Profile: Sabereen News

by Hamdi Malik, Crispin Smith, Michael Knights

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Hamdi Malik

Hamdi Malik is an Associate Fellow with the Washington Institute, specializing in Shia militias. He earned his doctorate at the school of social, political and global studies, Keele University. He is a co-founder of the Militia Spotlight platform, which offers in-depth analysis of developments related to the Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria. He is the coauthor of the Institute’s 2020 study “Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces.”

Crispin Smith

Crispin Smith is an associate at a Washington-based national security law group. His research focuses on Iraqi security, human rights, and law of armed conflict issues. He is a co-founder of the Militia Spotlight platform, which offers in-depth analysis of developments related to the Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria.

Michael Knights

Michael Knights is the Jill and Jay Bernstein Fellow of The Washington Institute, specializing in the military and security affairs of Iraq, Iran, and the Persian Gulf states. He is a co-founder of the Militia Spotlight platform, which offers in-depth analysis of developments related to the Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria.

Brief Analysis


or see Part 1: How to Use Militia Spotlight: Profiles (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/how-use-militia-spotlight-profiles)

Sabereen News is the main media conglomerate supporting all "resistance" actions and factions in Iraq, but it quietly keeps a unique connection to Asaib Ahl al-Haq.

Name: Sabereen News.

Type of movement: Media facade for one or more fasail (armed groups), most prominently Asaib Ahl al-Haq (node/16715) (AAH) for most of the channel's existence. Nonkinetic, information operations focus. Social media propaganda channel. Nonviolent support to kinetic military, kinetic paramilitary, and social operations aimed at weakening domestic and foreign opponents of the armed muqawama (resistance) groups.

History and objectives:

- Sabereen News appeared on January 11, 2020, as a small channel on the social media application Telegram. By late 2020, it had become the most influential muqawama social media channel. Whereas most muqawama Telegram channels have 10,000-20,000 subscribers, Sabereen has over 180,000.
- Sabereen's role, management, and staff have evolved throughout its history. It went through a period of severe flux in late 2020 and early 2021, closely mirroring internecine strife between muqawama militias.
- The channel's objectives include:
- Promoting the *muqawama* cause.
- Spreading disinformation for a variety of purposes, including to discredit the Iraqi government.
- Inciting *muqawama* supporters and other Iraqis against any parties or individuals deemed anti-*muqawama*. In particular, Sabereen seeks to counter the Iraqi protest movement known as Tishrin.
- Propagating anti-U.S sentiment.
- Promoting and disseminating real and fake news about kinetic operations carried out by facade groups.
- Promoting *muqawama* street vigilante groups.
- Organizing activities related to vigilante and *muqawama* groups engaged in cyber operations, such as hacking websites and accounts of *muqawama* opponents.

**Chain of command:**
- The preponderance of evidence indicates that Sabereen has been controlled by AAH throughout most (if not all) of its existence. This is based on:
  - Sabereen posts containing slogans such as “We are AAH” or “Unleash us, Qais, we are your soldiers,” referring to AAH leader Qais al-Khazali (Sabereen has not identified so closely with any other *fasail*).
  - The special coverage that AAH and Khazali have received from Sabereen compared to other *muqawama* militias.
  - Sabereen’s limited access to imagery and updates during certain operations linked to Kataib Hezbollah (/node/16641) (KH), compared with its apparent special access to information regarding AAH-linked groups and attacks.
  - At various points, other *muqawama* groups have seemingly attempted to take over Sabereen: an apparently unsuccessful attempt was launched in the last quarter of 2020 by Unit 10,000 (/node/16707), which sought to absorb or acquire the network; and Sabereen’s senior management was potentially changed between May and November 2021.
  - Beginning in summer 2021, Sabereen appears to have regained a “first among equals” status within the constellation of *muqawama* media channels, being given preference in launching new information operations within a tighter cooperative framework.

**Affiliate relationships:**
- Sabereen aggregates real and fake news from across the *muqawama* media space, but it also publishes statements and information apparently sent from insider sources representing various militias and facade groups.
- The preponderance of evidence suggests that Sabereen has a long-running special relationship with the facade group Ashab al-Kahf (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-ashab-al-kahf) (AK) and has been given seemingly unique opportunities to post some claims and statements on the group’s behalf. AK is itself uniquely affiliated with AAH.
- Sabereen may have used administrators and staff drawn from KH and other *fasail* at various points in its history. Sabereen supported a wide range of candidates from all *muqawama* lists in the October 2021 elections, but treated KH’s Harakat Hoquq (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-hossein-moanes-sparks-angry-words-between-kataib-hezbollah-and-asaib-ahl-al-haq) list more favorably, even though the group contested many constituencies against AAH candidates. The channel occasionally uses language indicating a nexus with KH and, more recently, Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada (/node/16731).
- Sabereen may draw upon the assets (vehicles, sites, personnel) of the Popular Mobilization Forces Central Security Directorate (Amn al-Hashd) and media directorate.

**Subordinate elements:**
- Sabereen News operates its own media channels on Telegram, Twitter, and Facebook.
- Sabereen launched a Farsi account on Telegram in May 2021. It also launched Turkish and Azeri channels on Telegram, but both are now inactive.
- Sabereen runs a "research" channel on Telegram called “Sabereen’s Security Analysis and Research.” The preponderance of evidence suggests that it evolved out of the Ababeel (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/militia-technical-disinformation-and-now-7-drone-
Telegram channel (not to be confused with the facade group Saraya Ababeel (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/saraya-ababeel-claims-baghdad-drone-and-rocket-attacks)).

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