



INTEGRITY_{UK}

ABOUT INTEGRITY UK

Integrity UK is an organisation committed to preventing extremism through innovative approaches to promoting integration, cohesion and social reconciliation within the MENA region and the UK.

IRAQ INTELLIGENCE REPORT

13th July 2018

During today's Friday Sermon in Karbala, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's representative, Sheikh Abdul Mahdi al-Karbala'i, said that the country's main religious authorities (Marja'iyah) express their solidarity with the demands of the demonstrators in Basra. Sheikh Abdul Mahdi went on to criticise the government's failure to address the issues in the province sufficiently and improve living conditions despite the "financial abundance", in reference to the province's large oil resources. He went on to call on the protestors not to attack or vandalise state institutions in the province. This stance by the Marja'iyah could be a significant blow to the government and could galvanise the protests in the Shia-dominated south of Iraq, where Ayatollah Sistani is overwhelmingly influential. His endorsement of the protestor's demands would not just put the government under more pressure to take the necessary action to improve the situation in Basra but could encourage more to join the protests.

Meanwhile, the large protests have caused a closure to the Umm Qasr port and according to reports, protesters stormed the West Qurna-2 oilfield. There were also reports that protesters vandalised and looted parts of the complex, where Russian firm Lukoil is reportedly operating. Local workers said around ten protesters managed to briefly enter a crude separation facility before police pushed them back. Policemen on the scene also claimed that an angry crowd set fire to a caravan used by policemen in the area. Overnight, the Basra Provincial Council building was evacuated after protesters tried to storm and block the road around it. According to local media reports, one person has been killed and 13 injured since the beginning of the protests in Basra, last Sunday.

As a result of the unrest in Basra, the Iraqi Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi, cut his trip to Brussels short and arrived immediately in the province to assess the situation. With uncertainty surrounding his future as Prime Minister looming, his handling of the crisis in Basra could be significant for his political future. If the situation escalates, his position will be even more precarious than it already is. According to reports, the Counter-Terrorism Services will dispatch a unit to protect oil institutions in Basra from vandalism, as the entire province goes into a state of high alert.

Meanwhile, Muqtada al-Sadr has endorsed moves to privatise the electricity sector in a bid to resolve the electricity crisis. In a recent statement, Sadr said that the government should use "foreign, non-occupying" companies to improve electricity services. Sadr believes that privatising the electricity sector will prevent government corruption from eating into the sector. Previous attempts to privatise the electricity sector have proven controversial and have been met with fierce opposition by political parties. The current Minister of Electricity, Qasim al-Fahdawi, was forced to U-turn on his electricity reform plan, which sought to partially privatise the electricity sector and increase electricity bills for households, due to the opposition he faced.

Security sources in the province of Anbar say that the United States plans to open a third military base in the province, near the Iraq-Syria border. The US currently has two other bases in the province: the Ain al-Assad base, located in the al-Baghdadi area, while the Habbaniyah airbase is located east of Ramadi. The third base would reportedly oversee the areas of al-Rutba, al-Qa'im, Haditha, al-Rawa and the western Anbar desert areas close to the border with Syria. This comes after reports that Islamic State (IS) militants are mobilising to infiltrate into Iraq from Syria. According to the US, there are approximately 3000 IS militants located near the Iraq border. These plans are likely to generate much controversy, as calls for the US to pull out of Iraq grow louder inside Iraq.