



Iraq at the creation of its new government

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On 22 December 2010 Iraq at last announced the formation of a new government, some nine months after inconclusive elections. This note looks at the composition of the government and political and security conditions in the country.

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1 The 2010 election

1.1 Parties contesting the election

The State of Law Coalition	This Shiite group is headed by the Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and includes his Dawa Party, the Anbar Salvation Front and a number of smaller parties
The Iraqi National Alliance	A Shiite religious group that includes the Hakim's Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (formerly SCIRI), Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress, the Badr Organisation, the Sadrists, breakaway Dawa party members led by former prime minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari, the Islamic Virtue Party (Fadhilah), the Shia Turkmen Movement, and other parties.
Iraqiyya	Led by Ayad Allawi, former Prime Minister and secular Shia. The coalition includes Allawi's Iraqi National Accord, al-Mutlaq's Iraqi Front for National Dialogue. Iraqiyya is the principal secular force in Iraqi politics and is expected to do well in the election despite the ban on the leaders of the Front for National Dialogue.
The Kurdish Alliance	This coalition is dominated by the two most powerful Kurdish parties, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), headed by current Iraqi president, Jalal Talabani, and the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), led by Massoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdish regional government.
The Gorran coalition	The Kurdish movement for change emerged as a possibly serious contender for Kurdish votes in 2006.

1.2 Election results

Alliances and parties	Votes	%	Seats	Increase/decrease
Iraqi National Movement (al-Iraqiyya)	2,849,612	24.72%	91	+54
State of Law Coalition	2,792,083	24.22%	89	+64
National Iraqi Alliance	2,092,066	18.15%	70	-35
Kurdistan Alliance	1,681,714	14.59%	43	-10
Movement for Change (Gorran)	476,478	4.13%	8	+8
Unity Alliance of Iraq	306,647	2.66%	4	+4
Iraqi Accord Front (al-Tawafuq)	298,226	2.59%	6	-38
Kurdistan Islamic Union	243,720	2.12%	4	-1
Islamic Group of Kurdistan	152,530	1.32%	2	+1
Minorities	61,153	-	8	+6
Total (turnout 62.4 %)	11,526,412	100%	325	+50

Source: Majlis.org

2 Prolonged negotiations

It had been widely predicted that the election would produce no clear winner, and that no one coalition would have even a clear plurality in the new parliament. This turned out to be the case. Indeed, the problem with the election has been the closeness of the result, and forming a government presented formidable difficulties. Experts predicted, correctly as it turned out, that it would take months, even most of 2010, to reach a conclusion, not least because Iraq's violent recent past means that there are many good reasons for most of the leaders to hate each other.

On 19 April, a special panel of Iraqi judges ruled that the Independent High Electoral Commission would have to conduct a recount in Baghdad. Evidence was presented that purported to show irregularities in the Baghdad count, and a manual recount was begun. Mr Maliki and the State of Law bloc had been pushing for the recount for some time, and expected the recount to reverse the position of the two leading blocs.

This represented a significant risk to the stability of the country. The Sunni minority already had some grounds for grievances against the electoral process, particularly over the disqualification process run by the Accountability and Justice Commission. In the event, the recount did not change the disposition of seats.

In May, it was announced that Maliki's bloc and the other main Shia bloc, the Iraq National Alliance, which won 70 seats and includes the Sadrists, were negotiating over a possible governing pact. Such a coalition would still be short of the 163 seats necessary for a majority and Maliki might have to stand down: Maliki's support among the Sadrists is not strong, since he ordered a fierce crackdown on the Sadrists' Mahdi Army militia in 2008. There were reports, however, that the Sadrists may be dropping their resistance to Maliki retaining his post. Iraqiyya's response to the proposed link-up between the two largest groups was to threaten to withdraw completely from the political process, including sitting in the Council of

Representatives, if it was excluded from the government.¹ On the other hand, further reports in May suggested that an Allawi/Maliki alliance, or even a merger of their blocs, was still a possibility; these reports, many of which are unattributed, may be leaks intended to bolster the position of the players in the negotiations.

