



MEI MEDIA WATCH

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Elected Government in Iraq

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[on 11 November President Jalal Talabani asked incumbent Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to form the government since the parliamentary elections were held on 7 March. This was seen as a first significant move towards political stability within the country. Commentaries from the Middle Eastern and international media are reproduced here.
Editor, MEI Media Watch]

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Khaleej Times
ONLINE

Dubai, Editorial, 1 November 2010, Monday

1. Saudi offers help to Iraq

The political impasse in Iraq continues with no one bloc in a position to form a government. Saudi Arabia's invitation to the leaders of all political blocs of Iraq for talks after Hajj should thus be taken in a positive light. Even more significant is King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz's advice to the Iraqi politicians to quell the ugly fires of sectarianism.

Iran and Saudi are both major powers and are cognisant of the fact that political instability in Iraq is not going to help either.

This is why the United Arab Emirates has also backed the Saudi initiative, which will go a long way in building consensus in the region for pulling the war-weary country out of the abyss of political bickering.

Iraq, since the election and the withdrawal of the US combat troops from the country has witnessed a sharp rise in violence this year (2010). Not only is this fatal to Iraq's fragile security, it is bound to have fallout on neighbouring states.

Coming to Iraq that has now broken the world record of the length of time by any country to form a government, it may well need external mediation. Iraq's neighbours, as mentioned can play a critical role to help resolve the deadlock.

Former Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki-led bloc, State of Law, is yet to comment on the Saudi offer to mediate talks to resolve the deadlock. The fact that most of the parties are now backing Maliki, he has emerged as a strong contender to head the new government. How he responds to the Saudi initiative remains to be seen. As for Iyad Allawi— a secular heading the other bloc, Al Iraqqiya that won the most seats but has been unable to huddle together enough support from other factions to form a government— there has been a positive response.

Some Kurdish politicians, however, have been critical of the Saudi offer on the ground that it may complicate the situation at this juncture. It is believed that Allawi was being pressured to join Maliki and form a government. Saudi intervention at this point, according to some, may negate that and allow Allawi an alternative option. For Saudi Arabia's role and influence among other allied groups is undoubtedly significant. However, one feels that Riyadh is fully aware of the way Iraq's political dynamics are morphing and knows that the Shia vote is now a significant power player in the country. It may be better for Iraqi politicians to view the Saudi offer as one aimed at defusing sectarianism. That in itself will be adding fuel to an already simmering situation where terror groups have already demonstrated their capability at wreaking havoc. The Iraqi people cannot afford this. It is time for Iraq's political leaders to set aside their differences and reconcile at reaching a consensus at the earliest. Since they have been unable to do so they should seek counsel and help from neighbouring states. It may also be a good idea for Riyadh to invite other regional states to the talks, if these take place.

Source:

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/editorial/2010/November/editorial_November2.xml§ion=editorial&col=



Dubai, Editorial, 6 November 2010, Saturday

2. Time for Iraqis to move on

At last, there is some good news from Iraq. The elected parliament is scheduled to meet on Monday (8 November) to elect a new speaker and two deputies, nearly eight months after the inconclusive elections.

This is a welcome development, especially taking into account the cost of instability that had ensued from months long political bickering.

Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki's masterstroke of grabbing Kurdish support is likely to grant him with a second tenure as country's chief executive, which nonetheless mandates him with the gigantic task of fulfilling his agenda of reconciliation and a government of consensus. The parliament meet, however, has come at a time when political ripples were being felt at the regional level. The lacklustre attitude of parliamentarians to form a new government had irked Iraqis at home and abroad, and at the same time invited criticism from regional stakeholders who saw in this an opportunity for unscrupulous elements to strike back. This is why Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates voiced their support for mediation, which was basically a friendly gesture to pull the country out of the abyss of indecisiveness. Though Baghdad had not officially commented on the offer, it goes without saying that it had furthered the urgency to end the prevailing political deadlock. Maliki's State of Law bloc, which won 89 seats in March (2010), two fewer than former premier Iyad Allawi's Al Iraqiya Movement, now with the help of Kurdish allies and pro-Iranian Shia radical Moqtada Al Sadr, can go ahead to form a government. What needs to be seen is how soon this phase of transition is overcome.

It would be a commendable affair if Maliki acts a statesman rather than a politician of sorts. His and Allawi's brinkmanship has already cost the Iraqis quite dearly. Maliki's fag end of first tenure was marked by political instability and it seemed he had intentionally given up his agenda of rapprochement with the opposition to serve his party's petty objectives. This phase of exigency cannot be furthered anymore. Restoring Iraq to the heights of glory in the Arab world where it stood before the horrible episodes of invasion and occupation is a must. Moreover, seeing through the withdrawal of foreign troops and re-inculcating nationalism are tasks that require a firm and get-going leadership. Baghdad, understandably, has no reasons to fail.

