

What Options Does the Coordination Framework Have in the Face of the U.S. Rejection of Nouri al-Maliki?



As we attempt to decipher Iran's future options in Iraq and to explore its efforts to install a trusted ally at the helm of power in preparation for what could be its final showdown with the United States Washington is preparing for that confrontation by amassing fleets and military forces in the region.

The goal: a potential strike on Iran that could seal the fate of its regime, erase its influence, and bring its regional role especially in Iraq to an end.

It is clear to all observers that developments in the region are unfolding at such a rapid pace that it is becoming increasingly difficult to construct a clear, forward-looking vision.

No one can yet ascertain what Iran truly intends to do in its confrontation with the United States and Israel, nor what plans it is weaving to preserve its last significant sphere of influence Iraq.

Will Iran lose everything with the fall of its regime? Or will it scatter the region's political deck—especially in Iraq—in a desperate maneuver to save itself from the looming fate drawn up by Donald Trump?

An Iran-Aligned Iraqi Government Is the Need of the Hour

Since the last parliamentary elections in Iraq, many observers predicted a smooth path for Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani to form his second government. His coalition secured the highest number of parliamentary seats, and he enjoys favor from both the U.S. and Iran a rare balancing act that allows him to skillfully accommodate the interests of both powers in Iraq.

However, as the deadline to nominate a new prime minister approached, Iran ramped up its behind-the-scenes efforts with the Shiite Coordination Framework, urging its leaders to replace al-Sudani with none other than Nouri al-Maliki. For Tehran, the priority now is preventing the collapse of its regime, and it seeks to rally all efforts toward this goal.

Iran's fall would mean the collapse of Shiite rule in Iraq, the erosion of influence held by Shiite parties and factions, and the end of their political era.

Should the Iranian regime fall, a domino effect could quickly sweep through Baghdad. Iraq's political system was built on Iranian support; any disruption to that foundation will shake the loyalties of Tehran's allies within Iraq.

Indeed, Iraq's ruling Shiite elite have already burned their bridges with nearly all actors both domestic and foreign in a display of loyalty to Iranian interests. They are acutely aware that if their regime falls, it will bring with it a reckoning: a moment of accountability long awaited by the victims of sectarian governance, backed this time by the formidable weight of the United States. Washington now sees Iraq's ruling class and its allied militias as having crossed every red line, under Iran's cover.

Armed Factions: Survival Hinges on a Government That Confronts the U.S.

For Iran-linked militias, the stakes are even higher. Forming a government aligned with Iran is not merely a matter of ideological loyalty it is a final opportunity to escape mounting domestic and U.S. pressure calling for their dissolution and disarmament.

While Shiite parties might survive an Iranian regime collapse by rebranding and adopting new rhetoric, such political maneuvering is not an option for the militias. The U.S. holds them responsible for the deaths of American soldiers and accuses them of targeting Israel following October 7. Before that, they were deeply involved in Iraqi bloodshed. Washington and Tel Aviv are unlikely to forgive or forget.

For these factions, then, it is essential that Iraq's next prime minister be a figure whose loyalty to Iran is beyond doubt someone sectarian enough to ensure their protection, resist disarmament efforts, and prioritize their survival above all else, even if it comes at Iraq's expense.

The Coordination Framework's Dilemma

Former President Donald Trump's explicit rejection of Nouri al-Maliki's candidacy for prime minister has left the Shiite Coordination Framework in disarray. All available options seem unfavorable.

If they yield to U.S. demands and nominate an alternative to al-Maliki, they risk setting a humiliating precedent openly bowing to American dictates after years of claiming independence. Such a move would undermine their credibility among their base.

But if they insist on al-Maliki, the consequences could be disastrous: a government under heavy U.S. sanctions, incapable of functioning, and dragging the country into political, economic, and security crises.

Backing down may, paradoxically, be more perilous than pressing ahead. The constitutional timeline is tight, and al-Maliki remains steadfast in his bid. Trump, for his part, has warned that the U.S. will not provide any support to Iraq if al-Maliki becomes prime minister.

Most likely, the Coordination Framework will acquiesce and select another candidate perhaps Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani or Iraq's intelligence chief, Hamid al-Shatri swallowing the bitter pill of American interference to preserve their grip on power.

Their guiding slogan has been clear: "Don't let it slip away." This encapsulates their determination to cling to power at all costs even if it means making painful concessions to avoid seeing it pass to the Sunnis.

But the issue doesn't end with rejecting al-Maliki. Washington has reportedly vetoed any candidate closely tied to Iran, which poses another serious challenge for the Coordination Framework: nearly all its members have longstanding connections to Tehran.

Even if they manage to nominate someone who is not explicitly linked to Iran's regime, Washington is expected to impose additional conditions. Chief among them is excluding from any future cabinet individuals affiliated with, or sympathetic to, the Iran-aligned militias.

This would effectively nullify the electoral gains those factions made in the last election, denying them entry into the government and stripping them of influence over Iraq's executive institutions. In this way, Washington hopes to sideline and ultimately dismantle the militias.

Given these complications, forming a new government is likely to face significant delays. Already, the U.S. has made its first move by urging Kurdish party leaders to postpone the parliamentary session to elect a new president thereby

preventing the next president from tasking al-Maliki with forming a government. More U.S. interventions are expected.

Pro-U.S. Kurdish and Sunni blocs may replicate the Coordination Framework's tactics against the Sadrists, who were previously blocked from forming a government through parliamentary obstruction.

Even if the presidency is filled and the new president tasks al-Maliki or any U.S.-rejected figure with forming a government, such a nominee would likely struggle to secure a vote of confidence.

Parliament could simply fail to meet quorum, reject ministerial candidates, or indefinitely postpone sessions. This political deadlock could ultimately lead to growing calls for new elections calls Washington would back.

In that case, the Shiite parties and armed factions would lose the advantage they gained from the Sadrist boycott of the last elections. The Sadrists are widely expected to return in force in the next round possibly shifting Iraq's political landscape once again.