

**IRAQ'S SECULAR OPPOSITION:
THE RISE AND DECLINE OF AL-IRAQIYA**

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IRAQ'S SECULAR OPPOSITION: THE RISE AND DECLINE OF AL-IRAQIYA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A key player in the political crisis currently unfolding in Baghdad is the Al-Iraqiya Alliance, a cross-confessional, predominantly Sunni, mostly secular coalition of parties that came together almost three years ago in an effort to replace Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in the March 2010 elections. It failed then, and its flailing efforts now, along with those of other parties, to unseat Maliki through a parliamentary no-confidence vote highlight Iraqiya's waning power as a force that could limit the prime minister's authority. They also show that what remains of the country's secular middle class lacks an influential standard bearer to protect its interests and project a middle ground in the face of ongoing sectarian tensions that Syria's civil war risks escalating. Finally, they underline the marginalisation of Sunni Arabs and Sunni Turkomans by the Shiite-led government, further increasing the potential for violence.

It did not have to be this way. As recently as two years ago, when election results became known, Iraqiya showed promise as a secular alternative in an environment defined by ethno-sectarian politics. It was the only political alliance to attract both Shiite and especially Sunni voters. It campaigned on an expressly non-sectarian platform (arguing, for example, against the notion of federal Sunni and Shiite regions) as the representative of liberals and moderates. It won the largest number of seats, 91, against the 89 mustered by its main rival, Maliki's State of Law list. Alone among major political alliances, Iraqiya claimed support throughout the country, having obtained twelve of its seats in Shiite-majority areas, when Maliki's did not win a single one in predominantly Sunni governorates.

But Iraqiya overreached. In negotiations over government formation, its leader, Iyad Allawi, insisted on holding the prime minister's position by virtue of heading the winning list. In response, Shiite parties that had fallen out with Maliki grew fearful that former Baathists would return to power and once again coalesced around him. Joining forces with Maliki, they managed to form the largest parliamentary bloc; the outgoing prime minister, who also gained support from both Iran and the U.S., held on to his position. In a striking reversal of fortune, Iraqiya lost its leverage. Some of its leaders rushed to accept senior posi-

tions in the new Maliki government even before other key planks of the power-sharing accord between Maliki, Allawi and Masoud Barzani, president of the Kurdish region, known as the Erbil agreement, could be implemented.

The goal of the Erbil accord had been to limit the powers of the prime minister. It was not to be. Since taking office in December 2010, Maliki steadily has built up his power, making no concessions to his governing partners. He has retained control over the interior and defence ministries as well as of elite military brigades. As a result, Iraqiya has found itself marginalised in government, its leaders and members exposed to intimidation and arrest by security forces, often under the banner of de-Baathification and anti-terrorism. Having campaigned partially on the promise it would bring such practices to an end, Iraqiya proved itself powerless in the eyes of its supporters. Matters came close to breaking point in December 2011, as the last U.S. troops left the country, when Maliki's government issued an arrest warrant against Vice President Tareq al-Hashimi, a senior Sunni leader, while declaring Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlak, another Sunni leader – both of them from Iraqiya – *persona non grata* for having referred to Maliki as a "dictator".

In April 2012, tensions between Maliki and his governing partners escalated further. Joining forces, Iraqiya leaders, Barzani and other Kurdish leaders as well as some of Maliki's Shiite rivals such as the powerful Sadrist movement, accused the prime minister of violating the Erbil agreement and amassing power by undemocratic and unconstitutional means. Their efforts ever since to hold a parliamentary no-confidence vote against Maliki have been hampered by internal divisions. The crisis is at a stalemate: Maliki hangs on to power, even enjoying a surge in popularity in Shiite areas; his rivals lack a viable strategy to unseat him until the next parliamentary elections, which should take place in 2014. This, they fear, leaves plenty of time for the prime minister to further consolidate his hold over the security forces and carry out further repression to achieve the kind of parliamentary majority in the next elections that has eluded him so far.

An emboldened prime minister, growing sectarian tensions and a deeply mistrustful opposition are a recipe for violent conflict, especially in light of troubling developments in neighbouring Syria. Iraqis across the divide express fears that a spiralling sectarian-tinged civil war in their neighbour could exacerbate tensions at home and usher the country into another round of sectarian conflict. In a separate report, Crisis Group has proposed some ways to mitigate the chances of such a scenario.

A key to understanding the political battle in Baghdad is to appreciate the extent to which it was avoidable. A series of ill-conceived steps has contributed to Iraqiya's decline as a non-sectarian alliance bringing in a significant and otherwise underrepresented segment of the population. If the group hopes to survive the current phase and truly represent its constituency's interests, it will have to engage in a serious internal reflection, in which it honestly assesses the strategies it has pursued, draws appropriate lessons and paves the way toward more democratic internal decision-making. If Iraqiya is to play a role in solving the dangerous political crisis, it first will have to overcome the crisis within that, over the past two years, has steadily been eroding its credibility.

As part of a new strategy it could:

- ❑ develop a more formal internal decision-making process that would allow for dissenting views to be communicated openly and directly to senior leadership;
- ❑ engage in a deliberate debate with its constituents on what they expect from the government and Iraqiya's role in it, and whether they consider that the alliance has contributed to meeting those expectations. This could be done by requiring its parliament members to regularly return to their constituencies to engage with voters through organised forums, or by encouraging its provincial representatives to maintain steady ties with universities and professional associations so as to allow constituents to provide feedback on Iraqiya's performance;
- ❑ develop and publish a strategy document that would review in detail and objectively developments since March 2010, including its own performance, and that of its individual ministers and senior leaders, with recommendations on how it could improve;
- ❑ review its relationship with other political alliances, including State of Law, the National Alliance and the Kurdistan Alliance, with a view to resolving differences and contributing to improving the state's performance;
- ❑ negotiate a countrywide political compromise with its counterparts, in which it would offer to abandon efforts by some of its members to establish federal regions in exchange for a more equitable security and human rights

policy (including prohibiting arrests without just cause, ensuring that all detainees have access to adequate legal representation within 24 hours of their arrest, and allowing them to contact their relatives immediately upon their arrest) and more meaningful decentralisation (allowing governorates greater control over local investment and discrete issues such as education and transport).

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IRAQ'S SECULAR OPPOSITION: THE RISE AND DECLINE OF AL-IRAQIYA

I. INTRODUCTION

The alliance of parties known as the Al-Iraqiya List, or in this report simply as “Iraqiya”, is unique in the country’s political landscape. Although it enjoyed the support of more than 80 per cent of the Sunni community in the 2010 elections,¹ it is headed by Iyad Allawi, a secular Shiite, former prime minister (2004-2005) appointed by the U.S.-led Coalition Provisional Authority and one of the country’s most popular politicians.² It is home to a large spectrum of political ideologies, from secular to religiously conservative, and from non-sectarian to supporters of Sunni-identity politics, but who have gathered under the “big-tent” banner of secular nationalism with a view to projecting unity of purpose, credibility, opposition to Iranian influence and readiness to represent the country as a whole and lead it.

That diversity, combined with its united leadership, allowed for an impressive result in the March 2010 parliamentary elections, in which it obtained 91 out of 325 seats in the Council of Representatives, a narrow plurality over its nearest competitor, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki’s State of Law list. In December 2010, it formed part of the new unity government. Paradoxically, Iraqiya’s success, combined with its ambition to take control of the government, have proven the greatest threats to its unity and ability to represent its constituents’ interests.

Maliki and State of Law campaigned on a similar non-sectarian, secular nationalist platform in the 2010 elections. Their goal was to reach out to, and win the support of, as large a number of Iraqis as possible and to distinguish themselves from the Iraqi National Alliance, a grouping of mainly Shiite Islamist parties (and some secular individuals) that had been Maliki’s allies in the January and December 2005 parliamentary elections.³ The 2010 election results confirmed Maliki’s popularity vis-à-vis his erstwhile allies, who obtained only 70 seats against Maliki’s 89, but it also highlighted that his principal rival for power was Allawi. He and Iraqiya presented a threat not only to Maliki’s hold on power but to the political direction the state had taken since 2005. Shiite Islamist parties were alarmed by how Allawi, during his tenure as prime minister, reintegrated former Baathist officers into the state apparatus, including the security forces. These parties reversed that trend once they came to power, first during Ibrahim al-Jaafari’s term (2005-2006) and then Maliki’s (2006-2010).

The 2010 election results therefore caused Maliki to set his sights on Iraqiya; this, along with Iraqiya leaders’ internal party mismanagement, thirst for top government positions and single-minded pursuit of the prime minister’s post in particular, plunged the opposition alliance into a continuous state of crisis and possibly on a downward slope toward demise.

¹ This figure is based on a comparison between the number of votes Iraqiya received in Salah al-Din, Anbar, Diyala, Ninewa and Kirkuk provinces and those cast for other predominantly Sunni Arab parties or candidates in the March 2010 elections.

² Iyad Allawi is regularly cited as Iraq’s most popular politician. For example, in a November 2011 poll, he enjoyed a 40 per cent approval rating, the highest of all political leaders. Zogby Research Services, “Iraq: The war, its consequences and the future”, p. 21, at http://aai.3cdn.net/2212d2d41f760d327e_fxm6vtlg7.pdf. That said, in May 2012, an opinion poll suggested that Nouri al-Maliki had surpassed Allawi in popularity. “A Major Shift in the Political Landscape: Results from the April 2012 National Survey”, Greenberg Quinlan and Rosner Research for the National Democratic Institute, pp. 9-12.

³ In the January and December 2005 parliamentary elections, the Shiite-identity-based electoral alliance was called the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA). Maliki’s Islamic Daawa Party was a junior partner, obtaining 13 of the UIA’s 130 seats in the December elections. For a brief analysis of the election results, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°52, *The Next Iraqi War? Sectarianism and Civil Conflict*, 27 February 2006, pp. 29-32. In mid-2009, following intense negotiations between Prime Minister Maliki and his nominal allies within the UIA over who should be the alliance’s leader (and therefore prospective candidate for prime minister) in the 2010 elections, Maliki split off and established the State of Law list; his rivals formed the Iraqi National Alliance. After the elections, the two lists merged in order to outmanoeuvre Iyad Allawi’s Iraqiya list, which had won a plurality of votes.

A. A PERMANENT STATE OF CRISIS

Once the Independent High Electoral Commission confirmed the election results in May 2010, political leaders launched what turned out to be protracted negotiations to form a government, which ended several months later with Maliki staying on as prime minister. Both the delay and his ultimate success allowed him to strengthen his hold on state institutions, including the security forces.⁴ Iraqiya, by contrast, which had aimed very high based on its electoral performance, ended up with a consolation prize: some senior positions in the new national unity government – parliament speaker, vice president, deputy prime minister and finance minister – and promises, yet unfulfilled, of further influential posts, including defence minister and head of a new strategic policy council, intended for Allawi.

Since then, Maliki's government has carried out repeated waves of arrests against alleged former Baathists in governorates with a heavy Sunni population where Iraqiya had scored strongest (Salah al-Din, Anbar, Ninewa and Diyala), as well as a campaign to remove Iraqiya-affiliated local government officials and academics on charges of belonging to the banned Baath party. It also squashed anti-corruption demonstrations and other forms of protest.

Most importantly, Maliki reneged on his commitment to share power with his rivals, taking personal charge of the defence and interior ministries, and consolidating control of forces under his direct command, as well as the council of ministers (which continues to operate without bylaws), the judiciary and several independent agencies.⁵

Maliki's campaign targeting Iraqiya escalated in the second half of 2011, ahead of the scheduled U.S. troop withdrawal at the end of the year. In September, security forces deployed armoured vehicles in the Green Zone, their guns turned ominously toward the homes of senior leaders such as Vice President Tareq al-Hashimi.⁶ At the

end of October, the government launched a new wave of what it termed pre-emptive arrests of suspected Baath party members in Baghdad and Salah al-Din governorate, accusing them of planning to overthrow the government as soon as U.S. soldiers had left the country. Setting aside the action's questionable legality, it proved highly intimidating to the population in the targeted areas because of the large number of arrests (in the hundreds, in a matter of hours) and the manner in which these were carried out (often by special forces, in the dead of night).⁷ At the same time, the higher education ministry announced it would remove more than 100 academics and staff from Tikrit University as part of a longstanding de-Baathification policy.

The combined impact of these two actions on Salah al-Din, and its capital Tikrit, was outrage and fear, but then also a surprising action: on 27 October, the provincial council declared the formation of a separate Salah al-Din federal region under the terms of the 2005 constitution.⁸ After council members realised the next day that such a move first required a local referendum, it proceeded to make the necessary arrangements, even to the point of printing the ballots itself, a task normally reserved for the Electoral Commission.⁹ Since then, Maliki has offered to halt any further de-Baathification in Salah al-Din, and the provincial council has deferred any additional action on federalism and agreed to negotiate a solution with the central government.

Several weeks later, on 15 December, responding to similar circumstances, the provincial council of Diyala, a governorate with a mixed Sunni-Shiite population¹⁰ but dominated politically by Iraqiya since the January 2009 provincial elections, also voted in favour of forming a federal region.¹¹ The next day, armed protesters opposed to the regionalisation move (some say they were members

⁴ A State of Law politician close to Maliki suggested that the prime minister was able to strengthen his control over state institutions during the period of political disarray after the March 2010 elections, and especially after he was reappointed prime minister in December of that year. Noting in January 2011 that government formation was far from complete, he said that "while many ministerial posts remain unfilled, there are people temporarily in charge, so the work continues. The prime minister is happy with this situation". Asked if Maliki was happy to let this go on for a long time, the lawmaker said: "To be honest with you, yes". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 16 January 2011.

⁵ See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°113, *Failing Oversight: Iraq's Unchecked Government*, 26 September 2011.

⁶ Crisis Group interviews, international consultant who visited the Green Zone, including Hashimi's home, at the time, Washington DC, 10 January 2012; and Saleh Mutlak and an aide to Tareq al-Hashimi, Baghdad, 18 December 2011.

⁷ Crisis Group observations, Tikrit, end of October 2011; and Crisis Group interviews, Baghdad, November 2011.

⁸ Under the 2005 constitution, provinces can transform themselves into federal "regions", theoretically putting them on a par with the Kurdish region in terms of the powers they enjoy independent from Baghdad. Federal regions are responsible for organising their own agricultural, education, transportation, health and electricity sectors, among others. Salah al-Din hoped that such autonomy would isolate it from continued central government encroachments.

⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Tikrit, 29 October to 1 November 2011.

¹⁰ Diyala is home to a sizeable Shiite population – around 20 per cent – and experienced extreme violence during the 2005-2008 sectarian war.

¹¹ Security forces arrested provincial officials in Diyala throughout 2011. Most were Iraqiya members; some were high-level officials, including the deputy governor, who was arrested on 20 January 2012.

of the Sadrist militia, the Mahdi Army¹²) occupied part of Baquba, the provincial capital, and several highways leading in and out of the province. They ransacked the council building, forcing members to hold an emergency session in Khanaqin, a Kurdish-controlled district in a far corner of the governorate.¹³ The process to form a region never took flight.

The situation continued to spiral downward. In mid-December, during Maliki's visit to Washington (where he met President Barack Obama), he undertook further actions against Iraqiya, calling on parliament to withdraw confidence from his deputy Saleh Mutlak after he declared, in two separate interviews, that the U.S. was leaving Iraq "with a dictator" and that Maliki was "worse than Saddam Hussein, because the latter was a builder, but Maliki has done absolutely nothing".¹⁴

Moreover, a judge issued an arrest warrant for Vice President Tareq al-Hashimi, a member of Iraqiya's senior leadership, on charges of terrorism, specifically that he had ordered assassinations. Police held Hashimi, who was travelling to Suleimaniya in the Kurdish region on 18 December, at Baghdad airport for three hours, allowing him to depart only after arresting three of his bodyguards. The next evening, state television aired the "confessions" of some of those detained, who claimed Hashimi had personally ordered a large number of assassinations; the bodyguards also were linked to an attack in the Green Zone a month earlier. Later that evening, Afaq TV (which is run by Maliki's Islamic Daawa Party) referred to Hashimi as a "wanted criminal" and reported that he had fled to Turkey.¹⁵ Hashimi stayed in the Kurdish region,¹⁶ however, waiting for his situation to be resolved, with Maliki's cir-

¹² Crisis Group interview, Baquba-based international official, Beirut, 1 July 2012.

