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This Issue's Top Stories

- ***The National Scene:*** The Maliki-Badr militia wing has pushed back at secularist protesters through physical intimidation, while Abadi seems to be softening his line. The danger posed to the militia parties from the protests, which they clearly sense, is that it will continue their current trend toward a focus on broader political reform instead of just demands related to corruption and services. Despite continued reform rhetoric from Abadi, we interpret his recent actions and speeches as an effort to lower expectations. We use the subsection here to address the controversial "Sunni-Sunni reconciliation" conference in Doha, Qatar. Attendance by leading Sunni figures, including Speaker Jiburi, will likely undermine what little momentum for compromise existed.
- ***Provincial Focus:*** Basra Governor Majid al-Nasrawi yet again faces an effort at impeachment over alleged improprieties, and the recent cooling off between him and Badr may reverse if the latter feels betrayed over the election of Najaf's new governor. Whatever Nasrawi's true demerits, the pressure he now faces is a continuation of the impeachment efforts he has faced – with a modest break after Abadi's election – since mid-2013. And this political tension is made worse by security tensions related to tribal feuds and populist protests. The election of a political insider in Najaf, Luay al-Yasseri, seems to run against the current of protests demanding reform.
- ***Political Economy in Focus:*** Oil revenue figures continue to disappoint; the Baghdad-Irbil oil export dispute continues even while escalating in regard to the fight for control of the Kirkuk-based North Oil Company; the Industry Ministry endeavors to reform; custom fees come into collection; the commission to raise money for reconstruction in Sunni areas faces many obstacles.

The National Scene

Iran-Aligned Forces Push Back

Pro-Iranian militia parties are pushing back at anti-Islamist elements of the protest movement, even as Prime Minister *Hayder al-Abadi* appears to pull back expectations of radical change. Sunni politicians attendance of Qatar's pro-insurgency conference threatens what cross-sectarian consensus exists in parliament.

Protests have continued in the south and central cities of the country and continue broadly as before, with some focused on governance demands (corruption, services) and others aimed at removing specific government officials (*IIP 113*). What changed in mid-August was an increased polarization, with secular activists becoming more outspoken about the need for broader political change¹ – instead of merely fighting corruption and demanding services – while protesters are increasingly chanting for the prosecution of former PM **Nuri al-Maliki**² and the removal of judiciary chief **Midhat al-Mahmud**.³ Activists in Baghdad and Babil especially have complained of politically-backed thugs assaulting protesters, attacks Maliki is widely viewed as sponsoring.⁴

Other pro-Iranian militia leaders have signaled that they have no intention of ceding the high ground to secular protesters. At an Aug. 22 event in Baghdad, ***Badr Organization's Hadi al-Ameri*** warned that “we will not allow anyone to infringe upon religious leaders,” and to further clarify, stated that the priority remained at the battlefield, and that “supporting fighters at the front had to be the priority in reforms.”⁵ In a visit to the headquarters of the ***Hizbullah Brigades*** the following day, Ameri reiterated his previous statement⁶ that protests were legitimate if they focused on rights and corruption, but warned against them becoming political ([video](#)). On Sept. 1, Ameri, along with ***Hashd*** chief **Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis**, took the unprecedented step of meeting publicly with Chief Justice Mahmud.⁷ Mahmud has been co-opted by Maliki since 2010, but this seemed to be a reminder that they controlled the judiciary.

Abadi's recent moves have been politically safe. In Babil he intervened to order security forces to protect protesters after Governor **Sadiq Madlul al-Sultani** ordered a curfew.⁸ On Aug. 29, he issued a “third series” of reforms, with the key measures being the opening of barricaded areas of Baghdad, and the formation of committees to ensure that state properties which have been taken over by political parties are restored to public possession.⁹ And to cover his security flank, on Aug. 25 he traveled to Samarra and addressed military officers, focusing on the importance of the fight in Bayji ([video](#)).