Source:

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/editorial/2010/November/editorial_November10.xml§ion=editorial&col=



Dubai, Editorial, 9 November 2010, Tuesday

3. Iraq can't do without stable government

The country's politicians are failing their people by continuing to squabble.

The Iraqi people have every right to be very frustrated with their politicians. Almost nine months after voters went to the polls, the politicians are still arguing about who will form the government.

It now looks certain that Nouri Al Maliki will continue as prime minister, with the support of Moqtada Al Sadr's bloc, but it is not certain if Iyad Allawi's Al Iraqqiya— which has the most seats in the new parliament— will join the government, or become the opposition. The parties will also spend weeks arguing about which ministries they will run, as they jockey for power in the new government.

This all means that it is far too early to congratulate the Iraqi politicians on any success, even if the basic structure of the new government has emerged.

The agreement between Al Maliki and Al Sadr shows that Iraq's two leading Shiite politicians want to make the constitutional system work, and also want to keep Allawi out of power. They are achieving this with the cooperation of the Kurds, whose main interest is not the health of the federal government, but ensuring their own autonomy in the north.

The new government will face several important tests. It will have to balance the regional concerns of Iran and Saudi Arabia and it will have to solve the seemingly insoluble conundrum of deciding whether Kirkuk— with its substantial oil reserves— should form part of Iraqi Kurdistan or not.

At the same time, the new government will have to get on with the essential task of delivering good governance across the country.

Iraq desperately needs confidence and peace in order to prosper, and this is what its new government has to prioritise.

Source:

<http://gulfnews.com/opinions/editorials/iraq-can-t-do-without-stable-government-1.708391>



Editorial, 11 November 2010, Thursday

4. Finally a Deal ... Maybe

After eight months of wrangling, Iraq's leaders have agreed on the outlines of a new unity government. We hope it proves to be a real accomplishment. Sectarian anger is rising. And Iraq needs legitimate, representative rulers to address years of neglected business.

In a worrying sign, just hours after the deal was struck, one crucial bloc walked out of Parliament. It seemed premature, to say the least.

Iraqiyya, and its chief, Iyad Allawi, a former prime minister, have a right to feel disappointed. They gave up a lot in this deal. The bloc—made up of Sunnis and secular Shiites—received the most votes in the March (2010) election. But after failing to rally enough additional support, it has accepted that Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, and his Shiite-led State of Law party, will form the new government.

In return, Mr. Maliki has acceded to an American proposal that the government create a new committee overseeing national security issues. Mr. Allawi is supposed to be the chairman, although he has not publicly agreed.

If it is truly empowered, the committee will give the Sunnis an important voice and more reason to stick with the democratic process. It should also provide an important check on Mr. Maliki's power and his closeness with Iran. For this to work, Mr. Allawi will have to spend more time in Baghdad, instead of his home in London, and commit to shaping the new job.

The Obama administration, especially Vice President Joseph Biden Jr., has been deeply engaged, arguing that the government must include all major factions and suggesting ways to accommodate all groups. Washington will need to stay involved.

Mr. Maliki has already shown that he will grab as much power as possible. It will be up to Iraq's other political leaders—Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, was re-elected president—to make sure that Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds all play significant roles and that Iraq's fragile democracy is strengthened.

They need to settle the remaining appointments and get to work. Iraq still doesn't have a law equitably sharing its oil wealth. The future of Kirkuk is still unsettled. Sunni fighters who came in from the cold still haven't gotten the jobs they were promised. The list goes on.

Source: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/12/opinion/12fri2.html?_r=1&ref=global



Jeddah, Editorial, 12 November 2010, Friday

5. Iraq settlement

The deal worked out by leaders of parties has more than a touch of Lebanon about it. It seems that finally, after eight months of party political squabbling and manoeuvring following March's (2010) inconclusive elections, Iraq is close to having a new government. A power-sharing deal has been hammered out in principle between the opposition Iraqiya bloc, Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki's State of Law bloc and the main Kurdish alliance. It has resulted in Jalal Talabani being reappointed president, Al-Maliki prime minister and a member of the largely Sunni Iraqiya bloc elected speaker of Parliament.

As such it is welcome news. There has to be a stable and workable government. A new deadly momentum of violence was building up, seen in the recent horrific attacks on Christians and Shiites. Militants have been intent on spreading chaos and taking advantage of the present power vacuum. If the barbarity of the attacks has brought the politicians to their senses and made them face up to their responsibilities then some good will have come out of the tragedy.

