

Why did the Sadrists Withdraw from the Iraqi Political Process?

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Brief Analysis

The current stalemate in Iraq may lead to a complete collapse of its political institutions and prompt the international community to intervene if domestic political actors fail.

The political crisis in Iraq has continued to escalate. Although more than eight months have passed since the last parliamentary elections, political blocs have failed to form a new government. The ongoing political impasse in Iraq has produced various other crises, most recently the resignation of all Sadrist representatives, who had won a majority of seats in Iraq's Council of Representatives. It is worth noting that this mass resignation occurred at the urging of Sadrist leader Muqtada al-Sadr, who communicated these plans to the head of the Sadrist parliamentary bloc, Hussein al-Ethari, and which were then acted upon by all 73 Sadrist representatives. As per the 2020 Iraqi elections law, parliamentary seats that the winning candidate does not occupy pass to the second-place candidate, as determined by the Independent High Electoral Commission based on the number of votes from their constituencies.

However, these resignations have created a great deal of legal confusion and debate. Legal scholar Ali Jaber al-Tamimi stated that although the Council of Representatives approved the requests for resignation, there are still missing pieces since this was not followed by any legislative order to document the resignations. Furthermore, the Independent High Electoral Commission was not approached on the matter of determining the second-place candidates, as per Article 15 of Elections Law No. 9 of 2020, nor were these candidates sworn in under constitutional oath.

Al-Sadr explained the reasons for this mass resignation using a Twitter account belonging to Saleh Muhammad al-Iraqi ("the commander's minister"). On 12 June, al-Sadr used the account to tweet that his decision stemmed from a desire to save the people of Iraq from a grim descent into unresolved political conflict. Al-Sadr also stated in a meeting with Sadrists in Najaf that he had **decided**

<https://www.arab48.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%A9/2022/06/15/%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%AF%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9> to withdraw from the political process in order to avoid collaborating with corrupt politicians in any way. He **added**

<https://www.arab48.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%A9/2022/06/15/%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%AF%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9> that the Sadrists would not participate in the upcoming elections due to corruption, and that this act was a covenant between the Sadrists, God, and the people of Iraq. However, there could be other reasons behind al-Sadr's sudden withdrawal from the political process.

The Sadrists' withdrawal might also be driven by a desire to flex their political power and draw attention to the failure to form a strong government in their absence, so that they will be asked later to return to the political arena. Other sources have affirmed that the withdrawal of Sadrist representatives has created fierce disagreements within the Shia Coordination Framework, particularly between State of Law Coalition leader Nouri al-Maliki and Fatah Alliance leader Hadi al-Amiri. Al-Maliki feels that it is necessary to accept the Sadrists' decision and move forward with forming a government, while al-Amiri believes that the Sadrists should be talked out of their withdrawal and brought back into the political process through sending a delegation to negotiate in al-Hannana, which is Muqtada al-Sadr's home base in the Najaf governorate.

The Sadrists' decision could also simply be a political maneuver carried out in coordination with its allies, especially since it is not possible to call up the second-place candidates or to issue any parliamentary resolutions at this time, since the Council of Representatives has gone into recess until early July. The quick approval of the Sadrist representatives' resignations by al-Sadr's main ally, Speaker of the Council of Representatives Mohamed al-Halbousi, lends credence to claims of a prior agreement between al-Sadr and his allies. Other Sadrist allies in the National Salvation Coalition also seemed unperturbed by the decision and all tweeted their support. This was evident in tweets from Khamis al-Khanjar, the leader of the Sovereignty Alliance, and Masoud Barzani, head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party. Such tactics are not new for the Sadrists, who announced last year that they would not participate in **the early Iraqi parliamentary elections**

<https://www.independentarabia.com/node/241846/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B7%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9> held in October 2021. However, they later changed their mind and became involved in the political process.

It is also possible that one of the main reasons for the Sadrists pulling out of the political process was that they realized that it was inevitably going to fail and wanted to protect themselves from being tarred with the same brush. Instead, they focused on preparing for the likely dissolution of the Council of Representatives and turning towards new parliamentary elections. Although the dissolution of the Council of Representatives was a rather remote possibility given that the Coordination Framework did not want to take risks after losing the most recent parliamentary elections, this option was back on the table after the Sadrists withdrew and successfully mobilized the public around the idea. Al-

Sadr had previous experience mobilizing the Iraqi public, and had led popular protests against Haider al-Abadi's government in 2016, when Sadrist stormed the Green Zone. The Sadrists were also very involved in the popular uprising in 2019, even if the nature of this involvement was different.

In light of all this, it is difficult to predict the Sadrists' next step given the conflicting strategies that they have previously pursued and their tendency to take sudden political action. However, there is no doubt that the withdrawal of the Sadrists from the political process is not good news for the Coordination Framework, which has shown willingness to work with other blocs and expressed its desire to form a government of independent candidates. However, the Coordination Framework has a complex past that will make it difficult to gain popular and political support for its ambitions to form a government. The current stalemate is leading Iraq towards the complete collapse of its political institutions, which would put the country in a very precarious spot from which it would be difficult to extricate itself. This could prompt the international community to directly intervene to resolve the crisis if domestic political actors fail to find a solution. ❖

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