

# Iraq General Elections 2014

## Ambiguities of Continuity and Change (fourth draft, 30 July 2014)

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### I

#### Introduction

As the outcome of the third Iraqi national elections was announced by the HIEC on 20 May, three weeks after the ballot, the contest and the drivers of conflict, international and regional pressures, before as after the vote, revolved on single major political issue: *whether or not the incumbent PM Nuri al-Maliki should continue to serve a third term in office.*

Before-during-and-after elections, various forms of mobilization, maneuvering, information, and disinformation/misinformation, negotiations, military strikes or terrorist bombings, were all geared, one way or another, either *to secure a third term*, on part of the Maliki Da'wa Party and its electoral bloc, the State of the Law (SL), *or abort such a perspective* of allowing Maliki to have additional, lean four years, on part of a dispersed multitude of rivals and foes alike. This is a new feature that was dormant at times, but began to surface during the 2012 crisis, and perhaps even earlier.

Although Maliki now commands 92 seats (out of 328), winning three extra slots compared to 2010, he is roughly in the same position as in 2010: a relatively strong bloc in dire need of additional support to win a stable majority in the parliament (165 votes) amidst hyper-fragmentation of almost all previous identity based blocs. Thus the obtaining political-electoral atmosphere and alliances involve a great measure of uncertainties.

In this report these pre- and post-elections developments and nuances shall be examined in some detail that may help envisage the possible developments ahead, which may well be long, arduous, and exhausting, throwing the political order into disorder.

#### **II-Segmentation of society, Dynamics of segmentation:**

The elections took place in a tense atmosphere with two antagonistic tendencies: the stiffening of segmentary ethno-communal fracture lines, on the one hand, and the fragmentation of each ethnic or communal segment from within. This paradox has to do with the disruption of nation-building mechanism that will be dealt with further below. But first is to cast at holistic segments.

The frequently recurring trilogy of Shi'is, Sunnis and Kurds has become a boring commonplace. Historically, the British built the new Iraq 'nation' in 1921 on the basis of a Shi'i-Sunni agreement, with a side track accommodation of the Kurds, a fact of which King Faisal I, the first monarch, was painfully aware. In 2003, the US 'reinvented' Iraq (to use a term couched by Toby

Dodge), on a Shii-Kurdish agreement, with a side track accommodation of the Sunnis. In the first instance, Iraqi society was pre-national, i.e. agrarian, segmented and fragmented society. But the ethos of the age was one of nationalism and national self-determination. And the semi-liberal nature of the polity coupled with open market economy, allowed for a great measure of inclusion and participation, which helped the heterogeneous national mix to jell <sup>1</sup> In the second instance, 82 years on, more than half a century of military authoritarian republics and civilian single-party totalitarian state,( between 1958 and 2003) had already blocked almost all participatory and inclusive venues, shattering therefore the basic structures of national cohesion. The decline of Arabist ideology and leftist forces and discourses was displaced by Islamism, which is, by its very nature, sectarian. This change caused a shift from ideological to identity politics which further shattered what was left of a divided 'nation'.

The course of doing identity-based politics is one of building a seemingly monolithic bloc with religion, sect or ethnicity as its marker. The cohesion of the segment, any identity-based segment, thrives on external hazard, and grows on contest for power. Contest for power-sharing, involving, by necessity, a redistribution of national wealth (a feature of the rentier state) hardens the dividing lines between segments, lending more force to group solidarity. Such proclivity is strengthened by what an Iraqi psychologist called the 'victim syndrome' among Shi'is and Kurds, or in political terms: collective grievances of disfranchisement; or sociologically speaking, the rise of identity politics geared towards collective re-negotiating the structure of nation-building. Such collective identity almost invariably buries internal schisms of any conceived or conceivable community under a very thin layer of unanimity. But once the basic objective of power-sharing, or power grabbing, was achieved, , the momentum of ethnic or communal unity wanes, and sundry motions step in.

### **III-Fragmentation of ethno-communal segments:**

Within each segment of the communal or ethnic groups, dormant divisions are enlivened by dynamics of class antagonism, ideological conflict, rival city solidarities, and sundry political interests, including individual rivalries among leaders; and when these step in they step in forcefully. And the two trends, that of communal cohesion, and that of communal inner fragmentation overwhelm the scene, and continue to co-exist in different modalities of changing proportions. There are several factors at work herein.

