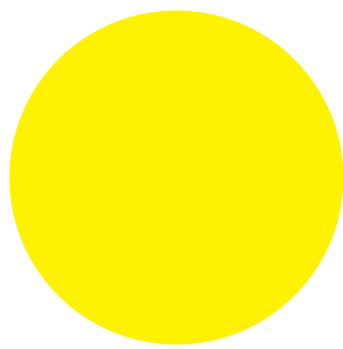


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Full coalition pullout could boost Iraq's disarmament drive

By Delaram Ahmadi
Staff writer

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

Iraq's new government, led by Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi, has launched a plan to bring all weapons under state control, setting September 30, 2026 as the deadline. The date coincides with the scheduled end of the US-led international coalition's mission in Iraq. Armed groups have not responded uniformly to the proposal. Some have shown flexibility and entered into talks with the government, while others have voiced objections to the plan, citing the continued presence of US forces in the country. This is not the first time an Iraqi government has attempted to disarm armed factions. In an interview with Iran Daily, Middle East affairs expert Majid Safataj argues that resistance groups still regard Iraq as being under US occupation and see disarmament as paving the way for



Majid Safataj

anti-national activities by Washington. As a result, he says, a complete and genuine withdrawal of coalition forces would significantly increase the government's chances of succeeding where previous administrations failed.

IRAN DAILY: Given the failure of previous Iraqi governments to disarm armed groups, how likely is Prime Minister al-Zaidi's new initiative to succeed, especially since its deadline coincides with the end of the international coalition's mission in September 2026?

SAFATAJ: There are several reasons why previous Iraqi governments failed to implement plans to disarm armed groups, but the most important is that Iraq remains under US occupation. Admittedly, unlike the early days of the 2003 invasion, American troops are no longer deployed throughout Iraqi cities and streets. However, their presence at what is the largest US military base in West Asia, located in Iraq, along with the numerous actions they have taken against Iraq's sovereignty and against the Islamic Republic of Iran, amounts to occupation.

As long as those forces remain, it is only natural that Iraqi armed groups such as the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), the Islamic Resistance, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, and other factions do not consider it either wise or logical to lay down their arms.

Disarmament should only take place once the US military has completely withdrawn from Iraq, evacuated its bases, and no American military personnel remain in the country.

If that scenario materializes—although I find it unlikely that the US-led international coalition will genuinely and definitively pull out of Iraq by September 2026—then it can be said that Mr. al-Zaidi's government would stand a better chance of disarming the resistance groups, the PMF, and other armed factions than previous governments did.

However, if that does not happen, then disarmament—which is conditional on the withdrawal of US forces—will naturally not move forward.

Is this initiative primarily driven by Iraq's internal push to consolidate state sovereignty, or has it been shaped by external pressure, particularly from the United States? How would you assess the relative weight of these factors?

At the first stage, this plan is mainly the result of external pressure. From the very beginning, when the resistance emerged in Iraq and took up arms, the United States sought to disarm it—particularly the Popular Mobilization Forces, the Islamic Resistance, and other factions aligned with the Axis of Resistance, but not the takfiri groups. In fact, the Americans themselves trained and organized the takfiri groups. They even nurtured and organized Daesh to enable it to dominate Iraq.

That is why Washington initially pushed for the disarmament of Iraq's resistance groups. The objective was to leave Iraq with a weak army, allowing takfiri and separatist groups to move in, fragment the country, and ultimately bring about Iraq's partition. Under the current circumstances, however, assuming that the United States and the international coalition fully withdraw from Iraq, it is only natural that the Iraqi people and various political currents would seek unified state sovereignty across the country. Under those conditions, they are also likely to

support the government's plan. Indeed, some groups, including Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq and others, have already expressed their approval.

The remaining groups are not entirely opposed to the initiative either. Rather, they believe it could still be exploited by the United States and occupying forces remain in Iraq. That is why they have made their support conditional upon the withdrawal of the international coalition—a condition that appears reasonable and logical.

Therefore, assuming the US-led international coalition completely withdraws from Iraq in September 2026, it can be said that the weight of internal and external factors in shaping this initiative would be roughly equal.

The core objection raised by the resistance groups is the presence of US forces in Iraq. How would a complete withdrawal of foreign troops by the deadline affect this process?

Yes, the resistance groups' primary objection to disarmament stems solely from the presence of US forces in Iraq. In fact, the success of this initiative is directly tied to that issue.

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