1 Feb 13: Kata’ib Hezbollah is Likely Responsible for New Rocket Attack against U.S. Forces in Kirkuk. Unidentified militants launched a rocket that struck an open area on the military base in Kirkuk Province, which houses U.S. forces. Unidentified Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) discovered a launch pad north of the base loaded with 11 unfired missiles. The attack is the first strike on the K1 base since Kata’ib Hezbollah (KH) killed a U.S. contractor last December 27, 2019. The February 13 strike is the fifth rocket attack on various U.S. targets since Iran’s ballistic missile attack on al-Asad airbase January 8, 2020. KH is likely probing U.S. response thresholds. The U.S. has not retaliated to any of these five attacks.

2 Feb 13: NATO Plans to Expand the Training Mission in Iraq. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stolker met with U.S. Defense Ministers to enhance “in principle” to expand the training effort in Iraq. NATO agreed to adjust the status of hundreds of trainers participating in the U.S. led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS to the authority of the NATO mission in Iraq. The transfer of NATO military forces from 2019 to 2020 may expand the training mission to at least three more bases in central Iraq. NATO forces legal mandate excludes forward combat operations. Why the U.S. led global coalition?

3 Feb 13 - 14: Agreement between Protesters and Security Forces in Baghdad Breaks Down before Friday Prayers. Unidentified Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) used tear gas, rubber bullets, and smoke bombs to disperse protestors in Woroth and Khulani Squares as well as at the Sank Bridge in central Baghdad. Protestors returned to these locations on Friday after protestors reached an agreement with the Baghdad Operations Command to withdraw. KH

4 Feb 13-16: Nasiriyah Activist Dr. Alaa al-Rikabi Emerges as Potential National Protest Leader. Dr. Alaa al-Rikabi, an activist from Nasiriyah, Dhi Qar Province, asked for demonstrators gather in public squares across the country to show whether or not they support him for the position of prime minister. Al-Rikabi issued the request on February 13 in a video shared widely on social media. According to the Iraqi Kurdish news agency Rudaw, “hundreds” of Iraqis, many carrying pictures of al-Rikabi, demonstrated in Kirkuk and Nasiriyah in response. An association between al-Rikabi and KH on February 5. It is unclear if Rikabi holds any previous political affiliation.

5 Feb 14: Iranian Proxy Commander Akram al-Kaabi Announces Shift to the “Offense” against the U.S. while in Iran, Akram al-Kaabi, leader of Iran’s proxy Harakat al-Nujaba and a co-founder of the Global Democratic Global Terrorist (SDGT), stated that the “resistance” has shifted from “defensive to offensive.” Kaabi made the remarks during a ceremony in Tehran attended by senior Iranian officials, including Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Deputy Commander Rear Admiral Ali Fadavi. Kaabi is responsible for multiple attacks against U.S. and Coalition forces since 2008.

6 Feb 14: Secretary Pompeo Discusses the Need for Sustained U.S. Troop Presence in Iraq with Iraqi Prime Minister. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met with Kurdish Regional Government Prime Minister, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Masour Barzani at the Munich Security Conference. Pompeo thanked Barzani for the KRG’s commitment to the security of U.S. personnel and their families in Iraq. Kurdish Barzani and Barzani agreed on the need for continued cooperation consistent with the U.S. Strategic Agenda, in accordance with a State Department readout. Pompeo likely urged Barzani to support PM-designee Allawi’s government formation process.

7 Feb 15: Moqtada al-Sadr Announces Humanitarian Initiative to Support Protesters. Nationalist Shi’ite Moqtada al-Sadr announced to announce to announce a “humanitarian initiative” calling for support for protesters and for Iraq to donate to the wounded. Sadr previously announced on February 11 that he disbursed organized units of his supporters referred to as “blue hats” who had begun beating and killing protestors.

8 Feb 16: Rocket Attack Hits US Embassy Compound in Baghdad but Causes no Casualties. At least two rockets landed on an undefined part of the U.S. Embassy compound in the Green Zone of Baghdad. The attack caused only minor infrastructural damage.

9 Feb 16: Iraqi Kurds and Sunni Allies Announce Condition Support for PM-Designate Allawi’s Government on the Basis of Islamic Unity. U.S. delegation member visiting the CoR that he will vacate the office of PM if the constitutionally designated 30-day deadline to install a new government fails. Mehdi said in the letter, “I would immediately investigate the killing of protesters and hold the culprits accountable.” He promised to hold early elections that will exclude “the influence of money, weapons, and foreign interference.” The line is a direct quote from a February 7 sermon by Grand Ayatollah Sistani and was likely intended to rebuke the Iranian proxy network.