Abadi's recent moves also show signs of a careful pullback. Abadi's Aug. 27 presentation to journalists ([video](#)) emphasized how “waste” was really the greatest

form of corruption, while “theft” was a less prevalent form, possibly an attempt to lower expectations of prosecutions of officials. Even the Samarra speech, despite the habitual rhetoric about progress, contained a pullback in emphasizing Bayji’s importance as being vital to the protection of Samarra and Baghdad, instead of being the “key” to Mosul.¹⁰ This “third series” of reforms in fact proposed no punitive measures against those who abused public property, and the fact that some long-time Maliki loyalists are praising Abadi’s “reforms” suggests they feel secure.¹¹ The Sept. 4 Friday message from Ayatollah **Ali al-Sistani** saying “the most important step in reform is prosecuting leading figures” may have been to firm up Abadi’s spine.¹²

The Sadrists’ move to join the protests could blunt the secular/Islamist divide while worsening associated political tensions. **Muqtada al-Sadr** spokesman **Salah al-Obaydi** announced the move on Aug. 24, saying Sadr’s followers were prohibited from using Sadrist pictures or slogans and were to simply push standard protester demands for better services, and only in Baghdad ([video](#)). In subsequent interviews, Obaydi was questioned skeptically about how they could protest when they were part of the system.¹³ What was left unsaid is that secular activists are getting squeezed, subject to physical threats from the Maliki-Badr wing and infiltration from the Sadrists.

The stalemate in Kurdistan has continued since **Kurdistani Democratic Party (KDP)** chief **Masud Barzani**’s term expired on Aug. 19 (he continues to exercise presidential powers de facto). The five Kurdish parties have held a series of talks which have produced proposals similar to those before, with opponents offering to extend Barzani’s term for two years on condition he accepts their demands for reducing the presidency’s powers, and the KDP offering a referendum on the key issue of the president’s election by parliament or popular vote. Neither side appears likely to back down at present.

Doha Conference Shakes Sunni Scene

Qatar’s Sept. 3 conference for Iraqi Sunnis appears to have been aimed at uniting insurgents and pro-Sunni autonomy politicians, and threatens an already weak Sunni leadership. The gathering, sponsored by Foreign Minister **Khalid al-Attiya**, was framed as “national reconciliation” by bringing pro-insurgency groups like the **Baath Party**, the **Muslim Scholars Association (MSA)** and the **Islamic Army** together with Sunni politicians, mostly from with **Osama al-Nujayfi**’s **Mutahidun**. Among those invited, leading attendees included **Ahmad al-Masari** and **Muhammad al-Karbuli**;¹⁴ they represent two of Mutahidun’s three factions (the **Islamic Party** and **al-Hal**, respectively) and Masari is the Mutahidun’s leader in parliament. Nujayfi’s Sunni rivals were at pains to differentiate themselves; **Salih al-Mutlak** ostentatiously held a conference for Anbar tribes in Baghdad on Sept. 2, while Ninawa MP **Abd al-Rahim al-Luwayzi** described Doha as a “provocation” because “regional states are implicated” in the current war.¹⁵

This should kill such limited parliamentary consensus for compromise as existed. Shia leaders competed in condemning the event as “post-Daesh planning” to implement “the

Biden plan” to “break up Iraq;”¹⁶ SLC MPs called for attendees to be prosecuted.¹⁷ Maliki ally **Khalaf Abd al-Samad** described it as “a new page in the despicable plan cooked in Qatar and implemented in Anbar... under American auspices.”¹⁸ Just days before, Speaker **Salim al-Jiburi** made another push for the national guard bill – viewed as a US-backed proposal – and it foundered on Shia opposition to recruitment being solely from the province in question. (The bill as drafted would allow Shia militiamen “residing” in Sunni provinces to be part of its guard; *IIP 102/14, 111/12.*) Astoundingly, Masari did an interview with the Qatari *al-Sharq* in which he talked about how vital the national guard was even while advocating “reconciliation” with Sunni insurgents.¹⁹

Doha may also wreck Speaker Jiburi’s credibility. Nujayfi decided against going, but Jiburi went. While Jiburi announced he was not attending the conference but heeding a separate invitation from Prime Minister **Abdullah bin Nasir** that happened to on the same day, followed by a trip to Iran,²⁰ this will not help, especially as Masari described Jiburi as part of the “reconciliation” effort in his interview.²¹

Provincial Focus

Basra Paralyzed by Political Crisis & Tribal Unrest

Tribal feuds and extortion of businesses are growing in Basra, and the threat of clashes among Shia militias remains. In Najaf, Dawa defeated Badr’s efforts to win the governorship, where the election of a political insider defied the reform wave.

