

Insights & Analysis for February 2010

Patriotic Union of Kurdistan: Revival or Mere Survival?

AHMED ALI
FEBRUARY 24, 2010



While all Iraqi political factions are competing strongly in lead up to the March 7 parliamentary elections, in Iraqi Kurdistan the internal competition is especially intense. In particular, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK, the more secular and less tribal of the two major Iraqi Kurdish political parties) stands to lose or regain much. The PUK suffered major losses in the July 2009 provincial elections in its main powerbase of Suleimaniyah at the hands of the newly-formed Gorran (Change) list. This has created the perception that the PUK has become a junior partner to the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) in the power-sharing arrangement between the two major factions in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Among the many important implications of the upcoming elections will be a signal as to whether the PUK can bounce back or Gorran is here to stay as a new force in Iraqi politics.

KDP-PUK Relations

For now, the KDP seems to be sticking to its 2005 agreement to share power equitably with the PUK. The agreement dictates the rotation of senior positions (i.e. president, prime minister, and speaker of parliament) between the two parties. The KDP is behaving this way because it would prefer for the PUK to win back support from Gorran, which has been highly critical of the KDP as well as the PUK. There are also past animosities between Gorran leader Noshewan Mustafa and KDP leader (and President of Iraqi Kurdistan) Masoud Barzani.

The KDP has shown more subtly that it feels it has the upper hand with the PUK, however, via a series of appointments. For example, in the discussions leading up to the formation of a new KRG, there were rumors that Prime Minister Barham Salih (PUK) would not reappoint incumbent Minister of Natural Resources Ashti Hawrami, given his reported ties to controversial oil deals. But Hawrami, who is considered close to KDP leaders, retained his position despite a public outcry. The reappointment signified a blow to Salih's efforts to implement the PUK electoral slogan, "Renewal and Reform." The KDP is reportedly resistant to reappointing PUK Deputy Leader Kosrat Rasul Ali to the vice presidency of Iraqi Kurdistan.

The KDP also is flexing its muscles regarding appointments to the Iraqi central government. The deputy prime minister position recently vacated by Salih, for example, has typically gone to the PUK, but this time it went to Barzani's Baghdad-based representative, Rozh Nouri Shaws.

Ongoing PUK-Gorran tensions

The fact that Gorran won 25 percent of Iraqi Kurdistan parliament seats was a wake-up call for the PUK. The group took steps to regain voters' trust in Suleimaniyah and to reenergize its political base, including a decision to expel Gorran members and to establish an internal integrity commission. PUK leader Jalal Talabani

w as the first to disclose his assets. Steps by the KRG, including the unprecedented disclosure of the budget and the announcement that 10,000 new KRG jobs will be created, also have helped the PUK.

Gorran says there is a less attractive side to the competition: continuous harassment and attacks on its members in PUK-controlled territory. Gorran alleges that the office of a one of its parliamentarians in the town of Koya was burned down, that salaries of teachers suspected of ties to Gorran have been reduced, and that security officers and *peshmerga* fighters sympathetic to Gorran have been punished.

Tensions mounted in January 2010 when Talabani strongly criticized Noshewan Mustafa during the PUK plenum, drawing a strong response from Mustafa in his new paper *Rozhnama*. The media war only stopped when President Barzani intervened, saying that “we will never allow for the Kurds’ blood to be shed by their Kurdish brothers again,” a reference to the KDP-PUK civil war of the 1990s.

Kurdish Parties in the Upcoming Elections

The KDP is likely to do better than the PUK in the March 7 elections, which will strengthen its position as the senior partner in the KDP-PUK partnership. The PUK will face stiff competition from Gorran not only in Suleimaniyah but in Kirkuk, where Gorran has been establishing a presence (and where the PUK is now concentrating resources). In addition to Gorran, competition from the northern-based Islamist parties will produce a more diverse Kurdish representation in Baghdad. Once the national elections are over, all the parties will begin to regroup for the Iraqi Kurdistan provincial elections scheduled for October 2010.

The parliamentary seat allocation has guaranteed the Iraqi Kurdish parties at least 43 future members of parliament (out of a total of 325), which will make them sought-after government partners by either Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki’s State of Law alliance or its competitor, the Iraqi National Alliance. Either way, Iraqi Kurdish parties will lend their support only if they receive guarantees on the issues of oil revenue, effective power-sharing mechanisms, Kirkuk, and the status of the *peshmerga*. Whatever the electoral results among Kurdish parties, they will likely continue to speak with one voice on Kirkuk or other disputed internal boundaries. Although the three parties’ positions on these issues differ a bit--Gorran has a more hard-line stance than the other two--no Kurdish party wants to be the one that surrendered an inch of “Kurdistani” land.

