

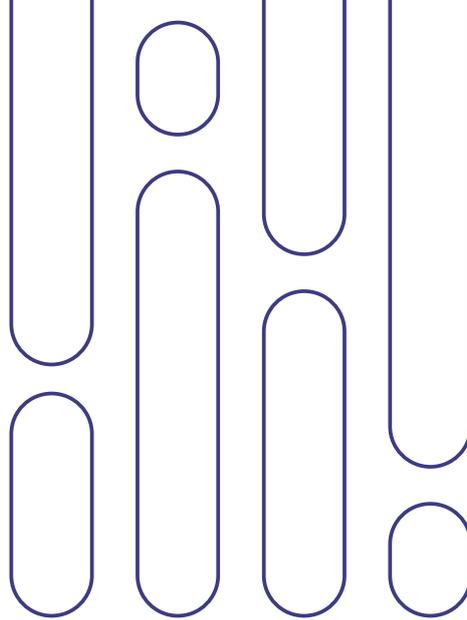
REPORT

A Review of the Features, Priorities, and Approaches of the New Iraqi Government

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After a full year of tensions between the Shiite parties over the posts of heads of state and government, the Iraqi Parliament on October 27, 2022, gave a confidence vote, by an absolute majority, to the candidate of the pro-Iran Coordination Framework (CF) Mohammed Shia al-Sudani headed the new government amid the ongoing intra-Shiite conflict between the two largest alliances: the Sadrist Movement and the CF. This new government was formed against the backdrop of accumulated challenges and addressing them will be a severe test for Sudani. These challenges prevented Haider al-Abadi from securing a second term and Adel Abdul Mahdi from completing his first full term in office.

The timing and process of forming the new Iraqi government raises significant questions about the allocation of ministerial portfolios among Shiite parties, and the likely approach to be adopted by the new government in the context of Iraq's statehood, control of militias, and foreign policy orientations.

The Formation of Iraq's Government Amid Complex Political Crises

Iraq's landscape reveals that the new government was not formed under normal conditions that would have enabled it to perform its tasks and address the challenges until early elections are held at the end of 2023. The aforementioned is reflective of the following:

- **Lack of political consensus:** Compared to the Kadhimi government, the new government lacks the necessary political consensus to conduct its tasks. This lack of consensus is because Sadr, who has mass popular support and is an important and influential wild card in the equation, and figures from the October protest movement, refused to participate in the new government, hence putting it under pressure and leaving it open to

the possibility of being ousted.

- **Erosion of popular support:** The new CF-backed government realizes that it faces popular and political impasses, unlike the Kadhimi government. The pro-Iran alliances received a resounding blow as the people did not vote for them in the elections, especially in the Shiite-majority southern governorates. A broad mass of people rejected Iran and its alliances.

- **Continuity of Shiite conflict:** the CF is one of the parties to the intra-Shiite conflict over Shiite leadership, and seeks to control the future form of the government and the state. The conflict has not yet been resolved. Consequently, the CF has become one of the parties to Iraq's conflict and adheres to the path of statelessness through allowing the continuation of uncontrolled arms and subordinating Iraq's decision-making to Iranian will. In contrast, the Sadrist Movement is committed to the path of establishing a sovereign Iraqi state and ensuring balance in the country's foreign relations.

The appointment of new ministers in the government reflected the CF's prowess in the Parliament, with it having 165 out of 329 parliamentary seats, with its position aided by Sadr withdrawing his 73 lawmakers from the Parliament in June 2022. Sudani's success was not because of a strong electoral turnout or because of his ability to form the largest parliamentary bloc in a competitive setting with the Sadrist Movement. Given this context, the Sudani government is weak while it completes its one-year tenure.

The Allocation of Ministerial Posts Between Alliances

The allocation of ministerial portfolios in the new Iraqi government according to data from a host of Iraqi sources is illustrated in detail in Table 1:

Table 1: Allocation of Ministries in Iraq's New Government (2022)

