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**SHIITE IRAQI BLOCS IN CRISIS AS KAZEMI PROPOSED AS ZURFI REPLACEMENT FOR PM**

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Asharq Al-Awsat (7 April 2020)

Hamza Mustafa

Up until Sunday, discussions over nominating Iraq chief of intelligence, Mustafa al-Kazemi, to the position of premier were dismissed as speculation, significantly after several armed factions and Shiite blocs had accused him of complicity in the killing of Iranian top commander Qassem Soleimani in January.

Soleimani and head of the Kataib Hezbollah faction Abu Mehdi al-Muhandis were killed in a US drone strike near Baghdad in January.

Kazemi, who is perceived as close to Washington, appears no different than current Prime Minister-designate Adnan al-Zurfi, who is also accused of having the same close ties. Moreover, his name was not proposed during discussions among the seven-member Shiite committee that was tasked with nominating a premier. Their failure to reach an agreement on a candidate prompted President Barham Salih to name Zurfi.

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