



Insights & Analysis

By Political Studies  
& State-Building Unit

# The Day That Could Change Iraq's Course

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Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi has set September 30 as the deadline for bringing all weapons under state control. This date represents not only a security milestone, but also a test for the future of the Iraqi state and its model of governance. The success of this course would mean consolidating state authority and strengthening the rule of law, while any setback could lead to political, economic, and security repercussions extending beyond Iraq's borders.

The deadline gained greater importance after al-Zaidi informed political leaders of his readiness to turn to the option of confrontation with factions that insist on retaining their weapons after the deadline expires. This comes amid unprecedented regional shifts. The US–Iranian confrontation has redrawn the balance of power in the region, and the file of weapons outside the state framework has become linked not only to security, but also to Iraq's future and its international relations. Furthermore, the financial pressures facing Iraq, and Washington's desire to link economic cooperation to Baghdad's ability to impose state sovereignty, have made this issue more urgent than ever.

Although several armed factions have agreed to enter into arrangements to reorganize their status, other factions still clearly reject this. Harakat al-Nujaba affirmed that the weapons of the “resistance” cannot be abandoned before the withdrawal of foreign forces and guarantees for Iraq's protection against any external aggression. Meanwhile, Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada, led by Abu Ala al-Wala'i, made any agreement conditional on the withdrawal of US forces, the passage of the Popular Mobilization Law, strengthening air defense, extending federal forces' authority over all territories and crossings, the departure of Turkish forces, the PKK, and Iranian opposition groups from northern Iraq, and an end to what it described as American dominance over financial and political decision-making.

Kata'ib Hezbollah, for its part, raised the ceiling of political confrontation with the government through a statement issued by its security official, Abu Mujahid al-Assaf, on August 18, 2026. Al-Assaf used harsh language toward Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi, warning that “the factions' patience with the young al-Zaidi” was beginning to run out. Al-Assaf set three conditions before entering into any understandings regarding regulating weapons: a complete American withdrawal from Iraq, the expulsion of Turkish forces from the north of the country, and the dissolution of the Peshmerga forces on the grounds that

they are, as he put it, armed formations outside the state framework. He also accused the al-Zaidi government of conducting raids under American supervision, warning against the continuation of what he described as provocative actions.

The danger of this statement is that it could transform the deadline for handing over weapons from a negotiating track into an open crisis. Accusing the al-Zaidi government of carrying out raids under American supervision also helps construct a narrative depicting the crisis as resistance to foreign influence, rather than a dispute over state authority and its monopoly on the use of force.

Despite these threats, the al-Zaidi government does not appear to rule out the possibility of direct confrontation, especially since Iraqi security forces today possess far better capabilities than they did after 2003, along with international support for the principle of bringing all weapons under state control. The gravity of this possibility appeared even before reaching the September 30 deadline itself. Following the American–Saudi strikes targeting Popular Mobilization sites, armed factions threatened to retaliate, before the head of the Badr Organization, Hadi al-Amiri, intervened and publicly called on them to postpone “for Iraq’s supreme interest,” while pledging to pursue the rights of the dead and wounded through diplomatic channels. The factions responded to the call by postponing the response indefinitely. However, according to subsequent reports, they did not abandon the decision to retaliate in principle.

This incident reveals a highly sensitive political equation: there are Shiite forces with close ties to the factions, but they recognize at the same time that moving the confrontation to Saudi Arabia or American interests could drag Iraq into a regional conflict and threaten its economic and political interests. Therefore, these forces may play the role of mediator between the government and the factions rather than aligning completely with either side.

Notably, Hadi al-Amiri, who is himself a member of the Shiite Coordination Framework, later set a conditional framework linking the success of what he termed “regulating weapons” to achieving full sovereignty, the departure of foreign forces, ending foreign interventions, disarming all groups that threaten neighboring countries, passing the two Popular Mobilization laws, strengthening air defenses, subjecting all crossings and territories to state authority, in addition to ending what he described as the “unjust” economic sanctions on Iraqi private banks and the “blatant” interference in Iraqi affairs.

It is clear from these conditions that they shift the discussion from the factions’ weapons to the nature of Iraqi sovereignty. This could turn the file of bringing all weapons under state control into an open list of conditions that are difficult to fulfill before September 30,

making the deadline susceptible to continuous postponement.

