

The Ahd Allah Movement: Another Iranian Proxy

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Twaseef Almogbal is a former journalist for Al-Riyadh newspaper and focuses primarily on security issues. She has expertise in political/military history and is pursuing a master's degree in Modern History with a focus on the Armenian massacres. Currently, she works as a secretary on the Board of Directors of the Saudi Society for Political Science and as a member of the International Federation of Historians.

Brief Analysis

As Gulf countries pursue dialogue with Iran, they must realize the threats posed by Iranian-backed Iraqi militias – both to Iraq itself, and to wider regional stability.

This summer, Iraq held an unusual summit, bringing together countries from across the region as a means for opening dialogue between Iran and the Arab Gulf states, followed up by bilateral talks between Saudi Arabia and Iran held in Iraq in September. However, it is important for the Gulf region to remain mindful of the threats Iranian-backed militias inside Iraq pose both to Iraqis and the broader region. Since the U.S. invasion of Iraq, numerous Iranian-funded militias have operated throughout the country, undermining Iraqi stability.

In this context, prominent Hezbollah ideologue Sayyed Hashim al-Haidairi, the former secretary general of Kata'ib Hezbollah, [founded the Ahd Allah movement \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-ahd-allah-islamic-movement\)](#) last November. Ahd Allah is an Islamist social and cultural movement that opposes the United States and Israel, and calls for taking up arms against them in preparation for the coming of the Mahdi. Prior to forming the movement, al-Haidairi gained prominence as the cultural deputy of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), though he did not hold a high-level position within the PMF leadership.

The Ahd Allah Movement and The Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist (*Velayat-e faqih*)

Iran uses paramilitary groups—which profess allegiance to Iran rather than the sovereign state of Iraq—and religious projects to gain a foothold in Iraq, as part of a broader regional approach to gaining influence. Using these methods, Iran primarily targets younger, moderate generations and exposes them to extremist ideologies and inflammatory discourse. In its propaganda, the Ahd Allah Movement uses both traditional and modern tactics, from Muharram sermons in mosques to posts on social media.

Directly after the group was established, al-Haidari [stated \(https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/%22%D8%B9%D9%87%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88-%D9%84%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%87\)](#) that the “plans and objectives of the movement are grounded in Islam and *velayat-e faqih*,” and emphasized that the group would be “on the frontlines of the resistance, in preparation for the return of the hidden imam, the Mahdi.” The movement plans to visit cultural institutions to attract young Iraqis, and also intends to open charity organizations to develop support. There is clear evidence that Kata'ib Hezbollah controls the Ahd Allah Movement and that there are close ties between the two groups.

On the one hand, Iraq's recent elections appear to be a popular rejection of the country's Iranian-backed militias; the Fatah coalition's share in parliament dropped to 14 seats. However, the militias have drawn on their media outlets to suggest that the elections were fraudulent, resulting from a “U.S.-Emirati-Israeli” conspiracy. As for the Ahd Allah Movement, al-Haidari announced that they would not participate in the recent Iraqi elections, and asked the movement's followers to “select the most righteous candidate,” stressing that top electoral priorities included education, spreading Islam, and providing aid to those in need. Despite this announcement, researcher and journalist Ziyad Al-Sanjari told Alhurra that Iran aims to control Iraqi politics, and establishing new groups in the country, like the Ahd Allah Movement, is one means of achieving this goal.

As Iraqis attempt to achieve political and economic reform based on democratic principles after years of brutal wars and instability, the movement's views pose an existential threat to these efforts. The movement's leader stated that “[Khomeini's approach is not limited to one country or people over another,](#)” [\(https://rasanah-iiis.org/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%B5%D8%AF-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1/%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%B9%D9%87%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A6-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%82/\)](#) demonstrating that the Ahd Allah Movement will adopt an expansionist ideology to support widespread Iranian influence. Ahd Allah likewise draws on the view that the Khomeinist doctrine of *velayat-e faqih*—control of the state by Iranian clerics—is not geographically limited to Iran, but rather extends to all Muslims. This belief in and of itself is at odds with the Iraqi political process, as the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist opposes all forms of democracy.

The fact that these movements are armed and constantly seeking new recruits emphasizes their ongoing danger to stability in Iraq, regardless of their failure in the elections. Moreover, Iraq's ongoing economic woes provide an opportunity for these organizations to draw new recruits and sympathy via charity work and the provision of social services and health care. Social services and preaching have been and continue to be two of the tools of soft power utilized by many extremist organizations in the Middle East, including ISIS and Al-Qaeda, to attract youth and encourage them to [participate \(https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-107shrg89957/html/CHRG-107shrg89957.htm\)](#) in armed jihad.

Since the Ahd Allah Movement is an Iranian tool for disseminating ideological principles, its narrative against Gulf states should be taken into account by Gulf actors. In a televised speech in June, al-Haidari accused the UAE and Saudi Arabia of collaborating with the United States in supporting and funding ISIS to kill Iraqis and undermine stability in the country. The movement's hostility towards Saudi Arabia could result in operations which target Saudi interests, both domestically and abroad.

The scant coverage of this group in Gulf media demonstrates that it is not adequately addressing the potential threat of these groups on both Iraq and the Gulf states . Hence, the foreign media must realize that Ahd Allah movement , which is constructed on the principle of *Velayat-e faqih*, will not remain a peaceful movement, but will be a source of significant threat to the whole region in future.

As such, Gulf states should be mindful of the deteriorating security environment in Iraq as a clear indication of the Iraqi government’s inability to obtain control over the Iranian-backed militias. Moreover, in this case, military options often used to eradicate such militias will not be applicable, as the Ahd Allah movement is still in the formation stage. Therefore, it can be effectively eliminated through other security and soft power measures. After all, in order to confront such movements, the Gulf countries should work in coordination with Saudi Arabia to enhance intelligence coordination, and cooperate with major powers involved in the war against terrorism , especially the United States, to exchange intelligence information and technology. Meanwhile, the new government must work on national legislation and local initiatives to exert control over these pro-Iranian groups, and should cooperate with the United States in implementing further sanctions, such as those suggested by the [bill \(https://www.congress.gov/bills/117th-congress/house-bill/2113/all-actions?r=33&s=1&q=%7B%22house-committees%22%3A%22Judiciary%22%7D%22%7D\)](https://www.congress.gov/bills/117/congress/house/bills/2113/all-actions?r=33&s=1&q=%7B%22house-committees%22%3A%22Judiciary%22%7D%22%7D) introduced by U.S. Representative Greg Steube. Simultaneously, the Iraqi government should do more to address the cultural and religious tools these groups use in attempt to influence Iraqis. ❖

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