

# The Withdrawal of International Coalition Forces from Iraq: Perspectives and Future Vision

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When we examine the security aspects of the future scenarios and perspectives following the withdrawal of the International Coalition forces from Iraq, we must start from an essential observation: we are dealing with probabilities, not certainties or inevitabilities. This means that the withdrawal of the Coalition forces from Iraq is not an inevitable or definitive reality; rather, it is an assumption and expectation. Since it is assumed and expected, it may manifest in at least two possible outcomes: the realization of the assumption or its non-realization.

Each of these two possibilities carries specific consequences and outcomes, which will become clearer through the following points:

### **First: The Potential Security Consequences of the Withdrawal of the U.S.-Led International Coalition Forces**

It is undeniable that the United States is a major power and does not accept defeat easily, as its modern political history indicates. In a situation where it cannot establish a political system that is loyal or friendly to it in a country that holds significant importance for its interests, the U.S. tends to punish that system after classifying it as hostile to American interests. Regarding Iraq, the continuous pressure faced by the United States on political, popular, and military levels may eventually force it to withdraw its forces, which form the backbone of the International Coalition, without proper coordination or agreement on safeguarding American interests in Iraq or organizing future relations with the Iraqi government. This would inevitably harm its international reputation, demonstrate its weakness in the Middle East in general, and send messages of insecurity to its "friends" and allies in the region. At the same time, it would signal strength, confidence, and a capacity for action to its adversaries, enabling certain countries to foster closer ties and impose a new agenda in the region, under Iran's leadership.

In this scenario, it is unlikely that the United States will remain passive. Instead, it will likely move to impose certain sanctions on selected sectors in Iraq, with the security sector being one of the most crucial to undermine Iraq's military and security capabilities. This may include halting the provision of specific supplies

and technologies for F-16 aircraft, Hellfire missiles designed for targeting mobile ground-based objectives, and equipment used to target vehicles of terrorist organizations. Additionally, the U.S. may suspend or reduce the supply of a wide range of military equipment, including Humvees, Abrams tanks, and various armaments. Moreover, there could be a discontinuation of the provision of crucial information for aviation operations, electronic military maps, and real-time satellite imagery.

Second: The Security Cooperation between Iraq and the Countries of the International Coalition Post-Withdrawal

The impact of Iraq's insistence on the withdrawal of the International Coalition forces from Iraq (without the approval and consent of the United States regarding the manner in which the withdrawal process is to be carried out) on Iraq's security relations with the Coalition countries is an issue that does not require deep contemplation. The matter is nearly settled, and the nature of the impact on future security relations is clear. Most of the Coalition countries, particularly those allied with and friendly to the United States, the United Kingdom, and NATO in general, will be forced to reduce the level of security relations and military support to Iraq. This reduction may involve hindering arms sales, ammunition, and military technology, as well as limiting military intelligence cooperation, especially regarding the movements and intentions of terrorist organizations outside Iraq's borders. The reduction in security support from the Coalition countries following the withdrawal will be justified by a decrease in the political importance of Iraq in the decision-making circles of Western countries, as it will no longer be a partner in addressing the security and geopolitical threats facing the Western world.

Third: Security and Intelligence Relations between the Center and the Region Post-Withdrawal

Kurdish politicians do not hide the nature of their political relations with the United States and do not hesitate to describe them as strategic, regardless of the presence of U.S. and International Coalition forces in Iraq. They even prefer that these strategic relations be built and maintained on the basis of a permanent U.S. military presence in Iraq, including a strong presence in the Kurdistan Region, to protect and strengthen this relationship. Kurdish politicians openly express their support for the continued presence of U.S. and international forces in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. They consider the withdrawal of these forces a threat to

Iraq and to the security and political future of the Kurdistan Region. They have declared that the Region intends to keep these forces on its territory, regardless of the stance of the federal government, which could undoubtedly lead to significant disputes between the regional government and the federal government. These disputes may escalate to the point of threatening the use of military force against the region for not respecting federal government decisions, thereby endangering the state's security, sovereignty, and the unity of its decision-making process.

The federal government's response to this situation primarily depends on the nature of the government and the political coalition supporting it, especially after the upcoming parliamentary elections. The more the government is influenced by the armed factions, particularly the resistance factions and political Islamic forces, including the Sadrist Movement and the Dawa Party, the more likely it is to adopt a firm and stringent stance toward the potential U.S. and international military presence in the Kurdistan Region. This may manifest in the government issuing international protest notes at the United Nations and the Security Council against the International Coalition and the United States. The situation could escalate to the point where the federal government encourages resistance factions to target those military bases, considering them a violation of Iraq's sovereignty since they are present without official authorization from the federal government.

