

MAY 2013

STEPHEN WICKEN

MIDDLE EAST SECURITY REPORT II

IRAQ'S SUNNIS IN CRISIS



Cover Photo: Demonstrating the diversity of the anti-government group, a Sunni politician delivered remarks, 18 February 2011. (Photo: Al Jazeera English)

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Published in 2013 in the United States of America by the Institute for the Study of War.

1400 16th Street NW, Suite 515 Washington, DC 20036.

<http://www.understandingwar.org>

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my gratitude to numerous colleagues present and past for their insightful comments, edits, and encouragement. Thanks in particular to Jessica Lewis, Marisa Sullivan, Aaron Reese, Aaron Menenberg, and Sam Wyr. I am also grateful to Omar Abdullah for his help with translations and to Isabel Nassief for her research assistance. Finally, I would like to thank Maggie Rackl, ISW's unsung hero, for her help with graphics and formatting and her general morale-boosting efforts.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MIDDLE EAST SECURITY REPORT 11 | IRAQ'S SUNNIS IN CRISIS | STEPHEN WICKEN | MAY 2013

The political participation of the Sunni Arab minority in Iraq is critical to the security and stability of the state. At present, they are functionally excluded from government, with those that do participate coopted by the increasingly authoritarian Shi'a Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Without effective political representation, the Sunni in Iraq are left with few alternatives to address their grievances against the Maliki government. The important decisions lie ahead on whether to pursue their goals via political compromise, federalism, or insurgency.

The cross-sectarian Iraqi National Movement (Iraqiyya) coalition provided a vehicle for the representation of Sunni Arabs in the 2010 parliamentary elections. Since that time, Iraqiyya has declined as a political force. Maliki has abandoned the non-sectarian nationalist platform that he adopted in 2009 and has systematically marginalized the senior cadre of Sunni national politicians. This began in earnest with the withdrawal of U.S. forces in December 2011, when Maliki targeted Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, who is now in exile.

The aggregate effect of Maliki's maneuvers and those of other Shi'a political parties against Iraqiyya from 2010 to 2012 was the identification of Iraqiyya as a sectarian Sunni coalition, which ensured its terminal marginalization. Frustrated and divided, Iraqiyya leaders, including Parliamentary Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi, failed repeatedly to mount an effective political opposition to Maliki. As a result, the U.S. and international community can no longer lean on Iraqiyya as a cohesive stabilizing political entity with regard to Iraqi Sunnis.

In December 2012, Maliki arrested bodyguards of Finance Minister Rafia al-Issawi, a native of Anbar province. This wave of maneuvers targeting Issawi sparked an anti-government protest movement across majority-Sunni Arab areas of Iraq that has persisted into May 2013. Protestors have articulated specific demands of the Maliki government that include de-Baathification reform and constraints upon the provincial disposition of Maliki's operational commands. The specific demands enumerate opportunities for U.S. and international involvement to mitigate Iraq's political crisis.

The anti-government protest movement and the establishment of organized demands signify the return of Sunni sectarian politics in Iraq. However, the protestors, as well as Sunni national political figures, are divided over whether to enter into negotiations with Maliki. A gulf of influence separates most national political figures from the protestors at this time, and a cadre of provincial, tribal, and clerical figures has entered into the debate. This cadre includes senior Sunni cleric Abd al-Malik al-Saadi, the key advocate of negotiations between protestors and the government.

The protests largely have been peaceful, but several exceptions, most notably a clash with Iraqi security forces in Hawija on April 23, 2013, demonstrate the potential for violence that may result from the protracted anti-government movement. Both AQI and the neo-Baathist Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqa al-Naqshabandia (JRTN) are attempting to hijack the movement and advocate for violent uprising. The majority of Iraqi Sunni Arabs do not support terrorism, having rejected AQI in 2008. Nevertheless, the discontent among Sunnis in Iraq creates opportunities for AQI to expand its presence in Iraq and to target the government of Iraq directly.

Terrorism is not the only security concern caused by Iraq's current political crisis. The anti-government protest movement also threatens to incite another Sunni insurgency in Iraq. The Syrian civil war provides a compelling example of an armed uprising against authoritarian leadership by a Sunni Arab population. As witnessed in Syria, once an uprising gains momentum, the requirement to succeed in battle supports unprincipled alliances, such as with al-Qaeda affiliates, in the name of tactical victory. Syrian spillover heightens the threat of escalation in Iraq and underscores the requirement for a careful political solution.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Maliki's dogged pursuit of Sunni politicians is a worst-case scenario for regional stability and U.S. national security. Targeting Hashemi, Issawi, and other prominent Iraqi Sunni leaders is purely self-interested behavior, and it does nothing to counter the threat of AQI. In fact, it fans the flame of Sunni discontent and generates a security threat by way of anti-government violence and insurgency. The U.S. would do well to acknowledge this about Maliki and to consider implementing conditions on assistance to Maliki's counter-terrorism and defense programs.

Cutting off Maliki completely is not a viable option. Maliki is not yet compelled by Iran, but the less influence the U.S. and the international community exerts in Iraq, the more Iranian influence will dominate. How the U.S. engages Maliki during this political crisis is a critical component of how the U.S. addresses regional threats emanating from Syria and Iran as well as transnational threats. Failing to engage with the political crisis at this time threatens to relinquish regional influence to Iran. This in turn risks the prospect of sectarian conflict in Iraq, to the detriment of the region as a whole.

The U.S. must engage to ensure July 2013 provincial elections in Anbar and Ninewa take place freely and fairly. Additionally, legitimate demands by protestors must be recognized and addressed in order to prevent the withdrawal of Iraqi Sunnis from politics. The longer Iraqi Sunnis are left without an avenue for political expression, the more vulnerable they may become to advocacy for violent alternatives. Particularly if protestors continue to encounter real or perceived threats by Iraqi Security Forces, this may cease to be a political movement. It could develop into an insurgency that, in tandem with the civil war in Syria, would have devastating effects on regional security.

MIDDLE EAST SECURITY REPORT II

IRAQ'S SUNNIS IN CRISIS

By Stephen Wicken

Growing Sunni Arab discontent in Iraq is translating into a deteriorating security situation. State security forces have clashed with armed insurgents in and around anti-government demonstrations in Sunni-majority provinces. Raids by security forces on Sunni politicians, protest leaders, and on protest camps have prompted retaliatory attacks by insurgents and the establishment of tribal militias for the defense of Sunni communities.¹

Capitalizing on this combustible atmosphere, extremist militant groups such as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) have increased their operations against government forces and figures, Shi'a civilians, and Sunni provincial politicians. The ongoing conflict in Syria has spilled over Iraq's borders, and the threat of sectarian warfare looms large in the minds both of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who has used it to justify security crackdowns on Iraqi Sunnis, and Iraqi Sunnis, who identify with the Syrian uprising against authoritarian leadership.

Members of Iraq's Sunni Arab minority have been protesting against the government of Maliki since December 2012. Once Iraq's most powerful ethno-sectarian faction under Saddam Hussein, the Sunnis fared badly in their support for insurgency against the U.S.-led occupation of the country. Although a majority of Sunnis rejected insurgency and extremism by 2008, Maliki's centralization of power since that time has given rise to political marginalization and widespread grievances over their harsh treatment by Maliki's security forces in the name of counter-terrorism. The Iraqi National Movement (Iraqiyya), the cross-sectarian coalition under which key Sunni politicians gathered in 2009 to win the most seats in the 2010 parliamentary elections, has fallen apart as its Shi'a rivals have exploited its internal fractures.

The anti-government protests represent a significant inflection in Iraqi Sunni Arabs' self-identification along ethno-sectarian lines. At the same time, however, Sunni tribes and political factions are divided over their place in the competition for power and resources both internally and with neighboring Shi'a Arab and Iraqi Kurdish communities. They are also divided in terms of their calculations about how to address their place in Iraq — through political participation, direct negotiation with the government, the pursuit of regional autonomy within a federal Iraq, or through insurgency.

These divisions within a Sunni population spread over a broad geographical area that encompasses many distinct historical and tribal identities have served to weaken the position of the Sunni minority in Iraqi politics. The alternatives to political participation, such as regional autonomy or a return to violence, may prompt responses from the Shi'a-dominated government that could push Iraq back into widespread sectarian conflict.

This report explores the fragmentation of Sunni political representation since 2010 in order to explain the possible courses of action for Iraq's Sunni population in 2013. The first section covers the uniting of Sunni political leaders under the cross-sectarian Iraqiyya coalition that won the most seats at the 2010 parliamentary elections. The second section details how this coalition declined in an atmosphere of rising sectarianism, in which it was marginalized by Shi'a rivals who portrayed Iraqiyya as a sectarian Sunni coalition. Iraqiyya's leaders were unable to combat this portrayal, limiting their ability to limit Maliki's consolidation of power and their own marginalization. The third section explores the emergence of a self-identifying Sunni minority through anti-government demonstrations in 2013, examining the implications of this manifestation for Iraq's security and stability.

IRAQIYYA'S RISE

The Iraqi National Movement (Iraqiyya) was a cross-sectarian political coalition assembled ahead of 2010 parliamentary elections that served as the principle vehicle for Sunni political participation in Iraq from late 2009 until 2012. The coalition was assembled by Ayad Allawi, a Shi'a politician of secular nationalist orientation who had been installed by the United States as prime minister from June 2004 to April 2005. Iraqiyya appealed to a broad spectrum of Sunni in the wake of the insurgency because of its nonsectarian nationalist platform, its

incorporation of former Baathist and Islamist elements, and its cross-generational membership.

The period from the beginning of the provincial elections season in 2008 to the de-Baathification dispute of January 2010 saw the brief emergence of nonsectarian nationalism as a significant concern in Iraqi politics after years of sectarian conflict. This nonsectarian turn was driven by two elements. The first was Nouri al-Maliki's 2008 push to broaden his appeal beyond the elements of the Shi'a Arab population from whom he already drew support. One element of this push was the commencement of operations against Sadrist Shi'a militants in southern Iraq. Maliki also put together the State of Law Alliance for the provincial elections, allying his own Islamic Da'wa Party and some of its splinter parties with more secular Shi'a groups and a smattering of minority parties in order to bolster his newfound nationalist credentials.

The second key aspect of the nonsectarian turn was the Iraqi population's disaffection with years of sectarian conflict and the poor governance that had accompanied it. In predominantly Sunni areas, this meant primarily the rejection of the provincial governance of the Iraqi Accord Front (Tawafuq), a previously popular Sunni political coalition led by the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP).² In Anbar, where the IIP had dominated what local government existed, the Islamists were accused of widespread corruption and failure to engage in any meaningful reconstruction.³

The results of the January 2009 provincial elections provided evidence of this turn away from purely sectarian politics. In Anbar province, where the IIP had nominally been in control of local government, the party was forced to ally with tribal figures in order to have any hope of appealing beyond its urban Islamist base. This alliance was not enough to prevent its being swept aside by a coalition of tribal Awakening leaders and Saleh al-Mutlak's Iraqi National Project Gathering, which drew strong support from former Baathists.⁴

In Ninewa, the stridently Arab nationalist al-Hadbaa National List won an absolute majority of provincial council seats through its virulent opposition to years of Kurdish dominance of provincial government and to Kurdish control in the northern parts of the province.⁵ Secularists, Arab nationalists, and parties focused on local dynamics pushed aside sectarian-oriented Islamists.

A Cross-Sectarian Coalition with Sunni Backing

It was in this atmosphere of prevailing secularism and anti-sectarianism that the Iraqi National Movement (Iraqiyya), headed by the secular Shi'a former prime minister Ayad Allawi, began to take shape as the dominant alliance among Sunni Iraqis.

Allawi's first attempt to assemble an alliance of secular nationalists around his Iraqi National Accord (Wifaq) had met with limited success in the January 2005 parliamentary elections. Subsequent attempts to expand the appeal of Allawi's Iraqi National List (INL) by incorporating secular or tribal Sunni partners failed to improve the alliance's electoral fortunes in the December 2005 elections. Sunni voters favored Tawafuq's explicit concern for their own sectarian constituency, while Allawi's list had to split the limited anti-sectarian vote among the Sunnis with Mutlak's first Arabist nonsectarian political party, the Iraqi National Dialogue Front (Hiwar).

Allawi's alliance continued to lose ground during the nadir of Iraq's sectarian conflict. Its guiding principles were at odds with the prevailing sentiments underpinning political identity. Foreshadowing the wave of defections that Allawi's list would suffer in 2011-2012, a number of key members of the coalition, both Shi'a and Sunni, defected from the coalition in protest variously at Allawi's stubbornness, failure to lead, and his refusal to consult with his colleagues.⁶

As violence receded and Iraqis turned against sectarianism, however, the INL's 2005 failures began to serve to its advantage. It was not tarnished by incumbency during a period of conflict and corruption that Iraqis overwhelmingly seemed to reject. Moreover, as prime minister of the Interim Government from June 2004 to May 2005, Allawi had pushed a secular liberal line, marginalizing the Shi'a Islamists in government.

Allawi had also attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to incorporate Sunni nationalist insurgents into the Iraqi state and the political process, seeking to divide them from foreign extremists such as AQI. Although Allawi's tenure had coincided with the Sunni political boycott, his philosophy was appealing to Iraqis tired of civil war.

 <p>AYAD ALLAWI</p>	<p>Born in 1945 in Baghdad Educated in Iraq and Britain Defected from Baath Party in mid-1970s Shi'a Arab Prime Minister of Iraqi Interim Government, June 2004-May 2005 Iraqi National Accord (Wifaq)</p>	 <p>SALEH AL-MUTLAK</p>	<p>Born in 1947 in Fallujah, Anbar province Educated in Iraq and Britain Expelled from the Baath Party in 1977 Sunni Arab Deputy Prime Minister for Services, December 2010-present Iraqi National Dialogue Front (Hiwar)</p>
 <p>TARIQ AL-HASHEMI</p>	<p>Born in 1942 in Baghdad Educated in Iraq Joined Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) in 1970s Sunni Arab Vice President of Iraq, April 2006-September 2012 Renewal List (Tajdeed)</p>	 <p>RAFIA AL-ISSAWI</p>	<p>Born in 1966 in Fallujah, Anbar province Educated in Iraq Studied medicine before joining IIP; elected to parliament on Iraqi Accord Front (Tawafuq) list in 2005 Sunni Arab Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, May 2006-July 2007; Deputy Prime Minister for Security Affairs, July 2007-2010; Finance Minister, December 2010-March 2013</p>
 <p>OSAMA AL-NUJAIFI</p>	<p>Born in 1956 in Mosul, Ninewa province Educated in Iraq Trained as an electrical engineer, progressed through Electricity Ministry Sunni Arab Minister of Industry and Minerals, May 2005-May 2006; Speaker of Parliament, December 2010-present Iraqi National Gathering (Iraqiyoun)</p>	 <p>ATHEEL AL-NUJAIFI</p>	<p>Born in 1958 in Mosul, Ninewa province Educated in Iraq Studied engineering and law before forming Al-Hadbaa list Sunni Arab Governor of Ninewa, April 2009-present Unified National al-Hadbaa Gathering (Al-Hadbaa)</p>
 <p>JAMAL AL-KARBOULI</p>	<p>Born in 1965 in Babel province Educated in Iraq Member of the al-Karabla clan of western Anbar Studied medicine and was elected president of the Iraqi Red Crescent Society Sunni Arab National Movement for Development and Reform</p>	 <p>AYAD AL-SAMARRAI</p>	<p>Born in 1946 in Baghdad Educated in Iraq before fleeing to Britain Joined Muslim Brotherhood in 1960s and became head of IIP in exile in 1990s Sunni Arab Speaker of Parliament, April 2009-December 2010 Joined Iraqiyya in 2011 when the Iraqi Center Alliance (Wasat) became part of the coalition</p>

FIGURE 1 | KEY IRAQIYYA LEADERS IN 2010

Incorporating Sunni Politicians

Looking ahead to the 2010 parliamentary elections, Allawi sought to broaden his alliance's base further by reaching out more explicitly to Sunni politicians. The new partners included other national figures of avowedly nonsectarian outlook, Sunni Islamists seeking to distance themselves from the IIP, and figures with strong local constituencies in predominantly Sunni provinces.⁷

Saleh al-Mutlak

Key among Allawi's new Sunni allies was Saleh al-Mutlak, a former Baathist who had been one of the main Sunni representatives during the process of writing the Iraqi constitution. An opportunist with a resume full of contradictions, Mutlak was expelled from the Baath Party in 1977 but had continued to praise it during the constitution-writing process as "the best party we have seen," refusing to vote for the constitution he had helped draft because it outlawed the Baathists.⁸

At the same time, Mutlak was one of the founders of the Iraqi National Dialogue Council, a group dominated by Sunni Islamists. As a result, he drew criticism from hardline Baathists.⁹ Mutlak subsequently split from the National Dialogue Council over the issue of the

constitution to form Hiwar. He was the face of the Hiwar-led Iraqi National Project Gathering for the 2009 provincial elections, which won a small handful of seats in Diyala and Salah ad-Din and formed part of the governing coalition in Anbar.

