The Real Results of the Iraqi Election:

By July 2010, in Early 2011, or Years Later?

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April 6, 2010

It may well be early 2011 before we know the actual results of the Iraqi election, and not because there were problems in the way the election was held, or in the counting of votes. Prime Minister Maliki is playing power politics with a relatively honest election, not protesting one with serious abuses. Elections, however, are ultimately about two things: Who gains power and who can govern.

The Challenge of Coalition Building

The question of who gains power is a matter of coalition building that can take months – and may end in an outcome that is unstable thus leading to a series of shifts within the coalition, a series of new coalitions, or paralysis from internal differences. The issues involved are complex and are compound by the fact the election did not produce any real winner – just leaders and parties with a higher starting score in the game of coalition building.

The three largest parties -- Maliki's State of Law Party (89 seats and 27.4% of the vote), Allawi's Iraqiya (91 seats and 28% of the vote) and the Hakim-Jafaari-Sadr coalition in the Iraqi National Alliance (70 seats and 21.5% of the vote) – are all unstable mixtures and temporary alliances of convenience. All may be subject to a series of internal shifts and power brokering that alters their current membership, and changes the post-election structure of Iraqi politics. The end result could be realignments radically different from the election results—ones that could bring a Prime Minister, other leading officials, and set of Ministers to power that are different from the leaders that went into the election and the "winners" that got the most votes.

Prospects for a "National Coalition"

The two basic types of coalitions that can eventually emerge from the election are a "national coalition" and a "Shi'ite coalition." A "national coalition" that brings Shi'ites, Sunnis, and Kurds into one government might do more to encourage political accommodation and reduce ethnic and sectarian tensions and violence. Many Iraqis – including some leading politicians – strongly advocated this kind of government during visits to Iraq before and immediately after the election.

A "national coalition" would, however, have to include Barzani and Talibani's Kurdistan Alliance (43 seats and 13.2% of the vote). This could present problems for both Iraqiya, which includes a Sunni faction that has very poor relations with the Kurds, and for the State of Law Party, because of Maliki's deteriorating relations with Barzani and other Kurds. The Iraqi National Alliance would have fewer immediate problems – but Sadr's relations with the Kurds have been problematic at best.

The Kurds present other issues that combine the problems of politics and governance. Creating a "national coalition" that includes the Kurds -- and keeping it in office – means addressing the key ethnic disputes that are now the greatest single threat to Iraqi stability

and security. The Kurds may ask a high price in terms of concessions over the disputed territories, obtaining petroleum concessions and revenues, and getting national funding of the Kurdish militia – the Persh Merga. In addition, the Kurds may insist on an early referendum over Kirkuk, as is called for in article 140 of the constitution, and over whether and when Iraq holds a national census.

The Sunnis present another set of problems. They voted in large numbers, and gained a major role in several provinces in the west and north, including Diyala, Tamim, and Ninewa. They remain divided, however, with no clear, strong leader or dominant party. The Sunni governor of Ninewa has become a major challenger of Kurdish interests, and a personal flashpoint in Kurdish-Arab relations. At the same time, the efforts of Iran, Ahmed Chalibi, and the de-Baathification commission to exclude more than 500 candidates from the ballot – some 400 of which were Sunni – not only helped trigger the large Sunni turnout, it left a new legacy of Sunni distrust of Shi'ites and vice versa.

The fact that Maliki accepted a real-world effort at election rigging – and offered some 20,000 Iraqi Army officers reinstatement as a political gesture days before his government began a purge of Sunni officers – means added distrust of Maliki and the State of Law party. Moreover, only a few of the limited number of Sunnis in the State of Law Party won seats, making the SOL coalition more Shi'ite than national. It was Shi'ite politicians affiliated with the Iraqi National Alliance, however, that triggered the effort to remove Sunnis from the ballot. This means Sunnis have a new set of problems with both of the leading Shi'ite parties, which makes building a "national coalition" even more difficult.