#### **Fourth: The Positions of the Iraqi Government and Iraqi Resistance Regarding the Military Presence of the Coalition Forces in the Event of Non-Withdrawal or Delayed Withdrawal**

The Iraqi government believes that the withdrawal should not occur in a manner that reflects the demands of hardline factions, neither in terms of the method nor the timing, especially since Iraq still requires the support of the International Coalition in the fight against ISIS or any other threat. Iraq also continues to need U.S. and Western military assistance to complete the armament and preparation of its military forces. The government still sees that the biggest beneficiary of the withdrawal process may be Iran, rather than Iraq. According to some factions within the Iraqi government, Iran has successfully exploited the significant Arab, Islamic, and local rejection of the U.S. position supporting Israel, forming a political and military movement, especially within Iraq, to expel U.S. and Coalition forces, viewing their presence as a threat to Iraq's sovereignty.

The utmost action the Iraqi government could take in the event of the International Coalition's refusal to withdraw according to the expected timelines is to file a complaint with the United Nations and the Security

Council or to intensify formal demands for withdrawal, without taking military actions on the ground. This would be done to avoid taking steps that could harm the cohesion of the political process or the future of the entire Iraqi political system.

This scenario, however, clearly does not align with the resistance factions, nor with their political discourse and declared military stance, which demand the full withdrawal of foreign forces as soon as possible. Their primary response to the U.S. delay in withdrawal is to continue the resistance process, targeting forces present on Iraqi soil or in the region in general, either individually or through coordination with other resistance fronts in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Yemen. In addition, there is the option of escalating political and popular actions against the Iraqi government in case of its lack of seriousness in demanding the withdrawal of the U.S. administration and the International Coalition. This escalation could reach the point of forcing the government to resign or calling for early elections.

Fifth: Possible U.S. Positions Regarding the Popular Mobilization Forces and the Resistance After the Withdrawal

The possible U.S. positions can be outlined as follows:

**1. Distinguishing Between the Popular Mobilization Forces as an Official Institution and**

**Some Factions as Their Own Entities:** The United States may adopt a selective policy by distinguishing between targets, focusing on certain armed factions considered to be the main drivers of the demand for withdrawal. This approach would avoid treating the broad spectrum of potential adversaries as one group, instead concentrating on particular factions within the Popular Mobilization Forces.

**2. Failure to Distinguish Between the Popular Mobilization Forces and Some Resistance**

**Factions:** This possibility depends on how the security situation develops prior to the withdrawal and the extent to which certain Popular Mobilization Forces institutions and their leaders may engage in military actions aimed at forcing the U.S. to withdraw. It also hinges on potential tensions and clashes between the Popular Mobilization Forces and the Iraqi government, particularly if the government or its Prime Minister is threatened by factions within the Popular Mobilization Forces demanding a quicker U.S. withdrawal.

**3.Potential Improvement in U.S. Stance Toward the Popular Mobilization Forces and Support for Some Factions to Exclude Hardline Groups:** Another potential U.S. approach could involve splitting the Popular Mobilization Forces by offering support, both financially and militarily with advanced weapons, to certain factions. This could transform the Popular Mobilization Forces into a counterterrorism-like agency, focusing on eliminating hardline factions.

Sixth: The Benefits of the Withdrawal of International Coalition Forces

The withdrawal of International Coalition forces from Iraq, according to diplomatic frameworks, would signify Iraq's liberation from the constraints that have persisted for many years, particularly regarding the full exercise of its sovereignty over its land, airspace, airports, and borders. It would also lead to a greater degree of political independence for Iraq, as it would be relatively freed from direct threats posed by the U.S. military presence. Furthermore, this withdrawal could ease the internal political tensions in Iraq, as various political forces that have long disagreed on the importance or lack of importance of the U.S. and international military presence in Iraq—especially in terms of security, politics, and economics—would likely see a reduction in the sharp divisions that have marked their discussions. Additionally, the risk of armed conflict between different factions, particularly between the federal government and the Kurdistan Region, or between hardline armed groups opposed to the U.S. presence and the Iraqi government, which seeks a peaceful and smooth withdrawal, would be diminished. This also includes the possibility that the government may not apply enough pressure on the U.S. and international forces to withdraw, as it may not be fully convinced of the benefits of the withdrawal itself.

### Conclusions

.The U.S. withdrawal from Iraq under pressure in such circumstances, from groups that the U.S. and its allies consider to be affiliated with or allies of Iran within the Resistance Axis, represents a type of defeat, or at least a strategic loss, that the United States will find difficult to accept without consequences.

.The U.S. position, which fully supports the Zionist aggression against Gaza, has increased pressure on the United States, the International Coalition, and the Iraqi government to force the

- U.S. to withdraw from Iraq. Otherwise, some factions may resume their military operations against the Coalition forces and U.S. forces.
- One of the potential impacts of the withdrawal process on Iraq's interests could be the reduction or cessation of U.S. and Western arms sales to Iraq, particularly the F-16 fighter jets, Abrams tanks, and other important equipment.
- It is unlikely that Iraq, through its government and official institutions, will take escalatory steps against the United States and the International Coalition by forcing their withdrawal in a humiliating manner.
- The Iraqi government will likely attempt to balance internal pressures with the strategic necessity of not losing a major power such as the United States or its international and regional allies. Instead, the government will continue to strengthen its negotiating program by completing its specialized negotiating committees.