¹³ The Diyala provincial council has not convened since that time.

¹⁴ See "Iraq PM moves to oust deputy as US forces leave", Agence France-Presse, 18 December 2011.

¹⁵ State of Law's insistence that the rule of law and justice must be upheld in the case against Hashimi rang hollow, given the government's selective application of justice. Various Iraqi and international organisations have documented the security forces' unlawful detention and torture of hundreds if not thousands of individuals without valid arrest warrants or even specific allegations. Human Rights Watch writes: "Iraq's government has been carrying out mass arrests and unlawfully detaining people in the notorious Camp Honor prison facility in Baghdad's Green Zone The government has held hundreds of detainees for months, refusing to disclose the number of those detained, their identities, any charges against them, and where they are being held". Human Rights Watch, "Iraq: Mass Arrests, Incommunicado Detentions", 15 May 2012.

¹⁶ Hashimi was given rooms in the Kurdistan regional government's official guesthouse on Dukan Lake in Suleimaniya province.

cles demanding that he be tried in Baghdad and Iraqiya warning that the vice president would respond to the charges only if the trial were transferred to a court in the Kurdish region or to Kirkuk – a demand Maliki rejected.¹⁷

Saleh Mutlak also sought refuge in the Kurdish region on 18 December.¹⁸ Since then, a series of deadly explosions in the capital and elsewhere have killed and wounded hundreds,¹⁹ further escalating tensions.

B. A LOOMING SHOWDOWN

Iraqiya's response – to boycott both parliament and government – only partially impeded the business of governing: in the absence of bylaws, the council of ministries does not require the presence of a specific number of ministers to take decisions and, as a result, it continued to issue decrees and instructions to ministries. Although parliament was forced to postpone its sessions several times for lack of a quorum, it held a number of regular meetings while the boycott was in effect. Moreover, members of Al-Hal, one of the parties that make up Iraqiya, soon defied their leadership and returned to parliament, stating that they considered Iraq's unity and allegiance to its institutions to be a priority in the current context.²⁰ Thus realising that a prolonged boycott was likely to have only a limited impact, Iraqiya ended its action on 29 January 2012 without having obtained significant concessions from Maliki.

¹⁷ In Kirkuk, which is adjacent to the Kurdish region, Hashimi would have been under Iraqi, not Kurdish, jurisdiction but under Kurdish protection. For the security situation in Kirkuk, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°103, *Iraq and the Kurds: Confronting Withdrawal Fears*, 28 March 2011. In March-April 2012, Hashimi left the Kurdish region to travel to Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, all of which received him as a statesman. In late April, a Baghdad court indicted Hashimi and six of his bodyguards for involvement in assassinations, including of six judges.

¹⁸ Crisis Group was on its way to an appointment with Mutlak in Baghdad when he suddenly changed his plans, saying he had to depart for the Kurdish region immediately. Crisis Group telephone interview, Baghdad, 18 December 2011.

¹⁹ A series of explosions shattered the morning peace on 21 December, killing approximately 60 civilians. The targets included a school and the offices of the Integrity Commission, where several investigative judges were killed as they arrived for work. A number of other major attacks occurred during Arbaeen (the commemoration of the martyrdom of Hussein, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson), in mid-January 2012, killing dozens of Shiite pilgrims. On 20 March 2012, explosions took place in fourteen cities, killing more than 50, including thirteen in Karbala, despite an intense security lockdown in preparation for the Arab League summit that commenced on 27 March. Responsibility for the attacks was subsequently claimed by al-Qaeda in Iraq.

²⁰ See "Final statement of Al-Hal's organisational conference", Al-Hal Bloc, 19 January 2012, at www.alhalnews.com/print.php?id=1310314624.

A tactic that is likely to have a much greater effect on Maliki and his approach toward Iraqiya is the call from provincial councils to form autonomous federal regions. Although this initiative started gaining steam in June 2011 when Parliament Speaker Usama al-Nujaifi (from Iraqiya) appeared to support it,²¹ it remained dormant for several months – until the arrests and the move against Hashimi and Mutlak. Under current circumstances, implementation of this far-reaching type of federalism – the conversion of individual governorates into stand-alone regions or, potentially, one or more larger regions – constitutes a frightening prospect even for the most ardent supporters of federalism, given both the current tense sectarian atmosphere and the lack of legal guidance on how a province should transition to a region in the event of a successful referendum.²² Many Iraqis fear it could precip-

itate the country's violent break-up along ethnic and sectarian fault lines.²³

Moreover, the impact on the federal budget would be catastrophic: if future regions were to be entitled to a cash transfer from Baghdad in proportion to their population (as in the Kurdish region's case), the government would be left with very little.²⁴ Intent to increase his power, not to devolve it to the governorates, Maliki has made a number of concessions, including an offer to halt the de-Baathification campaign, to governorates that would renounce their declared desire to become federal regions.

Even if Maliki finds a compromise solution with the governorates over decentralisation, it will not solve the larger problem of State of Law's gradual but determined expansion of control over the state, and therefore the ongoing dispute with Iraqiya. In early January 2012, President Jalal Talabani (of the Kurdistan Alliance) offered to organise a national conference to reach a comprehensive agreement between the main political blocs on their outstanding disputes, including the formation of federal regions, Maliki's control of state institutions and the security forces, the exploitation of oil and gas, and de-Baathification. It appears, however, that State of Law is content with the status quo and is quite prepared to head a government diminished by the departure of some of its key (Sunni) Iraqiya leaders.²⁵

As State of Law's principal rival (within or outside of government), Iraqiya leaders' challenge will be to continue to try to wrest powers from Maliki before the prime minister succeeds in fully consolidating power. In this struggle, Iraqiya could be easy prey, lacking sufficient countrywide support to reverse State of Law's centralising bent.

²¹ During a visit to the U.S., Nujaifi declared that people's extreme frustration with enduring sectarian politics had driven them to embrace the notion of creating regions. AK News, 30 June 2011. A strong reaction from political opponents and a popular outcry from his constituents soon forced him to backtrack. An Iraqiya parliamentarian said: "Nujaifi received two blows when he made his statement, the first in the form of the statement itself [as it contradicted his stated position until then] and subsequently the violent popular response Now he is trying to fix what he said. In a recent meeting with tribal leaders, he said very clearly that dividing Iraq was an absolute red line, and that 'we will stand firmly against those who want to do this'. I was somewhat surprised to hear him repeat something he abandoned for a whole year – that Ninewa's [provincial] borders are sacrosanct". Crisis Group interview, Zuhair al-Araji, a former Iraqiya parliamentarian turned independent, Baghdad, 25 July 2011. Among the chorus of opposition to Nujaifi's comments by State of Law members was a printed statement handed around the parliament press room on 28 June 2011, which asserted: "We cannot separate his statement from the statements of Joe Biden, who created this plan", and continued by declaring that over 110 lawmakers had signed a petition to have Nujaifi questioned (as opposed to the more polite "hosted") before parliament. Statement received by Crisis Group, 28 June 2011. Both the Kurdish Alliance and the Kurdish opposition party Gorran do not seem opposed to the idea of creating a Sunni region and refused to participate in what they deemed a "predominantly Shiite" campaign against Nujaifi. AK News, 29 June 2011.

²² If a province were to opt to become a federal region, the constitution provides guidance on what the end result will be, particularly concerning its new relationship with the federal government. The law is silent, however, about how the transition from province to region should take place. Provincial governments are vastly understaffed and lack the ability to carry out many of the vital functions of state (including, for example, overseeing state expenditure). It also remains unclear how potential regions would exercise some of the state responsibilities, such as the fight against corruption, which would require a functional anti-corruption body at regional level – a process still ongoing twenty years later in the Kurdish region. Corruption and

other forms of waste are thus almost certain to increase in the short to medium term in any new federal region.

²³ According to a former Baath Party official who resides in Tikrit: "The formation of federal regions is a dangerous can of worms. Many of our areas are mixed The borders between Sunnis and Shiites are not clear and will be a source of conflict if we pursue the formation of regions in the current climate". Crisis Group interview, Tikrit, 15 February 2012. An adviser to Salah al-Din's provincial council agreed: "[I]t can't work, especially since the recent wave of arrests. Many of us are completely against it. Iraq is one and cannot be divided. The idea of federal regions is being pushed by individuals who want for the country to be broken apart". Crisis Group interview, Tikrit, 31 October 2011.

²⁴ For example, the Kurdish region receives a cash transfer of 17 per cent of the national budget annually, calculated on the basis of a per capita estimate (in the absence of up-to-date census data). If enough provinces were to become regions, Baghdad could be under-resourced or even left without resources.

²⁵ Maliki has faced this situation before. During his first term as prime minister, his government was beset by a series of defections yet stayed in place, however rickety the resulting contraption may have been.

II. IRAQIYA'S ORIGINS

A. 1991-2005: THE ROAD TO BAGHDAD

Iraqiya's origins stretch back to the establishment in London in the early 1990s of the National Accord Movement (Harakat al-Wifaq al-Watani), more commonly known in English as Iraqi National Accord, hereinafter Wifaq. It was a secular, nationalist grouping of exiled former Baathists, dissident military officers and professionals. Iyad Allawi, a former Baath party official who had defected after falling out with Saddam Hussein and had survived an attempt on his life by Iraqi agents in his London home, anointed himself Wifaq's leader, a position he has maintained unchallenged. Today, the group, now a faction within Iraqiya, remains little more than a vehicle for Allawi to rally support from liberal, secular Iraqis around him.²⁶

In the 1990s, opposition to the Baath party concentrated around several poles: the Tehran-based Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI); the liberal Iraqi National Congress (INC) led by Ahmed Chalabi, which sought to act as an umbrella for all opposition groups but failed to attract significant support; and the two main Kurdish parties, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which operated in the Kurdish region, the only part of Iraq free of regime control since late 1991.²⁷ Within Iraq, Wifaq barely had a presence, forced to operate underground and at great risk; it did not distinguish itself in ideology or activism from most other opposition groups. Public perception that it maintained a close relationship with Western intelligence agencies while in exile appears not to have significantly harmed its reputation among Iraqis.²⁸ Unlike Chalabi's INC, however, Allawi's Wifaq did not play a major role in trying to convince international public opinion to support the U.S. war in 2002-2003, even if it participated in U.S.-sponsored opposition conferences.

The opposition entered Baghdad on U.S. coattails in April 2003. Its leaders' immediate challenge was to impress on the newly formed Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) that they were the right people to administer Iraq during the transition. Few opposition parties enjoyed a genuine domestic constituency (aside from the PUK and KDP which had more than a decade to build one in the Kurdish region).²⁹ As a result, their influence was based not on popular appeal but primarily on their alliance with – and proximity to – the occupying forces, with attending promise of political power and patronage.

Allawi was one of the 25 members of the Interim Governing Council,³⁰ a powerless body established by the CPA to give a local face to the U.S. occupation. Their positions nevertheless allowed the appointed leaders to improve their own personal brand and increase their public profile. Allawi used this opportunity to project the image of a strongman concerned with security and reestablishing a powerful central state, much like those of Iraq's Arab neighbours. When, a year later, the CPA prepared to transfer sovereignty to an interim government,³¹ it delegated authority to nominate individual ministers to the UN, except for the prime minister. Toward the end of the selection process, Washington intervened directly to impose Allawi for that post, despite the lack of consensus on his nomination among local elites.

Many Iraqis remember Allawi's tenure (28 June 2004-7 April 2005) as relatively free from violence, compared to the years that followed when the country descended into sectarian war. They credit him for adopting an uncompromising and balanced approach toward armed groups regardless of their sectarian affiliation, including by supporting the U.S.-led sieges of both (Sunni) Falluja and (Shiite) Najaf in 2004. Nevertheless, Sunni-Shiite relations deteriorated sharply during his tenure, mostly because of escalating attacks against Shiite pilgrims and bombings of public spaces in predominantly Shiite areas by (the Sunni) al-Qaeda in Iraq that were beyond the capacity of Iraq's nascent security forces, aided by the U.S. military, to prevent. Much like the CPA and subsequent administrations,

²⁶ Wifaq's official website (www.wifaq.com) states on its Arabic-language homepage that it is "Iyad Allawi's official website".

²⁷ The first Shiite Islamist opposition party, Daawa (Maliki's party), had badly splintered and become virtually extinct at the time, while the Sadrist movement did not emerge into the open until after the fall of the regime.

²⁸ This is in contrast to Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, which faced significant difficulty in shaking off the taint of disloyalty due to their close relationships with, respectively, Washington and Tehran. For an analysis of SCIRI's experience before and after 2003, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°70, *Shiite Politics in Iraq: The Role of the Supreme Council*, 15 November 2007.

²⁹ The Kurdish parties gained control of the Kurdish region in late October 1991, organised elections and formed a government the next year. Even before that, they enjoyed popular support as a national liberation movement.

³⁰ The Interim Governing Council was a 25-member body established by the CPA in July 2003 with the help of the UN. It lacked effective decision-making powers, which the CPA retained under its administrator, Paul Bremer.

³¹ The transition from occupation to formal Iraqi sovereignty and civilian control was set out in an agreement signed by the CPA and the Interim Governing Council on 15 November 2003. For more details on the agreement, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°27, *Iraq's Transition: On a Knife Edge*, 27 April 2004, pp. 2-4.

Allawi's tenure also was characterised by his failure to stem corruption.³²

Mainly in reaction to the spiralling violence, Iraqis outside the Kurdish region³³ began to desert the secular political centre in favour of parties and alliances that espoused unabashedly sectarian outlooks and openly claimed to defend their own communities against attack from vaguely defined outside enemies. In addition, Allawi's uncompromising opposition to the presence of Muqtada Sadr's militia, the Mahdi Army, in Najaf and his support for the U.S. siege to dislodge the group unintentionally and unexpectedly unified Shiite Islamist parties around a single cause – ensuring they would control the future government (following the January 2005 elections for a constituent assembly and transitional government) and appoint its prime minister. The result was the creation of the United Iraqi Alliance, formed in late 2004, which went on to win the elections.

B. 2005-2009: IRAQIYA'S CREATION, FALL AND REBIRTH

In preparation for the January 2005 elections, the first since the 2003 invasion, a number of secular and nationalist parties formed the Qa'ima al-Iraqiya (the Iraqi List, hereinafter Iraqiya), which expected to draw support from secular middle classes. Having contested every election since then, with wildly fluctuating results, the alliance has reconfigured itself several times. Its fortunes have ebbed and flowed in accordance with several factors, including the level of sectarian tensions, the state's ability to deliver essential services and Iraqiya's composition.

As sectarian violence peaked in 2005-2006, many dismissed Iraqiya as a marginal player that had little to contribute to the new ethno-sectarian order. When violence began to decline in 2007, voters started focusing their attention on spiralling corruption and the state's failure to improve living standards. At the same time, Iraqiya changed its composition to capitalise on popular disaffection with the governing Islamist parties and soon registered its best ever electoral result – a narrow plurality of votes in March 2010.

³² In one particularly egregious case, Hazem Shaalan, Allawi's defence minister, was accused of having embezzled hundreds of millions of dollars that were intended to finance a defence procurement contract. An Iraqi court convicted Shaalan in absentia only after Allawi had stepped down as prime minister in 2005.

³³ While the Kurdish region has minorities, the great majority of its population are Sunni Kurds.

1. Retreat

By the beginning of 2005, deteriorating security and growing sectarian tensions had left secular nationalists with virtually no political space; what influence they had continued to shrink in tandem with the rise in sectarian fighting. Its leaders' habits also did not help Iraqiya: Allawi spent little time in the country, leaving his parliamentary bloc rudderless and allowing it to disintegrate at a time when Iraq was desperately lacking a unifying vision.