Governor **Majid al-Nasrawi** of the *Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI)* is struggling against a determined effort to unseat him, led by the *Badr Organization*. Anti-Nasrawi protests in June fizzled after the Sadrists withdrew from the demonstrations,²² only to return with the outbreak of nationwide protests in early August.²³ Badr gathered signatures from 12 of the council’s 35 members in mid-August for hearings against Nasrawi on alleged financial irregularities. Nasrawi agreed in principle to appear to answer questions but requested more time to prepare his responses, and the council voted on Sept. 1 to delay his appearance at the hearings for one week, until Sept. 8.²⁴

The hearings could be a make or break moment for Nasrawi, although he has survived several efforts at impeachment since his 2013 election (*IIP 80, 84, 97*). Nasrawi is to answer 60 written questions about alleged improprieties, most centered on government contracts. Major allegations made public against him include those related to a 207 billion dinar deal with a Kuwaiti company to clean Basra streets²⁵ and a supposed contract with Lebanese businessman **Adnan al-Sarayifi** for a sewers project in the Hussein neighborhood; Sarayifi denies any connection to the project.²⁶

Given popular anti-incumbent sentiment, Nasrawi’s political future probably depends on a backroom deal to cancel the hearings against him or to tone down their impact,

perhaps by holding them behind closed doors. Nasrawi attended an Aug. 23 meeting between **Hadi al-Ameri** and ISCI's **Ammar al-Hakim** in Baghdad, along with Communications Minister **Hassan al-Rashid**, a Badr stalwart from Basra.²⁷ Rashid's wife, **Amtar Rahim**, is one of Badr's most outspoken Basra council members.²⁸ The meeting suggests Badr's push against Nasrawi may be a negotiating tactic, and that the group is still amenable to a deal which keeps him in place in return for concessions.

Security tensions in Basra between ISCI and Badr appear to be abating following the July 17 death of **Salam al-Dirawi**, the Badrist director of the Basra Hashd whom Nasrawi had tried unsuccessfully to remove (*IIP 111/4*). Dirawi died in a car rollover accident on the highway north of Basra.²⁹ Dirawi has been replaced by fellow Badrist **Ammar al-Jaafari** ("Abu Yasser al-Basri"). Jaafari reportedly sees "unity among factions" and "supporting families of the martyrs" as his priorities, so he may clash less with ISCI militias than his predecessor.³⁰ While the threat of imminent violence between Badr and ISCI militias has receded, the heavy presence of armed and uniformed men at Hashd funerals in Basra shows that militias maintain significant forces in the province.³¹

Degenerating Protest Movement Feeds Tribal Unrest

The liberal wing of Basra's protest movement has all but disbanded, leaving a series of unruly demonstrations by job-seekers led by tribal leaders. Unidentified thugs attacked the main protest tent outside the governor's office on Aug. 22, leading its organizers to disband two days later.³² Organizers claimed their demands had been partially met, perhaps referring to a vague promise by Nasrawi to replace the heads of departments with ones chosen on a meritocratic basis.³³ The movement has also secured approval from the *Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC)* for a referendum on creating an autonomous Basra region, as demanded by some protesters, although IHEC's move was probably a symbolic conciliatory gesture to protesters, as no referendum is likely to be held in the coming months due to budgetary and administrative obstacles.³⁴

Tribal figures took advantage of the protest movement to launch a series of disruptive job-seeking demonstrations at oil fields, which have since been suspended pending negotiations with authorities. Protests at West Qurna I & II, Rumeila, and Majnoon all demanded jobs, and in some cases even blocked roads, disrupting business activities.³⁵ The protests have died down since Abadi's visit to the province Aug. 18, during which he met with *Lukoil* representatives and promised to protect oil fields from disruption.³⁶ **Ali Shaddad Faris**, an ISCI councilman and head of the council's Oil and Gas Committee, is leading efforts to negotiate with tribal leaders, offering some new local hires and job training for locals in return for promises to keep the peace in the future.³⁷

