

Manipulation of Election Lists in Iraq

By [Global Research](#)

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Iraqi Shi'ite Holy City Threatens to Expel Baathists

BAGHDAD - The provincial council in Iraq's Shi'ite holy city of Najaf has threatened to expel anyone with ties to Saddam Hussein's outlawed Baath party, saying it would give them a day to get out of town or face "an iron hand".

The edict stepped up anti-Baathist rhetoric in a simmering controversy over a bid to bar 500 candidates from March 7 elections because of unspecified ties to the party that dominated Iraq during nearly a quarter century under Saddam.

The Najaf provincial council said in a statement it had decided to kick everyone with Baathist links out of politics and out of local government positions.

Thirdly, it would "give the gangs of Saddam Baathists and Sunni extremists a single day to leave the province," it added in the statement issued late on Monday.

"Otherwise, (we) will use an iron hand because they have not used the opportunity to disavow the Baath party and al Qaeda and return to the embrace of the homeland."

Iraqi election officials have agreed to exclude 511 candidates from March 7 parliamentary elections seen as critical to helping stabilise Iraq following years of war. The decision faces a court appeal.

The entire list has not been made public, but it includes both popular Sunni lawmaker Saleh al-Mutlaq and Defence Minister Abdel Qader Jassim, a Sunni who is a member of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's State of Law Coalition. Sunnis believe it is weighted against them.

The possible exclusion of Mutlaq angered Sunnis across Iraq and threatened to reopen sectarian wounds as Maliki's government tries to solidify security gains and U.S. forces prepare to end combat operations in August.

Overall violence has fallen sharply after sectarian bloodshed in which tens of thousands died but U.S. and Iraqi officials expect attacks to rise before the election.

The recommendation to exclude the 511 candidates was made by a panel whose job is to make sure high-ranking officials from Saddam's Sunni-led Baath party do not return to public life.

With Sunnis interpreting the attempt to purge Baathists from the ballot as a move to

marginalise them, Maliki, in an interview aired on Mustaqbil TV on Tuesday, said the Baath party used to have more Shi'ites than Sunnis.

"Seventy percent of the Baath party members were Shi'ite and some of them were big leaders in the Baath party. But they were governed by a sectarian regime," Maliki said.

"Yes, there are a number of Sunnis on the list but probably more Shi'ite names," he said.

(Reporting by Waleed Ibrahim, writing by Jim Loney; Editing by Charles Dick)

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