Prospects for a "Shi'ite Coalition"

If a "Shi'ite coalition" emerges in Parliament – which is the only practical alternative to a "national coalition" – this could seriously alienate Iraq's Arab Sunnis and Kurds at a time in which they now play a much stronger role in both the Council of the Republic and provincial governments. At the same time, there is no unity among the Shi'ite parties – *or within them* -- over such critical issues as the role of religion in the government, how to treat the new oil contracts, the role of private and foreign investment, options for federalism, the future of the US-Iraqi strategic partnership, Iraq's ties to Iran, which Shi'ite factions support, and a host of other issues. Sadr's strange educational "exile" in Iran, and tensions between and within Shi'ite militias add to these problems.

Ayad Allawi's Shi'ite supporters -- and those of Nuri al Maliki, Ammar al Hakim, Ibrahim al Jaafari, and the Moktada al-Sadr -- have little in common, and each faction has serious internal rivalries. The precedents also are not reassuring. Differences among a much more united set of Shi'ite factions brought Maliki – then a near unknown politician – to power in 2005 and helped delay the formation of a new government by nearly 160 days.

This time, the rivalries are much deeper, and they are compounded by ISCI's declining influence within the Iraqi National Alliance and the rise of the Sadrist list. A look at the

distribution of Shi'ite voting in the March 2010 election also shows that ISCI and the Sadrists were direct competitors in that they shared similar constituencies. They were also in direct competition with the State of Law coalition for a large portion of their voting base.

The Sadrists – who have been one of the most disruptive influences in Iraqi politics –did much better than ISCI in the elections. Unlike ISCI, which lost considerable popular confidence and which allowed so many candidates to run that they divided their voting base – the Sadrists regained populist support and united their voting base around a few candidates by holding a primary that limited the number of officials that could run. Some estimates give the Sadrists nearly 60% of the seats within the INA – approximately 39 seats versus 9 for Badr, 8 for ISCI, 1 for Jaafari, 6 for Fadhilla, and 5 for other candidates.

More Is Involved than the Prime Minister

Moreover, forming any type of coalition means dealing with which ethnicity and sect gets the Presidency (now held by a Kurd, Jalal Talibani) – determining how the new coalition will actually implement the new set of Presidential powers that went into effect with this election, and determining the future existence of Vice Presidents and/or Deputy Prime Ministers. It also means determining how the various positions within the 325-person Council of the Republic will be allocated, and whether the Council will have enough leadership and coherence to actually govern – rather than continue with endless debates and delays.

The allocation of power will also be determined by who governs which ministry out of a total of the 36 ministries shown below – appointments that will involve a somewhat different process than they have in the past, but which have previously required the approval of the Presidency Council and key officials other than the Prime Minister. Restructuring this list of ministers will involve a series of power struggles over who gets what, and again the precedents are not good. Giving the Sadrists key ministries like Health and Education was a disaster for the last government. Debates over who the Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior would be disrupted Iraqi security efforts for months.

In fact, such power struggles are already a serious problem. Neither the current Minister of Defense nor Minister of Interior succeeded in the recent election, and the Minister of Interior ran against the Prime Minister, cutting off all communication at one point in the campaign. This led to serious problems in coordinating security efforts leading up to the election, especially since all this was happening during a serious budget crisis. Many ministries became reluctant to make decisions and execute the Iraqi budget in the months before the election, and some refused to coordinate or cooperate with the Prime Minister – who became increasingly dependent on his own circle of advisors.

There is a good prospect that these struggles will continue, and grow worse, for at least several more months. Moreover, if the governing coalition that is formed is unstable, the problem of ministerial "turbulence" may occur again and again. This problem may affect far more than who takes the top posts. Politics can lead each new coalition to remove leading officials, technocrats and officers, make these positions more political in character, and make any form of tenure and career politics more uncertain. This kind of "turbulence" has limited the quality and effectiveness of Iraqi governance in the past, and the resulting lack of security has been a key factor shaping corruption.