These events intersect with preexisting tribal violence we noted last December (*IIP 97/8*), which may escalate following the Aug. 29 assassination of **Sabih al-Karmashi**, a prominent shaykh who had been active in helping to negotiate peaceful solutions to disputes.³⁸ Karmashi was killed by a remote-controlled bomb placed in his car at a

parking garage near the Shalamche border crossing, where he had parked during a visit to relatives in Iran.³⁹ The use of a sophisticated bomb represents an escalation from Basra's usual tribal violence, which tends to involve inconclusive shoot-outs. One such clash, among wings of Karmashi's own Karamsha tribe, led to widespread damage to private and public property in Garmat Ali, northern Basra, on Aug. 19.⁴⁰

Political turmoil, which leaves politicians vulnerable to tribal pressure, and the flood of weapons from the Hashd mobilization have both enflamed tribal violence, despite efforts to negotiate truces and the deployment of a "strike force" to contain feuds and arrest participants. Gun battles between tribes are likely to cause intermittent disruptions of traffic on the Basra-Baghdad highway for the foreseeable future.⁴¹

Dawa Insider Turns Back Badr, Reform Pressure

Badr's effort to win the governorship in Najaf was defeated by the Sept. 3 election of **Luay al-Yasseri**. Badr boycotted the session because "other factions failed to keep their word to Badr at the last moment."⁴² Supporters of Governor **Adnan al-Zurfi**, whom the council removed on July 13, also boycotted the session. Elections had been delayed while courts considered an appeal from Zurfi against the vote, and an Aug. 24 decision rejecting his appeal paved the way for the vote. With Zurfi's *Loyalty to Najaf* and Badr both boycotting, in an apparent effort to prevent the session from reaching quorum, Yasseri was elected by a unanimous vote, with 15 of 28 council members present.⁴³

Yasseri's election is a setback for Badr, which had hoped to gain the governorship for its own candidate, **Kathim al-Jalihawi**, who heads Badr's bloc on the council. *Al-Alem al-Jadid* reported a supposed national-level deal in late June in which Badr was to drop the campaign against Nasrawi in Basra in return for ISCI's support for Badr's Jalihawi for governor in Najaf; the Sadrists were reportedly party to the deal as well (*IIP 110/4*).⁴⁴ If such a deal did exist, it has certainly now fallen through, with Badr defeated in Najaf and still struggling to unseat Nasrawi. The upheaval in Najaf also highlights tensions inside Abadi's own SLC: Yasseri was supported by council chairman **Khudayr al-Jiburi**, of the SLC-aligned *State of Justice Coalition*, but Jiburi claims that the *Dawa Party* boycotted the session, even though Yasseri is himself a member of the party.⁴⁵

Governor Yasseri is a political insider adept at both administrative and media affairs. A former colonel in the Interior Ministry, he served as head of Najaf's traffic police, a role he used somewhat incongruously to become a patron of local literature and arts.⁴⁶ Elected to the council on the SLC slate in 2009, he served as chairman of the council's security committee.⁴⁷ After his reelection in 2013, he was made deputy chairman of the provincial council (*IIP 65/6*). After being accused of corruption during the recent wave of protests, Yasseri went on TV to deny the accusations ([video](#)). A phone call from Yasseri's office recently led the Grand Kufa mosque to fire one of its employees who had criticized Yasseri on Facebook, although Yasseri says this was not his intent.⁴⁸

Political Economy in Focus

Oil Revenue Takes Major Global Price Hit

Federal Iraq's oil exports for August were respectable but revenue was weak, and not surprisingly so given the state of the international market. According to the Oil Ministry, in August Iraq sold 3,181,567 million barrels of oil per day (bpd), falling short of \$4 billion in monthly oil revenue for the first time since February (*IIP 110/7*), coming in at \$3.874 billion. The culprit was the fact that Iraq sold its oil for just \$40.60/barrel.⁴⁹ In July comparable figures were 3,104,677 bpd which brought in \$4.9 billion – a full extra billion dollars for a single month – based on a sale price of \$51. Given that Baghdad needs \$5.6 billion/month to hit (now obsolete) budget projections, this is all the more reason for Abadi to focus on the austerity side of his “reforms.”

