July 15: Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and Foreign Minister Javad Zarif travelled to Baghdad in the US killing of IRGC Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani and de-facto leader of the PMU Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, which Zarif called a “criminal act.” Zarif then travelled to Abu Dhabi and met separately with Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah and UAE leader Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed. Zarif met with Iraqi proxy and head of the High Judicial Council Fuad Hussein to discuss bilateral security cooperation and counterterrorism. Additionally, he visited with Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi and met with top Iraqi officials in Baghdad.

July 19: Iraqi Foreign Minister Zainab Al-Saadi visited with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Baghdad to discuss expanding bilateral relations. Prime Minister Kadhimi received Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif and discussed bilateral relations and the US killing of IRGC Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani and de-facto leader of the PMU Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. Zarif called such a meeting a “crisis” and met with Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi and President Barham Salih. Zarif also met with the Iraqi Arab Parliament Speaker Mohammed al-Halbousi, Prime Minister Barham Salih and Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein. Zarif also met with Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi and met with top Iraqi officials in Baghdad.

July 20-21: Iraq-Saudi Coordination Council Delegation Sign New Agreement on Water Resource and Joint Action on the Cancellation of Prime Minister’s Visit. The Saudi delegation’s visit was postponed a planned visit to Saudi Arabia after Saudi King Salman was admitted to the hospital for emergency surgery. Zarif was meeting with top Iraqi officials in Baghdad.

July 20: Iraqi Prime Minister, redesignated as Minister of beige Kadhimi, announced on July 20 that he proposed a parliamentary visit to Saudi Arabia after King Salman was admitted to the hospital for emergency surgery. Iraq and Saudi Arabia have been working to improve Iraq-Saudi Arabia bilateral relations, commenced a series of meetings beginning on July 13 and 14, by appointing new ambassadors and directing the group to work toward implementing agreements.

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Key Takeaway: Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi’s efforts to preserve Iraqi sovereignty by shifting its regional relationships away from Iranian domination have been met with a mix of successes and setbacks. The hospitalization of the King of Saudi Arabia forced Kadhimi to cancel his symbolically important first foreign official visit to Saudi Arabia on July 20. Iraq capitalized on the cancellation, set to occur on July 20, to improve Iraq-Saudi Arabia bilateral relations, commenced a series of meetings beginning on July 13 and 14, by appointing new ambassadors and directing the group to work toward implementing agreements.

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