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## SADR'S RESIGNATION MOVE AND ITS AFTERMATH

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# SADR'S RESIGNATION MOVE AND ITS AFTERMATH

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## INTRODUCTION

**A**fter the 2018 Parliamentary Elections in Iraq, there were efforts to form a majority government for the first time, in which all parties who have seats in the parliament were not represented. After the elections, it was supposed to determine the largest parliamentary bloc in accordance with the number of deputies. Yet, as the deputies left their parties, it was not decided which bloc was the largest. Therefore, the two largest blocs, Sairun (the Sadr Movement) and Fatah, were not officially declared as the largest blocs, and Adel Abdulmahdi was picked as Prime Minister after the two blocs agreed. However, due to the anti-government demonstrations that started in October 2019, Abdul Mahdi's government became the first cabinet in the Iraqi political system after 2003 that

could not fulfill its term and had to resign. In this context, the efforts by Muhammed Taufiq al-Allawi and Adnan al-Dhurfi to form a government failed in the Prime Ministry crisis in the country. Afterwards, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, Head of the Iraqi Intelligence Service, formed the government with the promise of early elections, and accordingly, early parliamentary elections were held in Iraq on October 10, 2021, with a turnout rate of approximately 41 percent.<sup>1</sup> More than two months after the elections, the Iraqi Federal Supreme Court approved the election results, and the results were finally announced.<sup>2</sup>

According to the election results, the Sadr Movement had 73 deputies and the Fatah Coalition, which claimed to have formed the largest bloc after the 2018 elections, remained in

<sup>1</sup> "Turnout in Iraq's election reached 41% - electoral commission", Reuters, 11 October 2021 (Access: 12 June 2022).

<sup>2</sup> "Iraq's Supreme Court ratifies October election results, Aljazeera, 27 December 2021 (Access: 12 June 2022).



17 seats.<sup>3</sup> In this context, the Sadr Movement, as the largest political group has declared that it has established the "Save the Homeland" Bloc, which includes the Taqaddum (Progress) Coalition of Sunnis led by Mohammed al-Halbousi, the Sovereignty Bloc of the Azeem Coalition led by Khamis Khanjar, and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).<sup>4</sup> However, since the number of deputies who won the election through these parties remained at 155, it remained insufficient for Presidential elections that would initiate the establishment of the government. On the other hand, the Shiite Coordination Framework, led by the State of Law Coalition of former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and the Fatah Coalition led by Hadi al-Amiri, the leader of the Badr Organization, which emerged in opposition against the Save the Homeland Bloc, had at least 70 deputies. The parliamentary balance that emerged as a result of this situation did not enable the Save the Homeland bloc to form a government. On the other hand, Muqtada al-Sadr announced that he would go to the opposition after his failure to form a government and gave 40

days to the Shiite Coordination Framework to form a government, covering parts of April and May<sup>5</sup>. However, the arithmetic in the Iraqi Parliament, which did not allow the Save the Homeland bloc to form the government, did not enable the Shiite Coordination Framework to form the government in Iraq.

During this period, it was not possible to form a government for eight months due to al-Sadr's resistance against a majority government and the Shiite Coordination Framework's desire to be represented in the government with all its elements. although it has been about eight months since the elections. For this reason, the al-Kadhimi government continues its duty in its temporary capacity only to carry on day-to-day affairs. At this point, some vital developments, such as the 2022 budget, which will become effective with the increase in prices after the budget, whose effect has decreased due to the need for reconstruction and low oil prices after the terrorist organization ISIS, have been sacrificed to political problems.

<sup>3</sup> "Iraq announces full results of parliamentary elections, Anadolu Ajansi, 17 October 2021 (Access: 12 June 2022).

<sup>4</sup> "The Triple Alliance intends to announce the "Save a Homeland" bloc, Search4Dinar, 15 March 2022 (Access: 2022)

<sup>5</sup> "In surprise move, Iraqi cleric steps back for 40 days to let rivals form government", The Arab Weekly, 1 April 2022 (Access: 12 June 2022).

## SADR'S ATTEMPT TO SOLVE THE CRISIS: A CALL TO IRAQIS



After the failure to form a government due to political stalemate, Hasan al-Athari, head of the Sadr Movement's Iraqi parliamentary group, announced on June 9, 2022, that Muqtada al-Sadr would make a statement on television on the same day. In the statement, Sadr gave different messages to various groups in addition to calling on the deputies affiliated with the movement to resign. At this point, al-Sadr defined himself as the 'child of Hannana' and refers to the murder of his father, Muhammed Sadeq al-Sadr, a Shiite religious authority, together with his two sons in the Hannana district of Najaf due to his stance towards the Baath Party regime led by Saddam Hussein. On the other hand, al-Sadr utilizes harsh rhetoric against other political formations by making use of his family's "Iraqi" character. Al-Sadr continued in his statement, "Power and politics have never been a target for me. My only goal is to make reforms and expose those involved in corruption" and distinguish between the structures that have been at the center of politics since 2003 and himself.

