



Politics

06

OCT

19:02 UTC

Iraq Alert: Anti-government protests, attacks likely across Iraq, including Baghdad, in days leading up to October 10 parliamentary elections

Please be advised:

- Iraqi parliamentary elections will take place nationwide on October 10.
- The following security measures will be imposed over the following days or between October 9-11:
 - [All Iraqi airports will be closed](#) from 21:00 (local time) on October 9 until 06:00 on October 11. This includes airports in Baghdad, Basra, and the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) international airports in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah.
 - Between October 9-11, border crossings will be closed and movement between provinces will be banned.
 - The use of trucks or motorcycles will be banned on election day. However, intra-provincial vehicular use will still reportedly be allowed.
 - Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) used for filming purposes will be prohibited.
 - Trains will cease operations.
 - All gatherings will be banned.
 - All markets, restaurants, malls, commercial centers, and establishments will be closed. This measure excludes grocery stores, pharmacies, and fruit and vegetable markets.
 - The Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) is authorized to impose a comprehensive curfew when necessary and in emergency cases.
- Over 3,000 candidates have registered to compete for the 329 seats in Parliament.
- Iraq has invited more than 70 countries and international organizations, including the UN and EU, to monitor the elections. More than 600 international observers will monitor voting on October 10.
- As of October 5, multiple groups and activists from across Iraq's political spectrum like the group "The Opposition Forces Gathering", have announced their plan to boycott the upcoming elections.
- The spokesperson for Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada, which is linked to Iran-backed militias in Iraq, reportedly stated on September 28 that the group has gathered intelligence on assailants planning to target election centers or trigger civil unrest in southern Iraq's Nasiriyah.

Assessments & Forecast:

Potential for anti-government protests before, after elections

1. This is the sixth parliamentary election to be held in Iraq since 2003 and the first wherein the acting Prime Minister (PM) has not been nominated. Originally scheduled to take place in June, the upcoming elections slated for October 10 still comes several months ahead of the constitutionally

mandated date set for 2022. This is largely due to PM Mustafa al-Kadhimi's promise made to anti-government activists to hold early elections when he assumed office in May 2020. Moreover, unruly demonstrations denouncing government corruption and poor socio-economic conditions, which began in October 2019, have persistently been suppressed by security forces while activists affiliated with the anti-government movement have been subject to assassinations and arbitrary arrests. The significant turnout recorded across the country, including at Baghdad's Tahrir Square, to commemorate the anti-government movement on [October 1](#) demonstrates that large segments of the population remain disillusioned with the Iraqi government, despite al-Kadhimi's effort to meet demands by holding early elections.

- 2. FORECAST:** Given the widespread calls to boycott the elections, there is a high potential for anti-government protests to be recorded across Iraq ahead of the elections on October 10. Security presence will be bolstered near election polling stations and across major cities like Baghdad, Basra, and southern Iraq's Nasiriyah, which has been a focal point for anti-government activity and unrest. Furthermore, due to the restrictions on movement and gatherings to be imposed between October 9-11, security forces may use forceful means to disperse these anti-government protests or unauthorized gathering. This may manifest in security forces' use of riot dispersal measures, such as tear gas or water cannons, to disperse protesters. While live fire has been used against protesters previously, authorities are unlikely to use such extreme measures to avoid negative optics at this time of heightened international attention on Iraq.

Risk of clashes between Shiite militias, protesters; attacks against US interests