By the time of the January 2005 elections, Iraqis already had suffered close to two years of violence by armed groups that regularly targeted markets and other crowded public spaces, as well as by a U.S. military that used severe means against a population in response to attacks originating from its midst. A large proportion of the middle class – the very people most likely to support a secular political platform – fled the country to escape general insecurity and especially the threat of kidnapping. Those who remained found succour in the arms of sectarian Islamist parties (both Sunni and Shiite) that presented themselves as defenders of their communities. In addition, the majority of Sunni political forces, both Islamist and secular, boycotted the political process and elections, claiming Shiites had stacked the cards in their own favour.³⁴

As a result, when secular and nationalist parties, with Wifaq at their core, formed the Iraqiya List to contest the elections,³⁵ most of the new alliance's potential constituency was either abroad, had been enticed to vote for sectarian parties or boycotted the polls. Moreover, although Allawi's one-year term as prime minister provided Iraqiya with the advantage of incumbency, many associated it with his failure to restore public services, improve security and curb corruption. Finally, Iraqiya's membership and ideological inclinations also proved a source of vulnerability, particularly because the outrages of Baath party rule remained fresh in the collective consciousness.³⁶

³⁴ Crisis Group Middle East Report N°42, *Iraq: Don't Rush the Constitution*, 8 June 2005, pp. 2-5.

³⁵ The Iraqiya List included Wifaq as well as far smaller parties that do not appear to have left any mark on the political transition and have since either disintegrated or been absorbed into larger groups.

³⁶ In the run-up to the elections, a campaign poster affixed prominently throughout Baghdad and allegedly financed by the (Shiite Islamist) Sadrist movement portrayed a single face split in half, the right side of which belonged to Allawi, the other to Saddam Hussein. Underneath was written: "Baathist". Crisis Group observations, Baghdad, early 2005.

Iraqiya did poorly as a result: it obtained 13.8 per cent of the vote, or 40 parliament seats out of 275. In contrast, the Shiite Islamist United Iraqi Alliance won 140 seats, an outright majority.³⁷

Events in 2005 further eroded Iraqiya's popular base. Violence continued to climb and intercommunal relations deteriorated even further, with Baghdad neighbourhoods assuming a civil-war-like character. Moreover, although Iraqiya received the deputy chairmanship of the constitutional drafting committee, secular, liberal and nationalist Iraqis criticised it for failing to engage in the drafting process and adopt a recognisable or effective position toward proposed provisions on federalism and the relationship between religion and state. Iraqiya essentially folded its arms and left drafting of the constitution to ethno-sectarian parties that produced a text many considered a threat to the state's cohesion.³⁸

As a consequence of these factors, Iraqiya appeared even less relevant in the lead-up to the December 2005 parliamentary elections following the October adoption of the new constitution, despite gaining new partners.³⁹ Its electoral score further diminished: only 8 per cent of the popular vote, translating into 25 out of 275 seats.⁴⁰ The UIA-dominated coalition government formed in May 2006 was constructed according to a strict ethno-sectarian formula that left little room for entities such as Iraqiya, whose

meagre result gave it no more than six ministries out of 27, and mostly lesser ones.⁴¹

From 2006 to 2009, rather than closing ranks and presenting a credible alternative to sectarian politics, Iraqiya allowed itself to be eclipsed by the ethno-sectarian power arrangements in place. Its leaders were unfocused and aloof, leaving the parliamentary bloc without guidance on legislative initiatives.⁴² Allawi was the worst offender, failing to show up even once during the legislature's four-year term.⁴³ By 2007, internal disaffection was so great that several of its most prominent members had broken away, either to form their own movements or join some of parliament's larger blocs.⁴⁴

³⁷ The official results for the January 2005 elections are available at www.ihec-iq.com/ar/alwataneya.html.

³⁸ See Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°19, *Unmaking Iraq: A Constitutional Process Gone Awry*, 26 September 2005. An internal UN assessment of the constitution that was prepared at the time of the referendum concluded that "the provisions for the conversion of governorates into a region outside Kurdistan create a model for the territorial division of the State which in our view leaves the central government underpowered and possibly under resourced". "Summary and Critical Review of the Draft Constitution Presented to the TNA on 28 August 2005", UN Office of Constitutional Support, 15 September 2005, unpublished (in Crisis Group's possession). A leaked copy of this paper was quoted in Scott Johnson, Babak Dehghanpisheh and Michael Hastings, "Iraq: Loose federation or violent disintegration?", *Newsweek*, 10 October 2005. Professor Yash Ghai, one of the world's leading constitutional scholars who acted as process adviser to the chairman of the Iraqi Constitutional Committee, wrote at the time that "[we] have serious reservations whether the [draft constitution] as it stands can be fully and effectively implemented, without grave danger to state and society". Yash Ghai and Jill Cottrell, "A review of the Draft Constitution of Iraq", 3 October 2005.

³⁹ In December 2005, Iraqiya included, inter alia, Wifaq, the Iraqi Communist Party, the People's Union, the Iraqioun Party (led by former interim president Ghazi al-Yawer), several tribal alliances, as well as some smaller entities.

⁴⁰ The official results for the December 2005 elections are available at www.ihec-iq.com/ar/nuwab2005.html.

⁴¹ Two of Iraqiya's ministries were without portfolio and two others (human rights and science and technology) received insufficient funds to operate effectively. Its only two important ministries were telecommunications and justice. The two ministers withdrew in 2007, however, in protest over Maliki's appointments, which they claimed were sectarian in nature. They were replaced by Tawafuq members.

⁴² Iraqiya MPs did not even vote as a bloc when the controversial region formation law was put to a vote in October 2006. The bill and the vote were highly charged because of the draft's lax conditions on the formation of regions. MPs opposed to the bill decided not to attend the session, with the expectation that a quorum requirement would not be met. Yet the bill passed because some Iraqiya legislators attended and voted in favour. To this day, despite a parliamentary investigation, there is still significant doubt as to whether a quorum was actually achieved on the day of the vote. Crisis Group interview, legal adviser to parliament, Baghdad, 15 September 2011.

⁴³ In 2009, parliament published detailed attendance records for MPs, which revealed that Allawi never attended. See Anthony Shadid, "Iraq's last patriot", *The New York Times Magazine*, 4 February 2011. A senior Iraqiya politician said: "Iraqiya is without a leader in the Council of Representatives. Allawi should have been the main opposition leader. He could have become very popular. By contrast, look at [former Prime Minister] Ibrahim Jaafari. He is always present in the council when he is not travelling". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, May 2012. Iraqiya legislators openly criticised Allawi in their discussions with other blocs. Crisis Group interview, Sami al-Atroshi, former parliament member who served on the finance committee, Erbil, 26 October 2011.

⁴⁴ Defectors included Wael Abdellatif, who formed his own political movement and later joined the (Shiite Islamist) National Alliance but failed in his bid to return to parliament in March 2010; Iyad Jamal al-Din, a Shiite cleric who established his own liberal and secular movement that adopted a staunch anti-Iranian line but failed to attract any popular support, leaving its leader without a single parliamentary seat in March 2010; Safiya al-Suhail, a leading feminist politician who joined State of Law in March 2010, only to break away and start operating as an independent in early 2011; and Mahdi al-Hafedh, who also joined State of Law but failed to win a seat in the March 2010 elections.

2. A new opening

As violence ebbed in 2008 following the U.S. surge and the de facto division of Baghdad neighbourhoods and other towns into confessionally “pure” areas during the sectarian conflict,⁴⁵ Iraqis blamed sectarian parties for the havoc, as well as for an alarming rise in corruption in a situation of poor U.S. and governmental control, and demanded a sea-change in politics and governance. This resulted in a new rhetoric, evident in civil society, the media and political elites in which previously prevalent notions of ethno-sectarian “balance” in government (*muhasasa*) were replaced with expressions of national unity and non-sectarianism. Picking up on the changed sentiment, political leaders reconfigured party alliances and rhetoric in advance of the January 2009 provincial elections. As a secular alliance, Iraqiya would be a prime beneficiary of this change, soon re-emerging as a major national player.

Iraqis blamed the ruling Islamist parties and militias for the civil war that ravaged the country in 2005-2008. As a result, these parties relinquished resort to sectarian appeals as a political platform or mobilising tool.⁴⁶ As violence declined from 2008 onward, Iraqis’ principal complaint toward the local and national governments became corruption and failing public services. They directed their ire at politicians rushing to occupy prestigious government positions and milking these for personal gain.⁴⁷ In the words of a secular Diyala provincial council member:

A major change took place. People took note of the failure of the Islamist parties, whose administration of the provinces was a disaster. They stood accused of rampant corruption and neglecting to deliver meaningful services. In 2010, we obtained around two thirds of the votes in Diyala as a result.⁴⁸

In provinces with Sunni Arab majorities, this accusation mainly targeted Tawafuq, an alliance led by the Iraqi Islamist Party, the Iraqi offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. It was blamed both for prioritising parochial interests and for excessive compromises with Maliki in order to remain

in government.⁴⁹ In Shiite-majority provinces, voters had grown weary of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), a Shiite Islamist party tied to the Badr Organisation that was an active participant in the civil war. Until the 2009 provincial elections, ISCI controlled most provincial councils in the south. Its performance in governance and its members’ heavy-handed tactics generated much popular anger, however, and the party suffered a major loss in the elections.⁵⁰

In tune with popular sentiment, leading politicians began forming new alliances that shunned sectarian discourse. Maliki established the State of Law Coalition, led by his own Islamic Daawa Party, positioning it in opposition to the Iraqi National Alliance, a loose coalition of Shiite Islamist parties and (Shiite) secular politicians, offering a more explicitly liberal and less sectarian political vision. One of the two main Kurdish parties, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), split, with defectors establishing the Gorran (“Change”) movement, accusing the PUK of corrupt and undemocratic practices. Iraqiya took advantage of the new mood and of its own poor performance in the December 2005 elections and subsequent lack of engagement in parliament: it could convincingly dissociate itself from the government’s repeated failures to improve governance and control corruption.⁵¹ This played an important

⁴⁵ While there has been no systematic study of the impact of the 2005-2007 sectarian war, Crisis Group interviews during that period showed that the expulsion of members of the minority group in a given area led these areas to be dominated by the majority group, with members of the other community remaining only at the tolerance of the majority group’s militia and living in a condition of subjugation and fear.

⁴⁶ See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°82, *Iraq’s Provincial Elections: The Stakes*, 27 January 2009, pp. 8-11.

⁴⁷ See Crisis Group Report, *Failing Oversight*, op. cit.

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, Souhad Ismaeel Abdel-Rahim Al-Heali, provincial council member (Iraqiya), Baquba, 13 February 2011.

⁴⁹ According to a member of the Kurdistan Islamic Union, also affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood, “in 2003, the Iraqi Islamist Party [IIP] was the only party that had any popularity within the Sunni community. From 2004 to 2010, however, Tawafuq members focused only on their personal interests. They never presented any ideas or initiatives that would benefit the country. This is why they did so poorly in the 2010 elections”. Regarding the IIP’s relationship with the Maliki government, Atroshi said: “Their members did not have the country’s interests at heart. Partly as a result, they did not manage to obtain any concession from the government even while they were part of it. Their colleagues had warned them at the time that if they made too many concessions, Maliki would give them nothing in return”. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 26 October 2011. Independent parliamentarian Sabah al-Saadi, a Shiite cleric, said: “I warned the Islamic Party not to support Maliki. I told them they would not get anything in return, and that he would just use them. They didn’t listen and now they find themselves in the situation they are in”. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 26 October 2011.

⁵⁰ In the words of a tribal leader in Najaf: “ISCI knows how to turn to us to obtain votes during elections but it doesn’t know how to serve the people’s interests. They drive around Najaf in armoured vehicles and wave their guns at people in a way that reminds us of the previous regime. We made our position clear to them: we would not support them in the [2009] provincial elections”. Crisis Group interview, Najaf, 6 June 2011.

⁵¹ An adviser to the Salah al-Din provincial council argued that local voters turned to Iraqiya in the hope it might curb the activities of Baghdad’s security forces, which engaged in frequent night-time raids throughout the province: “Iraqiya tried to pre-

role in debates that filled the airwaves in the two years before the 2010 parliamentary elections.

Although Iraqiya benefited from sectarianism's decline and the government's failures, the electoral shift toward it also stemmed from the fact that it had incorporated new groups and thus more accurately reflected the population at large. This was particularly the case in the five provinces north and west of Baghdad (outside the Kurdish region). For example, it brought in many politicians who previously had been part of sectarian alliances but had since adopted a new outlook. Iraqiya's secular ideology ensured that it also maintained popularity among those in majority-Shiite provinces who rejected Islamist parties.

In its new incarnation, Iraqiya obtained its best result to date in the March 2010 elections, emerging the winner with 25 per cent of the popular vote, or 91 parliamentary seats.⁵² This confirmed two separate but compatible discourses on Iraqiya: that it replaced Tawafuq as the Sunni community's principal representative (given that 79 of its seats derived from Sunni-majority provinces, while Tawafuq was decimated, losing around 90 per cent of its parliamentary representation), and that it was the country's only significant cross-confessional alliance (12 of its seats came from Shiite-majority provinces, whereas no Sunni winners appeared on the main Shiite lists).⁵³

sent itself as a solution to sectarianism and militia rule. We gave them our full trust, as is evident from the election results. Some families voted for Iraqiya rather than their own relatives because they thought it would bring us safety and security". Crisis Group interview, Tikrit, 14 February 2011.

⁵² The January 2009 provincial elections already had previewed the evolution of the political landscape. Although Iraqiya did not exist in the same form in those elections (with different groups competing in each province), the parties, movements and alliances that would eventually join it to contest in the March 2010 elections obtained a total of 20–22.7 per cent of the popular vote. The breakdown was as follows: Iraqiya, 5.7 per cent; Hiwar, 4.6 per cent; Iraqiyoun, 6.1 per cent; and Tawafuq, 6.3 per cent. These figures are derived from data provided by the Independent High Electoral Commission, www.ihec.iq. Although Tawafuq had not yet suffered its mass defections at that point, those who eventually left the group after the January 2009 elections accounted for at least two thirds of Tawafuq's share of the popular vote. Moreover, many independent candidates stood for election in 2009, often on liberal or nationalist platforms; some of these joined Iraqiya in the 2010 elections, accounting for the increase in Iraqiya's electoral share from January 2009 to March 2010.

⁵³ A small number of other electoral alliances sought cross-sectarian appeal. The only one apart from Iraqiya to win any seats in the 2010 elections was the Iraqi Unity Alliance, which counted former interior minister Jawad al-Bolani and Ahmed Abu Risha among its leaders. This alliance fared poorly, winning only four

III. AN ALLIANCE IN FLUX

The new, reconfigured Iraqiya represented a marriage of convenience between Sunni politicians who no longer could win on the basis of their old platforms and Iraqiya's national leaders who could not make significant inroads in the Sunni and Shiite communities without adding local faces to their list. The result was an ideologically diverse, cross-sectarian, officially secular and electorally successful alliance. Regrettably for Iraqiya, however, it became a victim of its own success. Its vulnerability stemmed from several factors. The extent of its popularity in Sunni areas against its old rival, the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), contained within it the seeds of its own demise as a secular, liberal and cross-sectarian party. By incorporating former IIP members, Iraqiya became vulnerable to charges of sectarian tendencies and disillusioned some of its more liberal members.⁵⁴ In addition, its enemies exploited its ideological diversity to drive a wedge among its members on important issues such as federalism and sectarianism.

Although it has a genuine constituency that broadly agrees with its ideology (however poorly defined),⁵⁵ its predominantly Sunni membership has proved its main political vulnerability. One consequence has been that State of Law has actively tried to peel off Iraqiya's Shiite members by portraying it as a sectarian Sunni alliance. This strategy has had some success. It led to the desertion of some Iraqiya lawmakers, thus reducing its parliamentary clout; it also highlighted the alliance's internal divisions on federalism and disputed territories. Most notably, in reaction to a series of arrests of Iraqiya provincial officials and hundreds of individuals as well as a new wave of de-Baathification in governorates that had most strongly supported Iraqiya, local leaders launched moves to establish federal regions. This led some of Iraqiya's most nationalist members to reassert their stand in favour of territorial unity, which they deemed at threat, and leave the alliance. (See Section III.C.2.)

Iraqiya's new, diverse membership also failed to produce democratic internal procedures or decision-making. On vital issues, the group still is run opaquely and at the whim of a handful of individuals. The result has been questionable decisions, such as the boycott of government and

seats. State of Law also portrayed itself as cross-sectarian during the campaign but none of its Sunni candidates was elected.