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Sunnis and Iraq’s Elections: An Evolving Balance of Power

MUHAMMAD ABU RUMMAN
FEBRUARY 24, 2010



At first glance, the Sunni political scene in Iraq on the eve of the March 7 parliamentary elections appears to be an incoherent mosaic of political parties.

There are two main coalitions, however, that are expected to win most of the Sunni vote; the remaining parties reflect the community’s diverse ideological and political views but are unlikely to pack much of an electoral punch. There are new variables in the Sunni community that distinguish these elections from those of 2005 and even from the 2009 provincial elections. Most importantly, these elections will expose the changing balance among various forces within Sunni politics as a subset of the larger Iraqi political equation.

From Boycott to Participation

The upcoming elections will clarify, through voter turnout rates, the general attitude within the Sunni community toward political participation. Sunnis will either move toward further incorporation into the political process or will remain susceptible to rejectionists who want to keep Sunnis within the framework of armed resistance—or at least with one foot in the political game and the other out. Those advocating armed resistance and a boycott of the political process were dominant in the Sunni political scene in the wake of the 2003 U.S. invasion, when only a handful of personalities and parties (such as the Iraqi Islamic Party, and the Iraqi Accord Front) embraced the political option. Although these parties took part in the 2005 parliamentary elections, the prevailing Sunni position was to boycott, reflecting dominance of armed factions (especially al-Qaeda) at that time.

By 2007, serious disagreements emerged among the militant groups, on many occasions taking the form of armed combat between al-Qaeda and other forces such as the Islamic Army or the 1920 Revolution Brigades. The formation of the tribal Awakening Councils constituted a further Sunni reappraisal of the political situation and the utility of using force, and revealed growing Sunni opposition to al-Qaeda and Iran. Last year's provincial council elections provided another indicator of the Sunnis' evolution, with rising voter turnout and a diverse range of actors including Islamist, tribal, and secular parties.

The Rejectionists

Some Sunni groups, with various ideological perspectives, nonetheless continue to boycott politics and embrace militant activism. Former Vice President Azzat al-Douri leads the Baathists; it is unclear how much support they command as opposed to the various Islamist groups, which eschew any loyalty to Saddam Hussein and nationalist ideas. The Jihad and Reform Front is close to the Muslim Scholars Association, which is led by Harith al-Dari. The Front includes a number of leading factions, most prominently the 1920 Revolution Brigades and al-Rashideen Army, and boycotts politics at present.

Among the armed factions is the Islamic State of Iraq, under the leadership of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, comprised of al-Qaeda and its allies. Although it has been on the defensive for the past two years, the last few months have seen a resurgence of its headline-grabbing attacks. Another force to be reckoned with is the Political Council for the Iraqi Resistance, which represents four leading armed factions: the Islamic Army, Hamas-Iraq, the Islamic Front for the Iraqi Resistance (JAMI), and the Shari'a Committee of Ansar al-Sunna. Among the armed factions, the Political Council is the most receptive toward possible political involvement; it recently entered talks in Turkey with representatives of U.S. forces, although they bore no fruit. While the Political Council is continuing to boycott elections, the spokesman for JAMI, Abdullah al-Hafed, recently told a Qatari newspaper that the resistance would not target election centers. Sources close to the Political Council suggest that it might even quietly back some Sunni candidates.

Shifting Alliances and Blocs

Meanwhile, the number of Sunni parties taking part in the political process has grown and electoral coalitions have shifted. The biggest change, which applies to the Iraqi political scene at large, is the emergence of cross-sectarian coalitions and signs that political rhetoric is becoming more secular. This applies to newer entrants to the political field (such as the Awakening Councils) as well as to older, more established players.

This cross-sectarian feature is clearly dominant in the Iraqi National Movement, comprised of the Iraqi National Accord led by former Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, a secular Shi'a whom a broad range of Sunnis consider an acceptable candidate. He is joined by the Sunni former Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, as well as Usama al-Nujeifi, his brother Atheel al-Nujeifi, Adnan al-Pachachi, and a number of minor coalitions and figures. Observers expect this coalition to compete strongly for the Sunni vote against the Iraqi Accord Front, which until now has been the strongest representative of Arab Sunnis. The front is spearheaded by the Iraqi

Islamic Party led by Osama al-Tikriti, his deputy Eyad al-Samarrai, as well as Mohsin Abdul-Hamid.

