

The tension between the federal government in Bagdad and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) rose. Due to the budgetary reduction for Kurdistan and the persistent flight ban, the economic situation worsened to the extent that schools had to remain closed and civil servants were left unpaid. This led to a massive discontent throughout the Kurdish population. Further budgetary shortfall was caused by the loss of US subsidies for the Peshmerga. Beside the heavy financial loss suffered by the Kurds, Saudi Arabia tried to gain a

foothold in the Sunni areas in Iraq, by emphasizing the Arab identity of the Shiite Iraqis to balance the impact of Iran.

The Kuwait conference for rebuilding Iraq brought about \$33 billion in foreign investments, instead of an expected \$100 billion. That can account for the aforementioned budgetary cuts. Prime Minister Abadi acted on his campaign promise to fight against corruption. These actions may constitute an attempt to weaken the rival Badr party and to raise public support.



MAP ANALYSIS

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) carried out two wide offensives to repel the remaining IS fighters. The attacks and bombings of IS fighters are concentrating on the oil rich city of Kirkuk to worsen the relationship between the KRG and the central government and also on the capital Bagdad in order to frighten the population. In addition to attacking economically important cities, the remaining IS fighters increased savaging Sunni cities like Ramadi.

FORECAST

Due to the lack of security, caused by hidden IS fighters, and the growing healthcare problem, the situation in the Sunni areas in Iraq remains difficult. Despite minor subsidies, Sunni politicians will attempt to rebuild the the damaged infrastructure, to gain more votes in the upcoming elections (May 2018) and to avoid marginalization in the Shiite dominated parliament. The Shiite majority would choose between reformists' lists, such as the one of Prime Minister Abadi, and conservative Iran-backed lists, such as the one of Hadi al-Ameri. Since the ideological differences between the lists are fundamental, neither is expected to get an absolute majority of the votes.

The periodically published Fact Sheet compiles and analyzes significant developments pertaining to the Iraq conflict while providing maps and an outlook of possible future events.

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DOMESTIC POLITICS

01.02.: Following the victory over IS, Abadi reaffirmed his commitment (formerly expressed during his campaign in 2014) to fight corruption in Iraq. Accordingly, Sudani, former minister of trade, suspected of corruption was arrested in Lebanon and extradited to Bagdad.

05.02.: Whereas Sunni members of parliament were able to delay the local elections, the Iraqi Supreme Court affirmed that the federal elections would take place on May 12th as originally set. Civil activists and bloggers called the Iraqi people to boycott the parliamentary elections, claiming that damaged infrastructure in regions with a Sunni majority prevent IDPs from voting.

08.02.: Delaying the local elections was crucial for Iraqi Sunnis in order to allow the Sunni regions to be rebuilt and to guarantee a fair vote. Likewise, a fair vote is believed to be contingent on the departure of Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) from the aforementioned areas.

13.02.: Both governing Kurdish parties, KPD and PUK, run the risk of losing support because of the years lasting misgovernment. The displeasure for outstanding loans is high. By reason of the long lasting dangerous economic situation in Kurdistan schools and other service facilities had to be closed and salaries of civil servants can only be paid irregularly.

05.03.: Kurdish members of parliament voted against the new 2018 budget bill, which amounts to \$85 billion, as the budget for Kurdistan was reduced in 5% compared with last year.

05.03.: Baghdad offered to allow pilgrim's flights to Mekka despite the existing flight ban. Accordingly on 13.03., the federal government announced that it will reopen and administer all airports in Kurdistan.

13.03.: President Masum refused to sign the 2018 budget bill as he perceived it to greatly discriminate the Iraqi Kurds.

13.03.: Kurdish members of parliament asked Grand Ayatollah Sistani to mediate between them and the Shiite government. Sistani is one of the leading religious figures and has great influence on Shiites in Iraq.

MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

01.02.: The Turkish army attacked PKK positions in northern Iraq in order to demolish Kurdish tunnels and hideaways.

05.02.: Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) commenced two offensives against IS-cells: the ISF attacked IS hideaways in western Mosul and fought IS in the region between Rutba and the Saudi Arabian border.

06.02.: Following the victory over IS and in order not to create a vacuum, both the International Anti-IS-coalition and the US have decided to gradually withdraw its forces from Iraq.

21.02.: Prime Minister Abadi assured the Peshmera forces

INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

07.02.: Since the independence referendum, Erbil had tried to improve its relationship with Iran. The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) assured Tehran that the KRG will not provide Iranian Kurdish opposition groups with hideaways.

08.02.: Following the withdrawal of American armed forces from Iraq, the United States exerted pressure on European NATO member states, urging them to support the creation of a permanent mission to Iraq in order to prevent terrorism from reemerging.

09.02.: During the course of the Kuwait conference, Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi stated that the estimated sum, necessary to rebuild Iraqi infrastructure following the war, may amount to \$100 billion.

10.02.: The US government stated that no further investment will be made in Iraq. Since 2014 the US has already invested \$1.7 billion in Iraq, including 140 million in 2018 alone.

12.02.-14.02.: Whereas a target sum of \$100 billion was expected to be collected, only \$33 billion were obtained in the Kuwait conference. Investors included Western and Sunni countries (such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar) and international organizations. Vice President Alawi denounced the conference as a failure that will increase the country's existing debt.

15.02.: French foreign minister Le Drian stressed the importance of rebuilding Kurdish areas in Iraq, in light of the significant Kurdish efforts in the war against IS.

15.02.: Saudi Arabia announced that it will reopen its consulate in Basra in order to actively participate in the regional economic market.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

06.02: The federal government rejected the accusations, made by NGOs, according to which Baghdad is penalizing family members of IS fighters. Similarly, the KRG was accused of killing IS family members.

08.02: UNICEF described the health services in the provinces of Niniva, Anbar and Salahaddin as disastrous. In addition, dead bodies piling up in the streets result in a higher dispersion of diseases.

28.02: Displaced people were able to return to their homes throughout the last months. Yet, many Iraqis, whose family members fought for IS, are likely to face retaliatory measures from their tribes.



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