Tariq al-Hashemi

The second key group of new Iraqiyya leaders was comprised of Sunni Islamists who turned away publicly from the IIP and Tawafuq in order to ride the wave of secular Iraqi nationalism. The most senior of these figures was Tariq al-Hashemi, a long-time IIP leader who served as the party's general secretary until May 2009. Hashemi was appointed Vice President of Iraq after the December 2005 elections. Despite his career in the IIP and the allegations of terrorism that have subsequently seen him sentenced to death *in absentia* from exile in Turkey, Hashemi was at one point considered by the Bush Administration as a leader of a coalition intended to counter the rising influence of Shi'a cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.¹⁰

Hashemi pushed for greater Sunni involvement in the political process and in Iraq's security forces and opposed de-Baathification. In 2007, Hashemi drafted a document called the "Iraqi National Compact," a statement of

anti-sectarian and anti-extremist principles. As a result, his influence within the IIP began to decline. With the Islamists' own fortunes declining, Hashemi announced in September 2009 that he was leaving the IIP to form his own ostensibly nationalist, nonsectarian party of politicians, academics, and tribal leaders, which he named the Renewal List (Tajdeed).¹¹ Hashemi brought with him to Iraqiyya a number of Islamists who saw that they could no longer compete strongly under the banner of the IIP.

Rafia al-Issawi

A second former IIP member to become a key Iraqiyya leader was Rafia al-Issawi. Issawi is a member of the powerful Albu Issa tribe in Anbar province who became a doctor in Fallujah, where he ran a hospital during the Second Battle of Fallujah in November 2004. As part of the IIP's Tawafuq alliance, Issawi became a Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in the first Maliki government before withdrawing from the government with four other Tawafuq ministers in 2007, demanding that Maliki release Sunni prisoners and take stronger action against Shi'a militias.¹² When Tawafuq returned to the government in July 2008, Issawi was appointed Deputy Prime Minister for Security Affairs.¹³ In 2009, he broke with the IIP to establish his own party, the moderate, nonsectarian National Future Gathering (Mustaqbal).

Osama al-Nujaifi

Like Issawi, Osama al-Nujaifi came to prominence as a conservative but moderate Sunni with a strong local base in his home province. Osama and his brother Atheel are from an influential merchant family in Mosul in Ninewa province. The brothers had avoided politics publicly under Saddam Hussein while remaining friendly with the Baathists.¹⁴

An electrical engineer by training, Osama al-Nujaifi worked his way through the Iraqi Electricity Ministry before establishing his own company.¹⁵ He was appointed as Minister of Industry and Minerals in Ibrahim al-Jaafari's Iraqi Transitional Government, during which time he opposed the ratification of the constitution.¹⁶ A member of Ghazi al-Yawar's Baathist-linked Iraqiyoun party, Osama al-Nujaifi was elected to parliament in December 2005 on the Iraqi National List alongside Ayad Allawi.

The Nujaifi brothers rose to power by drawing on anti-Kurdish sentiment in the disputed territories of northern Iraq, particularly in Ninewa province.¹⁷ In June 2006, Osama al-Nujaifi claimed in parliament that Kurdish-dominated villages in Ninewa were of Arab origin, prompting 55 Kurdish MPs to walk out in protest.¹⁸ He later accused "Kurdish militias" of conducting a campaign of ethnic cleansing against minority populations, particularly Assyrian Christians, in Ninewa.¹⁹

Ahead of the 2009 provincial elections, Atheel al-Nujaifi was extremely outspoken in his criticism of the Kurds' governance record, calling for the resignation of all Kurdish politicians involved in local government.²⁰ Atheel accused Kurds in Ninewa of pursuing the interests of the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) at the expense of the province, particularly with regard to control of disputed territories along Ninewa's border with the Kurdish region, agriculturally rich and yielding the promise of oil reserves.²¹

On the provincial level, the Nujaifis sought to capitalize on the nonsectarian wave by pulling together an alliance of powerful urban and rural forces under the al-Hadbaa banner. The Nujaifis represented the Maslawi urban merchants; Abdullah Humaidi al-Yawar, the brother of a Shammari chief, was the most high profile tribal leader; and former Baathists, particularly army officers, were strongly represented. Arabized Kurdish tribes, particularly the Zeibari, Turkmen, and a small number of anti-Kurdish Shabaks, Yazidis, and Christians were also included.

Al-Hadbaa's stated goals were both national and local. It called for Iraq's Arab and Islamic identity to be recognized, and for an end to the U.S. occupation that they claimed had facilitated Kurdish domination of the provincial government.²² It also campaigned on a platform of provincial development and the disbanding of all militias.²³

Al-Hadbaa won a majority of the vote at the 2009 provincial elections, taking 19 of the 37 provincial council seats and installing Atheel al-Nujaifi, who received more votes as an individual than any other candidate in Iraq, as governor.²⁴ Atheel al-Nujaifi naturally allied the al-Hadbaa list with that of his brother's Iraqiyya coalition at the national level for the 2010 parliamentary elections.²⁵

Jamal al-Karbouli

The final key component of the Iraqiyya coalition at the 2010 elections was the National Movement for Development and Reform (al-Hal), led by Jamal al-Karbouli. Like Rafia al-Issawi, Karbouli has strong tribal ties in Anbar province and a background in medicine. He rose to public prominence in Iraq as the head of the Iraqi Red Crescent Society.²⁶ Karbouli founded al-Hal in 2008 on a nonsectarian platform, intending to bring together politicians and tribal figures.

While most of the key component parties were led by Sunnis, Allawi's reconstituted alliance included a number of parties and figures that bolstered the coalition's cross-sectarian credentials. In addition to Allawi's Wifaq and Mutlak's Hiwar, which included some Shi'a and Christian figures, Iraqiyya included the Iraqi Turkmen Front, representing the Turkmen minority in northern Iraq. It also included a number of independent Shi'a politicians.

Iraqiyya's appeal to Iraqi Sunnis

Iraqiyya was intended to attract a broad range of voters within the Sunni population as well as secularist Shi'a. This offered tangible benefits to Sunni leaders who could not hope to win nationally without appealing to voters beyond the Sunni minority. Ayad Allawi's position as the coalition's leader provided tangible evidence of cross-sectarian partnership and connection to a history of liberal secularism.

While none of the leaders had been high-ranking Baath Party members, and a number of them had ostensibly opposed Baathism under Saddam, many had demonstrated an ability to work with Baathists and to champion the cause of those affected by de-Baathification laws. A number of the new leaders had significant tribal backing or ties to specific and significant Sunni constituencies.

The alliance was officially secular in orientation, but contained enough former IIP members to appeal to religiously conservative constituencies. Moreover, in the face of the IIP's decline since 2005 and its poor showing at the 2009 provincial elections, figures such as Hashemi could portray themselves as having listened to the voters and shed the weight of past failures.

The leadership of the new Iraqiyya was also cross-generational, seating experienced figures such as Allawi, Mutlak, and Hashemi alongside a younger generation of Sunni leaders. Where Allawi and Mutlak had been educated in Britain and Hashemi's political education had come through the IIP's decades underground and in exile, their new colleagues had been educated and had established themselves professionally inside Saddam's Iraq.

The newcomers — the Nujafis, Issawi, and Karbouli — were not career politicians and, while never lacking for personal and political goals in the fight for power and resources, were able to convey a technocratic and professional image.

Iraqiyya's momentum leading into 2010 was unmistakable. It reflected a new mood of anti-sectarianism in Iraq, and could claim to represent both Sunnis and Shi'a as well as some minorities. Many of its leaders publicly had rejected Tawafuq and the corruption and poor governance with which it was associated. The new list was poised to compete strongly in the parliamentary elections, ensuring significant Sunni participation in what was expected to be a pluralistic, cross-sectarian government.

IRAQIYYA'S DECLINE

The breadth of the new Iraqiyya's appeal also put limits on its long-term viability. Such a diverse coalition held a strong position in a climate of anti-sectarianism and secularist nationalism. This encouraged Iraqiyya's Shi'a rivals to work to undermine the coalition and to exploit its internal divisions. The predominance of Sunnis within Iraqiyya rendered it vulnerable to charges that it was simply a Sunni body with a Shi'a head and was no less sectarian than its Shi'a rivals.

The involvement of regional Sunni states — particularly Turkey, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates — in encouraging, facilitating, and funding the list lent weight to these charges.²⁷ The historic links of some of its members to the Baath Party, moreover, presented targets under Iraq's de-Baathification procedures. As its rivals moved to exploit these vulnerabilities, fractures began to appear between some of the unlikely allies within the coalition.

De-Baathification

Iraqiyya's apparent strength as a cross-sectarian list with significant Sunni support immediately posed an electoral threat to its political rivals, particularly Maliki's State of Law Alliance and the Shi'a Islamist parties. Two months before the scheduled date of the 2010 parliamentary elections, the Accountability and Justice Commission (AJC), which oversees de-Baathification, ruled that nearly 500 candidates registered for the upcoming parliamentary elections should be disqualified on the grounds of support for the Baath Party.²⁸

The AJC was led by Ali Faisal al-Lami, a member of former Prime Minister Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress and himself a registered Iraqi National Alliance candidate for the parliamentary elections.²⁹ The AJC move appeared to be intended both to increase the weight of sectarianism in the political landscape — thus favoring parties representing the Shi'a majority at the elections — and to delegitimize Iraqiyya.

Seeking to avoid charges of sectarian conduct, Lami and Chalabi did not only ban Sunni candidates, but predominantly Sunni provinces generally saw a much higher number of candidates affected than other provinces outside Baghdad.³⁰ The Iraqi National Alliance, composed primarily of Shi'a Islamists, was almost untouched, and the most prominent member of Maliki's State of Law Alliance to be listed was Defense Minister Abd al-Qadir al-Obeidi, a Sunni.³¹

Chief among those affected was Saleh al-Mutlak. Mutlak's praise of the Baath Party during the constitution-writing process almost half a decade prior had not precluded his involvement in politics. As one of the senior leaders of an electoral list with significant appeal both to Sunnis and to secularist non-Sunnis, however, he had now become a target for opponents.

Also affected, albeit briefly, was Jamal al-Karbouli, whose al-Hal party was one of 15 entities originally proscribed by the AJC. Tawafuq head Thafir al-Ani was also targeted.³² The episode cemented the perception among Iraqi Sunnis that moves taken under the aegis of de-Baathification were attacks on their own community.³³

The Effect of De-Baathification upon 2010 Parliamentary Elections

The de-Baathification move quickly met with success in prompting renewed sectarian tensions. Provincial government members in southern, predominantly Shi'a provinces attacked what they claimed were Baathist plans to destabilize Iraq, and anti-Baathist demonstrations took place across the south, often led by Shi'a Islamist parties.³⁴ This cleavage widened when Maliki stated his support for the de-Baathification moves. His Da'wa party organized its own anti-Baath protests in Baghdad and Basra.³⁵

When a specially created Cassation Panel reinstated the banned candidates under the condition that they could not take office until investigations were completed, Maliki and State of Law opposed the ruling, claiming that the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) should ignore the ruling and follow the original AJC decision.³⁶

As southern provinces began to implement their own anti-Baathist investigations and policies, it appeared for a brief period that Lami's campaign had succeeded in pushing Mutlak and Iraqiyya out of the electoral race.³⁷ This experience would have a significant effect on Mutlak, who would subsequently turn repeatedly towards compromise with Maliki to avoid a repeat of his near-expulsion from politics.

Iraqiyya's decision to run in the elections after all was rewarded when it emerged as the overall winner of the March 2010 parliamentary elections. The alliance won nearly 25 percent of the popular vote, earning 91 parliamentary seats, two more than Maliki's State of Law. Iraqiyya owed its position primarily to the Sunni population, for whom it was the overwhelming choice, receiving more than 80 percent of Sunni votes.³⁸

Iraqiyya's Marginalization in Government Formation

The de-Baathification crisis was the first of repeated attempts by Shi'a parties to paint Iraqiyya as a list catering specifically to Sunnis.³⁹ Linking Iraqiyya to the Baath Party diminished the alliance's ability to attract political support from other parties, particularly Shi'a groups, with which it might otherwise have been able to form a governing alliance. Even as votes were being counted, State of Law threatened not to recognize the

results, claiming irregularities in the counting process and organizing demonstrations in the provinces where it fared well.⁴⁰

Although Maliki likely prepared a case well before the elections, just days after the final results were announced the prime minister submitted a query to the Federal Supreme Court on whether the constitution's use of the term "largest Council of Representatives bloc," the group given the first shot at forming a government after elections, referred to coalitions as they existed at the time of voting, or to coalitions once they entered parliament after the elections.⁴¹

Four days later, the judicial body ruled that a post-election coalition was entitled to take precedence in government formation. This placed Maliki, as the sitting prime minister who had enjoyed years of opportunity to amass leverage over potential partners and cement networks of patronage, in a particularly strong position.

Damaged by the de-Baathification crisis and prevented from taking the lead in government formation by an alliance between State of Law and the Iraqi National Alliance, Iraqiyya's electoral success was quickly stunted. This led to tensions within the alliance's leadership, particularly over the extent to which Allawi's insistence on taking the premiership limited Iraqiyya's ability to negotiate with other lists.⁴²

During the period of government formation, Allawi accused Mutlak of seeking to desert him for Maliki; Mutlak, in turn, complained of Allawi's monopolization of decision-making; and Nujaiifi and Issawi blamed Allawi's obsession with being appointed prime minister for Iraqiyya's ultimate failure to win a major role in government.⁴³ Jamal al-Karbouli and his al-Hal party were rumored to be negotiating with Maliki over abandoning Iraqiyya for State of Law.⁴⁴

Iraqiyya in the Second Maliki Government

When the second Maliki government finally was formed in December 2010, Iraqiyya received a number of positions of importance, but not a concrete and universally set of terms by which this government would be run. Political blocs, particularly Iraqiyya, subsequently referred to an "Erbil Agreement" concerning government negotiation, although no such document was ever published officially.

Each faction also appeared to have its own conception of what had been agreed, some of which had no basis in the Iraqi constitution.⁴⁵

This was most evident in Allawi's appointment to the head of the National Council for Strategic Policy, a body whose remit was not defined and which was never actually established.⁴⁶ Moreover, the national unity government necessitated a compromise with Kurdish parties, something that contradicted the political platform of Iraqiyya figures such as Osama al-Nujaiifi and the expressed preferences of many Sunni Iraqiyya supporters.⁴⁷

Iraqiyya did emerge with control of a number of ministries, the most important of which was the Finance Ministry headed by Rafia al-Issawi. Jamal al-Karbouli's brother Ahmed was given the contract-rich Ministry of Industry. However, most of the appointments were lacking in power. Hashemi was returned as vice president, and Saleh al-Mutlak was given the vague position of deputy prime minister for services, the responsibilities and powers of which he subsequently admitted had never been defined.⁴⁸

Osama al-Nujaiifi, however, was given the role of speaker of parliament, a position that would come to afford him significant independence and influence through control of the parliamentary agenda. This influence would be challenged as Maliki sought systematically to undermine the power of Iraq's legislature.⁴⁹

The position of defense minister, which was to be filled by an Iraqiyya nominee under the terms of the government formation agreement, remained vacant indefinitely; having been reduced to a subordinate role in government, Iraqiyya lacked the leverage necessary to force Maliki to accept one of its candidates. Taking advantage of the confusion over the details and legal authority of the agreement, Maliki subsequently claimed that the deal specified only that a Sunni rather than an Iraqiyya nominee should head the defense ministry.

