Profile: Hashd al-Shabak (PMF brigade 30)

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This local auxiliary unit plays an important role in consolidating Iran and its Iraqi proxies' influence in the strategic region of Nineveh plains.

**Name:** Hashd al-Shabak (the Shabak Hashd) (PMF brigade 30)

**Type of movement:** Tier 3 *fasail* (armed group). Badr-linked local auxiliary unit.

**Kinetic military operations against U.S., Kurdish and Turkish targets.**

**History and objectives:**

- The Shabak micro-minority in the Nienveh Plains has long sought to set up its own self-protection force, alleging the creeping expansion of Kurdish and Kurdish-backed Christian forces into its traditional community areas. The Shabak reached out mainly to Shia movements such as the Badr organization ([node/17003](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/node/17003)), the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, and Nouri al Maliki's State of Law coalition to support the development of a Shabak party with its own small militia in 2008-2012, the Democratic Assembly of Shabaks (*Tajamo al-Shabak al-Dimoqrati*), led by Haneen Qado.

- The first formation of *Hashd al-Shabak* was called the Quwwat / Liwa Sahl Nineveh and appeared in July 2014, at the height of the Islamic State (IS) power in Iraq, when Shabak areas in Nineveh governorate were imminently threatened by IS. The unit was later named the Liwa al-Shabak / PMF brigade 30 on
PMF brigade 30 area of operation is in Nineveh Plains, a strategic region linking Mosul to Erbil, the capital of the Iraqi Kurdistan region.

PMF brigade 30 troops have harassed U.S. forces present in Mosul:
- On February 19, 2019, PMF brigade 30 troops tried to blockade U.S. forces inside Iraq's Camp Kindi base in Mosul. U.S. force protection patrols simply walked through the attempted blockade.
- On November 22, 2019, PMF brigade 30 troops used a 23mm anti-aircraft gun to fire at a U.S. force protection drone near Camp Kindi.
- Numerous rocket and drone attacks on Iraqi Kurdistan and on U.S. and Turkish forces present in Iraqi Kurdistan have originated in the PMF brigade 30 areas of control in the Nineveh Plains.

Chain of command:
- PMF brigade 30 nominally answers to the commander-in-chief of the Iraqi armed forces, the prime minister of Iraq, and thereafter the Joint Operations Command and the Popular Mobilization Forces command. In reality, PMF 30 has proven to be one of the most autonomous and least controllable units in the Iraqi security forces. Iraqi prime ministers sought through written orders to force PMF 30 to withdraw its checkpoints from certain parts of the Nineveh Plains in July 2017 (under PM Haider al-Abadi), August 2018 (Executive Order 1388 under PM Adel Abdalmahdi) and again in July and August 2019 (under PM Adel Abdalmahdi). On October 17, 2020, PM Mustafa Kadhimi ordered Nineveh Operations Command (NIOC) to deploy army forces alongside PMF 30 forces at certain checkpoints and the NIOC commander was replaced to ensure compliance. The aim of this measure was to reduce the risk of provocative rocket attacks striking U.S. facilities in the waning months of U.S. President Donald Trump’s presidency.
- First commander of PMF brigade 30 was Waad Qado (aka Abu Jafar al-Shabaki). He was one of the founder of the brigade and its commander from 2014 to September 2020. In July 2019 he was designated by the United States for the activities of PMF brigade 30 which include extracting “money from the population around Bartalla, in the Nineveh Plains, through extortion, illegal arrests, and kidnappings. The 30th Brigade has frequently detained people without warrants, or with fraudulent warrants, and has charged arbitrary customs fees at its checkpoints”. Waad Qado, who is a MP, Still wield significant influence in PMF brigade 30.
- The second commander was Abu Kawthar al-Shabaki who led the militia from September 2020 to December 2020 when he reportedly died of Covid 19.
- Abu Yaseen al-Shabaki was the next commander who was appointed in December 2020.
- The current commander is Sabah Salem al-Shabaki of Bazwaya village in Nineveh plains. He was appointed in May 2022.
- PMF brigade 30 includes Shia Turkmen fighters. The deputy commander of the militia group is a Turkmen, Sami Bakdash (aka Abu Sadra al-Turkmani).
- One of the main figures of PMF brigade 30 is Hassan Sultan al-Shabaki (aka Abu Hujjatullah al-Shabaki) who is the commander of Rasul al-Adham regiment within the brigade. He is a Shia cleric and the representative of the Iranian supreme leader, Ali Khamenei in Nineveh plains.

Affiliate relationships:
- PMF brigade 30 is increasingly affiliated with Kataib Hezbollah (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-kataib-hezbollah) (KH) and Harakat al-Nujaba (node/16716) (HaN), mainly working on kinetic activities against the Turkish bases in Iraq and the Kurdistan region.
- The Sayed al-Shuhada cultural complex in Bartella, Nineveh plains. This complex is run by Khamenei’s representative in Nineveh plains, Hassan Sultan al-Shabaki who is a commander in PMF brigade 30. The complex is overseen by Khamenei’s representative in
Iraq, Ayatollah Mojtaba al-Husseini, who is an Iranian national.

- Al-Basaer foundation in Bartella, led by Abdulmalik al-Shabaki. This is a cultural center affiliated with Sayed al-Shuhada cultural complex and tasked with propagating the Islamic Republic's ideology in the region. It runs workshops, lectures, mobilize people for demonstrations and have a media wing mainly covering activities of the foundation, Sayed al-Shuhada cultural complex and PMF brigade 30.

**Subordinate elements:**

- PMF brigade 30 used to have a few social media accounts, particularly on Facebook and Twitter, but these have been abandoned. Currently numerous social media accounts affiliated with Iran-aligned Shabak politicians, Iran-backed Shabak organizations and fighters in PMF brigade 30 promote the militia group.
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