

## **Iraq Begins a Second Era with ad-Dawa Party**

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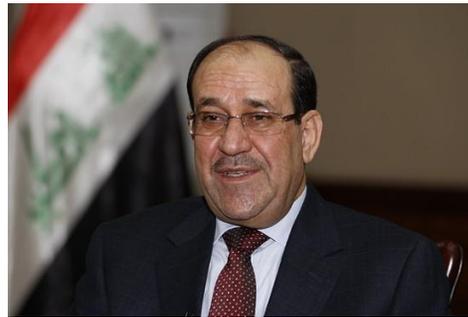
*(This essay was originally published in Arabic by al-Rawabet Center for Strategic and Political Studies. The following is a rather loose but honest translation that best reflects the original. It is being published here by mutual agreement and can be read in Arabic at <http://rawabetcenter.com/archives/235>)*

The practice of politics in Iraq has shown a great deal of distortion after eight years of governing by former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, political changes, and domestic conflicts. The clinging to power and attempts to re-invent authoritarianism, the pretense to upholding democracy, and the absence of civil norms, justice, and accountability spawned an unfettered individualism that led to unfathomable crises. The structural and functional flaw created by ethnic and sectarian power-sharing added a large degree of distrust among the different communities, that Iraq became a ground for killings and assassinations perpetrated by Shiite militias, certain government troops, and terrorist groups related to al-Qaeda.

Sunni provinces before last April's parliamentary elections witnessed difficult and tense conditions that led to popular and military activism long expected after the sectarian politics of the last decade. The presence of the "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" in the provinces exacerbated the situation, increased the sectarian divide, and allowed for the Kurds to press their demands and assert some demographic and geographic facts related to the disputed areas between them and the rest of the country.

### **Individualism and Parallel Institutions**

The failure to arrest the deterioration in Iraqi politics resulted in the adoption of a centralized style of governance enforced by al-Maliki's office and leading to serious repercussions for the country's future and its democratic transition. Specific practices included the following:



Outgoing Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki

- Al-Maliki directly controlled the military, Special Forces units, intelligence agencies, the civilian ministries, and internal security organizations in order to prevent the possibility of a military coup and to intimidate his political opponents. He also established extra-constitutional security apparatuses not supervised by the Ministries of Defense and Interior, combined his premiership with his title of 'Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces,' and employed political allies outside the system of accountability codified by the constitution. He chose corps commanders from among his supporters, especially the Shiites, without parliamentary approval.
- The former Prime Minister secured broad powers after the 2010 elections that allowed him to control civilian institutions, such as the judiciary, and independent agencies, such as the Electoral Commission, the Central Bank, and the

Accountability Board, thus depriving the country of necessary mechanisms for checks and balances.

- The Iraqi Parliament lost its constitutional mandate as an institution assuring governmental accountability after al-Maliki succeeded in splitting the opposition and sidelining his most vocal rivals. Important tools for this success included the ruses of de-Baathification, false accusations of corruption and support for terrorism, and distribution of largesse.

### **Ad-Dawa Politics: Corruption and the Absence of Reform**

Ad-Dawa belongs to the plethora of religious parties that profess divine infallibility and work to impose their version of religion on society. Since 2006, the party under Nouri al-Maliki has failed to govern by consensus, preferring sectarian politics that resulted in a mismanaged executive authority dependent on individualistic practices and turning a deaf ear to constructive criticism and reform. In essence, a dictatorship has been created that has absented the state and its institutions in favor of personalistic relations built around the person and office of the Prime Minister.

Iraq under ad-Dawa has become a failed state, scoring dismally on financial and administrative corruption indices, experiencing a terrible deterioration in security, and failing to deliver electricity, water, and health services. The climate for investment has ceased to exist, poverty and unemployment are rampant, and wanton death lurks everywhere. A small coterie of the Prime Minister's friends have gorged themselves on the government and state

institutions, creating a new class of politically-connected entrepreneurs who will be very difficult to dislodge in the future.

### **Lessons Learned**

The new Prime Minister designate, Haidar al-Abadi, is called upon to learn important lessons from the former government in order to construct and implement a new national agenda that would include a number of essential considerations.



Incoming Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi

- The formation of an inclusive government that would focus on reviving national dialogue and reconciliation that would result in rebuilding major state institutions, such as the military, security services, and judiciary, without the usual recourse to sectarian allocations.
- Legislating laws that would help restore societal peace and stability, abolishing de-Baathification, strengthening national unity, amending the constitution's confessional allocations, reinforcing religious cooperation and civil society organizations, and emphasizing citizenship, justice, and equality.
- Limiting the number of advisors in the Prime Minister's office to a small group of technocrats who would imbue their professional

advice with the necessary emphasis on national identity instead of sectarian, ethnic, or political orientation.

- Showing an overarching interest in political pragmatism and flexibility to foster the necessary dialogue between the different communities, and working to redress the issues of corruption, poverty, and lack of social services.
- Re-establishing the Iraqi military as a unifying national institution working first and foremost to defend the country from external threats. Essentially, the military needs to re-define its *esprit de corps* to re-emphasize discipline, duty, and national allegiance. At the same time, Iraq needs a national policy to fight terrorism, especially ISIS, but also should work to de-commission illegal Shiite militias such as *Asaib Ahl l-Haq*, *Iraqi Hezbollh*, and *Jaish al-Mukhtar*.
- In external relations, it is essential to arrest Iranian interference in Iraqi domestic affairs. Iranian influence in Iraq has invited parallel interference from other regional actors interested in buttressing Iraq's Sunnis and concerned about their interests in the country.

### **Only Time Will Tell**

It has become evidently clear that the American-Iranian agreement to support Nouri al-Maliki for Prime Minister after the 2010 elections –despite the secular Ayad Allawi's securing a majority in Parliament – has now been renewed to opposite effects. Al-Maliki could no longer provide the necessary Iraqi accord to address the major

threat that ISIS represents in the country and to its neighbors.

The formation of a new government may prove to be difficult in the coming days and weeks. To be sure, much damage has been done to the Iraqi political process for it to produce the desired outcome soon. Subsequently, Mr. Al-Abadi may find it rather difficult to achieve a quick political success. Personalities may change but enduring political structures and their governing mechanisms may not.

More important is whether the Prime Minister-designate can shake off his Dawa sectarian credentials in favor of a nationalist agenda that can lift Iraq from the abyss. Moreover, eyes are on Iran to see if it supports a re-engineering of the political process or insists on safeguarding sectarianism. Only time will tell whether it is possible to surmount the problems created by al-Maliki or continue to suffer their repercussions into the future.

*Views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of  
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Images Accessed 8/25/2014

Al-Maliki Image

<http://online.wsj.com/articles/iraqs-maliki-drops-struggle-for-power-1408923800>

Al-Abadi Image

<http://time.com/3149489/iraq-prime-minister-al-abadi-sunni-shiite/>