Maliki used this opportunity to appoint as acting defense minister Saadoun al-Dulaimi, a Sunni member of the Unity Alliance of Iraq, a secular, cross-sectarian coalition dominated by Anbar Awakening leader Ahmed Abu Risha and secular Shi'a former Interior Minister Jawad al-Bolani.⁵⁰ In so doing, Maliki took the first step

towards establishing a pattern of using Sunni allies to maintain a thin veneer of Sunni representation and participation in his policies even as he marginalized more popular elected Sunni leaders.

After having won the 2010 elections, Iraqiyya now found itself a junior partner in a national unity government that, while paying lip service to the concept of ethno-sectarian balance, was dominated by Maliki. Iraqiyya had enough high-profile positions in government and parliament to tie it into the government, but not enough power to check Maliki without working with other political blocs. Moreover, the other key blocs outside Maliki's circle to which it would need to appeal were at odds with the Sunnis on key issues: the Kurds on the disputed territories, and the Sadrists on de-Baathification.

Concern at Maliki's consolidation of power would in many cases be the sole factor uniting the prime minister's rivals, allowing him to ward off potential challenges through a mixture of concession and coercion. The alternative to pulling together such a broad opposition alliance would be to boycott the government. Iraqiyya would attempt to employ both strategies in the next two years. Its efforts were unsuccessful, its leaders marginalized, and its hold on government weakened even as did little to check Maliki's growing power.

Losing Shi'a, Gaining Sunnis

Saadoun al-Dulaimi's appointment highlights the fact that in 2010, Iraqiyya was not the Sunni population's sole choice for political representation at the national level. Sunnis who were not drawn to the secular nationalist platforms offered by Iraqiyya and the Unity Alliance of Iraq could vote for the Tawafuq list, now dominated more than ever by the IIP.⁵¹ Over time, however, Iraqiyya would come to constitute the Sunni population's *de facto* political representation in national politics. This diminished the coalition's standing among non-Sunnis, allowing its opponents to portray Iraqiyya's leaders as having been sectarian Sunni advocates all along.

This process occurred in two overlapping phases. First, Iraqiyya absorbed the other key parties with significant Sunni representation. Following the 2010 vote, Tawafuq, now led by former parliamentary speaker Ayad al-Samarrai of the IIP, joined with Bolani's Unity Alliance

and a number of independent MPs to form the Iraqi Center Alliance (Wasat).⁵² Bolani himself had failed to win a seat through his own secular-Shi'a Constitution Party in the 2010 elections.

However, his Unity Alliance partner, Ahmed Abu Risha, is a dominant figure in Anbari politics, and the new coalition brought together members of two important constituencies, Sunni Islamists and Anbari tribes. In the summer of 2011, first Bolani and then the rest of Wasat joined Iraqiyya.⁵³ This left Iraqiyya as the only major political bloc in Iraq with significant Sunni support.

The second phase in Iraqiyya's transformation was the gradual peeling-away of secular Shi'a representatives, particularly during 2011. Many of the defectors blamed Ayad Allawi directly or indirectly for his lack of leadership and his refusal to consult, or at times even communicate, with members of his Wifaq party, which suffered most of the losses.⁵⁴

Maliki also made concerted efforts to court Shi'a figures within Iraqiyya, and many of the defectors subsequently became a source of support for many of Maliki's policies and positions.⁵⁵ A further round of defections from Wifaq took place in December 2011, when Wifaq MPs from a number of southern provinces withdrew from the bloc citing Iraqiyya's lack of clear direction, lack of a national project, and the restriction of involvement in decision-making.⁵⁶

Dissent within Iraqiyya was not restricted to disaffection with Allawi. Two of the MPs who left in early 2011 were actually expelled.⁵⁷ One of them, Qutaiba al-Jubouri, publicly accused Mutlak and Hashemi of ejecting him without Allawi's knowledge because of his criticism of their lack of achievements, claiming that he had gathered 60 signatures supporting his campaign to replace Hashemi as vice president.⁵⁸

When senior Wifaq MP Iskandar Witwit, a Shi'a and an influential figure in his native Babel province, announced his withdrawal from Iraqiyya in January 2012 to form a new independent party, he noted that Iraqiyya was no longer run by Allawi but by "people from the blocs under the umbrella of the list," attributing the bloc's failures to the domination of Sunni leaders and their abandonment of the list's cross-sectarian direction.⁵⁹

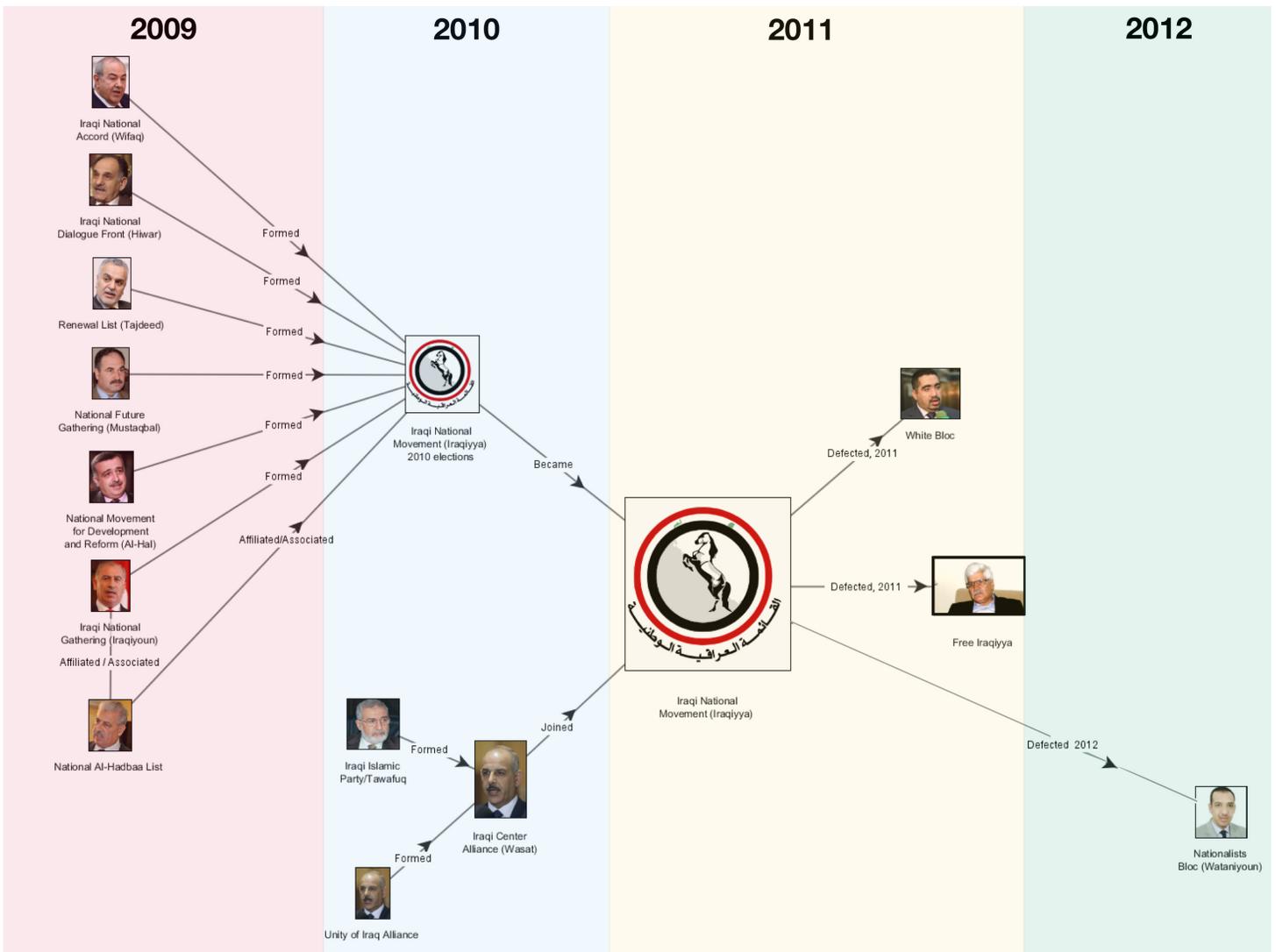


FIGURE 2 | THE FORMATION AND EARLY SPLINTERING OF IRAQIYYA*

Maliki's Maneuvers

At the cabinet level, Maliki has worked repeatedly to damage the credibility of Iraqiyya ministers. In August 2011, Maliki forced the removal as electricity minister of Raad Shalal al-Ani, a member of al-Hal, accusing Shalal of signing fraudulent contracts worth \$1.7 billion with foreign companies.⁶⁰ Maliki subsequently fought al-Hal's attempts to replace Shalal with one of their own, seeking instead to install an ally from his own bloc, Deputy Prime Minister for Energy Hussein al-Shahristani, in an acting capacity.⁶¹

Shahristani retained a close watch on the running of the ministry as part of his energy portfolio even after Maliki finally relented and allowed the nomination of al-Hal's Karim Aftan al-Jumaili.⁶² Karim Aftan would eventually

be expelled from Iraqiyya in February 2013 for breaking a subsequent cabinet boycott; at that time, he insisted that he was a technocrat and had never been a political candidate.⁶³

In a similar vein, Maliki forced the resignation of Ayad Allawi's cousin, Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi, as communications minister in August 2012.⁶⁴ In an August 27 letter to Maliki, Mohammed Tawfiq complained of political interference in the work of the ministry, pointing in particular to infringement upon his work by Hiyam al-Yasiri, an advisor in the telecommunications department installed by Maliki.⁶⁵ Accusing Yasiri of exceeding her brief and building her own power base within the ministry, Mohammed Tawfiq demanded that Maliki remove her; when the

* For more information on the White Bloc and Free Iraqiyya, see Footnote 54.

premier did not respond, the minister resigned.

Accepting the resignation while also implying that the outgoing minister had failed to tackle corruption at the ministry, Maliki replaced Mohammed Tawfiq in an acting capacity with Minister of State for Provincial Affairs Turhan Mufti of the Iraqi Turkmen Front.⁶⁶ Installing Mufti allowed Maliki to conduct outreach to Turkmen not already in his camp and establish a new relationship of patronage. Doing so in an acting capacity also prevented opponents from seeking to install an ally of their own through parliament.

Maliki has also targeted Iraqiyya MPs in order to silence critics and discourage others from following their lead. In February 2012, Maliki pressed the judiciary to have parliament lift immunity from two high-profile Iraqiyya deputies on the grounds that they had criticized the judiciary, particularly its close relationship with Maliki. Haider al-Mulla, the spokesman for Saleh al-Mutlak's Hiwar party, and Adnan al-Janabi, head of the parliamentary oil and energy committee and a close ally of Ayad Allawi, had criticized the judiciary's role in the Hashemi affair.⁶⁷

The judiciary also sought to remove immunity from Wasat MP and head of the parliamentary human rights committee Salim al-Jubouri.⁶⁸ While the attempt to remove immunity from these MPs came to nothing, it discouraged others from criticizing Maliki's relationship with the judiciary for fear of retribution, particularly after leaving parliament.

The Kurdish Question

Few issues have proven more difficult for Iraqiyya since 2009 than the question of regional autonomy, particularly with regard to the Kurds. As the overwhelming electoral choice of Sunnis, particularly in the northern provinces that share borders with the Kurdistan region, much of Iraqiyya's political support comes from constituencies virulently opposed to the Kurds.

Leaders such as Rafia al-Issawi and Jamal al-Karbouli must also be mindful that their political constituencies in Anbar province, while not contending directly with the issue of Kurdish power, are traditionally supporters of Iraqi unity in the face of movements towards regional autonomy. A commitment to maintaining the strength

and authority of the central government was one of the main tenets of Iraqiyya's "national project" in 2010.⁶⁹

As Maliki's power has grown, however, Iraqiyya has been forced repeatedly to choose between cooperating with Kurdish leaders, particularly Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) President Massoud Barzani, in attempting to limit Maliki's power, and siding with Maliki in the name of Iraqi Arab unity. This, in turn, has presented Maliki with numerous opportunities to exacerbate differences between Iraqiyya members and between the alliance's leaders and their political bases.

This has been a particular problem for Osama al-Nujaifi, who has been caught between his campaign to establish himself as one of Iraq's preeminent statesmen — even a genuine rival to Maliki — and his need to maintain his political base in Ninewa province.⁷⁰ This campaign has forced Nujaifi to vacillate between strongly worded criticisms of Maliki and compromises on behalf of his constituents.

He has also been affected by Atheel al-Nujaifi's apparent rapprochement with the Kurds in Ninewa, who initially withdrew from the provincial government upon Nujaifi's assumption of the governorship in 2009 only to be enticed back into the fold in 2012 amid rumors of secret deals regarding oil contracts and revenues.⁷¹

Maliki's relations with the Kurds reached a new low in September 2011 over the issues of hydrocarbons contracts and the disputed territories. Nujaifi launched the first of a number of statesman-like initiatives to resolve the conflict. Particularly notable were a joint Nujaifi-Maliki press conference and statement, ostensibly about terrorist attacks in Karbala and Anbar, but implying strongly the possibility of a united Iraqi Arab front against the Kurds over the disputed territories.⁷²

Additionally, Maliki made a significant concession to the Nujaifis over the actions of predominantly Shi'a security forces in Ninewa that had been accused of illegal arrests of Sunnis and torture of detainees. Maliki's decision to pull from Ninewa two senior security officers, Counterterrorism Operations commander Hassan Karim Khadir and Iraqi Second Army Division commander Abd al-Nasir al-Ghanam, appeared to mollify Osama al-Nujaifi, albeit briefly.⁷³

It also had the effect of pulling Nujaifi further from Ayad Allawi, prompting public criticism from Allawi's spokeswoman Maysoon al-Damalouji.⁷⁴ The need to balance opposition to the increasingly authoritarian prime minister, which is strengthened by working with Kurdish leaders who also oppose Maliki, with playing to an Arab nationalist base at odds with the Kurds in the disputed territories, has consistently been a thorn in Nujaifi's side.

External Pressures Widen Internal Divisions

Relations between Allawi and other Iraqiyya leaders, particularly Mutlak and Nujaifi, became increasingly strained as Allawi's star waned. Communication within the bloc was so poor that Mutlak's Hiwar party announced that the alliance was continuing to pursue the establishment of the National Council for Strategic Policy, the body apportioned to Allawi during government formation, in spite of Allawi's public renunciation of the project.⁷⁵

Meanwhile, Allawi responded to Nujaifi's high-profile efforts on the national stage with implicit criticism, proposing a new committee to investigate a number of political disputes, particularly those between Baghdad and Erbil.⁷⁶ Increasingly, Allawi made announcements through his own Wifaq party rather than through Iraqiyya, demonstrating his marginalization within the bloc.

The Hashemi Move

A key example of the internal dissent and lack of consistency inherent in Iraqiyya's political strategy was the bloc's response to the move against Tariq al-Hashemi. A long-time critic of the prime minister, Hashemi was Maliki's clearest target as U.S. forces withdrew from Iraq in December 2011.⁷⁷ Maliki sent tanks and security forces to surround Hashemi's residence in Baghdad's Green Zone on December 15, just hours after U.S. troops departed the country.

A number of Hashemi's guards were arrested, beaten, and forced to make confessions that implicated Hashemi in a terrorist attack on parliament in November 2011. While numerous further arrests of Hashemi's bodyguards were made, Hashemi himself fled first to the Kurdistan region, then to the Gulf, before establishing himself in Turkey, whence he has intensified his criticism of Maliki.