In addition, al-Sadr referred to the "neither East nor West" discourse he used after the elections, consistent with the previous part of his statement, and stated that he came under attack for this reason. That is because Sadr's slogan of "neither East nor West" was one of the slogans used in the Iranian Islamic Revolution, the Pahlavi dynasty was accused of representing "Western interests rather than Iranian interests" during the revolution process, and it was argued that the new regime would bring innovations such as "sharing the underground resources with the people". From this point of view, the adoption of the aforementioned slogan by al-Sadr is both a reaction against Iraqi Shiite actors who stayed in Iran during the opposition period and against actors in the current political spectrum who are criticized for representing the interests of foreign actors rather than Iraqi interests. In other words, al-Sadr rejects the influence of countries such as the USA and Iran, which are influential in the government formation process through their proxies, and continues to emphasize the "Iraqiness" that emerged in the

In addition, al-Sadr brings up the distinction between majority government and national unity government as the reason why the government could not be formed, regarding the failure of the Shiite Coordination Framework to form the government.

2018 parliamentary elections, and appeals to the people who feel excluded.

In addition to that, al-Sadr feels the need to explain his motivation for re-entering the election race after he announced that he would not participate before the 2021 elections. Although al-Sadr does not give detailed information on the subject in his statement, he gives clues about the pre-election negotiations. At this point, one could argue that al-Sadr emphasized that an agreement was reached with the parties to form a majority government before the elections, but that this commitment was not fulfilled after the elections.

In addition, al-Sadr brings up the distinction between majority government and national unity government as the reason why the government could not be formed, regarding the failure of the Shiite Coordination Framework to form the government. Al-Sadr blames the national unity governments for corruption and mismanagement in the country. All governments established after 2003 have been governments of national unity in which all groups in the parliament are represented at different levels, and after the 2018 elections, figures like Ammar al-Hakim withdrew their support from the government and announced that they would remain

in the opposition, and a 'transitional period' began. The Fatah Coalition and its allies, whose number of seats dropped in the 2021 elections, aim to remain in the government in order to protect the material power they have obtained and to acquire protection for their past activities. From this point of view, al-Sadr's "unwillingness to take a step back" caused a tension that affected the whole of Iraq, and he states that he represents Iraq's interests in this division.

Al-Sadr used the phrase "Iraq needs an absolute government today, not an incapable government," about the governments of national unity after 2003 and the governments of reconciliation after 2018. Al-Sadr criticizes previous governments and their characters, assigning responsibility for the failure to make reforms and improve the country's situation. He explains that there is a need for a "real government" in Iraq, especially by stating that the governments established after 2018 act as a "balance element" between the disintegrating parties and, therefore, in a way that meets the demands of political actors rather than taking long-term decisions. From this point of view, it can be said that in the message he gave to the Iraqi people, Al-Sadr accused many groups and put forward a new initiative to solve the political deadlock.



## THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESIGNATION



Muqtada al-Sadr had a meeting with Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi in January 2022.

The rumors circulating in the Iraqi public debate that the deputies of the Sadr Movement would resign were viewed as an element of leverage on other blocs in the government crisis. However, the deputies prepared their resignation letters after al-Sadr's statements and submitted them to the Chair of the Iraqi House of Representatives, and the resignations were approved. It is likely that resignations took place when al-Sadr could not bring rival political groups closer to his position by making use of the rumors.

In addition to that, it is also important that the resignation announcement came after the 'Emergency Food Security' bill was approved in the session attended by approximately 270 deputies<sup>6</sup>. The bill supported by the Sadr Movement also received support from the Shiite Coordination Framework and came into force. After the bill is approved by the parliament, the government is given the

authority to spend approximately 17.5 billion US dollars<sup>7</sup>. At this point, it should be remembered that the mentioned figure corresponds to 25 percent of Iraq's reserves, which were announced as approximately 70 billion US dollars in April. This bill authorizes the Iraqi government to make spending outside of the 2021 fiscal year budget, which it uses as a temporary budget. On the other hand, under the bill, which will be in effect until the fiscal year 2022 budget is approved by the parliament, 15 thousand people working on a temporary status will be appointed as permanent staff. At this point, the fact that the KRG is not among the provinces that will receive appointed staff may cause a new tension between the Sadr Movement and the KDP within the Save the Homeland bloc. In addition, the bill also authorizes the government to supply food products, to distribute food ration cards, to pay salaries, and to provide fuel and energy. At this stage, despite the Shiite Coordination's initial

<sup>6</sup> "Iraq's parliament passes emergency food bill", Reuters, 8 June 2022 (Access: 12 June 2022).