However, it is far too premature to start celebrating on Iraq's behalf. The deal there could still go sour or unravel.

Parliament may have reappointed Al-Maliki as prime minister but he has another four weeks to persuade his predecessor Iyad Allawi and the Iraqiya bloc to join his government. He may fail. If that happens, Iraqi Sunnis will continue to feel marginalized, with potentially deadly consequences. The walkout of Parliament by Allawi and a number of his Iraqiya colleagues on Thursday (11 November) amid accusations that Al-Maliki had backtracked on promises to lift the ban on a number of former Baathists may have been a symbolic gesture, but it shows how fragile the situation is. In any event, four weeks is a long time in politics. There could be yet more violence. A lot more Iraqis may die before a government is finally in place.

There is another reason for concern. The deal has more than a touch of Lebanon about it. A Kurdish president, a Shiite prime minister, a Sunni speaker of Parliament: Lebanon's political

model is hardly the best to follow. It may be temporarily necessary but Iraq is creating dire problems for the future if the share-out becomes entrenched. If the Sunni community is handed no more than the token post of speaker, it will feel excluded. That will play into the hands of the militants, as it has in Lebanon.

There will never be peace in Iraq unless its politicians put their communal differences aside and work for the common Iraqi good. The key word there is “Iraqi”. A government in Baghdad that is seen to act as a tool of a foreign power — any foreign power — to the detriment of a part of its own people will be the cause of continued conflict and strife.

Iraq has to have a genuinely inclusive government in which all the main communities— Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds— feel they have a stake. Anything less will be disastrous.

Source: <http://arabnews.com/opinion/editorial/article188249.ece>

gulfnews.com

Dubai, Editorial, 12 November 2010, Friday

6. Better late than never for the sake of Iraq

The country's leaders should strive to avoid future political stalemates.

The stability of Iraq is a responsibility that should be shared by all parties concerned. It is of grave importance that political differences are resolved if the country is to be set on the track of peace and stability.

Following intense negotiations among members of the Iraqi parliament, an agreement has been reached to retain Nouri Al Maliki as prime minister. The negotiations had previously been deadlocked since the elections held in March (2010). With the support of the Sunni coalition, led by former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, the members of parliament have been able to put the disagreement behind them.

Yet even with Sunni support, Al Maliki faces numerous challenges. Continued support is not a given, because of the fragile situation in Iraq. This is due in part to the sentiment amongst the Sunni bloc, many of whose members feel they have been marginalised and sidelined.

There is no question that all the political and religious groups in Iraq need to be part of any reconciliation process. Any party— regardless of how small it's following may be— has to be engaged as the repercussions of leaving one out could be far more damaging than what the

country is able to bear. With the Sunni bloc isolated, for example, an opening automatically emerged for insurgents to take advantage of and there was an increase in violence. In addition, some of the most recent bomb and mortar attacks have targeted a new group: Christians. Over recent weeks, their homes and communities have been attacked by extremists.

A heavy price was paid by the Iraqis as a result of the eight-month political impasse, which completely paralysed the government. A repeat of this scenario should be avoided in the future — this is the responsibility of Iraq's leaders.

Source: <http://gulfnews.com/opinions/editorials/better-late-than-never-for-the-sake-of-iraq-1.710958>



Dubai, Editorial, 13 November 2010, Saturday

7. Striving for political stability

There is finally a government in Iraq. Having broken the world record of taking the longest time to cobble together one since elections in March (2010), the political deadlock has at last been resolved.

As Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki once again takes the reins in hands, he faces considerable challenges. While security is of paramount concern, so is keeping the country's political factions in tandem. The reasons why the political impasse occurred should also be kept in mind. Maliki has to tread a very careful path. Iraq's political landscape is both fragile and volatile. Not only will compromises have to be made in order to integrate the varied political factions, a rethink may also be necessary in certain cases. For example, the walkout by the Sunni-backed Iraqqiya's head and former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi at the time of election of Jalal Talabani as President at parliament was principally for a similar reason. The reason being the renegeing on a commitment to reinstate four Sunni leaders previously banned for having links with Saddam Hussein's Baath party. If this is an indicator of how things may evolve over time in the new government, it does not portend well. It is not realistic to imagine that all tensions will resolve considering the numerous factions (even within major blocs), the new government will need to tread a careful path. Often, small fissures can deepen into major chasms if damage control is not exercised.

