

Backgrounder #41

## Provincial Governments in Southern Iraq

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Following Iraq's provincial council elections on January 31, 2009, the political parties that captured seats in the provinces of the mainly Shia south scrambled to form ruling alliances; these coalitions then selected council presidents and governors for each province, as stipulated in the Provincial Powers Law (PPL) which was passed in March 2008 and went into effect following the January 2009 provincial elections.

According to the PPL, a governor's primary responsibilities are to direct local security and set the budget in his province. His power is restricted first through dependence on the provincial council (especially the cooperation of the council chairman) for approval of his security and budgetary measures; and second by reliance on the national government for funding, although opportunities exist for raising revenue locally, such as religious tourism in Najaf. The governor is dependent on both the provincial council and the national ministries to approve his nominations for senior positions in the province, including heads of security agencies. Furthermore, neither the governor nor the council enjoy any authority over functions of national ministries, including health, education, transportation, water, and sewage. Currently, the powers of the provincial councils and governors are not clearly delineated; much will depend on how much control over local security the national government affords the provinces.

Below are summaries of the post-election political developments in each southern province, including the names and party affiliation of the new governors and council heads. In every southern province, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's Dawa Party, campaigning under the State of Law (SoL) electoral list, emerged as a powerful force and took aggressive action to establish itself as a ruling party. Dawa's broad strategy appears to have been to isolate the once-regnant Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) by allying with other parties, including Sadrist, secularist, and local politicians. This strategy seems to have succeeded in every province but three: in Muthanna, ISCI was able to outmaneuver Dawa and control the council, while in Wasit and Maysan on the Iranian border Dawa opted to include ISCI in its ruling coalition at the expense of other parties.

## **Babel**

Ruling coalition: SoL, “Noble” Sadrists, Allawi, Jafari, locals

Opposition: ISCI

In Babel, Prime Minister Maliki’s State of Law list gained a plurality of seats, with Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim’s ISCI coming in second. Since the election, SoL has allied with the Sadrists, Ibrahim al-Jafari’s and Iyad al-Allawi’s lists, and a local party to outmaneuver ISCI.<sup>1</sup> In protest, seven councilmembers from the now powerless ISCI bloc have staged a boycott.<sup>2</sup> However, because of “enmity between the Sadrists and Maliki’s man in Karbala, Aqil al-Khazali,” Dawa seems to have deferred to Sadrist control of top posts.<sup>3</sup> Sadrist (and former editor of al-Hawzah)<sup>4</sup> Hasan al-Zarqani (also: Nasser Taha Kaleel al-Zurqani) is the new governor; deputy governors are Iskandar Wattout, the former governor of a local secular party, and Sadeq al-Mhanna, of Jafari’s Reform Party.<sup>5</sup> Kadum Majid Tuman, another Sadrist, holds the council chairmanship.<sup>6</sup>

## **Basra**

Ruling coalition: SoL

In Basra, Maliki’s SoL won a solid majority of seats, relegating the previously dominant ISCI party to a distinctly minor role and shunting aside the fiery regionalist former governor. Both the provincial council chairman, Jabbar Amin,<sup>7</sup> the new governor, Dr. Sheltagh Aboud Sherad,<sup>8</sup> (also known as Sheltagh Abud al-Mayah),<sup>9</sup> and the first deputy governor, Nizar al-Jabiri,<sup>10</sup> are Maliki allies and were selected by SoL.

## **Dhi Qar**

Ruling coalition: SoL, “Noble” Sadrists, Jafari

Opposition: ISCI

Unclear: Fadilah

In Dhi Qar, SoL won the most seats but could not capture a majority. Maliki’s coalition has since allied with the second place, Sadrist-endorsed al-Ahrar bloc and Jafari’s Reform party, effectively sidelining the third place ISCI bloc.<sup>11</sup> Taleb al-Hassan of the Dawa party is governor<sup>12</sup>; Qusai al-Ibadi of the Reform party holds the council chair, and his deputy, Abdulhadi Mohan, is SoL.<sup>13</sup>

## **Karbala**

Ruling coalition: SoL, Sadrists, Habbubi

Opposition: ISCI

The secularist independent Yusif Majid al-Habbubi earned the most votes in Karbala; because he had no party affiliation, he was made only second deputy governor.<sup>14</sup> The Sadrist-affiliated Hope of Mesopotamia bloc and SoL tied for second. They appear to have carved up provincial posts between them, leaving the last place ISCI bloc without significant power. The Sadrist Mohammed Hamid al-

