

Points of order - Iraq's painful government formation

Michael Knights

Key Points

- The most likely scenario for government formation is a government of national unity that will hold together just long enough to appoint a president, prime minister and cabinet.
- Iraq is likely to witness restrictions on prime ministerial power, ongoing corruption and disrupted governance, although these factors will only slow rather than reverse the country's continuing stabilisation.
- Although Kurdish factions will probably be involved in forming the new government, there is likely to be growing parliamentary opposition to Kurdish demands and attempts to roll back Kurdish control of disputed areas by the new federal government.

The process of forming Iraq's new government will be long and complicated. Michael Knights identifies risks facing the country over the term of the next parliament and investigates three possible scenarios for its future associated with different types of new government.

On 26 March, the Iraqi High Electoral Commission (IHEC) released uncertified election results from Iraq's 7 March national parliamentary elections. These results are unlikely to be modified significantly before being certified by the IHEC, so they should represent the future balance of power in Iraq's parliament.

Former prime minister Ayad Allawi's Iraqi National Movement (INM, also known as Iraqiyya) holds the largest single number of seats of any pre-electoral coalition list. Iraqi electoral law currently states that Iraq's new president must call upon "the largest bloc in parliament" to make the first attempt at government formation. However, on 25 March the definition of 'largest bloc' was clarified by the Iraqi Supreme Federal Court as meaning post-electoral combinations of individual legislators, not just the formal pre-electoral coalitions. This means the INM will not necessarily be called upon to make the first attempt at forming a new government because a larger post-electoral coalition with a different leader may emerge. Iraq's factions are now involved in complex backroom and public negotiations over the shape of the post-electoral 'largest bloc,' resulting in significant potential for the reorientation of political alliances.

Key trends

Some key trends in Iraqi politics were highlighted by the electoral results. The first is the importance of the Shia Islamist Iraqi National Alliance (INA) and the Kurdistan Alliance as kingmakers in the next parliament. The two largest pre-electoral coalitions, Allawi's Iraqiyya and Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's State of Law Alliance (SLA), are fairly cohesive and are likely to stay largely intact during the government-formation process. While Allawi and Maliki's blocs might seem like natural partners as both espouse nationalist rhetoric and support a strong central government, the political ambitions of the leaders make an alliance unlikely.

This apparent impasse has thrown the focus onto the INA and the Kurdistan Alliance, plus other pro-Kurdish blocs. A government can be ratified by a 163-vote simple majority by whichever of the two front-running national blocs can draw these two coalitions, or large segments thereof, into their camp. Capturing the INA as a partner means wooing its largest sub-division, the loosely connected group of 39 legislators who follow Moqtada al-Sadr.

Incorporating the Sadrist into either an Allawi or Maliki government could be difficult. The Sadrist have problematic relations with both of these leaders, each of whom mounted major military operations against the main Sadrist militia, the Jaish al-Mahdi, during their terms as prime minister. It might also be difficult to combine the Sadrist with the Kurdistan Alliance in a new super-coalition, because of the strongly nationalist position they hold on issues such as the future of Kirkuk.

Aside from difficult relations with the Sadrist, the Kurdish factions present their own challenges as potential coalition partners to either Allawi or Maliki. Allawi's Iraqiyya includes political groups that are strongly biased against the Kurdistan Alliance, notably the al-Hadba political movement from Nineveh. Al-Hadba is the anti-Kurdish political bloc that runs the Nineveh provincial council, the administrative body that governs Mosul and many of the most sensitive Arab-Kurdish disputed internal boundary (DIB) districts such as Tall Afar, Sinjar, Tilkaef and Hamdaniyah. Since 2009, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) has administratively split off 16 of Nineveh's sub-districts in the DIB areas and physically prevented al-Hadba officials from entering them.

Next to these stumbling blocs, Maliki's relations with the Kurds are simpler but no less challenging; he is seen by the Kurds as an aggressive centraliser who has militarily bullied the Kurds since 2008, and he has very poor personal relations with KDP leader Masoud Barzani. Maliki will struggle to draw in Kurdish partners as long as Kurdish leaders view Maliki as an autocrat who is hostile to Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) ambitions.