As 2010 progressed, there was evidence that the inconclusive negotiations were leading to an increase in violent attacks (see chart below). On 22 April more than 60 died in a series of bomb attacks in Sadr City, a Shia area of Baghdad, and in Anbar province. On 10 May, 23 incidents in Baghdad and seven in other locations caused almost 100 deaths. Experts say that the May attacks were probably the work of al-Qaeda in Iraq. Another explanation for the violence may be that two top al-Qaeda in Iraq officials, Abu Ayyub al-Masri, an Egyptian who served as the military commander, and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, the chief ideologue, were killed in a US airstrike near Saddam's home town of Tikrit on 18 April 2010. Al-Qaeda in Iraq may want to show that it is still viable after what some hope was a major blow to the organisation.

In August, the State of Law and the Iraqiyya coalitions suspended talks on forming a coalition.

In October, one of the biggest obstacles to the formation of a government was overcome when the Iraqi National Alliance, which includes the forces of Moqtada al-Sadr, agreed to drop its opposition to Nuri al-Maliki continuing as Prime Minister. Iran is suspected to have used its influence to persuade Moqtada al-Sadr to support al-Maliki's leadership bid. This move was not especially welcome to the US, which would have preferred al-Sadr to be excluded and Sunnis, in the form of Iraqiyya, to gain the strongest representation possible to minimise Iranian influence over the new government.

3 Maliki is confirmed prime minister and a new cabinet is created

In mid-November 2010, after eight months of agonised deadlock and many false dawns, Nuri al-Maliki was finally designated for a second term as prime minister of Iraq. Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani was re-appointed as President.

On 21 December, ministerial responsibilities were largely agreed and the new Council of Ministers was approved by the Council of Representatives. The posts of Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry of State for National Security were left vacant because of continuing disagreement.

Of the 35 cabinet posts filled in the first instance, al-Maliki's Shia bloc took 19, Allawi's Iraqiyya nine, the Kurdish Alliance four and other smaller parties three. That meant that 20 Shiites, 10 Sunnis, four Kurds and one Christian had cabinet posts, according to one count.² The important ministries of defence, interior and national security were headed temporarily by Maliki himself.

The hope in western circles had been that the solution to the deadlock would be a government of national unity, which shared real power between the Shia blocs, Iraqiyya, the nominally secular grouping that won the biggest number of seats in the Iraqi Council of Representatives in the March 2010 election, and Kurdish groups. The new cabinet included representatives from all three main groups and, as far as number of seats was concerned, the Sunni minority was thought to have done reasonably well

¹ 'Al-Iraqiyya List Threatens to Withdraw from Political Process', *asharq al-awsat*, 19 April 2010

² "Iraqi cabinet starts work on "enormous" challenges", *al-Arabiyya*, 22 December 2010

The major obstacle to agreement remained the role of Iyad Allawi, leader of Iraqiyya. As part of the new deal, Mr Maliki accepted a US proposal for Mr Allawi to lead the still-to-be-created National Council for Strategic Policy. The US hoped that that would provide a check on Mr Maliki's power and also on the influence of Iran. Whether the council will have any serious powers is one of the most politically important questions for Iraq and will probably determine whether Mr Allawi is prepared to take up the position as its head.

Only one post was awarded to a woman: Minister without Portfolio Bushra Hussain Salih. While the Iraqi constitution stipulates that 25% of seats in the Council of Representatives should be occupied by women, no such provision exists for the cabinet. A campaign was organised in the Council of Representatives and outside to persuade Mr Maliki to give more posts to women.³

4 The return of Moqtada al-Sadr

Perhaps the most significant recent development in Iraq is the decision by Moqtada al-Sadr to drop his opposition to Nuri al-Maliki and to support him for the post of prime minister. This move effectively ended Iyad Allawi's bid for the post. It also brought an end to the stalemate, leading to the government being approved on 21 December.

On 5 January 2011, al-Sadr returned from Iran, where he had remained in self-imposed exile for three years. He received a rapturous welcome from supporters in the town of Najaf, widely considered the holiest place in Shia Islam. Some of his supporters welcomed him as "the Preparer", foretelling the coming of the Hidden Imam, who, according to Shia beliefs, will reveal himself at the end of time, bringing justice and taking revenge on the enemies of God.

