

Activists Seek to Break Political Deadlock

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NGOs file court complaint in attempt to speed up efforts to form a government.

A group of prominent Iraqi NGOs have gone to court to try to break the political deadlock that has left the country adrift without a government and, according to many, vulnerable to insurgent attacks and worsening social conditions.

Six months after inconclusive national elections, public anger with politicians' failure to form a government has been evidenced in demonstrations over electricity shortages and cries of frustration in the press.

Now activists have filed a legal challenge in the constitutional court, requesting it to force parliament to convene and select politicians to lead the country.

"There has been a horrible deterioration in security; horrible deterioration in the economy as well as services and all sectors of life. And that is a result of the absence of a government," said Hanaa Edward, the head of the Iraqi Assembly of Amal (Hope) and the organiser of the activist group, which also includes the Iraqi Assembly of Health Management and Development, the Iraqi Centre of Dar al-Salam and the Women for Peace Organisation.

"The current situation is an indication that the political blocs are not committed to their positions and do not perform in the best interests of their people."

Iraq's neighbours are also urging Iraqi politicians to form a new government. A committee of interior ministers from regional countries released a statement on September 23 calling the issue "a national, regional and international need".

Violence has spiked in recent weeks, with many observers claiming that militants are taking advantage of the political vacuum. A bomb blast on September 23 in northern Baghdad killed a policeman and wounded three civilians, and earlier this week two bombs in central Baghdad left at least 29 people dead and wounded 11 others in the worst day of violence since the withdrawal of United States combat forces last month.

Some claim the rise in attacks is a direct result of the foot-dragging over a new administration, and anger on the streets is building.

"I blame the cowardly politicians who are hiding in their palaces while we die in the streets," said Sura Nasir, 26, as she waited at Baghdad's Yarmouk hospital to see her brother who was wounded in the previous day's bombings and had just had his leg amputated.

"The only thing this delay in forming the government is bringing to Iraq is dead bodies. I think there has been enough; aren't the politicians satisfied now? If not, let's bring them here to this hospital or any morgue in Baghdad and let them see what is happening to the people they claim to represent."

The government has denied that the protracted political process has led to attacks and has rushed to reassure the public that Iraqi forces are capable of maintaining peace without the US military.

"Security forces are doing their best to face this terrorism which is supported from within the region," said Abdul Hadi al-Hasani, a senior member in the State of Law coalition, who preferred to characterise the political impasse as a sign of the country's independence.

"We are a sovereign country, as the Iraqi premier said, and the proof is that even after five or six months after the election Iraqi politicians are still in discussions and we do not have a government. No one has manipulated our politicians or changed their minds, we are an independent country," Hasani told IWPR.

Worsening security is not the only apparent consequence of the political squabbling between Sunni, Shia and Kurdish blocs in parliament, a dispute centring on who will fill the prime minister's post and other top positions in the incoming administration.

Saadi Kareem, professor of political science at Baghdad university, said, "The delay in government is [also] bad for the economy and social and cultural sectors."

As Kareem pointed out, the absence of a new government has put all proposed legislation on hold. This includes an impending revenue-sharing law that will distribute Iraq's oil wealth.

“The most important piece of legislation which is directly related to the economy is the oil law. This law cannot be ratified without parliamentary sessions. In other words, there will be no oil law if there is no government,” said Kareem.

Edwards views the political vacuum as a violation of Iraq’s constitution, which sets out specific time limits for the formation of a new administration. After the 2005 national elections, it took Iraqi politicians more than five months to form a government.

“We have demanded the [constitutional] court issue an order telling parliament to hold its sessions to accelerate the process of forming the government,” he said. “If not, we will call for new elections to be held. If Iraqi politicians keep favouring their own interests over the people, the Iraqi people will lose the confidence we placed in them.”

Representatives of the court declined to comment, but did confirm that the complaint had been heard and that a meeting had been scheduled next month to debate it. According to court documents, the case was filed against the longest-serving lawmaker, Foaad Maasom, who is charged with opening the first official session of parliament.

“We consider violating the constitution at this stage to be a very serious issue; one that is capable of destroying the whole political process,” said Edward.

Meanwhile, there is no end in sight for the political gridlock. Hamid al-Mutlaq, a senior member in the Iraqiya bloc, said, “Iraqi politicians need to shoulder their responsibilities and step up the process of forming the government.”

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Location: [Iraq](#)

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