

JIHADIST GOVERNANCE AND STATECRAFT

Michael Knights

SHIA JIHADIST STATE CAPTURE IN IRAQ



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Is today's Iraq an example of jihadist governance? I would argue yes. The militant factions that form the core of the country's ruling bloc, the Coordination Framework, are self-confessed members of a transnational jihadist front known as the "axis of resistance."¹ Their objective is to expand the Islamic Revolution that began in Iran in 1979 and to protect all the existing extensions of their so-called Shia project—the Islamic Republic of Iran, Lebanese Hezbollah, Yemen-based Ansar Allah, and the Iraqi terrorist groups and militias of the Coordination Framework.²

Since using judicial capture to manipulate the 2021 election results in Iraq—turning electoral defeat of the Coordination Framework into victory in forming the government³—the Coordination Framework's subsequent monopolization of all branches of the Iraqi government has been unprecedented in the country's post-2003 history.⁴ The Coordination Framework rules with a level of unchecked authority that Iraq has not seen since the days of Saddam Hussein. They control the prime minister—the hardworking but inconsequential public-sector manager, Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, who is openly disparaged by Tehran's allies in Baghdad.⁵ The real powers are three warlords, each closely tied to Iran, at the top of the Coordination Framework: U.S.-designated terrorist Qais al-Khazali, the head of the Iran-founded Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) militia;⁶ former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki; and the leader of the Iran-founded Badr Organization, Hadi al-Ameri.⁷

The Coordination Framework controls the speakership of the parliament and

its most vocal and powerful lists, Fatah and State of Law.⁸ The Coordination Framework controls the judiciary through the militia-captured head of the courts, Judge Faeq Zaidan.⁹ The conventional military (army, counterterrorism service, navy, air force) and the intelligence services are being rapidly penetrated and contaminated by Iran-backed terrorist and militia groups.¹⁰ The terrorist-led Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)¹¹ are a parallel military that has been built on the model of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and they are then fastest-growing armed force in Iraq.¹² Ministry officials are being replaced on the orders of terrorist and militia groups on a daily basis.¹³ Governors are being appointed by the Coordination Framework, including notorious U.S.-designated terrorists.¹⁴ This is a clean sweep of all the centers of power in Iraq—except perhaps the religious authority of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who is aging and whose power base is under challenge from the Iran-backed terrorist and militia groups.

For background, readers might wish to explore all the above issues in depth in the author’s December 2023 report in the West Point Combating Terrorism Center’s journal *CTC Sentinel*, “Iraq’s New Regime Change: How Tehran-Backed Terrorist Organizations and Militias Captured the Iraqi State.”¹⁵ A very detailed examination of the PMF—which remains largely relevant and updated even today—is the author’s 2020 study *Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces*.¹⁶

THE SPECTRUM OF SHIA JIHADIST GOVERNANCE IN IRAQ

In this short analysis, the spectrum of different militia actors will be splayed out and examined on the basis of their involvement in governance and state capture. An influential model introduced by Chatham House in February 2021 suggested that Iraqi militias can be categorized as “parochial” (militias focused primarily on political and economic activities such as Badr and AAH)¹⁷ or “vanguard” (militias focused primarily on resistance activities, such as Kataib Hezbollah, Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba, and Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada).¹⁸

As Militia Spotlight noted as long ago as an October 2021 *CTC Sentinel* article,¹⁹ those distinctions are much less apparent when Tehran-backed militias are investigated in detail. Most of the so-called vanguard are highly active in the “parochial” business of state capture and asset stripping, including all the

different wings of Kataib Hezbollah (KH).²⁰ Conversely, there are almost no purely “parochial” militias within the Coordination Framework: as the authors noted in their October 2021 *CTC Sentinel* piece, AAH and even Badr sometimes act more as “drivers of rhetorical and kinetic escalation due to their domestic political and factional needs” as self-styled resistance (*muqawama*) players.