First, the shaky Shi'i-Kurdish alliance in 2003-5, marginalized Sunni groups; remedies were contrived by general Petraeus in 2007-8 to cement a shaky national framework, but the therapy was reversed by PM Nuri Maliki right after the US withdrawal.

Secondly, the over-centralized power in 2010 soon clashed with the federal and decentralized structure of the new polity, inviting Kurdish opposition, as well as opposition from almost all

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<sup>1</sup> From US president Woodrow Wilson to the Russian revolutionary leader Vladimir Ilitch Lenin, the right to national self-determination was made a universal norm of international life.

provincial governments. Again, this was a shift from the 'victim syndrome' to 'monopoly syndrome'

Thirdly, the monopoly syndrome was now geared not only against Sunni and Kurdish groups, but also against Shi'i outfits other than the ruling Da'wa party, triggering fears and resistance on part of Sadrists and Hakimis, among others.

The logic of Maliki's Da'wa runs as follows: in the name of Iraqis, the Shi'i majority rules; in the name of Shi'i majority, the Da'wa (as a majority) rules; in the name of the Da'wa, Maliki, his next of kin and his trusted aides, rule.

Opposition ran deep and wide in search for a benign, constitutional, all-inclusive, participatory, federal, decentralized political order. Generally, the discourse of this opposition was political; that of some Sunni groups was as crudely sectarian as the discourse of Maliki's bloc.

If the grand communal blocs were the result of a shift from ideological to identity politics, which required a re-arrangement of nation-building, the nature of these processes of nation-building efforts (between 2003-2014), activated the dormant drivers of conflict within each community, and triggered new ones, leading to a multiplicity of contenders. The federal and decentralized structure of the new political order, added impetus to divisions that already existed between Talbani-Barzani, and within Talbani-led PUK, or between native (Sadr) and Diaspora Shi'i groups (Da'wa-Maliki-Ja'fari and Hakim Islamic Council) as within each group, e.g. the fracture line dividing Sadrists into two segments, the Fadhalis led by Ya'qubi, or Da'wa divided into two factions, Da'wa-Iraq.

Hence the two contradictory tendencies throughout the elections, the escalation of sectarianism, and the increasing ruptures and schism within each sect. The one is geared to mobilize collective identity behind one leader, and one party; the other is geared to prevent it.

And each trend had at its disposal instances and episodes to enhance its claims. Maliki had plenty: the Sunni 'threat' facing 'Shi'i majoritarian right' (conspiracies, the conflict in Anabr, then the Mosul episode); the Kurdish threat vis Iraq's unity (oil revenues, disputed areas and the Peshmerga), and the incompetent Shii rivals who are dividing the unity of the community (wahadat al-Ta'ifa).

Nowhere are these intertwined conflicting phenomena more evident than in the 2014 elections: a heightened ethno-sectarian mobilization, on the one hand, and a bitter fight within sects and ethnic groups, on the other. The sheer huge number of contestants, more than 9000 candidates affiliated to more than 277 competing political entities, conveys a sense of fragmentation well beyond the holistic trilogy of Shi'i, Sunnis and Kurds. The electoral coalitions among these 277 entities, which produced some 36 electoral blocs competing over 328 seats, indicated an uneasy awareness of the above fragmentation, a desire to overcome it, fear of marginalization, a test of its weight, with an eye on post-elections negotiations and potential alliances. Yet, for the first time since 2003, all unified ethnic and communal segments were reduced to political fragments,

weakening collective communal identity, and allowing for trans-communal tendencies to grow stronger.

The Shi'i Islamic bloc, that ran in 2005 constituent and general elections, as one list (the Iraqi national alliance-INA) under the auspices of grand ayatollah Ali Sistani, split into two major factions in 2010; now, in 2014, the two factions ran separately, in eight fragments as follows: three major groups, State of Law-Maliki, Citizens-Hakim, Ahrar-Sadr, plus five smaller groups: Fadila-Ya'qubi, Islah-Ja'fari, Da'wa-Iraq, and Sadiqun (Truthful), of 'Asa'ib al-Haq, a splinter faction of Sadrists. The trajectory started with one cemented faction, to two coalitions, to eight factions in 10 years.