Later, the leader of the State of Law Coalition and former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki joined the calls for regulating weapons, explaining that “the word ‘disarmament’ is not used, because the other party is then described as having been disarmed, and this has a psychological and practical effect; therefore, it is (better) to use the phrase ‘regulating and containing weapons’ in a form that we are still trying to define... and then there is a distinction between heavy, medium, and light weapons.”

Al-Maliki pointed out that “distinguishing between weapons is one of the matters on the table: does preservation, containment, withdrawal, or any other designation of the process include all weapons, or does it include only the type of weapon considered an instrument for internal and external targeting? This will be resolved by the committee formed with the factions.”

### *Weapons as Part of a Broader System of Influence*

The factions refusing to hand over their weapons invoke the regional deterrence equation, considering that the Iraqi state has not yet completed the requirements for a monopoly on force. In the view of these factions, the airstrikes against some of their headquarters demonstrated the need for an integrated air defense system. They also link their weapons to the ongoing conflict in the region, considering them an important regional pressure card and not merely an internal Iraqi matter.

Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi demands that the factions hand over a weapons arsenal comprising six main categories distributed across 12 bases and sites from Basra to Nineveh. These include short-range and ballistic missiles, attack and loitering drones, multiple rocket launchers and unguided rockets, as well as artillery, mortars, anti-armor weapons, armored vehicles, and light weapons. American estimates indicate that some of the factions refusing disarmament possess at least eight ballistic missiles. The core of the government's plan is therefore not simply to collect rifles, but to prevent any faction from retaining strategic firepower that enables it to decide to wage war or target other countries independently of the state's decision.

Al-Zaidi has presented a clearer view of the mechanism the government wants to adopt. The requirement does not stop at a faction declaring its acceptance of the principle of bringing all weapons under state control; it extends to severing its military and organizational ties, handing over weapons to the state, and then addressing the status of its members within official institutions. This detail is important because it reveals that the government project targets the independent military structure of the faction, and not merely weapons depots.

The difficulty of bringing all weapons under state control lies not only in the quality of the weapons and the military formations of the factions, but also in the fact that these groups have become part of the political, economic, and social landscape in Iraq. Today, they possess networks of influence within state institutions, economic interests, and broad tribal ties. Dealing with them is therefore different from any conventional disarmament experience, and any clash with them could extend its effects into the political system itself.

The scene grows more complex due to the overlap between certain factions and the Popular Mobilization Commission. This emerged clearly after the arrest of Abbas al-Yaqoobi, head of the reconnaissance unit in Harakat al-Nujaba, on August 17, 2026, when it became apparent that he also held the position of Director of Intelligence for the Baghdad Belt Operations Command in the Popular Mobilization Commission. He was released hours later under heavy pressure exerted by leaders in the Coordination Framework.

Furthermore, recent airstrikes carried out by Saudi and American fighter jets against Popular Mobilization sites resulted in the deaths of several members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and Yemen's Ansar Allah group, reflecting the regional dimension of these factions.

Therefore, the task of bringing all weapons under state control is no longer merely an internal Iraqi matter; it has become part of a broader regional security equation. Riyadh, which dispatched its Director of General Intelligence Khalid al-Humaidan to Baghdad at the height of tensions with the factions, is closely monitoring the Iraqi government's ability to control factional activity and prevent the use of Iraqi territory to threaten neighboring countries, thereby providing a more stable climate for the Gulf investments that al-Zaidi seeks to attract.

### ***Broad Political Cover for Bringing All Weapons Under State Control***

In a notable development, the State Administration Coalition issued a statement on August 7, 2026, affirming that bringing all weapons under state control has become a binding law. It emphasized commitment to the specified timelines and preventing the use of Iraqi territory to attack neighboring countries or drag Iraq into conflicts that do not serve its interests.

The statement issued by the largest coalition of ruling political forces reflects clear firmness in supporting the project of bringing all weapons under state control, but it now gains greater significance as it provides broad political cover for the al-Zaidi government before moving from the negotiation phase to a more decisive one.

