ABSTRACT

This policy brief analyzes the Iraqi domestic political scene in the run up to the 2014 parliamentary elections, arguing that they may represent a turning point in the history of Iraq. It briefly traces Iraq’s experience with elections by looking at the recent elections and their results, as well as discussing the changes to the electoral regulations. It examines the main challenges and contested issues that are affecting the political process before the elections, such as the different interpretations of the electoral laws and processes and the reluctance of the people to participate in elections. The brief examines in detail the main coalitions that will be competing in the elections, focusing on the shifts in their structure. The brief also elaborates on the prospects of the coalitions in the election results. The brief then examines the regional and international implications of Iraq’s elections, as well as the impact of the regional and international developments on the electoral process. The brief concludes with an outline of the four major lines of divisions within the Iraqi people as regards their attitude in the elections.
The election process in general is no longer a process that involves the local reality of the state itself, but rather, it clearly affects the overall local and regional political interactions. This is especially so for countries that are located on the axis of the current crises in the Middle East region, which is like moving sands, and hardly experiences stability and steadiness in a world of changes. The coming Iraqi parliamentary elections is considered to be an important event, not only in Iraq, but also throughout the region. Moreover, this election reflects the development of the nature of the political process in Iraq after the U.S. withdrawal, and the extent of changes in the attitudes of Iraqi voters. Election results will demonstrate whether the changes will alter the fundamentals of the political game of the Iraqi political forces.

A glimpse at numbers and history
If we trace the political process in Iraq since the last elections of the Iraqi parliament (2010) and the provincial elections in 2009 and 2013, this can reveal us a number of features about the basic details of the political and electoral processes in Iraq. This election in 2014 will be the third legislative elections to be held, in addition to the referendum on the constitution which was held in 2005.

On 15 December 2005, the ballot was held in the third elections after the fall of Saddam’s regime, and after the election of the National Assembly, from which the transitional government was emanated. After the vote on the permanent constitution on 15 October 2005, 275 Council of Representatives members were selected, and this new council formed the first government of national partnership in power for four years instead of the interim government, and a number of seats has been allocated for each province in a way proportional to the number of population, while 45 seats were reserved for Iraqi minorities and women have been granted representation (25%). While the 2005 elections witnessed competition of 6655 candidates belonging to 307 political entities and 19 coalitions, the main blocs were: United Iraqi Alliance, list number (555), which achieved 128 seats; and Kurdistan Alliance, list number (730), which achieved 53 seats; and Iraqi National List and the Accordance Front, list number (731), which achieved 44 seats.

On 7 March 2010, elections were held for the second Iraqi Council of Representatives, and these elections were held after a delay of more than two months from the scheduled date because of the delay in approving the election law, the discussion about the list of closed and open-list and single constituency and multi constituencies, and the desire of some blocs to postpone the elections. The rate of participation in the 2010 elections reached 55%, and the Iraqi List Coalition came in the first position and achieved 91 seats, followed by the State of Law Coalition with 89 seats, while the National Alliance achieved 69 seats, the Kurdistan Alliance achieved 40 seats, and the Accordance Front got 5 seats.

As regards the electoral process in the Iraqi scene in 2014, however, the number of candidates for the Iraqi elections reached 9040 candidates, and all will compete for the seats in the Council of Representatives in the elections that will take place on 30 April 2014. These numbers mean that an average of about 28 candidates will be competing for each seat in the Council, and with this situation, the number of candidates in this
If we compare the April 2014 elections and the Council of Representatives elections in 2010, we find some important differences, which are worth paying attention to.

Electoral Power Centers
Perhaps the next legislative elections in Iraq will mark a step towards economic development, the rebuilding of the social order in Iraq and the foundations of the state, the consolidation of a fair political system, and guaranteeing the appearance of new values that determine the meaning of belonging to a country unified in land and people. Thus, the elections are considered as the gate of salvation from the frequent crises. It is, however, important to remember that a just modern state is built on the principle of prosperity and economic stability and achievement of justice in the distribution of resources. More importantly, these values can’t flourish and consolidate unless democracy becomes the
prevailing social culture that transforms into valuable standards in all fields.

