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Iraqi Parliament Chaos as Thousands Protest Outside

By Jason Ditz
April 26, 2016

Thousands of demonstrators took to the area outside Iraq's parliament, demanding reform as the legislative body attempted, and failed, to have an orderly session regarding the proposed new technocrat cabinet.

Prime Minister Hayder Abadi's arrival caused a considerable ruckus, as MPs opposed to his cabinet threw water bottles at him and hollered "treachery" for nearly two hours, until the early session was ended. This also saw the removal of all reporters, for "security," amid reports that the protesters had entered the Green Zone.

The reporters weren't the only ones expelled, however, as a number of the anti-cabinet MPs were forbidden from attending the later session of parliament, nominally because they were causing too much disruption. In this later session, five of the 16 cabinet candidates were voted in, though whether this is ultimately legal will be a matter of considerable debate since the expelled MPs didn't get to vote.

This isn't the only disputed voting in Iraq recently, as last week the parliament's speaker was "fired" in a session held by the anti-cabinet faction, who claimed a narrow quorum was present, but in which photos show only a fraction of the claimed people were in attendance. The speaker was back today, and the MPs who were shouting insisted his presence was illegal.

Abadi is a member of the State of Law faction, the larger of two Shi'ite Arab blocs. Ironically, the opposition to his cabinet is overwhelmingly from his own bloc, along with the Kurds, while he is supported by the rival Shi'ite bloc, Moqtada al-Sadr's, which dominates the public protests, along with the Sunni Arabs, including parliament's speaker.

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