

# The Goal Behind the Hypocritical Discourse of Iraq's Militia Media

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Brief Analysis

**Pro-Iranian militia media channels are relying on distortion, character assassination, and misinformation to attract Iraqi audiences, after dependence on constant religious messaging proved futile.**

The media efforts of Iraqi militia in recent years have centered on two rhetorical tracks: exaggerated praise for the Popular Mobilization Forces and the resistance factions, and defamation campaigns against those who do not share their views.

These militias have no tangible achievements to demonstrate, and have therefore turned to media distortions to gain favor among Iraqi constituents, as they aim to warp perceptions, maintain sectarian delusions and therefore obtain popular support.

## The hypocritical shift in the media discourse of militias

While the militias' media strategies are [directed \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-iraqi-radio-and-television-union\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-iraqi-radio-and-television-union) by the Iraqi Radio and Television Union, which is linked to the Iranian Islamic Radio and Television Union, some militias have attempted to deviate from these established models. The most prominent example of this was when Al-Asaib's Al-Ahed television channel transformed from a channel that banned sports and the appearance of unveiled women, on the basis of fatwas issued by the late marja Mohammad Sadiq Al-Sadr, to a channel that promotes sports, allows non-veiled women to appear, and broadcasts photos of actors. This evolution is not based on principles, or changing convictions about women's rights and freedom of expression. Rather, it is part of a broader manipulation process, in which militia channels aim to draw viewers' attention to the program's basic message, thus imposing control on the viewers, and introducing them to the idea of resistance.

The shift in militia media discourse extends beyond Al-Ahed, as demonstrated by the establishment of other seemingly liberal channels such as [Watan / Al-Walaa \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/iraqs-pmf-entity-](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/iraqs-pmf-entity-)

**beyond-suspicion-or-mirage-deception**), owned by Abu Turab Al-Tamimi, the leader of the Popular Mobilization Forces; I-News channel, affiliated with Kata'ib Sayyid Al-Shuhada; and Al-Rabiaa, which is run by the militia media affiliated with Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis Ghazwan Jassem, who has a distinguished relationship with Muhannad Al-Uqabi, the media director of the Popular Mobilization Authority.

These shifts indicate how the Iraqi Radio and Television Union, and by extension the Islamic Radio and Television Union of Iran, have failed to attract followers through their traditional tactics of constant religious messaging. Moreover, the militias' media shifts demonstrate that the Iraqi and Islamic media unions have lost control over the social milieu that they broadcast to.

### **Distortion of the political analysis experiment**

Starting in 2007, when satellite channels emerged in Iraq, political analysis became a prominent part of the media, and university professors and academics such as Dr. Amer Hassan Fayyad, Dr. Abdul-Jabbar Ahmed, Dr. Saeed Majid Dahdouh, and others filled the satellite channels. Militia channels quickly hijacked this trend by broadcasting professors whose analysis aligned with militia agendas, and by marginalizing analysts who insisted on objective analysis. Most recently, these militia channels followed the Iraqi Radio and Television Union's order to reject any political analyst who does not support the militias' views. As a result, the role that political analysts hold in Iraqi media has shrunk to that of a cheerleader. The contentious debate space between politicians has only been preserved to nominally demonstrate that the channel respects other opinions.

Militia media stations were able to successfully distort political analysis by forming and financing groups of pseudo-intellectuals who established think tanks, and were then hosted on Iraqi satellite channels. This fraudulent process prevented many fair, impartial analysts from appearing on militia and other channels. Political analysts who join these institutions do not receive financial compensation from the channel, but rather, obtain a monthly salary from the think tanks and other militia-run institutions. Meanwhile, those who refuse to join these groups and centers are no longer hosted by the channels because they demand financial compensation for their fees and transportation expenses. Now, many ideologues who masquerade as political analysts have emerged onto the Iraqi media scene.

### **Hezbollah's new media cell**

The Hezbollah Brigades' new media cell, led by clerics Rida Abdel Rahman and Mazen Al-Mattouri, is seeking to go beyond television channels to penetrate Iraqi culture, and has focused on obtaining the support of intellectuals, and utilizing cultural centers—such as cafés like Rida Alwan and Qahwa and Kitab (Coffee and Book)—to attract support. They have also tried to incentivize pro-militia discourse on social media. The cell's Facebook page, Nadwa, utilized pro-Hezbollah content to attract intellectuals and online followers. One of the members of this cell, Talib al-Sayed, is an experienced documentary maker who produces documentaries and programs on Alejetah TV and E-News, which are channels affiliated with Hezbollah Brigades and Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada.

The Hezbollah media cell followed the same hypocritical path taken by other militia channels, with clerics now disavowing religious principles to justify engaging in cultural activities that are typically prohibited. This approach frequently conflicts with the fatwas issued in religious schools, such as the prohibition against mixing with women and interacting with unveiled women. Yet, the cell has flouted these values and restrictions by employing women who have nothing to do with their affiliation and ideology, and training them to appear on cultural programs regarding the female body and feminine beauty, in order to attract young audiences.

In keeping with the Quranic verse that says, “**God does not like evil to be spoken out (<https://quran.com/4/148?translations=39,33,25,31,27,41,75,23,32,38,77,52,101,84,21,20,19,18,95,22,17,34>).**” the religious establishment and Shiites in general tend to avoid broaching thorny societal issues or skirting close to prohibitions. Nevertheless, this cell has begun to raise hot-button issues, and is preparing to launch a number of programs that discuss prohibited issues

from an ideological angle, dealing with them in a way that on the surface is human and scientific but at its core is ideological and jurisprudential.

It seems that the strategic planners of the Iraqi Radio and Television Union realized that they exhausted their original approach, as they were unable to generate broader interest by using it, even when they pumped it with more funding. Their new plan originates from two different angles. First, they aim to penetrate the intellectual class and opposition opinions through the establishment of parallel entities, and target young people who were eager for culture, art, and literature. These young people are easy prey for those looking for an opportunity to broadcast worn-out ideas that can only gain acceptance in a sugar-coated form.

The second angle aims to flood the public sphere with accusations and character assassinations of those who do not share the militias' vision, and affix charges of "inferiority" to anyone seeking rapprochement with actors opposed to the militias. They seek to burnish their opponents' intellectual credentials through exploitation and accusation. In this way, they aim to impose a state of fear among those associated with them, and those who are neutral. The militia channels have also flooded the media atmosphere with an abundance of misinformation and fake achievements, which makes it difficult for a fair, objective person to tell the truth or speak rationally to an audience, as they will be subject to a torrent of false propaganda materials, which audiences conceive of as established facts. The best solution to confront this dangerous phenomenon is to establish a consortium of national media who refute the militia's content, and give audiences the alternatives they need to understand how the militias have distorted reality. ❖

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## RECOMMENDED



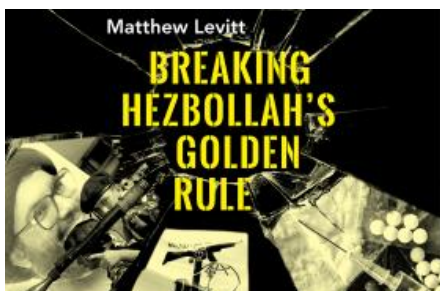
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