

Putting Policy Before Personality in Iraq

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There's a need to build a national consensus over issues that are important for the Iraqi voter over next four years.



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It seems the new Iraqi state still has some way to go before the interests of the public are put above those of its leaders.

There does not seem to be any sense of urgency among the leaders in Baghdad to settle the ongoing saga of who is going to form the next government, despite United States vice president Joseph Biden's recent statement affirming his country's determination to withdraw most of its troop after two months.

The March election proved that politics in our society is still very much polarised and personalised. No one managed to get enough seats to form a majority government.

The attempted alliances, the talks over forming new blocs and the dispute over the results are all centered around the issue of who should lead the country.

They do not address the questions the electorate is most interested in – how will the next government work, and what will it do.

The partisan divisions and personality politics that flourish in Iraq have caused the delay in forming the government. Almost three months have elapsed and we still do not seem to be any closer to having a new administration.

With every day that passes, the electorate is losing faith in representatives it recently elected to office.

While these representatives fight over who is to be the next premier, they could also work towards bringing the views of the people to the foreground.

This could be done by seeking to build a national consensus over the issues that are important for the Iraqi voter over the next four years.

A team of elected representatives who are not seeking cabinet posts could get together to produce a national charter that sets the roadmap for the country over the next four years. It can also serve as the political programme for the next government.

This would be a step to assure the public that Iraq's political process is about policy, not personalities.

The charter could address issues on which there is some consensus, ranging from security and national reconciliation to public services and good governance; from guaranteeing democratic rights and freedoms to economic prosperity and transparency.

The longer the current uncertainty continues, the more divided society will become and the less room there will be for a common platform that all Iraqis can agree on.

The longer it takes to name a prime minister, the more external interference is allowed in the country's affairs, making the choice of leader less representative of Iraqi interests.

Putting the Iraqi people's representatives in one room to agree on a common platform for the country would contribute greatly to reducing the differences between them. It would give the people a clearer vision as to what the next government should do for them.

A national charter would in effect be an important cornerstone for national consensus over the next four years. It would be an important step away from the polarisation and personalisation that Iraqi politics is seeing now.

It would also reduce the amount of opposition to the next premier by blocs that would not take part in government. The argument would be that although they did not nominate him, they had a say in drafting his job description.

If such a charter is not drafted for the next government, there is a risk that whoever is leading the country will have to make up the steps as they go along, especially when it comes to the first challenge - handling the withdrawal of the US forces that Biden has promised.

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