Chiefs of State and Cabinet Members

Pres.	Jalal TALABANI
Vice Pres.	Adil ABD AL-MAHDI
Vice Pres.	Tariq al-HASHIMI
Prime Min.	Nuri al-MALIKI
Dep. Prime Min.	Rafi al-ISSAWI
Dep. Prime Min.	Rowsch Nuri SHAWAYS
Min. of Agriculture	
Min. of Communications	Faruq ABD AL-QADIR Abd al-Rahman
Min. of Culture	Mahar Dilli al-HADITHI
Min. of Defense	Abd al-Qadir Muhammad al-MUFRIJI
Min. of Displacement & Migration	Abd al-Samad SULTAN
Min. of Education	Khudayr al-KHUZAI
Min. of Electricity	Karim Wahid al-HASAN
Min. of Environment	Nermin OTHMAN
Min. of Finance	Bayan Baqir JABR Sulagh al-Zubaydi
Min. of Foreign Affairs	Hoshyar Mahmud ZEBARI
Min. of Health	Salih Mahdi Mutlab al-HASNAWI
Min. of Higher Education	Abid Dhiyab al-UJAYLI
Min. of Housing & Construction	Bayan DIZAYEE
Min. of Human Rights	Wijdan Mikhail SALIM
Min. of Industry & Minerals	Fawzi al-HARIRI
Min. of Interior	Jawad Karim al-BULANI
Min. of Justice	Dara NUR AL-DIN
Min. of Labor & Social Affairs	Mahmud Muhammad Jawad al-RADI
Min. of Municipalities & Public Works	Riyadh GHARIB
Min. of Oil	Husayn al-SHAHRISTANI
Min. of Planning	Ali BABAN
Min. of Science & Technology	Raid Fahmi JAHID
Min. of Trade	
Min. of Transportation	Amir Abd al-Jabar ISMAIL
Min. of Water Resources	Latif RASHID
Min. of Youth & Sports	Jasim Muhammad JAFAR
Min. of State for Civil Society Affairs	Thamir Jafar al-ZUBAYDI
Min. of State for Council of Representatives Affairs	Safa al-Din al-SAFI
Min. of State for Foreign Affairs	Muhammad Munajid al-DULAYMI
Min. of State for National Dialogue	Akram al-HAKIM
Min. of State for National Security	Shirwan al-WAILI
Min. of State for Provinces	Khulud Sami Izara al-MAJUN
Min. of State for Tourism & Antiquities	Qahtan Abbas al-JABBURI
Min. of State for Women's Affairs (Acting)	Khulud Sami Izara al-MAJUN
Min. of State Without Portfolio	Ali Muhammad AHMAD
Min. of State Without Portfolio	Hasan Radhi Kazim al-SARI
Min. of State Without Portfolio	Muhammad Abbas al-URAYBI
Governor, Central Bank of Iraq	Sinan Muhammad Ridha al-SHABIBI

The Challenge of Governance

These problems would be critical in a stable, developed country. They are absolutely critical in a country that is badly in need of immediate improvements in the quality of its governance. It is a comforting Western myth that political legitimacy is largely a function of how governments are chosen, rather than how well they govern. No one who lives in a country as troubled as Iraq can afford that illusion.

It is all too clear that both the election, and the process of forming a government, will be a failure unless the end result is inclusive enough or at least be acceptable to Arab Shi'ite, Arab Sunni, and Iraqi Kurd. A coalition does not have to be overtly "national" in character, but it cannot simply serve Shi'ite interests, or deprive either Kurds or Sunnis of a fair share of power on a de facto basis, and govern in ways that move Iraq towards security and stability at a rate that will be acceptable to each of its major factions.

The Near Term Challenges: 2011-2012

If Iraq does acquire such a balanced coalition, it will still face a near-term loss of governing capacity as new and inexperienced ministers and officials take office, inexperienced politicians learn how to compromise, and the new government reshapes several plans, budgets, and procedures. Successful politics do not necessarily lead to successful governance – particularly if short-term political accommodation comes at the price of ineffective ministers and politicized appointments, or short-sighted spending overshadows longer term nation priorities. It may well take three to twelve months for an Iraqi government to develop the practical governing capacity it needs once a coalition is agreed upon – delaying the real results of the election to at least early 2011.

