

The Formation of Iraq's New Government Is a Major Victory for Iran and Its Allies

by [Nawzad Shukri \(/experts/nawzad-shukri\)](#)

Nov 8, 2022

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[Nawzad Shukri \(/experts/nawzad-shukri\)](#)

Nawzad Shukri holds a PhD in politics and international relations from Leicester University. He currently works as an Assistant Professor at the University of Salahaddin in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Shukri is a contributor to Fikra Forum.



Brief Analysis

Although framed as a government of solidarity between Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish factions, the Sudani government in Iraq gives Iran a significant arena in which to wield its influence.

In the aftermath of the failure by the [tripartite alliance \(https://www.rudaw.net/english/opinion/230120221\)](https://www.rudaw.net/english/opinion/230120221)—which included the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by Masoud Barzani, the Sadr Movement led by Muqtada al-Sadr, and the Sunni Sovereignty lead by Khamis al-Khanjar and Mohammed al-Halbousi—to form a majoritarian national government over the last year, sudden policy changes in September finally instigated a breakthrough in Iraq's deadlocked political scene.

More specifically, Barzani and Halbousi joined a new coalition, called the “[Running the State Coalition \(https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/kurds-see-safeguards-their-rights-iraqs-next-govt\)](https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/kurds-see-safeguards-their-rights-iraqs-next-govt),” with the Iran-backed Shia Coordination Framework following Sadr's withdrawal from politics to finally form a new government. Soon after, the new coalition gave confidence to Mohammed al-Halbousi as Iraq's Parliament Speaker and [elected \(https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/rockets-hit-baghdads-green-zone-sources-2022-10-13/\)](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/rockets-hit-baghdads-green-zone-sources-2022-10-13/) Abdul Latif Rashid as the country's new president on October 13. Rashid then named Mohammed Shia al-Sudani—a candidate nominated by the Framework and with the particular support of Nouri al-Maliki—as prime minister-designate, and the new cabinet of Sudani was approved by the Iraqi parliament on October 27.

The New Coalition and a New Road Map

The agreements that led up to this [new coalition \(https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/260920221\)](https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/260920221) between the Kurds, Sunnis, and the Coordination Framework have not all been disclosed, however, some details regarding stated coalition priorities have been released. In general, the coalition set forward goals such as fighting corruption, instituting reforms, rebalancing Iraq's regional relations, amending or changing the electoral

commission system, and emphasizing consensus among Iraqi factions. These points were again highlighted by Sudani during the presentation of his ministerial program

(https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GmKHYzNZwMT3VN2DeAiX4a5YzYa_D1Ni/view?pli=1) in parliament.

Regarding the participation of the Kurds in this coalition, the first six months of the government will be crucial in ensuring Kurdish cooperation, especially when it comes to the federal law on Oil and Gas based on the constitutional understandings with the Kurdistan Region. Also important will be the 2022 Iraqi budgetary issues, the Shingal Agreement (<https://www.kurdistan24.net/public/ckb/story/201778-%D8%A6%DB%8C%D9%86%D9%81%DB%86%DA%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%81%DB%8C%D9%83...-%D8%B1%DB%8E%D9%83%D9%83%DB%95%D9%88%D8%AA%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D9%86%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%AC%DB%8E%D8%A8%DB%95%D8%AC%DB%8E-%D9%86%DB%95%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%88%DB%95>) signed between the Kurdistan Regional Government and Kadhimi government in 2020 regarding the governance and security of the Shingal region, and the implementation of Article 140 of the constitution regarding Kirkuk and other disputed areas.

For their part, the participation of the Arab Sunnis in the coalition is seemingly hinged on demands

(<https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3878931/coordination-framework-approaches-iraq%E2%80%99s-sunnis-kurds-form-govt-without-sadr>) that include the withdrawal of Shia militias from Sunni cities, the reconstruction of liberated provinces, changes in the counter-terrorism laws, investigations into the fate of abducted individuals, and a return of displaced peoples and refugees to their homes.

Of course, there is significant doubt that the Framework-led government will actually follow through on these promises for the Sunnis and Kurds. In fact, with a long track record of violating agreements, there is little faith in the ability or willingness of the Coordination Framework to function as one, unified entity with its “allies.”

