



## The American Has Left... Can Baghdad Regain Its Decision-Making?

(Translated)

In Iraq, September 30, 2026, was not merely a date marking the withdrawal of American forces; it was a point where two seemingly separate issues converged, yet are profoundly interconnected: the withdrawal of foreign forces and the monopolization of weaponry under state control.

Today, the American military presence is nearing its end according to the agreed schedule between Baghdad and Washington, after more than two decades. In contrast, the issue of weapons outside state institutions remains unresolved by that same date; instead, it has shifted to a phased track extending, as per the latest government announcement, until June 2027.

It is tempting to view the withdrawal as a victory for one side and a defeat for the other, but politics is more complex. America is ending its direct military presence in Iraq, but not necessarily withdrawing from its relationship with Iraq. The agreed path is leading toward terminating the military coalition's mission, with the possibility of continuing a bilateral security relationship between Baghdad and Washington in a different form. Moreover, the remaining American forces had shifted years ago from a direct combat role to functions involving training, advising, and countering Islam. Thus, we are witnessing a change in the form of the relationship, not necessarily its severance.

More importantly, America is leaving at a regional moment entirely different from when it entered. When its forces returned to Iraq in 2014, Daesh (ISIS) posed a broad military threat, whereas today, America states that the decline of this threat has reduced the importance of maintaining a large military presence inside Iraq, especially given that its forces have come under attack from Iran and Iraqi factions linked to it. Therefore, the withdrawal is not solely a response to Iraqi pressure—if it exists—but also a recalculation by America of risks, costs, and benefits.

The withdrawal of foreign forces was supposed to remove one of the key arguments used by armed factions to justify retaining their weapons. So, if weapons are linked to resisting the American presence, what happens when that presence ends? Some factions did not consider withdrawal alone sufficient grounds to surrender their arms, while others announced their acceptance of procedures to regulate weapons or integrate them into state institutions. More hardline factions remain, rejecting the idea of relinquishing their independent capabilities.

When we began discussing the ninety-day test, the core idea was that Baghdad was attempting to transition from managing a balance between armed forces to reorganizing weaponry under state authority. What happened subsequently, however, is highly significant.

The deadline initially seen as the end of the weapons issue on September 30th has, in practice, become the start of a longer process. The government has moved to a phased plan, with June 2027 indicated as the new target date for completing the process, continuing negotiations instead of resorting to force. This is because the

state, while theoretically capable of using force to impose its will, recognizes that doing so against armed groups with political and military influence could turn the very process of state-building into a source of internal conflict. Hence, the government has thus far chosen the path of negotiation, containment, and reorganization.

An institution may possess legal weapons, but if it maintains an independent chain of command or the ability to make military decisions bypassing the General Command of the Armed Forces, the problem remains unresolved. Therefore, the future of the Popular Mobilization Forces, like that of other factions, cannot be reduced to the question: does it remain or is it dissolved? The more precise question is: in what form does it remain? Who commands it? Who determines its movements? And can it operate militarily without a state decision?

Here emerges the most sensitive issue in Iraq: the distinction between an armed force existing within the state and an armed force that, while part of the state, also retains independent decision-making.

The relationship between some Iraqi factions and Tehran is well-documented, with factions possessing deep political and military ties to Iran. Recent analyses suggest Tehran might accept the legal and administrative integration of these factions but views the loss of their independent operational capabilities as a strategic setback. Baghdad is attempting to redefine the boundaries of Iranian influence within the Iraqi system without triggering direct confrontation with Iran or its linked Iraqi forces.

Here, politics becomes more critical than weaponry. If Baghdad succeeds, it need not necessarily sever its relationship with Tehran; rather, it can assert: Iraq can be close to Iran, but it cannot be an arena for Iranian decision-making.

Conversely, the American withdrawal should not be misinterpreted as an American abandonment of Iraq. The United States is losing a direct military presence but retains other tools of influence—from political and security relations to economic, financial, and monetary systems. More importantly, Washington may have redefined its interests in Iraq. Instead of American forces in Iraqi bases being constant targets for attacks, the relationship could transform into security cooperation without a direct military presence, which may better suit Washington at this stage.

The opportunity lies in the withdrawal of American troops giving the government a stronger argument to declare that the phase justifying weapons by resisting the American presence has ended. The risk, however, is that America's departure may create a wider vacuum for regional and local forces if Baghdad fails to fill the resulting political and security void. Therefore, the success of the withdrawal is measured not by the number of soldiers who left, but by what follows their departure. If military decision-making becomes more centralized and the state gains greater control over its borders, airspace, and weaponry, the withdrawal could mark a step toward reclaiming Iraqi decision-making. However, if multiple centers of military power persist, Iraq will have ended the American military presence without resolving the issue of its own security sovereignty.

Five challenges warrant monitoring in the coming months:

First: Can the government transform the factions into a force de facto subordinate to the General Command, beyond mere administrative and legal integration?

Second: Can it resolve the weapons issue through negotiation without triggering domestic confrontation?

Third: Will the security relationship with Washington endure in a new form despite the end of direct military presence?

Fourth: Will the factions' capacity for military decision-making independent of the government be curtailed?

Fifth: Can Baghdad manage its relations with Iran, America, Türkiye, and the Gulf states from the position of an independent state, rather than as an arena for these powers to compete?

Independence means the state holds the decision on weaponry, the state decides war and peace, the state decides the use of Iraqi territory, and Iraq's foreign relations are an Iraqi decision—not an extension of others' conflicts.

Iraq is not merely a country at the heart of the Middle East; it is a land where one of humanity's oldest civilizations emerged, from Sumeria, Babylon, and Assyria. Then, during the era of the Khilafah (Caliphate), it became a political, scientific, and cultural center for the Islamic lands. In Baghdad, founded by the Abbasids in 762 CE, the Abbasid Khilafah (Caliphate) established its capital, transforming the city into one of the world's most important capitals. From it, the state's influence extended, and sciences, knowledge, and commerce flowed to vast regions.

Thus, Iraq carries a legacy transcending its current geographical borders; throughout history, it was a center for political and civilizational decision-making in the region. Therefore, restoring Iraq's role means not only regaining control over land and weapons but restoring the capability to resume the Islamic way of life by implementing Islam on the ground and reclaiming the Ummah's honor.

Praise be to Allah (swt) that there is a Hizb advocating the Ummah's project and working to establish it. It has prepared all that is necessary for steadfastness and achieving the goal, striving to secure military support (nussrah) from the people of military power and protection to adopt its project, so it may be implemented on Allah's earth and the affairs of the servants managed according to His Shariah.

I call upon all the sons of the Islamic Ummah, especially in Iraq—individuals, groups, and armies—to hasten their pace alongside this great party, to be among the men of this Ummah, and to establish the Khilafah Rashidah (rightly-guided Caliphate) which the Messenger of Allah (saw) promised when he said, « **ثُمَّ تَكُونُ خِلَافَةً عَلَىٰ مِنْهَاجٍ** » **«النُّبُوءَةِ»** **“Then there will be a Khilafah upon the Method of the Prophethood.”**

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by  
Nabil Abdul Karim**