It is more useful to think of the parochial-vanguard distinction as a sliding scale or spectrum. At one end, there are less transnational, more parochial terrorist and militia players who have a very strong focus on governance and state capture—with the primary objective of asset stripping the state. In Iraq, these include the most voracious termite-like movements such as Badr and AAH, which have the best grasp of illicit commercial activities.²¹ At moments of high drama, such as the current Gaza war, they profess to being passionate members of the axis of resistance,²² but their involvement in terrorism is nonetheless mostly nonkinetic—as facilitators, financiers, recruiters and rhetorical agitators.²³

At the other end of the spectrum are the most transnational, least parochial terrorist and militia players, who care relatively little about what occurs in Iraq—except that the Shia project succeeds. Their involvement in governance can be very limited, with Nujaba (for instance) only participating in minor ways in business and ministry functions, and focusing instead on niche parts of the PMF and penetrating the intelligence services.²⁴

Interestingly, Lebanese Hezbollah and its Iraqi partners (such as Kataib al-Imam Ali) are very parochial in the Iraqi environment—focusing almost entirely on business and state capture, and not at all on counter-U.S. “resistance” operations.²⁵ Iraq is a cash cow to the Lebanese members of the axis of resistance—often to the annoyance of Iraqi factions such as Badr.²⁶

Iraq’s Kataib Hezbollah does not seem to be able to fully make up its mind and has effectively split into two wings:²⁷ one more parochial and one more vanguard, though the two remain tightly connected. The more parochial wing, led by Abu Fadak,²⁸ is focused mainly on controlling the PMF (and its \$2.6 billion annual budget) and developing construction and contracting businesses linked to the PMF.²⁹ The planned Muhandis General Company was one such commercial spin-off, modeled on the IRGC’s Khatam al-Anbia conglomerate.³⁰ Abu Fadak and Badr leader Hadi al-Ameri regularly cooperate on business ventures, import customs evasion, and dollar diversion to Iran.³¹ At the same time, Abu Fadak’s elite PMF

intelligence and drones directorates play an important role in terrorist attacks on U.S. and Gulf Arab targets.³² A KH parliamentary wing, Hoquq, also tends toward the parochial.³³ A KH and AAH propagandist is the senior media advisor to Prime Minister Sudani.³⁴

The other wing of KH—led by Abu Hussein³⁵—has more pronounced vanguard tendencies, and has undertaken numerous anti-U.S. attacks in Iraq, Syria, and Jordan before and especially since the Gaza crisis began.³⁶ This wing has members in parliament and concentrated in PMF units, especially within security and intelligence roles.³⁷ Where the Abu Hussein wing is involved in economic activities, they are largely smuggling-related, including illicit oil exports and real estate scams.³⁸

IRAQ: GAME-CHANGING CASH COW OF THE IRAN THREAT NETWORK

The sobering reality is that the members of the axis of resistance, or “Iran threat network,” arguably pose a far more complex and impactful challenge than any other set of jihadist groups engaging in governance today, largely because of the raw size of the resources under their control as they take control of the world’s fifth largest oil producer.³⁹ Instead of setting up small Potemkin caliphates with miniscule funding capacity,⁴⁰ the Iran-backed groups penetrate and puppeteer recognized state structures that have the capacity to borrow on international markets, sell oil and gas (in dollars), and control sovereign wealth funds.⁴¹ In Lebanon and Yemen, the Shia jihadist networks control very distressed economies,⁴² while in Iran and Iraq they control world-class energy producers, each with huge potential in the fields of trade and manufacturing.

Control of Iraq, in particular, is a potential game changer for the Iran threat network. *Muqawama* control of Iraq’s government—currently without even a notional sharing of the spoils with Muqtada al-Sadr⁴³—puts the Iraqi militias into a league of their own as the economic powerhouse of Iran’s partner forces. Iran’s longest-serving proxy, Lebanese Hezbollah, and Iran’s newer Yemeni partner, the Houthi movement, are economic minnows compared to the Iraqi state. The Coordination Framework–led government’s first budget is the largest in Iraq’s history: \$153 billion in annual spending for three consecutive years, a roughly 50 percent increase from the last authorized Iraqi budget from 2021.⁴⁴ In contrast, expected spending from a bankrupt Lebanon was under \$2 billion in

2022,⁴⁵ and the country went \$72 billion further into debt due to massive financial losses since 2021. The Houthi enclave in Yemen also has a measly budget of around \$2 billion per year.⁴⁶

What the Iran threat network just gained is, in effect, a new Iran—but one that is not sanctioned by the United States. For counterterrorism analysts, the effective loss of the Iraqi state to Tehran-backed terrorist groups and militias to an unprecedented degree is pregnant with implications, especially in the fields of counterterrorism threat financing. In general, the intelligence resources dedicated to counter-threat financing in Iraq should be greatly boosted because of the order-of-magnitude increase in the funds that might be available to the axis of resistance due to the Iran-led bloc's inheritance of uncontested control of a three-year program of \$459 billion in approved government spending. In the first year alone, a terrorist-run Iraq hired over 700,000 civil servants, which is a level of largesse unavailable at any point to al-Qaeda or the Islamic State.⁴⁷

