

The NATIONAL INTEREST FOUNDATION

[Iraqi Protesters Rally Against Government Corruption](#)

Last week, a wave of protesters took to the streets in Iraq to rally against government corruption, failing public services, and a high unemployment rate. Demonstrations began on October 1st with thousands of Iraqis expressing their frustration with a lack of quality public services like water and electricity, in addition to the nation's growing rate of joblessness and widespread corruption. In fact, Transparency International places Iraq in the top tier of the world's most corrupt countries. The protesters have been met with harsh reactions from Iraq's Armed Forces, which has resulted in more than 100 people being killed and thousands injured since the protests began.

The anti-government demonstrations began in the capital city of Baghdad last week on Tuesday, October 1 and spread to several cities in the southern half of the country. Angered by rampant government corruption and economic mismanagement of funds, protesters gathered to demand new jobs and improved public services. Iraq is a country with a wealth of agricultural and resource potential; therefore, many Iraqis blame politicians and government officials for the corruption that has prevented the country from economically thriving. Ultimately, despite its abundance of resources, nearly three-fifths of Iraq's 40 million people live on less than \$6 a day, according to figures from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Additionally, unemployment is a major problem, particularly among the country's youth, while millions of citizens also lack access to sufficient schooling, healthcare, and water supplies.

The Iraqi Armed Forces responded to the protests by firing live rounds of ammunition, tear gas, and rubber bullets into the crowds of demonstrators, and authorities enforced an internet blackout and a strictly-imposed curfew in an attempt to curtail the protesters. Iraq's Cabinet also issued a new reform plan to address the protesters' grievances which touched on various topics including increasing welfare stipends for impoverished families and implementing training programs for unemployed young citizens. A governmental anti-corruption body, the Higher Council for Corruption Combat, ordered the dismissal of 1,000 employees at state institutions who had been convicted of wasting or embezzling public money.

Additionally, Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi gave televised remarks stating that he is willing to meet with protesters to hear their demands, but called on them to end their demonstrations. He described protesters' calls to put an end to government corruption as "rightful" and assured citizens that the government will not make "empty promises," saying that "demands to fight corruption and concern for the future of young people are rightful demands and we will respond to every legitimate request." Despite these statements, the number of fatalities and injuries continued to rise in the days following the Prime Minister's speech. Iraqi President Barham Salih condemned the attacks on demonstrators, and the military admitted to using excessive force in confronting protesters. Government officials also vowed to hold any security forces who "acted wrongly" accountable, but urged citizens to not allow peaceful protests to turn violent.

Overall, since the protests began last week, over 100 people have been killed and thousands have been injured in what most have deemed to be a harsh reaction and brutal crackdown on these rallies.