

As Shiite rivals jostle in Iraq, Sunni, Kurdish parties targeted

Author:

Tue, 2022-01-18 23:28

BAGHDAD: As Iraq's Shiite leaders jostle to secure a majority in the newly elected parliament, Sunni and Kurdish minorities have been caught up in a spate of warning grenade attacks, analysts say.

In recent days, unknown attackers have hurled grenades at Kurdish and Sunni targets including political party offices and a lawmaker's home – groups that could help Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr win the critical parliamentary majority needed to make his choice of prime minister.

“It is a way of punishing the forces that have allied with Moqtada Sadr to form a parliamentary majority,” said political scientist Ihsan Al-Shammari.

“Their message is political,” he added, calling the attacks “part of the mode of political pressure” adopted by some groups.

In multi-confessional and multi-ethnic Iraq, the formation of governments has involved complex negotiations since the 2003 US-led invasion toppled dictator Saddam Hussein.

No single party holds an outright majority, so the next leader will be voted in by whichever coalition can negotiate allies to become the biggest bloc – which then elects Iraq's president, who then appoints a prime minister.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Grenades have been lobbed at the home of a Taqadum lawmaker, as well as at the party offices of Azm, Taqadum and the KDP in Baghdad.

- On Sunday, flashbang stun grenades were hurled into the branches of two Kurdish banks in Baghdad – wounding two people.

In previous parliaments, parties from Iraq's Shiite majority have struck compromise deals to work together and form a government, with an unofficial system whereby the prime minister is Shiite, the president is a Kurd and the speaker of parliament is Sunni.

But Sadr, who once led an anti-US militia and who opposes all foreign interference, has repeatedly said the next prime minister will be chosen by his movement.

So rather than strike an alliance with the powerful Shiite Coordination Framework – which includes the pro-Iran Fatah alliance, the political arm of

the former paramilitary Hashd Al-Shaabi – Sadr has forged a new coalition.

That includes two Sunni parties, Taqadum and Azm, as well as the Kurdistan Democratic Party.

It has infuriated the Coordination Framework – who insist their grouping is bigger.

In recent days, grenades have been lobbed at the home of a Taqadum lawmaker, as well as at the party offices of Azm, Taqadum and the KDP in Baghdad.

On Sunday, flashbang stun grenades were hurled into the branches of two Kurdish banks in the capital Baghdad – wounding two people.

The heads of both banks are said to be close to political leaders in Iraq's autonomous northern Kurdistan region.

There has already been unrest following the election, with Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi escaping unhurt when an explosive-packed drone hit his residence in November during what his office called an "assassination attempt."

No group has claimed the attack.

While the culprits of the recent grenade blasts have also not been identified, a security source charged that the attacks "convey the messages of the parties that lost in the elections."

The purpose, the security source claimed, is to "disrupt the formation of the government" – implicitly pointing to the Coordination Framework, and in particular the Fatah alliance.

Fatah lost much of its political capital in the Oct. 10 polls, having secured only 17 seats, compared to the 48 it had before.

It alleged the vote was rigged, but Iraq's top court rejected a complaint of electoral irregularities filed by Hashd.

Hashd, which maintains an arsenal of weapons, fighters and supporters, has sought a variety of ways to make itself heard outside parliament, including demonstrations and sit-ins.

"Rather than accepting defeat at the polls, they threaten violence," said Lahib Higel, of the International Crisis Group.

Sadr has considered striking deals with certain members of the Coordination Framework, such as Fatah chief Hadi Al-Ameri, at the expense of other figures in the bloc, such as former Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki, Higel said.

But such an arrangement "is not Iran's preference" Higel argued, adding that Tehran "would rather see a consensus that includes all Shiite parties."

However, she said Iran could settle for a deal where Shiite parties held

sway. "It is possible that they (Iran) would accept a scenario where not everyone is represented in the next government, as long as there is a sufficient amount of Shiite parties, including some Hashd factions," she said.



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Iraq's Shiite divide makes forging government tough task
Attacks on Iraq political party's HQ, Green Zone raise security fears

[Giants Brigades discover cache of mines, explosive devices smuggled by Houthis under guise of UN aid](#)

Tue, 2022-01-18 22:44

RIYADH: The Giant Brigades fighting the Houthis in Yemen have discovered a large quantity of mines and explosive devices hidden by the militia in aid boxes in Harib, Saudi Press Agency reported on Tuesday.