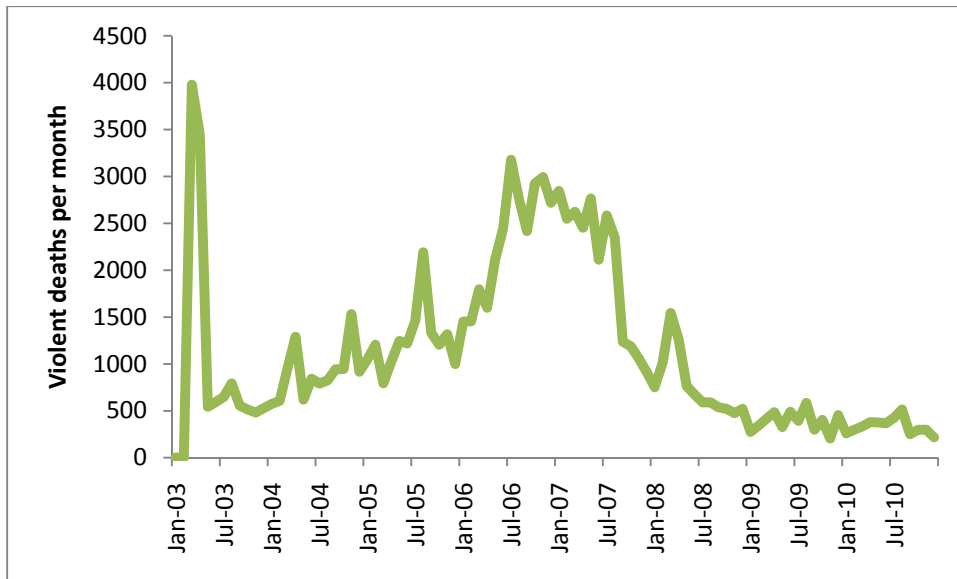
Moqtada al-Sadr may still be capable of evoking religious fervour among his supporters, but he appears to have made a decision to turn his movement into a more mature political force. The Mahdi Army, the movement's armed wing, fought US and British troops fiercely and was notorious for sectarian attacks in the worst years of violence in Iraq, is no longer active and Mr Sadr, who once denounced the Iraqi government as stooges of the USA, has decided to support it. Mr Sadr's support came with a price: hundreds of his followers were released from prison, and the movement was given a province governorship, influential positions in the security forces and control of some ministries.

5 Security

While a climate of fear still exists in many parts of Iraq, the number of violent deaths has continued to decline. The question of civilian deaths in Iraq is highly controversial, with different organisations reporting very different figures. However, Iraq Body Count maintains the same methods over time, so, if nothing else, the comparison with other years is likely to be significant. According to the Iraq Body Count, an organisation that monitors deaths in Iraq, 4,023 civilians died violently during 2010, compared with 4,680 such deaths in all of 2009. That made 2010 the least dangerous year since the invasion of 2003. December's total of 176 deaths was the lowest monthly total since 2003.

Civilian deaths in Iraq since 2003

³ "Women 'Disappointed' By Nearly All-Male Iraqi Cabinet", *Radio Free Europe*, 23 December 2010



Source: [Iraq Body Count](#)

Iraq Body Count pointed out that the rate of decline had slowed, and that an “impassable minimum” of violence may have been reached. Baghdad and Mosul were the most violent cities.⁴

6 US military presence

US combat troops left Iraq in August 2010. In line with his campaign pledge, US president Barack Obama intends to withdraw troops completely from Iraq by the end of 2011. However, there have been some suggestions that the administration is increasingly worried about the strategic consequences of leaving Iraq to its own devices. The problem is the same that has worried analysts since the invasion: Iraq used to balance the power of Iran and this balance maintained a semblance of stability in the region. With Iraq weakened and politically much closer to Iran since the fall of Saddam Hussein, Sunni Arab regimes in the Arabian Peninsula are scared of Iran’s military strength.

Adding to concerns about Iran, many commentators have cast doubt on the effectiveness of Iraq’s armed forces. As the American combat troops were leaving, chief of staff of the Iraqi Army Lieutenant General Babaker al-Zebari said, “If I were asked about the withdrawal I would say to politicians: the US army must stay until the Iraqi army is fully ready in 2020.”⁵

There have been suggestions that the Obama administration shares these concerns. Joe Biden, the US vice president, said during a visit to Iraq in January:

Our mission has now fundamentally shifted since September, but it is going to shift again at the end of 2011. We will probably be in the position of still maintaining and giving support. We will probably be in the position of still, in certain, specific areas, having to train and equip.⁶

While it looks increasingly unlikely that the US will negotiate an extension to the 2011 deadline, the Americans do not intend to leave completely. It was reported recently that several military bases will be handed over to the US State Department. These will then be