⁵⁴ Safiya al-Suhail was one such Iraqiya lawmaker who became disillusioned with the group's evolution. Suhail eventually joined State of Law during the 2010 electoral campaign, gaining a seat. However, she withdrew from the alliance not long afterward, citing State of Law's illiberal policies. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 4 October 2011.

⁵⁵ Numerous Crisis Group interviews, Iraqis who voted for Iraqiya, 2011.

parliament in December 2011, and a fragile loyalty of the group's base to its leadership.

A. MEMBERSHIP AND CONSTITUENCY

1. A more monochrome alliance

Iraqiya comprises almost all Sunni political forces as well as some secular liberal and nationalist ones, especially from the majority-Shiite south. The fact that they joined a pre-existing political alliance (as opposed to establishing a new alliance of their own) and agreed to operate under the leadership of a well-known secular, nationalist and liberal figure meant that all of them (Sunni Islamists included) formally had to adopt that alliance's secular program and rhetoric.⁵⁶

In preparation for the March 2010 parliamentary elections, first- and second-tier Sunni political groups took a strategic decision to unite under Allawi's and the Iraqiya umbrella. They were encouraged to do so by some of Iraq's Arab neighbours as well as Turkey, which hoped that a secular, cross-sectarian and explicitly anti-Iranian list could defeat the Shiite Islamist parties that had governed the country since 2005.⁵⁷ The enlarged Iraqiya included:⁵⁸

- Wifaq, led by Iyad Allawi;
- Hiwar, a nominally secular alliance, which includes some Shiite and Christian members but is dominated by Sunni Arabs and led by Saleh al-Mutlak;
- Tajdeed, founded by Tareq al-Hashimi after he broke away from the Iraqi Islamic Party in 2009;
- Mustaqbal, founded by Rafeea al-Essawi, who also broke away from the IIP in 2009;
- Iraqiyoun (known in the January 2009 provincial elections in Ninewa as Al-Hadbaa), led by the brothers

Usama and Atheel al-Nujaifi and composed of tribal leaders and other prominent figures from Ninewa province; and

- Al-Hal, led by Muhammad Karbouli.

Of these, the only two that previously had rejected sectarianism and promoted a form of secularism were Wifaq and Hiwar. The other four either have past ties to the Sunni Islamist IIP or are rooted in local interests that primarily concern Sunnis. The latter is the case, for example, of Al-Hadbaa, which was created to give a voice to Ninewa's Arabs and Turkomans (both predominantly Sunni) against the Kurdish parties' military, administrative and cultural activities in the province.⁵⁹

This has raised questions about Iraqiya's cohesiveness. Many of its political rivals have predicted that, because it is a broad alliance saddled with an allegedly weak leadership, it would be only a matter of time before it splintered. Even an Iraqiya insider, Hassan al-Alawi (one of the alliance's founders, who is no relative of Iyad Allawi), has made this point: "Unlike other alliances, Iraqiya does not have a unified leadership capable of enforcing its decisions. If the head of Iraqiya decides to withdraw from the government, the leaders of its constituent parts do not necessarily follow. This has weakened Allawi".⁶⁰ Iyad Alawi disagreed:

I have been hearing this story about Iraqiya breaking apart every day for the past two years, including that there are big problems between Usama al-Nujaifi and me. We don't have any such problem. The National Alliance comprises Fadhila, Daawa, Daawa al-Iraq, the Sadrists, ISCI and Badr, as well as independents, and each has at least two or three sub-groups. No wonder they keep attacking the cohesiveness of Iraqiya and keep saying it's falling apart.⁶¹

Saleh al-Mutlak, another senior Iraqiya leader, shared that sentiment:

What people don't ask as often is, "do the other alliances work as a unit?" I have been saying from the beginning that Iraqiya would not fall apart and that its leadership would stay united. There may be some problems between us, but this is normal. If you hear there

⁵⁶ According to Ahmed Jubouri, a parliamentarian of the Iraqiyoun bloc in Iraqiya: "Many of those who joined Iraqiya do not actually accept its program. For them, it is just a matter of personal interest: Iraqiya offers them the best way to get elected to parliament". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 3 August 2011.

⁵⁷ Crisis Group interview, Sobhan al-Mulla al-Jiyaad, a leading Iraqiya member in Salah al-Din province, Tikrit, 15 February 2011. A former parliamentarian with the Kurdistan Islamic Union agreed: "Turkey, backed by the UAE and Qatar, took the lead in supporting Iraqiya, so that Iran would not feel it was an Arab initiative". Crisis Group interview, Erbil, 26 October 2011. Turkish diplomats told Crisis Group that Ankara had asked Qatar to provide financial support to Iraqiya and that it had done so. Crisis Group interview, Ankara, November 2010.

⁵⁸ Al-Wasat joined Iraqiya in August 2011 to become the seventh group with parliamentary representation. (See further down in this section.)

⁵⁹ See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°90, *Iraq's New Battlefield: The Struggle over Ninewa*, 28 September 2009.

⁶⁰ Crisis Group interview, Hassan al-Alawi, Baghdad, 14 March 2011. An example of this was Al-Hal's refusal to adhere to Iraqiya's decision to boycott government in late December 2011.

⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, Iyad Allawi, Baghdad, 28 September 2011.

are individuals within Iraqiya who are unhappy, this happens everywhere.⁶²

Vice President Tareq al-Hashimi weighed in as well, using the occasion to refer to his own case:

From before the election until now, Maliki has been attacking Iraqiya in many ways in an attempt to split the alliance and its leaders, using de-Baathification as well as the charges against me. It has been very difficult for us in Iraqiya throughout but we are still in a suitable relationship with each other. The leaders are still more or less united. Even as they pin very serious criminal charges on me, I still receive strong support from the other leaders.⁶³

In fact, whatever cracks have appeared in its ranks have not been due solely, or mainly, to the wide array of potentially competing perspectives. Rather, political rivals have exploited the twin facts that key leaders such as Allawi have roots in the previous regime and that the predominance of Sunnis, including Islamists, places it more on one side of the sectarian divide than across it.⁶⁴ According to Yassin Majid, a parliamentarian and former adviser to Maliki:

Allawi is a Baathist. He is not a liberal, as he claims. The same goes for Saleh al-Mutlak. The rest, Tareq al-Hashimi and Iyad al-Samarraie and Rafeea al-Issawi, are from the Islamic Party, which is part of the Muslim Brotherhood. Usama Nujaifi is very close to the Islamic Party as well. They are all Sunnis close to the Islamic Party, except for Allawi and Mutlak, who are Baathists. If you look at it from outside Iraq, you would conclude it is a temporary marriage between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Baath Party.⁶⁵

The strategy of likening Iraqiya to a Sunni party was summed up by a State of Law parliamentarian: "This was a marriage for the sake of interests. They had a project,

which was putting a Shiite head on a Sunni body, and it failed".⁶⁶ During and after the 2010 elections, Maliki's goal appears to have been to depict Allawi as a Shiite (and Baathist) figurehead of a Sunni movement with sectarian roots and thus block his ascent to the prime ministership.⁶⁷ As part of that strategy, Maliki has tried on a number of occasions to create credible Sunni rivals to Iraqiya, though these efforts have yet to bear fruit.⁶⁸

Maliki scored an early success when a group of eight Iraqiya parliamentarians, including several Shiites, known collectively as "White Iraqiya", defected in March 2011.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview, Abbas al-Bayati, Baghdad, 6 October 2011.

⁶⁷ Iraqiya members have complained they were approached by Maliki aides who tried to lure them away from Iraqiya. One said: "He succeeded with White Iraqiya [see footnote 70], many of whom are Shiites. This not only takes away seats but also strengthens the impression that Iraqiya is a Sunni alliance. Many of us have received inquiries from Maliki's people, asking if we need anything, or something like that. These were clearly tests to see how we would react, and if we could be bought. The ones who tell us about this didn't switch, but it seems obvious to us that the ones who didn't talk about it and then switched received something in return. They went for the Shiite members first, because they would be easiest, but they talked to Sunnis, too". Crisis Group interview, Dhafer al-Ani, Baghdad, 6 October 2011.

⁶⁸ The most recent manifestation of that strategy was the return to Iraq on 23 March 2012 of Mishaa al-Jubouri, a former parliament member who has been accused of embezzlement of state funds and support of terrorist groups. "The Iraqi government confirms that Mishaa al-Jubouri has been accused of terrorism, and that the courts have not decided his case yet", *Al-Sumeria News*, 23 March 2012. Jubouri was exiled in Damascus for several years; there, he financed the *Zawra* television channel, which regularly broadcast videos of attacks against U.S. troops. He famously and provocatively read an Islamic prayer on a prominent *Al Jazeera* program immediately after Saddam Hussein's execution. His return to Baghdad was followed by the immediate dismissal of all court cases against him, which prompted him to state how surprised he was by the positive treatment he received from the authorities. Mashraq Abbas, "Mashaan al-Jubouri to *Al-Hayat*: I have returned to Baghdad and I call on Izzat al-Douri and Hareth al-Dhari to return as well", *Al-Hayat*, 24 March 2012.

⁶⁹ White Iraqiya officially left Iraqiya in protest against the alliance's opposition to Maliki and the way in which it had come to be dominated by Sunnis. According to an Iraqiya legislator, "the White Iraqiya parliamentarians felt they were not getting what they deserved in terms of ministries and positions in parliamentary committees. Anyway, Iraqiya is still as firm as it has always been, and the White Iraqiya people will return". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 27 July 2011. Although some White Iraqiya members confirmed that negotiations had taken place in Amman in September 2011 to explore their re-joining Iraqiya, those discussions appear to have ended. "White Iraqiya: The negotiations for us to rejoin Allawi's list have failed to reach an agreement", *Baghdadiya News*, 20 September 2011. Since their

⁶² Crisis Group interview, Saleh al-Mutlak, Baghdad, 31 July 2011.

⁶³ Crisis Group telephone interview, Tareq al-Hashimi from the Kurdish region, 22 March 2012.

⁶⁴ According to Hassan al-Alawi, one of Iraqiya's founders: "I was one of the masterminds of a pure parliamentary liberal secular group and of the idea to reconsider electoral divisions [outside the Kurdish region] from being based on whether someone was Shiite or Sunni to a distinction between secular and religious. This idea was welcomed by Arab countries such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Syria. While establishing Iraqiya, we began negotiating with those who had split from the Islamic Party, Tareq al-Hashimi in particular, and this led eventually to the Islamists' dominating Iraqiya instead of secularists". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 14 March 2011.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 3 August 2011.

Subsequently, a Shiite-led but mostly Sunni group called al-Wasat, holding ten seats, joined Iraqiya in August 2011.⁷⁰ While Iraqiya's number of parliamentary seats remained largely the same, the shifting composition buttressed critics' view of the alliance as essentially Sunni.⁷¹ It began to face serious trouble two months later, when some of its local leaders escalated calls for region formation (see Section IV.C.2). In response, other members who opposed these initiatives, mostly from the South, began to defect.⁷²

defection, they have defended Maliki's decisions at virtually every turn.

⁷⁰ Al-Wasat is an alliance established after the March 2010 parliamentary election results were announced. It comprises the IIP (now often referred to as the more secular-sounding "Tawafuq", the name of the once-powerful coalition it used to lead), led by Iyad Samarai, a former parliamentary speaker, and the Iraqi Unity Alliance led by Jawad Bolani, a former interior minister. A month before the entirety of Al-Wasat joined Iraqiya in August 2011, Bolani announced his own membership in the alliance. According to Maysoun Al-Damlouji, Iraqiya's spokeswoman: "Bolani is really one of us; he should have joined us during elections but didn't. As for the Islamic Party, they're doing much better than I expected. So far, they have adopted all of Iraqiya's principles. They are speaking very clearly against sectarianism, in favour of civil society, things like that. The day they joined, I gave a speech, telling them off: 'We will not tolerate any kind of sectarianism! This is not a Sunni bloc, this is a national bloc'. They took it well". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 24 September 2011. Concerning sectarianism within Iraqiya, Bolani said: "Although some voices within Iraqiya have spoken loudly in a way that seemed to be on the behalf of a particular sect, this is clearly not Iraqiya's official voice, nor part of its agenda. The other two main coalitions really cannot say this for themselves". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 31 July 2011.

⁷¹ According to Yassin Majid, a State of Law parliamentarian and former media adviser to Maliki, "realistically and practically, if we look at Iraqiya, away from the slogans and signs, it represents the Sunni sect. The biggest proof is al-Wasat's merging with Iraqiya yesterday. Al-Wasat has only Sunni members except one, Jawad al-Bolani, its leader. White Iraqiya left Iraqiya because they felt they were neglected and denied a role in decision-making. So now no Shiites are left in Iraqiya except Iyad Allawi, Husein al-Shaalan and a third person out of 91 parliament members. [Iraqiya claims that it still has more than three Shiite members]". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 3 August 2011. A State of Law Coalition legislator said: "Mr. Allawi belongs to a well-known Shiite family in Baghdad. Iraqiya wanted to become an alliance that represents Sunnis, Shiites, liberals, Islamists and Arab nationalists. This could only work if you break into other communities, which is extremely difficult in Iraq". Crisis Group interview, Abbas al-Bayati, Baghdad, 6 October 2011.

⁷² On 1 January 2012, several local Wifaq members based in the south, as well as Babel parliamentarian Iskander Witwit, left the movement in protest against Iraqiya's position on the formation of federal regions. Wifaq members in Basra, Thi Qar, Najaf and Salah al-Din provinces made similar announcements

2. An evolving constituency

There is some truth to allegations that Iraqiya represents Sunnis and evinces pro-Baath sympathies, although this needs to be nuanced. Although it is the only alliance that enjoys significant support across the fifteen provinces outside the Kurdish region, it remains unquestionably more popular in Sunni-majority provinces than in the largely Shiite south. The Maliki government has capitalised on that situation to increase tensions within Iraqiya's constituency.

Since its founding in 2005, it has sought to represent liberal, nationalist and secular members from among all segments of the population.⁷³ Although Allawi's shortcomings – his lack of government experience and perceived close relationship with foreign intelligence services – were well-known, voters supported Iraqiya because they thought he was genuinely non-sectarian.⁷⁴ An electoral cycle later, those same constituencies were joined by the general Sunni population, 80 per cent of whose registered voters chose Iraqiya in March 2010.⁷⁵ This by itself does not make Iraqiya a Sunni representative; as seen, twelve of its 91 seats were from Shiite-majority areas,⁷⁶ despite the difficulty of

in December and January. Wifaq dismissed these actions as those of disgruntled members who it claimed had lost their positions in a recent round of internal elections. While this might be true for local members, it does not apply to Witwit, a senior Iraqiya member who was a credible candidate for defence minister. While the defections could weaken the alliance temporarily, defectors have little chance of returning to parliament after the next legislative elections unless they join a major electoral alliance. Very few candidates who ran on Iraqiya's or another electoral list in March 2010 won sufficient support on their own to win a seat outright. An Iraqiya legislator expressed the following sentiments concerning her colleagues who defected with White Iraqiya: "None of them obtained enough votes. We all won with the votes given to Iraqiya. It is therefore not a big deal that they left". Crisis Group interview, Nada Mohamed Ibrahim, Baghdad, 14 March 2011. While defections reduce Iraqiya's parliamentary strength, they have yet to reach a level at which its standing vis-à-vis the other parliamentary blocs would be affected significantly.

⁷³ Because of the electoral system used in 2005, it is impossible to tell from which provinces Iraqiya obtained its support. The January 2009 provincial election results show that Iraqiya (before it merged with predominantly Sunni-led movements in preparation for the March 2010 parliamentary elections) received support from both Sunnis and Shiites: excluding Baghdad, it won nine seats in predominantly Shiites provinces (3.3 per cent of the popular vote) and another ten in Sunni-majority provinces (7.95 per cent).

⁷⁴ Crisis Group interview, Abdul-Hussein Shaaban, Iraqi intellectual and author, Beirut, 8 January 2012.

⁷⁵ This calculation excludes Kurdish-majority areas in Ninewa and Diyala provinces, as well as Shiite-majority areas in Diyala province.

⁷⁶ While secular Iraqis generally do not indicate to which sect they nominally belong, it is believed that these twelve Iraqiya

winning votes there.⁷⁷ Still, the absence of another party that could claim that title forced Iraqiya into this role.

