
Qais al-Khasali's interview; Iran is not the same as before

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In the past few days, Qais al-Khazali, leader of Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), had an engaging interview with BBC. His statements are important to help understand the negotiations of government formation and Iran's role in Iraq.

I will analyze al-Khazali words about the two factors of government formation and their connection with Iran in Iraq since I think the interview has useful information about those two matters.

Al-Khazali was born in Sadr City, and he is 47 years old now. He was a student at Mohammed Sadr School and was one of the leaders of the Mehdi corps, but after that, he got unlinked from Muqtada Sadr and chose a different path of his own. Therefore, he might be one of those people who know Muqtada Sadr the best. Since 2020, he is known as one of the leaders of (Muqawama), (resistance) groups. He claims that besides Muhammad Sadr, he has received (Sharia) authorization from Muhammad Shahrudi (one of the previous Iranian high officials) and Ayatollah Kazimi al-Haeri, who is also from Iraq but lives in Qom, which shows another level of his close connection with Iran. Besides all that, he has his role in politics activities of Iraq and is equally considered as the old politicians such as al-Maliki and al-Amiri.

Controlled Confliction with Sadr

It is clearly seen that he wants to control the conflicts with Sadr. Throughout the 24 minutes of the interview, he uses "Saeed" in front of Muqtada Sadr's name and calls him brother three times. When he is talking about the way the process of election of parliament presidential partnership took place, and when he remarks enrollment of Sadrist Movement members with military outfits, he feels unhappy about it and says it is wrong. "People do not want that. This has more harm than advantage" he states. This soft talking is a message to lessen conflicts rather than enlarging them.

He discusses two main discords with Sadr: Maliki and Hashed Al-Shabi weaponry! We do not have a considerable issue with Sadr about staying the American troops in Iraq, because Sadr has the same opinion, he says. However, the option that has to be chosen is either (Muqawama) gives up the weapons, and Sadr puts his all effort to make the withdrawal of American troops in Iraq happen, or no, (Muqawama) keeps what they have been doing. According to his speech, this matter has been discussed with Sadr in the meeting of Hadi al-Amiri's house, but it has no outcome yet. Related to the Veto of Sadr on Maliki, al-Khazali says, I hope "our brother Sadr" solves that problem.

At the end he says that Sadr can form the government and also direct the PM, but then he makes some statements expressed as threats, such as, "if he does that, the political process will not progress naturally", "that is dangerous", "there is the possibility of battle and fear of battle", "with the help of media, there are some outsider parties who want to set conflict up between different Shia parties", "If our brother, Sadr, directs Kazimi as the PM again, he has to take the responsibility because Kazimi was unsuccessful", "Kurd and Sunni are two reasons of Shia domestic disagreements, and they (Kurd and sunni) might also get separated", and "we either perform boycott, which is the most preferable option, or we become opposition and investigator on the government". However, he does not express his threats in a tough tone, so he uses statements like, "there is the possibility of the agreement until the last minute", "at the end of the day, the Shia alliance is more important for us than the other matters", "Muqtada Sadr has got all the power", highest Shia Shite religious authority and Shia house do not let conflicts to happen, even though this is not guaranteed", and "I stay in Najaf mostly, but now, because the situation is sensitive, I stay in Baghdad to control any instability". These statements are to deliver the message that they do not want a big number of damaging conflicts.

Connections with Iran; different than before

Iran has its own political acts and our decision as (Muqawama) is made from Iraq, Qais al-Khazali says three times while the interview. When the reporter asks if it is true that after the attack on Kazimi's house, the commander of Quds Force

ordered them to accept the election's results and lessen the conflicts with America, he says, "our decisions in Iraq is not related to Iran", he says with no denial for the information stated in the question. We thank Iran for the help and funds since 2003 until the ISIS battle, so they have the right to give advice, but in the end, our decisions are made by ourselves, says al-Khasali. Then he explains more about their connection with Iran and says, after the assassination of Qassem Sulaimani, our connections with the Shia political parties have not changed, but I can say the administration of the Iran organs that has a connection with the Iraq dossier has significantly changed. He says that he is sure that the president of Iran, Ali Khamenei, is insistent to help (Muqawama), but they are not sure if that "change" that is going on now is originated from one organ or the whole Islamic republic! What has been done as revenge for Qassim Sulaimani and Abu Mehdi al-Muhandis was not big, he says to explain their dissension with Iran in more detail. They asked us to stop at first until Iran responds; this does not fit the statement in which he states that their decisions are made from Iraq. He moves on, then, after a week, the attack of Ain al-Asad and Harir was held which lessened the interest in revenge. He states "A wrong analysis was done in fact". Later on, he talks about Iran; it is their choice to congrats Halbusi's election or not, or they want to accept the election's results or not. It will not leave any effect on us because we make our own decisions. Iran has their own interest, and we also have our own interest, and our decision for (Muqawama) is Iraqi and has no relation even with Vienna negotiations, he says at the end.

Conclusion

Qais al-Khasali's words are important because he has been one of the most famous characters of the groups that are known as (Muqawama). It seems like he is seeking an agreement with Sadr. His statements show that there might be pressure on Kurds and Sunni if they do not get to an agreement. He also shows prediction of next government's failure and conflict, but he also leaves a door open to step back. This provides the explanation that a controlled level of conflict will continue, for example, continuity of (Muqawama's) time to time attacks, and using media and political pressure on Sadr and its allies (Kurd and Sunni), but he also expresses that he doesn't have the desire to put the conflictions to the top level.

The most engaging part of his words is the ones on Iran. It seems like he is not still sure why Iran did not perfectly backed them before and after election dossier. Maybe one of the reasons that they underestimated Sadr at the beginning was that they though Iran would support them with full power, but Iran did not do it, and they were wrong. This time Iran plays a smaller role, and the republic is more into keeping things balanced rather than unbalanced for Shia and also for Kurds. Even though he does not direct these words to Ali Khamenei, he convicts the organs (responsible for Iraq dossier) for lessening the military supports for (Muqawama). His emphasis in making decisions inside Iraq with no opinion of Iran and ability of their groups in weaponry especially drones is to show Iran that they can keep their activities in progress without them. These statements of Qais al-Khasali are new about the presence of Iran in Iraq, but it is still soon to say Khasali can ignore Iran's orders.

Source

[1] -https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvRKOyp_ENc

[2] -
<https://ahlualhaq.com/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b3%d9%8a%d8%b1%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b0%d8%a7%d8%aa%d9%8a%d8%a9/>