The Houthi militia left the boxes, used to smuggle weapons, behind after fleeing the district in Marib province, Yemen's information minister Moammar

Al-Eryani said.

The minister said the boxes had UN logos on them and condemned the Houthi actions as “a heinous crime that reveals the ugly face of the criminal militia.”

He said the crime reveals tricks used by the militia to transport weapons and ammunition and exploit humanitarian work as a cover to continue killing Yemenis and carry out criminal activities.

It also shows how the militia employs airports and ports to smuggle ballistic missiles and Iranian-made drones, he said.

“We call on the UN and international relief organizations to investigate the incident and denounce the crime of using their logos as cover to transport and store mines and explosive devices used by the Houthi militia in homes, schools, mosques, markets, roads, (targeting) innocent civilians, including women, children, and the elderly,” Al-Eryani said.

He also called on the international community, and UN and US envoys for Yemen to condemn these practices and put pressure on the Houthi militia to stop its crimes against civilians.

He urged the international community to designate it as a terrorist organization and prosecute its leaders in the International Criminal Court as “war criminals.”

The discovery comes a day after the Houthis carried out a drone and missile attack on the UAE that killed three people.

The attack was condemned by the UN and the international community.



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Houthis reject UN call to release hijacked UAE-flagged ship UN Security Council demands release of UAE cargo ship seized by Houthis in Yemen

[UAE calls for UN Security Council session over Houthi attack on Abu Dhabi](#)

Author:

Tue, 2022-01-18 22:58

NEW YORK: The UAE mission at the UN in New York on Tuesday called on the Security Council to convene in response to the deadly terrorist attack on Abu Dhabi a day earlier.

In a letter addressed to the Norwegian delegation, which holds the presidency of the council this month, the UAE's permanent representative to the UN denounced the Houthi militia in Yemen for targeting civilians "in flagrant violation of international law" and called on the council to "unequivocally" condemn the attacks "with one voice."

"The UAE expresses its condolences to the families of the deceased and wishes those injured a speedy recovery," Lana Nusseibeh said in the letter.

"This illegal and alarming escalation is a further step in the Houthis' efforts to spread terrorism and chaos in our region.

"It is another attempt by the Houthis, using the capabilities they have unlawfully acquired in defiance of UN sanctions, to threaten peace and security."

Three people were killed and six injured in a drone assault on a key oil facility in the Emirati capital, and a separate fire was sparked at Abu Dhabi's international airport, police said. The Houthis claimed responsibility for the attack, which immediately drew condemnation worldwide.

On Friday the Security Council unanimously condemned another hostile Houthi act, the seizure on Jan. 3 of the UAE-flagged ship Rwabee in the Red Sea off

the coast of Yemen and the detention of its crew.

In a statement drafted by the UK, council members demanded the immediate release of the vessel and those on board, and urged the Houthis to guarantee the safety and well-being of the crew.

They also called on all sides to resolve the issue quickly and highlighted the importance of preserving freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea, in accordance with international law.

The hijacking of the Rwabee marked the latest Houthi assault in the Red Sea, a crucial route for international trade and energy shipments.



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Three killed by Houthi drone attack in Abu Dhabi Saudi Arabia leads global condemnation of Houthi attack targeting Abu Dhabi

UN official: Libya elections could be rescheduled for June

Author:

Tue, 2022-01-18 00:23

CAIRO: A senior US official said she is pushing for Libya to hold elections by June after the country missed a December deadline to elect its first president since the 2011 ouster and killing of longtime dictator Muammar Qaddafi.

Stephanie Williams, the UN's special adviser on Libya, said that it is still "very reasonable and possible" for the country's 2.8 million voters to cast their ballots by June in line with the UN-brokered 2020 roadmap.

Libya failed to hold its first-ever presidential elections on Dec. 24 as scheduled, a major blow to international efforts to end a decade-long chaos in the oil-rich Mediterranean nation.

Williams, who led UN efforts to end the latest bout of violence in Libya in 2020, said elections are needed in the country to give credence to the country's institutions.

"All the institutions are suffering a crisis of legitimacy," she said.

"I don't see any other exit for Libya other than a peaceful political process."

The country plunged into turmoil after the NATO-backed 2011 uprising and split into rival governments – one in the east, backed by military commander Khalifa Haftar, and another UN-supported administration in the capital of Tripoli, in the west. Each side is supported by a variety of militias and foreign powers.