Yet despite the consensus among the Shiite Coordination Framework forces on bringing all weapons under state control, they differ over the method of implementation. This emerged

more clearly after reports circulated regarding al-Zaidi's readiness to use force against factions that refuse to hand over their weapons. The head of the political bureau of the Badr Organization issued a statement considering that this information, if true, represented a major overreach, affirming a rejection of dealing with what he described as the "resistance" in this way, and calling on the government not to be dragged behind the American position and to handle the file calmly and by consensus.

This position reflects a clear disparity between agreement on the principle and disagreement over the means of execution. Some Shiite forces may support bringing all weapons under state control, but they reject turning that into a military operation. This indicates that the political cover needed by the al-Zaidi government could erode rapidly if it moves from negotiation and containment to the use of force.

The disagreement is not limited to how weapons control should be implemented, but extends to the legal framework of the operation. Al-Zaidi's discussions with the Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee on August 11 revealed the difficulty of reaching a consensus formula within the committee to draft a bill on bringing all weapons under state control, ending with the government taking charge of preparing the draft and referring it to Parliament. Legislative discussions are examining the definition of covered weapons, mechanisms for inventorying, handing over, and monitoring depots, as well as the fate of faction members and the possibility of absorbing cooperative elements among them into security institutions or other government positions.

According to State of Law MP Othman al-Shaibani, Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi informed the members of the Security and Defense Committee during his meeting with them that he feels alone in the campaign to disarm the factions, explaining to them that certain factions want him to hand over the state's weapons to them and that he will be candid with the public about these matters. Al-Shaibani reported that Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi said: "Even if I am executed, torn apart, or blown up, no weapons will remain after next September 30, and I will be the one facing this and taking to the field. In return, I will send the Popular Mobilization Law within two weeks for Parliament to vote on in order to preserve the rights of the Hashd. If, as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, I cannot return a plot of land to a woman that was seized by an armed group, then we face two choices: either we step up and undertake the process of correction, or we and those who oppose us will be erased from the equation."

This statement reflects Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi's insistence on disarming the factions by the specified deadline even if he is forced into a military confrontation. This scenario is supported not only by the prime minister's remarks; al-Zaidi has already issued orders

preparing military divisions in the Iraqi army numbering more than 106,000 fighters from various services to prevent any attack carried out by armed factions in response to the Saudi–American strikes targeting their headquarters, according to MP al-Shaibani. Indeed, a clash took place between Iraqi security forces and one of the factions during a raid on a site that turned out to be a drone factory, which ended with the seizure of drones that were prepared to target Saudi sites. By doing so, al-Zaidi prevented an escalation that could have turned into a regional battle, especially with both Saudi Arabia and the United States threatening to retaliate should their interests be subjected to any attack from Iraqi territory.

### *A Shift in Rhetoric*

However, the government's rhetoric has recently witnessed a notable shift. After setting the deadline as a final date for handing over weapons and using the term “confrontation” on several occasions, the al-Zaidi government has increasingly focused on the language of dialogue and “regulating weapons.” Iraqi government spokesman Haider al-Aboudi confirmed that a confrontation scenario is ruled out, and that dialogue includes six factions, some of which have responded to bringing all weapons under state control while advanced talks are underway with others regarding implementation mechanisms. This does not necessarily mean the government is retreating from its goal, so much as it points to a transition from raising the cost of refusal toward seeking a settlement that achieves the goal at the lowest possible security and political cost.

Another political development has also emerged that could present a completely different model from confrontation. The Coordination Framework agreed to the accession of Shebl al-Zaidi, commander of Kata'ib al-Imam Ali and head of the Khadamat Coalition, to the leadership of the Framework, after Kata'ib al-Imam Ali was among the factions that agreed to hand over their weapons to the state. This raises the possibility of a settlement model based on faction leaders moving from independent military influence to political influence within the institutions of the regime.

This possibility gains greater importance with Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, which has likewise agreed to the path of bringing all weapons under state control, coinciding with putting forward the name of Laith al-Khazali, brother of Asa'ib Secretary-General Qais al-Khazali, for the post of Deputy Prime Minister. If this model is repeated, we may face a new equation: relinquishing military independence in exchange for continued political participation and influence. This development could open the door to other settlements that might make political transformation an alternative to armed confrontation.