The Kurds in their turn, ran as one bloc in 2005, split into three (2010), now in four major factions, the KDP-Barzani, PUK-Talbani, Goran-Nu Shirwan, Islamic League, and Kurdistan Coalition, plus three small groups (Shabak and Yazidis).

The Sunnis, fragmented and lost in 2005, joined hands in 2010 in a unified front, in which mixed ex-Ba'thists, Sunni Islamists, and mixed centrists, came under the umbrella of Iyad Allawi, a Shi'i politician with some grass root base in Shi'i and Sunni provinces. Twenty of its 91 deputies in the 2010 national assembly were Shi'is. Now, in 2014, The Iraqiya was displaced by four major blocs, Wataniya-Alawi, Muttahidun-Nujaifi, Arabia-Mutlaq, and Karama, plus several small local fragments in Anbar, Ninewa, Salahudin and Diala provinces. Some of these small groupings are hostile, others friendly, to Maliki-led federal government.

The hegemonic policies pursued by PM Nuri Maliki, since 2006, and more aggressively since 2011 onwards, further contributed to more fragmentation. His onslaught on political foes and rivals, actual or potential, was multi-faceted.

The first target was the Iyad Alawi-led, Iraqiya, whose constituent groups were targeted one by one, shattering it into fragments. Ex-vice president Tariq Hashimi was sentenced to death and fled to Turkey; deputy PM Salih Mutlaq was suspended for months on charges of slandering Maliki, and was re-admitted after this public humiliation; Issawi, another leader of Iraqiya, was also targeted for alleged involvement in terrorism; the Shi'i members of the Iraqiya were hunted down, and pressured into disavowing Iraqiya: two splinter groups and few individual resignations

The second target was Sadr. A large chunk, known as Asa'ib al-Haq, was co-opted by Iran during the Charge of the Knights campaign in 2008-9; they were turned into an Iranian proxy, then were patronized by Maliki, and re-deployed against their old mentor, Sadr.

The third target was Hakim himself, a moderate compared to Sadr, whose Badr Corp, led by Hadi 'Amiri (minister of transportation) was turned against his mother group in alliance with Maliki.

The third target was the Kurds. Overtly or covertly,, Maliki had a role in widening divisions among the Kurds. The no-vote effort to unseat Maliki in the summer of 2012, ironically initiated by president Talbani himself, was aborted by no other than Talbani himself. His change of heart was the result of tremendous pressure by Iran, conveyed as it was, in a thinly veiled threat, by Qasim Sulaimani (Commander of Quds Corp of the Iranian Pasdaran, i.e. the Revolutionary Guard), a prominent Iranian leader in charge of the Iraqi dossier (and the Syrian), in a secretly held meeting with president Talbani, to end the no-confidence move.

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#### IV-The PM strategy in 2014:

Maliki's strategy in 2014 was shaped by his success in fragmenting the Sunnis of the Iraqiya front in 2012, and by his relative setback in the 2013 provincial elections. Maliki came out battered. Together with his new allies, the Badr Corp of Hadi 'Amiri and Fadhila party of Ya'qubi, he could hardly manage to get more than 97 seats out of 447 seats on the local assemblies in Arab provinces in 2013; compared to some 157 seats in 2009 provincial elections, which Maliki ran single-handed, and managed to control 7 out of 9 provincial councils directly.

By contrast, Sadr and Hakim who performed poorly in the provincial elections in 2009, fared too well in 2013; they got 58 and 61 seats respectively, forming an anti-Maliki front that unseated Da'wa party in several provinces. The Da'wa party, its leader Maliki, and their entourage, were at loss. The 'strong man' image they had projected in Maliki's show down with the Iraqiya leaders, as with the Kurds in 2012, and the success Maliki scored in foiling the no-confidence vote, seemed ineffective in electoral terms.

Three actions underlie the new 'recovery' strategy:

- 1- magnifying '*Sunni*' threat and escalation of military confrontation with the 'insurgent' Anbar province, now expanded to Mosul and Salahudin;
- 2- replacing 'consociational' by majority government; and
- 3- divide and rule; and manipulate the electoral system.

The three notions behind these three actions are crystal clear.