The good news, a point that has been reiterated since news of a breakthrough came, is that at least now there will be a functional government. Maliki's past record in implementing security is commendable. While US forces were actively involved at the time, the situation is different now. Iraqi forces will be in charge even if the reserves US force contingent remain. The past months

have seen a spiralling of violence reminiscent of the post-US invasion years. This signifies the continuing capability of Al Qaeda affiliated groups, something that cannot be dismissed easily. Moreover, even dormant sectarian tensions can re-erupt and engulf the country in flames. Another major challenge for the Iraqi government will be to keep a lid on sectarian and ethnic tensions as well.

It is hoped that Maliki will prove worthwhile in steering Iraq towards political stability and improved security. Iraq's neighbouring states should also contribute positively in stabilising Iraq and not making it an arena for their power wrangling.

Source:

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/editorial/2010/November/editorial_November23.xml§ion=editorial&col=



Muscat, Editorial, 13 November 2010, Saturday

8. Way to go for Iraq

At last a political deal cobbled by Iraq's main political parties on Wednesday (10 November) broke an eight-month deadlock over forming a government after the March (2010) elections. The agreement, reached between Shia, Sunni and Kurdish leaders, would see Nuri Al Maliki continuing as prime minister and Jalal Talabani as president while Iyad Allawi, the main contender to the premier post, would head a council for national strategy and his nominee would get the speaker's position. Discords among the main political leaders over distribution of posts and the support they needed from fringe parties had held up the formation of a new government all these months. A recent directive by the apex court to the leaders to set up a coalition seems to have intensified their efforts to dissolve their differences and reach a deal. It may be a 'national partnership' as Kurdish regional president Masoud Barzani calls it. But deep suspicions, factional loyalties, external interference and political expediency of constituent parties cast doubts on their ability to deliver goods. Their arrangement to govern the country looks ad hoc and is born out of frustrated power play. However, a silver lining on the otherwise dark horizon is the parties and other factions that matter in Iraqi politics were able overcome their feuds for the time being.

That's no consolation to Iraqis or the outside world until Maliki is able to put an administration in place within a month. He has a daunting task on hand in sharing ministerial positions which could create rancour and enmity with others. The next few weeks will test Maliki's perseverance, political acumen and manoeuvring in bringing fractious elements together to run the country

which is desperately crying for a healing touch that can be provided only by a united and committed government. Even if we give him the benefit of the doubt of accomplishing a herculean task, the number of seats he holds in parliament– 89 compared to Allawi’s 91– makes him vulnerable to the pressures from other parties within and outside the government. In other words, all those who are backing him now are likely to exact a price from him at an appropriate and crucial time. That’s the coalition politics norm anywhere in the world. Even if Maliki is taking a calculated risk and fulfilling his ambition of continuing as prime minister for the second term, the stakes are high.

During his first term, he enjoyed the full support of the US and its troops in Iraq. Now, Washington has virtually washed its hands off combat duties and left the security in the hands of Iraqis. Although the Obama administration is committed to stability in Iraq, how Baghdad polices its towns and cities is local security forces’ business. The recent church attack and Al Qaeda’s threats have renewed insecurity fears in the people. Besides security, the gigantic task of nation building assumes utmost priority. Unless the political groups of strange bed fellows keep their national priorities above their factionalism, there will be no deliverance from suffering for Iraqis.

Source:

http://omantribune.com/index.php?page=editorial_details&id=1786&heading=EDITORIAL



Beirut, Editorial, 13 November 2010, Saturday

9. A cabinet for Iraq's neighbours

While the people of Iraq went to the polls on March 7 (2010), it was not until late Thursday (11 November) night that their freshly re-elected president tabbed the incumbent prime minister to form a new cabinet. If something with that picture looks slightly askew, the problem is not with your eyes.

After more than eight long months of horse-trading, what appears to be brewing is a government that will be able to faithfully represent the interests of Iraq’s neighbours. Alas, the Iraqi people, who gave a plurality of votes to a party other than that of the prime minister-elect, will not be as well served by the next administration.

Scanning the names bandied about for cabinet posts, it seems clear that each of Iraq’s neighbours will get a slice of the pie – as will a certain North American nation with its own involvement. Lebanon has witnessed a similar phenomenon, which was labelled consensus government. The

bad news for the people of Iraq is that such a government is merely a showpiece without the slightest capacity to address the actual needs of the country. As it turns out, the members of the administration wind up foremost working to fulfil the agendas of the foreign patrons who nominated them.

For the Iraqi people, this development is a recipe for disaster. The citizenry has pressing needs such as daily bread, basic utilities, the eradication of violent extremists and the confidence in their nation's future that would give them a reason to even bother staying in Iraq.

The people need a return to the rule of law, but the favourites for the ministerial posts are not renowned for their commitment to that goal. Instead, many of them have a robust track record of appeasing the wants of external interests, regardless of the priorities of the domestic population.