Meanwhile, the Unity Alliance of Iraq under former Interior Minister Jawad al-Bolani (who is Shi'a) was also able to find allies within the Sunni community, particularly among the Awakening Council leaders such as Ahmed Abu Risha (leader of the Awakening Council of Iraq in Anbar), the former advisor to the Awakening Councils Abu Azzam Al-Tamimi, and the National Charter Gathering under Ahmed Abdul-Ghaffur al-Samarrai.

The State of Law coalition, led by Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki, has won the support of only a few Sunni tribal and political figures. This is also the case with the Iraqi National Alliance, which includes the main Shi'a parties competing with al-Maliki (the Iraqi Supreme Islamic Council, the Sadrists, Ahmed al-Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress, and Ibrahim al-Jaafari from the National Reform Movement).

Now that the pre-electoral strategic positioning and alliance-making has drawn to a close, the ball is in the court of the Sunni voters. Through their participation, they will answer two key questions. Will Sunnis embrace the political process decisively, which would curb armed resistance? And will Sunnis take advantage of intra-Shi'a divisions and increase their clout by voting overwhelmingly for a single coalition—or split their votes and limit their influence?

Muhammad Abu Rumman is a Jordanian scholar and writer. Paul Wulfsberg translated this article from Arabic.

Egypt's New Brotherhood Leadership: Implications and Limits of Change

HUSAM TAMMAM
FEBRUARY 17, 2010



Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood has been buffeted by a seemingly endless series of changes and blows over the past few years. No sooner had the organization begun to recover from a controversial leadership election that ended January 20 than the regime detained some of the new senior leaders—including Deputy Supreme Guide Mahmoud Ezzat and Guidance Bureau members Essam Erian, Mohie Hamid, and Abdul Rahman al-Barr—in uncharacteristic midnight arrests on February 8. The regime directed a new and surprising accusation at the three: attempting to form an organization based on the teachings of Brotherhood radical Sayyid Qutb (executed in 1966), including armed units intended to carry out militant operations inside Egypt. This was an apparent attempt to capitalize on the new leadership's association with Qutb, whose ideas are generally deemed extremist, and to remind Egyptians of the Brotherhood's past use of violence.

The combined effect of the elections and the arrests, coming on the heels of continuous regime attacks on the Brotherhood's leadership and finances during the past four years, is to push the organization in an increasingly conservative and defensive direction. The Brotherhood's internal divisions and problems are now exposed for all to see and real changes in the way the group functions may be underway. Relations between the Brotherhood and the regime, already poor over the last several years, might also be taking a turn for the worse.

Turning Inward

The January elections empowered conservative members who are deeply influenced by the Salafi-style political thought of Qutb. New Supreme Guide Dr. Muhammad Badi`, who was imprisoned with Qutb, is a

prime example. This conservative faction is more interested in working from within to cultivate a strong, disciplined movement than in engaging with other political forces and intellectual currents in Egyptian society. They place a higher premium on the spiritual education and social upbringing of the movement's base than on developing a comprehensive reform program that would appeal to a broader audience.

The Brotherhood begins its new chapter having lost almost an entire faction that was committed to a dialogue with other social and political forces and capable of building alliances with them. Although reformists never had a strong organizational presence and were unable to penetrate all of the movement's organizational levels, they had a few senior representatives in the Guidance Bureau—for example Abdul Monem Aboul Fotouh and Muhammad Habib—who lost their seats in the latest elections. New Guidance Bureau member Essam Erian has been known as a leading reformist, but his recent election reportedly was due to a deal with the conservatives in which he disassociated himself from his reformist colleagues. During the recent elections, disagreements between conservatives and reformists escalated to the point where some candidates filed official complaints challenging the integrity of the electoral process; some have refused to endorse the new guide.

Indeed, the elections precipitated an internal debate that threatens to produce a significant internal rift akin to the one that took place in 1996, when a group of young Brotherhood leaders left the movement to form the (still unlicensed) Wasat Party. The elections are also likely to set off a campaign to purge the Brotherhood of reformists. The movement will need time to overcome deep rifts and restore internal harmony, an unusual development for a group that had long succeeded in keeping such differences a private matter.

Changing Role for the Guide

Another notable internal change in the Brotherhood is the end of the era of charismatic supreme guides; the post has changed from that of a revered spiritual and symbolic figure to one that is strictly administrative.