⁴ Iraq Body Count website, [Iraqi deaths from violence in 2010](#), 30 December 2010

⁵ “Plea for US troops to stay until 2020; Iraq”, *Times*, 13 August 2010

⁶ “Biden: Iraq May Need US Help Beyond 2011”, *Voice of America*, 13 January 2011

used to house private security contractors and support staff. The State Department expects the number of private security staff to increase threefold over the present number, to between 7,000 and 8,000. A few military personnel could remain in a training role, some under NATO command and some under the auspices of the US Embassy.⁷

7 Refugees

Iraq has a history of displacement, the result of wars and Saddam Hussein's repression of the Shia in the south of the country and "Arabisation" of formerly mixed Arab/Kurdish areas around Kirkuk. Inter-communal violence after the invasion, particularly in 2006 and 2007, caused further huge movements of people: the United Nations High Commission for Refugees estimated in December 2010 that some 3.3 million Iraqis were displaced within Iraq or had sought refuge in other countries.⁸ More than half of refugees registered with the UNHCR in 2008 were Sunnis.⁹

The October 2010 attack on a church on Baghdad led to the deaths of 68 people, and further attacks have been carried out, or threatened by al-Qaeda in Iraq. The resulting atmosphere of fear has accelerated the exodus of Christians, particularly from the cities of Baghdad and Mosul, mostly heading for the Kurdistan Regional Government Region and the plains of Ninewa. Some 3,000 individuals have arrived in these areas since the beginning of November 2010. Syria, Jordan and Lebanon are also reported to be receiving increased numbers of Iraqi Christian refugees.¹⁰

A recent US official report drew attention to the plight of Iraqi refugees and published a map showing major movements (see below).¹¹ The report also pointed out that Iraq has a housing shortage of some 1.5 million units and that demand is increasing. It said that unemployment, legal uncertainty and the continuing threat of violence were hampering any attempt to resettle and re-integrate refugees. The GAO called on the US State Department to assist Iraq in formulating a programme for resettlement and called for increased international coordination.

⁷ "U.S. plans for presence in Iraq after pullout", *Washington Post*, 14 January 2010

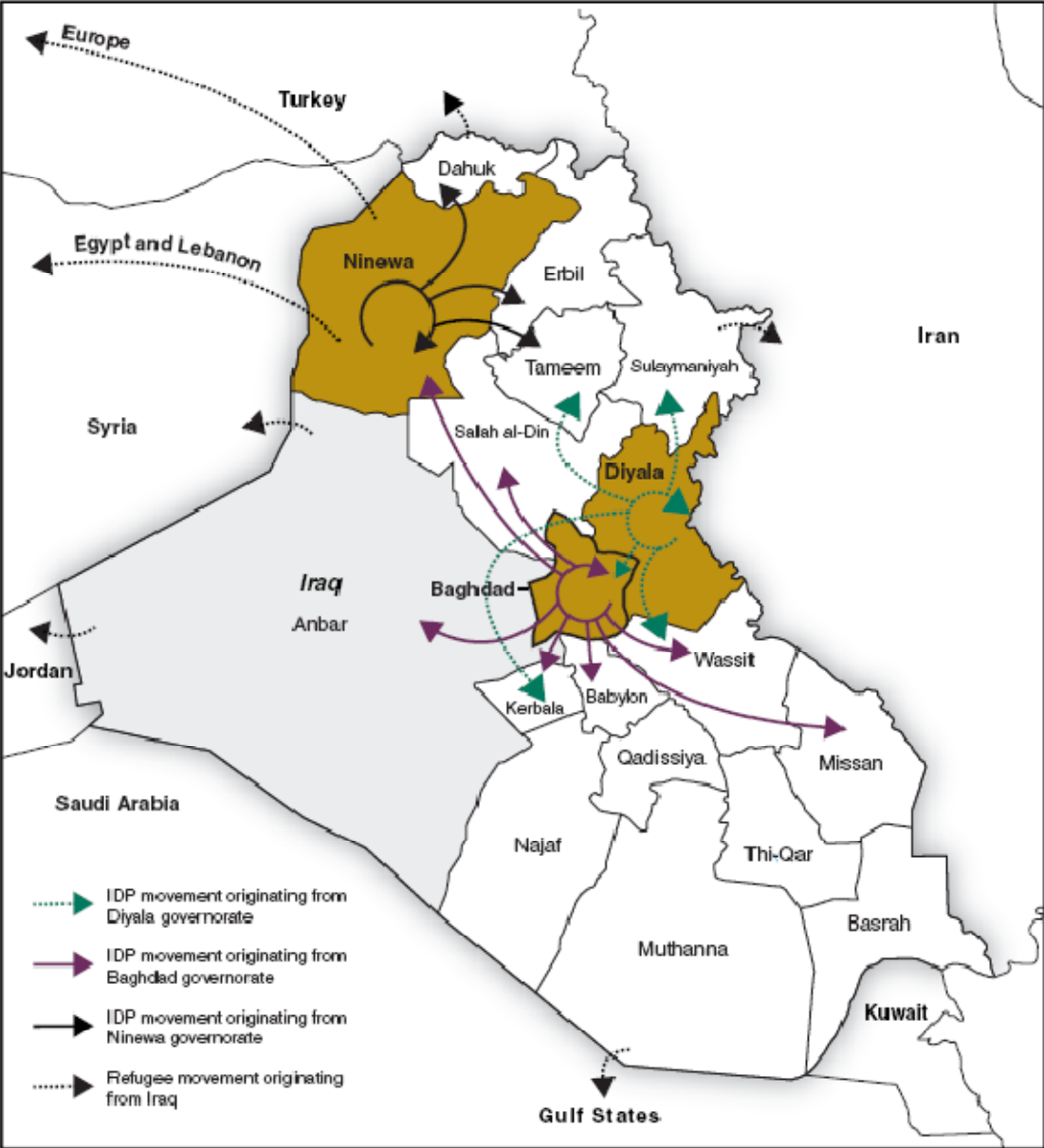
⁸ UNHCR, 2011 UNHCR country operations profile – Iraq [accessed 19 January 2010]