It is also important to assess the *type* of Sunni support Iraqiya received. Sunni Islamists who wished to support a party expressing their specific religious and political outlook in 2010 could vote for the IIP (within the Tawafuq electoral alliance) and did not have to choose a party led by a secular Shiite. Although statistical evidence is lacking, it appears that the Sunnis who voted for Iraqiya – a majority of the community – did so to express support for a secular Sunni platform – a major departure from 2005.⁷⁸

All told, and however unbalanced it may be, Iraqiya remains the only major political grouping that enjoys support from members of more than a single ethno-sectarian community. This has triggered two reactions: a tendency among Iraqiya's rivals to dismiss its cross-sectarian appeal and argue its only genuine support derives from the Sunni community, and an inclination among its own representatives to emphasise its membership's relative diversity. In an illustration of the first type of reaction, Ali Shubbar, a National Alliance legislator (ISCI), said:

Most of the political figures who joined Iraqiya were Sunni, which means it should be considered a Sunni

legislators from Shiite-majority areas in the south are all Shiites. As for Baghdad, it is impossible to determine what proportion of Iraqiya's votes came from the capital's Shiite-majority areas, because Baghdad province, which was treated as a single electoral district in the March 2010 elections (as were all of Iraq's other fourteen provinces outside the Kurdish region), comprises people of many religions and sects.

⁷⁷ Ammar al-Gharbawi, an Iraqiya (Wifaq) legislator from the south, said: "In the south, when people look at Iraqiya, they dislike it. All my votes came from urban liberals, especially those with a higher level of education. I really didn't get any votes at all from the countryside. The people there are directed by religion to a very high degree". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 24 September 2011. A State of Law adviser noted in March 2010: "Iraqiya has significant popularity in the south but is weak organisationally. Moreover, it can't raise its voice against the Shiite Islamist parties for fear of being called Baathists". Crisis Group interview, Diwaniya, 5 March 2010.

⁷⁸ A tribal sheikh in Salah al-Din province said: "It's irrelevant to me if Iraq is led by a Sunni or a Shiite, someone from Baghdad, the north or the south. I genuinely don't care. All I want is for our people to be treated fairly". Crisis Group interview, Tikrit, 15 March 2011. According to Hassan al-Alawi, a former Iraqiya member who defected with White Iraqiya, "although a number of religious figures joined Iraqiya, they didn't win by attracting the religious vote. They won through secular support. Iyad Allawi himself won only fifteen seats and the Islamic Party (which attracted support from Sunni Islamists) four, so where did the 91 seats come from? The Sunni community as a whole backed him up". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 14 March 2011.

list, designed to defend Sunni areas, regardless of its Shiite members, who are mostly liberals, unlike the others. Its success has prompted ideological inconsistencies between its Sunni and liberal supporters. This type of marriage cannot succeed. Iraqiya should seek to represent either the Sunnis or the liberals.⁷⁹

Regardless of how Iraqiya perceived itself originally, the political crisis with State of Law over region formation, de-Baathification and a wave of arrests in late 2011 affected its rhetoric. Given that Sunni-majority areas bore the brunt of the crisis, Iraqiya focused much of its subsequent discourse on those areas.⁸⁰ As a result, the public is likely to begin associating Iraqiya more closely with the Sunni community, potentially undermining its appeal among secular Shiites. Tellingly, a number of Iraqiya representatives in several southern provinces, including Najaf and Thi Qar, left the organisation.⁸¹

As for allegations that Iraqiya has ties to the Baath Party, one should draw a distinction between the party itself (which is banned but still maintains a formal structure out-

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 6 October 2011. An adviser to the Kurdish region's president, Masoud Barzani, said he agreed: "Let's not fool ourselves into thinking that Iraqiya is really secular or that it represents Iraq's secular community. They represent the Sunnis in addition to a small number of Shiites". Crisis Group interview, Erbil, 26 October 2011.

⁸⁰ Ahmad Jubouri, an Iraqiya parliamentarian, said: "I am supposed to represent all of Iraqiya, but the amount of suffering and fear for the future make me focus on the area from which I come and the people there. This is unfortunate; I wish it were not so". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 3 August 2011.

⁸¹ On 26 December 2011, several Wifaq members in Thi Qar (who do not appear to have occupied prominent positions) announced their withdrawal from Iraqiya, followed by similar defections in Najaf five days later. On 1 January 2012, parliamentarian Iskander Witwit and three Babel provincial council members also declared they were leaving the alliance. Iraqiya has denied subsequent reports of major defections in Salah al-Din province. "Iraqiya in Salah al-Din denies that defections have taken place within its ranks", Al-Sumeria News, 11 February 2012. Ahmed Abdullah al-Jubouri, governor of Salah al-Din, announced on 20 February 2012 that he was also breaking away from Iraqiya, but this move may be motivated by an instruction from the council of ministers to the Salah al-Din provincial council to replace Jubouri after it discovered he had been convicted of several crimes before he assumed his position. "A new political alliance that has broken away from Iraqiya is announced in Salah al-Din", Baghdadia News, 20 February 2012. Defections are not necessarily indicative of a genuine loss of support. Many defectors do not have their own support base, having gained their positions through Iraqiya's top vote getters. Whether Iraqiya's support base in predominantly Shiite areas will be discouraged from supporting it in the next elections because of its ideological shift toward Sunni areas remains to be seen.

side Iraq)⁸² and people who used to be members but publicly dissociated themselves prior to or immediately after the 2003 war. Many Iraqiya members fall in the second category; Allawi, Mutlak and many of their Wifaq and Hiwar colleagues are former Baathists.⁸³ Although some Iraqiya members may still maintain secret links to the Baath Party, there is no credible evidence to suggest any of its high- or mid-level members do or that the party influences its actions in any way.⁸⁴

Iraqiya's consistent position that de-Baathification should be halted and reversed, and applied only to those found guilty of crimes committed during the former regime, is widely shared by Sunni and Shiite liberals. The Sunni community as a whole adheres to that view, given the perceived discriminatory treatment it has received at the hands of the de-Baathification commission.⁸⁵ Iraqiya has institutional

reasons as well for taking that stand: the de-Baathification commission has sought to exclude many of its senior leaders from the elections while it has remained silent in relation to Maliki's closest allies, many of whom are also former Baathists.⁸⁶ Still, Iraqiya's position on de-Baathification has prompted accusations of direct cooperation with the Baath party and, by association, of involvement in insurgent attacks.⁸⁷

B. A COHESIVE BUT TROUBLED UNION

Iraqiya has developed internal mechanisms to ensure its various components' participation in decision-making, but these have prompted accusations of a lack of internal democracy, and many members have complained of questionable decisions. Iraqiya's decision-making takes place at different levels, involving different bodies.⁸⁸ Of its twenty constituent parts, only seven won parliament seats, high-

⁸² A former member of the Baath Party's Regional Command described its current activities as follows: "The party's leadership has tried to remain ideologically consistent with the past, which means they can't break with Saddam's legacy. This puts them out of step with the rest of the population, even in Tikrit [Saddam's birthplace]. They still refer to Saddam as a great leader and pretend that they command significant popular support, but they are the laughing stock in places such as Tikrit". Crisis Group interview, Tikrit, 15 February 2011.

⁸³ Crisis Group interview, former Iraqiya legislator, Baghdad, 15 August 2011. A State of Law parliamentarian conceded that "[it] doesn't mean they still have ties to the party". Crisis Group interview, Abbas al-Bayati, Baghdad, 6 October 2011. Sadrist parliamentarian Riad al-Zaidi said: "Iraqiya list is a nationalist list that has nationalist figures, but there are some who are trying to play the sectarian and the Baathist cards, and these are the reasons this country is still behind. They flirt with sides that try to disband Iraq's unity. Such figures can be in other lists as well, but in Iraqiya they are more obvious and in more influential posts". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 19 November 2011.

⁸⁴ The Baath party, which never was strictly Sunni in make-up (and indeed was predominantly secular-Shiite in origin), over time became primarily an instrument of political control in the hands of a regime toward which few members displayed any loyalty. One of the U.S.'s big mistakes after it occupied Iraq was its failure to institute a fair transitional justice process to judge people on their past conduct, not mere membership of a party with an outmoded ideology.

⁸⁵ A tribal sheikh in Salah al-Din provinces said: "Many former Baathists have been cut off from their livelihoods since 2003, with no hope of returning to work. Iraqiya was supposed to end de-Baathification in order to allow people to return to work or get their pensions". Crisis Group interview, Tikrit, 15 October 2011. An ISCI parliamentarian said: "According to Iraqiya's public statements, they are not with the Baathists, but still, the group is putting up a remarkable defence of Baathists by pushing to have them re-employed under the excuse they were treated unjustly. All the Baathists who committed crimes, and also those who didn't, voted for Iraqiya, hoping to regain the right to work". Crisis Group interview, Ali Shubbar, Baghdad, 6 October 2011.

⁸⁶ A prime example is General Qasem Ata, spokesman of the Baghdad Operational Command, a military unit established in 2007 that is answerable directly to Maliki (see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°99, *Loose Ends: Iraq's Security Forces between U.S. Drawdown and Withdrawal*, 26 October 2010, p. 7), as well as of the Office of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. In a media interview, he revealed that he had been a Baath Party member but insisted that he was "innocent of all crimes", an important criterion that has not been employed for former Baathists who are Maliki's political opponents. Hamza Mustafa, "Baghdad Operations Command Spokesman: The majority of terrorist operations are carried out by officials' bodyguards and by using officials cards and IDs", *Asharq al-Awsat*, 2 February 2012.

⁸⁷ A State of Law adviser stated: "Iraqiya is always cooperating with the Baath. You can see they are its tool used to publicise its claims. So who is Iraqiya really working for?" Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 22 September 2011. A State of Law (Daawa) legislator said: "Generally, Iraqiya doesn't support terrorism, but some individual members may have connections to terrorism. It's normal that when a party tries to recruit more followers for the sake of getting more votes, some will jump in who are involved in negative activities". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 17 October 2011. According to a former adviser to Maliki, "most of the detainees they want released are from provinces in which the Baath party and al-Qaeda are still active. These groups exist in the Sunni provinces, and you see that most of the Iraqiya representatives in parliament are always talking about releasing *those* detainees or improving *their* situation and *their* rights in prison". Crisis Group interview, Yassin Majid, State of Law parliamentarian, Baghdad, 3 August 2011.

⁸⁸ According to Salim Jubouri, chairman of parliament's human rights committee and spokesman of Al-Wasat, which joined Iraqiya after the March 2010 elections, "the structure of Iraqiya cannot be forced into a particular way of working. Its different components make it versatile. It is challenging, but I don't think this is a bad thing because it cuts out some kinds of bureaucracy and makes it possible to move and make decisions at different levels. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 13 February 2011.

lighting an internal distinction between “haves” and “have-nots”. If a unified position is required, representatives of each of the seven parties meet for debate. On an issue of strategic importance, these parties’ leaders come together.⁸⁹ In addition, committees coordinate Iraqiya’s work within the council of ministers, parliament and other parts of government, thereby automatically excluding those not represented in these bodies.⁹⁰ Iraqiya’s leadership occasionally has involved its entire parliamentary group in decision-making to promote consensus, as occurred when State of Law tried to withdraw confidence from the Independent High Electoral Commission.⁹¹

⁸⁹ On issues that are not deemed of strategic importance, the seven parties will send the following representatives: for Iyad Allawi (Wifaq), Maysoun al-Damlouji; for Saleh al-Mutlak (Hiwar), Haider al-Mulla; for Tareq al-Hashimi (Tajdeed), Ala Makki; for Rafeea Issawi (Mustaqbal), Salman al-Jumaili; for Muhammad Karbouli (Al-Hal), Jamal Karbouli; for Usama Nujaifi (Iraqiyoun), Hassan Alawi; and for Iyad al-Samaraie (Wasat), Salim al-Jubouri. Crisis Group interview, Maysoun al-Damlouji, Baghdad, 24 September 2011.

⁹⁰ Among the main committees: the governmental committee, headed by Saleh al-Mutlak (Hiwar), brings together all Iraqiya’s cabinet ministers and conducts a weekly meeting, just before the council of ministers meets; the parliamentary committee, led by Salman al-Jumaili (Mustaqbal), coordinates the work of Iraqiya’s representatives in parliament; the experts’ committee, headed by Dhafer al-Ani (Mustaqbal) and comprising parliamentarians as well as economists, jurists and other technocrats, debates legislative initiatives while offering advice on policy and the government’s performance; the coordination committee, chaired by Abdel-Karim Mahoud (Wifaq) and including representatives from all of Iraqiya’s constituent parts, coordinates the alliance’s work. Crisis Group interview, Dhafer al-Ani, Baghdad, 6 October 2011.

⁹¹ Crisis Group interview, Haider al-Mulla, an Iraqiya spokesperson (Hiwar), Baghdad, 31 July 2011. Karima al-Jawari, an Iraqiya parliamentarian, described this practice as follows: “On a lot of decisions, we consult each other. As you know, everyone has an opinion, and it’s different when we meet: five isn’t like 91. When the five leaders come up with a decision, they usually have some vision, and it is fairly simple. With the 91, sometimes a person you hadn’t thought of will come up with an idea that can be used as a base to build something bigger upon”. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 2 October 2011. The relationship between State of Law and the Electoral Commission has been acrimonious since the March 2010 parliamentary election results were announced. State of Law accused the commission of engaging in fraud in Iraqiya’s favour and has since sought to dismiss all its members. Even though it presented evidence of corruption allegations against the commission before parliament, State of Law failed to garner support for a no-confidence vote on 28 July 2011. Many lawmakers rejected the vote to prevent State of Law from encroaching on the commission’s independence. “Parliament votes to maintain confidence in the Electoral Commission and discusses the government’s programme”, Iraqi parliament’s media office, 28 July 2011.

Despite attempts to systematise decision-making, Iraqiya members often express confusion and even frustration at individual strategies and decisions. Many were critical, for example, of Iraqiya’s strategy during the government formation process, which lasted from March to December 2010, saying that the alliance should have called for a majority-based government between itself and State of Law. This ruling coalition would have been headed by Maliki but would have included Iraqiya as an equal partner.⁹² Then, after Iraqiya’s leadership yielded in favour of Maliki retaining the prime minister’s position without in return obtaining any concrete guarantees on policy objectives (see Section IV.A.1), members questioned the manner in which its leaders were selected for ministerial positions. According to Karima Al-Jawari (Wifaq):

I was upset with Allawi for that reason. He chose a minister [from Wifaq] without our knowledge. Are we selling vegetables? This applies not just to Wifaq but to all of Iraqiya. We were all surprised by the way in which ministers were selected.⁹³

Although there are many causes for these failures and frustrations, including the general lack of experience with democratic practice, a recurring theme since 2005 has been Allawi’s management style. He has been described as aloof, opaque and conspiratorial in his manner of working. According to his former colleague Hassan al-Alawi, “Allawi is incapable of having a dialogue with his own group. He just does not have the ability to listen”.⁹⁴ A former member of the Iraqi opposition in London said his methods had not changed since the 1990s:

When he was based in London prior to the 2003 war, Allawi preferred to work in the shadows, in dark conference rooms, away from the public. He was always

⁹² Crisis Group interviews, Iraqiya legislators and advisers, Baghdad, Baquba and Tikrit, January to June 2011. For more on the government formation process, see Section IV.A.1.

⁹³ A former Iraqiya parliamentarian described the situation as follows: “There are 91 Iraqiya parliament members, but all the decisions are in the hands of a few leaders. In nominating ministers, Allawi just came up with his own nominees. He unilaterally decided to nominate Maysoun al-Damlouji to be culture minister, Hussein al-Shalan minister for tribal affairs and Mohammed Allawi to communications minister”. Crisis Group interview, Alia Nussaif, Baghdad, 30 July 2011.

