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Subject: (NYT) Iraq's Premier Vows to Forge New Government

November 27, 2010
By JACK HEALY

BAGHDAD — Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, seeking to show that he is in control of a tenuous new ruling coalition, said Saturday that he would push ahead to form a new government with or without potential allies, and that there was no need for American troops to remain in Iraq past a December 2011 deadline for withdrawal.

In his first news conference since being formally nominated as prime minister two days ago, Mr. Maliki acknowledged the growing frustration of Iraqis, who have watched their leaders collect salaries of up to \$11,000 a month and fly off to their second homes while in much of the country's electricity remains sporadic and violent attacks continue.

Mr. Maliki's remarks also reflected the splinters that remained inside Iraq's nascent partnership government, and the competing interests of political groups that have coalesced behind him. There is no need for American troops to remain in Iraq beyond December 2011, Mr. Maliki said, apparently in a nod to the followers of the anti-American Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr, who have promised to fight any attempt to maintain an American military presence here.

The Sadrists have played a critical role in supporting Mr. Maliki for a second term after indecisive elections in March. Some American and Iraqi officials have argued that a residual force is necessary to continue training Iraqi soldiers and help maintain military equipment, but on Saturday, Mr. Maliki said the Iraqis could stand alone.

"I don't see a need for any other international forces to help Iraqis control the security situation," he said.

Iraqi officials announced Saturday that they had arrested 12 people who orchestrated a bloody siege against a Christian church here last month. They called the arrests evidence of improvements in the country's security forces.

Interior Ministry officials said the insurgents had ties to Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, and had also planned to also blow up the main gates of the International Zone, where the United States Embassy is located. Officials said they had seized 6 suicide belts, 10 improvised explosive devices and 5 tons of bomb-making material as a result of the arrests.

At his news conference, Mr. Maliki, a religious Shiite, said he wanted the new government to include his main rival, Ayad Allawi, whose Iraqiya coalition won the most support among Iraq's Sunni minority. But Mr. Maliki indicated he would move forward with or without Mr. Allawi, who has sharply criticized the power-sharing deal.

"If we reach the critical area and we have to announce the government, we will go on with who is beside us, who wants to be a partner," Mr. Maliki said.

Mr. Allawi, a secular Shiite and former Iraqi prime minister, has been offered a position leading a new strategic policy council, but has not said whether he will accept the job.

For Mr. Maliki, the clock is ticking. He now has four weeks to cobble together a government that satisfies most demands of the country's ethnic, religious and political factions.

He said he had sent letters asking the different coalitions for nominations for key government offices, and would announce his ministers by Dec. 10 or 15.

Duraid Adnan and Zaid Thaker contributed reporting.