As for the neighbours, their agenda is obvious: Iraq is a resource-rich country. During the past seven years of war, every one of the country's neighbours played a role in the killing, the degradation of the political sphere and the fomenting of continual instability.

It is hoped that this dire prediction is inaccurate and that the next Iraqi cabinet will bring about significant progress for the country's beleaguered inhabitants, but Lebanon's experience indicates a different outcome. Lebanon has the misfortune of a consensus government, which this month (November 2010) marked its first full year in office; the achievements of that year give new meaning to the phrase zero-sum game – for the end result of all their games has been zero.

The painful lesson is that when a deal between outside powers produces a consensus cabinet, that government does not and will not represent the people, but must instead move according to the whims of the foreigners' interests.

Source:

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=17&article_id=121500#axzz15A4E1KqG



Jeddah, Editorial, 13 November 2010, Saturday

10. An Iraq deal may finally be forming

After eight months of wrangling, Iraq's leaders have agreed on the outlines of a new unity government. It is hoped that it proves to be a real accomplishment. Sectarian anger is rising. And Iraq needs legitimate, representative rulers to address years of neglected

business, said the New York Times in an editorial published Friday (12 November). Excerpts:

In a worrying sign, just hours after the deal was struck, one crucial bloc walked out of Parliament. It seemed premature, to say the least.

Iraqiya, and its chief, Iyad Allawi, a former prime minister, have a right to feel disappointed. They gave up a lot in this deal. The bloc – made up of Sunnis and secular Shiites – received the most votes in the March (2010) election. But after failing to rally enough additional support, it has accepted that Prime Minister Nouri Kamal Al-Maliki, and his Shiite-led State of Law party, will form the new government.

In return, Mr. Maliki has acceded to an American proposal that the government create a new committee overseeing national security issues. Mr. Allawi is supposed to be the chairman, although he has not publicly agreed.

If it is truly empowered, the committee will give the Sunnis an important voice and more reason to stick with the democratic process. It should also provide an important check on Mr. Maliki's power and his closeness with Iran. For this to work, Mr. Allawi will have to spend more time in Baghdad, instead of his home in London, and commit to shaping the new job.

The Obama administration, especially Vice President Joseph Biden Jr., has been deeply engaged, arguing that the government must include all major factions and suggesting ways to accommodate all groups. Washington will need to stay involved.

Source:

<http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=2010111387299>



Editorial, 13 November 2010, Saturday

11. Iraq's new government

The eight months that passed between Iraq's parliamentary election and the re-nomination of Nouri al-Maliki as prime minister were painful and perilous. But they were also a necessary learning process for Iraqis and their neighbours. The results of the vote were messy: Parliamentary seats were divided among four major blocs representing the country's three major sectarian groups, with the coalition supported by minority Sunnis eking out a bare plurality. That meant it took a long time for two inescapable political truths to sink in: If Iraq is

to hold together, all of its factions must share power; and parties representing Shiites, who make up some 60 percent of the population, must lead.

The leader of the bloc supported by most Sunnis, Iyad Allawi, was among those who stubbornly resisted those facts. Though himself a Shiite, Mr. Allawi nourished the hopes of Iraq's western provinces, and neighbours such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan, that Sunnis could still lead the Iraqi government, as they did during Saddam Hussein's regime. In the end Mr. Allawi settled for the chairmanship of a promised new policy council, while a top Sunni leader was elected speaker of the parliament.

It will be crucial that Mr. Maliki live up to his commitments to share power with Mr. Allawi, reverse discriminatory measures against Sunni leaders and support former members of the Sunni militias who fought al-Qaeda. But Sunni leaders - and the governments that back them - also need to accept that Iraq has become a democracy where power is determined by electoral math. Mr. Allawi did not have a majority in parliament, and he was never likely to assemble one.

The manoeuvring over the new government was often portrayed as a contest between Iran and the United States - and many of those who opposed the U.S. invasion declared Iran the winner. That, too, ignores Iraqi reality. The Obama administration was no more able to override the parliamentary math than Tehran was to install an exclusively Shiite coalition. Led by Vice President Biden and his staff, the administration bowed to the reality that Mr. Maliki would remain in office while rightly pressing for maximum power sharing with Sunnis and Kurds. But if it comes into being as agreed, the new government should be no more subject to Iranian diktat than the last one.

Ideally, Iraq eventually will become a democracy where elections are fought by parties divided by political program rather than sect or ethnicity. But for now the forging of a coalition deal is another welcome step toward a stable and peaceful state.

Source:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/12/AR2010111206314.html>

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