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Sent: Sun, 01 Feb 2009 07:13:06 -0500
From: [REDACTED]
To: bettsta@state.gov, bmcgurk@nsc.eop.gov, [REDACTED], john.gerlaugh@osd.mil, sibleygn@state.gov, onealkm@state.gov, "Slotkin, Elissa B." <eslotkin@nsc.eop.gov>, lauren.haber@osd.mil, alifj@state.gov, [REDACTED], [REDACTED] "Wasserman, Adam R." <awasserman@nsc.eop.gov>, [REDACTED] dana.stroul@osd.mil, michael.flynn@js.pentagon.mil, "Slotkin, Elissa B." <"/o=eop/ou=first administrative group/cn=recipients/cn=elissa_b._slotkin17025525">, "Wasserman, Adam R." <"/o=eop/ou=first administrative group/cn=recipients/cn=adam_r._wasserman">
Bcc: "smtp:bmcgurk@nsc.eop.gov" <bmcgurk@nsc.eop.gov>, "Slotkin, Elissa B." <"/o=eop/ou=first administrative group/cn=recipients/cn=elissa_b._slotkin17025525">, "Wasserman, Adam R." <"/o=eop/ou=first administrative group/cn=recipients/cn=adam_r._wasserman">
Subject: Juan Cole on the Elections

From Juan Cole's Blog...

[Al-Sharq al-Awsat \[The Middle East\] reports in Arabic](#) that it conducted unscientific exit polling after Iraqi voters exited from the polling booths. It found that there was a lively contest between secular and religious parties. The newspaper found a surge for the Alliance for a Government of Laws led by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, head of the Islamic Mission Party (Da'wa)—the main component of the coalition. Falling behind was the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, led by cleric Abdul Aziz al-Hakim. ISCI dominated 9 of 11 provinces where there were Shiite majorities or substantial Shiite populations in the Jan. 2005 election.

Al-Maliki's coalition [consists of the Islamic Mission Party, the Islamic Mission Party - Iraq Organization](#), Solidarity in Iraq, The Islamic Union of Iraqi Turkmen, the Iraqi Fayli Kurdish Brotherhood Movement, the 1991 Popular Iraqi Uprising Bloc and independents. The core of this coalition is the two major branches of the Da'wa Party, the oldest Shiite fundamentalist party in Iraq, founded around 1958. It was devastated by Saddam Hussein's persecution from 1980 to 2003, and went underground as a conspiracy of cadres. Al-Maliki is now attempting to reformulate it as an ordinary mass political party. The Coalition for a Government of Laws contested seats in 13 provinces, skipping the almost totally Sunni al-Anbar Province. Still it seems to be attracting some Sunnis. That is not new. In its golden age of the 1960s and 1970s, about 10 percent of the Da'wa membership is estimated to have been Sunnis. Although Da'wa or the Islamic Mission Party is Shiite fundamentalists, it is not a clerical party and it is not as close to Iran as ISCI. It is benefitting from a perception that al-Maliki has gotten a handle on the security situation.

Two secular parties, the Iraqi List of former appointed prime minister Iyad Allawi and the Citizens Coalition, also seemed to SA to be attracting some voters. (Citizens [groups the Communist Party of Iraq](#), the Arab Socialist Party, and the National Democratic Party.) The problem with this newspaper's poll is immediately apparent when we consider that Citizens only ran 55 candidates in an election for which 450 seats on 14 provincial councils are open. They therefore cannot possibly garner more than about 10 percent even if they win every seat they contest, and they certainly won't do anywhere nearly that well. In fact, there is no point mentioning this coalition in the same breath with the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq. ISCI may not do as well as it did in January of 2005, but it is likely to win some southern Shiite provinces.

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