In response to the move against Hashemi, Iraqiyya leaders held an emergency meeting at the vice president's residence on the evening of December 16. The next day the bloc announced that it was boycotting parliament, and subsequently began a cabinet boycott. At this point, Maliki also moved against Saleh al-Mutlak after Mutlak, playing to his base, publicly called the premier a dictator with a record "worse than Saddam Hussein."⁷⁸

Maliki responded by asking parliament to withdraw confidence in Mutlak, and a day later was reported to have banned Mutlak from cabinet meetings. In a rare show of solidarity, Iraqiyya's other ministers in turn refused to attend cabinet meetings. Iraqiyya's response, however, was a profound miscalculation that diminished its power in government and laid bare its internal disunity. The decision to boycott parliament demonstrated a failure to take into account Maliki's weakening of parliament as an institution.

Iraqiyya Boycotts Parliament

The unwise nature of the boycott prompted further dissent within the bloc. Six MPs — three from Nujaifi's Iraqiyyoun and three from Karbouli's al-Hal — refused to continue the boycott and were expelled from Iraqiyya on January 7, 2012.⁷⁹ The three Iraqiyyoun MPs announced their departure to form the Nationalists' Bloc (Wataniyyoun), openly criticizing the boycott policy and, in a key harbinger of future opposition to Nujaifi, the pro-federalist positions of "certain Iraqiyya leaders."⁸⁰ More members of al-Hal announced on January 19 that they were returning to parliament in order to "safeguard the unity of Iraq."⁸¹

Growing internal tensions exacerbated by a failing strategy forced Allawi to end the parliamentary boycott on January 29. Iraqiyya had failed to convince Maliki to revisit the Hashemi case or to soften his position against Mutlak. Meanwhile, parliament continued to reach quorum about as regularly as it did before the boycott, leaving the bloc without a voice during ongoing budget negotiations.

There were further reports, moreover, that Allawi, Mutlak, and Nujaifi had clashed over returning to parliament, with Allawi and Mutlak ultimately forced to agree with Nujaifi's push to re-enter parliament in order to ensure that provincial constituents were not unduly impacted by the new budget.⁸²

The cabinet boycott, too, faltered quickly as it became clear that the policy was more dangerous than promising. An extended period of absence from government risked robbing Iraqiyya's ministers of their most important means of access to resources, influence, and patronage. As a result, at least six of Iraqiyya's nine ministers continued to attend either full cabinet meetings or meetings of cabinet sub-committees.⁸³

Three members attended cabinet meetings openly and repeatedly: al-Hal members Industry Minister Ahmed al-Karbouli and Electricity Minister Karim Aftan al-Jumaili, and Minister of State for Provincial Affairs Turhan Mufti of the Iraqi Turkman Front. Responding to rumors that the three would be expelled from Iraqiyya, Allawi was forced to announce that these three had been granted dispensation to attend cabinet meetings "in the interests of the citizens."⁸⁴

Agriculture Minister Iz al-Din al-Dawla (Iraqiyoun) and Education Minister Mohammed al-Tamim (Hiwar) also attended at least one cabinet meeting, and Science and Technology Minister Abd al-Karim al-Samarrai, who had left Tawafuq to join Hashemi's Tajdeed party, was reported to have attended a meeting of the energy subcommittee.⁸⁵

On January 17, 2012, Maliki ordered security forces to prevent Iraqiyya cabinet holdouts from entering their ministry offices, and the cabinet boycott crumbled.

The faltering response to Maliki's move against Hashemi further diminished Iraqiyya's political stature and internal cohesion. It also appeared to accentuate distances between the bloc's leaders. Hashemi fled, as briefly did Mutlak. Issawi allowed his name to be attached, alongside those of Allawi and Nujaiifi, to a December 27 *New York Times* op-ed piece excoriating Maliki, but he was largely cowed into silence by threats against him.⁸⁶ Karbouli appeared to be on the fence about whether to oppose Maliki at all.

Nujaiifi, meanwhile, appeared to be trying to fashion an independent course for himself, possibly to avoid prompting another Maliki putsch. On the one hand, he denied talks with Kurdish leaders about initiating a vote of no confidence in Maliki; and disclaimed involvement in the December op-ed piece to which his name was

attached alongside those of Allawi and Issawi.⁸⁷ At the same time, however, Nujaiifi was said to have voted for expelling MPs who broke Iraqiyya's parliamentary boycott.⁸⁸

The Failed No-Confidence Campaign

The issue of intra-Sunni divisions became even more prominent during the 2012 campaign for a vote of no confidence in Maliki. The vote became the key oppositional response to the Hashemi crisis in the first half of 2012. The question of a no-confidence campaign emerged from statements by KRG President Barzani and Sadrist parliamentary leader Bahaa al-Araji that Iraq should undergo new elections to replace Maliki.⁸⁹

Such a campaign would require three political blocs with significant histories of antagonism toward one another — Iraqiyya, the Kurds, and the Sadrists — to coordinate their efforts closely. Any one side of this triangle alone would have been difficult to solidify. As a result, Iraqiyya was divided internally over the prospect from the very beginning, with Nujaiifi disclaiming any knowledge of such proceedings, various ministers and MPs refusing to join Iraqiyya's boycotts of government and parliament, and southern Shi'a members such as Iskandar Witwit quitting the alliance altogether.

While Allawi continued to trumpet the possibility of removing Maliki, issuing unlikely ultimatums and publishing another anti-Maliki editorial in the U.S., Osama al-Nujaiifi appeared initially to take a pragmatic middle course.⁹⁰ Nujaiifi joined the anti-Maliki camp unambiguously only in April 2012, likely spurred by moves by Maliki to intimidate two heads of independent institutions that had opposed the premier's attempts to expand his power, Independent High Electoral Commission head Faraj al-Haidari and Central Bank of Iraq Governor Sinan al-Shabibi.⁹¹

On April 20, Nujaiifi told media sources that a "change in the pyramid of power" would be needed if the government remained unwilling to address outstanding issues, and he stated subsequently that Maliki was facing his last chance to share power with other major political blocs.⁹²

This heralded the beginning of a period of apparent close coordination between unlikely allies. On April

28, 2012, Allawi and Nujaifi joined Barzani, Talabani, and Muqtada al-Sadr in Erbil, where they produced a 9-point ultimatum to which they insisted Maliki respond within 15 days.⁹³ While Allawi's spokeswoman Maysoun al-Damalouji claimed that Allawi would support "any alternative" to Maliki, it was clear that other members of Iraqiyya were less sanguine about some of the Sadrist-proposed alternatives to Maliki.⁹⁴

Allawi and Nujaifi's growing alliance with Kurdish leaders provided Saleh al-Mutlak, whom Maliki had locked out of the cabinet and sought to replace, with an opportunity for rapprochement with the prime minister. On April 27, Mutlak stated that withdrawing confidence from Maliki was "not on the cards" at the present time. In the same statement, Mutlak openly criticized his colleagues' newfound allies, accusing the Kurds of threatening the unity of Iraq and rejecting federalism and regional autonomy as a "worst" option.⁹⁵

Mutlak's anti-Kurdish gambit appeared to work, moreover: on May 11, he announced that Maliki had decided to withdraw his request to sack him.⁹⁶ Caught between a Sunni base increasingly in opposition to Maliki and a prime minister intent on consolidating power along sectarian lines, Mutlak would appear to vacillate between ally and opponent of Maliki before ultimately emerging as the premier's key Sunni ally ahead of the 2013 provincial elections.

Maliki's Response

With Mutlak on his side, Maliki went on the offensive in order to split the nascent Iraqiyya-Kurdish alliance over the issue of the disputed territories. In early May 2012, he travelled to Kirkuk to hold a cabinet meeting in the disputed province at which he stated publicly that for all its different ethnic and religious communities, Kirkuk was Iraqi in identity.⁹⁷ The move was a calculated attempt to draw a line between the Kurds, who had long claimed parts of Kirkuk as their own, and Iraqiyya, which had won half of Kirkuk's parliamentary seats in 2010 primarily through support from anti-Kurdish Arabs and Turkmen.

Maliki's statement drew praise from Sunnis in Kirkuk, with one provincial council member saying that Iraqiyya had "failed" Kirkuk and that by contrast the province's

Arab residents were "proud" of and "honored" by the positions of the National Alliance.⁹⁸

Maliki-allied MP Mohammed al-Sayhud singled out Osama al-Nujaifi in particular, calling on the parliamentary speaker to make clear his position on Kirkuk, reiterating that Iraqiyya had won Sunni votes by rejecting the Kurdish presence in the disputed territories.⁹⁹ Highlighting the success of Maliki's turn against the Kurds in winning Sunni support, a number of current and former Iraqiyya MPs from Ninewa, Kirkuk, and Diyala subsequently released a statement expressing their support for Maliki's stance against federalism and regionalism and his defense of Iraq's Arab majority.¹⁰⁰

Maliki then capitalized on this momentum by taking the cabinet to Nujaifi's home town of Mosul in Ninewa province at the end of May, exactly at the time that Nujaifi was again in Erbil meeting with Kurdish leaders, alongside Allawi and Sadr.¹⁰¹ While the agenda of the meeting primarily involved questions of public services, and Maliki even made some suggestions about giving local governments such as Atheel al-Nujaifi's administration in Ninewa greater autonomy on fiscal matters, it was clear that Maliki's visit was intended to exacerbate the friction between Nujaifi and his base.

The premier followed up the session with a conference with over 100 influential provincial and tribal figures, further cementing his Iraqi Arabist credentials in the face of Nujaifi's Kurdish rapprochement.¹⁰² Osama Nujaifi and Allawi were forced to hold a meeting in Mosul on June 9 in response, inviting Saleh al-Mutlak as well as Atheel al-Nujaifi. The meeting was held while Kurdish leaders and Sadrist representatives were gathering in Erbil in an attempt to place some distance between the Arab Iraqiyya leaders and their sometime allies.¹⁰³ Once again, Iraqiyya leaders were torn between the need to work with other opponents of Maliki and their Sunni constituents' distaste for these new allies.

Iraqiyya Damaged and Divided

The no-confidence campaign against Maliki had collapsed by June 2012.¹⁰⁴ Muqtada al-Sadr had been coerced back into unenthusiastic support of the premier under Iranian pressure, and President Talabani saw no reason to make himself vulnerable by supporting a

doomed anti-Maliki bid.¹⁰⁵ The campaign had proven extremely painful for Iraqiyya. Relations between Allawi and other leaders had diminished even further, with Allawi's standing in Iraqi politics in serious decline.

A May 2012 poll by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner suggested that Sunni support for Allawi's Wifaq had fallen 16 points since mid-2011, while Sunni support for Mutlak's Hiwar had also declined, although a lesser extent.¹⁰⁶ Iraqiyya found itself between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, Iraqiyya leaders' inability to combat Maliki's growing power made them appear weak and ineffectual. On the other hand, their willingness to work with the Kurds and Sadrists, their only chance for opposing Maliki, hurt their popularity among Sunnis.

Iraqiyya's leaders emerged from the failed no-confidence campaign damaged and divided, their inability to limit Maliki's expansion of power exposed. Tariq al-Hashemi was in exile in Turkey; when he was sentenced to death *in absentia* in September 2012, the ruling elicited barely a whimper from his coalition colleagues. This muted response indicated the extent to which the alliance had been divided and demoralized by Maliki, as well as the extent to which Hashemi had become a political liability.¹⁰⁷

Mutlak's legitimacy with his Sunni base was eroded as he appeared to achieve full rapprochement with Maliki in July 2012, doubtless motivated in large part by his brush with electoral expulsion in 2009. Mutlak threw his weight behind Maliki's anti-Kurdish policies for the promise of an expanded, or at least deepened, ministerial portfolio.¹⁰⁸ In a key indicator of the Arab nationalist coalition that would emerge for the 2013 elections, Jamal al-Karbouli's al-Hal followed Mutlak in aligning with Maliki against the Kurds.¹⁰⁹

Ayad Allawi appeared increasingly irrelevant to Iraqi politics, while Rafia al-Issawi maintained a low profile as he focused on running the Finance Ministry. Osama al-Nujaifi's relationship with his political base had been undermined, and he was forced to continue criticizing Maliki's security policies with regard to the Kurds.¹¹⁰

From his position as head of parliament, Nujaifi emerged as the principal leader among Sunni politicians seeking to oppose the prime minister.¹¹¹ His relationship with his political base in ethnically divided Ninewa, however, would

limit his effectiveness in combating the prime minister's consolidation of power, forcing him to choose between the anti-Kurdish chauvinism for which he was elected and the need to work with the Kurds against Maliki.

Iraqiyya Fractures before 2013 Provincial Elections

By the end of 2012, the weight of Maliki's repeated attempts to harass, sideline, and manipulate Iraqiyya's leaders caused the alliance to fracture along internal fault lines that had long been apparent. Nujaifi and Issawi had positioned themselves as Maliki's key Sunni rivals; Mutlak and Karbouli had set themselves up as moderate and willing to work with the prime minister. The coalitions that registered for the 2013 provincial elections in late 2012 demonstrated Iraqiyya's demise as an alliance incorporating all the major Sunni parties. The main coalitions to emerge were united largely around their orientation towards Maliki and their strength with the Sunni base.

Mutahidun

The largest coalition to emerge from the wreckage of Iraqiyya was the United (Mutahidun), led by Osama al-Nujaifi. The coalition comprised Osama al-Nujaifi's Iraqiyoun, Atheel al-Nujaifi's al-Hadbaa, Rafia al-Issawi and Thafir al-Ani's Mustaqbal, and Abd al-Karim al-Samarrai of the IIP. Among provincial figures, the coalition also included Anbari strongman and Sahwa leader Ahmad Abu Risha and Salah ad-Din Provincial Council Chairman Ammar Yusuf.

Both Islamist and more secularist parties were represented, as were the Iraqi Turkmen Front of Arshad Salehi. Comprised of high-profile figures with strong political bases in Ninewa, Anbar, and Salah ad-Din, as well as the IIP and a local party in Diyala, the coalition was poised to perform strongly on an anti-Maliki platform.

