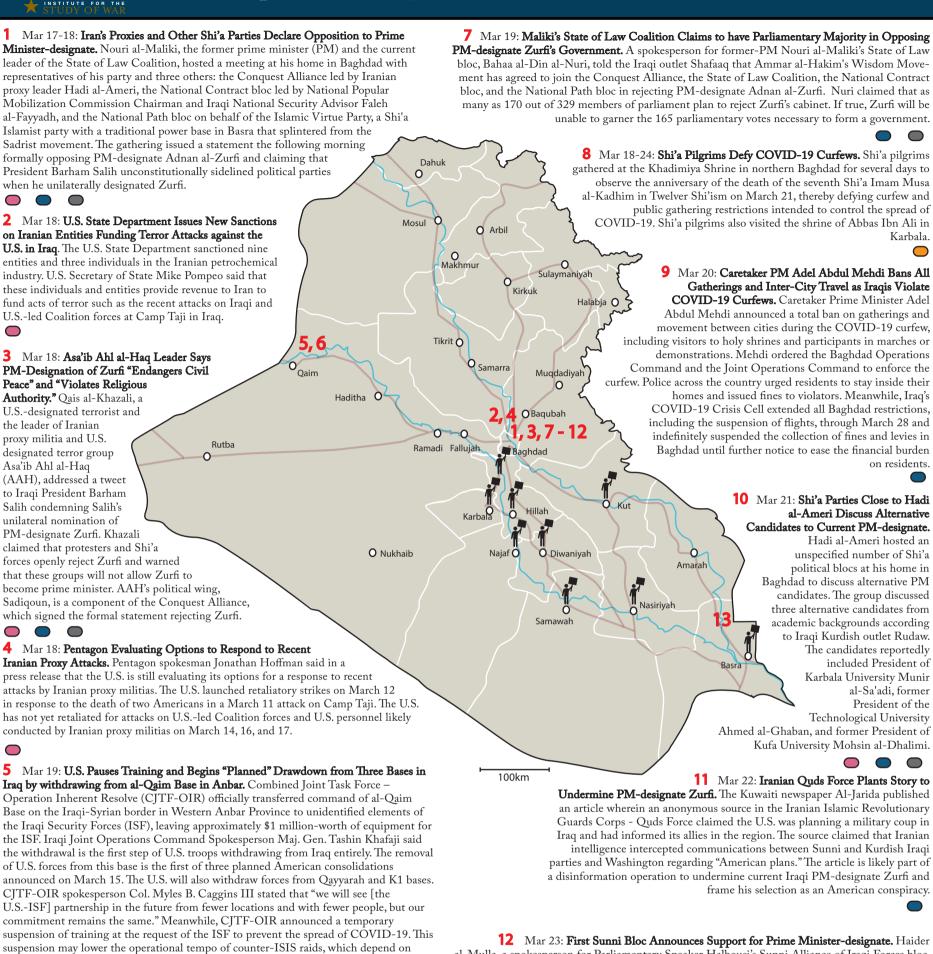


Iraq Situation Report: March 18 - 24, 2020



6 Mar 19: Kata'ib Hezbollah Claims U.S. Withdrawal from Qaim "Beginning of Defeat" for the U.S. The de facto spokesperson for Iranian proxy militia and U.S.-designated terrorist organization Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH), Abu Ali al-Askari, declared the U.S. withdrawal from al-Qaim Base to be a "humiliating escape." Askari called on KH fighters to prepare for "strategic operations if the enemy insists on its occupation and violation of sovereignty." Askari instructed KH fighters to continue targeting Americans and Iraqis who worked with the U.S., including logistical support companies and security companies associated with U.S. forces.

tactical Coalition enablers and assets. Neither group claimed responsibility for the attack.

12 Mar 23: First Sunni Bloc Announces Support for Prime Minister-designate. Haider al-Mulla, a spokesperson for Parliamentary Speaker Halbousi's Sunni Alliance of Iraqi Forces bloc, stated that the bloc supports PM-designate Zurfi. The party holds 32 seats in Parliament. Other Sunni blocs, such as the National Axis Alliance, have not yet announced a position on Zurfi.

13 Mar 24: Ministry of Oil Announces New Contract with Chinese Company for Majnoon Oil Field in Basra. The Iraqi Ministry of Oil announced that the China Petroleum Engineering & Construction Corp. (CPECC) won a \$203.5 million contract to build a processing facility for sour gas at Majnoon Oil Field in Basra. The contract's provision for a new facility will allow for 4.39 million cubic meters of high-sulfur natural gas to be processed per day. Iraq produces approximately 27.6 million cubic meters of natural gas daily.



Key Takeaway: U.S. forces began one of three planned withdrawals from small bases in Iraq, two of which have been targets of frequent Iranian-proxy mortar attacks. The Pentagon described the withdrawal as a planned consolidation of forces. Iran's proxies are framing the consolidation as the beginning of defeat for U.S. forces in Iraq. The political wings of Iran's proxies are also organizing opposition to Prime Minister-designate Adnan al-Zurfi, who received tacit U.S. approval and is attempting to form a government with support from Sunnis, Kurds, and minor Shi'a parties. Meanwhile, Iraq's COVID-19 crisis is deepening. The caretaker Iraqi government failed to enforce curfews as Shi'a pilgrims convened in large crowds to observe the martyrdom of the seventh imam in Twelver Shi'ism from March 18-20.

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