood.

8. Mar 06: Caretaker PM Mehdi Makes Surprise Visit to Inspect Basra Coronavirus Prevention Measures, Caretaker PM Mehdi visited the Basra province. zwischen crossing between Basra Province and Iran. According to a statement from the prime minister’s office, Mehdi then made a surprise visit to Baghdad International Airport, where he met with airport workers to ensure that coronavirus precautions were in place.

9. Mar 06: Sistani Cancels Friday Sermon for First Time since 2003 Due to Rising COVID-19 Cases, Seri Pushes to Reinstate Imam Al-Muhammed. The Iraqi supreme religious authority, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, cancelled his Friday sermon due to the coronavirus. Sistani has not cancelled Friday prayers since the 2003 fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime. Religious authorities in the holy city of Najaf have called on the government to allow mosques containing the Imam Hussein shrine, where Sistani’s weekly sermons are delivered by a representative. In the holy city of Najaf, however, nationalist Shi’a cleric Moqtada al-Sadr’s supporters gathered in the nearby town of Kufa to hear Sadi’s sermon delivered by a representative.

10. Mar 06 - 07: Kurdish Parties Seek to Reinstate Caretaker PM Mehdi as Active PM. The Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) issued a statement calling for restored confidence in caretaker PM Adel Abdul Mehdi to facilitate early elections. Taha Amin, a member of parliament from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) bloc, stated a day later that both the KDP and PUK approve of maintaining Mehdi as PM. Amin told PUK Media that the political parties will not find a better candidate than Mehdi.

11. Mar 07 - 09: Secretary General of Iraq’s National Security Council Meets with Iraqi Officials, Including Possible PM Candidates. The National Security Council, led by former presidential advisor Hadi al-Amiri, met with Iraqi officials from the various political blocs. The meeting was held in Baghdad.

12. Mar 08: ISIS Regis Joint Coalition-Iraqi Raib on Care Complex near Makrub, Killing 7, Injuring 11. The Iraqi Counterterrorism Service (CTS) soldiers conducted a joint air assault on an ISIS care complex in the Qara Cholds Mountains near Makrub, 5 km southwest of Arbil. The CTS killed two marines and wounded 11 others on March 8 crackdown against the occupants of the square. The unidentified units reportedly used hunting rifles and tear gas while protesters responded by throwing stones. Some protesters retreated to nearby Westara Square and Sinak Bridge. Westara and Khidr and Khadari Squares are adjacent to Takeh Square, the center of the popular protest movement.

13. Mar 09 - 10: Global Grudie-oil Prices Plunge, Risking Destabilization of Iraq’s Fragile Financial System. Oil futures fell by 25 percent, the 1991 close to zero for the first time since 2002. Saudi Arabia cut its pricing and began threatening to raise output in an attempt to gain a larger share of the oil market. Simultaneously, coronavirus fears have led to the first decline in global consumer demand for oil since 2009. Nearly 90 percent of Iraq’s government budget relies on oil revenues. Iraq’s parliament has not yet passed its 2020 budget and may be unable to pay the salaries of public servants. The Parliamentary Finance Committee denies that Parliament will cut the salaries of public employees or raise taxes.

14. Mar 10: Basra Protesters Block Entrance to Majnoon Oil Field, Protest Iranian Travelers. Protesters burned tires to block the main entrance to Majnoon oil field in Shatt al-Arab district, eastern Basra Province. Demonstrators protested the end of their contracts with the state-owned Basra Oil Company. In central Basra, protesters burned tires to block the main entrance to Majnoon oil field. Protesters also gathered in the Basra city center to protest travelers entering Iraq via the Shalamcha border crossing.

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