

Iraqi government formed under foreign pressure

BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

THE agreement for a unity government comprising of major Iraqi parties came after months of uncertainty and tension. The US has for months urged Iraq's leading factions to create a government that includes all major ethnic and sectarian groups. Iran has also played an important role in the formation of the new government, which remains in the hands of Maliki, an ally of Iran.

Oddly enough, both the US and Iran had been working toward the same goal: an al-Maliki to return to power. But they differed strongly on the degree to which the Sunnis would be involved in the new government, with Iran pushing for only token Sunni participation and the US lobbying for a real Sunni partnership.

New Pact

On 11th November, good sense prevailed and Iraqi leaders agreed on a deal that includes former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi in the government, a rival of the current Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

The agreement came on the heels of three days violence that brought back echoes of country's worst years. On 10th November, bombs exploded outside homes of Christian families across Baghdad, the first such coordinated attack on Christian homes in the capital and 10 days after a siege on a church that left 58 people dead.

Iraqi leaders on 11th November agreed to create a unity government believed to be under pressure from the US to accommodate the secular and Sunni supported Allawi in the government. The US insisted on the participation of Sunnis who formerly ruled Iraq and had been underrepresented in the Iraqi government since the Iraqi invasion in 2003.

Maliki has been fighting bitterly for last eight months for another term for the prime minister against his rival

former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, supported by Sunnis, who gained narrow win with two seats in the country's March 7 polls, and the Shiite religious party of Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council, headed by Ammar al-Hakim.

Allawi appeared to accept defeat after insisting for months that he would not settle for nothing less than the post of Prime Minister.

Ayad Allawi agreed in exchange of the position of Speaker of Parliament to the bloc plus being the head of a newly created committee overseeing national security, called National Council for Strategic Policy. His role remains to be defined as the power of the Strategic Policy Council remain to be solved by Maliki.

Under the political deal, the country's current President Jalal Talabani, a Kurdish leader, would remain as President, solidifying the role of Iraqi Kurds. Osama al-Najafi, a Sunni political leader within the Iraqi bloc led by the secular Shiite, Ayad Allawi, was chosen as Speaker of the parliament.

Last month, Iraqi Federal Court ordered the country's parliament to resume as soon as possible. The session of the parliament began on 11th November.

The parliament's first session was opened on June 14, three months after the country's March 7 parliamentary election, but it only lasted for 18 minutes due to disputes over the definition of the largest bloc and the government formation, and was delayed until further notice.

According to the Iraqi Constitution, the Parliament must elect its new Speaker and his two deputies in the first session. Then the Parliament under the new Speaker would elect a new President who will later assign the candidate of the largest bloc as the Prime Minister and to form his cabinet.

However, the Iraqi parliamentary blocs insist to agree on the nomination



of President, parliament Speaker and Prime Minister, as one package before resuming the parliament session.

Gainers and losers in the deal

Once again, in the government Shiites are predominant, Kurds are pacified and Sunnis are left with indeterminate powers. The last time that was the case, fol-

lowing the 2005 election, the country was ravaged by sectarian violence.

The agreement is a victory for Maliki who has remained determined to stay as Prime Minister. He visited Saudi Arabia, Iran, Syria, Jordan, Turkey and Egypt. Observers say that the purpose of the visit was to rally support for Maliki in the region for his candidacy for a second

term in the Prime Minister's office, as well as asserting his position as the country's leader to the global community, although some of the Sunni states he visited are wary over Iranian influence on Iraqi Shiite government.

The head of the Guardians Council, one of Iran's top clerical ruling bodies, praised al-Maliki's return to power and described it as a blow to neighboring, mainly Sunni Arab countries who opposed al-Maliki. It also means that the Nouri al-Maliki is more beholden to Iran than ever before.

As well, in the short term, Kurds have won what they wanted: the highly symbolic position of President and a barrel full of promises. In the long run, the Kurds may yet find themselves on the outs if the political forces in Baghdad renege on their promises.

In the short term, Ammar al-Hakim, leader of the Shia Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), appears to have backed the wrong man Allawi over al-Maliki.

Fragility of the government

Unclear role remains for the anti-American radical cleric Moktada al-Sadr whose support for Maliki ensured him the Prime Minister. Rivalries between Sadr and Maliki Shiite groups are long standing and often remain open. How Maliki can now manage the unwieldy alliance in running the government is a big question.

Joost Hitlermann, of the International Crisis Group, reportedly has said that the compromise deal and the new strategic council are necessary to ensure Sunni enfranchisement but that they will create an unmanageable coalition in power. "You are not going to have an effective in Iraq any time soon."