	Alliance	Ministry	Minster	Notes
Shiites	<u>Al-Furatain</u> (seats 3)	Prime Minister	Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani	The head of the coalition, the candidate of the CF, and a former member of the Dawa Party, State of Law Coalition, and a minister in the first Maliki government
	The State of Law Coalition Maliki-38) (seats	Oil	Hayan Abdul-Ghani	He has 40 years of experience in the oil sector, and he met with the Iranian ambassador in Baghdad, Mohammad Kazem al-Sadeq, on November 18, 2022, to coordinate the visit of his Iranian counterpart to Iraq.
		Health	Saleh Hasnawi	The former minister of health in Maliki's first government
		Youth and Sport	Ahmad al-Mubarqa	Worked in a television station owned by Nouri al-Maliki
		Agriculture	Abbas Jabr	A member the State of Law Coalition (led by Nouri al-Maliki)
	The Fatah Alliance Amiri- 29) (seats	Higher education	Naim al-Aboudi	Al-Sadiqoun Bloc, representing Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq
		Labor	Ahmad al-Asadi	Head of Sanad Bloc and the general secretary of Kata'ib Jund al-Imam (Imam's Soldiers' Battalions,
		Transport	Razzaq Muhaibis	A member of the Fatah Alliance
	Independent	Water Resources	Aoun Diab	Aoun Diab, a former advisor to the ministry, who criticized Iran in his previous statements, and is among the officials who called for the internationalization of the issue and resorting to the International Court of Justice to sue Iran for halting the flow of water to Ira.
		Electricity	Ziad Fadhil Sudani	During his meeting with Iran's Ambassador to Baghdad Mohammad Kazem al-Sadiq on November 17, 2022, he expressed the ministry's desire to expand cooperation with Iran in the field of power supply because the operations of Iranian companies in Iraq's gasoline sector were successful.
		Communication	Hoyam Aboud	She has direct and good relations with Maliki, and he visited her at her office in Yasiri once she had assumed her duties on November 2, 2022
		Interior	Abdulamir al-Shammari	He expressed anti-militia positions, he ordered the storming of the headquarters of the Iraqi Hezbollah, the closest Iraqi militia to Iran

Sunnis	The Sovereignty Alliance	Defense	Thabit al-Abbassi	He was a lawmaker in 2018, and his appointment sparked popular controversy due to his lack of experience and he had been discharged as lieutenant colonel
	Khamis al-Khanjar seats: 38 52) seats for the Progress Party and 14 for the Azem Alliance	Education	Ibrahim al-Jibouri	-----
		Planning	Muhammad Tamim	The former minister of education in Maliki's second government
		Industry	Khalid Battal	From Kadhimi's government
		Trade	Athir al Ghariri	-----
Independent	Finance	Taif al-Shakarji	She is independent and known as the "iron woman." She has played a significant key role in combating corruption	
Kurds	Kurdistan Democratic Party (31 seats)	Foreign Affairs	Fuad Hussein	He is a Kurdish Feyli ^{1*} and was a member of Kadhimi's government
	Kurdistan Coalition seats Pa- 17) triotic Union of Kurdistan and The Movement for (Change	Justice Culture	Khalid Shawni Ahmad al-Badrani	-----
		Not scored yet	Environment	-----
	Housing and Construction		-----	
Christians	The Iraqi minority coalitions	Immigration	Ivan Faiq	(Chaldeans (Christians

Sources: National Iraqi News Agency <https://bit.ly/3UDag1i>, Nas News Agency <https://bit.ly/3GmwTTC>, Shafaq News <https://bit.ly/3hHLuhK>, Alssaa <https://bit.ly/3O4RU75>, Ashourland <https://bit.ly/3AbN5D7>

Review of the New Government Formation

Predominance of the Consensual Approach in the Formation of the Government

The CF was able to pursue the consensual approach in forming the new government like past ones in contrast to Sadr's demand

^{1*} A Kurdish Shiite tribe mainly living in the borderlands between Iraq and Iran (outside the Kurdistan Region). They are considered a minority in comparison to the Sunni Kurds.

for a national majority government. This quest was aided by Sadr's withdrawal from the political landscape. The portfolios were distributed among 11 ministries for Shiites in addition to the post of prime minister, six for Sunnis and five for Kurds, including two under negotiation, and one for Christians. Iraq's crises are likely to continue as past consensual governments failed to address them, and the new government is likely to follow suit, in addition, it is likely to pursue a sectarian agenda instead of a national one. Moreover, Iraq's crises are likely to persist because of the following factors:

- Ministers are selected based on proximity to key leaders of coalitions, who naturally prefer to pay back leaders and win their support for further perks.
- The CF is now the largest parliamentary bloc; hence its policy of exclusion and marginalization is set to continue to ensure its final say over critical decisions.
- As the intra-Shiite conflict escalates, Iraq's political crises and dire economic conditions are likely to deepen. The electricity, water and unemployment crises are expected to escalate further, despite the huge oil resources in Iraq.
- The prevalence of corruption is a key feature of governance because the appointment of ministers is based on sectarian considerations and not for achieving national interests. Thus, priority is given to the sect and not to national interests.