Any major Iraqi company working in a key industry (e.g., oil exports) that has received significant contracts since October 2022 should be thoroughly investigated, especially if they previously had no track record in the sector where they have been awarded work by the Sudani government. Oil smuggling originating in or passing through Basra's offshore areas requires very close monitoring by the United States, because (as noted earlier) the Iraqi government is no longer effectively keeping watch. Close investigation is warranted in the case of the Iraqi Oil Tankers Company, the General Company for Ports in Iraq, and all companies involved in refining, oil transportation, vessel management, and ship-to-ship transfers in Iraqi waters.

Another necessary focus area is the project to build a Khatam al-Anbia-type conglomerate, perhaps in component pieces initially and with efforts made to better hide its existence.⁴⁸ Major company formation (especially when the PMF is involved), investment licenses, and land grants should all be closely watched by the U.S. Department of the Treasury, anti-corruption and anti-terrorism watchdogs, and citizen journalists.⁴⁹ In particular, great attention should be paid to the development of PMF- or militia-owned complexes near Iraq's borders—facing Saudi Arabia, in western Anbar, or elsewhere probably functioning as large free-trade zones or logistical transshipment sites but ideal for dual use as advanced conventional munitions storage and launch locations.⁵⁰

Engagement of Iraqi government organs should be much more carefully vetted due to extraordinary and accelerating penetration of these agencies by U.S.-designated terrorist organizations, U.S.-designated human rights abusers, and U.S.-designated corrupt actors.⁵¹ The most important is the need to pay more attention to the judiciary. Analysts should focus much more effort on Faeq Zaidan and other senior and midlevel judges, working on a smart assumption that the late KH head Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis probably did not plant just one seed in the judiciary (Zaidan) but many.⁵² U.S. security assistance to Iraqi security forces must also be reassessed in light of the new and significant *muqawama* penetration of agencies such as the Iraqi National Intelligence Service, Counter Terrorism Service, and Baghdad International Airport.⁵³

JIHADIST GOVERNANCE IN IRAQ AND GREAT POWER COMPETITION

Jihadist governance can also include foreign policy. From a great power competition perspective, Iraq falling under the control of anti-U.S. forces should be an issue of great significance and growing interest. The most vocal anti-U.S. resistance leader in Iraq, Akram Kaabi, is now a welcomed visitor in Moscow since 2022,⁵⁴ and the relationship between the Iraqi *muqawama* and Russia rapidly bloomed after the *muqawama* wholeheartedly supported the invasion of Ukraine.⁵⁵ The Russian embassy in Baghdad has continually deepened these ties, particularly since the Gaza crisis began, providing opportunities to exploit Iraqi anger to weaken U.S. “soft power” in Iraqi society. The Iraqi *muqawama*’s role in supporting anti-U.S. operations in Syria is an obvious initial point of collaboration, and at least one effective anti-U.S. attack in Syria—the killing of an American at the Rmelan Landing Zone in March 2023—has contained hints of Russian support for a lethal “offset action” to pay the United States back for its provision of lethal support to Ukraine.⁵⁶

More focused on economic fruits, China has also created deep inroads with the *muqawama* factions, receiving their support for China’s Belt and Road Initiative subprojects in Iraq, for Chinese oil-for-infrastructure loans, and for preferential—often corrupt—Chinese access to energy contracts.⁵⁷ The Development Road initiative,⁵⁸ ports and railroad projects, plus any digital payment, oil barrel management, and offshore vessel tracking systems should be closely watched as vectors of Chinese support to Badr and AAH companies, with significant threat financing potential.⁵⁹

