

Iraqi Sunni leader Jamal Al-Dhari gave Shafaq News a wide-ranging interview. The following is the full text.

Q1: How did you receive al-Sadr's decision to boycott the elections, and what impact does this have on the political process?

A: Muqtada al-Sadr's entry into the political process came later than the rest of the Shiite parties. From the moment he announced his participation in politics, he raised the banner of reform. It appears that after all these years, al-Sadr sees reform as nearly impossible amid the widespread corruption in many parts of the political system, including the electoral process. The elections witnessed setbacks in 2010, irregularities in 2014, ballot box burning in 2018, and near civil war among Shiite factions in 2021 due to the elections and their aftermath. As a national project, we share Muqtada al-Sadr's concerns about the futility of elections under such conditions. We have made many remarks before, and we've experienced how a winner turns into a loser and a loser into a winner, far from actual electoral entitlements. Our message to the political forces keen on Iraq's stability is to correctly interpret al-Sadr's message and not see his absence from the elections as an opportunity for partisan gains.

Q2: Do you believe recent regional changes will reach Iraq, and is a regime change similar to Syria's possible, as some advocate?

A: Iraq is a cornerstone in the region. What Arab countries experienced after Iraq's occupation in 2003 changed the political landscape in Yemen, Syria, and Lebanon. It proved that Iraq's stability reflects regional stability. We cannot predict the nature of future events in the region or their impact, but each country has its own context. A Syrian scenario is not necessarily destined for Iraq. However, any rational observer knows that Iraq's political scene is unsatisfactory for its people. Since 2003, there have been many objections—most notably February 25, 2012, the 2014 catastrophe when a third of Iraq was lost to ISIS, and the October 2019 revolution. All these milestones prove the need for radical reform. We believe the best way is a comprehensive national dialogue conference, including all parties, unions, and civil society organizations. It should

chart a roadmap for a new political process, amend controversial constitutional articles written under occupation, and move toward fair elections that restore Iraqis' trust in the state. Governance should be based on competence, integrity, and loyalty to the homeland—not sectarian or ethnic distribution of ministries and administrations.

Q3: There's ongoing debate about the Syrian government's legitimacy and its classification as a terrorist entity. What is your position on Syria's government?

A: The Syrian people are best positioned to judge their government and leadership. The regime change there was a natural result of a criminal regime against its people and neighbors. What Bashar al-Assad's regime has done over the past 14 years is clear proof of its bloody brutality. We affirm our respect and full support for the Syrian people's choices. We hope the transitional government will fully perform its duties, preserve Syria's unity, enforce the rule of law, proceed with national reconciliation, prosecute criminals through fair courts, vindicate the innocent, return the displaced to their homes, and begin reconstruction. Let the scent of Damascene jasmine return to Syria and positively reflect on Iraq and the region.

Q4: There is ongoing debate over the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)—its law and the calls for its dissolution. What is your stance, and are there risks of an ISIS resurgence?

A: Countries are built on clear foundations, including internal and external security. Worldwide, armies defend the homeland and the interior ministries maintain internal security. Any formations outside these frameworks are controversial and ultimately weaken security by multiplying responsibilities and authorities. Recently, there have been U.S. demands to disband the PMF, while Iraqi parliamentarians are working to amend its law. We believe in the need for openness and transparency in national decision-making. Iraqis deserve to know

what is required of them to act in the nation's best interest. Our concerns about these forces, especially in liberated areas, are that they serve political agendas—used to win loyalty and votes by pressuring members and their families to vote for specific lists. These are political tools serving partisan interests.

Q5: Who do you consider the political leader of Iraq's Sunnis? Can they be weighed alongside Shiite and Kurdish leaders?

A: Since 2003, much has been distorted in society and politics—including the concept of leadership. Leadership is neither a rank bestowed nor a status bought. A true leader wins people's hearts and gains consensus over years of service and achievement. The leadership concept is misunderstood in Iraq. A leader should work, give, and sacrifice for the people—not own money, political blocs, or temporary positions. Leadership requires principled individuals who don't compromise their community's interests for narrow partisan gains. Personally, I wish we'd drop the term "leader" in Iraq and replace it with "commander." We have commanders of parties and blocs, but they aren't leaders due to lack of public consensus. They may be respected and followed by segments of society, but I personally cannot classify any of them as a leader.

Q6: Do you expect new Sunni alliances to form, or will the old guard remain?

A: The Sunni lists are known, and perhaps a new list will emerge for the electoral race. Serious negotiations for alliances will now begin, especially after the Cabinet set November 11, 2025, as the date for parliamentary elections. We hope these elections will be fair and transparently monitored, free from corrupt political money and government or security interference in voters' choices.

Q7: From time to time, the issue of Sunni and Shia federal regions is raised. Is Iraq truly heading toward such a step?

A: Federal regions are constitutionally permissible if requirements are met. But what we see now—calls for sectarian regions—is frankly unacceptable. No rational person would agree to it, and anyone pushing this idea will face strong rejection from the Iraqi people. As I said on the 22nd anniversary of the Iraq invasion: to all voices calling for division and sectarianism—Iraq is not Shia and was never Sunni. Iraq has always been and will always be a country for all Iraqis, with no place for sectarians.

Q8: The return of the Baath Party resurfaces from time to time. Do you think this is still a relevant issue?

A: The Baath's return is one of the scapegoats used by failures to excuse their own incompetence. Those spreading such rumors aim to cover up their failed governance and distract Iraqis with fear-mongering about Baathist resurgence. We should instead trust the awareness and maturity of the Iraqi people. They alone know their interests and understand the motives behind such statements, which always emerge near election time.

Q9: Baghdad-Erbil tensions persist under various titles. What are the core issues, and why hasn't a solution been found? Also, with the constant Iran-U.S. tensions, is Iraq at risk of being pulled into conflict?

A: The disputes between the federal government and the Kurdistan Region must be resolved through dialogue and mutual understanding. Continued stubbornness from any side prolongs these issues and negatively impacts the Iraqi people. Regarding the U.S.-Iran conflict, it definitely affects Iraq, which unfortunately has become a battleground and a venue for regional and international score-settling. We hope national forces will take a bold step toward unity and prevent Iraq from becoming a war zone. No party should be allowed to hijack Iraq's sovereign

decision on matters of peace and war. Our country and people face real danger due to reckless acts and rhetoric that ignore Iraq's interests.

Q10: We see ongoing meetings within the Shiite political house. Why has such activity vanished among Sunnis?

A: Comparing Sunni leaders' meetings to the Shiite Coordination Framework's gatherings is misleading and disingenuous. Shiites rule the country and control its political and security decisions—without real partnership from Sunnis or Kurds. Their framework produces binding decisions, later wrapped in a national façade in State Administration meetings and passed as parliamentary resolutions. Sunni meetings, by contrast, are just talks, courtesy visits, and pleasantries. For citizens in liberated areas, these gatherings "neither feed nor satisfy hunger."