

# Balancing the ethno-social political triangle



By *Bashdar Pusho Ismaeel*

Four months after the much-anticipated national elections in Iraq that were supposed to foster the first all-encompassing government in Baghdad, Iraqi politicians continue to jockey, debate, and pursue tense negotiations on assembling the required majority to form a government. Giving the Iraqi track record, a lengthy period of government forming is hardly surprising. However, the process was exasperated with contentious delays to the election itself, controversy over banned politicians on the eve of political campaigning, and then bitter disputes over the final election results.

In many ways, Iraq has made a lot of progress since the previous elections marred by Sunni boycotting, not least on the security and sectarian front. However, as the democratic process has become stalled in recent weeks, this has afforded insurgents a chance to relay the road of instability and sectarianism.

The critical government-forming process has been given added bite with the expected withdrawal of U.S. combat forces by the end of August. While the departing of foreign forces may have been a welcome sight for many Iraqis, the presence and influence of the U.S. all too often masked political and security cracks, and this has now become more evident than ever.

At critical times over the past several years, Washington has used its substantial sway on Iraqi politics to ensure the Iraqi democratic bandwagon rolled on. Stability and success in Iraq shortly after the nightmare that ensued post-2003 became an American obsession. After all, in such an aftermath, anything short of peace, relative democracy, and stability in Iraq would have catastrophic consequences, especially with neighboring predators already circling with intent.

U.S. military presence will drop significantly from a peak of 170,000 just a few years ago. While the sheer U.S. military expen-



Iraq's Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki meets with Iraq's former Prime Minister and head of the Iraqiya coalition Iyad Allawi in Baghdad June 29, 2010.

diture and involvement in Iraq may have been taken for granted in recent years, as the democratic journey continues to remain frail, the readiness, loyalty, and impartiality of Iraqi security forces will be put to a firm test.

Government shaping has been further complicated with the lack of a clear winner at the polls. Although Ayad Allawi's al-Iraqiya group won the most seats, it was marginally ahead of incumbent Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's State of Law coalition, and debate continues to rage on the party that has the legal jurisdiction to attempt to form government. Although Maliki did not win, he strengthened his claim to form government with an alliance with the religious-based Shiite Iraqi National Alliance, meaning that his party was only seats away from attaining the majority needed to form a new government.

The Kurds, who continue to hold a key card in the formation of the new government, have taken their time over the selection of any alliance this time and

aim to seek written guarantees on nationalistic issues before committing to bring another power in Baghdad. The natural and preferred alliance of the Kurds will be to work once more with their Shiite counterparts. However, persistent foot dragging on key Kurdish interests by Maliki put doubt in the minds of many a Kurd, especially as Maliki's dominance and political standing solidified. However, the predominantly Sunni umbrella of Allawi is hardly the tonic that weary Kurds seek either. Al-Iraqiya was direct in competition to the Kurds in the tense, oil-rich province of Kirkuk, and has often voiced its intent against Kurdish attempts to annex disputed territories.

If Kurds do join the mainly Shiite coalition of Maliki, there is a danger that they may not receive their first choice of government posts, as may have been the case a few years ago. However, more critically, a Kurdish-Shiite alliance without the key Sunni parties and the ultimate victor of the polls, Allawi, will sew a new chapter of de-

mocracy in Iraq on shaky foundations. After all, it was the sidelining of Sunnis after their decades of near dominance that triggered Iraq to the brink of civil war. For years Baghdad and particularly the U.S. have sought to appease Sunnis and bring national reconciliation in Iraq.

While in theory U.S. Vice President Joe Biden's comments this week that Iraqi politics was «not a lot different» from other countries may speak true on the surface, unlike some other countries, democracy in Iraq produces brittle results. This is owed to the ethnic and sectarian disparity of Iraq. Regardless of election results, Kurds, Sunni, or Shiites will still demand power in government. The «triangle» cannot always be massaged based on election results. Shiites will always form a majority in Iraq, and Sunnis will always refuse to succumb to all-out Shiite dominance, especially with the proviso of a strong Tehran hand in Baghdad. At the same time, Kurd will never submit to Arab dominance

and influence, due to their autonomous existence, history, and national interests.

This means that key posts must be divided carefully regardless of the election outcome. The sidelining of any major group will only spell trouble. The elections themselves are generally formulaic--Kurds will always vote for Kurds, Shiites for Shiites, and so on, even if the elections this time around swayed from a sectarian underpinning compared to before.

The triangle became more interesting in recent weeks with the thawing of relations between Allawi and Maliki, raising the prospect of what seemed an unlikely political marriage. A coalition of such proportions may seem a dramatic gain for democracy, but this may also mean that key positions such as President and Prime Minister will go to Shiites. Furthermore, this has raised anxiety in Kurdistan that they lose political sway and key posts in Iraq to Arab coalitions.

The U.S. has largely stayed out of political manoeuvring this time around. However, Biden's visit was

a clear indicator that Washington is getting itchy feet. While their forces may withdraw, their high stakes in Iraq will not dwindle. Stability and prosperity in Iraq has become a keynote health gauge of the Middle East.

As for the political process itself, it is still better to endure more months of protracted progress and frustrations in hope of genuine gains than short-term achievements under U.S. pressure as witnessed too often, which may lead to shaky coalitions and more fundamental Iraqi issues being swept under the political rug.

It is these real issues such as oil-sharing, broadly represented security forces, federalism, and resolving disputed territories that often become sidelined for the sake of progress on the surface. Any new government must make firm commitments to these aforementioned principles and critically to the implementation of the Constitution that is, after all, meant to be the blueprint of the democratic existence in Iraq.

REUTERS/Mohammed Ameen

# Forgotten villages

GLOBE PHOTO/ Qasim Khidhir



A woman stands in front of her house in Mala Qara village, near Makhmur. The village suffers lack of basic service been neglected by the local and federal governments.

**National P 5**

## Talafar Turkmen call for separation from Ninewa

P 6

The Turkmen party in Talafar wants to secede from Ninewa province and join constitutionally with Kurdistan Region because of worsening conditions and basic services, serious issues for which they hold the governor responsible. "The Turkmen Front-Legitimate Leadership will organize a peaceful demonstration next week to demand Talafar town gain independence from Ninewa province and implement Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution," said TFL leader Olay Falakoghlo. He expects large participation by town residents.

**National P 4**

## Kurdish director discusses his projects



**National P 7**

## KRG Higher Education seeks reforms

The Kurdistan Regional Government Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research seeks reform in the higher education system so as to reach a scientific level in the Region's universities. Changes are to be implemented in the teaching system, scholarships, and higher education studies, among other specific areas.

**When you fly with us, we'll grant you more than just three wishes.**

Enjoy Austrian Airlines' long-haul comfort on your way from/to Erbil: oriental flair, DO&CO gourmet menus and outstanding in-flight service. Now for Austria, and Europe new selected special fares (Scandinavia, Italy, France, Spain and more) from 30 April till 30 June 2010.

Austria from USD 844,-  
Europe from USD 744,-

**Austrian**  
We fly for your smile.

Information & booking at [www.austrian.com](http://www.austrian.com), in our sales office: Sheikawa Street, Tel: 075 302 0333, 075 761 1672  
E-mail: [erbil@austrian.com](mailto:erbil@austrian.com)  
Erbil - Erbil - Erbil

**www.austrian.com**