

1 May 6: **Three Katyusha Rockets Strike near US Facilities at Baghdad International Airport, Ending Monthlong Pause in Escalations.** Unidentified militants, likely members of an Iranian proxy militia, launched three Katyusha rockets from the al-Barkiya area, 6 km northeast of Baghdad International Airport, striking three locations near a US-Iraqi military installation near the airport early in the morning of May 6. The rockets caused no damage or casualties, and no group claimed responsibility. This is the first rocket attack to target a US-Iraqi military facility since March 26.

2 May 6-7: **Mustafa al-Kadhimi Becomes Iraq's New Prime Minister.**

Iraq's Parliament, the Council of Representatives (CoR), approved the cabinet of Prime Minister-designate Mustafa al-Kadhimi, thereby elevating Kadhimi to the office of Prime Minister with broad, pan-sectarian support. Two-hundred and sixty-six members of the three-hundred and twenty-nine seat CoR attended the vote. The CoR pushed the vote past midnight as multiple blocs made new demands regarding the composition of Kadhimi's cabinet. Former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's State of Law Coalition boycotted the vote. The CoR had to approve at least 13 of 22 ministers in order to approve Kadhimi's government. Kadhimi nominated 20 ministers but only received approval for 15. Prior to his confirmation, Kadhimi read aloud his government plan and identified holding early elections, improving the government's response to COVID-19, and enforcing the rule of law by restricting arms to the control of the state as his three top priorities.

3 May 7-8: **Kadhimi Agrees to Fund Pensions and Welfare in the Face of Potential Salary Cuts.**

Deputy Parliamentary Speaker and Toward Reform Member of Parliament (MP) Hassan al-Kaabi announced that he spoke with Prime Minister Kadhimi and resolved an issue threatening pensions and welfare payments. Former Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mehdi ended all government payments, including social safety net payments, on May 5. Kadhimi reportedly agreed to protect social safety net payments from austerity measures, but austerity may be necessary in other areas of the federal budget in the face of Iraq's looming financial cliff. Two anonymous senior officials involved in Iraqi budget negotiations told French wire service AFP that allocations funding, informal payments, and perks like cars or cash bonuses may be cut for the revised 2020 budget. Allocations made up two-thirds of Iraq's \$36 billion 2019 budget allocation for public salaries and are often informally awarded on the basis of political and family ties.

4 May 7: **Kata'ib Hezbollah Criticizes Its Allies for Failing to Prevent Ascension of Prime Minister Kadhimi.**

Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH), a key Iranian proxy militia and US-designated terrorist organization, posted a statement to its website criticizing all members of Iraq's Parliament for allowing Mustafa al-Kadhimi to become prime minister. KH stated that even its "loyal group of brothers," likely referring to Iran's proxies in parliament, are not excused. KH reiterated its claim that Kadhimi is responsible for the US strike that killed Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) - Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani and Popular Mobilization Commission Deputy Chairman and Kata'ib Hezbollah founder Abu Mehdi al-Muhandis on January 3.

5 May 7-9: **Iraq's Two Most Important Backers, the United States and Iran, Quickly Congratulate Kadhimi; US Extends Energy Sanctions Waiver.**

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi on May 7 to congratulate him on his confirmation and announce a new 120-day energy sanctions waiver allowing Iraq to import electricity from Iran as "a display of [US] desire to help provide the right conditions for success." The US last granted Iraq a 30-day sanctions waiver on April 26 and warned that the waiver renewal would be reassessed once a "credible government" was formed. Iran's foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif also tweeted his congratulations on May 7 and promised to stand with the Iraqi people on "their choice of administration." On May 9, Kadhimi met with Iranian Ambassador to Iraq Erg Masjidi in Baghdad. The Iranian news outlet Tasnim News Agency reported that Kadhimi stressed Iraq's interests in establishing strong relations with Iran, but that Iraq should not be considered a place for terrorist activities or aggression against any country.