Regarding the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), its monthly report indicated it exported 472,832 bpd in August, of which 353,510 bpd were from “fields operated by the KRG” (i.e. in the KRG proper or Makhmur) and 119,322 bpd came from the Kirkuk-based *National Oil Company (NOC)*, of which 50,936 bpd the KRG claimed turned over for federal export.⁵⁰ Given the unorthodox methods the KRG is using to export its oil,⁵¹ it is assumed they are selling below market price but it is not clear how much. But assuming a discount of 15 percent from the federal price, we may estimate that the KRG brought in about \$400 million in oil revenue in August. That is about half what the KRG needs to pay its public sector, not to mention the contractors operating its fields.

Kurdistan Oil Dispute Hits the Media, Kirkuk

On Aug. 20, the KRG Ministry of National Resources (MNR) issued an amazing press release blasting not only Baghdad, but also bashing its rivals within the KRG. In English the release was entitled, “Setting the Record Straight on Oil Revenue and Export So the People of Kurdistan Can Judge for Themselves.”⁵² Its denunciation of Baghdad for allegedly failing to fulfil its obligations was standard, but it not only attacked the KRG's Finance Ministry (controlled by *Gorran*, a rival of the KDP, which controls the MNR), it also implicitly called into question President Barzani's leadership. We noted during the negotiations that MNR Minister **Ashti Hawrami** had laid down a hard line against any compromise with Baghdad on exports at a conference on Dec. 17 in London (*IIP 98/2*). Given that Barzani did ultimately cave in on Baghdad's demands to centralize export revenue – a fact which Kurdish leaders have often obfuscated⁵³ but which is clear from the law (*IIP 101/7-8*) – the Aug. 20 statement that the MNR had “registered its doubts” about the deal seems to be Hawrami's way of saying, “I told you so.”

Separately, both sides seem to be escalating the struggle for the control of the Kirkuk-based NOC. On the one hand, the Kirkuk provincial council, which is dominated by the *Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)*, voted on Aug. 9 to rename the NOC to be the

“Kirkuk Oil Company,” a move protested by Arabs and Turkmen.⁵⁴ The KRG is already de facto expropriating oil which is nominally controlled by the federal government (Kurdish Peshmerga control the ground), and we suggested previously that Barzani’s visit to Kirkuk in July may have been about Kirkuk getting a share of the oil the KRG is exporting from the province to replace funds from Baghdad (*IIP 112/3*). Then on Aug. 26, Governor **Najm al-Din Karim** suggested this publicly,⁵⁵ and so the de facto secession of Kirkuk from Iraq continues. It is in light of this controversy that Prime Minister Abadi’s appointment of **Akram Fuad** as the new head of the NOC on Sept. 2 may be viewed.⁵⁶ Fuad is Turkmen, and Turkmen outside the KRG – both Sunni and Shia – have generally sided with Arab factions against the Kurds.

Industry Ministry Navigates Populist Backlash

Amid protests sweeping the south and center of the country, Industry Minister **Muhammad al-Durraji** is attempting reform while avoiding layoffs, which may be an impossible task. As noted previously, the ministry’s “self-financing companies” – production facilities employing about 600,000 Iraqis which are too inefficient to be truly self-financing – are a major portion of the salary payment crunch (*IIP 102/10*). Generally state employees have been getting paid, but within government-controlled federal Iraq, contract workers, industrial workers and Hashd militiamen are three groups in arrears. Durraji’s plan is to consolidate administration by merging factories to reduce the total number from 73 to 37, which he claims he can do without laying off laborers.⁵⁷

This followed continued protests by industry workers over unpaid salaries, which they said were running three months late (the same as when we addressed this in *IIP 102*). The Industry Ministry at least appears to have been successful at shifting blame, as protests in early August focused on the Finance Ministry, with protesters yelling **Hoshyar Zebari**’s name instead of Durraji’s.⁵⁸ Durraji said a week after protests began that salaries would be paid and this calmed protests, and announced broader reforms:

The ministry is reforming by opening up to the free market and bringing in investment through quasi-privatization... and increasing productivity by no less than 25 percent... Measures taken at the top level will be aimed at removing administrative bloat by merging administrative offices without touching public assets...⁵⁹

Durraji is also moving toward new production lines. When he reiterated the plan on Aug. 19 he added that there would be a shift toward the war effort, and that his ministry would be working with the Labor Ministry and the security services to have plants repairing armaments.⁶⁰ Furthermore, beyond the war, the ministry announced on Aug. 25 what could be a major step with the opening of a factory in Babil producing cars from Korea’s **Kia**, on an experimental basis at the rate of 24 cars per day.⁶¹ The ministry indicated the cars would be aimed at the local market and that the local producer, the **Public Company for Vehicle Manufacture**, is well advanced in preparation for the infrastructure necessary to begin production.⁶²

