

Interview - Salim al-Jabouri

Written by E-International Relations

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Dr. Salim al-Jabouri was elected as the Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament on 15 July 2014. He holds a doctorate in law and previously worked as a law professor at Nahrain University in Baghdad. In this interview he answers questions about ISIS and the challenges associated with the rebuilding of Iraq and its military.

What factors in Iraq's modern history do you think led to the creation of Daesh (ISIS/Islamic State)?

Policies of oppression, discrimination, partisanship, the sectarian interests of the ruling elite, and the gross negligence of the demands of important parts of the Iraqi people are, without a doubt, among the main factors that helped in the growth of Daesh, and provided the permissive environment to promote it. Adding to that ideas of "extremism" that some have adopted and considered part of their belief system. Some international players have also facilitated and helped in exporting such ideas to Iraq. Religious extremism is not part of the Iraqi culture, but the continuous support for such ideas through media and social media have led to the polarization of some of the young and enthusiastic people who found themselves in such a permissive environment for this kind of ideas.

Who or what are the contributing factors that are leading to Daesh losing territory?

Daesh is suffering from internal problems. These problems stemmed from the fact that some of the Daesh members are ex-Ba'athists, remnants of the previous regime's intelligence apparatus, and opportunistic fighters. Also, the differences in approach definitely lead to such internal problems. In addition to that Daesh became more and more obsessed with the financial gains, which in turn has become another source of internal tensions and a conflict of interest.

However, one of the main factors that led to Daesh losing territories is the incorporation of the Sunnis in liberating their own areas. It is a well-known fact, that the Sunnis have an expertise in challenging extremists. A skill they learned throughout their war against Al Qaeda about ten years ago especially in Al Anbar. Furthermore, we can't discard the role of the international coalition, which has been a source of support and aid through its effective air strikes, special consultancy and information sharing. This is in addition to the international coalition's recent efforts in providing weapons, equipment, training and logistical support.

Do you think Daesh's loss of territory in the Middle East will translate into an increase in attacks in the West?

We cannot rule out that as a result of despair Daesh will feel the need to search for new land for its terrorist actions. There is a difference, however, between finding an alternative land, and waging attacks on additional areas. In all cases, I think, Daesh will not give up on threatening the West whether it loses here or not. Therefore, we talked a lot about the importance of eliminating Daesh instead of just defeating it or destroying it. This is crucial to prevent it from resurfacing again in other areas promoting its bloody atrocities. We have called for the world to support us, so that we could provide a model and success story on how to face and eliminate extremism.

We have explained that this battle is based on various tools, last of which is the security solution. A package of real steps towards reform, and awareness campaign against extremism are enough in limiting Daesh influence and

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capability to its minimum.

What are the challenges associated with fighting Daesh?

One of the most important challenges we are facing in the fight against Daesh is the challenge of including local fighters in the battle. This is in addition to the challenges in securing the logistical needs, i.e. weapon, training, information and aid. Furthermore, it is important to use the concept of “hold on” to the newly liberated territories as one of the main tools in this fight.

Daesh is still capable of regaining territories it loses, if we don't utilize the potential of the local people themselves hold on to their own lands. Another instrumental factor in providing the manpower for this fight is the IDPs “Internally Displace People” outside their place of origin. Daesh knows for sure that those people who have been expelled and suffered a great deal from being IDPs will fight and defend their land fiercely against them.

How is Daesh being used as a tool to advance foreign interests?

Daesh is a militarized organization that is based on an idea and interest. When its interests match with the interests of some other countries then Daesh and these countries will not hesitate to strike a deal to fulfill these interests with the help of each other. In addition to that, some of these countries have long determined to send some of their intelligence members as fighters within Daesh, and they might already have reached senior positions in this terrorist organization.

I am confident that some of the countries use dirty tools to deal with Daesh and communicate with it in order to achieve its interests or to upset its international adversaries and take revenge on them. That is why, we have heard more than once some calls to communicate with Daesh, even to recognize it.