Current stability

With this politicking as a background, a variety of scenarios exist for Iraq. From an assessment of the country's current stability, categorised into five stability factor groupings, such scenarios can model anticipated future stability.

Political stability

The primary political risks facing [Iraq](#) in the next two years relate to the scheduled transfer of authority after the national elections. State institutions are growing stronger but they now face the near-term risk of a 'governance gap' under which a caretaker government could be in place until at least July 2010. The legislative agenda may not commence until the post-Ramadan period in September 2010 and the federal and provincial governments are likely to suffer trickle-down disruption from the change of political appointees at all levels of the system.

The most successful and largest state institutions, the security services, continue to slowly grow in size and to improve their capabilities. These services can be expected to feed strong nationalist views into policy-making on issues such as relations with foreign countries and the federal-Kurdish issue.

Non-military branches of government are also competing for power. There are two divergent models of power politics at play in [Iraq](#) today. On one hand, the system is highly stratified and decisions gravitate towards the most senior decision-maker, the prime minister. On the other hand, the concept of muhasasa (sharing of quotas) reassures distrustful political groups that a new dictatorship will not arise by deliberately diffusing power over resources. During the period from 2006 to 2010, the balance swung back and forth as Maliki achieved a dramatic concentration of power, only for other power bases (parliament, the presidency, the KRG) to seek to claw back power to themselves.

Between 2010 and 2015, the emergent power balance will depend greatly on the nature and character of the next prime minister. If the new premier, or a re-elected Maliki, is both a forceful individual and a clever coalition builder, he will be able to use the top-down inclination of the system to gather greater power if he wishes. However, even such a forceful and skilful premier will face many challenges, not least the emergence of the legislature as a major potential counter-balance to the power of the prime minister.

The legislature still has weaknesses: between 2010 and 2015, the parliament is likely to be more fragmented than ever and continue to experience chronic absenteeism. These factors may make it difficult for individual blocs to assert themselves. However, it is likely that individual parliamentary legislators will also continue to develop a corporate identity that sits alongside their party political identities. This means parliament will periodically mobilise to teach the prime minister that he cannot ignore or outflank the legislature. Showdowns will occur over key votes; in cutbacks to funding at the disposal of the prime minister's office; and in parliamentary committee 'grillings' of ministers.

In the next five years, other political actors will also be vying for greater control of resources and decision-making. Some provinces are on the verge of receiving significant fiscal independence for the first time since the Iraqi state was created. Article 43 of the 2010 budget committed the federal government to transferring funds to oil-producing provinces: USD1 per barrel of produced oil; USD1 per barrel of refined oil; and USD1 per 150 m3 of produced natural gas.

Overall, therefore, it will be difficult for even a forceful prime minister to significantly centralise power around himself with so many competing power bases. The Iraqi political system may instead become less centrally controlled, less capable of making rapid decisions, more dependent on broad-based consensus and less personality-driven during the coming government term. The broader the base of the next Iraqi government and the more inclusive it is, the greater the chance that it will underperform in governance. This is because a very broad-based coalition will probably not have a shared agenda and it will carve up the ministries according to quotas.

Social stability

Although health, demographic and crime-related risks are important at the local level in [Iraq](#), the key category of social risk facing the country is that of strained social cohesion. Alongside paralysis of government policymaking owing to over-inclusiveness, another key political risk facing any prime minister in the next five years could be ethnic or sectarian exclusiveness in the government.

Any government combination that did not include a significant Kurdish element could position the country for more intense ethnic crises along the federal-Kurdish 'trigger line' of disputed areas. The chief strain on social cohesion can be felt along the multi-ethnic swathe of districts bordering the KRG. For example, at numerous **points** during 2009, Nineveh province governor Atheel al-Nujaifi and the provincial police chief (both Sunni Arabs) were physically prevented from entering Kurdish-claimed districts with threats of lethal force.

