



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

23rd August 2018

The leader of the Hikma Movement, Ammar al-Hakim, rejected the sanctions imposed on Iran by the United States, saying that Iraqis should not just “stand by and watch” as the United States imposes sanctions on its neighbour as both countries share major interests. Speaking during his Eid sermon in Baghdad, Hakim went on to call for the US to reconsider its decision to impose sanctions on Iran. While Hakim has distanced considerably from Iran since splitting from the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), his recent comments suggests that he is still reluctant to adopt an adversarial stance towards Tehran. His comments also come just a few days after his party along with the Nasr Coalition, the Sa’ioun Alliance and the Wataniyah Coalition orally agreed to form a united coalition in a bid to become the largest bloc in parliament and thus lead the government formation process. As a result of this, the bloc will be careful not to alienate their neighbour too much as an adversarial Iran would make any efforts at government formation considerably more difficult.

The leader of the Islamic State (IS), Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, released a new audio recording where he called on supporters to carry out attacks on Western countries. The audio recording is the first released since September last year, where he called on fighters in Iraq and Syria to continue their resistance against their enemies. The audio recording confirms that the group’s leader is still at large despite numerous reports claiming he has been killed or is nearing death. The new audio recording represents a notable shift in rhetoric and strategy since Baghdadi’s previous recording. While the group’s prior strategy at that time was focused on maintaining its presence in Iraq and Syria, the group appears to be actively expanding the scope of its operations, singling out numerous countries in this latest message. This may result in an active shift in resources and attention by the group from Iraq to carrying out attacks in western countries. If this were the case, it would have wide-ranging implications for the group’s operations and activities in Iraq.

The leader of the Turkmen Front, Arshad Salihi, has called on the Kurdish leadership to reach an agreement with them to resolve issues in disputed areas. Salihi said that an agreement between Shias, Sunnis and Kurds alone would fail if the Turkmen were not involved in the negotiations. His remarks came one day after Turkey’s Ambassador to Baghdad, Fatih Yildiz, said Kirkuk is the “land of ancestors” for them and that Turkey is the “land of ancestors” for Kirkuk residents. He went on to say that Turkey is ready to provide any form of assistance to them in Kirkuk. The status of disputed areas such as Kirkuk and Tuz Khurmato has long been a source of great tension between Kurds and Turkmen. However, this latest appeal by the leader of the Turkmen Front leader is an indication that the party are open to negotiations and dialogue with Kurdish authorities.

Just a few hours after these comments, tensions between Turkmen and Kurdish armed groups in Tuz Khurmato flared up. Mortar shells reportedly hit a neighbourhood in the town, injuring two people. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) accused Turkmen factions in the Popular Mobilisation Unit (PMU)

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of firing the mortar rounds. Meanwhile the Turkmen faction blamed the Peshmerga for the incident. Details of the incident are yet to be confirmed by authorities. The incident is an indication of how tense and volatile the situation is in these disputed areas as well as the level of mistrust between Kurdish and Turkmen factions in the region.

According to reports, oil exports from southern Iraq are on course to hit another record high this month. Southern Iraqi exports in the first 19 days of August averaged 3.7 million barrels per day (bpd), up 160,000 bpd from July's 3.54 million bpd. The increase suggests that Iraq is following through on an OPEC agreement reached in June to raise oil production after nearly two years of production cuts. Iraq's increasing production also comes as the country continues to face serious economic problems and a shortage of electricity.