10 Feb 18: Assistant U.S. Secretary of State Meets with Outgoing Caretaker PM Mishkhi, President Barham Salih, and Speaker Halbousi, Haudaf, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs David Schenker met with Iraqi Caretaker President Barham Salih, Speaker Halbousi in Baghdad to discuss the U.S. partnership with Iraq. Schenker highlighted the continued need for a “strong [U.S.] partnership with the Iraqi Security Forces to safeguard Iraqi sovereignty.” Schenker also condemned the use of violence against peaceful protesters. Shenker did not meet with PM-designee Allawi.

11 Feb 18: Sunni Speaker of Parliament Hosts Kurdish Politicians in Follow-on Meeting in Baghdad. Council of Representatives (CoR) Speaker Halbousi held a meeting at his home in Baghdad with Sunni and Kurdish politicians. Mohammed al-Karbouli, a Sunni member of the parliament for the Alliance of Iraqi Forces, confirmed the meeting took place in a Twitter statement.

12 Feb 18: Pro-Sistani PMF Brigades Demand PMF Administrative Positions. Falih al-Fayyad, the Chairman of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), reportedly met with a representative for Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, as well as the leaders of four Sistani-loyal militia: Abu Fadl al-Abbas Brigade, Firqat al-Iman Ali al-Qulaih, Firqat al-Imam Marjai, and Liwa Ali al-Akbar. The pro-Sistani brigades presented a list of senior PMF positions they wish to hold, including secretary of the PMF, as well as their demands for operational authority over the Middle Euphrates, Ramadi, and Mosul regions. The pro-Sistani brigades are much smaller than the Iranian proxy militias in the PMF. However, politicians loyal to the religious establishment in Najaf, such as Ammar al-Hakim’s National Wisdom Trend, support the pro-Sistani brigades and may agree to support PM-designee Allawi’s cabinet in exchange for an increased role of the pro-Sistani brigades in the PMF.

13 Feb 19: Turkish Family Considers Control over Kirkuk Leadership. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) General Leadership Council officially announced the appointment of Bafel Talabani and Lahur Shehbal to lead the PUK. Talabani is the son of former Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, and Lahur is the former leader of the pro-Sistani Democratic party and a pro-government Sunni politician. PUK agreed to support Talabani and Lahur, as well as enter into an exchange for Kurdish support of the PUK. PUK is the leader of the pro-Sistani bloc in the Iraqi parliament.

14 Feb 19: Fayyadh Travels to Kurdistan to Sound Government Formation. National Security Advisor and Chairman of PMF Falih al-Fayyad met with Najaf religious leader, Ayatollah Sheik Dr. Qasu Aswad, in Najaf on February 15. Fayyad likely urged Barzani to support PM-designee Allawi’s government formation process.

15 Feb 19: PM-Allawi Calls for Extraordinary Session in Parliament to Approve Cabinet. PM-designee Allawi announced he has finalized his cabinet selections and called on the CoR to hold an extra-parliamentary session on Monday, February 24, to vote on his cabinet. Allawi said, if his government wins a confidence vote, that he would immediately investigate the killing of protesters and hold the culprits accountable. Allawi promised to hold early elections that will exclude “the influence of money, weapons, and foreign interference.” The line is a direct quote from a February 7 sermon by Grand Ayatollah Sistani and was likely intended to rebuke the Iranian proxy network.

16 Feb 19: Caretaker PM Says He Will Vacate Office by March 2, Increasing Public Pressure behind Allawi’s Call for Emergency Parliament. Outgoing Caretaker Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mehdi announced on February 19 that all of the “resistance” has shifted to an offensive phase of anti-U.S. operations. The Iraqi Security Forces in Baghdad broke down before Friday Prayers. Protestors and for Iraq to donate to the wounded. Sadr previously announced on February 11 that he disbursed organized units of his supporters referred to as “blue hats” who had begun beating and killing protestors.

Key Takeaway: Iran’s proxy network is escalating its anti-U.S. campaign. The proxy network is likely responsible for a rocket attack on February 13 that targeted the same military base in Kirkuk Province as Kata’ib Hezbollah (KH) killed a contractor last December 27, 2019. An Iranian proxy leader and U.S.-designated terrorist, Akram al-Kaabi, announced during a speech in Baghdad on February 14 that all of the “resistance” has shifted to an offensive phase of U.S.-led operations. The United States directly intervened in the process of Allawi’s cabinet formation by sending high-level officials to meet or urge competing Iraqi power brokers – Sunni, Kurdish, and Shi’a – to forge consensus in support of Allawi’s premiership.