<sup>7</sup> "Iraq's parliament passes emergency food bill", Alarabiya News, 8 June 2022 (Access: 12 June 2022).

In addition to that, it is also important that the resignation announcement came after the 'Emergency Food Security' bill was approved in the session attended by approximately 270 deputies.

opposition to the draft law, approximately 270 deputies participated in the session and voted in favor. From this point of view, it is likely that an agreement has been reached between the Save the Homeland Bloc and the Shiite Coordination Framework. It is also possible that the central political actors sought to garner social support from the funds that this bill enabled them to spend. On the other hand, although al-Sadr was likely to abandon the majority government in exchange for support for the draft bill, his statements made on the same day eliminated this possibility. In addition, Jamal Kocher, deputy of the Kurdistan Islamic Union Party (Yekgirtu) in the Iraqi Parliament, said that one third of the amount would be sufficient for the spending needs and that it would not be possible to control the budget to be used due to the temporary status of the government.

In this context, it is also likely that the Sadr Movement aims to garner public support in possible elections through the "Immediate Support to Food Safety" bill. It shows the Sadr Movement's aim to obtain more seats in a possible early election by using instruments such as food supply, rentier policy tools, and creating an image of a 'person working in favor of Iraq'. On the other hand, al-Sadr also aims to strengthen his 'man of the people' image by both supporting

the bill and withdrawing from the political process.

As will be explained below, if the Sadr Movement does not withdraw from the parliament and believes that the Shiite Coordination Framework cannot form the government, it will agree to remain in the opposition outside the parliament. That is because, in this case, al-Sadr may expect early elections by blaming the Shiite Coordination Framework for failing to form a government. In this scenario, it is more probable for the Sadr Movement to emerge as a 'savior' figure. On the other hand, with his live statement, al-Sadr aims to gain support with an agenda-setting approach when the Shiite Coordination Framework cannot form the government.

In addition, the bill will enable the political groups in power to prolong the period without government with rentier activities and to gain time for the disintegration of the 'opposition' bloc. In addition, the bill prevents resignation by Prime Minister al-Kadhimi due to the budget it provides and enables him to continue in his interim post as Prime Minister. While al-Kadhimi wants to be prime minister for a second term, he can continue as a "consensus candidate" with the support of the people and political groups despite the fact that he does not belong to one. In this respect, it is likely that al-

Kadhimi will adapt to al-Sadr's political maneuvers.

Finally, al-Sadr's statement aims to create a new impetus for the disintegration of the "other" bloc and the establishment of a majority government under the leadership of Sadr. However, if the Sadr Movement deputies resign, a new fragile situation will emerge in the Iraqi political equation since new candidates will be sworn in as deputies in the relevant constituencies. In order for the parliament to dissolve itself, it needs to get votes from outside the Save the Homeland bloc. Article 64 of the Iraqi constitution, which regulates the dissolution of the parliament, does not require the prime minister and the president to receive an absolute majority from the general assembly of the parliament with a consensus of one-third to initiate the dissolution process<sup>8</sup>. In the case of dissolution, it is

stipulated in the Constitution for the president to lead the country to a new election within sixty days after the dissolution. Despite these possibilities and considering the social support of the movement, the withdrawal of the Sadr Movement from politics may lead to a possible intra-Shiite conflict.

In this context, the statements of Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani as a decisive personality and the largest Shiite religious authority in Iraq are important. Because a possible message by Sistani to 'unite', 'repeat elections' or 'the parliament should dissolve itself' may cause the actors to change their positions. In a period when a similar situation emerged after the October 2019 demonstrations, Sistani played an important role in overcoming the crisis by managing the political process with his statements.

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<sup>8</sup> Iraq's Constitution of 2005

1. The Council of Representatives may be dissolved by an absolute majority of the number of its members, or upon the request of one-third of its members by the Prime Minister with the consent of the President of the Republic. The Council shall not be dissolved during the period in which the Prime Minister is being questioned.
2. Upon the dissolution of the Council of Representatives, the President of the Republic shall call for general elections in the country within a period not to exceed sixty days from the date of its dissolution. The Council of Ministers in this case is deemed resigned and continues to run everyday business.