The *first* notion is this: magnifying '*Sunni*' threat as one near at home, symbolized by demonstrations in Anbar and military action in Mosul and other regions, fanned by regional actors, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and non-state actors, the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS), which extended its operations from Aleppo in Syria to Mosul-Falluja in Iraq. Official spokesmen advised the public in earnest that 'insurgents' (now a synonym of Sunnis) were heavily armed and could easily invade Baghdad. The inflated security threat did cause public alarm in Shi'i communities, and embarrassed both Sadr and Hakim, who publicly expressed fears that the military action, in substance and timing, was a political maneuver to influence the outcome of coming elections. They criticized both the sectarian discourse by protestors, and the

deployment of the military against their own civilian citizens. Maliki's propaganda machine depicted both figures, directly or otherwise, as 'bad' Shi'is', wasting Shi'i victory and jeopardizing their very existence. Maliki went even further to describe Sadr as being 'politically immature'. Selling the notion of Sunni threat at a time when Shi'is are firmly in the saddle commanding roughly one million-man armed forces and around \$150 b., in annual oil revenues, is hard to sell unless the other, complementary notion of 'bad' or 'weak' Shi'is is adjoined. And by its logic, the combination is at one and the same time an instrument of fomenting sectarianism, and a tool to divide whatever common Shi'i space may exist.

The *second* notion is both naïve and dangerous: *majoritarian rule*. Maliki loathes the consociational (*Tawafuqiya*) form of government, a term signifying a government inclusive of representatives of the three major ethnic and sectarian communities, i.e. a broad, coalition government, meant to run nation-building mechanisms along broad participatory, more integrative lines. Maliki's mistrust of Sunni politicians, his thinly hidden discomfort, to say the least, with the Kurds, and his disregard for his Shi'i allies, all stemmed from his narrow understanding of, and his inability to build the much needed consensus.

Most Shi'i politicians have a very unique view of democracy, as a purely majority rule, and majority in their dictionary has a demographic meaning. Democracy is demography (to borrow a phrase coined by Rend Rahim). The idea of majoritarian rule has its roots in this demographic conception of democracy; in Maliki's case there is an added element of his relative success as the largest Shi'i party. Hence the equation: Shi'is rule by dint of being the majority, and Maliki runs the Shi'is by dint of being a majority within the majority. PM Maliki began his onslaught against consociational -ism as early as 2009, but more vigorously during 2013-4, blaming all failures, military, economic or otherwise, on this 'obstacle'. The strong man image, it was alleged, could come in full fledge if and when the 'consociational' handicaps were removed. The resolution of the problem is majority rule; after all this is the basic principle of all democracies. The implication for oppositional Shi'i and Sunni politicians was a clear threat of marginalization. The illusions of majority rule as a magical balm of sorts are abundant.

Of course, majority or consociational, a coalition government will require 165 votes in the parliament, a threshold that had never been reached by any community in the aggregate.

And whether a narrow coalition is of a majoritarian or consociational nature, it remains the case that the government will be a multiparty one, and that policy and decision making would require the consent of multiple partners in the government (cabinet and parliament).

The third notion is the activation of the principle of 'divide and rule' by splitting foes and even nearest allies as well, then manipulating the electoral statutes and machinery to prevent the emergence of a strong Shi'i rival.

Not only the IHEC was restructured in terms of staff at head and branch offices, but also the Saint Lego Method, which allows a measure of representation for small blocs to get represented, was modified. At the previous elections, the Saint Lego Method divisor was at 1, a

value favorable to small groups, but at 1.4 or 1.6 it would be less favourable, and so on. The new San Legó divisor is 1.6, strongly in favour of the big blocs, but does not discount smaller ones altogether. In preparation for the electoral battle, Maliki's SoL created a host of electoral small entities in order to "fish and disperse" the votes, as one insider put it. There are at least 2 old and 8 new small and entities of this sort: the Fadhila (Ya'qubi) and Islah (Ja'fari), have already existed; Hussain Shahrastani (deputy PM), Izzat Shahbender (Maliki's advisor), Sami al-Askari (another Maliki advisor), Muwafaq al-Ruba'i (ex-security advisor), Sadiqun (of 'Asa'ib al-Haq), each deployed their own electoral list. In addition a new comer, Fadhil Dabbas, a Shi'i businessman close to Maliki, constructed a Shi'i-Sunni list to attract pro-Maliki Sunnis in Ninewa, Anbar and Salahudin provinces.