The parliamentary elections and the parliament in the old Iraq history is not something new. At first glance, democracy appears to be so much in the European civilization that we cannot imagine that the first constituent assembly in history was held in Sumer in the third millennium BC, and it was composed of two councils: the first was the Senate, and the second was the Parliament. But after the fall of the Saddam’s regime, Iraq is practicing the electoral experience in a new form, and without any doubt, it is imperative that the changes that took place between 2005 and 2010 elections will reflect on the upcoming elections. It was proven that the Iraqi people, despite their novel experience in democracy and elections, is able to adopt a wise attitude towards the political blocs, and to prioritize their interests to any special considerations, for which they need clearly to move from political polarization to new standards based on efficiency, integrity and professionalism.

Three traditional parties with their small allies have been dominating the political processes and sharing the power in the parliament and government. According to the democratic system, each party sought, at that time, to achieve the dream of political majority. However, after a review of the re-formation of the political coalitions and after the changes that happened in the forms of alliances that used to dominate the current political scene, we see that the existing blocs and coalitions are split into several coalitions, and they re-organized themselves in preparation for the upcoming electoral process.

As for the National Alliance, it has split into four coalitions. The first is the State of Law Coalition which kept the current structure that includes the Dawa Party, with its two wings, and the independents and other political entities with tribal and secular nature. But what can be observed here is that this coalition was able to pull an important historical ally of the Supreme Council, which was the Badr Organization,
which became part of the State of Law Coalition since the provincial elections last year. Secondly, there is the Citizen Coalition which represents the weight of the Supreme Council and its affiliates with an enrollment of some movements and small entities, which were formed recently. Thirdly, the Liberal Coalition represents the Sadrist movement and his supporters. Lastly, the Alliance of National Reform is headed by Dr. Ibrahim Al Jaafari, who entered individually in this election, after he participated with the State of Law Coalition in the provincial elections.

The Iraqiya List is also split into three coalitions. The Uniting for Reform includes Osama Al Najafi, Rafie Al Issawi and Jamal Al Karbouli, in addition to the new political names and interfaces recently formed, which all belong to the Islamic Party. The Arab Coalition “Al Arabiya Coalition” includes Saleh Al Mutlaq and his new ally Mishan Al Joubouri, who was excluded recently from participation, and other entities and movements with Arab nationalist nature. Lastly, National Coalition includes Iyad Allawi who remained with his allies within the Iraqiya list, in addition to new blocs and entities formed by deputies and ministers. Probably it will have a strong presence in the western provinces, ahead of the Arab and united coalitions.

This time, the elections will witness civic and democratic movements, while some parties may unite such as the Communist Party and the Democratic Movement and the People’s Party in a single civic alliance in most provinces, entitled the Civic Democratic Alliance but the predictions and surveys indicate very modest chances for this coalition in the next elections. This is because of the electoral attitude of the Iraqi people, which is still very far away from those movements and very close to the national and religious discourse, which will be strongly present at the upcoming elections in the light of the current crisis taking place in the country.

**Variations of the third parliamentary elections**

There are several problematic issues facing the upcoming elections in Iraq. Firstly, there is the issue of the differences between the political forces on electoral law. This situation is due to the fact that the new law was used in the provincial elections, under which some blocs had been affected negatively by facing a sharp decrease in their votes. At the same time, other blocs had gained votes. The truth indicates that all political blocs are equal in the profit and loss under this law, and this law cannot support the defeated, nor can it alone defeat the victors, as it is just a mechanism for the distribution of seats. Some powers refused to adopt the amended Sainte - Lague method, and experts say that the current parliament is composed of 10 parliamentary blocs allied within three main movements, and such a large number in the previous session led to the complexity of the legislative and regulatory parliament work.

The use of Sainte - Lague method may lead to about 20 blocs making their way into the parliament, because the law allows small blocs to rise, which may lead to more complexity in the parliament’s work. Moreover, there remain legal loopholes which were created while the law was passed, one of which is that this law eliminates the previous law No. 15 of 2005, but in the text it refers to amending it. Passing the law such quickly and overlooking such problems demonstrates that there exists a strong desire of big international powers to settle the matter.
The 2014 Iraqi Parliamentary Elections: An Analysis of the Political Map and Expectations

The second problem lies in the reluctance of the public from participating in the upcoming elections and the lack of people’s enthusiasm for it. People’s reluctance is largely because of a sense of frustration towards many issues related to the legislative and executive matters, especially in vital and urgent areas, throughout the 10 years since the fall of the former regime. Such issues involve confronting terrorism, confronting corruption, confronting poverty, the unemployment, the electricity crisis, the housing crisis, the low level of municipal services and basic services, and the unsatisfactory development and reconstruction in the country, despite the presence of huge annual federal financial budget.