## TRANSITION INTO A CO-CHAIRMANSHIP SYSTEM: COMPETITION BETWEEN BAFEL AND LAHUR



After the deputies of the Sadr Movement resigned, Iraq's parliamentary arithmetic changed. For replacing the resigned deputy, other candidates in the relevant constituency who received the most votes are invited to the parliament and take their oath. Nevertheless, the presence of a women's quota ruled by the Election Law for ensuring women's representation is likely to trigger some discussions. Some women's quotas were transferred between constituencies when female candidates received higher votes among general candidates in the same constituency. In this context, the situation of the deputies who took the oath after the elections due to the women's quotas' relocation to their original regions will also be discussed.

Despite these problems, three of the 73 seats of the Sadr Movement go back to the other candidates of the Sadr Movement when the candidates who ran second in the electoral district of the resigned deputies are shifted. Considering that these names will resign due to a Bloc decision, it is expected that the distribution of the new deputies to take office will be as shown below.

Groups that increase in number	Increase
Fatah Alliance	11
Alliance of National State Forces	9
Emtidat Movement	7
State of Law Coalition	7
Rights Movement	5
National Contract Alliance	3
Tasmeem Coalition	3
Al Furatain Party	2
Wafa Movement	2
Qadimun	2
Taqaddum Coalition	2
National Approach Alliance	2
Muhafzun	1
Fav Zaho	1
Iraq National Movement	1
Ishraq Qanoon	1
Munkizun	1
Nur Movement	1
Wasit Independents Bloc	1
Independent	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>



The high number of seats won by the Sadr Movement after the elections stemmed from the electoral districts of the southern provinces, where the Shiites in the country mostly live.

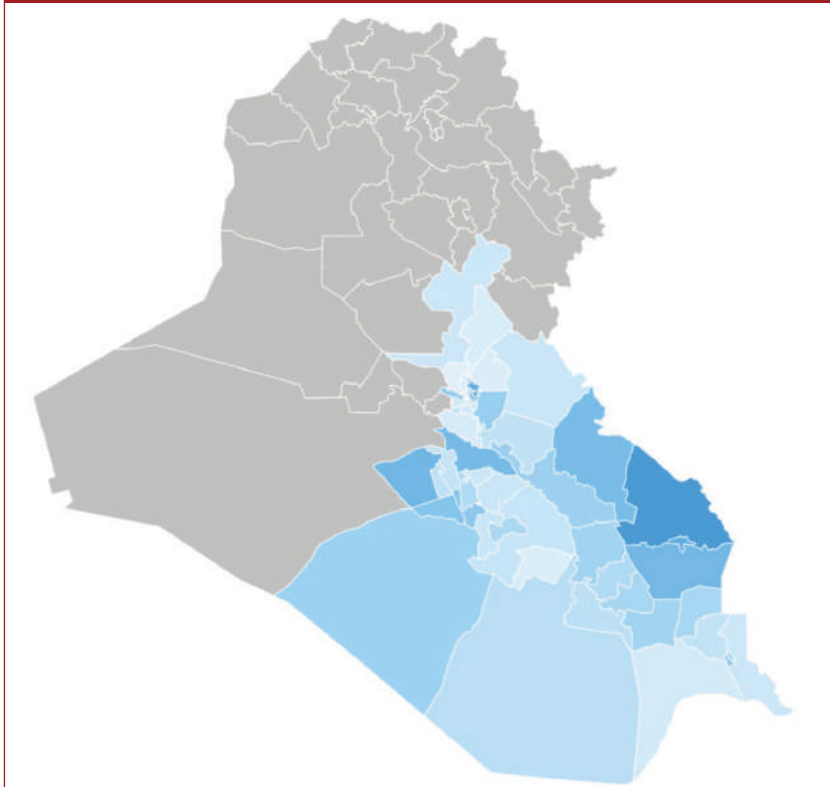
The high number of seats won by the Sadr Movement after the elections stemmed from the electoral districts of the southern provinces, where the Shiites in the country mostly live. For this reason, in the new parliamentary arithmetic formed after the resignation decision, Sunni and protester candidates have the right to represent in the electoral districts where different groups live, but most of the seats are transferred to other Shiite political formations.

Below is the weight map of the seats obtained by the Sa-

dr Movement according to the constituencies. Dark tones were applied according to the Sadr Movement candidates who won in the constituencies.

After the Sadr Movement Deputies' resignation, the Fatah Coalition was the most successful political group that increased its number of deputies with an extra 11 seats. In addition, the Alliance of National State Forces, led by Haider al-Abadi and Ammar al-Hakim, has gained 9 more seats in addition to the 4 seats it won in the elections. At this point, the Alliance of Nation-

Below is the weight map of the seats obtained by the Sadr Movement according to the constituencies.



Dark tones were applied according to the Sadr Movement candidates who won in the constituencies.

