

Iraq's political crisis

Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki has called a crisis council of Iraq's top five politicians in a bid to save his crumbling Shia-led government. With just 21 ministers in his 38-strong cabinet still loyal there is tremendous pressure from both Sunni leaders and Washington to replace him



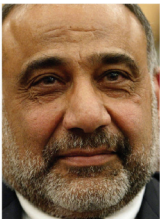
Nouri Al Maliki
Shia prime minister



Jalal Talabani
Kurdish president of Iraq



Tareq Al Hashemi
Sunni vice president



Adel Abdul-Mahdi
Shia vice president



Massoud Barzani
President of Kurdish region

■ **May 20, 2006:** **Al Maliki** sworn in as prime minister, backed by **United Iraqi Alliance** (UIA) – largest Shia party

■ **Jun:** Al Maliki presents bold **national reconciliation plan** to parliament. Plan requires disarming of militias; amnesty for rebels; reaching out to Sunnis, including purged members of **Ba'ath Party**; timetable for withdrawal of U.S. troops, and release of all security detainees from U.S. and Iraqi prisons. Plan is fiercely opposed by Washington

■ **Oct:** Bush administration criticises Al Maliki for political inaction in face of escalating violence

■ **Feb 2007:** Bush administration starts funding Sunni tribal leaders hostile to Al Maliki's government. In following months U.S. recruits an estimated 25,000 Sunni militiamen

■ **Apr 16:** Six ministers of cleric **Muqtada Al Sadr's** Shia bloc quit cabinet citing PM's failure to establish timetable for U.S. troop withdrawal

■ **Jul 25:** Six ministers from **Iraqi Accordance Front (IAF)** – biggest Sunni political bloc – pull out of cabinet over failure to purge Shia militias from Iraqi army and police, and release thousands of Sunni prisoners

■ **Aug 2:** Move by Sunni Iraqi **National Dialogue Front** to form rival coalition with **IAF**, Shia **Fadhila Party**, and **Kurdistan Alliance**. Coalition would have overall majority in parliament – IAF leader **Ayad Allawi** would be its candidate for prime minister



■ **Aug 6:** Five ministers loyal to Allawi boycott cabinet meetings

■ Seventeen ministers have walked out of Al Maliki's government in past four months in protest at what they see as officially sanctioned persecution