Retired Guide Mahdi Akif's tenure raised some concerns. Akif—a simple person with a tendency to overreact—made several political mistakes and media blunders. Akif's age (82) and status as a member of the founding generation have nonetheless guaranteed his standing as an icon for younger generations, especially outside of Egypt. There were no more contestants from the founding generation of the Brotherhood to replace him, which contributed to the intense competition over the post of supreme guide and controversy over the results.

The controversy was intense enough to necessitate the involvement of Brotherhood leaders outside of Egypt, which cost the group much of its prestige as the oldest Brotherhood organization and one that had often mediated other branches' internal differences. Egypt's movement has now joined the ranks of Brotherhood organizations in Jordan, Iraq, and Algeria, all of which have recently experienced internal rifts.

This will hurt the Egyptian Brotherhood's ability to play a leadership role in the future and might effectively mark an end to the international Brotherhood organization.

Implications for Political Participation

Despite the extensive changes in the Brotherhood's leadership, the group's major strategic choices—renouncing violence as a tool, participating in politics, and adopting a gradualist approach—are unlikely to shift suddenly. The Brotherhood made those choices over the course of three decades; all factions of the movement were involved, and the group's social base supports them. The Brotherhood has long been known for its pragmatism and steadiness, and it will take years for effects of the current ideological reorientation to become clear.

As a result, the Brotherhood is expected to try to participate in all scheduled elections this year, including those for the Shura Council in May and the People's Assembly in November. The fact that the Brotherhood constitutes the largest parliamentary bloc (88 out of 444 elected seats) after the ruling National Democratic Party also means that the new leadership will have no choice but to contest elections; otherwise it would be

accused of sounding a retreat. Engaging in a strong battle with other forces might also help the group regain its internal cohesion.

While the Brotherhood will continue to participate in politics, there are likely to be significant changes in its political platform. The conservative turn probably means that the Brotherhood will be less receptive than in the past to dialogue about and criticisms of its program—for example, its refusal to accept the nomination of women or Copts to the presidency—from other political forces.

The Brotherhood's likely loss of flexibility and ability to make common cause with other political and intellectual forces will assist regime attempts to contain the group and prevent the emergence of any broad opposition front. The change will not necessarily diminish the Brotherhood's popularity, however, as its support base favors conservative views and apparently desired a more conservative leadership. While this reorientation would seem to produce a Brotherhood more manageable for the regime, the recent arrests also open up the possibility of a new, more confrontational chapter between the two.

Husam Tammam is an Egyptian researcher on Islamist movements. Dina Bishara translated this article from Arabic.

Iraq's Elections Highlight Gap in U.S. Policy

BRIAN KATULIS
FEBRUARY 16, 2010



Iraq's March 7 parliamentary elections represent the ultimate "stress test" for the country's fragile democratic transition. Just as a cardiologist uses a treadmill to test a heart patient's vital signs, the upcoming elections will test how well Iraqi political institutions and processes have evolved since the last round of national elections in 2005.

Regardless of the outcome, a new government in Iraq will represent an opportunity for the Obama administration to link its Iraq policy to a more coherent strategic approach to the broader Middle East.

Last year's provincial elections in Iraq offered some encouraging but still mixed signs of political evolution. The emergence of a handful of new political forces—new coalitions touting nationalist instead of divisive sectarian agendas, more active engagement by a wider range of Sunni actors (many of whom stood on the sidelines in previous elections), and new leaders and parties challenging the dominant leaders and parties—were positive signs of a strengthening democratic transition.

Beneath the surface, however, more fundamental questions remain unanswered. How strong are the foundations for advancing liberties, including religious freedom, respect for minorities, and protection from human rights abuses? Recent reports by the U.S. State Department and independent human rights monitors offer a grim picture of endemic abuses. Furthermore, reports of misuse of Iraqi security forces by the Maliki government to settle political battles raise concerns about whether those forces will remain politically neutral. How much have Iraq's internal sectarian and ethnic divisions narrowed in reality? It took leading political factions months to agree on rules for the elections, and the opaque manner in which numerous candidates have been banned from running was extremely troubling.

The 2007-2008 surge of U.S. forces helped reduce violence and this relative calm held (except for a handful of prominent attacks) after U.S. forces withdrew from urban areas. But this reduced violence has not yet resulted in major political progress. Honest assessments of the benchmarks outlined in U.S. Congressional

legislation three years ago —long-forgotten yet rudimentary measurements for Iraq's political transition —conclude that Iraqi leaders have not achieved much progress to date on resolving core power-sharing issues. Promises of constitutional reform made on the eve of the 2005 constitutional referendum have not been kept. Major unresolved issues, including the Arab-Kurdish divide in Kirkuk, the disputed territories, and the unfulfilled Article 140 of Iraq's constitution (which outlined a process for settling the status of the disputed territories in northern Iraq), do not seem any closer to resolution.