These problems will not, however, excuse the new government if it fails to act as soon as possible in a wide range of areas where Iraq simply cannot afford a long learning curve. The new government must:

- Revitalize the effort to develop effective Iraqi security forces, and the campaign against insurgents and militias, especially in troubled areas like Ninewa. It must act to resolve the problems created by the CY2009 budget crisis, election-driven political manipulation of some key appointments, and election-driven debates over de-Ba'athification. Put the modernization of the armed forces on an affordable and sustainable track to creating forces for defense and deterrence of foreign threats and shift away from internal security.

- Move towards an effective rule of civil law that adapts Iraq's "confession-based" legal system to pay far more attention to evidence; move the regular police towards ordinary rule of law activity; and find an effective balance between the role of the judiciary and police. Provide the structure to bring security against crime and stability in civil law.

- Resolve the problems left over from 2009 when the annual budget expired without funding a wide range of projects, deal with the deficit problems in the 2010 budget, and put the 2011 budget on a more stable path.

- Perform triage between the mix of Iraqi government projects using the results of US and other foreign aid efforts to ensure the best aid projects are effectively transferred and sustained. Reshape the overall mix of Iraqi funded development to ensure they are both affordable and serve Iraq's broader interests.

- Find some compromise between Arab and Kurd that at least buys time for a broad, negotiated political settlement, and maintains joint checkpoints, joint patrols, and other procedures to ensure that clashes do not take place between IA/IP and Pesh Merga forces, and between Arab, Kurd, and other minority.

- Find ways to ease the tensions between Arab Sunni and Arab Shi'ite that were exacerbated by the election campaign and new de-Ba'athification efforts. Move back towards inclusion, rather than exclusion. Deal with the legacy of having to integrate the Sons of Iraq into the Iraq security forces.

- Deal with past failures to create effective programs that deal with either internally displaced Iraqis or Iraqi refugees outside the country.

- More forward to ensure that the petroleum contracts signed in 2009 are fully supported by the new government, show oil companies that other aspects of Iraqi law and tax policies support outside investment, and provide a clearer picture of how Iraq will give such efforts security.

- Make similar reforms to provide incentives for private and foreign investment that are competitive with those offered by other Gulf states.

- Define the practical relations Iraq will have with the United States as part of the Strategic Framework Agreement for both civil and military aid and relations before US forces fully withdraw, and set clear goals for US aid funding to Iraq in the FY2012 budget. These efforts are particularly urgent because the US will decrease its forces from 126,000 at the end of 2009 to 50,000 by September 2010, and to zero by the end of 2011 – during a time when Iraq will still be fighting a serious insurgent threat, will need to build effective armed forces and police, and must simultaneously begin to return to a more normal rule of law.

- Establish a foreign policy that shows Iraq will work with all of its neighbors, and will act independently of Iran without threatening it.

- Find an early modus vivendi with the new powers and role of provincial governments, as well as find more effective ways to give major cities more independence and control over their funds.

Iraq cannot fully succeed in all of these efforts, or even most, during 2010-2011. It must, however, at least begin to address these issues. Many require urgent decisions, and all require at least some action if the government is to win popular support and improve Iraq's relations with other states.

The Longer Term Challenges: 2012-2015 and Beyond

Iraq's new government faces the equally serious mix of longer-term structural challenges shown below. These are challenges that will endure well beyond the next Iraqi national election – and which will test the capability and survival of any Iraqi coalition throughout its coming term of office. These challenges include the need for fundamental economic reforms, and for a stable and effective programs in economic development. The CIA estimates that Iraqis now have a per capita income that ranks 160th in the world – two times lower in rank than any other Gulf state and close to the poverty level of the West

Bank and Gaza (166th). Qatar is a rival for the highest rank in the world, and even Iran ranks 85th.

- Complete the constitutional and legal basis for Arab and Kurdish political accommodation; move towards truly "national" treatment of Sunni and Shi'ite.

- Stable planning and funding of economic and infrastructure development.

- Fully shift away from outside aid; create stable planning, spending, and control of budget without major deficits.

- Creation of jobs for steadily growing population. Rise in per capita income from 160th to Gulf standards, better distribution of income.

- Structural reform of agriculture

- Long-term solutions to water problems.