The sectarian aspect of social risk could also threaten social cohesion across [Iraq](#) as grievances persist between Shia and Sunni Arabs. This kind of threat was demonstrated by the extreme levels of Shia-Sunni violence, sectarian cleansing and migration between 2006 and 2008 in multi-sectarian areas such as Baghdad and the provinces adjacent to the capital.

The threat is arguably much reduced now, because of an apparent recognition by Sunni Arabs that they cannot improve their sectarian position through force of arms alone. [Al-Qaeda](#) in Iraq's attempts to re-foment a sectarian civil war in 2008 and 2009 notably failed to provoke widespread sectarian backlash; instead Sunni-Shia collaboration continues in local governance, communities and economies.

Economic stability

Economic stability is a factor that directly affects political, social and military risks in [Iraq](#). Unemployment, under-employment and lack of local development have increased local discontent and consequently the insurgent manpower pool since 2003. Job creation and local community development have achieved the reverse in many places, weakening the insurgency.

In the next government term, Iraq's economy will continue to depend on oil revenues, which account for 95 per cent of government revenues. The 11 oil and gas licences signed by [Iraq](#) in 2009 could result in a strong increase in oil production and exports between 2013 and 2015, plus greater use of

flared gas. Although many in parliament, the provinces and the oil industry criticise the involvement of foreign oil companies, these are steadily committing resources. As such, both Maliki and Allawi moved quickly after the elections to reassure Western countries that they intended to honour the 2009 licences.

Between 2013 and 2015, Iraq is likely to experience a shift in oil production from around 3.8 million barrels per day (bpd) to 5.5 million bpd, according to oil and gas consultancies contacted by Jane's. Gas production might reach 2.5 to 3 billion cubic feet per day by 2015. As a result of improvements to export infrastructure, it is feasible that oil exports might be 2.5 million bpd to 2.7 million bpd by 2013 and higher by 2015.

According to economic forecasting house IHS Global Insight, Iraq's economy is likely to grow steadily over the term of the incoming government. Moderate annual gross domestic product growth of between five and seven per cent can be expected as long as oil prices are in the range of USD60-70 per barrel. By 2015, Iraq is likely to be consistently balancing its budget (from 2013) and building fiscal reserves.

Military and security stability

The most significant reductions in violence in Iraq were achieved in 2007 and 2008, followed by a slower decline of violence in 2009. This process will continue between 2010 and 2015, albeit slowly because of reduced US military presence and a more gradual rate of improvement in the reliability and effectiveness of Iraqi security forces. From current levels of around 400 to 500 serious incidents per month, the level in 2015 is more likely to be between 50 and 100 serious incidents per month.

Major stumbling blocks, such as a decisive breakdown in Sunni-Shia reconciliation or Arab-Kurdish relations, are unlikely to result in widespread insecurity. Potential disruptive factors such as Al-Qaeda in Iraq, Iranian-backed proxies and ostracised Sadrist militants do not appear to have the strength to derail stabilisation, either individually or collectively. That said, there is strong potential for repeated local upturns in violence lasting one to three months and largely taking place in rural areas, which will potentially have an unsettling effect on investment, reconstruction and hydrocarbons development.

Insurgency will still take place in some rural areas with high risk factors such as rough terrain, proximity of border sanctuaries, cross-border criminal traditions and ethno-sectarian strife. In the insurgency zone, a significant minority, perhaps as large as five per cent, of civilians are active participants or passive supporters of the insurgency. Parts of Nineveh, Kirkuk, Diyala, and Salah al-Din provinces will continue to be active theatres of counter-insurgency with relatively broad participation in the insurgency. The intensity of insurgency in these areas will typically be far less than it is now.