⁹⁴ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 14 March 2011. Officials from other groups agree. A former Kurdish parliamentarian said: “Allawi is a real failure. I used to like him. I thought he would unify people. In the four years that I was in parliament, his own parliamentarians used to criticise him openly while he was travelling abroad. He thinks that he is a world leader and stands above party politics. He doesn’t know how to cooperate with people and seek their advice”. Crisis Group interview, Erbil, 20 October 2011.

secretive about his whereabouts. He would wait until the last moment before confirming his participation in meetings, and then when he did, he would often not show up and send an envoy in his stead. He still does this today. Immediately after Tareq al-Hashimi fled to Erbil when he faced an arrest warrant, Allawi travelled to Beirut for several days, meeting with Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati and attending social functions. No one could understand this.⁹⁵

C. IDEOLOGICAL AMBIGUITY

Iraqiya's discourse evinces a number of broad ideological principles that, albeit vague, represent a set of core values that many Iraqis recognise and with which they identify. The term most often used to refer to its ideology is its commitment to the "national project" (*al-mashroua al-watani*). Although the term has never been defined, its three main components are a commitment to (an Iraqi version of) secularism, strong central government and an independent foreign policy. Iraqiya currently is under attack in relation to each aspect of its "national project",⁹⁶ a consequence being a dilution of its original ideology.

1. Secularism

Secularism in Iraq (and in the broader Middle East) does not signify full separation between state and religion. The Iraqi state has always officially sought inspiration and support from religion and (for better or worse) always maintained an official relationship with the many religious institutions. This has manifested itself in various forms, including the 1959 personal status law, which is loosely based on Sharia, the government's sponsorship of religious

pilgrimages (particularly since 2003) and its involvement in the management of religious endowments.⁹⁷

Iraqiya's version of secularism has largely been defined by what it is *not*: sectarian. It is in favour of maintaining government support for religious belief and institutions and draws on religious traditions when drafting legislation but insists on state neutrality vis-à-vis religious denominations.⁹⁸ What this appears to mean in practice is that Iraqiya supports the state's hewing closely to religious traditions and institutions while holding these at arm's length, the implication being that no individual institution or tradition ought to receive preferential treatment.⁹⁹

For a variety of reasons, notably a decades-long absence of free expression and post-2003 bewilderment about national identity,¹⁰⁰ secularism often is confused with athe-

⁹⁵ Crisis Group interview, Abdul Hussein Shaaban, Beirut, 8 January 2012.

⁹⁶ Many politicians and observers argue that there is little ideological difference between Iraq's various political blocs (although important variations exist with respect to federalism and secularism). One said: "The nationalist discourse isn't the point. The point is performance, convictions and programs. All the blocs have nationalist slogans regarding Iraq's unity, independence and sovereignty". Crisis Group interview, Abbas al-Bayati, State of Law parliamentarian, Baghdad, 6 October 2011. A leading intellectual and former member of the opposition to Saddam Hussein's regime stated: "All of the parties have very basic programs. Iraqiya's program does not differ significantly from State of Law's. They all say they support national sovereignty, the constitution, power sharing, pluralism, respecting the will of the people, equality, reform, improvement of public services and stopping terrorism. You will find those same nine points in all of the main political movements' platforms. The only difference for Iraqiya is that it was formed to prevent the state from being dominated by Shiite Islamist parties". Crisis Group interview, Abdul Hussein Shaaban, Beirut, 8 January 2012.

⁹⁷ Most Arab countries have a "personal status law" inspired by Sharia that governs inheritance, alimony and the right to marry and divorce, among others; as well as personal status laws that apply to Christians and other religious communities. Lebanon, which recognises Islam's various denominations (Sunni, Shiite, Alawite), applies separate rules to each. Iraq's 1959 personal status law has been the source of praise and controversy, because rather than recognising different Muslim groups, it draws on the most progressive aspects of the Sunni and Shiite traditions and applies these to all Muslims without distinction. Iraqi law contains separate rules governing Christians and other religious minorities. Purists have long demanded separate laws for Sunnis and Shiites. Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, the late ISCI leader, made one such attempt in December 2003, when he was a member of the CPA-appointed Interim Governing Council, but he was overruled by several other council members, as well as by CPA Administrator Paul Bremer. Article 41 of the 2005 constitution was drafted with a view to overruling the 1959 law (by giving citizens the choice to be governed on the basis of their personal status according to their "religion, sect, belief or choice") but has not led to any practical change in the way the law is applied.

⁹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Tikrit University professor, Tikrit, 14 February 2011.

⁹⁹ An Iraqiya parliamentarian in Salah al-Din provided the following definition: "Secularism means that you want civilians to govern the country, not the army or religious figures. It doesn't mean that you are an atheist. I pray every day and I fast during Ramadan. I am a strong believer, but I also believe that religious figures shouldn't have any direct or indirect role in governance. Being secular in Iraq also means that you believe that there should be no discrimination between people of different religions and faiths – that everyone should be treated equally". Crisis Group interview, Fatin Abdul Qadir, Tikrit, 28 March 2011.

¹⁰⁰ Haidar al-Mulla, an Iraqiya spokesman in Saleh al-Mutlak's Hiwar party, said that one of Iraqiya's main problems is that "we don't have a definition for the Iraqi identity. If someone asks whether our state is Islamic or something else we cannot respond we are a liberal country, because of what the religious parties have done. And what is the economic identity of the state? Are we capitalist? Socialist? We really don't know. This

ism and thus is a taboo for many Iraqis. According to a State of Law parliamentarian:

Secularism, or liberalism, is historically weak in Iraq. Unfortunately, it failed because after the fall of the monarchy [in 1958], the Communist Party and the Baath Party gave secularism a bad name. Liberals could not survive in that environment. Sure, there are some secular academics and intellectuals, but they end up not being neutral but joining sectarian parties.¹⁰¹

As a result, secular politicians have had to tread lightly: they cannot openly champion secularism and often have to fend off accusations of disrespecting religious institutions and seeking to weaken religion.¹⁰² Secular parties also are accused by political opponents of affinity with the Baath Party.¹⁰³

Contrary to most other political alliances, Iraqiya has a genuine commitment to secularism for a number of important reasons. These include the fact that its membership is religiously diverse while mostly belonging to a religious minority, and that many of its members and constituents remember the failure of Sunni Islamist policies to offer any form of protection to those who had support-

applies to everything. Iraq's struggle is to find an identity, and it is still very far away". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 31 July 2011.

¹⁰¹ Crisis Group interview, Yassin Majid, Baghdad, 3 August 2011.

¹⁰² An Iraqiya (Wifaq) parliamentarian (a secular Shiite) from Kut provided the following explanation of the difficulties he faced campaigning in his province: "When a Shiite imam speaks to his congregation, he will try to scare them about Sunnis. He might even tell them that someone from Iraqiya is very secular, to the point of being an infidel, or that he has become a Sunni. Imams often seek to convince the devout that Iraqiya candidates are actively working to bring back the Baath Party, or the Sunnis generally. This happened to me. I have relatives who know me well, and know that I pray and have been to Mecca three times. They know that I am a judge. Nevertheless, they didn't vote for me. This is highly unusual in Iraq. Sectarian talk was used to frighten them". Crisis Group interview, Ammar al-Gharbawi, Baghdad, 24 September 2011. A physician from Kirkuk province provided the following anecdote: "Before the March 2010 elections, my mother told me that she was planning on voting for Allawi, because she said that the country needed a change. After the elections, she told me that she had changed her mind and voted for Maliki instead because she had heard that Allawi was in favour of banning Shiite religious pilgrimages". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 15 June 2011.

¹⁰³ Haider al-Mulla said: "Sectarian parties have historically not provided much for the people, so naturally people might not vote them in again. The parties therefore loudly claim that Iraqiya, being secular, has a strong relationship to Iraq's sadistic past under Saddam in order to frighten voters. This is extremely damaging for the future of Iraq, but it often works and gets these parties votes". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 31 July 2011.

ed them. This is in contrast to Iraqiya's political rivals, which pay lip-service to secularism for electoral purposes but are prepared to adopt overtly sectarian policies if they find it politically expedient.

For example, Maliki's State of Law campaigned on a non-sectarian platform and as the self-professed protector of a unified Iraq in the run-up to the 2010 elections. It played up its avowedly non-sectarian credentials,¹⁰⁴ giving prominent place on its electoral lists (it ran candidates in most governorates) to a number of Sunni and liberal figures (some of them former Iraqiya members). Most importantly, it declined to ally itself with the Iraqi National Alliance, whose main components were the explicitly Shiite Islamist Sadrist movement and Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq.¹⁰⁵ Although the 2010 election results confirmed that non-sectarianism had large popular appeal,¹⁰⁶ they also indicated that many people did not regard State of Law as that perspective's standard-bearer. State of Law has since reverted to a more openly sectarian approach to governance, including by pushing both the army and police to become vehicles for the growing expression of Shiism,¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ State of Law embraced the de-Baathification campaign against hundreds of (mostly Sunni) candidates in the run-up to the March 2010 parliamentary elections. Although the campaign was led by Ahmed Chalabi and Ali Feisal al-Lami (the de-Baathification Commission's executive director, later assassinated), Maliki and his allies jumped on the bandwagon shortly afterward, encouraging the swift exclusion of candidates prior to the elections. See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°94, *Iraq's Uncertain Future: Elections and Beyond*, 25 February 2010, pp. 27-32.

¹⁰⁵ Both State of Law and the Iraqi National Alliance members were key components of the United Iraqi Alliance, which won the January and December 2005 elections. They reunified as the National Alliance after the 2010 election results were announced in order to keep Iraqiya, which had won most seats, out of power.

¹⁰⁶ Iraqiya and State of Law, both of which campaigned on non-sectarian platforms, together won slightly over 50 per cent of the popular vote.

¹⁰⁷ Across Baghdad, police and army forces routinely fly banners that display Shiite religious figures and slogans from vehicles, on and around checkpoints and at the entrances to government buildings and the Green Zone. Crisis Group observations, 2010-2012. Moreover, people in both Sunni and Shiite neighbourhoods of Baghdad increasingly report that police and army ask them threateningly why they do not have Shiite flags up in front of their houses on religious holidays. These residents (Sunnis included) often feel they have to put them up or leave ones up that uniformed members of security forces have placed there themselves. Crisis Group interviews, Baghdad, 2011. Throughout 2011, the central square in Diyala Province's capital, Baquba, was occupied by a military unit that placed a large poster of Imam Ali beside them. Moreover, residents complained that army and police have flown Shiite religious banners from their vehicles and broadcast religious chants via loudspeakers placed on their vehicles or at army posts and checkpoints. Crisis Group

and has used the state apparatus to intimidate Maliki's enemies by often defining them on a sectarian basis.¹⁰⁸

Iraqiya, which incorporated Islamists in an effort to compete with Maliki, has encountered its own problems with secularism. Safiya al-Suhail, a former Iraqiya parliamentarian who defected in 2007 to become independent, joined State of Law for the 2010 elections and then turned independent again, said: "This Iraqiya is not the same as the Iraqiya that ran in the 2005 elections. When we started, we were truly liberal and represented a nationalist view. Today, they are representing other views as well, and maybe this is a natural part of being a bigger party".¹⁰⁹

2. Federalism vs. centralism?

The second element in Iraqiya's "national project" is its commitment to strong central government. Yet, in response to political developments, it began to reconsider this position in 2011 and supported the bid of some of its leading Sunni Arab members to form federal regions in Salah al-Din, Diyala and Anbar.¹¹⁰ Iraqiya's leadership never opposed decentralisation as long as it preserved the country's unity.¹¹¹ But it faced a shifting political landscape: state failure to deliver adequate services led oil-rich Basra province to demand the right to form its own federal region in September 2010. By mid-2011, other governorates followed suit in response to Maliki's refusal to share con-

interviews, local residents and tribal sheikhs, Baquba, January to December 2011.

¹⁰⁸ According to a (secular Shiite) civil society activist: "Two recent events are relevant: the January 2012 Arbæen pilgrimage to Karbala, and the military parade in Baghdad on 6 January. The government bragged that 15 million people participated in the pilgrimage and then lined up its tanks in the Green Zone for everyone to see. What was the point of that? Our army is weak, probably the weakest in the region. I wouldn't be surprised if Kuwait could destroy the entire army in a day. The purpose wasn't to intimidate or impress the enemy outside our borders, however; it was directed toward the enemy within – the Sunnis. The message was: we have the numbers and we have the weapons". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 10 February 2012.

¹⁰⁹ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 4 October 2011.

¹¹⁰ According to an Iraqiya member: "We try to avoid focusing on whether someone is Sunni or Shiite, but when we feel threatened, our group identity becomes more important. This makes the problem far worse than it ever has to be". Crisis Group interview, Dhafer al-Ani, Baghdad, 6 October 2011.

¹¹¹ Karima al-Jawari, an Iraqiya parliamentarian, said: "One of our red lines is the unity of Iraq. We have big fears that the establishment of new regions could be misused to divide Iraq, as in the case of the Kurdish region, which is always talking about self-determination. This is why we are worried. Legally, however, there is nothing wrong with it at all; it's all about getting more legal powers for the provinces, nothing more". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 2 October 2011.

trol over both decision-making and the security forces and, even more, the waves of arrests and de-Baathification of public servants in Salah al-Din, Diyala and Ninewa in October 2011.¹¹²

Iraqiya has been host to a broad range of views on federalism:

- A small but growing number of Iraqiya members have publicly expressed support for the formation of federal regions. Parliamentary Speaker Usama al-Nujaifi stirred controversy when he stated repeatedly in 2011 that Sunni Arabs' growing sense of disenfranchisement and persecution would foment a commensurate increase in their desire for self-rule.¹¹³ He was soon joined by many

¹¹² Failing public services have long been a powerful incentive for Basra to push for the formation of a federal region. Local officials hope this will mean a larger investment budget and greater control over how it is allocated. In September 2010, Basra's provincial council voted in favour of holding a referendum to determine the province's status. Both the central government and the Independent High Electoral Commission, which would have to organise such a referendum, ignored the move, and the matter did not go any further. In late 2011, Salah al-Din, Anbar and Diyala provinces voted in favour of holding such a referendum, but no progress has been made either.

¹¹³ Nujaifi made his statements during a trip to Washington in June 2011. According to his political and media adviser, "the reason why people hyped Nujaifi's statement in Washington is because he made it just after meeting with Vice President Biden, who has been calling for Iraq to be split into three ethno-sectarian regions for years. This made some people assume that Nujaifi's call was part of a larger conspiracy to split the country apart. In fact, before visiting Washington, Nujaifi had spent considerable time visiting the provinces, listening to people's grievances and considering possible solutions. In the current context, his call to form federal regions seemed to be the most positive solution for their aggrieved population, given that the state is as centralised today as it was before the war, and all the way back to the 1970s". Crisis Group interview, Aiden Aqsu, Baghdad, 24 September 2011. Iraqiya parliamentarian Ahmed Jubouri offered an additional explanation: "A tough, central power makes it easy for people to want to split. Saddam's government was very tough on the Kurds, pushing them to fight for their own region. The same is happening in other parts of the country today, but in a different way. I do not want more regions in Iraq, but maybe the threat of splitting the country could keep the government in line and keep the country together. If only it gave up some of the powers it exercises over the provinces, no one would be talking about regionalisation, and this is better for everyone". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 3 August 2011. Shortly after Nujaifi's comments, Irshad al-Salihi, leader of the Iraqi Turkoman Front, which is part of Iraqiya, made the following distinction: "This statement is very risky if it was meant to divide Iraq based on specific geographically-based ethnic groups. However, if it was meant to express the suffering of Iraqiya [and its constituencies] in dealing with State of Law, then it is a different case. I really hope the latter is correct". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 29 June 2011.

of Iraqiya's local politicians, including virtually all its provincial council members in the five provinces in which the alliance has significant representation (Salah al-Din, Diyala, Ninewa, Anbar and Kirkuk), as well as several parliamentarians.¹¹⁴ In an interview in December 2011, Nujaifi himself called for the provinces' rights to form regions as the best way to solve the problem of failing services and government repression.¹¹⁵ This marked a sharp departure from Iraqiya's position as recently as early 2011, when its opposition to regionalisation was unmistakable.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Tikrit and Baquba, October and November 2011. According to Karima al-Jawari, an Iraqiya parliamentarian from Salah al-Din: "Our sons in the provinces are angry. They face arrest with or without cause and are transferred to Baghdad to be tortured in very ugly ways. They feel that if they were living in a region, these violations wouldn't happen. As for me, what really matters is how to save the life of our sons. I support region formation for this reason only". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 2 October 2011.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Sharqiya News, 14 December 2011. Nujaifi is not advocating a single Sunni Arab region but the establishment of individual regions based on existing provinces, if they so wish. Dhafer al-Ani, an Iraqiya member, explained: "The type of federalism we are advocating is that of a single province becoming a region, not two or three joined together, or making some kind of Sunni province. The people from these areas are very upset and always ask why Maliki's forces are able to come and do whatever they want, while they cannot do so in the Kurdish region. This point alone is enough to fuel federalism. Citizens feel there is no other way to protect themselves from mass arrests or other forms of persecution, disguised as de-Baathification". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 6 October 2011.