What were some of the lessons learned in recapturing Ramadi and the other areas that have been liberated from Daesh?

One of the most important lessons we have learned from liberating Ramadi is the importance of depending on the tribes to liberate their own areas and the importance of effective cooperation between them and the Iraqi army. This model has proven to be successful and has achieved big results. Thus, we call for repeating the same model in Ninawa (Mosul) and in liberating the rest of Salahddin areas, which have not yet been liberated. In the same regard, it is important to include the local people, who may feel ashamed when they are prevented from participating in the liberation battles. The local people ask for the honor of participating in the liberation effort, and are looking forward to taking their revenge on Daesh. Daesh killed their sons, demolished their homes, and forced them to leave their areas, to be IDPs for more than two years now.

In your opinion how do you think violence can be stemmed?

Violence is a result of various reasons. One of the main reasons are the feelings of despair and oppression. I think one of the main tools to eliminate violence and extremism is to unite our efforts to achieve social justice and political reform. This is not to forget the important and critical role the media plays in the society, raising the awareness about the danger and wrong doings of ISIS.

How do you think Iraq will be governed the day after Daesh is completely eliminated? Can you please describe some potential strategies and/or policies?

Certainly the day after Daesh will be completely different from the day before. I think we all have learned the lesson. This means it is important to achieve the principle of decentralization as one of the most important tools that helps in getting rid of authoritarianism, by giving the society and community the opportunity to govern themselves. I think the day after ISIS will yield a very important lesson for our people about the importance of standing against any extremist idea. I expect that the areas, which will be liberated will have a huge opportunity to develop and progress and these

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areas will be immune to the return of terrorism. For the talks about dividing Iraq, I rule that out and stand against it. However, there will be a definite decentralization in the next stage. As I mentioned, I don't rule out that some of the governorates will ask for a regional status and I don't see a problem in this, as long as it is within the constitution and within the governorate framework, not within a sectarian identity.

What are some of the challenges associated with the rebuilding of Iraq and its Administration?

One of the biggest challenges is the economic hardship that Iraq is facing, and I think we will be unable to rebuild the destroyed areas alone even after ten years from now. However, we rely on international support and seizing the opportunity of a reconstruction process that is based on International investment. This process will hugely depend on the government's flexibility in its investment regulations, procedures, and in its effort convincing the international companies.

On another regard, we are awaiting for the World Bank to support the local governments directly in their effort to rebuild their areas by providing grants and loans. We consider that to be one of the most effective tools to expedite the reconstruction effort. In this regard, we think it is important to hold an international conference for the World Bank, sponsored by the United Nations to support the effort to rebuild Iraq. Having said that, we can't neglect the crucial impact of the security situation on the process of reconstruction. Without a permissive and stable security situation, it will be difficult for any international player to enter the area, to initiate a reconstruction process, or to invest.

What challenges do you see in recruiting, expanding and strengthening the Iraqi military?

The biggest challenge is certainly political, as some parties would like to see the army represented by only one faction of the Iraqi society. This is bad for the army and for the Iraqi people. The second challenge is the lack of mutual relations between the people and the army in some areas. It is crucial that people feel that the security apparatus is there to serve them, not to suppress them. Only then they will be cooperative, and the mission will certainly succeed.

In addition to these factors, the economic challenges hinder the expansion and development of the army. For example, the current budget for the ministry of defense and interior does not represent a war budget. It is limited and small.

Do you think tribal loyalties have an adverse impact on the Iraqi military?

In general, tribal loyalties do not conflict with, or stand against military doctrine and performance. Actually, it is the sectarian loyalties that affected the military institution and I think the experience of including the tribes in the fights and battles proved how developed is the tribe vision of and relation with the state. The tribes no longer stand against government authority or the rule of law. Yes, there are tribal unrest in Basra, which have affected in a way or another the security apparatus, but at the end these are limited incidents.

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This interview was conducted by Satgin Hamrah. Satgin is an Editor-at-large with E-IR