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US, Iran-Backed Shi'ites Choose Replacement of Maliki

By Jason Ditz

August 11, 2014

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's potential successor has been selected today by the Iranian-back Iraq National Alliance (INA) faction, and both they and the United States are throwing their weight behind Dr. Hayder Abadi as the new PM-designate.

Abadi, another member of Maliki's Dawa Party, is the current Finance Committee chairman for the Iraqi parliament, and a long-standing MP. He lived in Manchester, England in exile for decades during the Saddam-era, and returned during the US occupation.

Yet how easily Abadi will be able to amass a majority to form a government remains unclear, with Maliki still fearing every attempt to replace him is a coup, and many of his allies spurning Abadi as an "illegitimate" replacement who doesn't represent Dawa Party interests.

The presumptive backing of much of the INA, along with the various Kurdish blocs beholden to US wishes will only get Abadi so far, and without some cross-over from Dawa and the State of Law in general, it is unclear how a majority can come together.

Maliki also deployed large numbers of special forces loyal to him across the capital yesterday, and those troops haven't gone anywhere in the wake of Abadi's appointment, meaning even if the PM-designate can somehow get a narrow majority government, that does not guarantee that Maliki will step down.

The US State Department has congratulated Abadi on his nomination and is calling on him to form a government “as swiftly as possible.” At this point, that appears to be wishful thinking on their parts, and any government formation seems certain to take some time, if Maliki allows it at all.

Some analysts believe Maliki is unlikely to relinquish power under any terms, and that his deployment of troops throughout the capital anticipates an attempt to consolidate his rule and launch a coup of his own against any new premier.