Terrorism zones are harder to identify. Although individual acts of high-visibility violence, such as mass casualty attacks and other high-impact targeted strikes, could happen anywhere in Iraq during the next government term, they will tend to be clustered in particular locations because of target concentrations and media focus. In these zones there may be no appreciable support from the population at all. Urban areas of Baghdad, Basrah, Anbar, Dhi Qar, Wasit and Babil provinces face a serious threat of terrorism committed by very small groups of Al-Qaeda and Shia militants. Almost all mass casualty bombings are likely to be focused in the insurgency zones plus Baghdad and Ramadi.

External stability

Very few of the detailed local dynamics in Iraq will have any regional impact, but the strengthening of the Iraqi state as a whole may begin to affect the calculations and options of regional states. In specific terms, three countries have direct and well-defined interests in Iraq: the US, Iran and Turkey. A range of others may take an interest in Iraq's politics or economics in a less structured manner or because of unique connections between their country and Iraq.

The US clearly has strong strategic interests in Iraq to 2015. The US will want Iraq, as the ascendant military power in the region, to be guided away from certain behaviour such as hostility towards Israel and pursuing weapons of mass destruction. Although the US seeks access to Iraq as a potential platform for containing Iran, it will also want to ensure competition between Iran and Iraq stays within stable parameters.

Iran cannot control Iraq or its government, but it seeks influence over key political blocs to mitigate strategic threats emanating from Iraq. Given the bilateral war from 1980 to 1988, Iran hopes to stop Iraq from developing aggressive military power and will fight particularly hard to prevent the development of US air bases in Iraq. Tehran will feel Iraq's Shia establishment must not be allowed to overshadow or challenge the model used in Iran.

Baghdad's potential power as an oil and gas exporter could be a threat to Tehran, which must broadly stay within the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries' quota system, from which Iraq is currently exempt. Finally, Tehran will feel Iraq's Kurdish region should not be allowed to emerge as a haven for Iranian Kurdish rebels.

Turkey potentially has much to gain from Iraq in terms of oil and gas supplies and trade volumes. Interactions between the KRG, federal Iraq and Turkey will have intensified by 2015. By that year, Iraqi gas could be flowing through the Nabucco pipeline to Europe. In terms of threat perceptions, Turkey will clearly have concerns about any permanent expansion of the KRG or its increased fiscal independence. However, indicators point to growing Turkish acceptance of the KRG.

| | |
|----------------|-------------|
| Risk factors | May-10 |
| Political risk | Significant |
| Security risk | Significant |
| Economic risk | Moderate |
| External risk | Moderate |

| | |
|--------------------|-------------|
| Social risk | Significant |
| Total country risk | Significant |

Three future scenarios

Negotiations to form legislative alliances are underway following parliamentary elections on 7 March. Alliances must be formed by the time parliament sits, which is likely to happen by mid- to late May. The largest bloc will be able to elect the president, so it would then be the most likely grouping to form a government. Following these convoluted negotiations, Jane's assesses the three most likely scenarios for the formation of a government.

Scenario one: Anti-Maliki alliance

Probability moderate

In this scenario, Allawi emerges as the next prime minister, having drawn together a range of Kurdish and Shia Islamist partners united only by their desire to prevent Maliki from being re-elected. He would lay claim to the position by **pointing** to his personal voting tally of 407,537 votes, which makes him the second highest-scoring candidate after Maliki, who won 622,961 votes. If circumstances prevented Allawi, who is from the dominant Shia Arab sect, from being prime minister, an alternative Shia candidate would be drawn from the INA.

Allawi could reliably bring more than 60 parliamentary seats to such a coalition, even if more anti-Kurdish elements of Iraqiyya dropped out. This would be greater than the Kurdistan Alliance (42 seats) or even all the pro-Kurdish parties combined (59 seats). Iraqiyya would also comfortably compare to the whole INA and importantly the largest Shia Islamist bloc, Moqtada al-Sadr's 39 parliamentarians.

Building such an Allawi-Kurdish-Shia super-coalition would be difficult, but it may be possible and there are indicators that negotiations are presently underway. Allawi explicitly supported Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) leader Jalal Talabani for re-election as president on 27 March and has since met KDP leader Masoud Barzani, building on his relatively good personal relations with the Kurdish leadership. Allawi may be willing to trade some defections from Iraqiyya for a strong Kurdish partnership.