Mediated by the UN, an October 2020 ceasefire led to the formation of a transitional government and scheduled elections for Dec. 24. But the vote faced steep challenges that eventually forced its postponement.

Williams urged lawmakers, who are convening Monday in the eastern city of Tobruk, to agree on a "clear, time-bound process with a clear horizon and to not create an open-ended process."

"They have to shoulder a great responsibility right now to respect the will of the Libyans who registered to vote," she said.

"Libyans want an end to this long period of transition that the country has experienced since the events of 2011."

The missed election deadline came after bitter disputes over the laws

governing the electoral process. Outbreaks of fighting among armed factions and the presence of thousands of foreign fighters and troops in the North African country also fed mistrust between the rival groups.

Controversial figures declaring runs for the presidency have further polarized the political scene in recent months. Among them are Hifter, Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah and Seif Al-Islam Qaddafi, the ousted dictator's son and one-time heir apparent. Opponents of Hifter and Gadhafi have said they will never accept an election victory by them.

The country's election commission didn't name a final list of candidates for the presidential and parliamentary elections. Imad Al-Sayeh, head the commission, told the parliament Monday that militias threatened to stop the electoral process if a final list was announced.

Al-Sayeh said the commission needs between six and eight months to prepare for elections, given the uphill challenges that led to the postponement of Dec. 24 vote.

Williams said lawmakers and leaders in Tripoli should work out the disputes over the elections rules. She did not see the departure of foreign mercenaries as a "prerequisite for the elections," saying that holding the cease-fire is the priority.

"There have been mercenaries in Libya since 1970s," she said, adding later, "I don't believe that that is a card that is necessary to play at this time."

Williams also said all factions should accept the results no matter who wins.

"The way to solve this is (allowing) the Libyan voters go to the ballot box and make their own choice," she said. "Results need to be respected."

The vote's delay also threatens to open a power vacuum. Lawmakers have argued that the mandate of Dbeibah's government ended on Dec. 24. Aguila Saleh, the influential speaker of parliament, said Monday that the transitional government "should be restructured."

The UN adviser called on the parliament to focus on delivering the vote rather than appointing a new transitional administration.

"What Libyans have clearly said is that they want to go to the ballot box and choose their government, a democratically government representing the entire Libya," she said.



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Libyan security forces break up protest sit-in by migrants
UN envoy says hard to hold Libya elections in December

[**Palestinian shot dead by Israeli troops in occupied West Bank**](#)

Author:

Tue, 2022-01-18 00:00

HEBRON: A Palestinian tried to stab an Israeli soldier in the occupied West Bank on Monday and was shot dead by him, the army said.

In a separate incident, the Palestinian Health Ministry said an elderly Palestinian died of injuries received nearly two weeks ago when he was hit by a vehicle in Israeli police service.

Violence has simmered in the West Bank, among territories Palestinians seek for a state, since US-backed peace talks with Israel stalled in 2014.

Video circulated on social media, and apparently taken by a motorist, showed a man lying on the road at the Gush Etzion junction in the West Bank, knife in hand, as three soldiers approached with rifles trained on him. A military spokesman said a man had emerged from a car and tried to stab a soldier, who shot him dead, and that the vehicle had fled the scene.

Another Israeli military official identified the dead man as a Palestinian from an outlying village.

In the nearby city of Hebron, the Health Ministry announced the death of 75-year-old Suleiman Al-Hathalin, a veteran protester against Israel's West Bank settlements.

He had been standing in front of a tow truck that had been sent to his village of Um El-Kheir to confiscate unlicensed cars on Jan 5, a relative, Hazem Al-Hathalin, said.

He said that Suleiman Al-Hathalin was struck deliberately by the truck, which "ran him over with its front and back wheels" before driving away.

Israeli police spokespersons did not immediately comment.

In a statement quoted by Israel's Haaretz newspaper on Jan. 14, police said Palestinians had thrown stones at the truck and police forces that had accompanied it, making it impossible for them to stop and help a man who had climbed on the vehicle and fallen.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh said on Facebook that he "died defending his village."

Villagers said vehicles which police had sought to tow away were bought from Israelis at low cost after they failed to pass annual roadworthiness inspections in Israel.



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Israel extends detention of ill Palestinian teen: father 80-year-old found dead after Israel West Bank raid: Palestinians