By and large, the Sunnis are not getting that much," said Marina Ottaway, director of the Middle East Program at the Carnegie Endowment for

International Peace. "The Iraqiya were thrown a bone but it is not clear that there is any meat attached to the bone or not."

She said the true test would be whether Iraqiya receives any of the powerful ministries such as foreign affairs, interior or defense.

The top cleric at one of Iraq's most important Sunni mosques said the power-sharing deal "copies the old sectarian and ethnic distribution of power and this brings us to square one. We are expecting another four hard years," the cleric, Abdul-Satar Abdul-Jabar, who is the imam of the Abu Hanifa mosque in Azamiyah, told The Associated Press.

Meanwhile the deal is proven so fragile that on the first day of the session of the new Parliament on 11 November, some 60 Iraqiya MPs, including Allawi and the new Speaker, stormed out of the Parliament when Maliki's bloc refused to support the promised vote on lifting the Baathist ban.

Allawi's bloc says that under the agreement, Maliki's bloc have committed to get rid of the controversial de-Baathification law entirely within two years. Sunnis view the panel, which purges former members of Saddam Hussein's ruling party, as a thinly veiled Shiite attempt to disenfranchise Sunnis.

While not unreasonably upset, the Allawi bloc is probably trying to flex its muscles to make sure that Maliki doesn't balk at the other important promise: that the new security council promised in which Allawi has real power.

Given the rift on the first day of the session of Parliament, analysts say it will be something of a miracle if the government lasts until the end of next year (when U.S. troops are to be fully withdrawn), let alone lasting until the next scheduled election in 2015.

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China relents but cannot stop North Korea from weapon proliferation

RAJARAM PANDA

NORTH Korea's nuclear weapons development programme has remained a worry for the world. Global efforts to rein in Pyongyang have yielded little results and the 'rogue' state continues to defy the world. What moreover worries the rest of the world is North Korea's support for Syria, Myanmar, Iran and Pakistan in their nuclear weapons development programmes.

for six months following objections by China.

What were the reasons behind this Chinese stance? The Chinese objection to the report's early release was because of its misplaced self-confidence in international diplomacy which ultimately failed to face the rigour of world pressure. The world was more or less convinced in May 2010 itself that North Korea, already under UN sanctions for testing nuclear devices in 2006 and again in 2009, had become a proliferator of

ment. Each member of the sanctions committee has a virtual veto power and if consensus eludes, the panel report may not be published.

The Chinese decision not to bloc all sanctions reports could be a deliberate strategy to send a wrong message to the world. Though China allowed the Council to impose sanctions on North Korea in 2009, it refused to expand the 2005 arms embargo in Sudan. China also joined Russia when Britain and the US attempted to impose sanctions in 2008 on

greater restrictions on sensitive technology.

The Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) was created in 1987 with the aim of limiting the spread of missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons. Though it has no enforcement organization, yet it succeeded in blocking several missile programmes. But it has failed to stop North Korean missile development, production, and exports, or to win the full cooperation of Russian and Chinese entities.

In his recently-published memoirs, Decision Points, former US President George W. Bush reveals that in 2007 US intelligence determined that Syria had built a nuclear reactor with North Korean help. Citing the memoir, a recent Washington Post report mentions that Israeli jets destroyed the reactor when then Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's request to the US to bomb the facility was rebuffed. Of course, Olmert "hadn't asked for a green light." As regards North Korea, Bush, then in office, warned then Chinese President Jiang Zemin in February 2003 that the US would review the launch of a military attack on North Korea if the nuclear problem was not resolved diplomatically. Bush asked Jiang to form a united front against North Korea after gaining intelligence on Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions. Jiang rejected the request, citing that exerting influence on North Korea was a complex matter. Pyongyang remained undeterred and went ahead with its planned programme of test-firing a long-range missile in July 2006 and drew international attention and opprobrium.

The significance of China reversing its stance on the panel report's release cannot be overlooked as it came two days before President Obama was to meet Chinese President Hu Jintao in Seoul where the two leaders are attending a summit of the Group of 20 major economies. The US and its allies in East Asia Japan and South Korea have been the strongest proponents of imposing tough UN sanctions to rein in Pyongyang with the objective of persuading the communist regime to curtail its nuclear ambitions. Though China supported in 2009 the adoption of the resolution of the UN Security Council to enforce measures to curb North Korea's trade in nuclear and ballistic missile technology, its private posture has been otherwise. It is uncomfortable with public disclosure of the findings, which are highly sensitive as those would expose Chinese complicity, as has been a test case in Sudan. The gainer in the process remains North Korea, as it continues with its own weapon development programme regardless of what world opinion may be and no matter if its economy continues to be on the brink.