Political Group	Number of Seats
State of Law Coalition	40
Taqaddum Coalition	39
Kurdistan Democratic Party	31
Fatah Coalition	28
Kurdistan Coalition	17
Emtidat Movement	16
Azeem Movement	14
Alliance of National State Forces	13
New Generation Movement	9
Tasmeem Coalition	8
Ishraq Qanoon	7
National Contract	7
Rights Movement	6
Other 26 groups	40
Independents	54
<b>Total</b>	<b>329</b>

al State Forces, which could not demonstrate the expected success in the election, has increased its weight in the new parliamentary arithmetic. On the other hand, the State

of Law Coalition and the Emtidat Movement gained seven more seats each. This situation may cause an increase in protest activity in the parliament, as well as cause the State of Law Coalition to become the largest political group with the balance that changed after the elections.

The new balance that has emerged in Parliament will push the political formations to re-determine their positions, even if it will not enable the Shiite Coordination Framework to form the government in the current situation. In this context, the participation of the KDP along with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, which already acts within the Shiite Coordination Framework, will be decisive in the presidential elections. However, in this case, the two Kurdish parties will have to reach a consensus on the candidate. On the other hand, it can be expected that there will be divergences between the Taqaddum Coalition and the Azeem Movement, which have taken positions together under the name of the Sovereignty Bloc. Such a disintegration will put the Shiite Coordination Framework in a more advantageous position in the presidential election.



## SCENARIOS AHEAD OF IRAQ



The demonstrations that started in October 2019 have left their influence on political life in Iraq.

The presidential and government crisis that has been going on for about eight months in Iraq culminated in the resignation of 73 deputies affiliated with the movement and 2 independent deputies following the statements of Muqtada al-Sadr, who won the most seats in the 2021 parliamentary elections. The President of the Iraqi House of Representatives (Parliament), Mohammed al-Halbousi, also announced that he accepted the resignations. Thus, the process of forming a government entered a new phase. After the resignation of the Sadr Movement deputies, the possible position of the KDP and the Sunni Sovereignty Bloc, with which al-Sadr formed the Save the Homeland Bloc, gained importance. In this regard, Masoud Barzani, leader of the KDP, stated on his social media account, "We respect Sadr's decision and will follow the process."<sup>9</sup> From this point of view, it is clear that Barzani has not determined a clear position

but will act according to the positions of both Sadr and other actors. On the other hand, al-Halbousi paid a visit to Jordan right after the resignation. Al-Halbousi stated that "The resignation definitely had a political impact. The Sadr Movement is the bloc that won the highest seat with 73 seats in the elections. The Sadr bloc has its supporters and opponents, and it was clearly seen in these elections. As political forces, we will be in contact with the Sadr Movement."<sup>10</sup> From this point of view, it is possible to say that al-Halbousi, like Barzani, did not adopt a clear position.

On the other hand, the position of the Shi'ite Coordination Framework, which is in competition with the Sadr Movement and the Save the Homeland bloc over both the form of government and the presidential candidate and adopts a different stance from al-Sadr in forming a government, is also important for the political future of Iraq. In the statement

<sup>9</sup> "Başkan Barzani'den Mukteda es-Sadr'ın kararına ilişkin açıklama", Rudaw, 13 June 2022 (Access: 14 June 2022).

<sup>10</sup> "Irak Meclis Başkanı Halbousi: Sadr Hareketi ile temas halinde olacağız", Asharq Alawsat, 13 June 2022 (Access: 14 June 2022).

**In addition, it can be said that Sadr's desire to use the power he obtained in the parliament alone on behalf of the Shiites made it difficult for him to ally with other Shiite groups.**

made by the Shiite Coordination Framework after the resignations, it is remarked that "We respectfully welcome the resignation decisions taken. We will establish a dialogue with all parties, complete the constitutional principles and form the government. We will work to establish a national government."<sup>11</sup> At this point, the Shiite Coordination Framework has signaled that it will take part in the government formation process despite the resignations. That is because, the Shiite Coordination Framework will have a more advantageous position compared to the pre-resignation parliamentary arithmetic with the new deputies taking office after the resignations.

At this point, the Shiite Coordination Framework will emerge as the leading actor in the government formation process, with the Sadr Movement withdrawing from the political process in Parliament. Yet, in the previous period, Muqtada al-Sadr twice withdrew from the political process and opened space for the Shiite Coordination Framework to form a government, but the Shiite Coordination Framework failed. However, the new parliamentary arithmetic remains ambiguous due to the uncertainty of both the Shiite Coordination Framework and the actors who

will take a position against the bloc.

