

Sabereen's Suspension (Part 1): Signs of Dissent and Noncompliance

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Brief Analysis

Part of a series: [Militia Spotlight \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight)

or see [Part 1: How to Use Militia Spotlight \(/policy-analysis/how-use-militia-spotlight\)](#)

The network was closed down almost entirely from March 28 to April 8, albeit with one apparent effort by rebellious members to refuse the suspension and blame Iran.

On March 28, the main Telegram channel for Iraqi militia media outlet [Sabereen News \(/node/16673\)](#) abruptly stopped posting and did not fully return for twelve days. While Sabereen—considered to be among the most important social media outlets run by *muqawama* (resistance) groups—has gone on hiatus before, it has generally provided a reason (even if spurious) for going offline. In this case, internal leadership changes may have been the cause.

Sabereen's hiatus was briefly interrupted on the day it began, when the channel posted a short Arabic message roughly translated as "whatever happens, it's for the best...#[we will] return." This phrase is often associated with the late Iranian general Qasem Soleimani, who used it frequently. Since his death in January 2020, *muqawama* media have used it often as well, typically when mourning for him, and more generally as a message of hope in the face of adversity. After posting this message, Sabereen went back on hiatus until resuming normal service on April 8. Smaller networks attempted to fill the void, but Sabereen's absence reduced the reach of militia news and propaganda at a time when kinetic attacks [have been increasing \(/node/17380\)](#) after a months-long lull.

Internal Dissent Over the Suspension?

In addition to reassuring users that the channel would return, at least some of Sabereen's leadership tried to circumvent the hiatus. On March 29, the Sabereen subsidiary channel "Sabereen for Security Studies and Analysis" (once known as Ababil) was rebranded as "Al-Maymun" (Figure 1).

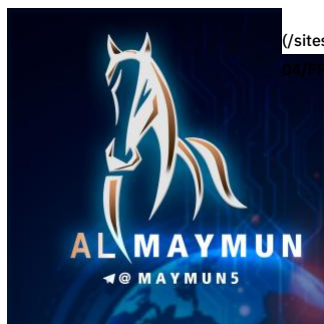


Figure 1: Al-Maymun logo.

Al-Maymun immediately began posting the kind of commentary and statements normally pushed out by the main Sabereen channel, and the subsidiary's membership grew very suddenly as a result of Sabereen fans promoting it. In effect, Sabereen's activity continued under another brand, controlled by the same individuals behind the original accounts.

Sabereen Unhappy With Iranian Interference?

This strategy worked for a few days, but by March 31, Sabereen's team appeared to be under new pressure to close down this workaround. Al-Maymun's final two posts before it ceased publishing indicate that Iranian officials—specifically Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) personnel—likely intervened in the matter. On April 1, Sabereen's team (under the Al-Maymun disguise) posted the following message in Farsi trying to vindicate themselves (Figure 2):

"Brother...do you know why Imam Khomeini called us soldiers of Imam of the time [Mahdi]? Because we work in secret for the principles of the Revolution, and many do not know us and even think that we are far from the path of Velayat-e Faqih, while we are all revolutionaries and ready to sacrifice for the Imam. I recommend that you read the principles and literature of Imam Khomeini well" (Figure 6).

This was the first time that Sabereen's team had publicly expressed the need to prove that they are part of the *muqawama*. The post drew on the authority of Iran's first Supreme Leader while trying to hide behind a veil of secrecy and covert action. Yet the plea—combined with the patronizing request to read up on revolutionary principles—seemingly failed, and Al-Maymun was silenced hours later. When Sabereen returned on April 8, Al-Maymun went back to its previous name of Sabereen for Security Studies and Analysis and resumed its usual activities.

[Part 2 \(/node/17382\)](#) of this analysis examines what combination of activities may have gotten Sabereen suspended in the first place, and what lessons can be learned about the network's direction and control. ❖

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