Arab Iraqiyya

By contrast, Saleh al-Mutlak's Arab Iraqiyya coalition represented the faction within Iraqiyya historically most amenable to accommodation with Maliki. The list included Mutlak's Hiwar, al-Hal (led for the elections by Mohammed al-Karbouli), and the Iraqi Republican Gathering, a group that had explicitly supported Maliki in the past.¹¹²

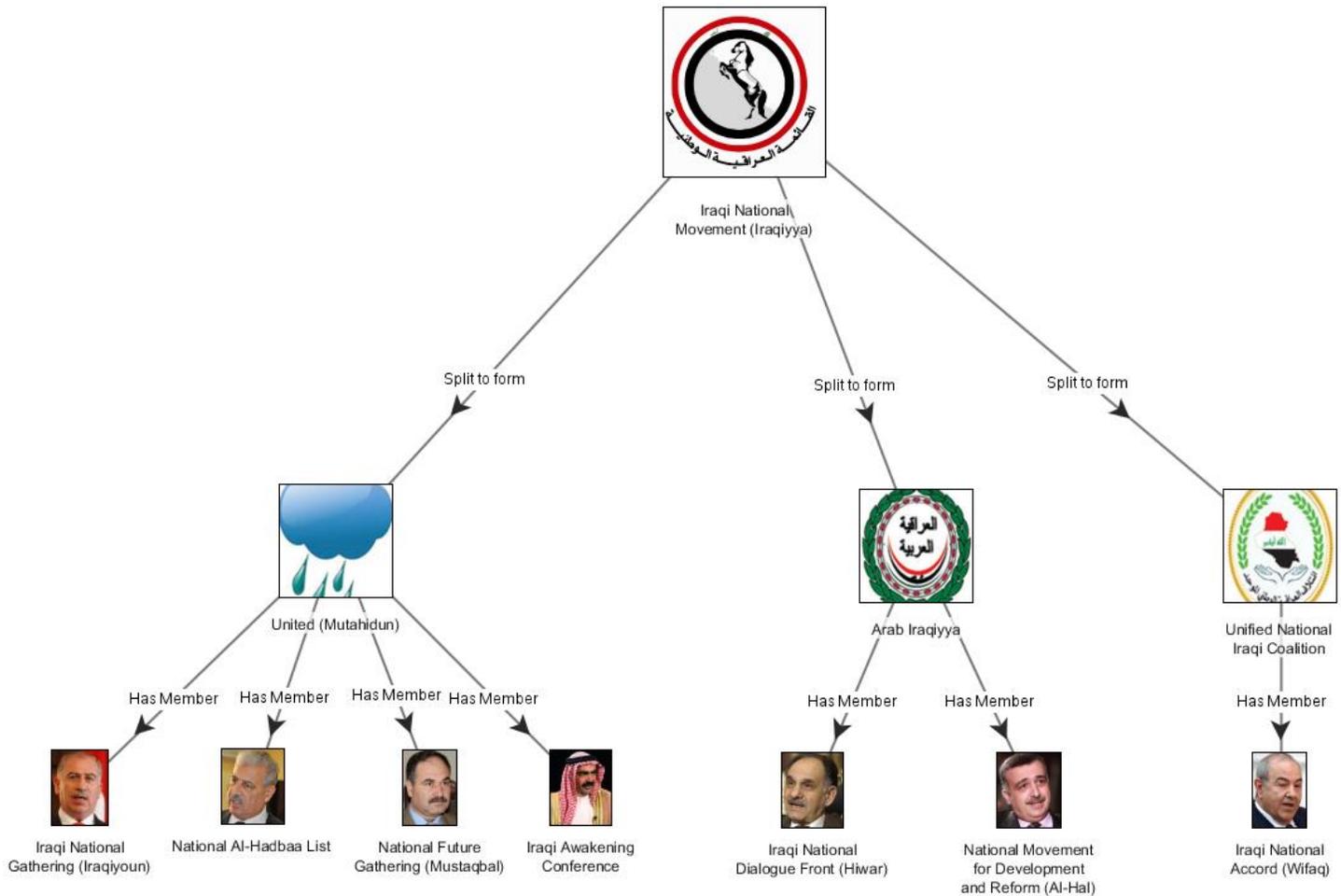


FIGURE 3 | THE SPLINTERING OF IRAQIYYA IN 2013

In Ninewa, Mutlak and Karbouli were joined by a number of smaller parties that had explicitly opposed the Nujafis, including Wataniyoun, a group that broke away from Osama al-Nujaiifi’s Iraqiyoun, and the al-Hadbaa Free Gathering, a party explicitly named in juxtaposition to Atheel al-Nujaiifi’s al-Hadbaa. Mutlak and Karbouli’s use of the Arab Iraqiyya label suggested that they were seeking to appeal to Arab nationalists as well as to present themselves as the heirs to Iraqiyya’s successes of 2009-2010.¹¹³

In interviews launching their coalition’s election campaign, Mutlak and his allies criticized Nujaiifi’s leadership of parliament and hit hard at the Nujafis’ weakest points vis-à-vis the Sunni electorate, emphasizing the Nujafis’ ties to the KRG and the Turkish government, supportive references to federalism, and ties to Sunni Islamist parties.¹¹⁴ On March 27, 2013, on the eve of provincial elections, Mutlak’s spokesman Haider al-Mulla went so far as to pronounce “the death of the

Iraqiyya list,” accusing “neo-Islamists” — Osama al-Nujaiifi and Rafia al-Issawi — of seeking to implement the sectarian division of Iraq.¹¹⁵ By contrast, they presented their own list as secular Arab nationalists, working for the unity of Iraq and opposing Kurdish expansionism in the disputed territories.¹¹⁶

Abdullah al-Yawar

A third challenger to the Nujafis was Abdullah al-Yawar, who headed the United Ninewa Coalition and was allied with Raad al-Shakir in Salah ad-Din under the United Salah ad-Din Coalition banner. Having split from the Nujafis over their rapprochement with the Kurds in Ninewa, Yawar assembled coalitions encompassing Sunni nationalist groups such as the Unified Arab Political Council and the Unified Arabism Movement. In both cases, Yawar and his allies were set up to play strongly to Arab opposition to the Kurdish presence in the disputed territories, seeking to take votes from the Nujafis.

A RENEWED SECTARIAN SELF-IDENTITY

On December 13, 2012, IHEC spokesman Safa al-Moussawi announced that the electoral commission had extended the registration period for 2013 provincial election coalitions, based on the large number of applications submitted.¹¹⁷ The key coalitions representing the Sunni population already appeared in the provisional lists of coalitions updated continually on IHEC's website. By the time the registration process had been completed, however, a series of developments had begun that would come to threaten the likelihood of Sunni participation in the political process.

Counter-terrorism forces raided the home of Rafia al-Issawi inside Baghdad's Green Zone on December 20, 2012.¹¹⁸ Five of Issawi's bodyguards were arrested: it subsequently came to light that two other members of Issawi's personal security team had been arrested on terrorism charges in the previous two days. The timing of the arrests coincided both with the extended deadline for the registration of electoral coalitions — pushed back to December 20 — and with the anniversary of the arrest of Tariq al-Hashemi's bodyguards in December 2011.

The timing of the raids, their similarity to those carried out against Hashemi, and the use of counterterrorism forces — long dubbed the Fedayeen al-Maliki, a play on the “Fedayeen Saddam” — made clear that the move against Issawi was politically motivated and emanated from the prime minister's office.¹¹⁹

Hashemi had been an increasingly vocal critic of Maliki's sectarian, pro-Shi'a policies in the months before he was forced to flee. In contrast, Issawi had adopted a relatively low profile since his house had been surrounded by security forces at the time of the move against the vice president. At the time of the Hashemi arrests, Issawi had participated in Iraqiyya's boycott of parliament and the cabinet, and had publicly level accusations against Maliki of attempting to build a new dictatorial regime in Iraq.¹²⁰

Since the boycott policy had broken down, however, Issawi had graced few headlines. He had been involved in mediating a provincial dispute between his Finance Ministry and the Anbar provincial government over customs dues from border crossings.¹²¹ Issawi was also reported to have headed reconciliation efforts among

prominent Anbari leaders in August after the chairman of the Anbar Provincial Council's investment committee threatened to report Issawi to Maliki for corruption.¹²² Issawi had not made any public pronouncements against Maliki, abstaining even from criticizing the removal of the governor of the Central Bank of Iraq, suggesting that he had been effectively intimidated by Maliki's move against Hashemi.

Issawi's entrance into an electoral coalition with the Nujafis, however, rendered him a high-profile target for Maliki. Issawi's popularity in Anbar province is such that his involvement threatened to deliver large numbers of votes to Mutahidun candidates. Issawi had also been mentioned as a possible outside contender to replace President Jalal Talabani, who was hospitalized by a stroke days before Maliki's move against the finance minister. Unlike Osama al-Nujaiifi, moreover, Issawi had given up his parliamentary immunity to prosecution when he became a minister, leaving him open to judicial proceedings.

The Protest Movement

The Issawi raids were the last straw for many Sunnis. After years of perceived targeting by security forces under the guise of counter-terrorism and of political marginalization by Maliki, Sunnis began to voice their grievances in ways they had not done before, presenting themselves as an ethno-sectarian community with a largely agreed-upon set of complaints.

Although this was done initially in response to the harassment of a national-level Sunni politician, the protests that have developed in majority-Sunni provinces have further highlighted the impotence of existing Sunni leaders on the national political stage in the face of Maliki's maneuvers. Religious and tribal leaders, provincial politicians, and civil activists have emerged into this space to compete for influence, with significant implications for the future of Sunni political participation in Iraq.

Within hours of the raid on Issawi's Baghdad residence, demonstrations were underway in Anbar province, spreading to Ninewa and Salah ad-Din within days. Protesters in Issawi's hometown of Fallujah chanted, “Down, Down, al-Maliki,” while in Mosul they focused less on Issawi than on the treatment of female detainees

1. Release all female prisoners accused under the Counterterrorism Law and referral of their cases to their home provinces; refer the women of Baghdad specifically to Anbar; and transfer the case against Rafia al-Issawi and his guards to courts in Anbar; prosecute culpable officers and rapists connected with the above-mentioned cases.
2. End implementation of the death penalty.
3. Freeze execution of Article 4 of the Counterterrorism Law until it can be voided by parliament.
4. Parliament should pass the General Amnesty Law, remove exceptions, and release all prisoners.
5. Freeze execution of the Accountability and Justice Law until parliament can repeal it.
6. Achieve balance in all institutions of the state, especially the military, security services, and judiciary.
7. Repeal the operations commands in all provinces and all unconstitutional elements of the security services; withdraw the army from cities and inhabited neighborhoods in Baghdad and the provinces; remove the concrete barriers; work fervently to provide security to citizens; and devolve responsibility for security to local police.
8. Reinvestigate cases related to religious and national leaders inside and outside Iraq in neutral judicial forums free from political influence.
9. Prohibit the use of sectarian phrases and slogans in state institutions, especially in the security services and the media.
10. Undertake a comprehensive national census before the next general elections, including reference to religious, sectarian, and ethnic identity.
11. End arbitrary night raids, arrest accused persons in the light of day by legal methods, and end the "secret informer" law.
12. Form a Federal Supreme Court of professional and non-corrupt judges who do not belong to any specific ruling party or bloc, to serve as an independent, non-politicized judiciary.
13. Return all mosques and other religious properties as well as private properties improperly taken under expropriation, and repeal Law No. 19 of 2005 [the Law Governing the Holy Shrines and Shi'a Pilgrimages, which formally separated the Shi'a and Sunni religious endowments.]

FIGURE 4 | THE 13 DEMANDS ISSUED BY PROTESTERS IN ANBAR, NINEWA, AND SALAH AD-DIN IN JANUARY 2013

from Ninewa who had been reported raped and tortured in Baghdad prisons.¹²³ Protesters in Ramadi blocked the main highway from Baghdad to the Syrian and Jordanian borders.¹²⁴ In Samarra, the Salah ad-Din Provincial Council announced its support for peaceful demonstrations and urged the federal government to respond to the protesters' demands.¹²⁵

Over the next two weeks, smaller demonstrations were organized elsewhere in Salah ad-Din as well as in Diyala and Kirkuk. Isolated demonstrations took place in majority-Sunni areas of Baghdad, particularly Adhamiyah, although Maliki was quick to use security forces to restrict movement in and around the capital. Within a week, the Anbar protests had emerged as the focal point of the demonstrations, with tribes from Salah

ad-Din, Diyala, Baghdad, Maysan, and Basra sending delegations to Ramadi.¹²⁶

From the beginning, the imagery of the anti-government protests demonstrated a range of grievances and intentions among protesters. Protesters flew different versions of the Iraqi flag, including the three-starred version of the late-Baathist period (1994-2004) and the post-invasion flag that included the three stars but not Saddam Hussein's handwriting. The use of each of these flags suggested that protesters were seeking to distinguish a Maliki-ruled Iraq from a period in which Sunnis enjoyed greater power. The prevalence of the contemporary Iraqi flag, however, pointed to a strong nationalist current within the protests that saw the protesters as true Iraqis and the Maliki government as a tool of Iran.¹²⁷

Black and white flags bearing the *shahada* (the Islamic creed) demonstrated the presence of Sunni Islamists within the protests, but the flag of the Islamic State of Iraq, the al-Qaeda front group, did not appear. By contrast, Free Syrian Army flags were flown by some protesters, particularly in Anbar, suggesting an emotive or ideological connection to the revolution ongoing across the Syrian border. In Mosul on December 27, protesters chanted the slogan of the Arab Spring, “the people want to bring down the regime,” highlighting their connection to revolutions that had taken place across the Arab world.¹²⁸

Through late December 2012 and early January 2013, provincial officials attempted to take ownership of the protests, styling themselves as spokespeople for Sunni sentiment, particularly with the western media. At the same time, however, groups referring to themselves as coordinating committees began to identify themselves

publicly as the organizers of the protests.

A group referring to itself as the Coordination Committees of the Revolution issued a statement on December 28 insisting that Iraqis were united in their opposition to Maliki’s sectarian rule. Facebook pages and Twitter handles for groups referring to themselves as “support committees” or “coalitions” were registered and began to display images of the protests. These sites began to be used to disseminate the labels attached to the protests, particularly as smaller protests outside Anbar and Mosul began to die down, surging only immediately following Friday prayers.

The early protests appeared generally to be relatively peaceful, united, and spontaneous. In contrast to protests against the Maliki government in 2011, however, they occurred exclusively in Sunni-majority areas of Iraq. Although protesters and leaders continued to call



FIGURE 5 | ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS IN SUNNI-MAJORITY AREAS OF IRAQ, DECEMBER 2012-MAY 2013



PHOTO 1 | PRESENT-DAY IRAQI, ISLAMIST, AND BATHIST-ERA FLAGS AT PROTEST IN FALLUJAH, JANUARY 2013

for the avoidance of sectarian slogans, the geography and iconography of the protests, as well as the demands issued by the protesters, demonstrated the emergence of a sectarian, Sunni Arab identity that defined itself largely by its grievances against the Maliki government.

Emerging Leaders

Sunni clerics emerged as key figures among those presenting themselves as speaking for the protesters. As Friday protests became the focal point of the protest movement, sermons became a key medium for criticizing Maliki's government. Two figures in particular emerged as emblems of the demonstrations: Abd al-Malik al-Saadi, styling himself as the protesters' spiritual guide, and Said al-Lafi, the spokesman of the protests in Anbar.

Abd al-Malik al-Saadi, born in Hit in Anbar to a clerical family, is one of Iraq's most senior Sunni scholars. Under the Baathist regime, Saadi preached and taught Islamic studies, directing a religious school in Ramadi before being appointed to the board of trustees of the

Saddam University for Islamic Studies in 1992. In 2001, he moved to Jordan to teach at Mutah University in Amman.¹²⁹

A moderate figure, Saadi denounced the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq but refused to call for insurgency. Instead, he supported efforts to increase employment in his native province of Anbar to discourage disaffected Anbaris from joining al-Qaeda. In 2007, Saadi was elected Grand Mufti of Iraq, but refused to accept the position.¹³⁰ He remained in Jordan, escaping the fate of his brother Abd al-Alim, a member of the Sunni Endowment in Anbar who was assassinated by AQI in July 2010.¹³¹

Saadi reappeared in Iraq on December 30, 2012, addressing protesters in Ramadi. Crying before the protesters over the state of sectarian tensions in Iraq, Saadi insisted that demonstrations must remain peaceful and that Sunnis must coexist with Shi'a, even as he denounced Maliki's rule.¹³² He subsequently attempted to follow a line similar to that of Shi'a Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the highest ranking Shi'a cleric in Iraq, in

 <p>ABD AL-MALIK AL-SAADI</p>	<p>Considered the spiritual leader of the Ramadi and associated protests One of Iraq's most senior Sunni scholars Briefly countenanced tribal defense militias after Hawija incident, but quickly clarified that he endorsed only self-defense Leading initiative for negotiation with government, but rejects politicians' involvement</p>	 <p>SAID AL-LAFI</p>	<p>Spokesman for the Anbar Coordination Committee based in Ramadi Thought to be member of Iraqi Islamic Party Key figure in presenting 13 demands of the protesters Regularly appears with Muthahidun politicians at protests Has made inflammatory anti-government speeches Target of repeated arrest attempts by security forces on accusations of terrorism</p>
 <p>AHMED ABU RISHA</p>	<p>Powerful Anbari tribal leader Led Anbar Awakening after death of his brother Abd al-Sattar Abu Risha in 2007 Former member of Unity of Iraq Alliance, which joined Iraqjiyya in 2011 Leading member of Muthahidun Uncle of Muhammed Khamis Abu Risha, accused of involvement of killing of five soldiers in Ramadi on April 27</p>	 <p>AHMED AL-ALWANI</p>	<p>Anbari leader of the Iraqi Islamic Party Member of Muthahidun Hosts meetings of the six-province coordinating committee at his residence in Ramadi Vocal proponent of regional autonomy for Anbar Has accused Iraqi Shi'a of subservience to Iran</p>
 <p>SHALAN AL-KARIM</p>	<p>Wealthy tribal leader in Salah ad-Din Vocal proponent of regional autonomy for Salah ad-Din in 2011 Former member of Ayad Allawi's Iraqi National Accord (Wifaq) Split from Wifaq to form the Coalition for Authentic Iraq Rival of Salah ad-Din Provincial Council Chairman</p>	 <p>ALI HATEM AL-SULEIMAN</p>	<p>Heir apparent to the leadership of the Dulaim tribal federation Awakening leader who formed his own party, the National Salvation Front, briefly supportive of Maliki Regularly makes incendiary anti-Maliki speeches in Ramadi Announced formation of "Army of Pride and Dignity" in Anbar Removed from candidacy in Anbar provincial election for incitement to violence</p>
 <p>MUTHANNA AL-DHARI</p>	<p>Qatar-based spokesman for Muslim Scholars Association, movement established in 2003 to coordinate pro-insurgency Sunni clerics in Iraq Has called current protests the "third stage" in insurgency against the Iraqi state Muslim Scholars Association is influential in Tikrit and Fallujah protests</p>	 <p>IZZAT IBRAHIM AL-DOURI</p>	<p>Vice-president and deputy chairman of the Iraqi Revolutionary Command Council under Saddam Hussein Thought to be in hiding in Syria in 2009, but now claims to be active in Iraq Commander of Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al-Naqshabandi (JRTN), a neo-Baathist insurgent group JRTN affiliate Free Iraq Uprising influential in Mosul and Hawija protests</p>