The religious authority in Najaf may play a role in urging for participation. Actually it happened before that political actors have benefited from the religious authority’s support for the elections and the latter’s issuance of statements urging people to participate in the vote in all previous elections. Moreover, the reason for the voters’ reluctance to participate is the low political awareness and the weakness of democratic culture among the public. The people also tend to hold on to the easiest solution such as boycotting, but they forget that the democratic system carries correcting mechanisms within it. Therefore, the people need to be reminded that the best way to reform the bad situation is to participate in the elections for the renewal of blood and removing corrupt officials.

As regards the chances of the main competing lists, the following observations can be made. Firstly, the State of Law Coalition. Perhaps, what distinguishes this coalition is its maintaining of the main entities forming it, and the absence of withdrawals or splits in it. On the contrary, it was able to strengthen its presence and support, with the accession of some parties and movements to it, which were previously within the umbrella of the National Coalition and allied with the Supreme Council and the Sadrist Movement in the parliamentary elections in 2010. One of those most significant parties and movements were the Badr Organization, the historical ally of the Supreme Council. Nevertheless, some people believe that the first and second term of Maliki did not deliver anything new in terms of services, and not resolving the Anbar battle will affect the results and the chances of the State of Law.

Second, there is the Citizen Coalition, of which the Supreme Council and its affiliates form the backbone together with some small movements and parties. Perhaps its chances will be less compared to the State of Law Coalition, because of the presence of certain individuals within the coalition, and also given the coalition’s showing in the provincial councils.

Third, there is the Liberal Coalition, which is based on the Sadrist movement. Its chances will also be very little because of the Sadrist movement’s policies and political attitudes that affected its reputation and popularity, especially in the central and southern provinces. By looking at the fact that it participated with three lists, it can clearly be seen that the coalition was influenced by the decision of the movement’s leader, Muqtada Al Sadr, to withdraw from the political scene, after the members of its bloc voted in favor of the privileges of the current Council of Representatives members.

Fourthly, the Uniting for Reform is represented by the movements of the Sunni Political Islam forces, which are currently generally going through a relapse in the Arab region. It is also facing...
tough challenges due to the difficult security situation experienced by the Anbar district generally, and the city of Fallujah particularly since the beginning of this year. This situation may imply that there exists a big decline in the rate of participation in the elections in those districts, as well as a significant decline in the chances of the Uniting for Reform. As a result, this list might be the biggest loser in the upcoming elections.

As for the Arab Coalition, it represents the Sunni Arab Nationalist Movement that witnessed lately a significant decline, which means that the chances of this coalition will be considerably low. Lastly, the National Coalition that represents Iyad Allawi and some allies from other lists and blocks, which joined it recently, may be in a better position compared to the Arab and Uniting for Reform coalitions, especially in the western provinces of Iraq. It is nonetheless expected that there will be a significant decline in its popularity because of the floundering of Iyad Allawi in the leadership, and the deep split of a large number of the list leaders in the current Council of Representatives.

The international implications of the Iraqi elections

The April 2014 elections will have a significant effect on the Iraqi political scene, since the domestic situation is going through major challenges, especially the fight against terrorism in Anbar, and the relationship between the central government in Baghdad and the local government in northern Iraq. Moreover, other issues concerning the relationship between the executive power and the legislature (Parliament) or other issues will have a significant impact on the nature and form of the next Iraqi government.