The anti-Maliki bloc would command a slender simple majority in parliament that would allow it to ratify the prime minister and cabinet. Once the government was formed, the new super-coalition would probably lose the little cohesion it achieved during government formation. A good mixture of Shia, Sunni and Kurdish factions would be represented in Iraq's cabinet positions, but the government would not have a shared vision for Iraq. Allawi would need to show strong leadership skills to maintain government cohesion or forge new alliances on a case-by-case basis whenever legislation and budgets needed parliamentary approval.

The initial inclusion of a Kurdish bloc in the super-coalition would not guarantee improved federal-Kurdish relations. Once prime minister, Allawi could reorient his alliances to call on Maliki's SLA bloc to support a gradual rollback of Kurdish demands in disputed internal boundaries in Nineveh and blocking other Kurdish demands on oil policy and revenue sharing. Under an Allawi government, Iraq would generally continue to stabilise, albeit slowly. Carving up ministries along factional lines would slow their development and probably perpetuate the current high levels of corruption within the system. The ongoing dispute with the KRG would spill over into parliament and result in Kurdish attempts to block legislation. However, because of changes to the role of the president, who will no longer have a legislative veto in the next or subsequent parliament, the Kurds will be ill-equipped to block legislation and may face an increasingly hostile parliamentary environment.

With the exception of certain trouble spots such as Mosul, the security environment will continue to improve under the firm hand of an Allawi premiership, allowing the Iraqiyya leader to build on the reputation for toughness he acquired during the security crises of 2004.

| | |
|--------------------|--------------|
| Risk factors | Scenario one |
| Political risk | Moderate |
| Security risk | Significant |
| Economic risk | Moderate |
| External risk | Moderate |
| Social risk | High |
| Total country risk | Moderate |

Scenario two: Broad-based national unity

Probability significant

In this probable scenario, a range of circumstances and agendas will result in a very broad set of coalitions joining together to form a 'unity government'. In fact, the principal motivation behind joining the super-coalition would be a fear of exclusion from government and there would be little unity of purpose in the government. Such a scenario would probably begin with the two main Shia Islamist blocs: reuniting Maliki's SLA and the INA.

At a certain **point**, this burgeoning super-coalition might gain enough weight that other factions would quickly seek to join while there was still some benefit to doing so, in terms of ministerial positions. Leaders such as Ayatollah Sistani and many involved countries (such as the US) would probably wish to see Sunni Arab representation in the government, which would mean drawing Iraqiyya or large parts of it into the government.

The holdouts might include one or more of the three most significant individual power bases: those of Maliki (who can firmly control around 30 seats) or the Sadrists (39 seats). Selecting a prime minister would be a very complex affair in this scenario, so government formation might be extended beyond July or August. Both Allawi and Maliki would fight hard to win over their detractors to lead the super-coalition. Many factions, particularly the Sadrists, will want to push aside the strongmen (Allawi and Maliki) to put in place a weak compromise candidate such as Ibrahim al-Jaafari or Adel Abdal-Mahdi, vice-president and a Shia leader from ISCI who won just more than 30,000 votes in the election (one 20th of the personal vote gained by Maliki).

While the government that emerged would represent Iraq's ethnic and sectarian communities, it would suffer a range of serious defects. To an even greater extent than in the anti-Maliki scenario, the government would be so polyglot in nature that it would lack any cohesion on policy issues. The parliament might be split between many factions, the ministries would be disrupted for many months to accommodate the wave of new political appointees, and the parliament would reign over a weakened executive branch.

As in the anti-Maliki scenario, the creation of majority voting blocs in parliament would be fluid after the new government was ratified. This might tend towards the same kind of creeping anti-Kurdish agenda described in the previous scenario, as the Kurds find themselves without significant leverage and non-Kurdish factions coalesce on issues such as Kirkuk, Nineveh and Kurdish oil deals.