The effects of these three actions-notions were, in the words of Muwafaq Ruba'i, to secure Maliki some 120-140 seats single-handed, with an array of smaller allies in Shi'i and Sunni regions, sufficient to build a near majority massive bloc that would force some reluctant Kurds and few pragmatic or even hostile Sunnis to acquiesce. The pre-election scenario confided by Maliki's aids was this:

Maliki and satellites +Goran (Change) of the Kurds+ plus some pragmatic Sunnis+ the Arabs of Kirkuk+ Turkmen, would secure a third term comfortably.

This formulae, they contented, would bring Talbani or Barzani to his knees, and put Hakim in the corner.

#### **V-Pre-election adversary moves:**

As the looming military confrontation in the Anbar province escalated into full-fledged military operation, the situation further deteriorated by the resurgence of al-Qa'ida new group, named the Iraq Syria Islamic State ISIS(*Dawlat al-Iraq wal Sham al-Islamiya*), which controlled Fallujah and Ramady townships, split the local community, and overshadowed the ongoing civil action in these and other towns. The timing of onslaught and the concomitant sectarian agitation on both sides of the conflict soured the atmosphere, and brought back the dark memories of the sectarian war in 2006-8. While oppositional groups accused the federal government of anti-Sunni sectarianism, the discourse of the federal government under Maliki stressed the perils of terrorism and foreign intervention, in particular Saudi Arabia and Qatar, equating thereby terrorism with Sunnism.

The old blocs of 2010 were now reorganizing their fragmented factions.

The old Iraqiya front was now a shadow of its former self. Iyad Alawi newly invented *Wataniya, The Patriotic*, acted singlehandedly, distancing itself from its old partners, Mutlaq, Hashimi and Nujaifi, after sustaining a huge loss of former Shi'i constituencies in Basra, Babylon, Misan, among others. These represented some 20 MPS, but left Iraqiya during the no-confidence vote in the 2012 crisis. Now Alawi opted for a broader, pan-ethnic and pan-communal approach. His meetings with both Sadr and Barzani signaled his new direction of building this broad, anti-

Maliki front. If this front was materialized at any moment, it would have the potential to attract Hakim and some Sunni factions (Nujaifi and Mutlaq); or it would increase their bargaining capacity vis-à-vis any other contender.

Nujaifi and Mutlaq, on the other hand, while professing their opposition to Maliki, failed to build any meaningful cooperation. Nujaifi's bid to 'represent the Sunnis', distanced him from Mutlaq and Alawi, whose 'nationalist discourse' contradicts the communal idiom deployed by Nujaifi. Their opposition to Maliki, however, did not, thus far, bring them anywhere nearer to each other, most probably by their personal rivalry, as well as by their ideological differences. The potential for rapprochement, however, exists. So is the case of the fragments of local winners from Anbar, Salhudin and Ninewa provinces, who linger on in waiting for better bargains.

On the Kurdish front, Masoud Barzani has been adamant not to have Maliki for a new term in office. He made his position crystal clear, time and time again. But the Kurdish house has not been in order. Differences among the Talbani-PUK leaders as between them and Barzani, were in the open. The rise of Goran was another problem. Up to July 2014, Nechirvan Barzani failed to meet Goran's demand to have a greater share in the cabinet relative to their weight as the second parliamentary bloc in size, and failed to satisfy the PUK's demand to have a slot in the cabinet equal to that of KDP as stipulated in their old Strategic Agreement; hence the failure to form a new Kurdish cabinet. The question is whether the three major Kurdish groups, the KDP, PUK and Goran, can hold together vis-à-vis Maliki in any future negotiations.

Lastly, the National Coalition (NC), the Shi'i front that incorporates Maliki's State of the Law (SoL), and the National Alliance (NA) inclusive of Hakim, Sadr and Ja'fari. In point of fact, the NC exist only on paper. Perhaps the NA is partly so. While Ja'fari has been acting more of a pro-Maliki Trojan horse within the NA, the growing cooperation between Sadr and Hakim throughout the 2013 provincial elections, culminated in ousting Maliki in several strongholds he had had in provincial governments. Sadr opted for a head-on collision course against Maliki, targeting the latter in person, accusing him of being a dictator, a menace to the Shi'i community, who is alienating it from the Kurds and the Sunnis.