Meanwhile in Washington, the Obama administration is focusing more of its attention on problems at home and other priorities abroad. In the past 18 months, the center of gravity for U.S. national security policy in the broader Middle East and South Asia has shifted eastward, with Afghanistan getting more troops and money and Iran and Pakistan receiving increased diplomatic attention. President Barack Obama's central message on Iraq in his January 27, 2010 State of the Union address was clear and succinct: U.S. troops are leaving, just as he promised when he ran for office. Left unanswered are larger strategic questions: what sort of Iraq is the United States leaving behind, and how does that Iraq fit into the broader U.S. regional strategy?

President Obama did note in his speech that "we will support the Iraqi government as they hold elections, and we will continue to partner with the Iraqi people to promote regional peace and prosperity." And in fact, the Obama administration remains heavily invested and engaged in Iraq. On the most simple measure—troop levels—the United States still had more troops there than in Afghanistan as 2010 began. The U.S. embassy in Baghdad remains the largest in the world, and the Obama administration has started to implement programs aimed at fulfilling the promise of the bilateral Strategic Framework Agreement, which outlines security, economic, educational, and cultural activities to build the foundations for a privileged bilateral relationship. The U.S. State Department last month announced new initiatives to maintain a strong presence and involvement in Iraq on matters such as police training and economic development.

The United States also invested significant efforts to intervene in the election law debate last fall and the recent dispute over banning candidates. Vice President Joe Biden flew to Baghdad in January, and has met with a steady stream of Iraqi visitors to Washington in advance of the March elections. Several Iraqi leaders have openly criticized this intervention, however, as ineffectual.

In fact, it is no longer clear just how much leverage the United States retains to shape political outcomes in Iraq. For many years, the United States overestimated its power to affect trends such as intra-Shi'a politics or to bridge Arab-Kurdish divides in Ninevah or Kirkuk. The United States has had a major impact in rebuilding Iraq's security forces in the past few years. But just as the 2007-2008 surge of U.S. forces has not necessarily ushered in a new era of cooperation and reconciliation among Iraq's competing factions, it remains unclear how much that security assistance will translate into progress in Iraq's political transition.

Another important question for U.S. policy in Iraq also remains unanswered: where does Iraq fit within a broader regional strategy? In its first year, the Obama administration has set a new overall tone of engagement in the Middle East in speeches in Egypt and Turkey. It embarked on aggressive diplomacy on the Arab-Israeli front and reached out to Iran, efforts that have not yet produced tangible gains.

But as of yet, the Obama administration has not defined its overall strategy for the broader Middle East and where Iraq fits into that approach. If, as some analysts argue, the recent political developments inside of Iraq point to the country moving closer to Iran's orbit, what does that mean for broader U.S. policy objectives? Iraq featured prominently in the past two administrations' broader regional strategies: Iraq was at the center of the Bush administration's Freedom Agenda, and was one half of a dual containment policy that included Iran under the Clinton administration. Whether those approaches were the best for advancing U.S. interests is debatable, but there was an overall strategy.

The Obama administration should more clearly define how it sees the bilateral relationship with Iraq fitting into a larger plan to deescalate tensions and foster stability in the broader Gulf region. A new Iraq is emerging, and the elections will produce a different government, but the Obama administration has not yet figured out a

coherent regional strategy in which Iraq once again plays an important role.

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Visit our [Iraqi Elections](#) webpage for additional analysis.

In the News

Jordanian Judges Demand Judicial Independence

FEBRUARY 22, 2010

Sixty Jordanian judges signed a memorandum requesting greater financial and administrative independence during a judicial conference held at the Dead Sea on February 16. The memorandum includes requests to establish an independent body to administer courts and provide administrative and financial oversight in lieu of the Ministry of Justice. The judges also requested increased salaries and improved benefits. Neither Justice Minister Ayman Ow deh nor Rateb al-Wazni, head of Jordan's Cassation Court and chairman of the judicial council, have commented on the memorandum as of this writing. Click [here](#) for more in Arabic.

U.S.-Egypt Endowment Discussed

FEBRUARY 22, 2010

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Jacob Lew announced, in a statement to the press on February 16, that negotiations with the Egyptian government are underway to establish a joint endowment as an alternative to the current U.S. economic assistance program. Lew said that the program would continue to support the efforts of civil society organizations and that the details of the proposal would be ironed in the coming months. Egypt has for several years sought the establishment of an endowment to replace U.S. economic support funds, which have diminished significantly over time and been accompanied by U.S. requests for economic and political reforms. Click [here](#) for more in Arabic.

