Feb 26 - 28: Coronavirus Spreads to Baghdad, Wasit, and Maysan. The Health Ministry announced new cases of COVID-19 (coronavirus) in Baghdad, Wasit, and Maysan Provinces, bringing the total number of cases in the country to 31.

Feb 27: Iraqi Parliament Fails to Meet Quorum to Vote on PM-designee Allawi's Cabinet. The Iraqi Council of Representatives (CoR) failed to meet a quorum during an extraordinary session to vote on PM-designee Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi's proposed cabinet. Only 105 members of parliament attended, well short of the 165 required for a quorum. Unconfirmed reports suggest the parties boycotted the vote which included the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the Sunni Alliance of Iraqi Forces and National Axis Alliance blocs, the Shi'a Victory Alliance, and elements of the Iraqi National Intelligence Service's Conquest Alliance bloc including former PM Nouri al-Maliki's State of Law Coalition. The breadth of these parties indicates that Allawi faces widespread opposition across the political spectrum.

Feb 27: Kata’ib Hezbollah Issues “Final Warning” to Iraqis Cooperating with U.S. Forces. Abu Ali al-Askari, a Kata’ib Hezbollah security official and de facto spokesperson, issued a tweet denouncing Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, whom the group has termed a “United States puppet.” The tweet called on the group’s supporters to stop cooperating with the U.S. military in Iraq and stated that future U.S. military operations in the country would “result in the death of all of you.”

Feb 29 - Mar 5: Kata’ib Hezbollah Takes Part in Anti-government Protests. Kata’ib Hezbollah, a Shi’a militia, participated in anti-government protests in Baghdad and Tahrir Square. They were among several groups that gathered in Tahrir Square to protest against alleged corruption and poor government performance.

Mar 01: Security Forces Block Protest near Green Zone before Parliamentary Vote. Unidentified units in the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) closed Baghdad’s Green Zone in anticipation of protests during expected parliamentary voting. Thousands of protesters intended to gather in the Green Zone to voice opposition to Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi’s proposed cabinet. Protesters from southern Iraqi provinces rushed into Baghdad for the protest but did not organize near the Green Zone due to the security precautions.

Mar 01: Prominent Nasiriyah Protester Leader Travels to Baghdad’s Tahrir Square. Dr. Alaa al-Rikabi, a nationally recognized protest leader from Dhi Qar Province, led southern protesters to join demonstrations in Baghdad ahead of the expected parliamentary voting. Rikabi visited Tahrir Square in Baghdad, the epicenter of the popular protest movement. Rikabi may attempt to position himself as a national representative of the demonstrators.

Mar 02: Kata’ib Hezbollah Likely Responsible for Deadly Rocket Attack near U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. The Iraqi Security Media Cell announced that two Katyusha rockets landed in the Green Zone near the U.S. Embassy without causing any damage. Unidentified militants launched the rockets from Baghdad’s eastern Zayouna neighborhood, according to the statement. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack. However, KH is likely responsible. The strike was likely retaliation for the U.S. designating KH’s new leader as a terrorist.

Mar 02: Caretaker PM Mehdi Rasouli Declared Prime Minister by President. Caretaker PM Abdul Mehdi released a letter addressed to President Barham Salih and CoR Speaker Mohammed al-Halbousi in which Mehdi announced that rather than vacate his office as threatened, he will observe a “voluntary absence from his role” and delegate daily responsibilities to unspecified ministers. Mehdi proposed snap parliamentary elections to be held on December 4, 2020, and called on Parliament to hold an extraordinary session to finalize electoral districts and the electoral commission, two key components of the election law passed on December 24, 2019. Mehdi previously threatened on February 19 to quit entirely if Allawi did not form a government.

Mar 03: Kata’ib Hezbollah Attempts to Discredit Iraqi Intelligence Chief as Potential PM. Abu Ali al-Askari, a KH security official and de facto spokesperson, issued a tweet denouncing the Iraqi National Intelligence Service Director Mustafa al-Makhadmi, accusing him of corruption and inefficiency. Al-Askari said the KH would work with the Iraqi Intelligence Service to expose Makhadmi’s corruption. The tweet was met with widespread condemnation from politicians and security officials.

Mar 03: Protesters Accuse Muqtada al-Sadr of Orchestrating Attacks on Anti-gov’t Activists in Baghdad. Protesters on Twitter accused Muqtada al-Sadr of orchestrating attacks on anti-government activists with the Free Patriotic Movement. Demonstrators claimed that the attacks were instigated by Sadr’s Movement for the Renewal and were aimed at preventing the anti-government movement from gathering in Tahrir Square.

Key Takeaway: Iraq’s newly designated prime minister (PM), Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi, withdrew his nomination after failing to gain parliamentary approval for his cabinet appointments despite U.S. support for Allawi’s candidacy. Allawi’s withdrawal at this point in the government formation process is unprecedented. Caretaker PM Abdul Mehdi, who resigned in November, stated that he will remain in office but will delegate his PM duties to an unspecified minister. Mehdi’s Council of Ministers remains in place and continues to perform basic government functions without clear legal authority. President Barham Salih is now constitutionally required to restart the government formation. Salih must identify a new PM-designee within 15 days.