NOTES

- 1 Hamdi Malik and Crispin Smith, “*Muqawama* Lauds ‘Resistance Government’ in Iraq,” *Militia Spotlight*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 11, 2023. Also see Michael Knights, “Iraq Is Quietly Falling Apart,” *Foreign Policy*, June 5, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/iran/iraq-quietly-falling-apart>.
- 2 For a recent explainer on the axis, see Kian Sharifi, “Iran’s ‘Axis of Resistance’: Different Groups, Same Goals,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, February 19, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-s-axis-of-resistance-different-groups-same-goals/32826188.html>; also see Katherine Zimmerman, *Yemen’s Houthis and the Expansion of Iran’s Axis of Resistance*, *Critical Threats* (Washington DC: American Enterprise Institute, 2022), <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/yemens-houthis-and-the-expansion-of-irans-axis-of-resistance/>.
- 3 Michael Knights, “Iraq’s Two Coups—And How the U.S. Should Respond,” *Fikra Forum*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 2, 2022, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/iraqs-two-coups-and-how-us-should-respond>.
- 4 The control by Iran-backed Shia Islamist parties of the prime ministership is normal, but at present the same cabal (the Coordination Framework) also controls Iraq’s two main judges, and holds the speakership of parliament and the largest bloc in parliament. The only major role outside this power base is the ceremonial role of the presidency, held by a pro–Coordination Framework Kurdish bloc.
- 5 Hamdi Malik, “‘Sudani Is a General Manager’: How Militias View Iraq’s New Prime Minister,” *Militia Spotlight*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, December 1, 2022, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/sudani-general-manager-how-militias-view-iraqs-new-prime-minister>.
- 6 For a good profile of Khazali, see Isabel Coles, Ali Nabhan, and Ghassan Adnan, “Iraqi Who Once Killed Americans Is a U.S. Dilemma as He Gains Political Power,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 11, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/iraqi-who-once-killed-americans-is-a-u-s-dilemma-as-he-gains-political-power-11544529601>; also see Michael Knights, “Profile: Asaib Ahl al-Haq,” *Militia Spotlight*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 27, 2021 <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-asaib-ahl-al-haq-0>.
- 7 For *Militia Spotlight*’s updated profile of the Badr Organization, see Michael Knights, Crispin Smith, and Hamdi Malik, “Profile: Badr Organization,” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2, 2021, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-badr-organization>.
- 8 Hamdi Malik, “Asaib Ahl al-Haq and Badr Fall Out Over Controlling the New Parliamentary Speaker,” *Militia Spotlight*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 29, 2024, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/asaib-ahl-al-haq-and-badr-fall-out-over-controlling-new-parliamentary-speaker>.

- 9 For an analytic summary of Zaidan’s actions in the post-electoral period, see Crispin Smith and Michael Knights, “Remaking Iraq: How Iranian-Backed Militias Captured the Country,” *Just Security*, March 20, 2023, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/remaking-iraq-how-iranian-backed-militias-captured-country>, as well as Knights, “Iraq’s Two Coups,” <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/iraqs-two-coups-and-how-us-should-respond>.
- 10 Michael Knights and Amir al-Kaabi, “Mainstreaming Hashd Commanders (Part 1): Advanced Education for Senior Militiamen,” *Militia Spotlight*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 15, 2023, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/mainstreaming-hashd-commanders-part-1-advanced-education-senior-militiamen>. The PMF is penetrating the conventional military much as Iran’s IRGC penetrated and overpowered the Iranian armed forces (Artesh).
- 11 Michael Knights, “Kataib Hezbollah Is Part of Iraq’s PMF,” *Militia Spotlight*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 15, 2024, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/kataib-hezbollah-part-iraqs-pmf>.
- 12 Amir al-Kaabi and Michael Knights, “Extraordinary Popular Mobilization Force Expansion, by the Numbers,” *Militia Spotlight*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, June 3, 2023, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/extraordinary-popular-mobilization-force-expansion-numbers>.
- 13 For a detailed look at the special grades issue in a longer timeframe, see Toby Dodge and Renad Mansour, “The Expansion of the Special Grades Scheme,” chap. 4 in *Politically Sanctioned Corruption and Barriers to Reform in Iraq* (London: Chatham House, 2021), <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/06/political-sanctioned-corruption-and-barriers-reform-iraq>.
- 14 Michael Knights, Ameer al-Kaabi, and Hamdi Malik, “AAH Terrorist Planner Adnan Fayhan Takes Over as Babil Governor,” *Militia Spotlight*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, February 12, 2024, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/aah-terrorist-planner-adnan-fayhan-takes-over-babil-governor>.
- 15 Michael Knights, Hamdi Malik, and Crispin Smith, “Iraq’s New Regime Change: How Tehran-Backed Terrorist Organizations and Militias Captured the Iraqi State,” *CTC Sentinel* 16, no. 11 (December 2023), <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/iraqs-new-regime-change-how-tehran-backed-terrorist-organizations-and-militias-captured-the-iraqi-state/>.
- 16 Michael Knights, Hamdi Malik, and Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, *Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces*, Policy Focus 163 (Washington DC: Washington Institute, 2020), <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/honored-not-contained-future-iraqs-popular-mobilization-forces>.

