

The US-Iran Silent War Is Transformed into an “Iraq Uprising”

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The last four days have shown that the ongoing US-Iran war is acutely affecting the whole region. This is now evident in Iraq where more than 105 people have been killed and thousands wounded in the course of demonstrations that engulfed the capital Baghdad and southern Shia cities including Amara, Nasririyyeh, Basrah, Najaf and Karbalaa. Similar demonstrations could erupt in Beirut and other Lebanese cities due to the similarity of economic conditions in the two countries. The critical economic situation in the Middle East offers fertile ground for uprisings that lead to general chaos.

Iraq has special status due to its position, since the 2003 US occupation of the country, as both an Iranian and as a US ally. Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi up to now has armed himself with [article 8](#) of the constitution, seeking to keep Iraq as a balancing point between all allies and neighbouring countries, and to prevent Mesopotamia from becoming a battlefield for conflicts between the US and Iran or Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Notwithstanding the efforts of Baghdadi officials, the deterioration of the domestic economic situation in Iraq has pushed the country into a situation comparable to that of those Middle Eastern countries who were hit by the so-called “Arab Spring”.

Fuelled by real grievances including lack of job opportunities and severe corruption, domestic uprisings were manipulated by hostile foreign manipulation for purposes of regime change; these efforts have been ongoing in Syria since 2011. Baghdad believes that foreign and regional countries took advantage of the justified demands of the population to implement their own agenda, with disastrous consequences for the countries in question.

Sources within the office of the Iraqi Prime Minister said

“the recent demonstrations were already planned a couple of months ago. Baghdad was working to try and ease the situation in the country, particularly since the demands of the population are legitimate. The Prime Minister has inherited the corrupt system that has developed since 2003; hundreds of billions of dollars have been diverted into the pockets of corrupt politicians. Moreover, the war on terror used not only all the country’s resources but forced Iraq to borrow billions of dollars for the reconstruction of the security forces and other basic needs.”

“The latest demonstrations were supposed to be peaceful and legitimate because people have the right to express their discontent, concerns and frustration. However, the course of events showed a different objective: 8 members of the security forces were killed (1241 wounded) along with 96 of civilians (5000 wounded) and many government and party buildings were set

on fire and completely destroyed. This sort of behaviour has misdirected the real grievances of the population onto a disastrous course: creating chaos in the country. Who benefits from the disarray in Iraq?”

The unrest in Iraqi cities coincides with an [assassination](#) attempt against Iran’s Soleimani. Sources believe that the

“assassination attempt against the commander of the Iranian IRGC-Quds Brigade Qassem Soleimani is not a pure coincidence but related to events in Iraq”.

“Soleimani was in Iraq during the selection of the key leaders of the country. He has a lot of influence, like the Americans who have their own people. If Soleimani is removed, those who may have been behind the recent unrest may think it will create enough confusion in Iraq and Iran, allowing room for a possible coup d’état carried out by military or encouraged by foreign forces, Saudi Arabia and the US in this case. Killing Soleimani, in the minds of foreign actors, could lead to chaos, leading to a reduction of Iranian influence in Iraq”, said the sources.

The recent decisions of Abdel Mahdi made him extremely unpopular with the US. He has declared Israel responsible for the destruction of the five warehouses of the Iraqi security forces, Hashd al-Shaabi, and the killing of one commander on the Iraqi-Syrian borders. He opened the crossing at al-Qaem between Iraq and Syria to the displeasure of the US embassy in Baghdad, whose officers expressed their discomfort to Iraqi officials. He expressed his willingness to buy the S-400 and other military hardware from Russia. Abdel Mahdi agreed with China to reconstruct essential infrastructure in exchange for oil, and gave a \$284 million electricity deal to a [German](#) rather than an American company. The Iraqi Prime Minister refused to abide by US sanctions and is still buying electricity from Iran and allowing the exchange of commerce that is bringing large amounts of foreign currency and boosting the Iranian economy. And lastly, Abdel Mahdi rejected the “Deal of the Century” proposed by the US: he is trying to mediate between Iran and Saudi Arabia and therefore is showing his intention to keep away from the US objectives and policies in the Middle East.

US officials expressed their complete dissatisfaction with Abdel Mahdi’s policy to many Iraqi officials. The Americans consider that their failure to capture Iraq as an avant-garde country against Iran is a victory for Tehran. However, this is not what the Iraqi Prime Minister is aiming at. He is genuinely trying to keep away from the US-Iran war, but is confronted with increasing difficulties.

Abdel Mahdi took over governance in Iraq when the economy was at a catastrophic level. He is struggling in his first year of governance even though Iraq is considered to have the fourth largest of the world’s oil reserves. A quarter of Iraq’s over 40 million people live at poverty level.

The Marjaiya in Najaf intervened to calm down the situation, showing its capacity to control the mob. Its representative in Karbalaa Sayyed Ahmad al-Safi [emphasises](#) the importance of fighting corruption and creating an independent committee to put the country back on track. Al-Safi said it was necessary to start serious reforms and asked the Parliament, in particular “the biggest coalition”, to assume its responsibility.

The biggest group belongs to Sayyed Moqtada al-Sadr, with 53 MPs. Moqtada declared –

contrary to what the Marjaiya hoped – the suspension of his group from the parliament rather than assuming his responsibilities. Moqtada is calling for early elections, an election where he is not expected to gather more than 12-15 MPs. Al-Sadr, who visits Saudi Arabia and Iran for no strategic objective, is trying to ride the horse of grievance so he can take advantage of the just requests of the demonstrators. Moqtada and the other Shia groups who rule the country today, in alliance with Kurds and Sunni minorities, are the ones to respond to the people's requests, and not hide behind those in the street asking for the end of corruption, for more job opportunities, and improvement of their conditions of life.

Prime Minister Abdel Mahdi doesn't have a magic wand; the people can't wait for very long. Notwithstanding their justified demands, the people were "not alone in the streets. The majority of social media hashtags were Saudi: indicating that Abdel Mahdi's visits to Saudi Arabia and his mediation between Riyadh and Tehran have not rendered him immune to regime change efforts supported by Saudi," said the source. Indeed, Iraq's neighbours gave strong indications to the Prime Minister that Iraq's relation Iran is the healthiest and the most stable of relations with neighbouring countries. Tehran didn't conspire against him even if it was the only country whose flag was burned by some demonstrators and reviled in the streets of Baghdad during the last days of unrest.

The critical economic situation is making the Middle East vulnerable to unrest. Most countries are suffering due to the US sanctions on Iran and the monstrous financial expenditure on US weapons. US President Donald Trump is trying hard to empty Arab leaders' pockets and keep Iran as the main scarecrow to drain Gulf finances. The Saudi war on Yemen is also another destabilising factor in the Middle East, allowing plenty of room for tension and confrontation.

Iraq seems headed for instability as one aspect of the multidimensional US war on Iran; the US is demanding support and solidarity from Gulf and Arab countries to stand behind its plans. Iraq is not conforming to all US demands. The Iraqi parliament and political parties represent the majority of the population; regime change is therefore unlikely, but neighbouring countries and the US will continue to exploit domestic grievances. It is not clear whether Abdel Mahdi will manage to keep Iraq stable. What *is* clear is that US-Iran tensions are not sparing any country in the Middle East.

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