The only country, China, which can probably halt Pyongyang's nuclear programme and its support to other countries, continues to remain a suspect in its sincerity to do so.

For the past several months, the UN Security Council had been working to prepare a report to study the alleged North Korean transfer of ballistic missiles and nuclear technology to Syria, Iran and Myanmar. China, the ally of North Korea, blocked the release of the report for almost six months but finally agreed to its release in early November 2010. The report reinforces US claims that North Korea has emerged as a key supplier of banned nuclear weapons materials to these three countries.

The 75-page report by the so-called Panel of Experts on Pyongyang's compliance with UN sanctions was delivered to the Security Council's North Korea sanctions committee in May 2010. Normally such reports, when completed, are reviewed and then passed on to the Security Council for consideration of possible action, but the report went into limbo

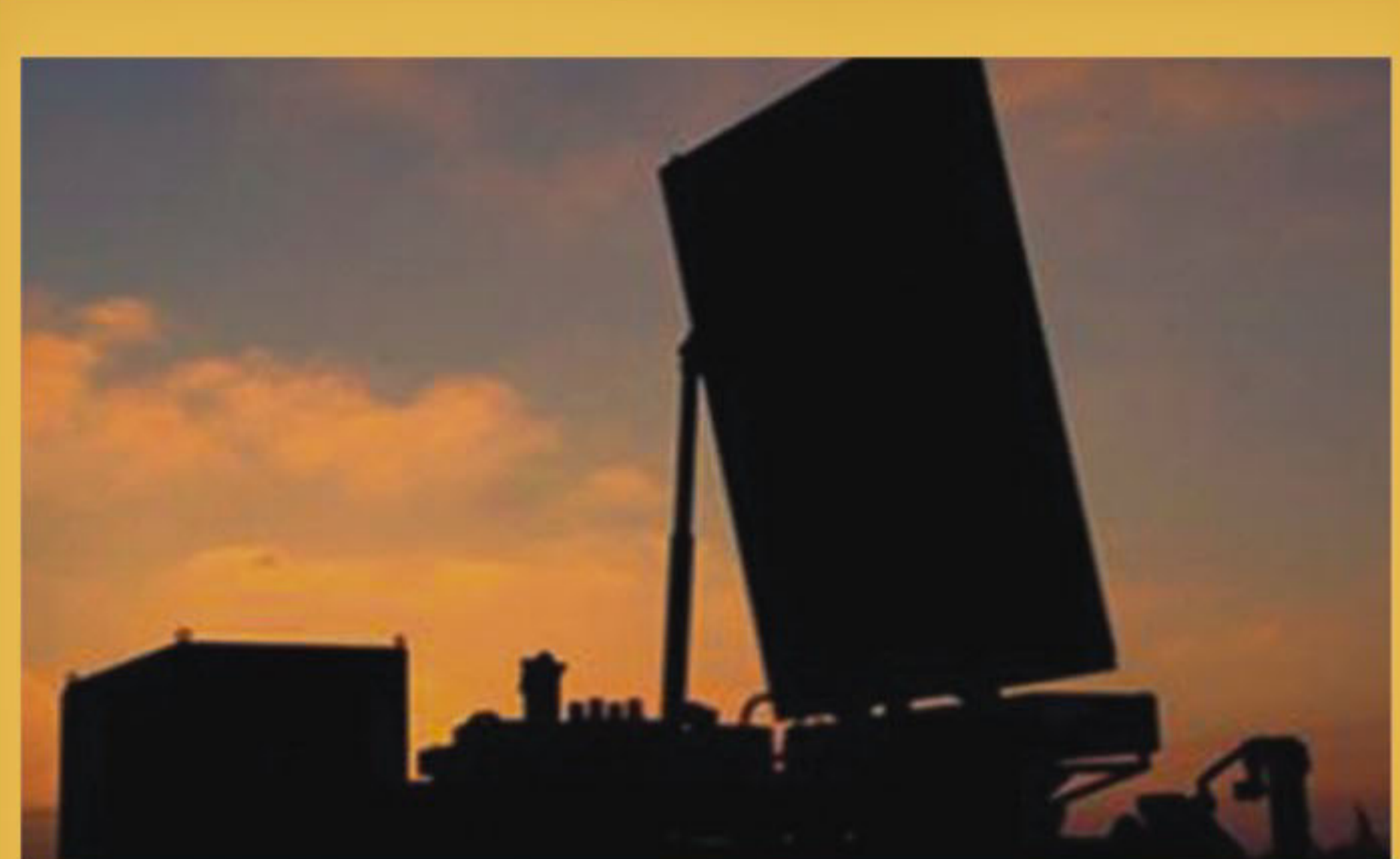
banned technology. Finally, when in the first week of November 2010, the 15-nations on the Security Council asked if any one had any objections to the report, surprisingly China chose to keep silent as its priorities had probably shifted. It is unclear, however, if the UN Security Council would decide on further sanctions based on the findings in the report, as China's support will remain doubtful.