In the field of security, the government is likely to gradually lever the Kurdish groups out of parts of Nineveh province by a slow military and administrative crumbling of their presence. Under a weak prime minister, this policy could increasingly unfold according to the design of the Iraqi military, beginning by rotating pro-Kurdish Iraqi army forces out of the north and replacing them with predominately-Arab central and southern Iraqi divisions.

The international relations of the Iraqi government would probably not be helped by the creation of a weak Shia Arab premiership and Kurdish presidency. Sunni Arab countries in the Gulf Co-operation Council would remain suspicious of the Iraqi government and particularly its ties to [Iran](#). These suspicions would have some basis as the Iranian government would welcome the creation of a broad-based and indecisive central government in [Iraq](#). With such a government, [Iran](#) would be able to continue to play a significant mediation and influencing role among the many small parties involved in the government.

| | |
|--------------------|--------------|
| Risk factors | Scenario two |
| Political risk | High |
| Security risk | Significant |
| Economic risk | Moderate |
| External risk | Significant |
| Social risk | Significant |
| Total country risk | Significant |

Scenario three: Nationalists coalesce

Probability low

In this unlikely scenario, Maliki's SLA and Allawi's Iraqiyya would overcome personal and factional competition to form a cross-sectarian nationalist bloc, marking a major departure in Iraq's politics. The hurdles facing such a super-coalition are not to be underestimated. Maliki and Allawi are bitter rivals and have worsened this situation in their post-electoral comments. Maliki's tacit support for recent de-Baathification disqualifications of Iraqiyya candidates has not helped relations.

The key problem is that one of the two leaders would have to step aside to allow the other to be prime minister. A possible solution would be for Allawi to take the premiership while Maliki was given the presidency of [Iraq](#).

The nationalist bloc would include most of INM (89 seats), some or all of the [SLA](#) (87) plus numerous smaller blocs and a significant slice of the INA. Drawing these disparate factions together to muster the simple majority (163 seats) for a delayed election of the presidential position would be difficult enough. Doing it again to ratify the new government would be ever harder. In government, the cohesion of such a super-coalition would be tested regularly by the many strong and competitive personalities in the Iraqiyya and the [SLA](#).

One possible driver for such an alliance would be the failure to draw Kurdish factions into either an Allawi-led or other super-coalition. This could hinge on maximal Kurdish demands, possibly including a demand for public or formal agreements about issues to prevent future backsliding by the new government. There is a significant risk that the key issue holding together such a super-coalition would be suspicion of KRG ambitions and a desire to roll back the KRG's de facto lines of control in provinces like Nineveh, Kirkuk and Diyala.

| | |
|----------------|----------------|
| Risk factors | Scenario three |
| Political risk | Moderate |

| | |
|--------------------|-------------|
| Security risk | Moderate |
| Economic risk | Low |
| External risk | Low |
| Social risk | Significant |
| Total country risk | Moderate |

Conclusion

Iraq is most likely to see the creation of a sprawling super-coalition that emerges either by accident or by design. It may begin as an anti-Maliki alliance, a Shia-Kurdish alliance or even a nationalist alliance, but it will probably end by incorporating elements of all the main political coalitions.

This super-coalition's primary role is to elect an Iraqi president and ratify a package deal concerning the appointment of the prime minister and cabinet. Thereafter, the ties that bind this super-coalition could quickly erode and become a weak form of association. Politics would thereafter be a game of case-by-case coalition-building whenever a new raft of legislation needed to be collectively tackled. Disrupted governance, limited prime ministerial authority, corruption and ongoing Iranian influence would all be features of this system, although the gradual stabilisation and economic recovery of Iraq will not be reversed.

The prospect of a major change such as a new nationalist super-coalition are limited during the coming government, but such factions are likely to collaborate throughout the next government, building long-term pressure for the consolidation of nationalist elements in Iraq. In time, such a nationalist super-coalition probably will occur, and such a collection of legislators will collectively mobilise throughout the new government's term in numerous test-runs of nationalist voting power.