Enforcement of 2015 Customs Fees Begins

Baghdad is now beginning enforcement of new customs fees, an emergency fund-raising measure included in the 2015 budget. Despite repeated demands of Basra leaders,⁶³ the fees went into effect Aug. 1. News of the impending increase in fees reportedly led to feverish traffic at Basra ports in July, as importers rushed to get goods in before collection began.⁶⁴ Now, traffic at the port has reportedly declined, with one car dealer telling journalists he and other dealers had stopped importing used cars entirely because of an increase of the customs fee from three percent to 15 percent.⁶⁵

Also, federal and KRG officials say the law is being enforced at KRG border crossings as well. This answers a key objection from Basrans who had argued that without uniform enforcement, the law would end up pushing importers away from Basra ports.⁶⁶

Reconstruction Fund for Sunni Areas Faces Obstacles

The Reconstruction Fund for War-Damaged Provinces, headed by **Abd al-Basit Turki**, is struggling to raise funds needed. The committee is planning a major international conference for donor states and businesses in December to be held in Kurdish territory. Turki says the fund's needs are more than one trillion dinars (more than \$830 million).⁶⁷

To this end the World Bank committed \$350 million in July ([text](#)), which have now been allocated to seven areas: Dur, Alam, Thuluiya, and Tikrit in Salah al-Din; and Jalula, Saadiya, and Hamrin in Diyala. The Salah al-Din locations are all pockets of pro-government Sunni sentiment, while the Diyala areas are all in the disputed territories, suggesting an effort to reinforce federal influence through reconstruction.

The committee is also engaged in creating tent camps for refugees, performing the role of general manager of the government's efforts to help channel foreign money to Sunni provinces.⁶⁸ This has not prevented Anbar Governor **Suhayb al-Rawi** from acting independently, trying to arrange his own meetings with representatives of donor states.⁶⁹ Rawi claims to have Abadi's backing in this effort, although most donors will probably prefer to work with Turki's committee rather than with Rawi.

Despite its initial success with the World Bank, the fund's prospects of raising more money from abroad appear poor. Apart from donor fatigue and concerns about corruption, there is also the prospect of Shia militias attempting to interfere in the reconstruction effort: Hashd forces continue to police the return of IDPs to Tikrit, in some cases demanding displaced tribes make "blood money" payments before being allowed to return.⁷⁰ The Sept. 2 kidnapping of 18 employees, some of them Turkish citizens, from a construction site of a sports facility in the Habibiya neighborhood of Baghdad, raises the prospect of militias shaking down contractors, something they would be able to do under a variety of pretexts in areas liberated from IS.⁷¹

For the Record

Iraqi Politics August 18 – August 31

This is a timeline of key political events during the period covered by this issue. It is primarily focused on the actions of parliament and the prime minister; meetings of the parliamentary committees of Security & Defense, Oil & Energy, Finance, Economy, Foreign Affairs and Legal Affairs, as well as other notable events, may also be included. Cabinet and parliament sessions are provided in summary format.

Aug. 18: The cabinet meets, now reduced to just 22 ministers. It authorizes a committee under the auspices of the cabinet's general secretariat to provide compensation to victims of recent terrorist attacks in the Habibiya and Jamila neighborhoods of Baghdad and in Diyala's Hawidar. The cabinet hears a report on security threats to oil installations in Basra and other southern provinces, and resolves to prevent violent or disruptive protests from interfering with the oil industry. It reaffirms its commitment to the schedule agreed to on Aug. 1 for transferring specified authorities from the ministries to provincial governments, and warns of legal penalties for provincial governments that attempt to assume powers ahead of schedule.⁷²

Abadi announces an executive order implementing his proposal, approved by Parliament, to eliminate special paid advisor positions at the ministries and to limit the President, the Prime Minister, and the Speaker of Parliament to a maximum of five paid advisors each.⁷³ Abadi travels to Basra, where he meets with Lukoil executives at the West Qurna 2 oil field, and promises to protect them from security threats, including those posed by violent protesters ([video](#)).⁷⁴ Abadi also addresses the Basra provincial council, where he calls on political parties to appoint qualified administrators to key posts instead of partisan loyalists ([video](#)).