Hakim was more cautious, focusing on 'inefficiency', 'corruption' and 'lack of services', themes almost shared across the electoral spectrum. Both, Sadr and Hakim, were concerned that the rising tide of violence and sectarian agitation might play in the hands of Maliki and consequently weaken their positions. Sadr was resolved to disclose these concerns in public, Hakim was to bury them under a thick layer of moderate talk and 'administrative' criticism. Unlike Sadr, his organization suffered from what many observers called 'acute sense of no-self-confidence'. This was relatively alleviated by the progress Hakim had made in the 2013 local elections. Still, Hakim's outfit did not fare well enough in 2014. His moderation may prove too weak to hold, unless a broad and strong anti-Maliki front officially evolves to provide solid ground for Hakim to hold his current position. Perhaps that is why Baqir Solagh, an outstanding figure in the Hakim group, called on Sunnis to build a single, united bloc, ala the Kurds; his intention, perhaps, was

to facilitate his engagement with two anti-Maliki factions that might end up with a broad, formidable alliance in favour of Hakim.

Pre-elections maneuvering involved Iran. Qasim Sulaimani, the commander of the Quds Corps, the strongman in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, is semi-officially known to be in charge of the Iraq and Syria 'dossier'. In his visits to Baghdad and Najaf (March and April), Sulaimani's major concern was to mend Shi'i-Shi'i, and Shi'i-Kurdish fences, to keep a solid Shi'i-Islamist front with a measure of Kurdish support that may secure Maliki in position. Though no official records disclose what went behind closed doors, it has been confided that Sulaimani revealed Iran's direct position as follows: 1-Iran would support the largest Shi'i bloc (presumably in parliament); 2-Iran has no personal preference (Maliki or otherwise). Rightly or otherwise, this has been interpreted by Sadr, Hakim, among other blocs, as an endorsement of a government with or without Maliki, but definitely with the Da'wa party on board. Sulaimani's meeting with a Da'wa strongman, Tariq Najim, has been read along the same lines. Interestingly, Maliki gave public statements that he was willing not to seek renewal. These incidents might prove tiny little maneuvering with no genuine substance; but they reveal the tremendous difficulties encountering rebuilding the old blocs now shattered in hostile factions.

Lastly, the supreme religious authority, Marj'atism, in Najaf, deployed every trick in the book to convey dissatisfaction, nay disapproval of Maliki's government. Leaders of Friday prayers in Najaf and Karbala, mostly representatives of grand ayatollah Sistani, directly criticized the government on accounts of inefficiency, corruption and failure to keep security; the central office of Sistani urged voters to choose those who serve the public interests. Other grand ayatollahs, Nujaiifi in particular, was not that diplomatic. The rift between grand Pontiffs in Najaf, and the lay Shii leaders in Baghdad has become a matter of fact. Its political impact, however, is minimal.

## **VI- The results**

The IEHC announced the results roughly four weeks after the ballot. There was no shortage of irregularities. Among the most flagrant cases was reportedly the fate of some 15% of electoral identity cards which the IEHC failed to deliver to eligible voters. Conflicting reports seem to suggest part of these IDs have been manipulated to double the votes. Another case, reported by the agents of the Sadrists, was the discrepancy between the actual turnouts of voters in greater Baghdad registered at 22%, and the turnout officially published thereafter at more than 80%. The difference is believed to be the result of manipulation. A third massive incident is the fact that more than 1000 IEHC officers were sacked right after the elections for alleged fraud. The votes in a dozen or so of station were cancelled accordingly. Rigging, fixing, threats and other irregularities notwithstanding, the results reflected the hyper-fragmentation of old segmentary factions anchored in ethnicity, communal identity and localism. No single electoral bloc could master any majority; and dividing rivals before the elections has become a handicap right thereafter.