6 May 8: **Mustafa al-Kadhimi Appoints New Army Chief of Staff.**

Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) MP Harim Kamal Agha, a member of the Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee, told Iraqi media outlets that Prime Minister Kadhimi appointed Lieutenant General Abdul Amir al-Shammari as the new Chief of Staff of the Iraqi Army, replacing the US-backed former Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Osman Ghanimi, who is serving as Kadhimi's new Minister of Interior. Shammari formerly served as the head of the Baghdad Operations Command until the 2016 ISIS Ramadan attack that killed hundreds of people in Karrada, Baghdad. After the attack, then-Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi appointed Shammari to serve in the less prominent role of Military Inspector of the Iraqi Ministry of Defense.

7 May 9: **Prime Minister Kadhimi Chairs First Cabinet Meeting, Asks Parliament to Fix Incomplete Election Law and Cancels Decision to Prevent Government Borrowing.**

Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi chaired the first session of his cabinet, the Council of Ministers (CoM). The CoM approved a series of decisions that included releasing pensions payments to retirees, lifting a restriction on foreign and domestic borrowing to finance the 2020 fiscal deficit, and increasing the staff and support for Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) to hold new elections. Kadhimi also called on Iraq's Parliament to complete and fix the December 2019 Election Law. That law did not address issues necessary to hold elections, including defining district sizes and creating a mechanism for selecting a prime minister in the absence of party lists.

8 May 9: **Prime Minister Kadhimi Appoints Popular, US-backed General Abdul Wahab al-Saadi to Head Counterterrorism Service.**

Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi promoted the popular Lieutenant General Abdul Wahab al-Saadi to be the head of Iraq's elite Counterterrorism Service (CTS), replacing Talib Shaghathi al-Kanani. Saadi previously served as Deputy CTS Commander until September 2019, when then-Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mehdi demoted him. Saadi's removal from the CTS command partially sparked Iraq's popular protest movement, which began in October 2019. Protesters claimed that Iran ordered Mehdi to remove Saadi and decried his removal as evidence of corruption, mismanagement, and foreign interference throughout Iraqi governance. The US-backed CTS is the most professional of Iraq's security services and therefore serves as a bulwark against Iranian influence.

9 May 9-10: **Prime Minister Kadhimi Moves to Free Detained Protesters.** Mustafa al-Kadhimi stated in a press conference following his CoM session on May 9 that all protesters detained since the start of the anti-government demonstrations should be freed except those involved in violence. The Supreme Judicial Council, the highest court in the country, ordered that protesters be released in line with Kadhimi's decision on May 10.

10 May 10: **Protesters Disagree over Response to Kadhimi's Government.**

Protests recommenced across southern Iraq to call for early elections, an end to corruption, and justice for those killed in previous demonstrations. Protesters expressed bifurcated views on Prime Minister Kadhimi, with some arguing that no government formed under Iraq's current political system can ever be acceptable and others arguing that protesters should postpone demonstrations to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and allow Kadhimi time to attempt reforms. A group of protesters retook the Jumhuriyah Bridge in central Baghdad while another set fire to the Diwanayah headquarters of the Dawa party in Qadisiyah Province. In Kut, Wasit province a group of protesters burned the provincial headquarters of the Iranian proxy Badr Organization and the home of Saad Al-Mayali, an MP from the political wing of the US-designated terror group Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq.

11 May 10-11: **Prime Minister Kadhimi Targets Iran-backed Militia Allegedly Involved in Anti-demonstrator Violence in Basra.**

Prime Minister Kadhimi ordered unspecified units of the Basra police to raid the headquarters of the shadowy, Basra-based Iranian proxy militia group Thar Allah on May 11. The Basra Provincial Police announced the closing of the Thar Allah headquarters and the arrest of several members. Kadhimi's office stated that the Thar Allah militiamen fired live rounds at protesters in central Basra overnight on May 10.

12 May 11: **Prime Minister Kadhimi Replaces Unpopular Military Spokesperson who Denied Violence against Protesters.**

Prime Minister Kadhimi appointed Brigadier General Yahya Rasool as the new spokesperson for the prime minister in Kadhimi's role as the Commander-in-Chief of Iraq's Armed Forces, replacing Major General Abdul Karim Khalaf. Gen. Rasool previously served as the spokesperson for the Ministry of Defense. Gen. Khalaf repeatedly dismissed the killing of protesters by security forces between October 2019 and May 2020, earning him the derogatory nickname "Baghdad Bob" among Iraq's protest movement in reference to a Saddam-era spokesperson who denied that US forces were in Baghdad even as shots could be heard in his broadcasts.

