

Policy Analysis /

# Interpreting the Reemergence of the Allies of Syria Operations Room

by [Hamdi Malik](#)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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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."



Brief Analysis

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## The recent attack on al-Tanf base and the identity of the Iraqi factions that reportedly helped carry it out indicate Iran's plans to establish a new "deterrence equation" in Syria.

On October 26, [Haaretz reported](#) that "Israel's defense establishment has identified growing Iranian efforts to improve their air defenses in locations where...the Israeli air force has been carrying out attacks [in Syria]." This is in line with a report by the pro-Hezbollah Lebanese daily *al-Akhbar* one day after the October 20 [attack on al-Tanf base](#) in Syria. The paper quoted Iraqi *muqawama* (resistance) sources stating that the Iranian-led axis is working on a plan to "break free from the restrictions imposed by the military realities of the past years" (Figure 1). These sources also declared, "It is time to devise a new deterrence equation in relation to the Israeli and American enemy. [This will be achieved] by responding to the direct [Israeli and U.S.] attacks."

In addition, *al-Akhbar* reported that "contacts were made and meetings took place

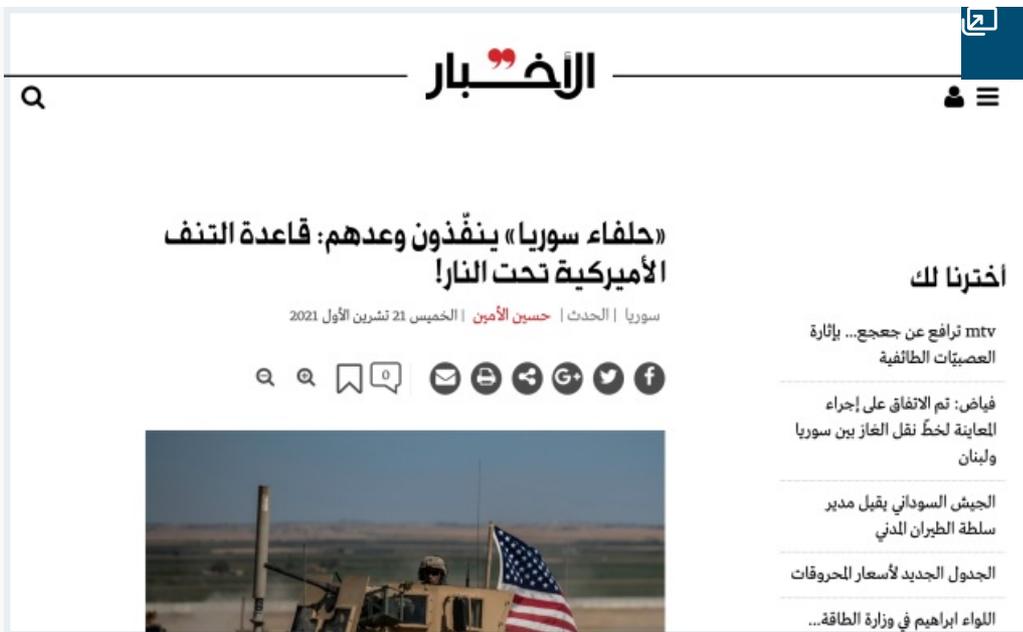


Figure 1: *Al-Akhabar* reports on al-Tanf attack, October 21, 2021

between leaders in the *muqawama* axis in Beirut, Damascus, and Tehran, and it was decided to strengthen the presence of the axis forces throughout the Syrian geography.” The paper then confirmed that the so-called "Allies of Syria Operations Room" was behind the attack on al-Tanf.

The *Akhabar* report was republished on the platform "Media War in the Islamic Resistance" (al-Elam al-Harbi fil Muqawama al-Islamiya), also known

as "the Central Media" (al-Elam al-Markazi). Overseen by Lebanese Hezbollah, this outlet reports on news regarding all *muqawama* groups in the Middle East (Figure 2). Disseminating the *Akhabar* story showed that the *muqawama* had confirmed the information about who was behind the attack.

Given the reemergence of the Allies of Syria Operations Room, the *muqawama* axis may indeed intend to change its collective behavior in Syria. Formed circa 2015, the group is led by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force and incorporates members of Lebanese Hezbollah (who also play a leading role) and Iraqi militias.

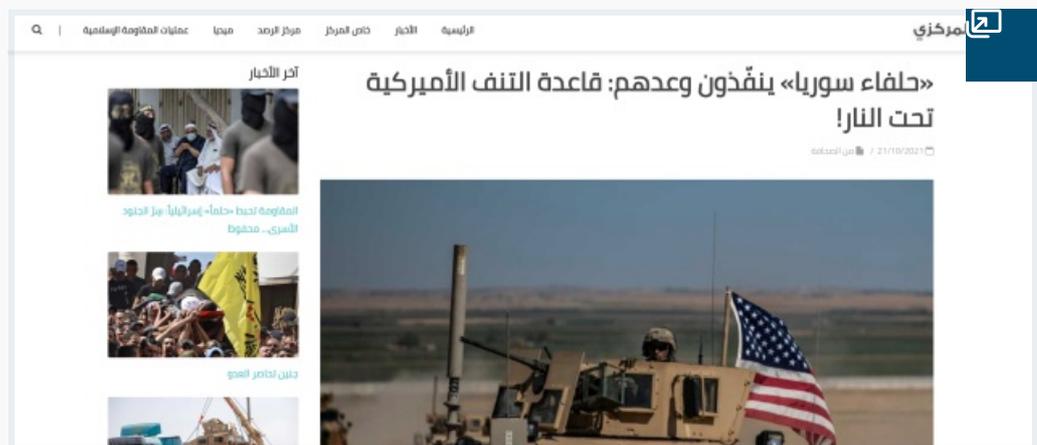


Figure 2: The Central Media outlet republishes *al-Akhabar*'s report, October 21, 2021

At various points, *muqawama* media platforms have published clips of past meetings that the Operations Room held in Syria. Some of them show slain Hezbollah military leader Mustafa Badreddine briefing the late Qods Force chief Qasem Soliemani about the war in Syria (Figure 3).

The Operations Room was very visible in the media throughout



Figure 3: Mustafa Badreddine briefs Qasem Soleimani at a meeting of the Allies of Syria Operations Room (exact date unknown, sometime before Badreddine's May 2016 death)

2017-18. At times it also deliberated with Russia to cooperate on certain operations. But after [a schism developed between Iran and Russia](#) in June-July 2019 over events in Deir al-Zour, the Operations Room became a purely *muqawama* entity with much less visibility.

Following Soleimani's death in 2020, the role of the Operations Room further diminished. This trend continued in 2021 up until October 13, when

*muqawama* and Syrian army positions in Palmyra were [bombed](#). A day later, the Operations Room reemerged with a statement warning that it had "taken a decision to respond harshly to the aggression against Palmyra." On October 20, al-Tanf was struck with drones and rockets. Yet according to the aforementioned *al-Akhbar* report, the decision to establish a new "deterrence equation" was made before the Palmyra attack. ❖



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