(Consults tables **1, 1A+Ab**)

Maliki's expectations, which were voiced by many of his over-confident aids, to score some 160 seats with the help of his small satellites, were dashed. His bloc, SoL, got altogether 92 seats; however, in this bloc his Da'wa group got roughly one third; the other third went to Shahrستاني's faction, another third to Hadi al-Amiri's Badr Corp. In short, this a fragile coalition, reminiscent of the SoL coalition in 2013 provincial elections when Maliki hardly kept half of the seats he had had in 2009. His alliance with Badr Corp and Shahrستاني groups was more beneficial to the new allies than to Maliki. His survival has become now totally dependent on two non-Da'wa leading figures, who have their own agendas, self-interests, and calculations.

And Hakim-Sadr would direct their attacks on the glaring fracture lines that cripple SoL, and render Maliki outflanked.

In order to better understand the parliamentary groupings and their potential, we shall divide them into six categories:

- 1- Maliki's SoL and its old and new satellites (All in Yellow); their major inner divisions are marked.
- 2- The Shi'i, staunch or lukewarm, rivals: Sadr and Hakim;(All in green)
- 3- The centrist, non-sectarian groups: Watania of Iyad Alawi, Arabia of Salih Mutlaq, and Tahaluf al-Madani, i.e. the Civil Alliance of leftists and democrats;(All in blue)
- 4- The professed large Sunni blocs, Mutahidun of Nujaifi and Karama of 'Ab'ub;(All in red)
- 5- The Kurds, inclusive of Barzani-KDP, Talbani-PUK, Anu Shirwan-Goran; Islamic League, the Yezidis, and the Shabak;(All in velvet)
- 6- A host of local groups inclusive of tribal groups from Anbar, Ninewa, Salhudin, Diyala provinces; also inclusive of Turkmen of Kirkuk, Arab of Kirkuk, and deputies of Christians.(All in brown)  
(Consult figure 1 in colours).

The political-parliamentary landscape as seen in this diagram conveys the reality of hyper-schisms, dispersion and diffusion of forces, a portent to a long, arduous process of census building, with too many unpredictable and uncertain factors. Not only SoL, but also its adversaries, faces the same seemingly insurmountable obstacles of super-divisions.

An important feature in this configuration is that all Shii Islamic forces plus a lay partner (Iraq Coalition constructed and financed by a rising businessman, Fadhil Dabbas), have won more than 50% of the seats for the first time since 2005. This the result of the destruction of Iyad

Alawi's constituencies in Basra, Qadisiya, Wasit, and relatively in Najaf, Babylon, among other provinces. Never before 2014 general elections could all Shii Islamic blocs reach the 50% threshold, a fact testifying to the weakening of independent Shii middle class and tribal strata.

Any contender would require tremendous effort to go over political and constitutional barriers: **first** is to secure a decisive support from within the Shi'i front; and **second** is to win a two third majority for the simultaneous election of president, speaker of the national assembly, and nomination for premiership; these two conditions apply to Maliki's SoL, as well as to any challenger from the NC. Without approval say of Hakim (the green column), SoL cannot make any meaningful move to initiate further negotiations in the hope of meeting the second condition. Hakim's support (29 seats), if secured, would not be enough to master absolute majority, let alone the two-third majority required. SoL would need additional selective support, say from among the Kurds (Goran-9seats, or Talbani-PUK-19), and the support of some groups from the large but divided Sunni bloc (Nujaifi-23 seats, and ten different small groups holding together 20 seats.

What are the chances of going over *the first barrier* that of wider Shii support?

In 2010, Sadr became the king maker. His shift towards coalition with SoL saved the day for Maliki. Sadr was in exile, his organization was under military pressure, his followers being hunted down, and the Iranian pressure could easily drive him to keep Shi'i ranks in order behind Maliki. Now, neither Sadr, nor Hakim for that matter, are in such a weak position. The only, and major pressure, is that of the deteriorating military situation: the fall of Mosul, parts of Kirkuk, under ISIS control, after the setback of the Iraqi military in Anbar. Sadr may hold position, but Hakim may prove the weakest link, although his bargaining position is potentially very strong.

Both Sadr and Hakim, together with other leaders, fear SoL might well encroach upon their groups using political money to lure some not so loyal individuals. Another concern is the possible failure to agree on an alternative candidate. The names in circulation, the ex-vice president Adil Abdul Mahdi, or the ex- minister of interior Baqir Solagh, Ahmad Chalabi, or mayor of Misan (nominated by Sadr), seem to have marginal prospect, if for no other reason, then for the strong Iranian opposition to almost all these figures; perhaps with the exception of Baqir Solagh. A candidate out of the blue may and should be expected. Once Omar Khayam, the great medieval poet-mathmatician was asked by asocrcerer of which of the seven gates he would exist, Khayam wrote on a piece of paper: of the eighth gate!