Aug. 20: Abadi's office announces that the budgets of the vice presidents and deputy prime ministers, whose positions have all been eliminated, will be returned to the state treasury. It also announces that a new table of salaries for state employees will be created within 30 days.⁷⁵ Abadi meets with representatives of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to discuss the refurbishment of the Harithiya power plant in Basra.⁷⁶ Abadi orders a legal investigation into recent assaults on journalists in Najaf.⁷⁷

Aug. 23: Abadi meets with Norwegian Foreign Minister Borge Brende and Norwegian Defense Minister Ine Marie Eriksen Soreide.⁷⁸ Abadi chairs a meeting of the National Security Council, which discusses a new system for computerized tracking of detainees.⁷⁹ Abadi orders the Babil Operations Command to reverse a curfew it had imposed to block protesters.⁸⁰

Aug. 24: Abadi chairs a meeting of the Crisis Cell for economic affairs, which approves a five trillion dinar loan program for the agriculture, manufacturing, and construction sectors. It also discusses revisions to Iraq's oil field development plans in light of falling oil prices.⁸¹ Abadi's office issues a denial of rumors that he has given orders to halt protests demanding reform.⁸² Abadi visits Bayji to meet with military commanders and discuss progress against IS ([video](#)).⁸³

Aug. 25: Parliament meets ([parliamentary schedule](#)) with 246 MPs present. Speaker Jiburi announces his rejection of a request by Electricity Minister Qasim al-Fahdawi to delay hearings

into his performance until a legal appeal can be adjudicated, and threatens to hold a vote of no confidence against him if he does not appear for questioning by Aug. 29. Parliament votes to adopt the recommendations of the Oil and Energy Committee and of the Integrity Committee on the electricity crisis ([text](#)). Speaker Jiburi decides to delay a first vote on a proposed bill eliminating the Open Educational College until it can be revised. Parliament completes a first reading of a bill on devolution of federal powers to the provinces, of an anti-money laundering law, of a law on university admissions for security forces personnel, of a law on the income sources of municipal governments, and of a revision of the Assumed Name Identity Documents of Refugees Law No. 79 of 2012. Parliament votes to return a law on the National Transportation Training Center to the cabinet for revisions. Qutayba Ibrahim al-Jiburi of the Iraqiya bloc takes the oath of office as an MP, reassuming the seat he resigned from last fall to become Environment Minister, a position recently eliminated by Abadi's reforms.⁸⁴

The cabinet meets. It approves funding for the Electricity Ministry to buy fuel for power plants. The cabinet does not publish a complete list of its decisions.⁸⁵ Abadi meets with security commanders and urges them to protect protesters regardless of their political views and to foil efforts to poison security forces' relations with citizens. Defense Minister Khalid al-Obaydi and Interior Minister Muhammad Salem al-Ghaban are also present ([video](#)).

Aug. 26: Abadi holds a meeting with political and media figures. He tells them that political parties should stop trying to appoint unqualified loyalists to senior civil service posts, and defends the constitutionality of his reform proposals ([video](#)). Abadi meets with Jan Kubis, the head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).⁸⁶

Parliament's Security and Defense Committee meets to discuss the National Guard law.⁸⁷

Aug. 27: Parliament meets ([parliamentary schedule](#)) with 269 MPs present. It passes the [Political Parties Law](#). It completes the first readings of a revision to the Forensic Medicine Law No. 37 of 2013. It completes a second reading of a bill defining the freedom of expression and the freedom of assembly. It passes a non-binding resolution asking the cabinet to pay salaries to government employees who have fled from IS-held territory.⁸⁸

Abadi attends the funeral of deputy Anbar Operations Command chief General Abd al-Rahman Abu Raghif and 10th Army Division commander Safin Abd al-Majid.⁸⁹

Aug. 28: Abadi orders the opening of streets closed to provide security zones for political party offices,⁹⁰ and orders preparations to end restrictions on entering the Green Zone.⁹¹ Abadi forms a committee to examine improper sales, awards, and rentals of state-owned real estate.⁹²