1. Meanwhile, Iran-aligned Shiite militiamen have reportedly been placed on standby should they need to aid Iraqi security forces during the election. On the one hand, several of these Shiite militias operate under the Iraqi security umbrella, largely tasked with carrying out counter-militancy operations against IS or enforcing public security. On the other, such militias' potential deployment to enforce security arrangements during the election is liable to provoke confrontations with anti-government protesters and may lead to potential clashes between the two. This is because Shiite militias in Iraq are accused of killing the hundreds of activists during the October 2019 anti-government movement and have subsequently been perceived by segments of society to actively target anti-government activists on a regular basis. **FORECAST:** Thus, such existing tensions between Iran-aligned Shiite militias and anti-government protesters may result in scuffles or clashes between the two, should the former's security services be employed.
2. Additionally, Iran-backed Shiite militias, such as Ashab al-Kahf, frequently target US-led Coalition convoys and linked Iraqi civilian contractors as part of their long-standing efforts to compel US disengagement from the country. Such attacks have prompted, in part, an escalation in tensions between Iran-backed militias and US forces in Iraq over recent months. This is further underscored by the former alleging the US of having conducted an "enemy drone" attack on an Iran-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMU) facility in Najaf Province on July 26. The US-led Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) spokesperson subsequently stated that the US did not conduct airstrikes in Iraq on that day. Given that the US generally acknowledges such strikes in Iraq, the accusation indicates the PMU's likely aim of projecting the US as an aggressor, thereby justifying militia-perpetrated attacks against them. **FORECAST:** Thus, the threat to US interests, and linked personnel, operating in Iraq will remain relatively high. Given that US military forces help support the Iraqi security apparatus, particularly in regard to ensuring the security of holding elections, the likelihood of such personnel to be subject to an armed attack remains a possibility.

Threat of militant attacks by IS

- 1. FORECAST:** IS will also likely attempt to increase the frequency and scale of their attacks against security forces affiliated with the Iraqi security apparatus, as well as civilians, over the coming

days. Given the prevalence of anti-IS operations carried out in multiple regions of Iraq, particularly around northern Baghdad's Tarmiyah in recent months, IS is likely to capitalize on the days surrounding the election to attempt a symbolic attack as a sign of armed resistance. Such attacks may manifest in the form of IED and shooting attacks against election facilities or security installations and personnel. The jihadist group is also liable to target civilian areas, such as popular markets or polling stations, as underscored by a [July 19 suicide bombing](#) at al-Waheilat market, which resulted in the killing of at least 35 civilians, in Baghdad's Sadr City.

- 2. FORECAST:** Furthermore, given the increase in the presence of foreign entities, including journalists, monitoring and reporting on the election, there is an increased risk to such individuals operating in Iraq. This is because such individuals constitute higher profile targets and therefore may be subject to an IS-perpetrated attack or kidnapping as it would draw widespread international news coverage. As significant security protocols will be implemented in the days surrounding the elections, including restrictions on movement, the risk of a successful IS-perpetrated attack will be significantly diminished, however, it cannot be entirely ruled out.

Recommendations:

1. Those operating or residing in Iraq on October 6 and over the coming days are advised to maintain heightened vigilance the vicinity of all election facilities, including polling booths, due to the slated parliamentary elections and the associated risk of attacks and unruly demonstrations at these locales.
 2. In Baghdad and Basra, avoid the immediate vicinity of any political gatherings or demonstrations, regardless of goal or affiliation, given the risk of the event devolving into unruly civil unrest and subsequent security crackdowns.
 3. It is further advised to maintain heightened vigilance in and around Baghdad due to the threat of militancy and civil unrest. The threat of militancy is higher in the outskirts, particularly in Shiite-populated neighborhoods.
 4. Remain vigilant of the risk of roadside IEDs planted throughout Iraq by Shiite militias, which are aimed at targeting US-linked logistical convoys but carry a risk of collateral damage due to misidentification. It is advised that any travel, particularly in outlying areas, be conducted in armored vehicles, with proper security escorts and coordination with authorities.
 5. Adhere to government instructions and take necessary precautions to ensure business continuity due to the slated restrictions on movement and travel across the country.
 6. If a security checkpoint is encountered, act respectfully and patiently, while cooperating fully with security personnel.
 7. Westerners are advised to maintain a low profile and exercise heightened vigilance. To mitigate the risk of attacks or abductions, ensure that accommodation is equipped with sufficient perimeter security details. While conducting intra-city travel, regularly alter itinerary routes and avoid disclosing sensitive information to strangers, including your affiliation with foreign-based firms as your response could attract a negative reaction from locals or subject you to a potential attack.
- 8. Contact us at Operations@max-security.com or +44 20-3540-0434 for itinerary and contingency support options.**