13 May 11: **US and Iranian Presidents Call to Congratulate Prime Minister Kadhimi.**

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani called Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi and told him that Iran will continue to support the Iraqi Government because "we were and still are on the Iraqi side." Kadhimi told Rouhani that "we will never forget the support you provided us regarding Iraq's security and stability, especially during [the] fighting ISIS period." Later that same day, US President Donald Trump called to congratulate Kadhimi, stressing that the US will strengthen bilateral relations and "provide the necessary economic assistance to support the Iraqi economy."

14 May 11: **Sunni Alliance of Iraqi Forces Spokesperson Says Iraq "Needs" US and Coalition Support for "Years" to Eliminate ISIS.**

Faleh al-Issawi, a spokesperson for the largest Sunni bloc in Parliament, Mohammed al-Halbousi's Alliance of Iraqi Forces, told Iraqi outlet Al Sumaria that Iraq needed US and Coalition support to ensure the complete and enduring defeat of ISIS. Issawi stressed that the January 5 parliamentary decision to expel US forces was legitimate, but "hasty" and due to unspecified external interference. Issawi said the decision should be reconsidered because "America does not need Iraq, but we need it and the international Coalition." Issawi claimed that there will be joint committees to restart Coalition assistance to Iraq.

15 May 11-12: **Prime Minister Kadhimi Fills Vacant Cabinet Ministries with Interim Leaders.**

Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi appointed himself and other sitting cabinet ministers to temporarily take on the responsibilities of vacant cabinet posts. Kadhimi appointed Finance Minister Ali Allawi as interim oil minister, Youth and Sports Minister Adnan Darjal as interim culture minister, Education Minister Ali Hamid as interim trade minister, Higher Education and Technology Minister Nabil Kadhim as interim justice minister, and Transport Minister Nasir Hussein as interim migration and displacement minister. Kadhimi will take on the responsibilities of interim foreign affairs minister.

16 May 12: **Conquest Alliance MP Discusses End to Escalation with the United States.**

Hanin al-Qaddou, a member of Hadi al-Ameri's Iranian-aligned Conquest Alliance bloc, told Iraqi news outlet Shafaq that "escalation with the United States is currently not in the interests of the forces opposing the US presence in Iraq." He added that because many of the officials in Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi's new government have good relations with the US, it is in the "economic, security and health" interests of Iraq to accept the reality of new relations with the US. Qaddou, the Secretary General of the Democratic Shabak Community, has previously used heavily anti-US rhetoric; following the visit of US Vice President Mike Pence in November 2019, Qaddou accused the United States of encouraging the Kurds to secede from Iraq. He has also previously accused the United States of fomenting a military coup in Iraq.



- Major Cities
- Iraqi Security Forces
- ISIS
- Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)
- Demonstration
- Anti-ISIS Coalition
- Iran
- Iraqi Council of Representatives
- Iranian Proxy Militias
- Religious Figures
- Iraqi Prime Minister and Cabinet



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Key Takeaway: New Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi jumpstarted his term by conducting a series of executive-level actions favorable to Iraq's restive population and the United States, but potentially harmful to Iranian interests in Iraq. Kadhimi appointed powerful generals with US ties to head the US-trained Counterterrorism Service and Iranian-infiltrated Ministry of Interior, indicating a willingness to push back against corruption and Iranian influence in Iraq's security sector. Kadhimi also issued orders likely designed to win over Iraq's popular protest movement, which appeared divided over how to respond to the new government. Each of these moves challenges Iran's influence in Iraq and may draw backlash from Iran's political and militia allies in the country despite previous Iranian support for Kadhimi's government. Kadhimi's shift could benefit the United States, which Kadhimi is likely to court for financial support to mitigate Iraq's ongoing budget crisis.

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