

Kadhimi follows through on promises to reform Iraq's security sector

Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi's recent appointments and reforms are likely to face resistance from some political blocs and armed groups who feel they are losing power.

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BAGHDAD — Since he took office in May, Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi has made a series of changes in senior and [sensitive security positions](#) to improve the security institutions' performance. The moves have raised concerns in various political blocs that see these changes as

strengthening Kadhimi's power.

Among the most prominent changes was the reinstatement of Lt. Gen. Abdul-Wahab al-Saadi — who had been dismissed in 2019 by Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi — to lead the counterterrorism agency. Kadhimi also appointed former Interior Minister Qasim al-Araji as national security adviser, replacing Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) head Faleh al-Fayadh. Fayadh also was replaced as head of the National Security Agency by Gen. Abdul-Ghani al-Asadi, a former commander of the antiterrorism agency.

Kadhimi appointed Gen. Arqan Watout as the manager of the intelligence department protecting public facilities and figures. Also, former Defense Minister Khalid al-Obeidi was appointed as head of the operations center in the Iraqi National Intelligence Service; Maj. Gen. Maan al-Saad was appointed as commander of the air force, succeeding Lt. Gen. Jabbar Kadhim; and Maj. Gen. Hamid al-Zuhairi was placed in charge of protecting public facilities.

A source close to Kadhimi told Al-Monitor, "Kadhimi seeks to save the security institutions from political and partisan conflicts and to develop their capabilities by appointing competent leaders."

Kadhimi is targeting the so-called "deep state" that has practically controlled and managed the state's key posts since 2006. Since that year, successive governments have limited the distribution of security and administrative positions to the large traditional blocs, based on the quota system. That was due to parliament failing to resolve the issue of appointing directors of national bodies. [Article 61](#) of the Iraqi Constitution stipulates that parliament is to approve the appointment of ambassadors and directors of national bodies. However, this has not been done due to the sharp differences between political parties. As a result, prime ministers have appointed many such officials on a supposedly temporary basis.

Kadhimi, [commenting on objections](#) to the aforementioned appointments, [stressed that](#) these changes have a legal basis. He said the fact that the objections had crossed so many party lines showed he had no party's interest in particular.

Al-Monitor learned from various sources that the Shiite blocs that are close to the PMU are working to put together a parliamentary majority to annul Kadhimi's security appointments and come up with a comprehensive deal that includes appointments for all public posts. Katei Najman, a member of parliament for the Fatah alliance, told Al-Monitor, "The parliament will invite Kadhimi for a discussion of the recent security appointments," adding, "The parliamentary security and defense committee has not reviewed these appointments yet and has some legal objections in this regard."