Iraqi Prime Minister Kadhimi Orders the Counterterrorism Service (CTS) to Seize Both Mundhiriya and Mandali Border Crossings, but Likely Did Not Retake either Crossing.

Kadhimi had previously authorized the CTS to seize both Mundhiriya and Mandali border crossings in Diyala Province. The ERD, a special security force, is responsible for securing and controlling the border crossings across Iraq. However, it remains unclear whether the ERD permanently ousted any Iran-backed militias or permanently stationed at the border to ensure government control. Border crossings across Iraq are currently staffed by Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) unit reportedly prevented buses from entering the city due to COVID-19 regulations. The ISF captured several individuals during the clash and circulated a video of the clashes.

Likely Iranian Proxies Attempted to Fire One Rocket toward Green Zone

This attack likely did take place and likely targeted a convoy carrying supplies to one of the unrecognized Iranian proxies. It is unclear whether the rocket was launched from Iran or Iraq.

Iraqi Protests:

July 11-13: Islamic State Forces Launch Phase Four of Operation Heroes of Iraq Targeting ISIS Cells in Diyala Province with New Peshmerga Coordination. ISIS leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was reportedly killed in a US airstrike in Iraq on July 11.

July 11:

Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi Inspects Mandali Border Crossing and Announces Reopenings. Prime Minister Kadhimi inspected the Mandali border crossing with Iran, a press conference during which he repeatedly condemned "ghosts who blackmailed businessmen" and announced that Mandali would reopen under the control of military forces. The crossing has been closed since March 3 due to COVID-19. An anonymous Iraq envoy said that Iraq “is not interested in escalating conflicts” in the region. PM al-Kadhimi’s press conference, posing an implicit threat to Kadhimi as he denounced the presence of unregistered militias at border crossings. Unspecified fighters from likely pro-Iran factions in the area are reported to have some influence on the government, posing a potential threat to Kadhimi.

Kadhimi approached al-Mundhiriya and Mandali border crossings to stabilize regions near the Iranian border and areas disputed by the Iraqi Government and Kurdistan Regional Government. The operation also seeks to disrupt ISIS movements over the border between Diyala and Salah ad-Din provinces. The operations allegedly searched at least 53 villages over the first three days.

The Iraqi government launched the first phase of Operation Heroes of Iraq targeting ISIS cells in Kirkuk, Diyala and Salah ad-Din provinces on June 2. This phase of the operation was met with widespread condemnation and reports of civilians being killed.

PM al-Kadhimi refuted claims announced by some pro-Iran groups that Iraq’s government bears responsibility for the attacks, stating that Iraq is not “interested in escalating conflicts” in the region. PM al-Kadhimi’s press conference, posing an implicit threat to Kadhimi as he denounced the presence of unregistered militias at border crossings. Unspecified fighters from likely pro-Iran factions in the area are reported to have some influence on the government, posing a potential threat to Kadhimi.

Protests against Poor Electricity Provisions Accelerate in Southern Iraq.

Demonstrations resulted in the storming of local electricity distribution department buildings. Qadisiyah Province, said that demonstrators were also frustrated with the “rampant” corruption stemming from political parties and “army groups.”

Key Takeaway: Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi’s political maneuverability is increasingly constrained by resistance from Iraq’s militia proxies and from protesters demanding better government services. Kadhimi directed elite forces to retake border crossings, advancing his campaign to reclaim Iraq’s border crossings from Iranian-backed militias with limited success. These security operations have not resulted in arrests or the permanent outing of any militia groups to date but do signal the intended threat that Kadhimi is taking the most aggressive actions he can without triggering violent retaliation from Iran’s proxy militias. Meanwhile, mass demonstrations broke out across the Shu’a-majority south to protest a lack of electricity service provisions after a months-long, COVID-19-induced downturn. Kadhimi continues to pursue new energy partnerships with Iraq’s neighbors, especially Saudi Arabia, but will be unable to provide the immediate jump in electricity supplies needed to quell the protests.

Iraq Situation Report: July 8-14, 2020

Iraq: Prime Minister Calls for Dialogue, but Demonstrations Erupt in Southern Iraq.

July 11:

July 12: Islamic State Forces Deny Claims that a Clash with Protesters in Nasiriyah Resulted in Casualties. ISIS unit reportedly prevented the buses from entering the city due to COVID-19 regulations. The ISF fired upon and killed several individuals during the encounter, according to a report by Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi. The operation was also met with widespread condemnation and reports of civilians being killed.

July 13:

Prime Minister Kadhimi Reshuffles Iraqi-Saudi Coordination Council as it Looks to Implement Bilateral Agreements to Accelerate Iraqi-Saudi Trade and Improve Relations. Prime Minister Kadhimi issued a series of new appointments to the Iraq-Saudi Coordination Council, a government body tasked with promoting economic relations. On July 13, Kadhimi named his close confidant, Finance Minister Ali Allawi, as chairman of the council. Other appointments included the Iraqi Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, the governor of Iraq’s Central Bank, and individuals from most government agencies. Allawi announced on July 14 that Iraq and Saudi Arabia would continue their efforts to finalise the bill of agreement that governs the buses and that the ISF “repelled them” without using weapons or live ammunition. The operation was also met with widespread condemnation and reports of civilians being killed.

July 14: Parliamentary Speaker Orders Study to Lead Corruption Investigation into Ministry of Electricity. Mohammed al-Halbousi, the prime minister's choice for the position, asked the speaker of Iraq's parliament, the Council of Representatives (CoR), to form a parliamentary committee to audit and investigate corruption within the ministry. The committee will be chaired by Deputy Speaker Hassan al-Kabi, who is also a member of nationalist Shi’ite Misrada al-Sudayr’s faction, the parliament’s largest. The committee will also include representatives from the major parliamentary groups and will be tasked with collecting evidence and drawing up recommendations for the government.

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