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From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
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Subject: (Reuters) Iraqi PM Maliki asked to form government

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - Iraq's president formally asked Prime Minister Maliki to form a new government, giving him 30 days to choose a cabinet from among Iraq's fractious Shiite, Kurdish and Sunni political factions. The request from President Talabani came two weeks after political leaders reached an agreement to divide up the top government jobs, a deal that put Maliki, a Shiite, on track for a second term as premier. The power-sharing pact, more than eight months after an inconclusive March 7 parliamentary election, offered some hope that Iraq could avoid a return to the sectarian warfare that killed tens of thousands of people at its peak in 2006-07. The deal gave Talabani, a Kurd, another term as president and installed Sunni lawmaker Osama al-Nujaifi as speaker of parliament. Among Maliki's biggest decisions are his choices to head the oil and finance ministries.