Yet the success of this approach depends on its substance rather than its form. If the transition of faction leaders into politics leads to dismantling military structures, handing over weapons

depots, and subjecting funding, command, and operational decision-making to the state, it represents a real transformation. But if the matter is limited to changing political titles while retaining military capability directly or indirectly, the state will have merely reorganized the weapons issue rather than resolved it.

### *Washington and Economic Pressure*

The United States is closely monitoring the file of factions handing over their weapons, having informed the Iraqi government that it is closely scrutinizing the entire process. While Washington is keen not to be dragged into a broad military confrontation with the factions, it will not, at the same time, accept attacks against its interests or allies. To remove the pretexts used by some factions without adopting their logic, Washington approved a helicopter deal for Iraq valued at \$800 million to enhance state capabilities in transport, reconnaissance, and air operations. Furthermore, the administration of President Trump informed leaders in the Kurdistan Region that it does not plan to renew the memorandum of understanding on security support for the Peshmerga, which expires on September 30.

The US administration appears to understand the complexity of the file of bringing all weapons under state control and the need to organize this process under government supervision, but it certainly will not accept this being merely a way to buy time. Practical steps to regulate weapons must lead to handing them over, beginning with the inventory process, moving to government oversight, freezing operational capabilities, drying up funding sources, and severing military ties. Meanwhile, missiles, drones, and military decisions will not be open to discussion, as Washington insists that these must remain the exclusive prerogative of the Iraqi state.

The weapons file cannot be considered a security issue isolated from the economy; it has become part of the equation of confidence in the state. The more the al-Zaidi government succeeds in imposing its sovereignty, the more confidence investors and international financial institutions will have in the Iraqi economy. Conversely, any postponement or partial implementation could prolong uncertainty and delay strategic projects such as the Development Road, oil export pipelines, and regional interconnection projects.

The government's statements about its success during its first 100 days in sparing Iraq international isolation, particularly regarding the sovereignty file, gain importance in this context. For the al-Zaidi government, bringing all weapons under state control is no longer a separate security file, but part of a broader project linking sovereignty to economic stability and openness to international investments and partnerships.

This file gains additional importance due to the fragility of the Iraqi economy, which relies

on oil for more than 90% of budget revenues. Any decline in confidence in the financial system or disruption in the flow of dollars could lead to a rise in the exchange rate, higher inflation, widening fiscal deficits, and difficulty in fulfilling government obligations.

Therefore, Washington is likely to continue using financial and economic pressure tools, whether through sanctions or tightening oversight over the financial system, making the dismantling of the factions' economic structure no less important than collecting the weapons themselves.

### *Weapons and Corruption: Two Separate Files of One Battle*

The file of bringing all weapons under state control coincides with the campaign led by Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi against corruption. The prime minister has described this process as an irreversible war, taking strict measures across ministries, institutions, and border crossings.

The factions do not rely on weapons alone to extend their influence in the Iraqi state, but also on economic networks, crossings, banks, companies, contracts, and imports. The US Treasury has previously imposed sanctions on officials, banks, and commercial networks that used forged documents and receipts, engaged in money laundering, and smuggled oil to provide dollars or resources to the Revolutionary Guard and Iran-aligned factions, according to the Treasury's description.

Therefore, the continuation of weapons outside the state framework may pose a threat to the anti-corruption campaign. If the government succeeds in dismantling funding sources and the parallel economy, the ability of these armed factions to retain an independent arsenal will weaken even without a military confrontation.

In parallel with al-Zaidi's campaign against corruption, the US Treasury is tightening its oversight of Iranian shadow-banking networks, exchange bureaus, and front companies whose influence extends outside Iran, specifically in a country like Iraq. This means that the economic pressure campaign against Iran could turn in practice into a parallel campaign against the factions' funding sources within the Iraqi economy. Therefore, combating corruption, like the file of bringing all weapons under state control, is also no longer a purely domestic Iraqi affair, and complacency regarding it could lead to American sanctions that increase the burdens on the Iraqi economy.

