

## CONTESTED CONSOLIDATION OF POWER IN IRAQ

MARIA FANTAPPIE

During his second term, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki emerged as a dominant player in Iraq's political landscape. A weak legal framework and divisions among the prime minister's opponents helped facilitate his rise to power. But above all, control of the Iraqi security apparatus and army was key. The struggle to consolidate power has created a climate of continuous political crisis that can only be overcome by the efforts of all political groups to establish effective political leadership and strengthen Iraq's legal framework.

### Key Themes

- The deployment of the army throughout Iraq enabled the prime minister to strengthen his political power base in Baghdad. As the only institution present throughout all the provinces (except for the territory of the Kurdistan Regional Government), the army has allowed Maliki to assert the central government's authority over much of Iraq.
- Several attempts were made in 2012 to unseat the prime minister, but Maliki's power remains difficult to challenge. His opponents have failed to form a unified front.
- The Kurds possess their own security forces—the peshmerga—and the region of Kurdistan is exclusively controlled by those forces. They have been engaged with the prime minister in a military standoff.
- The prime minister's power consolidation remains contested. The end of 2012 saw a wave of antigovernment protests in the Sunni-majority provinces and rising tensions between the Kurds and the central government over the disputed territories.

### Policy Recommendations for Iraq's Political Groups

**Invest in bolstering Iraq's legal apparatus and state institutions.** All political groups should refrain from using security forces to conduct a political struggle. Building up Iraq's legal framework and institutions will help the country avoid the continuous cycle of political crisis.

**Strengthen ties with Iraqi citizens.** Political groups should reach out to the segments of society that feel disenfranchised by the government and poorly represented by the opposition.

**Work together to build a more inclusive government.** Consolidating power through policies that exclude certain segments of society affects Iraq's stability. For the country to become stable, its main political groups should have a genuine stake in governing.

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