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ABOUT INTEGRITY UK

Integrity UK is an organisation committed to preventing extremism through innovative approaches to promoting integration, cohesion and social reconciliation within the MENA region and the UK.

IRAQ INTELLIGENCE REPORT

23rd - 25th June 2018

On Saturday, the head of the *Nasr Coalition* Haider al-Abadi and the head of the *Sa'iroun Alliance* Muqtada al-Sadr announced an agreement between their two blocs. Speaking from the city of Najaf, Abadi and Sadr, whose blocs came third and first in the recent Iraqi elections, said that this new agreement “transcends sectarianism”. While a manual recount of votes is yet to begin, it is unlikely that the results will alter dramatically. This agreement makes Abadi’s inclusion in the new government more likely and brings its formation closer once the final results are ratified by the Supreme Court. In the two leaders’ statement, an eight-point memorandum of understanding was agreed upon that included: forming a government that moves beyond sectarianism; combatting corruption; forming a technocratic system; supporting and strengthening the Iraqi Security Forces and centralising state control over weapons; instigating a reform plan; ensuring balanced relations with Iraq’s neighbours and non-interference in foreign issues; supporting reform of the judicial system; and, preserving the unity of Iraq. In a subsequent statement on Sunday, Sadr’s spokesman Jaafar al-Mousawi said that the arrangement between the two sides builds upon other alliances formed between *Sa'iroun* and other political blocs.

This announcement raises concerns for Nouri al-Maliki and his *State of Law Coalition*, which has thus far only held informal discussions with Sadr. With Abadi and Sadr’s agreement, in conjunction with the other agreements made with *The Hikma Movement*, *The Wataniya Coalition*, and *The Fateh Coalition*, this leaves the bloc with enough seats to form a majority government. Despite this, a statement released by the *State of Law Coalition* on Monday called for a “national program” that includes the participation of “all political powers that are in harmony with a majority program [...] which contributes towards building the state”. While these words remain positive in building an all-encompassing government, they may be viewed as overtures towards Sadr (and other factions) that have called for an inclusive government. In recent weeks since the elections, Maliki has also held talks with the major Kurdish parties in an attempt to form an alliance that can enter government.

On Sunday, Iraq’s Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) said that they would limit the manual recount of votes to districts where violations were reported after the Supreme Court ruling last Thursday. While the ruling ratified parliament’s decision to manually recount all votes cast, the IHEC has interpreted this as only polling centres where complaints were recorded in Iraq and abroad. According to the IHEC, this decision was taken “to preserve the votes which occurred without violation” and comes amidst calls to speed up the recount process. Given that parliament’s term ends at the end of June, fears have been growing that there would be a long constitutional vacuum if all votes were recounted as this process would take months to complete. The IHEC added that the recount would be held in coordination with the UN and at a date that will be announced “at a later date”. In response to the likely constitutional vacuum, the *Nasr Coalition* said that this issue was “a constitutional dispute,” adding that it was not unprecedented given that parliament was extended for nine months in 2010 “without parliamentary cover”.

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The Commander of the US CENTCOM, General Joseph Votel, and the Consul General to Erbil, Ken Gross, met with the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Nechirvan Barzani, on Sunday in Erbil to discuss the KRG's role in the next government. In the meeting, Votel and Gross emphasised the importance of coordination among all military factions in Iraq and the KRG to ensure that the IS does not re-emerge in the region. In a post-meeting statement, the KRG added that the US would continue military support to the Kurdistan Region, with the statement hoping that the support would continue into the next financial year.

The High Independent Electoral Commission in the Kurdistan Region said on Monday that the period to register coalitions has been extended again for a further two days. The registration period had opened last Monday (18.06) for three days. However, it was extended last Thursday (21.06) for a further four days before being extended today (25.06) for a further two days. Leaders of *The Coalition for Democracy and Justice*, *the Islamic League (Komal)*, *the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU)*, and *the Change Movement (Gorran)* have all attempted to form a joint bloc after holding talks in Sulaymaniyah over the past week. These four parties all opposed the results of Iraq's recent parliamentary elections, citing numerous incidents of voter intimidation and fraud. With time running out to register a coalition, however, it appears that these negotiations may have reached an impasse, with some sources reporting that *Gorran* is impeding the formation of the new alliance as they believe it may not be in their interest to align with smaller parties.

The Deputy Commander of the Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) Abu Mehdi al-Muhandis said that the PMU would not remain silent on the airstrike on pro-Syrian Government forces in eastern Deir ez-Zour on the border with Iraq last week. The airstrike, which Muhandis believes was carried out by the US, resulted in the death of 22 PMU fighters, as well as members of the Syrian Army and Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards (IRGC). In his statement, Muhandis said that an investigatory committee has been formed to examine the remnants of the missile to determine its origin and called on the Iraqi Government to "take a stance for their fallen sons and martyrs".

In a worrying development, the Islamic State (IS) released a video saying that the group will execute six members of the Iraqi Security Forces that were kidnapped last week unless female IS prisoners (some of whom thought to be related to the militants) are released from prison. In the video, which was reported on Saturday, the IS militants said that they would give the Iraqi Government three days to release the women. While videos demanding an exchange or release of prisoners are not unprecedented, they are more uncommon, with the IS favouring to simply execute their prisoners. In response to this video, relatives of the captured men called on the government on Sunday to do more to secure their release, criticising their "silence" on the matter. On Monday afternoon, however, Counter Terrorism Forces reportedly stormed a number of villages in Kirkuk Province, searching for the six detainees, and arrested IS militants allegedly linked to the kidnapping.

On Saturday, the Iraqi Air Force (IAF) launched an airstrike on the town of Hajin, which is located in eastern Syria. According to the IAF, 45 militants were killed including a number of high-profile figures. Among these were reportedly the cousin of the group's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, a "deputy war minister" and a "media emir".

The IAF also bombed Islamic State (IS) positions in Hawija district on Sunday, which resulted in the killing of six militants.