- 17 Coined by Renad Mansour in section 3 of *Networks of Power: The Popular Mobilization Forces and the State in Iraq* (London: Chatham House, 2021), <https://kalam.chathamhouse.org/articles/networks-of-power-the-popular-mobilization-forces-and-the-state-in-iraq/>.
- 18 Mansour, *Networks of Power*, <https://kalam.chathamhouse.org/articles/networks-of-power-the-popular-mobilization-forces-and-the-state-in-iraq/>; and see two Militia Spotlight profiles by Michael Knights, “Profile: Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba,” April 27, 2021, updated October 21, 2023, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-harakat-hezbollah-al-nujaba>; and “Profile: Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada,” Militia Spotlight, May 3, 2021, updated October 21, 2023, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-kataib-sayyid-al-shuhada>.
- 19 Michael Knights, Crispin Smith, and Hamdi Malik, “Discordance in the Iran Threat Network in Iraq: Militia Competition and Rivalry,” *CTC Sentinel* 14, no. 8 (2021), <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/discordance-in-the-iran-threat-network-in-iraq-militia-competition-and-rivalry/>.
- 20 Michael Knights and Amir al-Kaabi, “Coordination Framework Militias Exposed for Stealing Baghdad Real Estate,” Militia Spotlight, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 31, 2023, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/coordination-framework-militias-exposed-stealing-baghdad-real-estate>.
- 21 For more detail on these activities, see Knights, Malik, and Smith, “Iraq’s New Regime Change,” <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/iraqs-new-regime-change-how-tehran-backed-terrorist-organizations-and-militias-captured-the-iraqi-state/>. AAH tends to focus on oil and industrial projects, while Badr has more reach within banking and logistics.
- 22 Hamdi Malik et al., “Potential Escalation in Iraq (Part 1): Khamenei and Badr,” Militia Spotlight, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, November 1, 2023, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/potential-escalation-iraq-part-1-khamenei-and-badr>.
- 23 For instance, Badr has significant military basing access that is useful for importing, moving, and hiding missile and drone systems. All the militias, even Badr, call for the violent eviction of U.S. forces from Iraq, despite their presence due to the invitation of the Iraqi government. Hamdi Malik et al., “Potential Escalation (Part 1),” <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/potential-escalation-iraq-part-1-khamenei-and-badr>.
- 24 Knights, “Profile: Harakat,” <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-harakat-hezbollah-al-nujaba>.
- 25 Abdullah Hayek et al., “Profile: Kataib al-Imam Ali,” Militia Spotlight, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, February 27, 2024, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-kataib-al-imam-ali>.

- 26 For more detail, see Knights, Malik, and Smith, “Iraq’s New Regime Change,” <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/iraqs-new-regime-change-how-tehran-backed-terrorist-organizations-and-militias-captured-the-iraqi-state/>. Kataib al-Imam Ali can stand up to Badr and KH when Lebanese Hezbollah provides the militia with strong support.
- 27 Michael Knights, “Back into the Shadows? The Future of Kata’ib Hezbollah and Iran’s Other Proxies in Iraq,” *CTC Sentinel* 13, no. 10 (October 2020), <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/back-into-the-shadows-the-future-of-kataib-hezbollah-and-irans-other-proxies-in-iraq/>.
- 28 Abu Fadak’s formal name is Abdul-Aziz al-Mohammadawi.
- 29 Michael Knights, Hamdi Malik, and Crispin Smith, “The Muhandis Company: Iraq’s Khatam al-Anbiya,” *Militia Spotlight*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 21, 2023, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/muhandis-company-iraqs-khatam-al-anbia>; also see Kaabi and Knights, “Extraordinary PMF Expansion,” <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/extraordinary-popular-mobilization-force-expansion-numbers>.
- 30 Knights, Malik, and Smith, “The Muhandis Company,” <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/muhandis-company-iraqs-khatam-al-anbia>; see also Sinan Mahmoud, “Iraq’s Militias Set to Benefit as Government Creates Company for State-Backed Groups,” *The National*, November 29, 2022, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/iraq/2022/11/29/iraqs-militias-set-to-benefit-as-government-creates-company-for-state-backed-groups/>.
- 31 Knights, Malik, and Smith, “Iraq’s New Regime Change,” <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/iraqs-new-regime-change-how-tehran-backed-terrorist-organizations-and-militias-captured-the-iraqi-state/>.
- 32 See Crispin Smith, Hamdi Malik, and Michael Knights, “Profile: Alwiyat al-Waad al-Haq,” *Militia Spotlight*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 1, 2021, updated October 24, 2023, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-alwiyat-al-waad-al-haq>; and Michael Knights, “Kataib Hezbollah’s Role in the August 15 al-Tanf Attack,” *Militia Spotlight*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 25, 2022, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/kataib-hezbollahs-role-august-15-al-tanf-attack>.
- 33 Michael Knights, Hamdi Malik, and Ameer al-Kaabi, “Profile: The Hoquq Movement,” *Militia Spotlight*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 15, 2024, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-hoquq-movement>; see also Michael Knights, “The Hoquq Candidates: Kataib Hezbollah’s Aspiring Parliamentarians,” *Militia Spotlight*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 30, 2021, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/hoquq-candidates-kataib-hezbollahs-aspiring-parliamentarians>.
- 34 Hamdi Malik and Michael Knights, “Militia Journalist to Head New Prime Minister’s Communications Team,” *Militia Spotlight*, Washington Institute for