Cabinet Reshuffle in Tunisia

FEBRUARY 16, 2010

Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi announced on January 14 the first major cabinet reshuffle since President Zine Abidine Ben Ali's reelection in October 2009. Minister of Defense Kamel Morjane was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs (replacing Abdelwahab Abdallah). Ridah Grira was appointed Minister of Defense. Other changes included, inter alia, the ministers of information, social affairs, justice and human rights, and education. Click [here](#) for more.

Iraqi NGO Law Passed

FEBRUARY 16, 2010

The Iraqi parliament passed a new Law on Non-Government Organizations on January 25, a few days before going on recess. The draft law, which has been in review for months, was hailed as an improvement over its predecessor.

Egyptian Newspaper Editor Sentenced

FEBRUARY 16, 2010

A Cairo court sentenced editor-in-chief Yasser Barakat of a weekly newspaper *al-Mougaz* to one year in prison and a fine of \$10,800 (60,000 EGP) on charges of defamation on February 2. Member of Parliament Mustafa Bakri, editor-in-chief of the weekly *al-Osbo'*, brought the suit against Barakat. Click [here](#) for more in Arabic.

Jordanian Courts Suggest Harsher Laws on Web Media

FEBRUARY 16, 2010

The Committee to Protect Journalists reported on February 2 that Jordan's Court of Cassation suggested classifying online media outlets as publications and thus subjecting them to the highly restrictive national Press and Publication Law. The court's suggestion has not yet been introduced as a law. Jordanian journalists and activists fear increased government interference in online media. Click [here](#) for more.

Muslim Brotherhood Arrests in Egypt

FEBRUARY 16, 2010

Security forces arrested three prominent Brotherhood leaders--Deputy Supreme Guide Mohamed Izzat and Guidance Bureau members Issam al-Arian and Abdel Rahman al-Bar—as well as 12 other members on February 8. A Brotherhood statement suggested that the arrests were in retaliation for activities in support for Hamas and Gaza. Click [here](#) for more in Arabic. An additional 29 Brotherhood members were arrested between February 7 and 10. Click [here](#) for more in Arabic.

Political Parties Barred from the Upcoming Election in Iraq

JANUARY 13, 2010

The Iraqi parliament's Accountability and Justice Committee on January 11 barred fifteen political parties, including Saleh al-Mutlaq's Iraqi Front for National Dialogue, from participating in the March parliamentary elections on accusations of affiliation with Ba'athists. Mutlaq's party, part of a larger Sunni bloc called the Iraqi National Movement and headed by vice president Tareq al-Hashimi, threatened to boycott the election if the committee's decision is not reversed. The parliament appointed a committee on January 12 to look into the matter. Click [here](#) for more in Arabic.

Iraqi Parliamentary Elections Finalized for March 7

JANUARY 13, 2010

Iraq's parliament voted on a revised election law on December 5 that addressed Vice President Tareq al-Hashimi's concerns about adequate representation for Iraq's Sunnis population. Elections, which were originally scheduled for January 16, will be held March 7. Click [here](#) for more coverage of the upcoming elections.

Sectarian Tensions in Egypt

JANUARY 13, 2010

Tensions remain high following a shooting that left six Copts and one police officer dead on January 6, the eve of Coptic Christmas, in the southern Egyptian city of Naga' Hamadi. Thousands of Christians in the area clashed with security forces on January 7. The Egyptian parliament discussed the incidents on January 11. The governor of Qena testified that the shooting appeared to be a revenge killing related to the alleged rape and abduction of a young Muslim girl and was not motivated by religious hatred; Coptic parliamentarian Georgette Qillini reportedly called the governor a liar and stormed out. Click [here](#) for more on the aftermath of the incident in English, and [here](#) for more on the parliamentary discussion in Arabic.

Brotherhood Elections, Arrests in Egypt

JANUARY 13, 2010

Dr. Muhammad Badi' is the new Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, according to an announcement made by his predecessor during a news conference on January 16. Dr. Badi' is a 67 year old pathologist, who served nearly a decade in prison after being convicted in the same 1965 case as renowned Brotherhood militant Sayyid Qutb. He replaces Mahdi Akef, who held the post for five years and retired voluntarily at age 80. The internal election process has been fraught with controversy, with some Brotherhood members preferring to defer elections for several months. Click [here](#) for more in Arabic.

