



مركز البيان للدراسات والتخطيط
Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies

Iraq's Shiites: The difficult choice for the president of the republic

Hamid Redha Al-Ibrahimi



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About

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Al-Bayan Center pursues its vision by conducting independent analysis, as well as proposing workable solutions for complex issues that concern policymakers and academics.

Translation: Mortadha Nasser Kazem.

Written by: Hamid Reda Al-Ibrahimi.

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**www.bayancenter.org
info@bayancenter.org**

Since 2014

Iraq's Shiites: The difficult choice for the president of the republic

Hamid Redha Al-Ibrahimi *

Introduction:

The 2021 elections have changed the compass of the political equation in Iraq to a large extent. As it turned the scales of decision-making in the favor of previously marginalized forces, bringing them to the frontlines, such as the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which returned to the fore strongly after being pushed back in the previous era. This was accompanied by the marginalization of some influential Shiite forces, which were pioneers in decision-making, such as: (The Wisdom Movement and Al-Fateh). This change in the political map came after the events of October 2019, as it completely changed the way key positions in building the Iraqi state were filled. Muhammad al-Halbousi was chosen as Speaker of the Council of Representatives this time without referring to the Shiite consensus, unlike previous sessions, this time it was limited to a relative consensus between the Sadrism movement, Sunni groups, and the Kurdistan Democratic Party. Although this coalition formed the political majority and was accepted by the international community, it is subject to two points that must be known and differentiated.

First: the marginalized political forces that seek to return to the spotlight and influence political decision-making as they were before.

The other: the political forces that believe that passing through the current political stage should not be at the expense of accepting any

* Journalist specializing in the affairs of the Arab world and the Middle East.

equation that is presented, and thus returning the forces known for corruption to the fore.

This will be the mainstay of the content in this article.

The Narrative:

Since the fall of the previous regime, the Kurdistan Democratic Party has relied on the Kurdish Union within the framework of the Iraqi political process for its tactics, and this matter is not hidden from anyone, as the party has been seeking the independence of Kurdistan in principle. However, his popular referendum movement, which led to its complete isolation regarding the fall of Kirkuk, and their forced withdrawal from the province, practically made them in a narrower category than they were previously until they lost the Ministry of Foreign Affairs portfolio in Baghdad. But after the events of October and the fall of the government of Adel Abdul-Mahdi, they were given the opportunity to re-emerge and restore their political grounds. Their first gain in the Al-Kadhimi government was to restore the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through their separatist candidate, Fouad Hussein. This angered the political circles and their objection to assuming the position of a separatist after they considered him far from the spirit of patriotism. The question that aroused their objection was, "How can a separatist defend Iraq's right in diplomatic forums?" This problem is not without realism, as the question of the Kurdistan referendum should not be viewed as a passing tactical issue, belittling the event, and then allowing Barzani to regain his political power and influence again.

This issue has taken a more severe turn than it did previously in the last elections. The leader of the Sadrist movement presented the slogan of forming a national majority, and in agreement with Kurdish and Sunni forces, to form a government away from all the Shiite parties with close ties to Tehran. Meanwhile, the Sunni and Kurdish forces

aligned with al-Sadr –because of his need to partner with them– seek to impose their candidates and pass them on at any cost. After the election of Al-Halbousi as Speaker of the Council of Representatives, the Kurdistan Democratic Party aims to obtain the presidency of the republic, after it had become a traditional monopoly of the Patriotic Union. The presidency of the republic does not seem like an active position, but Barzani is trying to highlight his ability and break the union's dominance of this position. Barzani's confidence was so great that he nominated Hoshyar Zebari to the presidency, knowing that he is one of the most prominent defenders of the referendum and the independence of Kurdistan. He was also surrounded by many financial suspicions when he was Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the end, he was rejected by all Shiite blocs after he was excluded from the Federal Court¹.

However, Barzani is still clinging to the position and he wants one of his close associates to fill it. As part of his coalition, Al-Sadr announced that he did not object to any candidate supported by the Kurdistan Democratic Party, which seems to be a political mistake. Al-Sadr's fears that prompted him to form a national majority has a viable point of view, but he shouldn't just avoid the Coordination Framework's trap and then fall into the Kurdistan Democratic Party's trap, as Al-Sadr must stay away from these ideas, because standing next to Barzani will lead to the collapse of the Sadrist movement and the Kurdistan Democratic Party together. Barzani seems to be in dire need of an alliance with al-Sadr to get his cards in order inside Baghdad. While Al-Sadr can offer some ministries to the Kurdistan Democratic Party to retain the three presidencies, because Barham Salih enjoys high international and regional acceptance, and he also played an important role in appointing Al-Kadhimi, and crossing over from the era of Abdul-Mahdi. While other personalities such as Zebari and because of the widespread rejection, will not be able to play the same role if they

1. <https://tinyurl.com/y9afkwlb>

claimed the presidency of the republic².

It may be necessary for Muqtada al-Sadr – and to unite the Iraqi people – to accompany forces that possess a spirit of high citizenship, and not forces that possess a spirit of secession such as the Kurdistan Democratic Party. Al-Sadr can rely on more moderate figures in the Kurdistan Democratic Party³, as a figure like “Nechirvan Barzani” can play a positive role in this regard, as the KDP has a great position among the Kurdish component and the role of “Nechirvan” in it is undeniable. But on the other hand, not all demands can be accepted and met to join a political alliance, the KDP must realize that the political tax of the referendum and the idea of secession will be exorbitant in the long-term, maybe permanent, time cannot be reversed to before that fatal mistake, while the low-cost return of the Kurdistan Democratic Party to its previous position will be another motive for re-drawing the mechanism of separation, this is what the Shiites of Iraq should think thoroughly about.

Al-Sadr must – before drawing any strategic alliance – obtain guarantees that the scenario of Kirkuk or another separatist referendum will not be repeated, because the confrontation with the opposite parties is likely to multiply the Arab-Kurdish dispute and make each of them in a trench, and then re-enter Iraq in the struggle for existence. However, the current situation constitutes an appropriate opportunity to run the country in a national partnership by the current parties, and in this way it is possible to manage future demands, and this issue will be determined by the obligations of the winning Shiite parties, especially the Sadrist movement, which will lead to a satisfactory settlement by granting them some ministries or involving them in the management of some disputed areas in exchange for keeping Barham Salih as the President of the Republic.

2. <https://tinyurl.com/yb22wx34>

3. <https://tinyurl.com/y729l2r2>