The biggest debate between the Sadr Movement and the Shiite Coordination Framework was about the method of government formation. While al-Sadr wanted a majority government, the Shiite Coordination Framework took a stand for a national unity government with the representation of all the groups in parliament, as in previous governments. The debate on the form of government within the framework of the new arithmetic is likely to continue, and on the other hand, it creates a dynamic that can drag Iraqi politics into the middle of new crises.

At this point, the Sadr Movement does not want to be in alliance with Nouri al-Maliki, the leader of the State of Law Coalition, which is in the Shiite Coordination Framework. It is also known that he had problems with Qais al-Hazali, who was a member of the Sadr Movement but left the group due to later disagreements and founded the Asaib Ahl al-Haqq group. In addition, it can be said that Sadr's desire to use the power he obtained in the parliament alone on behalf of the Shiites made it difficult for him to ally with other Shiite groups. As a matter of fact, Muqtada al-Sadr was determined to either form a na-

<sup>11</sup> "Koordinasyon Çerçevesi'nden Sadr'ın çekilmesine ilişkin açıklama", Türkmen Basın Ajansı (TEBA), 13 June 2022 (Access: 14 June 2022).



tional majority government or remain in opposition during the 8-month period after the election and did not want to form an alliance with the Shiite Coordination Framework. It would not be wrong to state that Sadr, who grew in power in the 2021 elections as well as the 2018 elections, initiated a leadership struggle among Shiite groups. Therefore, the Shiite position in Iraq was maintained and tensions emerged in Shiite domestic politics among Iraqi Shiites.

Seeking to capitalize on the support he received from the social and political base for this leadership struggle, Sadr tried to show with the resignation move that a government could never be formed without him. At this point, the emphasis on Najaf in al-Sadr's last statement and his use of the phrase "I am a child of Hannana" are noteworthy. In addition, when al-Sadr met with the resigned deputies in Hannana<sup>12</sup> after the resignations, it is implied that he aimed to maintain his social support through his identity, despite withdrawing from parliamentary politics. It is important that Sadr remarked at this meeting that "there is no step back" from his resignation and that he will withdraw from the political process<sup>13</sup>. From this point of view, one could ar-

gue that al-Sadr will not be directly involved in the constitutional political mechanism that will continue in the parliament. However, despite this, he is expected to maintain his dominant role in politics due to his social support base.

In addition, one could argue that al-Sadr tried to imply that he had the covert support of Najaf. Muqtada al-Sadr makes a religious reference to Hannana, where his father Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr fought against Saddam Hussein as a religious authority and his two brothers were killed in 1999, and reveals his political perspective. As a matter of fact, the silence of the Shiite religious authorities in the conflict is important in terms of understanding that it does not oppose Sadr even if it does not support it. However, the statement, "The religious authority is following the developments and has warned about many issues related to the country", which was later attributed to al-Sistani, shows that al-Sistani refrains from a clear political position. In other words, he does not reject any political position from the beginning. Because although the biggest Shiite religious authority in Iraq seeks to stay away from politics, its statements about the former governments

**Muqtada al-Sadr makes a religious reference to Hannana, where his father Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr fought against Saddam Hussein as a religious authority and his two brothers were killed in 1999, and reveals his political perspective.**

<sup>12</sup> "Sadr, istifa eden vekiller ile toplanacak", Türkmen Basın Ajansı (TEBA), 15 June 2022 (Access: 16 June 2022).

<sup>13</sup> "Seyyid Sadr: Temsilciler Meclisine sunulan istifadan geri adım yok", Iraqi News Agency (INA), 15 June 2022 (Access: 16 June 2022).

of Haider al-Abadi and Adil Abdul-Mahdi and elections steered political debates and processes. At this point, it can be said that al-Sistani will determine his position depending on the developments in the country. That is because the fact that the Shiite religious authority is not involved in the process may mean that it supports Sadr's decision or that it is not involved in the process in order not to be a party to the current disagreement. On the other hand, al-Sistani left a space for Sadr with his vague position. It is likely that al-Sistani may have opted for this in order to preserve the Iraqi Shiite identity of the Najaf basin against the historical tension between Najaf and Qom.

According to the new parliamentary balance after the resignation of the Sadr Movement deputies, the pro-Iranian groups will take advantage and will be enabled to reach the position of being the executive power of the new government formation process with the increasing seats of the State of Law Coalition, Fatah Coalition and independent deputies. At this point, it would not be wrong to argue that the Sadr Movement provided an opportunity for the Shiite Coordination Framework for government formation. However, on the condition that a government cannot be formed and a possible early election is held, the groups that would be deemed unsuccessful due to their failure to form a government may be expected to lose power in the new balance.