FIGURE 6 | KEY FIGURES OF INFLUENCE OVER ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS

shunning the attention of politicians.¹³³

Saadi did, however, meet with a delegation sent by Muqtada al-Sadr in early February. This allowed Sadr to express a populist, anti-sectarian stance in presenting limited support to the protests.¹³⁴

Said al-Lafi, the head of the Anbar Coordination Committee, emerged as one of the key on-the-ground leaders, regarded initially as the spokesman for the Anbar protests. Lafi is a young religious scholar who appears in public in cleric's robes and preaches forcefully to the protesters in formal Arabic. In contrast to Abd al-Malik al-Saadi, Lafi is rumored to belong to a political party (the IIP) and took a visible role in leading and representing the protesters. He has met regularly with provincial and national politicians, particularly Rafia al-Issawi, and tribal leaders such as Ahmed Abu Risha.¹³⁵

The influence of both clerics, and particularly Abd al-Malik al-Saadi, was evident in the list of demands that were announced by the coordination committees in Anbar and Ninewa on January 6 [see figure "13 demands"].¹³⁶ Many of the demands were broad and referred to long-held grievances among Sunnis, such as the insistence that the government cease the use of

Article Four of the Counterterrorism Law to conduct mass arrests in predominantly Sunni areas and a demand for the repeal of the Accountability and Justice Law of 2008 that governs de-Baathification.

Two demands, however, stand out as having first been proposed publicly by Saadi in an interview on the *al-Baghdadia* television channel on December 31, 2012.¹³⁷ The first demand, that female prisoners held in Baghdad be transferred to detention in Anbar, and the final demand, that the law formalizing the division between Shi'a and Sunni religious endowments be repealed, were both first articulated by Saadi during this interview. The latter demand, in particular, has not been taken up by any other Sunni figure speaking for the protesters, implying that Saadi had great influence over the formulation of the list of demands.¹³⁸

Despite the fact that many of the protesters' demands referred to grievances substantiated by evidence—particularly with regard to the lack of sectarian balance within the state and security forces—the formulation of these demands in fact placed the Sunnis in a more difficult position. The demands that execution of Article Four of the Counterterrorism Law and the Accountability and Justice Law be frozen until both laws can be struck down in parliament imply a failure to

understand how such demands would be read outside the Sunni community.

Shi'a figures with an interest in opposing Maliki, at least for the duration of the provincial election campaign, such as Muqtada al-Sadr and Ammar al-Hakim of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), have been discouraged from voicing more than lukewarm support for the protests by such demands, which run counter in particular to the hard line Sadrism position on de-Baathification.¹³⁹ Voicing support for these demands would prove extremely popular with these leaders' political bases.

Shi'a seeking to castigate Maliki for his consolidation of power have been forced to distinguish between the protesters' "legitimate demands" and those that they oppose outright. As a result, the expansive nature of the demands has limited the ability of the protesters and the politicians catering to them to draw support from across the sectarian divide, further isolating the Sunni minority.

The demands of the protesters subsequently increased and intensified as a result of a confrontation at Fallujah. On January 25, protesters in eastern Fallujah attempting to reach the demonstration site were blocked at a checkpoint by security forces deployed from Baghdad. The demonstrators threw rocks and water bottles at the checkpoint, prompting security forces to fire first in the air and then directly into the crowd, killing seven and wounding more than 60.¹⁴⁰

The incident was followed by clashes between AQI gunmen and security forces in two areas of eastern and southern Fallujah.¹⁴¹ The next day, Ahmed Abu Risha appeared on television to issue an ultimatum to Maliki: the government must turn over the members of the security forces responsible for killing the protesters within seven days or risk "losses among their ranks."¹⁴² The demand was one that Maliki was never likely to consider, and Abu Risha's deadline came and went without response.

Political Reactions

The crisis deepened once more in March 2013 when Maliki turned his attention back to Issawi. Issawi had been present and vocal at demonstrations in Anbar since December 26, when he addressed protesters at

Ramadi to denounce the arrests of his security detail, the politicization of the Iraqi judiciary that had allowed the arrests, and the corruption of the Maliki government.¹⁴³

Issawi subsequently led a boycott of Maliki's cabinet by Iraqiyya ministers — a move that met with even less success than the boycott in the aftermath of the Hashemi arrests.¹⁴⁴ Sensing an opportunity to remove a number of opponents from the cabinet altogether, Maliki announced that boycotting ministers would be placed on "compulsory leave."¹⁴⁵

While the Sadrists insisted initially that their ministers would not take over Iraqiyya's ministries, the lure of the contract-heavy finance ministry proved irresistible, and on February 4, Muqtada al-Sadr announced that he had approved Planning Minister Ali al-Shukri's assumption of the finance minister post on an acting basis.¹⁴⁶ Issawi responded by resigning publicly on March 1, delivering a blistering speech at the Ramadi protest in which he told demonstrators that he had chosen to side with "his people" rather than remain within a Maliki government that had rejected "any principle of partnership."¹⁴⁷

Having rejected Maliki's government and returned to Anbar to assume the role of the prime minister's most vocal critic, Issawi once more became the premier's key target. On March 12, Issawi's convoy was intercepted by security forces while travelling from Ramadi to the town of Rutba in western Anbar to attend the funeral of a provincial election candidate who had been assassinated the previous day.¹⁴⁸

While the move was reported as an attempt to arrest Issawi, whom Maliki had accused of corruption, it appeared more like an attempt to intimidate Issawi into fleeing the country as Tariq al-Hashemi had done. A government source subsequently claimed that Issawi had sought to flee to Jordan following the incident, seeking to discredit him.¹⁴⁹ Issawi denied the claims, insisting that he would leave Anbar only as a "dead body."¹⁵⁰

National Sunni Politicians Divide over Protests

Issawi's return to Anbar highlighted a stark choice for Sunni politicians as the protest movement intensified: to side with the demonstrators against the Maliki government, or to seek accommodation with Maliki. In

the context of provincial elections, the former option offered legitimacy with a large portion of the Sunni base and a ready-made stage for campaigning; the latter ensured access to nodes of power and resources, such as ministries and provincial posts, through which to maintain patronage networks.

The cleavage between factions of national-level Sunni politicians widened as the protests continued and as Maliki continued to maneuver against Sunni leaders. The leaders of Osama al-Nujaifi's Mutahidun bloc — the Nujaifi brothers, Issawi, Ahmed Abu Risha, and leading IIP members such as Ahmed al-Alwani — appeared regularly at protests in Anbar, Ninewa, and Salah ad-Din. Izz al-Din al-Dawla, a member of Nujaifi's Iraqiyoun party, followed Issawi's lead in resigning from the government on March 8, denouncing the Maliki government and the killing of protesters in Mosul by federal police.¹⁵¹ According to Issawi, Science and Technology Minister Abd al-Karim al-Samarrai also announced his resignation at a protest in Samarra.¹⁵²

On the other side, the Mutlak-Karbouli Arab Iraqiyya bloc continued to work with Maliki in a number of ways. Mutlak attempted to present himself as a mediator between the protesters and the government, working alongside Deputy Prime Minister Hussein al-Shahristani, a key Maliki ally, as part of a five-person committee tasked with addressing the protesters' demands. The strategy did little to endear Mutlak to the demonstrators: on December 30, he was chased from the Ramadi protest under a hail of shoes, rocks, and bottles by protesters angry at his continued involvement in the government.¹⁵³

Education Minister Mohammed Tamim of Mutlak's Hiwar and Industry Minister Ahmed al-Karbouli of al-Hal returned with Mutlak to cabinet meetings in late March. An official Iraqiyya statement condemned the decision to return to the cabinet meetings.¹⁵⁴ This prompted a war of words between Mutlak, who accused his former colleagues of seeking to establish an autonomous Sunni region in western Iraq, and Nujaifi's Mutahidun, who accused Mutlak of "selling his conscience" to Maliki.¹⁵⁵

Postponement of Provincial Elections in Anbar and Ninewa

The postponement of provincial elections in Anbar and Ninewa, Nujaifi and Issawi's home provinces and

the areas in which the anti-governments are largest, highlighted this division and Maliki's place in it. Using a rise in violence, particularly against provincial elections candidates and likely perpetrated by AQI, as justification, on March 19 Maliki's cabinet announced that elections in the two provinces would be postponed for up to six months.¹⁵⁶ The cabinet decision came after an overwhelming majority of the Anbar Provincial Council requested that the election be postponed, citing security concerns.¹⁵⁷

Among those supporting the postponement were Saleh al-Mutlak, who claimed that the postponements were essential to preventing the Nujaifi-Issawi faction from pursuing federalism, and Anbar Governor Qasim Mohammed al-Fahdawi, who has been accused of seeking to minimize the Anbar protests in order to remain on the side of Maliki.¹⁵⁸ Fahdawi was elected in alliance with Ahmed Abu Risha in 2009 but subsequently sought to carve out an independent relationship with the prime minister; for the 2013 elections, he put together his own coalition, Abirun. In contrast, 13 political blocs and some 400 electoral candidates stated their opposition to the postponement, most prominently the Mutahidun.¹⁵⁹

The electoral delay in the two key Sunni-majority provinces transparently was a political decision intended to strengthen Maliki's Sunni allies and hamper his strongest opponents. The postponement was meant to prevent the Nujaifis, Issawi, and their allies from using the anti-government protests to rally their constituencies against Maliki. It provided time for Mutlak and his allies to emerge as Maliki's mediator to the protesters, announcing major concessions on some of the protesters' key demands. It also further encouraged the divisions emerging among Sunnis over their position towards the government.

Having returned to cabinet meetings, Mutlak and his allies appeared closer to Maliki and even to Muqtada al-Sadr than to their former Iraqiyya colleagues. Mutlak and Karbouli travelled to Beirut on March 22 to meet with Sadr: ministers allied with each leader ended their respective cabinet boycotts four days later.¹⁶⁰ Following his return to government, Mutlak announced on April 7 that the cabinet had approved a draft amendment to the Accountability and Justice Law that would allow Baath party members up to the level of division (*firqa*) chief

to rejoin the civil service and allow a large proportion of members of the Fedayeen Saddam, the Baathist paramilitary organization, to receive pensions.¹⁶¹

Tellingly, the Sadrists abstained from the vote rather than opposing it despite their historic support for sweeping de-Baathification.¹⁶² The confluence of the coordinated return to cabinet meetings and the Sadrist abstention from opposing the de-Baathification reforms implies a deal made in Beirut between Mutlak, Karbouli, and Sadr, although it is not immediately clear what Sadr might have gained in return. Mutlak underscored the break with his former Iraqiyya colleagues when he met with National Alliance head Ibrahim al-Jaafari on March 29 to discuss “national unity.”

More than ever, Sunni politicians were now divided and turned against one another. Mutlak was now Maliki's key Sunni ally, with his Arab Iraqiyya coalition positioned to play a role in the political majority government that Maliki has threatened repeatedly.¹⁶³ The Nujaifi-Issawi faction, meanwhile, was marginalized in national political terms. Nujaifi holds power only in parliament, a body that Maliki has worked systematically to undermine.

Issawi and Ahmed Abu Risha are isolated in Anbar, while rumors about their imminent arrests continue to circle. Increasingly, this faction has identified itself as the opposition. Rafia al-Issawi claimed in early April that he had told State Department adviser Brett McGurk that he and the “leaders of the Iraqiyya list,” including Ayad Allawi, Osama al-Nujaifi, Thafir al-Ani, and Salman al-Jumaili, took an “identical position” to the presidency of the Kurdistan region in opposing “autocracy and dictatorship.”¹⁶⁴ With the Iraqi Kurds boycotting both the cabinet and parliament, this placed the Nujaifi faction in the role of *de facto* opposition, a position that might bring political legitimacy at the expense of power.

Divisions within the Protest Movement

Divisions among groups within the protest movement also became increasingly apparent as Mutlak reached out to the protesters. Said al-Lafi announced in early March that Abd al-Malik al-Saadi and his supporters planned to form a team to negotiate with the Maliki government over the protesters' demands.¹⁶⁵ The delegation was announced on March 24 as the Commission of Opinion, incorporating 26 members under the leadership of

Saadi's son Ahmed al-Saadi: eight tribal leaders, six religious leaders, six intellectuals, and six leaders of youth movements.¹⁶⁶ The delegation would carry to Maliki 14 demands: the original 13 demands from January 6, plus the delivery of the Fallujah killers.¹⁶⁷

This prompted division even among Sunni proponents of negotiation with Maliki: in response, a second group of protest organizers from Anbar, Ninewa, Salah ad-Din, Diyala, Kirkuk, and Baghdad announced a second group on March 27 called the “People's Committees of the Popular Movement in the Six Provinces,” headquartered in Ramadi but intending to coordinate negotiations between the government and protesters in all six provinces.

The founding statement released by this group explicitly denounced both the Saadi faction — for having moved ahead with negotiation plans without involving protesters from outside Anbar — and Saleh al-Mutlak and his ministers, who the group insisted did not represent the protesters.¹⁶⁸ Three groups now sought to present themselves as legitimate interlocutors with the government on the demonstrators' behalf.

At the same time that protest representatives were meeting in Ramadi to choose delegates for the negotiating team, moreover, supporters of a group known as the Free Iraq Uprising, an increasingly vocal group within the protest movement based in Ninewa, withdrew from the Ramadi protests, announcing its rejection of negotiation with the government.¹⁶⁹ They subsequently joined a rival camp at Fallujah — a historic base of insurgency and AQI stronghold — where more radical, anti-negotiation factions have gathered.¹⁷⁰

It subsequently became apparent from the group's social media accounts that the Free Iraq Uprising is strongly linked to, if not a political component of, the Sunni nationalist militant movement Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al-Naqshabandi (JRTN).¹⁷¹ Members of the group invaded the Ramadi protest on March 24, demanding that the Sunnis take up arms against the government.¹⁷² This forced both Said al-Lafi and Anbari tribal leader Ali Hatem al-Suleiman — influential figures in Anbar who have been prone themselves to incendiary speeches against the government — to address the protesters and demand the continuation of peaceful protest.