Musawi was elected chairman of the council, Dawa's Engineer Amaleddin Majeed Hameed Kadhem (also: Kamal al-Hirr, or Amal al-Din al-Hirr) was elected governor, and Abbas al-Musawi, another Sadrist, holds the first deputy governor's post.<sup>15</sup>

## **Maysan**

Ruling coalition: SoL, ISCI

Opposition: Sadrists, Jafari

In Maysan, where SoL, the Sadrists, and ISCI split the vote evenly, Maliki's party has formed a ruling coalition with ISCI. Muhammad al-Sudani of the Dawa party is governor<sup>16</sup> while Hashim al-Shawki of ISCI's Hizballah wing is council chairman.<sup>17</sup> [Shawki is known only as nominee; his confirmation must be verified. Vitter's website seems to support this.] Interestingly, SoL had the numbers to ally with the Sadrists and smaller parties to isolate ISCI, but unlike in other provinces it ultimately chose to cooperate with them.

## **Muthanna**

Ruling coalition: ISCI, Locals

Opposition: SoL, Jafari, Sadrists, Locals

Muthanna's elections resulted in no clear winner; SoL and the incumbent ISCI earned the most council seats. The council chairman's post, now occupied by Abd al-Latyif Abbas al-Hasani,<sup>18</sup> went to ISCI while the governorship fell to SoL's Dawa party.<sup>19</sup> Shortly after taking office, however, the SoL-listed governor Ibrahim al-Mayyali switched to ISCI, prompting a walkout by Dawa council members.<sup>20</sup> Here, the pro-Iranian party appears to have successfully co-opted what looked like a Dawa election victory, cobbling together an ISCI-led ruling coalition through post-election political wrangling.<sup>21</sup>

## **Najaf**

Ruling coalition: SoL, Locals,

Opposition: ISCI, Sadrists

Unclear: Jafari

In Najaf, SoL held a slim electoral lead over ISCI and the Sadrists. Instead of cooperating with either party, however, Maliki's party seems to have allied with various local parties and secular blocs to form a council majority.<sup>22</sup> The council chairman, Fayad al-Shamari, was selected by SoL;<sup>23</sup> Adnan Abd Khudeir al-Zarfi of a local independent party was picked as governor over the objections of a disunited ISCI bloc and the Sadrists.<sup>24</sup> The local ISCI choice and former governor, Asaad Abu Gulal, has mounted a legal challenge to the appointment, supported at the national level by the Sadrist Baha al-Araji, "ostensibly an ally of Maliki at the moment."<sup>25</sup>

## Qadisiyah

Ruling coalition: SoL, Allawi

Opposition: ISCI, Jafari, Sadrists, Fadilah

SoL emerged with a large plurality after elections in Qadisiyah. After Allawi's National List contested the election results,<sup>26</sup> Maliki's party reached out to them, forming a tenuous ruling coalition that isolated the second place ISCI bloc. The coalition has appointed a Dawa council chairman, Jubeir al-Juburi,<sup>27</sup> and governor, Salim Hussein.<sup>28</sup>

## Wasit

Ruling coalition: SoL, ISCI

Opposition: Sadrists, Allawi, Local Dawa

In Wasit, where SoL won by far the largest portion of seats but not a majority, Maliki abandoned an initial alliance with Sadrists and other small parties in favor of cooperation with second place ISCI.<sup>29</sup> Mahmoud Abdulrida Talal was named as council chairman by the ISCI bloc.<sup>30</sup> Lateef Hamad al-Tarfa, the incumbent governor, was re-appointed by SoL with Maliki's blessing over the objections of several independent parties and some disgruntled members of the local Dawa party.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Shadid, "New Alliances in Iraq Cross Sectarian Lines," *The Washington Post*. 20 Mar 2009.

<sup>2</sup> AmR (P)/SR, "Babil council elects independent engineer as governor," *Aswat al-Iraq*. 18 Apr 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Reidar Visser, "Maliki Suffers Setbacks as Samarra Is Confirmed as New Speaker and More Governors Are Elected South of Baghdad", <http://historiae.org/samarrai.asp>. 19 April 2009.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.al-bab.com/arab/countries/iraq/press2003.htm>

<sup>5</sup> AmR (P)/SR, "Babil council elects independent engineer as governor," *Aswat al-Iraq*. 18 Apr 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Steven Lee Myers, "Politics and Mistrust Chip Away at the Foundations of Reconstruction," *The New York Times*. 16 Apr 2009; see also Myers, "Iraq Provinces Try to Overcome Political Disarray," *NYT*. 15 Apr 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Reidar Visser, "Maliki Suffers Setbacks as Samarra Is Confirmed as New Speaker and More Governors Are Elected South of Baghdad", <http://historiae.org/samarrai.asp>. 19 April 2009.