- Conversion-modernization-privatization of state industries.

- Full legislation and liberalization to attract foreign and domestic investment.

- Reconstruction and modernization of upstream and downstream petroleum sector; pipelines and Gulf facilities; stable Iraqi-foreign company partnership.

- Make Ministries effective; revitalize health and education sectors.

- Deal with foreign refugees and internally displaced persons.

- Shift and downsizing of Iraqi military from counterinsurgency to deterrence and defence against foreign threats.

- Complete shift police and security forces from counterinsurgency to rule of law; checks on corruption and organization crime.

As the reports of the Special Inspector General for Iraqi Reconstruction have made all too clear, massive outside aid has accomplished far too little since 2003. Most of the aid is now phased out or down to levels where Iraq must fund most of its own efforts, and many efforts to transfer projects from aid to Iraqi control have either been fatally mismanaged or are at serious risk.

Iraq's own development plans have yet to result in successful efforts in any key sector, with the possible exception of a beginning in key financial reforms. Iraq's industrial sector and agriculture are in crisis, and its education and health systems – once some of the best systems in the developing world – have virtually collapsed. Iraq's official employment figures range from 15% to 20%. US officials estimate Iraqi unemployment and underemployment may approach 40%, and this is particularly true for young men – the group most likely to turn to violence and reignite another round of sectarian and ethnic strife.

Iraq has vast potential petroleum wealth, but underground oil and gas cannot be spent or buy development. Major increases in oil exports and revenues – based on at least a doubling of oil exports to 4 million barrels a day or more -- are probably 4-5 years away, and per capita oil revenues will still be limited for at least the next half a decade because of population growth. Oil, however, is the main source of Iraq's current income, and accounts for over 90% of government revenue and foreign exchange earnings.

This means Iraq's new government will face budget problems driven both by the structural needs created by 30 years of turmoil and neglect, and by the budget crisis that came out of a drop in oil revenues in 2008. Iraq had to cut last year's budget from $80 billion to $58.6 billion, and had to spend most of the remainder on jobs and overhead costs. Iraq's budget will be higher in 2010-2011, but Iraq will still run a massive deficit and be unable to properly fund many of its most critical needs.

Iraq's new government will have to deal with the fact that Iraq will not be able support all of its essential development and infrastructure programs at the level required during its present term in office. It must also come to grips with serious problems with budget execution, corruption, and equitably sharing its money and resources. The same is true of ethnic and sectarian inequities that are compounded by regional inequities, and a lack of provincial and urban governance capacity. Moreover, Iraq needs a government that can pass a full mix of effective petroleum, investment and property laws; and develop proper tax policies.

Security will still be a major problem well beyond 2011, and Iraq will have to deal with the longe term impact of cut backs in critical activities like improving its security forces, and freeze recruiting for its Army and police – steps that led to serious drops in unit manning in 2009. It must develop effective long-term procurement and modernization efforts that deal with the fact that key procurements have had to be put on hold, and Iraq's poor maintenance standards have made things worse.

These are longe-term needs that an effective Iraqi government can make progress in addressing during its full term in office – but not until it is fully in place and has learned how to function. This is necessary to put Iraq back on the road towards full-scale development by 2015, and to show that democracy can work. An Iraqi government that fails in these areas may make the democratic structure of Iraq fail as well. It is all too easy to forget that dictators come to power not only because of their own ambitions but also because of the failure of elected leaders to govern effectively.

Looking Ahead

There is no way to predict how well Iraqis will deal with this mix of problems. There are many possible "worst cases," as there are many possibilities of success. What is important is to understand that the election is only the prelude to determining the real path of Iraqi power and governance. It is equally important to understand that Iraq's elections and democracy will not be a model of anything unless the Iraqi government succeeds in bringing security, governance, and development to its people.

There can be no "victory" in Iraq before it is clear how these events unfold. Moreover, it is clear that Iraq will need as much continued aid as other states are willing to provide, and Iraq will require years of continuing US assistance and aid. Iraq and US-Iraqi relations have come a long way since the dark days of 2007 and 2008, but – election or no election – they still have a long way to go.