PHOTO 2 | PRESENT-DAY IRAQI FLAG, WITH HAND-ADDED BATHIST STARS AT PROTEST IN ANBAR, FEBRUARY 2013

Peaceful protest was in fact the prevailing mode for nearly four months, despite the events at Fallujah in January. Ahead of the provincial elections, AQI sought repeatedly to encourage Sunni protesters to abandon demonstration and return to violence, highlighting Sunni marginalization by calling for them to choose between “elections and their parties and the tax of humiliation” and “arms and jihad and the tax of dignity.”¹⁷³ AQI’s calls to arms met with little success: even after the shooting of protesters in Fallujah, demonstrators there burned a mound of leaflets distributed by AQI urging violence against the security forces and the government.¹⁷⁴

While AQI has continued to conduct large-scale attacks throughout the duration of the protests, to date JRTN has been better positioned to take advantage of Sunni nationalism. On April 19, Iraqi security forces clashed with protesters outside the protest site at Hawija in Kirkuk province.¹⁷⁵ Protests had been ongoing in Hawija since January, and had grown in size and in strength of anti-Maliki rhetoric over time, with the JRTN-linked Free Iraq Uprising clearly dominant.¹⁷⁶

Security forces surrounded the Hawija protest, demanding that the demonstrators hand over those

that they accused of attacking a security checkpoint. Protest organizers responded that the security forces had attacked protesters. After a three-day standoff, security forces from the 12th Army Division entered the protest camp. Armed men at the protest site fired on the security forces, and in the ensuing shooting dozens were killed.¹⁷⁷

The showdown at Hawija spurred violence across Sunni-majority areas of Iraq. JRTN militants clashed with security forces at Qara Tapa in Diyala province.¹⁷⁸ Gunmen took control of the town of Suleiman Bek in Salah ad-Din for 24 hours before tribal elders negotiating a truce with security forces.¹⁷⁹ Security forces clashed with militants in Ramadi, Fallujah, and Mosul.¹⁸⁰

Ali Hatem al-Suleiman exhorted tribes to arm themselves, and the next day tribal militias were announced in Anbar and Samarra, ostensibly to protect their communities from attack, whether by militants or security forces.¹⁸¹ Ali Hatem has continued to push for confrontation with security forces, primarily in an attempt to bolster his own profile in Anbar and nationally.¹⁸²

The eruption of violence is a serious setback to the groups within the Sunni community that seek negotiation with

the government. Abd al-Malik al-Saadi was forced briefly to accept the formation of Sunni militias in order to regain legitimacy in an increasingly perilous climate, blaming Maliki for the escalation and ignoring the role of Sunni militants.¹⁸³

In so doing, he followed the prevailing line of many Sunni politicians and leaders, including the Grand Mufti of Iraq, Rafia Taha al-Rifai, who have continually claimed that all violence in Iraq — including terrorist acts claimed by AQI — is sponsored by Iran.¹⁸⁴ This sectarian rhetoric, like evidence of extremism and calls for revolution from protesters, provides seeming justification for the Maliki government's oft-stated warnings that the demonstrations constitute staging areas for terrorism and even for a renewed insurgency.¹⁸⁵

Negotiation, Partition, or Insurgency?

Iraqi Sunni leaders are at odds on a range of issues. Despite his brief countenancing of tribal militias, Abd al-Malik al-Saadi has continued to advance his negotiation initiative, announcing on May 13 the formation of a "Committee of Goodwill" to begin dialogue with the government.¹⁸⁶ Saadi's campaign has drawn support from protest leaders in areas that have seen rising support for insurgency, including Dri al-Dulaimi of the IIP, a leader in Tikrit who declared jihad against the government following the Hawija crisis.¹⁸⁷ The initiative was also welcomed by a section of protests in Fallujah, despite the visible presence of AQI and JRTN at the "Martyr's Square" site there.¹⁸⁸

Saadi's direction of the negotiation initiative, while aimed at preventing further deterioration of the security situation, highlights a serious issue for Sunni political participation in Iraq. Despite the close links between Saadi's camp and Osama al-Nujaifi's Mutahidun — protest leaders meet at Mutahidun member Ahmed al-Alwani's house in Ramadi to formulate tactics and protest slogans, making it a target for security force raids — Saadi has rejected the involvement of politicians in the negotiation process.¹⁸⁹ This is likely intended to minimize further politicization of negotiations. However, it risks distancing elected Sunni politicians even further from any concessions Saadi's committee might gain from the government.

The results of the initial round of provincial elections showed that the Mutahidun drew support in Salah ad-Din and Diyala, but not overwhelmingly so. The Mutahidun emerged from the initial round of provincial elections with the most overall provincial council seats among Sunni lists, but did not come first in Salah ad-Din or Diyala.¹⁹⁰ Salah ad-Din Governor Ahmed al-Jubouri's Iraqi Masses Alliance, allied with Maliki, won a plurality in Salah ad-Din, while coalitions representing what was once Iraqiyya were only able to match the 12 seats won by a pan-Shi'a list in Diyala.

With provincial elections in Ninewa and Anbar scheduled for June 20, Mutahidun stands to benefit from its known links to the Saadi camp.¹⁹¹ A low voter turnout in these provinces reminiscent of 2005, however, would be a serious blow to the Mutahidun in particular, and imply a turn away from electoral politics as a means of political expression among Iraq's Sunnis.

The fluidity of coalition-making in Iraqi politics means that it is too early to predict the shape and character of Sunni representation at the parliamentary elections scheduled for 2014. The internal relationships within the major 2013 electoral coalitions — Nujaifi's Mutahidun and Mutlak's Arab Iraqiyya — appear strong. The links between these groups, however, remain fluid and will continue to depend upon what each can offer in terms of power, resources, and constituencies. The results of the provincial elections in Anbar and Ninewa will likely provide important indications in this regard, and likewise the negotiations surrounding governing coalitions in those provinces may offer a guide to how the key players will position themselves.

In the meantime, however, developments on the ground may overtake political strategies. Influential groups and individuals both at open-air protest sites and at mosques have renewed calls for federal autonomy for majority-Sunni areas.¹⁹² Senior Mutahidun figures have been careful not to call for Sunni federalism publicly, given such a move's minimal feasibility, although this has not stopped Mutlak's Arab Iraqiyya from painting the Mutahidun as bent on creating a Sunni region.

Should a concerted push for federalism emerge in Anbar and Ninewa, the Mutahidun are best positioned to capitalize upon it. Such a campaign, however, would

inevitably prompt a serious response from Maliki, Shi'a parties, and even insurgent groups such as JRTN, who recently have attacked the prospect of regionalism.¹⁹³

CONCLUSION

Iraq's Sunni Arab minority is left with few appealing options through which to address the widespread sense of alienation that has developed among them during nearly a decade of growing marginalization. Maliki's consolidation of power since 2006 has been deep-seated and widespread, personalizing his control of the security forces, subverting the autonomy of parliament and independent governmental bodies, and working tirelessly to marginalize and isolate political rivals.¹⁹⁴

Sunni grievances will not be mitigated solely by the decisions of a handful of Sunni politicians to work within the Maliki government, nor solely by the signaled intent to fulfill a few key demands on Maliki's part. Nor are the interests of the majority of Sunnis that reject violence, whether nationalist or Islamist in generation, served by a return to out-and-out sectarian conflict, whether with predominantly Shi'a security forces or with Shi'a militants who would likely join the fold.

These divisions historically have created opportunities for Maliki to coopt, cajole, and coerce a segment of Sunnis in order to weaken political rivals while maintaining a veneer of Sunni representation. Disunity also provides an opening for militant groups such as AQI and JRTN to seek to incite sectarian tensions, attempting to push Sunnis into a sectarian civil war of the kind that they have lost in the past and are likely to lose again, not without enormous bloodshed on both sides. Large-scale bombings of both Shi'a and Sunni areas, including mosques, highlight this trend. Prolonged deterioration of Iraq's internal security threatens to render political initiatives irrelevant.

The Hawija crisis and the violence that has followed have highlighted the real danger that a parallel situation to Syria could develop in Iraq itself. A combined area of operations for Sunni militants spanning the notoriously permeable Iraqi-Syrian border would almost certainly become a vortex for violence and extremism, pulling in regional actors including Iran, Turkey, and the Gulf states. It would also provide a base from which to plan attacks on the U.S. and its allies.

Iraq's Sunnis have accumulated a broad and deep set of grievances over the past decade. They turned away from insurgency and violence once, playing a key role in pulling Iraq out of sectarian conflict. Maliki's repeated use of the apparatus of the state to harass and marginalize Sunnis, the ongoing Syrian crisis, and the increasing weight of sectarianism in the region that has accompanied that crisis, have prompted growing expression of a self-identifying Sunni minority in Iraq.

Militant groups such as AQI and JRTN continue to escalate violence in the hope of pushing Iraq into renewed sectarian warfare, forcing Sunnis to take sides against the Shi'a and the Maliki government. Without meaningful participation from all of Iraq's ethnic and sectarian populations and significant U.S. and international engagement with both Maliki and Sunni leaders on how to pull the country back from the brink, Iraq risks descending once more into inter-communal conflict — a risk that threatens to undermine regional stability to an unprecedented degree.

The United States and international actors should seize opportunities to ensure meaningful political representation for Iraq's Sunni population.¹⁹⁵ This would include an end to the targeting of Sunni leaders by Maliki and would necessitate restraint in the use of security forces against protest camps. It is also important to conduct outreach to Sunni representatives with influence among protesters, such as Abd al-Malik al-Saadi, to enhance their pursuit of effective negotiations with the government and the achievement of legitimate demands. Reform of de-Baathification procedures is one particularly contentious demand that would benefit from international community involvement.¹⁹⁶ Above all, it is imperative that provincial elections in Anbar and Ninewa proceed as scheduled in July 2013.

The present moment offers an opportunity for U.S. and international policymakers to re-engage with Iraq. The U.S. is supporting Maliki's national defense and counter-terrorism programs through foreign military sales and CIA support for counter-terrorism services that report directly to the office of the prime minister.¹⁹⁷ Maliki emerged from the provincial elections in a weaker position, requiring him to maneuver politically to retain influence.¹⁹⁸ The prime minister has made clear repeatedly, moreover, that he fears spillover from the

Syrian conflict. While this is conveniently self-justifying, it is also a legitimate concern. These observations collectively generate an opportunity for the U.S. to act upon Maliki to influence the tide of Iraqi Sunni political withdrawal.

Maliki warned in a recent opinion piece in the *Washington Post* that “a Syria controlled in whole or part by al-Qaeda and its affiliates — an outcome that grows more likely by the day — would be more dangerous to both our countries than anything we’ve seen up to now.”¹⁹⁹ The U.S. and international response to Maliki should consider the present disposition of the broader Iraqi Sunni Arab population and how best to prevent a violent uprising in Iraq. Unconditional support to Maliki’s counter-terrorism program will produce the opposite effect.

APPENDIX I: SUNNI POLITICS FROM 2005 - 2009

While a small section of liberal secularist exiles had returned to Iraq in 2003 in support of the U.S.-led invasion, as had the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Iraqi Islamic Party, the dominant current of Sunni Arab sentiment opposed the very principles on which the post-invasion political system was based. There was particular opposition to the outlawing of the Baath Party and the marginalization of its former members. These ranks included the senior strata of the Baathist regime as well as tribal leaders and merchants, who would form the basis of the insurgency against the occupation and the new Iraqi state. The question of how former Baath Party members would be involved in post-Baathist Iraqi state and society would remain central to Sunni Arab political calculations for the next decade.

Sunni Arabs largely boycotted the January 2005 provincial elections in the face of the gathering Sunni insurgency against the occupation and the hardening of sectarianism. The battle over key issues of Sunni contention in the process of drafting the Iraqi constitution — particularly the fate of the Baathists and the balance of power between central and local government — prompted the return of Sunni Arabs to the political process in December 2005. A revised election law that divided the majority of seats by province guaranteed that Sunni-majority provinces would be represented should they participate, and Sunni clerics encourage their congregations to vote.

Iraq's December 2005 parliamentary elections offered an early example of a choice that would come to be familiar to Sunni Arab voters: a menu of Sunni Islamists, former Baathists, and groups proclaiming secularism and opposing sectarianism to more or less convincing effect.²⁰⁰ The Sunni Arab population's main choice was between the Iraqi Accord Front (Tawafuq) list, a Sunni Islamist coalition led by the (IIP), and the Iraqi National Dialogue Front (Hiwar), led by Saleh al-Mutlak, a Sunni Arab-dominated group that sought to portray itself as Arabist but nonsectarian and included a small number of Shi'a and Christian politicians.²⁰¹ The election results were an early sign that Sunni Arabs increasingly viewed their position in terms of sect rather than nation, with Tawafuq winning 44 seats to Hiwar's 11. Sunni Arab voters chose the Islamists, concerned at having been sidelined during the constitution-writing process and scared by Shi'a Islamists' control of both government and the security apparatus.

Iraq descended into sectarian war in 2006 between Shi'a militants and AQI and allied Sunni Arab insurgents. In mid-2006, incoming Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki inherited a weak state and a disastrous security situation. Maliki's immediate priority, and that of the coalition forces, was to stabilize this situation. Maliki emerged from this period intent on centralizing control around his office and his Shi'a Islamist inner circle. From the beginning, Maliki demonstrated extreme reluctance to engage with the various groups that comprised the Awakening movement, Sunni Arabs who had renounced anti-government insurgency to fight AQI and its allies. In the face of Maliki's intransigence, Tawafuq, as the Sunni's main representative in government, set a pattern that has endured to this day, walking out of the cabinet in August 2007 and leaving the Sunni Arab population once more with only a marginal voice in government.

Maliki launched counterinsurgency operations in 2008 that succeeded to a surprising extent in reframing the public image of the prime minister as an impartial Iraqi nationalist, while at the same time continuing to consolidate power in the hands of the premier. Over the course of that year, Maliki moved against armed groups belonging to each of Iraq's major ethnosectarian constituencies: the Shi'a Islamist Sadrists in Basra and Baghdad; AQI in Diyala; and the Kurdish Peshmerga forces in the disputed northern territories. Tawafuq returned to the cabinet in May 2008, mollified by the passage of a law easing de-Baathification regulations.²⁰²

The Islamists were also mindful of a key drawback to the use of the boycott as a political strategy: if they failed to return to their cabinet seats ahead of provincial elections, originally scheduled for late 2008, they would be unable to use their ministries as networks of patronage. This was a crucial electoral advantage over figures who had emerged as leaders of Awakening groups and who now sought to enter the political process.²⁰³ Subsequent boycotts by Sunni representatives in 2012 and 2013 have reiterated these risks inherent in withdrawing from government: without access to power and resources through the control of state institutions, political factions are unable to exercise their influence and reward their supporters.