Growing federal pressure on the Kurds is a common feature of almost all scenarios. The Kurds are kingmakers only until there is a king, and it will be difficult for them to gain ironclad guarantees that will lock the ruling coalition into any deals it may have promised. The loss of the presidential veto on legislation could also reduce Kurdish leverage. The coming government is likely to witness steady and occasionally violent efforts by the federal centre to undermine Kurdish control in the disputed areas in Nineveh.

On the vital issue of oil policy, none of the potential combinations of political factions promise to bring major reconsideration of the existing 11 oil and gas licences. There is little chance of major new oil licensing rounds in 2011 or perhaps even 2012, so the impact of the new government may be limited in this field.

GOVERNMENT FORMATION

The key deadline for the emergence of a bloc capable of forming a government will be the election of the new Iraqi president, who will call on the leader of the largest bloc to form a government. The IHEC is likely to certify the final results of the parliamentary poll by the end of April, with the parliament then sitting within 15 days and appointing speakers and deputies by approximately mid-May. Then the new president must be elected by a two-thirds majority (216 votes) within 30 days of the first session of parliament. If the first attempt fails, the bar will drop to a simple majority of 163 votes. The election of a president is likely to happen in June.

The process of gathering a broad-based bloc capable of mustering 216 votes to appoint the president has probably already begun and is likely to continue until May. This creation of a super-coalition could be an important dress rehearsal for the ratification of a new government. The recognised leader of this grouping of three or more major coalitions stands a good chance of holding such a coalition together for long enough to be selected by the new president to make the first attempt at forming a government and to ratify it (with 163 votes) within 30 days of the president's invitation.



Thousands of supporters of the Kurdish opposition Gorran or "Change" movement attend a rally in Sulaimaniyah, 260 km northeast of Baghdad, in Iraq, on 3 March. While coalition between Kurdish and nationalist parties may hold the key to winning a parliamentary majority, such collaboration is unlikely to last in the long term. (PA)
1396267



Former Iraqi prime minister Ayad Allawi speaks to the press in Baghdad on 27 March 2010 (above). Allawi is in a strong position to return to power. (Below) Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre shows a continuing high frequency of attacks in Iraq. (PA)
1396268



Iraqis are searched before entering a polling station to cast their vote for the parliamentary elections in Baghdad on 7 March. The Iraqi High Electoral Commission is likely to certify the final results of the poll by the end of April, allowing a new government to be formed after lengthy negotiations. (PA)
1396269



Iraqi police officers, some holding Iraqi flags, raise their inked fingers after casting their votes in Najaf on 4 March. The Iraqi High Electoral Commission is likely to certify the final results of the poll by the end of April. (PA)
1396270



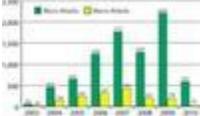
Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki votes in the Iraqi parliamentary election in Baghdad's Green Zone on 7 March. His State of Law Alliance shares a nationalist stance with former prime minister Ayah Allawi's Iraqi National Movement, but the two leaders' personal ambitions stand in the way of collaboration between the coalitions. (PA)
1396271



Iraqi security forces inspect the site of a car bomb attack near the Iranian embassy in Baghdad on 4 April. Although violence levels in [Iraq](#) are declining, Baghdad remains a high-risk area in terms of terrorist attacks and mass-casualty bombings. (PA)
1396272



Women supporters wave Iraqi flags at a rally for Ammar Al-Hakim, head of the Iranian-backed Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC), which is part of the Iraqi National Alliance, in Baghdad on 5 March. [Iran](#) seeks influence over key Iraqi political blocs to mitigate strategic threats from its neighbour. (PA)
1396273



Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre shows a continuing high frequency of attacks in [Iraq](#). (JTIC)
1396294

Related Articles

- Allawi's Iraq election victory stuns Maliki
- Withdrawal symptoms - What will happen after the US leaves [Iraq](#)?
- Sentinel: Political Leadership/Iraq
- **Author** Michael Knights is the Lafer International fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.