⁹ Government Accountability Office, *Displaced Iraqis: Integrated International Strategy Needed to Reintegrate Iraq's Internally Displaced and Returning Refugees*, December 2010, p10

¹⁰ UNHCR, *UNHCR reports increase in flight of Iraqi Christians; reiterates advice on protection needs*, Briefing note, 17 December 2010

¹¹ Government Accountability Office, *Displaced Iraqis: Integrated International Strategy Needed to Reintegrate Iraq's Internally Displaced and Returning Refugees*, December 2010

7.1 Movements of Iraqi displaced persons, map



Sources: GAO analysis of maps from UNHCR and OCHA; IOM (data); Map Resources (map).

There are now few mixed neighbourhoods in Baghdad, as Sunnis have either moved into the western suburbs or moved out entirely.¹² The same has happened to a greater or lesser extent in formerly mixed areas all over the country, but particularly in Diyala and Ninewa Governorates.

8 List of principal members of the Council of Ministers, December 2010

Prime Minister: Nuri al-Maliki (State of Law (SOL)/Daawa) will also be acting minister of Interior, Defence, and Minister of State for National Security until candidates can be approved.

¹² "HBaghdad: Mapping the violenceH", BBC News Online, 2007

Deputy Prime Ministers: **Saleh al-Mutlaq** (Iraqiyya/Hewar); **Hussain al-Shahristani** (SOL/Independent) — with oversight of energy policy — and acting minister of electricity; **Roz Nuri Shawes** (Kurdistan Alliance (KA)/Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)), and acting minister of trade.

Minister of Foreign Affairs: **Hoshyar Zebari** (KA/KDP) will also be acting minister of womens' affairs.

Minister of Finance: **Rafia al-Issawi** (Iraqiyya/Mustaqbal)

Minister of Oil: **Abdul Karim al-Luaibi** (independent but associated with Daawa)

Minister of Higher Education: **Ali al-Adeeb** (SOL/Daawa) will also be acting minister of state for national dialogue (reconciliation)

Minister of Housing and Construction: **Mohammed Sahib al-Daraji** (Iraqi National Alliance (INA)/Sadrist)

Minister of Education: **Mohammed Tamim** (Iraqiyya/Hewar)

Minister of Industry and Minerals: **Ahmed Nassar Dali al-Karbouli** (Iraqiyya/Tajdid)

Minister of Justice: **Hassan al-Shimari** (INA/Fadhila)¹³

¹³ "Full list of Iraq's new cabinet", *Iraq Business News*, 22 December 2010. An official list in English is not available, and some of the names, as well as their spelling, differ according to source