

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN IRAQ'S NASCENT GOVERNMENT

On March 28, 2011, more than three months after the seating of the government, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki submitted the names of the nominees for Ministers of Defense and Interior to the parliament for approval.¹ This breakthrough comes after more than six months of debate. The question of who would fill these vital ministerial posts has been a main point of contention in the negotiations over government formation since last fall. On account of the deadlock, Maliki nominated himself as interim Minister of Defense and interim Minister of Interior in late December 2010, when the government was seated. Since that time, he has held these positions in addition to serving as Commander-in-Chief, effectively heading of all of Iraq's security forces.

- Maliki submitted two names as nominees for Minister of Defense due to a lack of consensus between his State of Law Coalition (SLC) and the Iraqiya list, led by former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi.
 - They are Khalid al-Obeidi and Hisham al-Samarraie.² Al-Obeidi, the frontrunner for the position, is a Sunni who was a general officer in the Iraqi Army under the former regime.³
 - Al-Obeidi was thought to be the preferred candidate for the Iraqiya list; however, there are some reports of a disagreement between al-Obeidi and Iraqiya leader Iyad Allawi, who wanted guarantees from al-Obeidi that he would withdraw from the government if Iraqiya asked him to do so.⁴
- There are conflicting reports on the nominees submitted for Minister of Interior.
 - Some sources report three nominees for the position: Muhsin al-Ka'bi, Ibrahim al-Lami, and Adnan Al-Assadi,⁵ though others list only Ka'bi and Lami as nominees for the post.⁶ All three are Shi'a.
 - Ibrahim al-Lami is considered the frontrunner for the position. Lami is member of the Office of the Adjutant General of the Armed Forces, which reports to the Prime Minister's office. Maliki is also said to favor Adnan al-Assadi for the post, despite resistance from the Sadrists and Iraqiya.⁷
 - The main Shi'a blocs—SLC and the Iraqi National Alliance, which is comprised mainly of the Sadrist Trend and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) — have disagreed on the candidate for this position.
- Even now that the candidates have been submitted, the parliament has shown little willingness to quickly approve Maliki's nominees. The blocs continue to squabble over the nominations.
- This political deadlock has many politicians and parties questioning the viability of the national partnership government, the unwieldy parliamentary coalition that formed after a power-sharing agreement was brokered in late 2010.
 - Kurdish President Massoud Barzani successfully persuaded all of Iraq's major political factions to accept a power-sharing arrangement in November 2010.
 - The agreement, known as the Barzani Initiative, allowed Maliki to retain his position as Prime Minister. In exchange, Iyad Allawi would be appointed to head a new executive body, the National Strategic Policy Council (NSPC), which was envisioned as a means for Allawi to influence national security matters and to balance Maliki's control of these issues.

- Yet, this power-sharing agreement is now breaking down. Many politicians, including members of Iraqiyah, acknowledge that plans for the NSPC will not be realized, as anticipated.⁸
 - This has further complicated debate over the security ministry nominees.
- Maliki is pushing for the dissolution of the current parliamentary coalition by a no-confidence vote in his own government, in the hopes that a majority ruling coalition and parliamentary opposition can be formed instead.⁹
- Any dissolution of the parliament will be preceded by intense negotiations among the political groups to form a new majority coalition and opposition. The make-up of these blocs is unclear, though members of ISCI have indicated that their party is prepared to move into the opposition.¹⁰

Recent events underscore the fragile nature of Iraq's political system. The disparate and often divergent interests of those in the national partnership government have made it difficult to build consensus. The potential move away from an all-inclusive coalition towards a parliamentary majority may actually provide the means for a functioning government to form. This could also allow for the establishment of a parliamentary opposition capable of checking Maliki's current attempts to consolidate power; however, this outcome is by no means assured.

NOTES

¹ "PM Maliki submits candidate names for security cabinet posts to Parliament," Aswat al-Iraq, March 28, 2011; "Maliki passes Iraq security ministers names to Parliament," Al-Sumaria News, March 29, 2011.

² "Maliki notified the Three presidencies about his anxiety regarding because of the postponed of approving the nominees for the planning and the two security ministries," Al-Sumaria News, March 31, 2011. Translated from Arabic.

³ Ismail Zayer, "Maliki provide the names of the nominees today, MOI is between Challabi and The border guards division commander, Ryadh Gareeb for National Security, Obaidi for MOD," Al-Sabbah Al-Jedeed, March 17, 2011. Translated from Arabic.

⁴ "Iraqiyah list withdrew its nomination of Obaidi for MOD and nominated Major General Faseeh Al-A'Ani and Lieutenant-General Hikmat Al-Jihaishey instead," Al-Sumaria News, March 28, 2011. Translated from Arabic.

⁵ "Iraqi PM sends Interior, Defence portfolio nominations to parliament," Al-Iraqiyah TV, Baghdad, Translated from Arabic by BBC Monitoring Middle East, March 28, 2011.

⁶ "Maliki notified the Three presidencies about his anxiety regarding because of the postponed of approving the nominees for the planning and the two security ministries," Al-Sumaria News, March 31, 2011. Translated from Arabic.

⁷ Ali Al-Dhurgham, "Iraqiya list officially rejected the assigning of Ministry of Interior to Adnan Al-Assadi," Buratha News, January 9, 2011. Translated from Arabic; "Forty Parliament Members represent Sadr trend opposed the nomination of Adnan Al-Assadi and Aqeel Al-Tereehy for the position of the Minister of Interior," Al-Iraqiyah, January 12, 2011. Translated from Arabic.

⁸ "National Council for Strategic Studies expected to be abolished, MP says," Aswat al-Iraq, March 26, 2011.

⁹ "Maliki plans to form Iraq majority government," Al-Sumaria News, March 29, 2011.

¹⁰ "Iraq's Supreme Islamic Council to move to opposition in Parliament, MP says," Aswat al-Iraq, March 29, 2011.