Among China's other priorities could be blocking a similar report by another UN panel of experts on compliance with an arms embargo for Sudan's deadly conflict-torn western Darfur region. This is because, unlike the one on North Korea, Chinese firms are suspected of violating the Darfur arms embargo and China fears embarrassment if the facts come out in the open. In fact, China felt strongly about the report on Sudan and prevailed upon the panel committee to stall the process of submission to the Security Council for action. The tracing of Chinese bullets at the site of attacks against the UN-African Union peacekeepers proves China's involve-

Zimbabwe's leaders. Further, China objected to the US and British stance on sanctioning Myanmar's military junta for human rights abuse. It is a different matter that the elections held in Myanmar after 20 years were "insufficiently inclusive, participatory and transparent" as UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon put it.

Indeed, there has been widespread concern for years about North Korea. There is no disputing the fact that if radical states and terrorists lay their hands on weapons of mass destruction (WMD), it will be a threat to world security. Multilateral regimes to restrict trade in nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and missile technologies have not proved to be successful always. North Korea withdrew from the NPT in 2003 and tested nuclear devices in 2006 and 2009. Iran failed to comply with its treaty obligations in 2005. The discovery of the nuclear black market network run by Pakistan's A. Q. Khan spurred world leaders to design new measures to strengthen the regime, including

By arrangement with IDSA, New Delhi.



US to boost weapons stockpile in Israel

Jerusalem: The United States is to significantly increase the amount of military equipment held in Israel as part of a move to upgrade security ties between the two allies, press reports said Thursday.

The move, which will see an extra 400-million-dollars worth of smart bombs and other precision weaponry and equipment moved to Israel over the next two years, was approved last week by the US Congress, the Israeli correspondent of Defense News reported.

The upgrade will see the value of US military equipment stockpiled in Israel rise to one billion dollars in 2011, with another 200 million to be added in 2012, the paper said. In 2007, the stockpile was valued at 800 million dollars.

Such equipment can be used by US forces throughout the world but also by the host country, under the terms of the US foreign aid law governing reserve stockpiles for allies.

Israel made use of the stockpile during the 2006 war with the Lebanese Hezbollah militia -- a conflict which killed 1,200 people in Lebanon, most of them civilians, and around 160 Israelis, most of them soldiers, the Haaretz daily reported.

The move comes as part of a major upgrade of military ties between the United States and Israel.

Earlier this year, the US Congress approved a 205-million-dollar grant to help Israel develop the Iron Dome anti-missile system, on top of the annual three billion dollars the Jewish state receives from Washington.



Iran holds defence drills at nuclear plants

Tehran: Iran has conducted defence drills at its sensitive nuclear facilities, a senior commander told media on Sunday, adding that fresh aerial war games will be launched across the country next week.

"This year, we carried out tactical drills which resembled real combat in Fordo, Tehran, Natanz, Bushehr and Isfahan," where the country's nuclear plants are located, the Mehr news agency quoted Ahmad Mighani as saying.

Mighani did not specify when exactly the exercises were conducted.

Iran's arch-foes Israel and the United States have not ruled out a resort to military action to prevent it developing a nuclear weapons capability, an ambition it strongly denies.

Mighani said the armed forces will stage a new five-day air defence drill from Tuesday "all over the country in order to improve defence capability," the Fars news agency reported.

Iran's armed forces regularly conduct such exercises to show off the country's military prowess and test-fire what they boast are home-made missiles.

Following the latest package of UN sanctions on Iran, Russia refused to deliver long sought-after S-300 ground-to-air missiles.

A top commander said on Wednesday that Iran would soon test its own version of the S-300. It was unclear whether that would be during the upcoming war games.

Source: defencetalk.com