

from the February 17, 2005 edition - <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0217/p06s01-woiq.html>

A 'pragmatic' Islamist for Iraq

Ibrahim Jaafari, a former exile and a physician, appears poised to become Iraq's new prime minister.

By Dan Murphy and Jill Carroll | staff writer and contributor

BAGHDAD - Ibrahim Jaafari, a stern and careful Iraqi doctor whose Islamist activism began in his youth and continued during a 2 the race to lead Iraq's first elected government since World War II.

Though there's still room for change, aides to both Mr. Jaafari and members of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in they're close to a deal that will deliver him the premiership.

"There's a general acceptance that Jaafari should be our sole candidate," says Adnan Ali al-Khadimi, Jaafari's deputy chief of sta hasn't been a formal announcement yet."

Jaafari's rise will put a Shiite Islamist in charge of the government for the first time in Iraq's history. It also underscores waning US have preferred to see a secular leader emerge, not an Islamist who once lived in Iran. Jaafari's party is also unlikely to support ex the US at the start of the war.

And while Jaafari enjoys some support among Iraqis, his new parliament may well be consumed by politicking over constitutional desperately want and fixing the power supply.

The name of Jaafari's party loosely translates as "Islamic Call" or "Islamic Propagation." While his priorities are protecting the rig claimed tens of thousands of lives, Islam is at the center of his party's vision for the country.

As a politician, Jaafari presents a blend of a secular style, human rights rhetoric, and commitment to Islamic values that sometime

But his friends and allies say no contradiction exists - that he's a pragmatic politician who sees Islam as the best guarantee again modern interpretation of Islam's political role can be found that's acceptable to most who live here.

"Iraq's minorities must be protected, and they must be given their rights," Jaafari said in a recent interview with the Monitor. "But v should be the official religion of the state ... and we shouldn't have any laws that contradict Islam."

"He looks at Islam as a bridge to all humanity, not just for on particular type of people," says Mr. Khadimi. "He doesn't want an Isl Saudi Arabia's. He wants to see something modernized and that recognizes that Iraqis are closely tied to their religion and traditic want."

"I wouldn't say he's secular, or religious either," says Toby Dodge, an Iraq expert at Queen Mary University in London. While Daw wanted *sharia* (Islamic law) for Iraq, Mr. Dodge says the exiles have recognized that something on an Iranian model would be dis their message. "Jaafari has been particularly honest about this. He is a pragmatist and the reason he has [some] support ... now dreams of exiles."

But Iraq's top job will not come without complications. The United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), the religious Shiite slate that won 140 seats has been locked for a week in marathon negotiations over how to divvy up power and patronage.

The UIA's main players are Dawa and SCIRI, who are sparring over both the premiership and ministerial posts.

Members of SCIRI say they have withdrawn the candidacy of Adil Abdul Mahdi in exchange for an agreement that SCIRI appoint Ministry, which oversees domestic security and intelligence, and other ministerial posts that will provide them a strong power plat

SCIRI - which has close ties to Iran and to the Badr Brigade militia, an armed wing that was formed in exile - would probably then security apparatus.

Iraq's ethnic Kurds, who came in second with 70 seats, will also have to be appeased. They're demanding the presidency for vet

Talabani as well as the foreign minister post.

The Shiite politicians are hoping to strike a "package deal" among themselves and the Kurds over the cabinet, premiership, and probably around the end of the month - and it seems that Jaafari has played the game of political brinkmanship most effectively.

SCIRI officials say Dawa has been so adamant about giving the prime minister's job to Jaafari, who polling shows has the highest support among Shiite politicians, that they feared splitting their alliance if they didn't back down. He has a favorable rating from about 20 percent among the politicians.

Shiite leaders said Wednesday that they would hold a secret ballot to choose the prime minister, the Associated Press reported. Jaafari, who leads the Iraqi National Congress. Jaafari is strongly favored to win.

"On extremely flat terrain, he's the highest point," says Mr. Dodge, who adds that Dawa has trumped SCIRI, founded under Iranian leadership. Shias are Iraqis first and Shias second, and Dawa seems more indigenous to people than SCIRI, which sometimes appears to be

Jaafari was born in 1947 and grew up among an extended clan of textile traders and hotel owners in the Shiite shrine city of Karbala, or direct descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. He attended medical school in the northern city of Mosul.

He joined Dawa in the 1960s. When he returned home in 1974, he ended up leading the party in the city, setting himself apart as

"He likes reading a lot. He likes planning.... He has got vision," says Reda Taki, SCIRI's head of political relations.

Mr. Taki says the diplomatic but hard-charging Jaafari used an aggressive media strategy and excellent public-speaking skills to become one of the most popular politicians in postwar Iraq.

"Iraqi people didn't know who is Abu Ahmed," said Taki, using Jaafari's nickname. "But he knows the mentality of the Iraqi people speaking."

When Saddam Hussein said that all Dawa members would be executed in 1980, Jaafari fled first to Iran and then London with his wife's profession as evidence of his support for a woman's role outside the home.

Jaafari served in the US-appointed governing council, sometimes clashing with US officials, particularly when the interim constitution was a source of Iraq's laws.

Khadimi says that independence is part of Jaafari's appeal. "He's never allowed himself to be under anyone's influence, in Iran or here, for this."

[Full HTML version of this story which may include photos, graphics, and related links](#)

[Home](#) | [About Us/Help](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Feedback](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Archive](#) | [Print Edition](#)
[Privacy Policy](#) | [Rights & Permissions](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Advertise With Us](#) | [Monitor Mall](#) | [Today's Article](#)

www.csmonitor.com | Copyright © 2008 The Christian Science Monitor. All rights reserved.