Maliki-Amiri Control Over the New Government

Table 1 reveals the participation of pro-Iran alliances, like the State of Law Coalition and the Fatah Alliance, in the new government, with them controlling the majority of the 12 portfolios allocated to the Shiites. These include influential portfolios such as oil (important given the rise in oil demand amid the Russia-Ukraine war), education (important in shaping the mindsets

of the youth), agriculture (food security), labor (employment), and security (controlling borders to facilitate the tasks of militias on the borders). Therefore, some describe this new government as Maliki's third government, and the beginning of a new phase of exclusion.

The control of the State of Law and Fatah coalitions over the new government risks Sudani's anti-corruption project and perpetuates the causes of the mass protests, most prominently over corruption. It was reported that prominent Iraqi officials were involved in what is called the "theft of the century;" they stole around \$ 2.5 billion. This control led some observers to predict that Iraq will face a new phase of corruption, oppression, and exclusion. One needs also to mention here that the Parliament session during which the ministerial posts were distributed, Iraqi lawmakers physically clashed with each other over the allocations. Such incidents will prevent the new government from addressing the country's crises.

The Absence of Maliki's Allies From the New Government

In the Kadhimi government, all alliances participated including: the Wisdom Movement, National State Forces affiliated with the CF, and independents who were not affiliated with pro-Iran alliances (see Table 2). The Sudani government did not include the Sadrist Movement and the emerging movements such as: Ishraqat Kanoun, Emtidad, and the New Generation (al-Jeel al-Jadeed). Neither did it include Maliki's closest allies in the CF such as the Wisdom Movement and the National State Forces. Therefore, some observers wonder: does this mean that the absent alliances are aware of the dangers of the next stage? Are they unwilling to take responsibility for any potential setbacks? Are they concerned about the government's inability to complete its one-year term? Are they concerned about the differences between the CF components over major issues?

A New Step in the Plan to Integrate Militias Into the Ruling System

The first step taken by the Kadhimi government in this context was to integrate the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) into the Iraqi army. The second step has been taken by the Sudani government as it gave portfolios to the following:

- Higher Education Ministry handed to Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq.
- Labor Ministry handed to Kata'ib Jund al-Imam (The Imam's Soldiers' Battalions).

These two are the largest and strongest pro-Iran militias. The integration of Shiites into governance is the next step after Shiite militarization, like Hezbollah's participation in the Lebanese government. The integration of Shiite militias into the government will legitimize their presence and operations. Accordingly, confronting the danger of Iran's influence in Iraq will be more costly.

Table 2: Comparison Between the Kadhimi and Sudani Governments

	Sudani Government	Kadhimi government
Prime Minister	Al-Furatain Movement	Independent
Shiite quotas	The State of Law Coalition and Fatah close to Iran, received the 12 quotas allocated to Shiites. Therefore, both the Wisdom Movement and the Patriotic State Forces, Maliki's allies in the CF, did not receive portfolios in the new government	The quotas of Shiites were divided among all the coalitions of Shiites, including the alliances that did not participate in Sudani's government, such as the Wisdom Movement, the National State Forces affiliated with the CF, and the Sadrist Movement, the strongest Shiite alliance, represented by the Sairoon Coalition
Coalitions	Amid the growing economic crisis at home and abroad, the State of Law Coalition secured the significant Oil Ministry Independents secured the ministries of Health, Youth and Agriculture	The Wisdom Movement secured the Ministry of Oil and the Ministry of Labor, which is controlled by Fatah in Sudani's government
Militia quotas	Sudani's government includes militia ministers in education and higher education	No militia ministers

The Priorities and Directions of the New Government

A host of major factors reflect the priorities and policies of the new government. These factors include: the intellectual framework of the political current that backs Sudani, the mechanism of cabinet formation, the nature of the cabinet's approach, the allocation of portfolios among alliances, the prime minister's directions, and finally the decisions and meetings held by the new government.

Pro-Iran alliances of the CF such as State of Law Coalition and Fatah adopt a political/intellectual discourse that supports the system of Wilayat al-Faqih in Iran, and even Iran's expansionist project in its spheres of influence. Therefore, their discourse lacks the concepts of sovereignty, independence and establishing balance in Iraq's foreign relations. The CF also depended on the consensual approach in forming the government, thus reinforcing its position and weight in the Iraqi equation, especially in light of the challenges facing Iranian clout in Iraq.