In his first press conference, the new Supreme Guide stressed the importance of dialogue and participation, rejected acts of violence, and said that the Brotherhood was not an adversary of the government. Click [here](#) for the full speech in Arabic. The Brotherhood also elected a new 16-member Guidance Bureau on December 21. Reformist Essam al-Arian was among those elected, following controversies about Supreme Guide Mahdi Akef's previous unsuccessful attempts to appoint him to a vacancy. Click [here](#) for a full list of members in Arabic.

Egyptian authorities arrested ten members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Kafr al-Sheik on December 5. Brotherhood Secretary General Mahmoud Ezzat said that those arrested had not yet been charged, and that Egyptian authorities are currently detaining 227 Muslim Brothers. Click [here](#) for more in Arabic.

Request to Question Kuwaiti Information Minister

JANUARY 13, 2010

Members of the Kuwaiti parliament submitted a request to question Minister of Information Sheikh Ahmad al-Abdullah al-Sabah on January 11 following a dispute regarding a television channel that aired a program allegedly insulting Kuwaiti tribes. MPs representing tribal interests have also indicated an interest in interviewing the Minister of Interior. Click [here](#) for more.

Kuwaiti Prime Minister Questioned

JANUARY 13, 2010

For the first time after repeated political crises, members of the Kuwaiti parliament questioned Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Mohammad al-Sabah about allegations of fraud in a closed session on December 8. The questioning, which lasted six hours, also involved Interior Minister Sheikh Jaber Khaled al-Sabah and Defense Minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak al-Sabah (both senior members of the ruling family) as well as Public Works and Municipalities Minister Fadel Safar. Following the questioning, ten MPs filled a non-cooperation motion against the prime minister and a no-confidence motion against the interior minister, claiming the answers they provided were unsatisfactory. Click [here](#) for more in Arabic.

The National Assembly voted on the motion on December 16, in overwhelming support of the prime minister (35 MPs voted against the motion, 13 supported it and one abstained from voting). Previously, Sheikh Nasser has resigned on several occasions and the parliament has been dissolved three times in order to avoid permitting parliamentarians to question him. Click [here](#) for more in Arabic.

Kuwaiti Journalist Freed

JANUARY 13, 2010

Kuwaiti journalist Mohammed al-Jassem was released on December 3 after he paid a fine of 1,000 dinars (\$3,492). The journalist was detained on November 24, 2009, when he was called in for questioning regarding a libel suit filed against him by Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Mohammad al-Sabah. Click [here](#) for more.

Cabinet Reshuffle in Morocco

JANUARY 13, 2010

Moroccan King Mohammed VI appointed five new ministers on January 4. Taib Cherkaoui, a former prosecutor, replaced Interior Minister Chakib Benmoussa. The interior ministry portfolio includes internal security and anti-terrorism efforts, international security issues, the Western Sahara conflict, elections, and local politics. Other new appointments include Justice Minister Mohamed Naciri, Minister of Parliamentary Relations Driss Lachguer, Deputy Minister for Modernization of Public Sector Mohammed Saad Alami, and Minister of Tourism Yassir Znaoui. The king also launched a 22-member advisory committee on regional development projects on January 6. Click [here](#) for more.

Views from the Arab Media

FEBRUARY 24, 2010

- Prominent Saudi columnist Daoud al-Sharian cautions that Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's recent accusations that specific Sunnis harbor Baathist sympathies is turning Iraq into another obsessive authoritarian regime. The February 16 [article](#), carried in the London based pan-Arab daily *al-Hayat*, accuses the United States of first enflaming sectarian sentiments and now standing by and watching al-Maliki abuse power in the name of democracy.
- Saudi columnist Tareq al-Hamid claims that Iraq's nascent democracy is falling by the wayside due to government-sponsored political vendettas and abuse. The [article](#), published in the pan Arab daily *al-Sharq al-Awsat* on February 18, points out that most politicians banned from participation in the upcoming elections happen to oppose Iranian influence in Iraq. The author argues that Iraq is increasingly taking on Iranian characteristics, and compares the Justice and Accountability Council responsible for banning the candidates to Iran's Guardian Council.
- Lebanese commentator Khaled Saghia argues that a new phase in the Arab-Israeli conflict began with Hizbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah's February 16 speech. The February 17 [article](#), published in the pro-opposition Lebanese daily *al-Akhbar*, says that Nasrallah's stern words toward Israel showed new found confidence and overcame the long-held sense of Lebanese and Arab inferiority.
- Lebanese columnist Saati Nouredine predicts that twists and turns in relations between Iran and the West will be played out in Lebanon. His February 17 [article](#) in the Lebanese daily *Assafir* says that the June 2006 war between Hizbollah and Israel shows how Lebanon's destiny is inextricably linked to Iran's. He cautions that Nasrallah's warning of a possible Israeli attack in the spring or summer might come true as U.S. policy towards Iran changes from engagement to containment.

