Khazali Isolated Within Muqawama Over International Zone Protests

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Qais al-Khazali is being constrained by other muqawama members of the Iran-dominated Shia Coordination Framework (SCF) on the issue of how to respond to Sadrist protests.

One day after the Sadrist movement entered the International Zone (IZ) and parliament on July 30, 2022, Nouri al-Maliki’s 37-seat State of Law (SoL) and Qais al-Khazali of Asaib Ahl al-Haq (/node/16715) (AAH) created the Organizing Committee to Support Legitimacy and Preserve State Institutions. This committee issued a statement saying: “we call on “the sons of our Iraqi people, from all social, tribal, academic and cultural backgrounds to demonstrate to defend their state…especially after the recent developments that threaten to carry out a suspicious coup, hijack the state, cancel its legitimacy, violate its constitutional institutions, and abolish the democratic process” (Figure 1). This effort saw one part of the SCF – Maliki and Khazali – try to beat Sadr at his own game with counter-protests. The Organizing Committee statement was first re-posted by State of Law accounts such as Noidoha Dola (we will remake it [a strong] state) and Thikrayat Jonubi (memories of a southerner). Qais al-Khazali meanwhile issued a voice recording on August 1 providing instruction for the protesters of the SCF. Khazali has emerged this year as the muqawama leader mostly closely aligned with Maliki and the most in-sync with Maliki’s wish to see the SCF adopt a confrontational stance towards Moqtada al-Sadr, form a government and purge Sadrist from government agencies. Maliki and Khazali seem to have got their way, as shown by the effort to rapidly form a government this weekend (July 30) under a Maliki proxy, Mohammed Shia al-Sudani.
Another camp within the SCF – and thus within the *muqawama* – has suggested an alternative approach: a slowing-down of the government formation process and an attempt to bring the Shiite house back closer together by wooing Sadr with inducements. This alternate sub-bloc is led by Hadi al-Ameri (the leader of **Badr** ([node/17003]) and the 29-seat Fatah bloc within the SCF, which includes AAH’s parliamentarians). What appears clear is that Maliki (who theatrically armed himself to patrol his compound during the IZ incursion) and Khazali have been weakened within the SCF and potentially within the *muqawama* because their confrontational approach drew a heavy Sadrist reaction – as Ameri predicted.

Ameri moved quickly and confidently. Only, half an hour after the State of Law channels started posting the statement of ‘the Organizing Committee to Support Legitimacy and Preserve State Institutions’ at around 21:30 (Baghdad time) on July 31, 2022, Hadi al-Ameri warned that the protests “might get out of control” and called on “the brothers in the Sadrist movement and the SCF” to resort to “reason, wisdom, self-control, deliberation” and to “prioritize the interests of the country and people through serious and constructive dialogue” (Figure 2).

The fact that Ameri is addressing the “brothers in the SCF” means that he is placing himself outside the Framework and showing his discontent with the decision to launch counter protests. This is also an indirect threat to Maliki and Khazali, that Ameri’s group will withdraw from the SCF if the two leaders continue with an escalatory approach.

After this statement was published, **Sabereen news** ([node/16673]) felt compelled to reassure the *muqawama* bases in the early hours of August 2 that the SCF and *muqawama* was intact. Sabereen quoted a source in the SCF saying “It is not true that there are any splits within the coordination framework, as some discredited agencies circulate” (Figure 3).

Maliki and Khazali seemed to quickly recognize that they had overstepped: protestors with *muqawama* flags did not make a serious effort to storm the southern entrance of the IZ and Khazali quickly published another voice message asking the protesters to withdraw. Khazali even felt compelled to issue a sycophantic statement praising Ameri for his jihadi credentials, ending his statement with the hashtag “Ameri Sheikh of the Framework” (Figure 4).

**Kataib Hezbollah** ([https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile/kataib-hezbollah](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile/kataib-hezbollah)) (KH) has distanced itself from Khazali’s call to protest, with KH media account Abu Ali al-Askari writing: “We are not aware of any protest in front of the Green Zone (aka IZ)” (Figure 5).

Ameri’s actions – followed by a swift show of deference by Khazali – suggest that there is a decision within the SCF and the *muqawama* – including...
their Iranian advisors – that Ameri’s idea of de-escalation was the right path and that the counsel of Maliki and Khazali proved unwise. This fits with broader trends: an Iranian desire, above all, to leave room for reunifying the Shiite house; KH political wing Hoquq’s refusal to take up five vacated Sadrists seats in parliament; a narrowing difference between Maliki’s and Ameri’s total number of MPs; and with Maliki’s desire (documented on a recent leaked recording) to strengthen his own militias because the *muqawama* would not fully back his play. ❖

![Figure 4: Khazali’s statement calling Ameri Sheikh of the](/sites/default/files/2022-08/4.jpeg)

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