- Near East Policy, November 3, 2022, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/militia-journalist-head-new-prime-ministers-communications-team>.
- 35 Abu Hussein’s real name is Ahmad Mohsen Faraj al-Hamidawi. See Amir al-Kaabi and Michael Knights, “Kataib Hezbollah and the Gaza Crisis (Part 1): Special Ops in the Lead,” *Militia Spotlight*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, November 7, 2023, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/kataib-hezbollah-and-gaza-crisis-part-1-special-ops-lead>.
 - 36 Michael Knights, Amir al-Kaabi, and Hamdi Malik, “Tracking Anti-U.S. Strikes in Iraq and Syria During the Gaza Crisis,” *Militia Spotlight*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 24, 2023, updated daily, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/tracking-anti-us-strikes-iraq-and-syria-during-gaza-crisis>.
 - 37 Knights, “Kataib Hezbollah Is Part of PMF,” <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/kataib-hezbollah-part-iraqs-pmf>.
 - 38 Kataib Hezbollah has a special connection to a range of oil fields, including those in al-Qayyara and some in Basra, and is able to truck illicit oil into Iran for export; see Knights and Kaabi, “Coordination Framework Militias Exposed for Stealing,” <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/coordination-framework-militias-exposed-stealing-baghdad-real-estate>.
 - 39 U.S. Energy Information Administration, “What Countries Are the Top Producers and Consumers of Oil?” updated April 11, 2024, <https://www.eia.gov/tools/faqs/faq.php?id=709&t=6>.
 - 40 To give an example, when al-Qaeda in the Arabia Peninsula took over al-Mukalla in 2015–16—one of the most alarming feats of jihadist governance to date—the jihadists gained around \$292 million in cash and fundraising opportunities. Michael Knights, *The Race for Mukalla* (London: Profile Editions, forthcoming 2024), 96. In Iraq and Syria, at the height of its geographic control in 2015, the Islamic State may have gained access to as much as \$1.36 billion in total, although not as liquid or deployable resources. See Colin P. Clarke, “ISIS’s New Plans to Get Rich and Wreak Havoc,” *Foreign Policy*, October 10, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/10/isiss-new-plans-to-get-rich-and-wreak-havoc/>. In contrast, Iraq generated \$8.7 billion in oil sales in March 2024 alone, and it generates multibillion-dollar revenues every month, every year. Ben Van Heuvelen and Staff, “Iraq Crude Exports Steady in March,” *Iraq Oil Report*, April 4, 2024, <https://www.iraqoilreport.com/news/iraq-crude-exports-steady-in-march-46420/>.
 - 41 Iraq’s sovereign reserves, which are at the disposal of the Coordination Framework, were \$100 billion in December 2023. See Agence France-Presse, “Iraqis Hurt by Dollar Limits Despite Having \$100 Billion in Reserves,” December 17, 2023, available at <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq/iraqis-hurt-by-dollar-limits-despite-having-100-billion-in-reserves/>.

- 42 See CIA World Factbook studies on Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon, available at <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/>.
- 43 Ranj Alaaldin, “Muqtada al-Sadr’s Problematic Victory and the Future of Iraq,” Brookings Institution, October 28, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/muqtada-al-sadrs-problematic-victory-and-the-future-of-iraq/>; and Sarhang Hamasaheed, “What’s Behind Moqtada al-Sadr’s Bid to Shake Up Iraq’s Politics?” United States Institute of Peace, August 4, 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/08/whats-behind-moqtada-al-sadrs-bid-shake-iraqs-politics>.
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