### *The Marja'iyah and the Wali al-Faqih*

The position of the religious authority (al-Marja'iyah al-Diniyah) in Najaf, represented by Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Sistani, on the file of bringing all weapons under state control is a decisive factor. The Marja'iyah, whose famous fatwa provided the religious basis for what is known today as the Popular Mobilization to confront the ISIS organization, emphasized

that carrying weapons must remain within official channels and not lead to forming groups that take orders from outside the state. In contrast, some armed factions in Iraq adhere to the authority of the Wali al-Faqih in Iran, Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei, the successor to his father, Ali Khamenei, which makes the issue transcend weapons to become a matter of loyalty and the source of decision-making.

This jurisprudential disagreement over loyalty will complicate the scene further, especially if the Iranian Supreme Leader insists on the necessity of retaining weapons. A divergence in positions between the Marja'iyah of al-Sistani and that of Khamenei regarding the factions' weapons, if it occurs, would represent a major rupture across the Shiite scene as a whole and could turn into a clash between the followers of both sides in Iraq. However, this matter remains unlikely due to the overlapping interests between the two authorities and their agreement on the need to avoid escalation.

New indicators have emerged demonstrating Iran's readiness to help with the factions' weapons file. Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani revealed that Iranian officials expressed their readiness to help the Baghdad government with this file, meaning that Tehran is a key party to any settlement with the armed factions. Tehran may find an interest in this that preserves its political and economic influence without insisting on supporting the military nature of the factions, giving it greater room for maneuver in Iraq.

However, this contradicts what has been reported regarding the position of Quds Force Commander Esmail Qaani during an unannounced visit to Baghdad, where he asked faction leaders not to hand over their weapons, urging them to use this file as a pressure and bargaining chip in negotiations with Washington. Furthermore, the Speaker of Iran's Parliament, Mohammad Ghalibaf, sought to extend the October 30 deadline, in addition to reducing reliance on the dollar and adopting local currencies in trade exchanges between Iraq and Iran. The issue of storing the factions' heavy weapons was also raised, either by transferring them to Iran or storing them in Popular Mobilization depots in Iraq, where Ghalibaf suggested that a committee from the Coordination Framework be formed to supervise this matter.

In a notable development, several Coordination Framework leaders expressed their resentment over the wave of arrests targeting a number of Popular Mobilization commanders, demanding that Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi not repeat this and that it be conducted by officially notifying wanted persons to appear before the judiciary or the competent authority. Notably, part of this meeting took place in the presence of the new Iranian Supreme Leader's representative, Mohsen Qomi, in order to formally introduce himself to the government and religious authorities.

This Iraqi–Iranian dialogue over the factions’ weapons and the American monitoring of developments in this file make clear that this matter is no longer linked solely to what the al-Zaidi government offers in guarantees, but also to the results of negotiations between Washington and Tehran and the regional files linked to them.

The disparity in messages arriving from Tehran regarding the factions’ weapons also reflects a clear division within the Iranian leadership, or a division of roles that allows Tehran to maintain more than one option in Iraq. In either case, Baghdad’s ability to turn the settlement into an internal Iraqi track will remain an important factor in reducing the ability of external parties to control the future of this file.

### What Follows September 30?

Recent developments reveal that the question is no longer confined to whether the government will confront the factions after September 30. There is now a third path between postponement and military confrontation: gradually dismantling the factions’ united front, absorbing groups that hand over their weapons, moving their leaders into political activity, negotiating with the hesitant, and isolating the most hardline groups, while keeping force as a last resort.

This path may redefine the meaning of the deadline itself. September 30 may not be the day on which all weapons outside the state disappear, but rather the date after which the continued existence of an independent military force outside official institutions becomes politically and legally unacceptable. Consequently, handing over and integration operations could continue after the deadline within clear timelines, without that necessarily meaning a retreat by the government from its goal.

All political parties in Iraq agree that September 30 will not be merely a date for handing over weapons, but a real test of the Iraqi state’s ability to redefine its relationship with armed factions. The matter also requires finding a path through which members of factions that gave up their weapons can be integrated into official institutions, providing economic and social alternatives.

However, this path carries an obvious danger: “regulating weapons” could turn into a compromise formula that preserves the factions’ arsenals and influence in exchange for a temporary freeze on activity. If that happens, the essence of the state will not change much.

Therefore, the real test after September 30 will not be in the number of missiles and drones collected, but in whether the state has effectively reclaimed the decision of war and peace.

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Thank you