<sup>8</sup> SH (P)/SR, "Basra governor seeks to turn province into economic capital," *Aswat al-Iraq*. 28 Apr 2009.

<sup>9</sup> DBA, "British troops mark end of Iraq campaign as new era looms," *Earth Times*. 30 Apr 2009.

<sup>10</sup> "Suicide bombing kills 10, wounds 22 in Kirkuk," Al-Sharqiyah TV, Dubai, Translation by BBC Monitoring Middle East - Political, April 15, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> SH (P)/SR, "New alliance of winning blocs formed in Thi-Qar," *Aswat al-Iraq*. 30 Mar 2009.

<sup>12</sup> SS (P), "New local gov't takes office in Thi-Qar," *Aswat al-Iraq*. 27 Apr 2009.

<sup>13</sup> MH (P)/SR, "New provincial council's head, deputy selected in Thi-Qar," *Aswat al-Iraq*. 16 Apr 2009.

<sup>14</sup> AmR (P)/SR, "Karbala governor assumes duty after republican decree issued," *Aswat al-Iraq*. 19 Apr 2009.

<sup>15</sup> AmR (P)/SR, "Karbala governor assumes duty after republican decree issued," *Aswat al-Iraq*. 19 Apr 2009; SS (S), "Karbala governor vows crackdown on liquor shops, brothels," *Aswat al-Iraq*. 21 Apr 2009.

<sup>16</sup> SH (P)/SR, "Dawlat al-Qanoon nominates Mohamed Shayaa for Missan governor," *Aswat al-Iraq*. 2 Apr 2009.

<sup>17</sup> AmR (P)/SR, "Shahid al-Mihrab names 2 members for Missan council," *Aswat al-Iraq*. 11 Apr 2009.

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- <sup>18</sup> Highlights: Iraqi Press 20 May 09, al-Sabah, Open Source Center Summary.
- <sup>19</sup> Salam Faraj, "Maliki Scores Big with Iraq Local Leadership Posts," Agence France Presse (English). 4 May 2009.
- <sup>20</sup> "Iraq TV Update 8 May," BBC Monitoring Middle East – Politics. 9 May 2009.
- <sup>21</sup> Reidar Visser, "Mixed Outcome for Maliki as Muthanna and Najaf Elect New Governors," <http://www.historiae.org/notebook.asp>. 1 May 2009.
- <sup>22</sup> Reidar Visser, "Mixed Outcome for Maliki as Muthanna and Najaf Elect New Governors," <http://www.historiae.org/notebook.asp>. 1 May 2009.
- <sup>23</sup> "Najaf Provincial Council elects President and Vice-President," Alsumaria TV Network (online video in Arabic). 16 Apr 2009.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid; SS (P), "PB issues decree appointing governor for Najaf," *Aswat al-Iraq*. 19 May 2009.
- <sup>25</sup> Reidar Visser, "ISCI Keeps Fighting for the Najaf," <http://www.historiae.org/notebook.asp>. 8 May 2009.
- <sup>26</sup> SH (P)/SR, "INL forms committee to contest Diwaniya's election results," *Aswat al-Iraq*. 16 Feb 2009.
- <sup>27</sup> AmR (S)/SR. "Final deal to share sovereign posts in Diwaniya – official," *Aswat al-Iraq*. 13 Apr 2009.
- <sup>28</sup> SS (P)/SR, "New local gov't in Diwaniya takes office," *Aswat al-Iraq*. 29 Apr 2009.
- <sup>29</sup> Reidar Visser, "Maliki Suffers Setbacks as Samarra Is Confirmed as New Speaker and More Governors Are Elected South of Baghdad", <http://historiae.org/samarrai.asp>. 19 April 2009.
- <sup>30</sup> SS (P)/SR "Wassit governor, provincial council chief elected," *Aswat al-Iraq*. 15 Apr 2009.
- <sup>31</sup> Reidar Visser, "Maliki Suffers Setbacks as Samarra Is Confirmed as New Speaker and More Governors Are Elected South of Baghdad", <http://historiae.org/samarrai.asp>. 19 April 2009; AmR (P)/SR, "Shiite party quits alliance in Wassit," *Aswat al-Iraq*. 11 Apr 2009; SS (P), "Dawlat al-Qanoon in Wassit wants governor out of office," *Aswat al-Iraq*. 13 Apr 2009.