What are the chances to meet *the second condition*? Would Goran, or the PUK, simply leave the Kurdish vessel in return for a few privileges under Maliki in Baghdad? Or can they have enough will to pressure or convince Barzani to change course? The first case might prove too perilous for Goran and the PUK despite their cordial relations and past record of collaboration with Iran; the second case might stand a chance of success, if and when a strong Shi'i bloc emerged under Maliki, or, what amounts to same thing, if and when Sadr and Hakim failed to build an independent Shi'i bloc to replace Maliki.

The centrist bloc, while weak, is not a spent force. Its strongest bargaining and mobilizing chip is the pre- and post- election rapprochement with the Kurdish coalition and Sadr, mastering together anywhere between 113-123 seats), a match for SoL and its small allies. Its strongest point is commonality of political aim: displacing Maliki; its weakest aspect is lack of any vision of the substitute. No meaningful contacts have been made so far to engage potential coalition partners, or to build broader fronts to that effect.

Lastly, the professedly Sunni groups have little initiative to offer unless united in a coalition with strong leadership. Nujaifi (23 seats), has first to deal with some 10 political groups (having 20 seats altogether) if his intention to build a unified Sunni bloc is vigorously pursued; but no sign of such endeavour has thus far been observed. The ongoing inter-fight, sundry self-interests, and even antagonisms, have torn these groups apart to such an extent that any meaningful unity of purpose could be expected. Another failure is the growing gulf separating Nujaifi from his nearest potential partners, namely Wataniya of Iyad Alawi and Arabiya of Salih Mutlaq. This situation presents an opportunity for each faction to overtly or covertly engage Maliki to secure privileges of sorts.

All in all, the general trajectory will become clearer once more than one Shii candidate is officially announced; otherwise uncertainties will continue to overshadow the process. Time and political money, as some observers contend, are not on the side of challengers of the status quo.

### **VII\_Three possible scenarios**

In the abstract three possible scenarios exist, two of which are in the extreme, and one probable case of a compromise.

*Firstly, on the extreme, Maliki might manage to build a fragile parliamentary front to secure a third term in office;*

*Secondly, on the other extreme, Maliki's adversaries might not fail to deploy a successful PM, ousting Maliki.*

*Thirdly, a compromise might bring Maliki-free-SoL into an acceptable coalition with an array of Shii, Kurdish, centrist and Sunni groups.*

Before the ISIS onslaught against and take-over of Mosul and Tikirt, the pendulum might have been wavering between options 2 and 3; now, thereafter, it seems to tilt between options 1 and 2.

Hakim's position is betraying signs of a more hesitant, less confrontational mood; perhaps even readiness to renege on his pre-elections stand. He appeared with a black turban (the symbol of

noble lineage) and a military fatigue, that of Special Forces, a signal to fight terrorists (but with whom?). Najaf under Sistani is now more vocal on confronting ISIS, with feeble hints on national unity and support for the Iraqi military. (The text of Sistani's statement attached).

Maliki's camp is trying its best to turn the debacle into victory, and transform their PM from a dissent-maker into a unifying savior. Would the political-security crisis in the aftermath of the Mosul-Tikrit episode create the much needed and indeed fanned external Sunni threat save Maliki for a third term; or would it be an opportunity to hold him accountable for the mess?

The term of the old parliament is over; the confirmation of the newly elected MPs is yet to come, leaving the new legislative power in absentia, and the old government firmly in place.

## **Appendix:**

### **General Elections:**

**Results of 2014 general elections (Table 1, 1A+Ab)**

**Results of 2010 general elections (Table 2)**

**Results of the 2005 general elections (Table 3A+3B)**

**(Table 3A shows results of the constituent elections January 2005; Table 3B shows the results of the general elections, December 2005).**

### **Provincial Elections:**

**Results of 2013 provincial elections (Table 4)**

**Results of 2009 provincial elections (Table 5)**

**Results of 2005 provincial elections (Table 6)**