¹¹⁶ Sobhan al-Mulla al-Jiyaad, a Salah al-Din provincial council member (Iraqiya), said: "There has been some discussion about forming a single Sunni region. Some support the idea because they face arrest over their continued loyalty to the former regime. Others want to take advantage of federalism to get rich – on the assumption that whatever federal region is formed will have a significant budget with weak oversight. Again others support the idea because they feel that a strong Iraq is over. I don't think it could work, principally because the people are against it. Federalism has been rejected by both the Sunni and the Shiite street. ISCI was punished for that reason [in 2009]". Crisis Group interview, Tikrit, 15 February 2011. Ali Shubbar, a National Alliance (ISCI) parliamentarian, explained why ISCI now proceeds with caution in relation to federalism: "At first, Iraqiya called for centralism and accused those who supported federalism of trying to divide Iraq. We [ISCI] were the first to call for federalism because we believed that, administratively, it could solve a lot of problems. However, all of the blocs rejected it and we lost a lot of popular support as a result. But the Iraqi people have come to understand the idea and its importance, and now, after we lost so many of our supporters, we see others talking about federalism and regions. So now we remain silent, while others, like Iraqiya, are pushing for federalism to be implemented in several provinces. We would support it if the people really wanted it, but we don't want to go against the

- A core group of Iraqiya members, led by Allawi, holds that the state remains fragile and may be incapable of withstanding the establishment of federal regions (outside the Kurdish region) until it has succeeded in reasserting its authority and legitimacy.¹¹⁷ They argue in favour of a strong central government able to provide essential services, but also recognise the need for significant decentralisation that could help fill the gap.¹¹⁸
- Some Iraqiya members continue to favour a strong central government and oppose meaningful decentralisation and especially regionalisation. However, even the most ardent supporters of centralised government have had to acknowledge that Maliki's security and de-Baathification policies have encouraged many Iraqiya supporters to advocate stronger decentralisation. Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlak is one of the most prominent and vocal proponents of this view:

The Iraqi people oppose federalism. They like a strong Iraq, and we all know that federalism may weaken Iraq and create problems within and between regions. The best thing is to keep a united Iraq. At the moment, however, because of Maliki, many people are calling for federalism. They want the provinces to take care of their own affairs. This is a result of Maliki's policies. He is running the country in a way that will lead to the division of Iraq. As soon as he is out of power and his policies disappear, people will revert to their natural positions and will oppose federalism as they always have done.¹¹⁹

people. We were accused in the past of trying to divide Iraq and we don't want to go through that again". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 6 October 2011.

¹¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, Sobhan al-Mulla al-Jiyaad, Salah al-Din provincial council member (Iraqiya), Tikrit, 15 February 2011.

¹¹⁸ Although Law 21 (2008), the "provincial powers law", purports to bring into effect a decentralised system of government, provincial councils throughout the country have roundly criticised its provisions for not affording any real powers to local administrations. The vast majority of local officials are still appointed by and receive their instructions from ministries in Baghdad, while locally-elected officials have close to no staff and almost no budget. Crisis Group interviews, Salah al-Din, Diyala and Kirkuk provincial council members, Tikrit, Baquba and Beirut, January to April 2011.

¹¹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 31 July 2011. An academic at Tikrit University who is an adviser to Iraqiya described support for federalism as follows: "A Sunni region might be attractive to some people because it might give them hope that it would help protect them. Perhaps we should create a region for that reason, but the problem is that most people are opposed to this idea. It won't work in Salah al-Din and it won't work in Ninewa. It might get no more than 20 per cent support". Crisis Group interview, Tikrit, 14 February 2011.

Iraqiya's evolution has led to tensions with the rest of the political leaders, most of whom (with the exception of the Kurdistan Alliance and ISCI) oppose the formation of federal regions. State of Law and its allies, in particular, have accused Iraqiya of sectarianism and seeking to establish safe havens for Baathists as well as break up the country.¹²⁰

IV. AN IRREVERSIBLE DECLINE?

Government formation, which took seven months in 2010,¹²¹ proved to be Iraqiya's undoing in more ways than one. After the electoral commission announced the results on 14 May, with Iraqiya gaining a narrow plurality, its leaders saw an opportunity to gain power and undo the results of five years of Shiite Islamist rule. They invested all their energies into ensuring that Allawi would become prime minister.¹²² Ultimately, however, by failing to extract a genuine power-sharing deal in exchange for joining the government, Iraqiya placed itself in a highly vulnerable position. This explains the severe crisis in which it has found itself since 2011.

A. MARGINALISATION

1. From election winner to junior government partner

During the protracted negotiations between Iraqiya and State of Law, neither side seriously proposed forming a government without including the other; the dispute was over who would be prime minister. For Iraqiya the goal was to end Maliki's perceived creeping takeover of the state. During his first term, he and his allies had begun to intimidate and marginalise non-Shiites in important parts of the bureaucracy through de-Baathification and strengthen their control over security forces. For State of Law, by contrast, holding off Iraqiya was seen as essential to prevent the return of the Baath party and renewed persecution of Shiites.¹²³ For both coalitions, occupying the top seat would mean greater access to public funds and patronage networks – the lifeblood of Iraqi politics since 2003.

Iraqiya faced important obstacles from the start, most notably Maliki's influence over the courts.¹²⁴ It also suffered

¹²⁰ The Maliki government may have gone further than that. After Diyala's provincial council voted on 13 December 2011 in favour of holding a referendum to determine the province's status, the provincial capital Baquba was overrun by armed men who stormed the council building, forcing its members into hiding. Although the identity of these armed men has not been identified, several were seen driving around in army vehicles. Crisis Group interviews, local residents, Baquba, 14-17 December 2011.

¹²¹ The Independent High Electoral Commission confirmed the results more than two months after the elections were held. The government formed pursuant to those elections won a parliamentary vote of confidence on 22 December 2010.

¹²² Iraqiya lawmaker Hamid al-Mutlak said that Iraqiya held fast to the idea of attaining the position of prime minister, "in the hope that we could prevail by standing strong and being unified, despite internal disagreement. Sometimes this works in politics, but it didn't work this time". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 12 July 2011.

¹²³ Crisis Group interview, adviser to Maliki, Baghdad, 15 January 2011.

¹²⁴ The 2005 constitution provides that the leader of the "largest bloc" has 30 days to form a government, without clarifying whether this denotes the largest electoral bloc or the largest parliamentary bloc. In case of the former, Iraqiya would have had the right to form a government. The Federal Supreme Court ruled on 25 March 2010 that the term refers to the largest par-

from its own unwavering insistence that its electoral victory entitled it to the prime minister's position, despite pressure from within and without to abandon the position in exchange for meaningful State of Law concessions. According to a senior Iraqi politician:

It was clear that Allawi could not become prime minister, because Iran opposed him. So Iraqiya should have accepted a prime minister from the Shiite parties and then negotiated a quid pro quo. It should have teamed up with the Kurds, postponing the disputed territories question. It didn't do that. Then Allawi blamed Issawi [the head of the negotiating team] for mismanaging the negotiations, and Issawi and Nujaiifi blamed Allawi for insisting on being prime minister.¹²⁵

Sobhan al-Mulla al-Jiyaad, a Salah al-Din provincial council member (Iraqiya), offered a similar diagnosis:

Iraqiya and State of Law should have formed a majority government. Most of the political parties, including Sunni Islamists, Shiite Islamists and the Kurds, did not want Iraqiya to seek the prime minister's position. We should have realised this but, regrettably, Iraqiya insisted. It should have used the prime minister's position as a bargaining tool. We could have given the position to someone in exchange for a commitment to a political program we could support. They were too stubborn to realise this; they rejected the idea, wanting to have it all. In the end, Iraqiya compromised on everything and ended up the biggest loser.¹²⁶

An adviser to Maliki provided his assessment of Iraqiya's negotiating strategy:

We took a major risk in establishing State of Law, both electorally and in terms of potentially alienating Iran. Our results were almost identical to Iraqiya's, something they should have recognised. Instead, they insisted on taking over, and this forced us to move back into the Shiite fold, in alliance with Iran. Iraqiya didn't seem to understand our position. We and our community will never forget our mass graves and therefore will never entrust our security to anyone else again.¹²⁷

After several months of negotiations without any progress, Masoud Barzani, the Kurdish leader, suggested a compromise that could form the basis for a unity government. A new round of negotiations between the top leaders produced the "Erbil Agreement" in November 2010. Although all major parties were said to agree to its terms, it has not

been published and therefore neither most parliamentarians nor the general public are aware of what exactly it entails. Indeed, it is not even clear whether it was a signed text or merely an oral understanding.¹²⁸

The Erbil Agreement sounded the death knell on Iraqiya's quest by anointing Maliki head of a national unity government in which Iraqiya was to receive a fair share of positions: Tareq al-Hashimi would be vice president, Usama al-Nujaiifi parliament speaker, Saleh al-Mutlak deputy prime minister and Iyad Allawi president of a new institution known provisionally as the National Council for Strategic Policy. In practice, this relegated Iraqiya to the position of junior partner. By rushing to fill these positions, the alliance's leaders failed to negotiate a governing program or to create other checks on the prime minister's power, such as bylaws for the council of ministers or a guarantee that the new policy council would indeed be established. Moreover, none of the ministerial positions was likely to translate into real power. For example, Mutlak never gained clarity on what the position of "deputy prime minister for services" entailed, what authorities he would have or how these related to the powers of the prime minister and other ministers.¹²⁹ Only Nujaiifi seemed to gain an influential position, one that he has used well in the time since.

Several drafts of a law to establish the National Council for Strategic Policy have circulated, suggesting that this new institution would determine the government's policies on strategic issues and function essentially as a parallel decision-making body.¹³⁰ Although the proposal briefly enjoyed popularity in the international community, many Iraqi actors opposed it from the start, despite the Erbil Agreement. Opponents included Maliki, who correctly saw it as an attempt to clip his powers,¹³¹ but also some of Ira-

¹²⁸ A former Iraqiya legislator spoke about the Erbil Agreement as follows: "Most of the representatives really have no idea what is in it and when we asked our leadership they told us it is not an agreement but only a non-binding understanding. On the day the government was formed [in November 2010], Maliki, Barzani and Allawi signed the agreement in the presence of the Americans. Only these three and the Americans really know what is in it. Today, whenever we are close to reaching agreement on a given issue, someone will bring up the Erbil Agreement just to ruin the meeting". Crisis Group interview, Alia Nussaif, Baghdad, 30 July 2011.

¹²⁹ Crisis Group interview, Saleh Mutlak, Baghdad, 2011.

¹³⁰ Various iterations of the draft law also provided for the council to take decisions by an 80 per cent super-majority – a recipe for stalemate. See Draft Law on the Establishment of the National Council for Strategic Policy, undated (in Crisis Group's possession).

¹³¹ An adviser to Maliki complained of U.S. pressure to establish the council over State of Law's objections: "This is an institution that the Americans are trying to force us to create. We don't want to, but they feel we should give something to Allawi, some type of compromise position. When you look at what

liamentary bloc. This encouraged Maliki to seek a dominant coalition with his Shiite rivals in the Iraqi National Alliance.

¹²⁵ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, May 2012.

¹²⁶ Crisis Group interview, Tikrit, 15 February 2011.

¹²⁷ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 15 January 2011.

qiya's own constituents on the ground that it had no constitutional justification and could lead to paralysis.¹³² In any event, parliament failed to muster the votes it would need to pass a law setting up the council and so the idea has remained stillborn, a net loss to Iraqiya.

Because Iraqiya flubbed government formation in this manner, Maliki was able to use his new term to extend his control over key institutions, including the security forces.¹³³ For example, the November 2010 deal provided that Iraqiya would designate one of its own as defence minister, leaving the interior ministry to State of Law. However, Maliki repeatedly rejected Iraqiya's candidates while he himself assumed the defence portfolio in an acting capacity, until he appointed an ally as acting minister in August 2011.¹³⁴

they are proposing, they are just trying to recreate the Revolutionary Command Council from the times of the Baath". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 15 January 2011.

¹³² A senior provincial official in Tikrit close to Iraqiya said: "The national council won't lead to anything. From a constitutional perspective it makes no sense. It's something artificial they are trying to set up merely to give Allawi a status similar to that of prime minister in order to satisfy his ego. It's a very disturbing phenomenon". Crisis Group interview, Tikrit, 13 February 2011. An Iraqiya adviser in Diyala agreed: "The council they want to create isn't constitutional. It would be an alien entity that won't be able to deliver anything for either Iraqiya or Iraq. How could it take decisions with 80 per cent approval? Everything will be frozen". Crisis Group interview, Baquba, 17 June 2011.

¹³³ For the legal and institutional bases for Maliki's growing control over institutions, see Crisis Group Report, *Loose Ends*, op. cit. Iraqiya lawmaker Hamid al-Mutlak said: "We haven't been able to get the kind of power in governmental institutions that we thought we would; the government is holding on to this power. I'm not just talking about ministers here but about the essential positions nobody talks about, like deputies, general executive managers, department heads, general inspectors, etc. Without a share of these, no party, however big, can make effective strides toward reform. This is very important. Everybody notices that Maliki doesn't give up the security ministries, but these other positions together are even more important. For example, we may have one of our own as minister but everyone else at that ministry might be from rival groups, and then we cannot control anything". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 12 July 2011.

¹³⁴ Maliki appointed Saadoun al-Dulaimi, who won a parliamentary seat in Anbar as a member of the Unity Alliance list headed by Jawad Bolani, which coincidentally joined Iraqiya that same month. Al-Dulaimi's appointment was the result of a direct agreement with Maliki. Not having been consulted, Iraqiya rejected the move. Maliki, however, argued that according to the Erbil Agreement the position should go to a Sunni, not necessarily an Iraqiya member. Parliament has yet to confirm Dulaimi, which has greatly reduced his scope of action because it makes him dependent on Maliki's personal approval.

He also has maintained direct control over the interior ministry which, his opponents claim, he has used to crack down on government critics.¹³⁵ Furthermore, Maliki seized control of the nominally independent Integrity Commission, the main anti-corruption body.¹³⁶ After years of government pressure, the commission's head resigned in protest in September 2011. Fearing that the prime minister would take advantage of this opportunity to replace him with an ally, his opponents in parliament moved swiftly to approve a law that gave parliament the power to appoint the commission's head.¹³⁷ In response, and realising that parliament could not act without his cooperation, Maliki appointed an acting head in September 2011, who proceeded to refer all files to the prime minister's office for approval, thus snarling the commission's work.¹³⁸

Iraqiya's failure to demand written, public and binding assurances during government formation allowed Maliki to ignore the Erbil Agreement or unilaterally modify its terms. Meanwhile, Iraqiya has been reduced to raising its voice in protest, with no noticeable impact. In a comment that foreshadowed his public incendiary characterisation of the prime minister as a dictator that triggered the December 2011 government crisis, Saleh al-Mutlak told Crisis Group in July 2011:

Maliki is heading toward a system run by one party and one man, with the Daawa Party replacing the Baath Party and Maliki taking the place of Saddam Hussein. The only difference is that Daawa is not really the Baath, because it doesn't have the strength or support that the Baath once did, and for that reason Maliki is not really the same as Saddam Hussein.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Before his party joined Iraqiya in August 2011, an IIP spokesman said: "Maliki has been sending forces from Baghdad to Samarra and Tikrit to arrest people. His goal is to tell Iraqiya it has no role, no place in the country". Crisis Group interview, Tikrit, 15 February 2011.

¹³⁶ See Crisis Group Report, *Failing Oversight*, op. cit.