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise stated, “Sunni” in this report refers to Iraqi Sunni Arabs, as distinct from the majority of Iraqi Kurds who are also Sunni Muslims.
2. See Appendix I.
3. As Maliki’s Arab nationalist gambit began to succeed, the inability of Tawafuq to work effectively with the prime minister in government further tarnished the alliance’s appeal. In a precursor to the divisions that would come to plague Sunni political cooperation from 2010 to 2013, the coalition was also riven by internal conflict between the IIP and the remaining members of the National Dialogue Council. Weeks before the 2009 provincial elections, 10 National Dialogue Council MPs quit Tawafuq over the IIP’s “unilateral actions” and the alliance’s “failure to achieve its mission.” “Iraq’s Main Sunni Arab Bloc Splinters,” Reuters, December 24, 2008.
4. The results were less striking in Diyala and Salah ad-Din: in both provinces, the IIP’s Tawafuq coalition won the most seats, but had to work with Sunni-backed but avowedly nonsectarian parties in order to form governing coalitions.
5. In Diyala, Tawafuq (9 seats) was able to match the combined seats of Saleh al-Mutlak’s Iraqi National Project Gathering (6 seats) and Ayad Allawi’s Shi’a-led, cross-sectarian Iraqi National List (3 seats), forming a governing coalition with the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and the Kurdish list. In Salah ad-Din, Tawafuq (5 seats) also tied with Allawi (5 seats), and they formed a governing coalition to shut out Maliki’s State of Law. In neither case could the Sunni Islamists form a provincial government without partners.
6. Safia al-Suhail, a feminist Shi’a politician, and Hajim al-Hassani, a moderate Sunni, withdrew from the Iraqi National List in 2007, accusing Allawi of forcing decisions upon the bloc from his perch in Jordan. Sameer N. Yacoub, “Two lawmakers withdraw from the block headed by former premier Allawi,” Associated Press, September 20, 2007.
7. “Iraqi political leaders to form new electoral coalition; security roundup,” Al-Iraqiyah, translated by BBC Monitoring, October 18, 2009; “Iraqi politicians react to calls for open-list election system; update 6 Oct 09,” Al-Iraqiyah, translated by BBC Monitoring, October 7, 2009.
8. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, p. 405.
9. Larry Kaplow, “The Return of the Baathists,” *Newsweek*, March 27, 2009.
10. Barbara Slavin, “Iraqi VP says Bush wants coalition to counter al-Sadr,” *USA Today*, December 14, 2006.
11. Joshua Partlow, “Top Iraqis Pull Back from Key U.S. Goal,” *Washington Post*, October 8, 2007.
12. Ali al-Fadhily, “In Fallujah, donkeys tell a tale,” *Asia Times*, September 7, 2007.
13. Campbell Robertson and Sabrine Tavernise, “Sunni End Boycott and Rejoin Iraqi Government,” *New York Times*, July 20, 2008.
14. International Crisis Group, “Iraq’s New Battlefield: The Struggle over Ninewa,” Middle East Report No. 90, September 28, 2009, p. 11.
15. “Sunni Arab MP Osama al-Nujaifi named Iraqi parliament speaker,” Agence France-Presse, November 11, 2010.
16. “Iraqi official expects nothing to new constitution,” Xinhua, October 14, 2005.
17. Ninewa and its capital city Mosul are home to a powerful Sunniist identity that defines itself to some degree against the more mixed Baghdad and predominantly Shi’i Basra. More importantly, the province straddles the faultline between Arabs and Kurds. The Vilayet of Mosul was defined as an autonomous Kurdish region by the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920 before being incorporated into Iraq by the League of Nations in 1926. This ethnic dynamic was exacerbated by the Baathist regime’s manipulation of internal boundaries and displacement of Kurds. In turn, after 2003 and particularly after Kurdish parties took control of the provincial government in the face of the Sunni electoral boycott in January 2005, the KRG sought to reverse the “Arabization” of northern Ninewa, using both administrative and military means. As such, Ninewa became a focus for Sunni Arabist sentiment in Iraq. Between 2005 and 2009, Arabs accused Kurds of ‘racism’, using Kurdish border guards, intelligence units, and Kurdish-majority army units to harass, detain, torture, and even murder Sunnis, including provincial political figures. Khalid al-Ansary, “Election friction flares in Iraq’s violent north,” Reuters, January 2, 2009.
18. “Kurdistani coalition walks out of Iraqi parliament over Nujaifi statement,” KUNA, September 25, 2006.
19. “Kurdish groups behind attacks on Assyrians in Mosul: Iraqi MP,” Assyrian International News Agency, October 12, 2008. Osama al-Nujaifi also persuaded 120 MPs, both Sunni and Shi’a, to add their signatures to a January 2008 petition refuting Kurdish demands over Kirkuk and demanding a strong government stance. Sean Kane, “Don’t forget about Iraq’s parliament,” The Middle East Channel, *Foreign Policy*, December 22, 2010.
20. Joel Wing, “Al-Hadbaa Party Leader’s Vision for Ninewa,” Musings on Iraq, March 8, 2009.
21. Corey Flintoff, “Shift in Power Heightens Tensions in Iraqi City,” NPR, February 27, 2009.
22. One of al-Hadbaa’s component parties, led by former adviser to Saddam Hussein Arshad Ahmed Zeibari, publicly opposed the separation of the Kurdish region from Iraq. The Zeibaris are traditional rivals to the Barzanis whose head, Massoud Barzani, was president of the KRG. Another component party, Faris al-Sinjari’s al-Wasat Iraqi Assembly, advocated greater decentralization of power to Iraq’s provinces. “The Hadbaa National List,” *Niqash*, January 28,

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2009.

23. "Iraq: Provincial Elections Guide — 2009," Open Source Center, January 21, 2009.

24. The Kurdish Ninewa Fraternal List won 12 seats on the provincial council but was denied leadership positions by the al-Hadbaa-IIP alliance. Stephen Farrell, "Election: Preliminary Results," At War: Notes From The Front Lines, *New York Times*, February 5, 2009. Striking a deal with the IIP, which won three seats, Atheel al-Nujaifi took the governorship, appointing Feisal Humaidi al-Yawar, brother of Abdullah, as deputy governor; Jabr Abd al-Rabbo, a Jubouri tribesman, was appointed chairman of the provincial council, with Dildar Zebari as deputy chairman. Of the new officials, only Second Deputy Governor Hassan Mahmoud Ali was not part of al-Hadbaa. "Tensions rise in Iraq's Mosul amid Kurdish boycott," Reuters, April 22, 2009; Joel Wing, "Arab-Kurdish Divide Over New Ninewa Provincial Council," Musings on Iraq, April 16, 2009; International Crisis Group, "Iraq's New Battlefield," p. 10.

25. "Hadba expects to win 20 seats in the March 7 polls," *AK News*, February 27, 2010.

26. Jamie Wilson, "Tribe gathers to bury Saddam's sons," *The Observer*, August 2, 2003.

27. Sean Kane, "The Coming Turkish-Iranian Competition in Iraq," Special Report 276, United States Institute of Peace, June 2011; International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Secular Opposition: The Rise and Decline of Al-Iraqiya," Middle East Report No. 127, July 31, 2012, p. 10.

28. Liz Sly, "Iraq Bars Major Sunni Party from Vote," *Los Angeles Times*, January 8, 2010; Marisa Cochrane Sullivan, "Background: Sunni Politicians Barred from Candidacy," Institute for the Study of War, January 14, 2010.

29. Joel Wing, "Iraq's Divisive DeBaathification Official Gunned Down in Baghdad," Musings on Iraq, May 29, 2011. Lami had been detained in 2008 on charges of involvement with Iranian-backed Shi'a militant groups in Baghdad, and General Raymond Odierno, the senior American commander in Iraq at the time, was quick to point to an Iranian hand attempting to influence the elections. Rod Nordland and Sam Dagher, "U.S. Will Release More Members of an Iraqi Militia," *New York Times*, August 17, 2009; Thom Shanker, "General Says 2 Iraq Politicians Have Ties to Iran," *New York Times*, February 16, 2010.

30. Reidar Visser, "Governorate and Party-Level Indicators of De-Baathification, Plus Some Breaking News," Iraq and Gulf Analysis, February 16, 2010.

31. Reidar Visser, "The 511 De-Baathification Cases: Sectarianism or Despotism," *Historiae.org*, January 20, 2010.

32. Muhammad Ashour, "Al-Mutlak, a ban and a crisis," *Niqash*, January 15, 2010. Iraqiyya had 72 candidates affected, while the

other key electoral lists targeted, the Unity of Iraq Alliance led by Jawad al-Bolani and the Liberals (Ahrar) bloc of Ayad Jamal al-Din, were also cross-sectarian coalitions led by secularist Shi'a figures. International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Uncertain Future: Elections and Beyond," Middle East Report No. 94, February 25, 2010, p. 29.

33. Kenneth Katzman, "Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights," Congressional Research Service, December 13, 2012, p. 10.

34. "Karbala Council: Baathists destabilize the situations in Iraq," *AK News*, January 13, 2010; "Demonstration in Diwaniya against Baathists' return," *Aswat al-Iraq*, February 9, 2010; "Karbala forms accountability committee to remove Baathists," *Aswat al-Iraq*, February 11, 2010.

35. Steven Lee Myers, "Iraqi Court Given Time to Review Candidates," *New York Times*, February 7, 2010.

36. Steven Lee Myers, "Ban on Hundreds of Iraqi Candidates Overturned," *New York Times*, February 3, 2010.

37. Joel Wing, "Campaigning Officially Begins in Iraq as Hunt for Baathists Spreads to the Local Level," Musings on Iraq, February 13, 2010; "Iraqi secular list suspends campaign," Agence France-Presse, February 15, 2010; "Key Sunni Group to Boycott Iraqi Elections," *Al-Rafidayn*, February 19, 2010; "Prominent Iraqi Sunni Ends Party's Poll Boycott," Reuters, February 25, 2010.

38. International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Secular Opposition," p. 1. In a sign that the list's nonsectarian platform continued to resonate with some Shi'a, however, it also won 12 seats in predominantly Shi'a areas. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that even Ayad Allawi focused his campaign upon wooing Sunnis, particularly through his regular appearances on the Baathist-linked al-Sharqiya TV. Uticensis Risk Services, *Inside Iraqi Politics* 8, February 8, 2011.

39. De-Baathification has also been a source of repeated success for Maliki in coopting Iraqiyya leaders. At a press conference on January 29, 2012, a representative for Jamal al-Karbouli announced that Maliki had agreed to release the first 49 of an estimated 820 detainees arrested on suspicion of planning a Baathist coup in 2011. This first group comprised detainees from Karbouli's native Anbar; the rest would be released in groups with Karbouli prepared to post bail on their behalf, implying that Karbouli had been intimately involved in negotiating with Maliki. Just over a week later, Maliki returned to this tactic, striking a deal with Mohammed al-Tamim, the Education Minister from Mutlak's Hiwar party who had declined to follow Iraqiyya's cabinet boycott. Tamim agreed to stand bail for 43 detainees from Kirkuk, his home province, after a discussion on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting. "Jamal al-Karbouli prepared legally to take care of 800 detained members of dissolved Baath Party, will be released in groups," *al-Mowaten News*, February 4, 2012; "Release of 43 detainees from Kirkuk who were arrested on charges of belong to the Baath Party," *al-Sumaria*, February 8, 2012.

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40. Leila Fadel, "Allawi reaches out after Iraq election win," *Washington Post*, March 28, 2010.
41. Meghan O'Sullivan and Bernard Gwertzman, "After the Elections: Iraq's Uncertain Future," Council on Foreign Relations, March 29, 2010.
42. "Differences that caused the withdrawal of 10 al-Iraqiyya coalition legislators 'settled,'" *Aswat al-Iraq*, December 18, 2010.
43. Haider Najm, "MPs defect from Ayad Allawi's Iraqiya list," *Niqash*, March 18, 2011; International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Secular Opposition," p. 21.
44. "Political initiative provided by the Solution movement out of the government crisis," *al-Sumaria*, October 15, 2010.
45. A nine-point agreement signed by members of the National Alliance, Iraqiyya, and the Kurdistan Alliance was published in some Iraqi media outlets in 2012. Reidar Visser, "Time to Publish the Arbil Agreement?," *Iraq and Gulf Analysis*, June 23, 2011; "Erbil Agreement content disclosed," *The Kurdish Globe*, May 7, 2012.
46. Allawi finally announced that he was abandoning the National Council for Strategic Policy initiative in March 2011. "Allawi announces abandoning the presidency of the Supreme Policy Council," *al-Sumaria*, March 2, 2011.
47. Early on in the government formation period, Osama al-Nujaifi was reported to be negotiating well with the Kurdish parties, as he subsequently would do in 2012. Author's interview with a U.S. analyst working in Iraq during government formation, April 2013.
48. International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Secular Opposition," p. 21. Mutlak, Jamal al-Karbouli, and Thafir al-Ani were restored to the political process when parliament voted to annul the de-Baathification rulings against them in December 2010. "Majority attend, raising the ablation of Mutlak and Karbouli and Ani," *al-Ikhbariya*, December 18, 2010.
49. Reidar Visser, "Why Iraqiyya Should Accept the Speakership," *Iraq and Gulf Analysis*, November 4, 2010.
50. Reidar Visser, "The Unity of Iraq Alliance: Another Second-Generation Coalition," *Historiae.org*, October 21, 2009.
51. Tawafuq did win six seats in the elections, four of them going to the IIP. While the enormous difference in seat numbers won by Iraqiyya and Tawafuq strongly implies that a majority of Sunni were persuaded by Iraqiyya's nonsectarian campaign, it is worth pointing out that the IIP, never a particularly popular party, had been publicly renounced by some of its most influential leaders — particularly Tariq al-Hashemi — and had been badly tarnished by its governance failures at the provincial level. "The biggest loser," *Niqash*, April 7, 2010.
52. "Some independent MPs join Wasat Alliance, says Iqbal," National Iraqi News Agency, October 26, 2010.
53. Reidar Visser, "The New Political Balance of the Iraqi Parliament," *Historiae.org*, February 20, 2012.
54. In March 2011, eight MPs announced their defection from Iraqiyya to form the White Iraqiyya Party (subsequently renamed the White Bloc in order to demonstrate a definitive break from Iraqiyya.) The new group was led by Hassan al-Alawi, a prominent anti-Baathist intellectual, and included Minister for Tribal Affairs Jamal al-Batikh, who had been a prominent member of Wifaq. A month later, another five MPs left the alliance to form Free Iraqiyya. "Splits in the Accord Movement forced Allawi to restructure," *al-Rai*, January 3, 2011; "Eight MPs withdraw from Iraqiyya, form new party," *al-Sumaria TV*, March 8, 2011; Haider Najm, "MPs defect from Ayad Allawi's Iraqiya list," *Niqash*, March 18, 2011; Mustafa Habib, "Opposition? What opposition? The incredible shrinking Iraqiyya party," *Niqash*, November 8, 2012.
55. For example, one defector, Qutaiba al-Jubouri, subsequently became Maliki's envoy to Salah ad-Din province during the federalism push in October 2011, and Maliki tried to install him as Deputy Prime Minister in place of Saleh al-Mutlak in December 2011. "*Al-Mada* reveals contents of the Prime Minister's letter to Salah ad-Din," *al-Mada*, November 5, 2011; "Maliki issued a decision to dismiss his deputy al-Mutlak and nominate a substitute," *al-Mustaqbal*, December 21, 2011.
56. "Dhi Qar: splinters from Allawi's party," *al-Hayat*, December 27, 2011; "New splinters in Iraqiyya in Najaf and Allawi accuses "ruling element" of conspiracy against his movement," *al-Hayat*, January 1, 2012. It was reported that Kamal al-Dulaimi of al-Hal had formed a new political group called the 'Political Process Correction Bloc' in October 2011; however, since "bloc" and "party" are often used interchangeably in Iraqi reporting, it was not clear at the time that he or other members had withdrawn from Iraqiyya as a coalition. "MPs found new political bloc," *AK News*, October 15, 2011.
57. "Al-Iraqiya List drops Ahmed Oraibi and Qutaiba al-Jubouri from its membership," *al-Sumaria*, February 25, 2011.
58. "Qutaybah Jubouri: Mutlak and Hashemi behind the decision of my deportation and that of Ahmed al-Oraibi from the Iraqi List," *al-Tawafuq*, February 22, 2011. Another defector, Alia Nassif, subsequently claimed that a similar number of signatures had been submitted to support Jubouri's candidacy for the post of defense minister in opposition to Allawi's preferred candidate, suggesting a significant current of rebellion with the bloc against multiple leaders. "Alia Nassif: Iraqiyya has confidence in their candidate for the defense minister, Qutaiba Jubouri," *al-Rayy*, February 25, 2011. In light of the rebellion, it was reported in some regional sources that Mutlak, Nujaifi, Jamal al-Karbouli, and Thafir al-Ani had met in Jordan to discuss sidelining Allawi within the alliance, although this was never confirmed. "'Pillars' of INM meet in Amman without knowledge of members and without Allawi," *al-Mada*, March 27,

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- 2011; “Split forms between Allawi and Nujaifi over Minister of Defense,” *al-Malaf*, March 26, 2011; see Uticensis Risk Services, *Inside Iraqi Politics II*, March 27, 2011.
59. “Iskandar Witwit announces his withdrawal and that of four others from Iraqiyya to form independent bloc,” *al-Sumaria*, January 2, 2012.
60. While two of Iraqiyya’s spokespeople, Haider al-Mulla (Hiwar) and Maysoon al-Damalouji (Wifaq), initially defended Shalal, claiming that Maliki was responsible for the contracts, they were unwilling to do so for very long. “Iraqiyya determined to keep Shalal at Electricity Ministry,” Radio Free Iraq, August 19, 2011; “Allawi calls a meeting of Wifaq to discuss repercussions of electricity minister’s removal,” *AK News*, August 7, 2011.
61. “Tharab rather than Raad Shalal to the Ministry of Electricity,” Baghdad International News Agency, August 24, 2011; “Maliki tasks Hussein al-Shahristani to take over the Ministry of Electricity,” *Buratha News*, August 24, 2011.
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