Politics is subject to the effects of globalization, and is no longer confined within the borders of the countries itself. Iraqi domestic politics also extends beyond borders, because of Iraq’s strategic location and importance in the region. Iraq has been one of the most exposed countries in the world to the external developments. Iraq has been affected by the regional and international transformations that are taking place around it, and this is one of the reasons...
that caused its political fragmentation. Countries such as Iraq that have regional and international relevance cannot isolate themselves from the changes in their environment. But, such countries often seek to achieve a balance between affecting the events and being affected by the events, in order to keep themselves afloat. This general observation can be applied to Iraq and its current predicament can be summed up as follows: Iraq always is affected by external events, thus it is translated inside Iraq in both negative and positive senses. Therefore Iraq is considered to be the most affected neighbor by the Syrian crisis, the first to be affected by the crisis around the Iranian nuclear file, the first to be affected by the strained relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia, and the first to be affected by Turkey’s fight against the PKK, or by a car bomb in a suburb of Beirut.

In the framework of its exposure to the developments around it, Iraq is concerned about the transformations it witnessed in the last months of 2013, most notably the important change in the Syrian crisis in favor of the regime. The second change is about the new resolution to put the Iranian nuclear crisis on the way to solution in more serious way than ever before, while thirdly one can talk about how, as an inevitable result for these transformations, the United States has sought to change its alliances and switch its horses in the region in a way that harmonizes with its new vision in protecting its interests in the Middle East. One can recount such developments as the Iranian-American dialogue and Turkey’s resolution process whereby it has initiated communication with the PKK. These developments may affect in a way or another the nature of the next Iraqi political map.

The impact of the developments in Anbar remains on the Iraqi arena, since the fight against the so-called terrorist Islamic State in Iraq and Sham (ISIS) has not yet been resolved in military terms. Though the current situation in Anbar might be heading towards stability after the Iraqi army controls more of Anbar areas, especially the border regions near Syria, there still remain some
areas where the military solution won’t be imposed. According to Anbar people, there are still secure areas, and this may for instance affect the elections there. In this process, it also has appeared that there is a clear division among the tribes and some political forces in Anbar. In this context the upcoming rapid changes may open doors to all possibilities. Because the possibilities for postponing the elections due to security situations have been often discussed, the government worked to facilitate the procedures for the citizens in Anbar, to get to the ballot, and etc.

On the other hand, the United States has very few assets to offer in this regard. Nevertheless, Washington has the ability to play an important role, not only by providing military assistance, but also through its commitment to the principles outlined in the strategic framework agreement. These principles include preserving the unity and independence of Iraq, fighting against terrorism, defending democracy, maintaining stability in Iraq, as well as maintaining the flow of oil. As announced clearly by the Obama administration, it is not the U.S. concern to interfere in the internal political affairs of Iraq. Nonetheless, the United States can play an important role that commits to the strategic agreement’s objectives. Here, however, there are bureaucratic procedures that impede the U.S. support for Iraq in the realm of security. For instance, despite the Iraqi government’s requests of F16 planes, it was only agreed to sell only 12 planes. There are speculations that there is a certain Republican lobby in the United States, and another Gulf Saudi lobby, that seek to present Obama as mistaken in the process of withdrawing from Iraq. As a result, there are vigorous attempts not to allow other arrangements regarding arming the Iraqi army, such as the Russian deal and others.

**Conclusion**

Domestically, there is undoubtedly frustration towards the political crisis and its security repercussions on the Iraqi scene. Therefore, in the 2014 elections, the Iraqi voters will be divided into four categories. The first is a large crowd that disgruntles terrorism and interacts with the current government. This group...
finds representation mostly among the Shiite public, as well as receiving the support of some Sunni tribes that are fighting terrorism as well. The second group consists of the ones who belong to the civil forces and its sympathizers, and perhaps the new law will give them a hope to participate legislatively. This is particularly because of the fact that the law (amended Sainte - Lague method 6.1) favors small and medium sized blocs. The third group represents the ones who belong to the religious forces (not supporting the government). Its constituents are traditionalists and their popularity has experienced deep vibrations due to their recent attitudes towards the Anbar issue, as well as because of what is happening to the political Islamic movement across the Arab countries. The fourth group represents the ones who refrain from participating in the elections, as well as the undecided. They may be waiting for the emergence of a new national alternative.

The parliamentary elections of 2014 may represent a turning point in the history of Iraq, where it might provide an opportunity for a real change. It may give the political process a chance to take a fresh breath and put an end to the political fight.