¹³⁷ After helping to pass the law, Iraqiya legislators congratulated themselves for having stopped Maliki from seizing control over a vital check on government. Maysoun al-Damlouji, Iraqiya's spokeswoman, said: "Last week we managed to free the Integrity Commission of government influence. We are doing all right, especially now that we have drawn closer to the Kurds". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 24 September 2011.

¹³⁸ Similarly, Iraqiya has not made any effort in parliament to regulate the appointment and dismissal of inspectors general. This has perpetuated the legal vacuum, allowing Maliki to continue unilaterally dismissing individual inspectors. In January 2012, the prime minister's office reportedly fired eight inspectors general and is threatening to dissolve the institution altogether. Crisis Group interview, U.S. embassy official, Baghdad, 8 March 2012.

¹³⁹ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 31 July 2011. In December 2011, Mutlak told Al Jazeera: "My advice to him [Maliki]

2. Continued persecution

State of Law and its allies have used de-Baathification and arrest waves to weaken Iraqiya's leadership; in turn, this has led supporters to lose faith in the group's capacity to deliver on its campaign promises. In its most dramatic action to date, judicial authorities issued an arrest warrant against Vice President Tareq al-Hashimi in December 2011 for alleged acts of terrorism and murder.¹⁴⁰ It has since continued to arrest his former bodyguards and staff members, including female press secretaries who were detained without charge for weeks.¹⁴¹ One bodyguard died while in detention on 18 March 2012, raising strong suspicions he had been tortured.¹⁴² Hashimi himself remained mostly in the Kurdish region, where authorities refused to surrender him to the Baghdad court despite numerous protests from the Maliki government.¹⁴³

One of Iraqiya's stated objectives has been to bring an end to de-Baathification, an indiscriminate and destructive tool wielded especially against Sunni Arabs, and redress some of the resulting injustices. In Allawi's words, "de-Baathification continues. We support punishing those

is that he should leave his chair because he is the reason behind all that is happening in Iraq because he turned into a real dictator in this country He is a dictator without wisdom He should leave his position for somebody else and [we should] form a new government until we reach the election". Al Jazeera online, 28 December 2011.

¹⁴⁰ Although the arrest warrant was issued by a panel of judges, some have questioned whether the judicial authorities had adequate opportunity to review the files before taking this step. Crisis Group interview, Iraqi judge, Baghdad, 30 December 2011.

¹⁴¹ In a statement, Amnesty International called for Iraqi authorities to reveal the location of two detained female staff members who had been denied access to their families and legal representation. The statement read in part: "The circumstances of their arrest and their incommunicado detention when we know that torture is rife in Iraq can only raise the greatest fears for their safety". "Iraq must reveal whereabouts of Vice-President's detained aides", Amnesty International, 30 January 2012.

¹⁴² Although judicial authorities immediately denied that Amir Sarbut Zaidan al-Batawi's death was the result of torture and cited health reasons, Human Rights Watch called for an investigation: "His family told Human Rights Watch that his body displayed signs of torture, including in several sensitive areas. Photographs taken by the family and seen by the NGO show what appear to be a burn mark and wounds on various parts of his body". "Iraq: Investigate Death of VP's Bodyguard in Custody", Human Rights Watch, 23 March 2012.

¹⁴³ Hashimi has not had formal means to defend himself, as he has refused to surrender to the courts' jurisdiction in Baghdad. He has focused on how the authorities have abused the process, notably by airing televised confessions and denying detainees their constitutional rights. Crisis Group interview, Tareq al-Hashimi, Kurdish region, 21 March 2012. A principal problem with the Iraqi judicial system is that convictions routinely are based almost entirely on confessions.

who committed crimes, but to use this against ordinary people and politicians for political motives is unacceptable".¹⁴⁴ Today, however, the process of removing state officials continues apace. A former legislator alleged: "The government has three motives for the de-Baathification campaign: it is vindictive; it wants Sunnis to feel they have no one to protect them; and it wants to induce as many of them as it can to leave the country and never come back".¹⁴⁵ Iraqiya has been powerless in the face of this effort.¹⁴⁶ It has succeeded, with U.S. support, in immunising its own senior leadership only. Many of its supporters have come to see their nominal leaders, who have promised more than they delivered and failed to extract any significant concessions from the Maliki government, as incompetent and principally motivated by self-interest.

This perception has been compounded by successive arrest waves in Sunni-majority areas in 2011. On each occasion, forces dispatched from Baghdad in the middle of the night took persons from their homes, often detaining them without charge for months. Some were released but many others languish in prison. Residents in these areas, who mostly supported Iraqiya in the March 2010 elections, cite these events as stirring them to anger.¹⁴⁷ Although Iraqiya has pledged to address this issue, it has failed to place any restraint on security forces through its role in government.¹⁴⁸ Hashimi told Crisis Group in March 2012:

I hate to say it, but there is undeniably a sectarian dimension to these attacks and it is a message to people in certain areas. If the most senior politicians are not immune from attacks like this, how safe can the peo-

¹⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, Iyad Allawi, Baghdad, 28 September 2011. For example, the Justice and Accountability Commission excluded a large number of Sunni Arab candidates, including former members of the constitutional drafting committee, from contesting the 2010 elections. Some, including Saleh al-Mutlak, the current deputy prime minister, were reinstated following an outcry in Iraq and internationally.

¹⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 15 November 2011.

¹⁴⁶ Some progress was made on de-Baathification in May 2012, when a new commission was formed and its members appointed. Until that moment, and despite the fact that parliament passed a law calling for the establishment of a commission in January 2008, the old commission had remained intact, operating in a legal vacuum. Two of the new commission's seven members are from Iraqiya; its head is a Sadrist. Whether this positive change will improve the de-Baathification process remains an open question.

¹⁴⁷ Crisis Group interviews, local residents, Baghdad, Baquba and Tikrit, January to November 2011.

¹⁴⁸ According to a Salah al-Din tribal leader: "Everything that Iyad [Allawi] promised us turned out to be wrong. He hasn't done anything for us. It was all a lie. All he and his colleagues wanted was to get high positions in power. Iraqiya hasn't been able to stop de-Baathification. Maliki has proved to be the stronger party". Crisis Group interview, Tikrit, 3 November 2011.

ple in the street feel? It is a message that those in the government can get to anyone.¹⁴⁹

In October 2011, the higher education ministry subjected more than a hundred academics and staff of Tikrit University to de-Baathification in the same week that security forces arrested hundreds of former Baathists in Salah al-Din province. The Salah al-Din provincial council (which is dominated by Iraqiya) reacted by declaring it would turn the province into a federal region. While entering into talks with the council, the government blocked its initiative by preventing the Independent High Electoral Commission, which would have to supervise a referendum, from responding, thus once again exposing Iraqiya's weakness.¹⁵⁰

B. A BLEAK FUTURE?

Lacking a clear governance program, Iraqiya has prioritised security issues and combating de-Baathification within the government – when it is not consumed by its conflicted relationship with State of Law. Its officials spend significant time visiting prisons to prevent or report abuse, following up on individual detention cases to arrange legal representation, and using their political standing to counteract unfair dismissals and repressive actions by the security forces.¹⁵¹

However, Iraqiya's attempts to ensure due process have had little impact – arrests in Sunni-majority areas continue unabated, with detainees disappearing, often for weeks if not longer, in undeclared detention facilities. Also, while

these matters greatly concern Iraqiya's constituents, the latter remain deeply frustrated by deficiencies in service delivery.¹⁵² They see government officials, including those designated by Iraqiya, as ineffectual administrators, who not only have failed to root out corruption by introducing overdue reforms, but have themselves become part of the feeding frenzy on oil-fuelled government largesse.¹⁵³ Indeed, regardless of its actual role, Iraqiya's participation in government means it cannot escape being held accountable for its overall performance.

As a result, Iraqiya's popularity appears to have markedly declined over the past year.¹⁵⁴ Supporters and even activists feel abandoned by their leaders and ignored by elected representatives. In the words of a tribal leader in Diyala:

Our tribe is impoverished. Many of our people live in areas that don't have access to clean drinking water. We have around 7,000 votes to offer. We supported the same candidates in the 2009 provincial and 2010 national elections, and they won both times. In 2010, the Iraqiya candidate we endorsed had the highest vote in our province. We have learned not to expect anything from these people, however, or from the government generally. Since the elections, one of the candidates we supported arranged for a few roads to be paved in our area. That's all we have seen from them. It's true that our candidates haven't had much of an opportunity to do anything, but even with time, they will do nothing, because they lack real power. Power lies elsewhere, not with Iraqiya. Furthermore, our candidates are not

¹⁴⁹ Crisis Group telephone interview, Tareq al-Hashimi from the Kurdish region, 22 March 2012.

¹⁵⁰ An Iraqiya supporter and Tikrit University academic said: "We are expecting the worst. The prime minister has launched a vindictive campaign against Tikrit University and against society. We don't expect anything from Iraqiya. Their popularity is very low now, close to zero. They may try to use arrests and de-Baathification to increase their popularity, but the government will see through it and prevent them from achieving anything, specifically to prevent them from getting credit in the street". Crisis Group interview, Tikrit, 4 November 2011.

¹⁵¹ According to a member of Diyala's provincial council (Iraqiya): "Our main priority in Diyala is security. It is what concerns citizens the most. If we can make progress on security, our constituents will be satisfied. Services like electricity are of secondary concern to them. We believe that our reputation and success in future elections will depend entirely on our performance on security. A large number of arrests have taken place in recent weeks and security has deteriorated. We've tried to follow up on individual cases of arrest, but we cannot always obtain judicial permits to access prisons, because our influence is limited. So what we do is apply pressure on the courts and other authorities to give us information on the status of such cases". Crisis Group interview, Souhad Ismaeel Abdel-Rahim Al-Heeali, Baquba, 13 February 2011.

¹⁵² Crisis Group interviews, Iraqiya supporters, Tikrit, Baquba and Baghdad, January to December 2011. According to a senior official in Diyala's provincial government, who is an Iraqiya supporter, "all Iraqiya thinks about is security, but they are taking things from the wrong angle. Security doesn't derive only from hiring new police officers and soldiers. They used to complain of the militarisation of society under Saddam Hussein, but now we have more soldiers and police officers than ever. Security comes from providing people with employment, electricity and other basic services. By ignoring these areas, they are providing fertile ground for terrorism and continued problems with security". Crisis Group interview, Baquba, 13 March 2011.

¹⁵³ One such official was Raad Shallal, a former electricity minister designated by Iraqiya to serve in the second Maliki government in late 2010 but dismissed in August 2011 for entering into large contracts with foreign companies that did not have the capacity to deliver. A former communist who supported Iraqiya in March 2010 said: "We were hopeful about Iraqiya's performance because Allawi is secular. But the candidates on their [provincial] lists were the worst possible. Many were corrupt; they bought their positions at the top of the lists just to be sure they would be elected". Crisis Group interview, Tikrit, 20 June 2011.

¹⁵⁴ This assessment is based on scores of Crisis Group interviews in Iraq in 2011.

particularly interested in serving the people. The moment they were elected, they changed their cell phone numbers without telling us. Of all the candidates I supported, I have been able to maintain a relationship with only one, and even this may change. If our people continue to fail to deliver, we won't support them again. To be honest, though, I don't know who else we would support. There aren't any realistic alternatives.¹⁵⁵

Iraqiya's supporters also resented the manner in which their elected representatives rushed to fill government positions without being sure what these entailed or ensuring they were qualified to fill them.¹⁵⁶

Although Iraqiya's leaders and members appear aware that their poor performance has affected their standing among supporters, they have failed to come up with a strategy to reverse a trend that could lead to their irreversible decline.¹⁵⁷ For this to happen now, at a time when concern is growing about the prime minister's illiberal autocratic tendencies and State of Law's apparent power grab, would be particularly unfortunate. For it would leave those in positions of authority without an effective and credible counterweight at a critical time in the country's history.

¹⁵⁵ Crisis Group interview, Baquba, 15 February 2011.

¹⁵⁶ A senior official in Diyala's provincial government described Iraqiya members' rush to fill positions: "There is no difference between Iraqiya and the Islamic Party. They're all the same. All they care about is their positions. Have you ever heard of a government with 42 ministries? The president's office is full of protocol officers who have nothing to do beyond collecting their salaries. They have appointed their brothers, sisters, cousins and friends to various positions rather than relying on competent people". Crisis Group interview, Baquba, 16 June 2011. An adviser to Salah al-Din's provincial council stated: "Some of Iraqiya's parliamentarians are interested only in pursuing their personal interests. The trust they received from the people is dwindling". Crisis Group interview, Tikrit, 14 February 2011. A former legislator from the Kurdistan Islamic Union noted that many of Iraqiya's senior leaders abandoned their campaign positions as soon as they were elected: "Iraqiya betrayed the trust it received from the people by focusing on positions and setting aside all the projects they had promised during the elections they would pursue". Crisis Group interview, Erbil, 26 October 2011.

¹⁵⁷ According to Saleh al-Mutlak: "They may not be so happy with us in Iraqiya, but they are unhappy with all of us politicians – not because they think we are bad people, but because we failed to make good on our promises". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 31 July 2011.

V. CONCLUSION

Iraqiya is at a crossroads. It has been badly bruised by State of Law's continuous campaign to undermine it as the country's only cross-sectarian political alliance. It also has suffered from its own ill-conceived strategies: by single-mindedly aiming to take over the prime minister's position, it united the Shiite Islamist parties and encouraged Maliki to set his sights squarely on Iraqiya; by agreeing to join the government without seriously pursuing any significant concessions in return, it forfeited all its bargaining chips; and by deciding to boycott both the government and parliament, it laid bare internal fault lines while failing to prevent Maliki from further consolidating power in his hands. Iraqiya provincial council members' threat to form federal regions – spontaneous and poorly thought-through as it was – forced Maliki to negotiate a solution to several local concerns. Yet in so doing Iraqiya risked alienating itself from a significant part of its own constituency which does not necessarily support a weakening of ties with Baghdad.

- Today, Iraqiya remains a strong but diminished political force. Its current situation is eerily similar to Tawafuq's in 2006-2007. It is part of the government without having any clout to influence governance or the actions of security forces. In that sense, Iraqiya dashed its supporters' hopes and is thus exposing itself to a significant challenge in future elections. For the moment, it does not appear to have any serious rivals within the Sunni community, particularly since it absorbed the remaining elements of the Iraqi Islamic Party, but this easily could change with time. Iraqiya's continued decline as a broad-based and powerful parliamentary bloc would have serious consequences if no one else were to step forward to represent secular Iraqis. Most importantly, it would remove the main opposition to Maliki's power grab, facilitating the state's evolution into yet another autocracy. It would also lead to increased marginalisation of Sunnis, who would have seen both of their main representatives since 2003 fail to satisfy their interests and aspirations.
- If Iraqiya is to better represent its constituents' interests and play a role in preventing Maliki from monopolising power, it will have to reconsider its current path and formulate a new strategy. It could work toward an improved and more democratic internal decision-making process; engage in a deliberate debate with its constituents about their expectations and whether they consider that Iraqiya has contributed to meeting those; review the performance of its individual ministers and senior leaders; develop and publish a strategy document reviewing developments since March 2010, including its own performance, with recommendations on how it could improve; resolve differences with other political alliances, including State of Law, the National Alliance

and the Kurdistan Alliance, with a view to improving the state's performance; and negotiate a countrywide political compromise with its counterparts, in which it would offer to abandon efforts to establish federal regions in exchange for a more equitable security and human rights policy and more meaningful decentralisation.

Political alliances rise and fall in the majority of pluralist states and this natural evolution is not something that habitually is cause for concern. However, the decline in Iraqiya's fortunes comes at a particularly critical time. The prime minister continues to silence critics and seize control of key institutions while the memories of Baathist one-party rule are still fresh. In addition, the 2005-2008 sectarian conflict has forced Iraqis to live uneasily in fear of resumed violence; a growing civil war in neighbouring Syria has only accentuated this trend. Iraq's ability to navigate these troubled waters will depend in large part on Iraqiya's ability to improve its own performance and act as an effective counterweight to the prime minister's party in parliament and government.

Baghdad/Brussels, 31 July 2012

APPENDIX A

MAP OF IRAQ



APPENDIX B

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Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

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