Upcoming Political Events

- Iraq: Parliamentary Elections, March 7, 2010
- Sudan: Presidential and Legislative Elections, April 4, 2010
- Egypt: Shura Council (Upper Legislative House) Elections, June 2010
- Bahrain: Parliamentary Elections, September 2010
- Egypt: People's Assembly (Lower House) Elections, November 2010

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Recent publications on **Iraq** include:

- "[Iraq's Uncertain Future: Elections and Beyond](#)" (International Crisis Group, Middle East Report no. 95, February 25, 2010).
- "[Iraq's National Elections 2010: The Parties, the Issues, and the Challenges for U.S. Policy](#)," by Charles W. Dunne (Institute for the Theory and Practice of International Relations, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, February 25, 2010).

- "[The Uncertain Security Situation in Iraq](#)," by Anthony Cordesman (Center for Strategic International Studies, February 17, 2010).
- "[Recent Trends in the Iraq War](#)," by Anthony Cordesman (Center for Strategic and International Studies, Report, February 3, 2010).
- "[Strategic Partnership with Iraq](#)," by Anthony Cordesman, Adam Mausner and Elena Derby (Center for Strategic and International Studies, Report, February 3, 2010).
- "[Iraqi Elections: Political Tremors?](#)" by Brett McGurk (Council on Foreign Relations, Expert Brief, January 25, 2010).

Publications on the **Arab-Israeli conflict** include:

- "[Behind the Settlements](#)," by Daniel Kurtzer (The American Interest, March-April 2010).
- "[Confronting Settlement Expansion in East Jerusalem](#)," by Joel Beinin (Middle East report Online, February 14, 2010).
- "[Peacebuilding through Health Among Israelis and Palestinians](#)," by Leonard Rubenstein and Anjalee Kohli (United States Institute of Peace, Peace Brief, January 2010).

New publications on **Lebanon** include:

- "[The Ghosts of Martyrs Square: An Eyewitness Account of Lebanon's Life Struggle](#)," by Michael Young (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).

Recent publications on **Egypt** include:

- "[Egypt's Wall](#)," by Ursula Lindsey (Middle East Report Online, February 1, 2010).
- "[A Radical Turn for the Muslim Brotherhood?](#)" by Shadi Hamid (The Brookings Institution, January 26, 2010).
- "[Renewed Violence against Egypt's Coptic Christians](#)," by David Schenker (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, PolicyWatch no. 1621, January 15, 2010).

Publications on **U.S. policy in the Middle East** include:

- "[The Obama Administration: Facing Challenges in the Middle East](#)," by Martin Indyk and Kenneth Pollack (The Brookings Institution, January 2010).
- "[Middle East Notes and Comments: A U.S. Role in Yemen](#)," by Jon Alterman (Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 22, 2010).

Recent publications on **terrorism** include:

- "[The Saudi Deradicalization Experiment](#)," by Marisa Porges (Council on Foreign Relations, Expert Brief, January 22, 2010).
- "[Al-Qaeda's Financial Pressures](#)," by Greg Bruno (Council on Foreign Relations, Background, February 1, 2010).

Recent reports on **human rights** include:

- [“Torture Redux: The Revival of Physical Coercion during Interrogations in Bahrain”](#) (Human Rights Watch, February 8, 2010).
- [“Stateless Again: Palestinian-Origin Jordanians Deprived of their Nationality”](#) (Human Rights Watch, February 1, 2010).
- [“Broken Promises: The Equity and Reconciliation Commission and its Follow-up”](#) (Amnesty International, January 13, 2010). The report decries Morocco’s failure to follow up on the Equity and Reconciliation Commission’s investigations of human right abuses during King Hassan II’s rule.

Recent Arabic periodicals include:

- The February issue of [Araa’](#) (Opinions), published by the Gulf Research Center, focuses on GCC economic development, EU/GCC cooperation, and Iraq.
- The February issue of [Majalat al-Mustaqbal al-Arabi](#) (Arab Future), published by the Beirut based Center for Arab Unity Studies, includes articles on recent developments in the Arab Israeli conflict, Dubai’s financial crisis, and the Afghan war.

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