However, as of the current situation, the withdrawal of the Sadr Movement from the political process may trigger many dynamics in Iraq. That is because, unlike al-Sadr's previous decision, his departure from the parliament means that he will carry on his parliamentary opposition activities outside of the parliament. As a matter of fact, it has been

clearly seen in previous demonstrations that al-Sadr's power and ability to mobilize the masses is higher than other groups. In the context of this possibility, Sadr will be able to become the leading actor of social opposition by initiating opposition in the streets and observing the failure of pro-Iranian groups.

Sadr's preference for street activism and efforts to undermine pro-Iran Shiite groups' government formation activities may increase the political and social turmoil in Iraq. As a matter of fact, the risk of armed conflict among the Shiites should not be underestimated in an intra-Shiite struggle between the Sadr Movement and other groups since these groups also have armed militia as well as political wings. This situation prepares the ground for a "civil war" among the Shiites. However, the importance of the position of al-Sistani, who is an actor who can prevent such a development between Shiite groups, is increasing. On the other hand, a possible intra-Shiite civil war may cause the country to re-enter a spiral of civil war and terrorism in a broader sense. That is because terrorist organizations such as the PKK and ISIS have shown in the past that they can take advantage of a power vacuum in Iraq.

In this context, it is possible to foresee that such a development among Shiite groups will not be limited to Shiite groups only. As a matter of fact, some actors who are aware of this risk are trying to preempt such a negative turn of events. It is possible to make sense of Iraqi President Barham Salih's statement, "A new political initiative to be put forward will aim to turn Sadr back from his decision. This decision is of a magnitude that could seriously affect Iraq. No government can be successful without the support and approval of Sadr,"<sup>14</sup> from this vantage point, while the leader of the

<sup>14</sup> "President Salih to launch a political initiative soon", Shafaq News, 14 June 2022 (Access June 2022).

Fatah Coalition, Hadi al-Amiri, was expected to emerge stronger after the resignations, he demanded al-Sistani's intervention to resolve the crisis by stating, "The Marjah always appears at the right time to save the day and bring life back to normal"<sup>15</sup>. A possible intra-Shiite conflict poses the risk of polarization for Sunni Arabs, Kurds, and even Turkmens. For this reason, new initiatives and even al-Sistani's intervention are expected so that the crisis can be resolved before it escalates further.

The Save the Homeland bloc, which was established under the leadership of Sadr and which included the Sunni Sovereignty Bloc and the KDP, entered the phase of de facto dissolution after the resignation of the Sadr Movement deputies. At this point, the KDP and Sunni groups, who aligned with the Sadr Movement and confronted pro-Iranian forces, are faced with difficulties. As a matter of fact, it has also been observed that these two actors are trying to prevent the Sadr Movement from withdrawing from the political process. That is because the best option for these two actors seems to be to approach negotiations with a clear motivation in order not to lose their gains and positions. However, if both the KDP and the Sovereignty Bloc

manage to protect their components, an opposing position against the Shiite Coordination Framework may cause the political deadlock to continue. At this point, the evaluation of the Save the Homeland Bloc as a government formation alliance can take place in Iraq's political history as an example that prevents different groups from coming together in common alliances after the next elections in Iraq. However, in the event that the alliance has been established beyond an intra-parliamentary perspective, it may be possible to re-emerge more strongly in a possible early election.

At this point, it is noteworthy that Masoud Barzani, leader of the KDP, stated regarding the resignations that they "respect the decision and follow the process". It would not be wrong to say that the KDP has left the door open for new proposals with Barzani's statement, "We are following the process". Furthermore, it is likely that the KDP will aim for a stronger comeback within a possible Save the Homeland bloc. In this context, the Sovereignty Bloc and KDP did not resign from the parliament and thus differed from the Sadr Movement in terms of politics. However, in the process of returning to a possible alliance, the Sovereignty Bloc is in a more

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<sup>15</sup> "Al-Amiri calls on the Marja'iyah to intervene and solve the crisis", (Shafaq News, 13 June 2022 (Access: 16 June 2022).

The simultaneous resignation of the entire Sadr movement clearly shows the level of coordination and unity within the Movement. The elected deputies who resign lose all their personal rights because they have been in office for less than a year.

fragile situation than the KDP. That is because the Sovereignty Bloc, with its different components and political personalities, endorses the Sunnis' divergent heritage. In this context, it is noteworthy that strong Sunni leaders such as al-Halbousi and Khanjar cannot inspire inclusion at the grassroots level. However, it is a possible scenario that groups leaving the Homeland Rescue Alliance show their differences in politics and signal to the government to be formed in the future from the basis of 'group interest'. As a matter of fact, it is remembered that Hadi al-Amiri, on behalf of the Shiite Coordination Framework, made more than one visit to Arbil in order to convince the KDP<sup>16</sup>. In this context, the meeting of Nouri al-Maliki, one of the leaders of the Shiite Coordination Framework, with the PUK, the Azeem Coalition, and the Babylon Movement<sup>17</sup>, which had four deputies after the resignations, is important in terms of showing that the Shiite Coordination Framework wants to increase its effectiveness in the government formation process.