Instead, it seems that the Coordination Framework made these promises simply as a tool for getting what they want. Having been unable to secure a two-thirds quorum in the past without the cooperation of Barzani and Halbousi, the Framework realized—with the help and influence of Iran—that new alliances would be necessary, even if superficial. When the Sadrists withdrew from politics in late August, the Framework seized the opportunity to turn tripartite allies into Framework allies for the purpose of a quorum only.

Despite the intentions and inconsistency of the Coordination Framework, the Kurds and Sunnis were essentially left with no choice but to cooperate. In the face of the Sadrists’ extreme unpredictability and a lack of consultation between the Sadrists and their tripartite allies about developments and political process in Iraq, Barzani and Halbousi saw the Coordination Framework as their only chance for stability and meaningful contribution.

Moreover, Iran and its allies expertly wielded pressure campaigns against the KDP and the Sunni Sovereignty parties to achieve agreement. While the United States remained indifferent, Iranian entities in Iraq politically, economically, and militarily pressured the Kurds and Sunnis to join with the Coordination Framework and form a government. Although framed as benefiting the interests of all, such an alliance only strengthened the position of Iran in Iraq.

What does the New Government Mean for Iraq?

Despite stating priorities, making agreements, and electing ministers, it is unlikely that the new government will institute real reform in Iraq, and there are still huge challenges that await Sudani and the parliament. Dealing with Sadr and his movement will be at the top of these challenges. Although Sadr has refused

(https://twitter.com/salih_m_iraqi/status/1581219181223038977) to participate in this government, he still publicly berates Sudani as “Maliki’s man” and fears that Sudani will target the Sadrist Movement. Indeed, on November 2, al-Sudani abolished all decisions

(<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/politics/2022/11/2/%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%A9->

%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%A1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%85)

that had been made by Kadhimī during his caretaker government since October 2021. Some of these radical changes to the security, political, and administrative sectors have directly targeted Sadrist Movement figures.

Consequently, it is foolish to assume that Sadr won't continue to be a major player in the Iraqi political scene. Inevitably, the new Coordination Framework government will likely provoke Sadr and his followers, and in turn, Sadr's anti-government demonstrations will likely start back up again. It remains to be seen whether Sudani will pursue a policy of appeasement towards Sadr to prevent this possibility early on, or if intra-Shia divisions will prevent him from doing so.

Even beyond the Sadrist Movement, Sudani's government faces the possibility of an uprising at the hands of other actors, including the October Movement, which was responsible for the public protests that toppled former Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi's government in 2019.

October Movement figures are still unhappy that their demands have not been met by the Iraqi government, including demands for an end to the sectarian quota system, the removal of the political elite from Iraqi politics, the accountability of Iranian-backed militias under state authority, an end to Iran's blatant meddling in Iraqi politics, serious reforms targeting corruption and providing better basic services, and increased employment for Iraqis. With the formation of a government being led by Iran-backed allies, the October Movement could accelerate public demonstrations or create new coalitions with the Sadrist Movement to topple Sudani.

Losers and Winners in the New Government

Although a political breakthrough was long overdue in Iraq, the formation of a new government by Sudani can only be regarded as a major victory for Iran. Since the elections last year, Iran has directly engaged in the Iraqi political process and has pressured its rivals in order to undermine democratic processes, shifting the political equation in their favor despite the fact that Iran's allies were defeated in the last elections. As it stands, the new government is a fresh start for Iran to continue strengthening its regional agenda in Iraq and beyond.

On the losing side of this equation, of course, are the Iraqi people. The new Framework-led government represents a setback for democratic processes and reforms in Iraq, and it severely lacks legitimacy. Not only is the bloc that a majority of Iraqis voted for—the Sadrist bloc—not represented in this government, but the clear influence and interference of Iran in the new government gives the Iraqi people even less confidence.

Another loser in the formation of the new government is the United States. A Sudani-led government grants Iran the ability to wield significant influence while disregarding the needs of the Iraqi people, and this speaks to the increasing indifference of the United States toward its own allies and the institution of democracy in Iraq. Indeed, the United States has remained silent about Iranian meddling in Iraqi politics, and has largely pursued a policy of disengagement in the Iraqi theater that has allowed Iran to expand its sphere of influence. ❖

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