

Navigating the Political Impasse Between Sadrists and the Coordination Framework

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Azhar Al-Rubaie is a freelance journalist based in Iraq. His writing focuses on a variety of issues, including politics, health, society, wars, and human rights. Al-Rubaie is a contributor to Fikra Forum.



Brief Analysis

10 months after Iraqi elections, intra-Shia feuding between the Sadrist movement and the Coordination Framework has led to several public demonstrations but few viable solutions.

Political confusion has once again roiled the political process after a wave of angry protests announced and organized by the followers of Shia leader Muqtada al-Sadr against the Iran-aligned Coordination Framework candidate for prime minister in the next government, Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani. This comes amid a ten-month impasse in the political process following the Iraqi elections. Protests continue around the Iraqi Parliament building in the Green Zone, where the headquarters of diplomatic missions and government facilities are located. Prior to that, there were demonstrations in Tahrir Square and surrounding areas near the entrance to the Green Zone, amid strict security measures.

Al-Sudani, the Coordination Framework candidate, was previously the Governor of Maysan Province from 2009 to 2010, the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs from 2014-2017, the Acting Minister of Industry in 2016, and the Minister of Human Rights from 2010-2014.

But it was his nomination for prime minister that angered the Sadrist movement and triggered demonstrations “against the corrupt,” the most recent development in a feud between the Sadrists and the Coordination Framework. On July 31, 2022, Shia leader Muqtada al-Sadr said on Twitter: “It is a great opportunity to fundamentally change the political system and the constitution, and the elections that were rigged in favor of the deep state have become the most free and fair elections. While they were fair and removed the corrupt, they have become counterfeit, ravaged by the corrupt, on the one hand, and by malicious claims, on the other.” This tweet increased the Sadrist movement’s momentum against the Coordination Framework.

Origin of the dispute

The political differences between the two rivals, namely, the Sadrist movement and the Coordination Framework, go back to the nomination of the candidate for Prime Minister and the formation of the next government. The Sadrist bloc believes it is entitled to form a national majority government, while the Framework sought to pressure the Sadrist movement to form a consensus government and for all Shia stakeholders to obtain ministerial positions in accordance with the political quota system upon which Iraqi governments have been based since 2003. The failure to reach a solution satisfactory to each side has deepened the political crisis and caused a long-lasting and ongoing political impasse without benefit or solution.

The Kurdish front is also a line of contention, with issues directly proportional to the Shia actors’ dispute. The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), a friend of the Sadrist movement, and the Kurdistan Patriotic Union Party (PUK), which is aligned with the Coordination Framework, compete for the presidency of the republic. The PUK has held the presidency for three terms, while the KDP is striving to attain the office. The Iraqi Parliament has failed many times to hold its sessions and elect both the president and prime minister, which led to the mass withdrawal of Sadrist-bloc representatives, leaving the issue of forming the government to the Framework, which failed to do so.

Iraqi member of Parliament Diyaa al-Hindi, of the Emtidad Movement, believes that the dispute between the leader of the Sadrist movement, Muqtada al-Sadr, and the leader of the Framework-aligned Dawa Party, Nouri al-Maliki, is personal, and once the Framework removes al-Maliki from its bloc, al-Sadr may be open to sitting down at the table with the Framework.

Solutions on the table

In the course of his conversation with the author, al-Hindi mentioned several proposed solutions, including giving the current Parliament a full one-year extension in order to form a transitional government that will amend the elections law and constitution, and then proceeding to the decision to dissolve Parliament and hold new elections. Regarding the current solutions, al-Hindi added: “Control must be handed over to the independent representatives and new movements that won the election, and the old parties in the Sadrist movement and the Framework must not interfere or be involved in any way in

forming the next government.” Al-Hindi noted that the independent representatives and the Sadrist movement favor early elections.

Meanwhile, Saleh Mohammed al-Iraqi, known as the minister to Shia leader Muqtada al-Sadr, announced several conditions under which, if implemented by the Framework, the Sadrist movement would accept talks with its opponent.

1. Withdrawal of the leader of the Fatah Alliance, Hadi al-Amiri, from the Coordination Framework.
2. Explicit condemnation of leaked statements made by the leader of the Dawa Party, Nouri al-Maliki (referred to as “Speicher Man”), which were published a few days ago.
3. Putting in place new guarantees and signing the Sadrist bloc’s document of reforms.

On August 10, al-Sadr published a [tweet \(https://twitter.com/Mu_AISadr/status/1557359204645707776?s=20&t=k6srJxYbGy87mv9HduHYFg%3Chhttps://url.emailprotection.link/?bz94aV19uZIx8Mr7hN-ILKjP1drvSrEdxfzl2K4VdOCLq30vXnhcc5VPI-AB6HLS7KnuqQ5QgQg4S76uEGCt3NLkyScCDurb3LDk4KKf7359ihvi73cC0z3JcRT2y_ojH_Jb8ojX31jroQXJcVzVlnP8aV6JRa9CzzYKCoWT0xxw~%3E\)](https://twitter.com/Mu_AISadr/status/1557359204645707776?s=20&t=k6srJxYbGy87mv9HduHYFg%3Chhttps://url.emailprotection.link/?bz94aV19uZIx8Mr7hN-ILKjP1drvSrEdxfzl2K4VdOCLq30vXnhcc5VPI-AB6HLS7KnuqQ5QgQg4S76uEGCt3NLkyScCDurb3LDk4KKf7359ihvi73cC0z3JcRT2y_ojH_Jb8ojX31jroQXJcVzVlnP8aV6JRa9CzzYKCoWT0xxw~%3E) calling on the judicial authorities to dissolve Parliament when the deadline to choose the President and PM to form the government had expired, and gave the court a period not exceeding the next week to do so.

Sadr's tweet came in response to Maliki, when he issued a [televised statement \(https://youtu.be/TGYt49YbgIw\)](https://youtu.be/TGYt49YbgIw) broadcast by Afaq TV, a local TV station owned by him, saying: "There is no dissolving parliament, no regime change, and no early elections unless the Parliament resumes its session."

Observers of the Iraqi political scene have warned of an intra-Shia conflict on the ground after the Coordination Framework called on its supporters to stage counter-demonstrations against the Sadrist movement’s demonstrations around the Green Zone. Political analyst Ali al-Baydar believes that the intra-Shia war is not in the interest of all the players because a war will likely lead to a decisive conclusion to this conflict and subsequently allow political calm to prevail. Neither party – namely, the Sadrist movement and the Framework – likely feel they would benefit from actual conclusions.

Al-Baydar added: “Al-Sadr claims that he is proposing the idea of reforms, but according to my follow-up with politicians associated with al-Sadr, I find that they have not achieved the reforms al-Sadr called for. Furthermore, the solutions al-Sadr proposed cannot be achieved all at once, but must come about gradually in order to attain results and solutions that satisfy everyone.”

Al-Baydar continued: “Al-Sadr wants to dominate the Shia street, politically, socially, and even religiously. This dominance comes through weakening and beating opponents, as well as by bringing others closer to obtaining absolute leadership. In the near future, the political scene will remain unsettled—a state of part war and part peace, part stability and part chaos—and through that chaos, the two sides in the conflict can advance their interests and pass almost everything.”

Iraqi and international calls for calm and to bring the parties to the table to resolve the current crisis have not stopped the Sadrist demonstrations inside the Green Zone, now in their second week. Saleh Mohammed al-Iraqi has called for the demonstrations to continue, saying they are “very important for achieving the demands.” Meanwhile, the Iraqi people must continue to wait for the formation of the Iraqi government, after their interests have been continually obstructed by political deadlock and paralysis. ❖

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