On the other hand, the simultaneous resignation of the entire Sadr movement clearly shows

the level of coordination and unity within the Movement. The elected deputies who resign lose all their personal rights because they have been in office for less than a year. As a matter of fact, the Sadr Movement's Politburo Chair Ahmed al-Mutayri's statement, "Al-Sadr's withdrawal from politics by political sacrifice and the deputies' leaving their seats to rival political groups means that he sacrificed himself to Iraq" and Sadr's statement in the letter to the deputies, "This step is to protect our people and our country. It means that I made sacrifices to save myself from an unknown future"<sup>18</sup> provides insight into the reasons for the resignations. Despite this, the fact that all deputies complied with the resignation directive shows that the schism in the Shiite House in Iraq has reached the point where it cannot be repaired. In line with this schism, the statements of the Shiite Coordination Framework that they will undertake the government formation process despite the different position of the Sadr Movement show that the deterioration in relations has reached further stages. The Shiite Coordination Framework made a statement declaring, "We are ready to approach all

<sup>16</sup> "President Barzani receives al-Amiri in Erbil", Shafaw News, 17 January 2022 (Access: 16 June 2022).

<sup>17</sup> "Sadr grubunun istifası sonrası diğer siyasi bloklar bir araya geldi" Rudaw, 15 June 2022 (Access: 16 June 2022).

<sup>18</sup> "Iraklı uzmanlara göre Sadr'ın siyasetten çekilmesi sokak hareketlerini tetikleyebilir", Anadolu Ajansı, 14 June 2022 (Access 16 June 2022).

political parties as we believe that the next government should be a strong and capable government that provides services, preserves the unity and sovereignty of the country, and Iraq's position in the region. We will proceed in dialogue with all political forces in order to complete the constitutional obligations and to form a national service government"<sup>19</sup>. From this point of view, the disintegration of the "Shiite House" in Iraq to a point that cannot be repaired is obvious since the Sadr Movement declared that it will remain in opposition if the government is formed by the Shiite Coordination Framework. That is because, with the resignation move of the Sadr Movement, Sadr put intense pressure on the deputies and the movement and prevented the movement from taking part in the national unity government.

In addition to the current division among Iraqi Shiites, new street movements are likely to be expected in Iraq due to the social effects of Muqtada al-Sadr, who will continue his political life and therefore his opposition role outside the parliament. That is because the October 2019 demonstrations brought about a partial change in the current political structure, thereby increasing the attraction of street activism. In this context, it is expected that al-Sadr will call for demonstrations if problems, such as another government crisis in the country, cannot be resolved after the resignations. Despite this, in the event of large-scale street movements, holding early elections will not be possible due to the temporary capacity of the government. In this case, the parliament must dissolve itself.

Even in the case of early elections, al-Sadr states that the possibility of early elections is being considered, "We will not participate in the next elections if those involved in corruption participate"<sup>20</sup>. In this context, although the Sadr Movement will support the early election scenario, the Shiite Coordination Framework's takeover of the government process may somehow ensure the continuation of the process. In this case, it is possible to say that al-Sistani's political position and his call for "political renewal to overcome the crisis" will be a factor that can change the approach of all Shiite political groups, which are the main actors in Iraq.

At this point, it would not be wrong to say that Iraq is at a new turning point. When all of the scenarios mentioned are considered, it is obvious that Iraq is heading towards a change and transformation. As a matter of fact, the reconciliation or conflict between the Shiite groups, which are the driving force of Iraqi politics, affects the state mechanism as well as playing an important role in terms of stability and security, considering the administrative power, political influence, weapons, and material and human resources held by the Shiite groups. However, this dynamic and balance between Shiite groups also affects and closely concerns groups other than Shiites. From this point of view, one could argue that the direction of dynamism among Shiites will also be decisive for the future of the country. However, it seems difficult for Iraq, which is trying to deal with many problems, from politics to the economy, from social life to security, to get rid of a new division and polarization.

<sup>19</sup> "Sadr grubunun istifası sonrası diğer siyasi bloklar bir araya geldi" Rudaw, 15 June 2022 (Access: 16 June 2022).

<sup>20</sup> "Iraqi Shia leader al-Sadr withdraws from political process", Aljazeera, 16 June 2022 (Access: 16 Haziran 2022).



## NOTES

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