The government's internal policy includes approaches that are opposed to the interest of militias as it has called for two major steps: combating corruption and using all resources available to improve and empower the army and police forces — as they are the guarantors of governance and the law. These two steps prevent, at least theoretically speaking, the militias from reaping profits from illegitimate sources as well as from their proxy roles. However, the new government did not mention the necessity of regulating the use of arms exclusively under its authority and the dismantling of militias. Thus, implementing these two steps are practically impossible.

Externally, the political declaration reiterated the consolidation of relations with countries on the basis of mutual respect

and common interests, non-participation in the axes policy, and the promotion of relations with neighboring countries, especially with the Gulf states and Arab countries. This declaration reflects the intent not to turn Iraq into a corridor or a platform for carrying out hostile acts against neighboring countries, hence reassuring countries about the new government's foreign policy approach. Sudani's first meeting was with the Saudi ambassador to Iraq.

Sudani is the candidate of the pro-Iran CF, and he belongs to the traditional Shiite political class because of his affiliation to the Dawa Party in the past and his closeness to Maliki. He was the Minister of Human Rights and Governor of Maysan during Maliki's term and elected as a lawmaker for the State of Law Coalition in the previous parliamentary election. Therefore, many Iraqi analysts believe that Sudani's selection was because of his closeness to Maliki and because he would allow the CF to manage the Iraqi scene as it wishes. However, Iraq's complicated landscape, the difficulty in forming the Sudani government, the deep crises and the power of the Iraqi street will not be in the best interests of the CF.

As for the decisions made by Sudani after assuming office, some analysts described them as an absolute political and administrative coup against the alliances that support the path for establishing an independent Iraqi state. They argue that Sudani was settling scores against them. Sudani's decisions were deemed legitimate because they were made by the caretaker government (it reversed all of Kadhimi's decisions taken since the parliamentary elections of October 2021). Sudani eliminated 169 security and military officials who served under the Kadhimi government, most of them were affiliated with the Sadrist Movement. Before Sudani took these decisions, a parlia-

mentary committee was formed from the largest bloc from the CF to revise all of Kadhimī's decisions. It is expected that settling scores will include, later, figures who support the path toward establishing an independent Iraqi state, who will be eliminated from the political scene through various accusations.

The Likely Internal and External Approach of the New Government

Accordingly, Sudani's government is likely to maintain the non-state path theoretically, but practically it is likely to rely on a balanced approach as much as possible during its one-year timeframe, not because it is convinced of this approach, but rather it fears being overthrown given the following factors and challenges:

- Not ending the conflict between Shiite rightists and Shiite moderates,² *and Sudani's concern for the future of his government, especially if the Sadrists take to the streets; they have mass support which is a potential sword over the head of his government. Therefore, convincing Sadr not to overthrow the government is the most important challenge for Sudani. The policies and directions of Sudani's government will determine the path of interactions with the Sadrists.
- Divergences in the CF over power, influence, and how much distance to keep from Sadr. The CF has many heads and leaders. Therefore, a tough challenge for Sudani is how to tackle these people, and how to change their approaches.
- The short period granted for the government is not enough to meet all the promises and resolve the intractable crises such

The Shiite moderates are more open to issues related to identity, state, and society. They do not * grant privileges to any social component neither do they impose sectarian conditions as the rightists who follow Wilayat al-Faqih. The moderates Shiites include the Sadrist Movement and the forces of the October protest movement as well as independent political parties

as electricity, water, unemployment, corruption, and repeated Iranian and Turkish attacks on northern Iraq. Therefore, the Sudani government does not have sufficient time to maneuver and implement sectarian schemes in the country.

- Sudani's first meeting with the Saudi ambassador to Iraq included a message of reassurance that the government will not abandon Iraq's Arab and Gulf surroundings. Therefore, the Gulf states congratulated Sudani and expressed their hope that his government would pursue a balanced approach in foreign relations.

Conclusion

The gap between the promises made by Sudani to address Iraq's crises and the ability to achieve them is excessive; a few years are not enough to address the crises, especially given Iraq's harsh conditions that have been worsening since 2003. This country's decisions have been dominated by alliances and political and military arms, turning Iraq into a partisan and interest-based fiefdom. In addition, a network of selective and interest-based relationships prevails in Iraq, increasing the strength and weight of certain alliances or factions at the expense of the interests of the state and Iraqi society. Therefore, Sudani will not be able, during his short period, to tackle all of Iraq's difficult crises and achieve a breakthrough that could alleviate the popular discontent for a very simple reason – the largest parliamentary bloc that backs Sudani has been the main reason behind the crises since 2003 and is the greatest beneficiary of these crises. This is part of Iran's plot to secure control over the Iraqi landscape.