Aug. 29: Parliament meets ([parliamentary schedule](#)) with 264 MPs present. Electricity Minister Qasim al-Fahdawi appears to answer questions into alleged contracting irregularities at the ministry raised by Union of National Forces (UNF) MP Salah al-Jiburi. At the conclusion of Fahdawi's appearance, Parliament votes to renew its confidence in him as minister. (The interrogating MP is from a rival faction of the UNF, al-Hal, which was viewed as wanting the Electricity Ministry and is viewed very negatively, and this undermined any incentive for Shia factions to impeach Fahdawi.) Parliament also completes first readings of a revision to the Principles of Criminal Justice Law No. 23 of 1971 and of a revision to the Compensation For

Victims of Military Operations, Friendly Fire, and Terrorist Acts No. 20 of 2009. It completes the second reading of the a revision to the Income Tax Law No. 113 of 1982.⁹³

Aug. 30: Parliament meets ([parliamentary schedule](#)) with 243 MPs present. It votes to create a committee to examine allegations of foreign support for IS, at the recommendation of the Security and Defense Committee. It passes a non-binding resolution to pay salaries to state employees who have fled IS-held territory. It completes second readings of the ratification of three international agreements: the charter of the Arab Peace and Security Council, a scientific and cultural cooperation agreement with France, and a trade agreement with Kuwait.⁹⁴

Aug. 31: Abadi chairs a meeting of the cabinet's energy committee.⁹⁵ Parliament's Legal Committee meets to discuss revisions to the criminal trials law, the civil service law, the general amnesty law, and the laws on civil service and the work of paid advisors in state bodies.⁹⁶

Note: As a reminder, we have recently adopted a citation style rule by which links to actual video sources are indicated by the addition of "TV" to the name of the media outlet. For example, a citation to "al-Jazeera" alone would just be to the outlet's website, whereas "al-Jazeera TV" indicates a link to a video from al-Jazeera, usually from You Tube.

¹ For example, see comments by activist Ali al-Zaydi, "Behind the News," [al-Jazeera TV](#), Aug. 22, 2015.

² "Protest in Karbala Demands Execution of Maliki," [JBC News](#), Aug. 12, 2015; "Maliki: from Vice-President to Wanted Man," [al-Bawaba](#), Aug. 13, 2015.

³ For example regarding Mahmud, see "Evening News Broadcast," [al-Sumaria TV](#), Aug. 21, 2015.

⁴ "Iraq: Assassination of Activists to Prevent Reform Process," [Sky News Arabic](#), Aug. 31, 2015; "Maliki Activists Attack Protesters in Baghdad," [al-Arabi al-Jadid](#), Aug. 15, 2015.

⁵ "Ameri: We Will Not Allow Anyone to Infringe upon Religious Authorities," [Voice of Iraq](#), Aug. 22, 2015.

⁶ See the quote we included from Ameri in the *National Scene* of the preceding issue. Protests against corruption (in general terms) and for services do not threaten Ameri; broad political change does.

⁷ "Ameri and Muhandis Meet with Mahmud and Express Support for the Judiciary," [al-Sumaria](#), Sept. 1, 2015.

⁸ "Abadi Directs Babil Operations to Remove Curfew in Babil and Calls for Protesters to Cooperate with Security Forces," [al-Mada Press](#), Aug. 24, 2015.

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¹⁰ The Iraqi commentator Yahya al-Kubaysi noted this in a program on al-Jazeera; see, "Behind the News: What Abadi's Visit to Samarra Tells Us," [al-Jazeera TV](#), Aug. 25, 2015.

¹¹ See for example comments by Saad al-Matlabi, "State of Law Leader: This Third Series of Reforms Touches the Root of the Problem," [al-Maalomah](#), Aug. 29, 2015. Matlabi is a Baghdad provincial councilman and has been a confidant of Maliki for years. In this article he talks about parties taking over government property as if he were not himself at the heart of the system.

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- ¹⁷ "Bloc Leader: We Will Seek Legal Action Against Any MP Who Attends the Doha Conference," [Shafaag](#), Sept. 2, 2015; "MP Awadi Calls for Attendees of Doha Conference to be Referred to the Courts," [Afaq](#), Sept. 2, 2015.
- ¹⁸ This quote is taken from the video from al-Itijah linked above.
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