

Mainstreaming Hashd Commanders (Part 2): Fifty-Fold Increase in Officer Training

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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 \(/policy-analysis/how-use-militia-spotlight\)](/policy-analysis/how-use-militia-spotlight)

This year has seen a massive increase in the training of Iraqi militia officers at Defense Ministry academies, and a dedicated PMF training college might be developed under expanded legislation.

As detailed in [Part 1 \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/mainstreaming-hashd-commanders-part-1-advanced-education-senior-militiamen\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/mainstreaming-hashd-commanders-part-1-advanced-education-senior-militiamen) of this analysis, senior Iraqi *muqawama* (resistance) leaders are increasingly graduating from professional military establishments. This installment looks at the expansion of officer training cadres.

The training of tactical leaders from al-Hashd al-Shabi (Popular Mobilization Forces or PMF) at Iraqi Ministry of Defense (MoD) officer training facilities is not new, but it has received intensified attention since this January due to the induction of the first large intake of PMF trainees. Previously, the PMF would provide small cadres of around ten trainees per MoD intake; indeed, nine of these trainees graduated in the January 2 ceremony. Yet 412 trainees were provided at the latest intake, a fifty-fold increase, and a second intake is planned for later this year.

Although the PMF has a "General Directorate for Training" (al-Mudiriya al-Aama lil-Tadrib, or Muawiniya al-Tadrib), it does not operate a unified training facility. Instead, smaller training efforts are undertaken by individual factions such as the U.S.-designated terrorist movements [Kataib Hezbollah \(/node/16641\)](/node/16641) and [Asaib Ahl al-Haq \(/node/16715\)](/node/16715). (For a rundown of PMF training bases, see pages 30 and 67-69 of [Honored Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/sites/default/files/pdf/PolicyFocus163-KnightsMalikTamimi-v3%281%29.pdf#pdfjs.action=download\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/sites/default/files/pdf/PolicyFocus163-KnightsMalikTamimi-v3%281%29.pdf#pdfjs.action=download).)

PMF Training at MoD Facilities

Iraq's Military Service and Retirement Law (No. 3, 2010) lays out the expectation that soldiers should receive a modicum of basic and advanced training, and that professional military education is made available to eligible candidates. Article 4 of Prime Ministerial Executive Order 85 ("Instructions on Hashd Fighters Affairs," March 7, 2018) explicitly notes that Hashd personnel

should also have access to military colleges and academies, with allocations “to be determined in coordination with the Ministry of Defense” (the full executive order is translated [here](#)

<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/sites/default/files/pdf/PolicyFocus163-KnightsMalikTamimi-v3%281%29.pdf#pdfjs.action=download>).

This effort was strongly backed by the late PMF vice chairman and U.S.-designated terrorist Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis and his assistant Abu Ali al-Basri (i.e., the **Badr Organization (/node/17003)** officer also known as Adnan Ibrahim al-Najar, not the Falcons counterterrorism chief). In January 2020, Abu Ali explained that PMF officers needed to be fast-tracked through professional military education colleges at Nasiriyah and Rustamiyah (in Baghdad) in order to meet qualification standards for promotion under the Military Service and Retirement Law. This fast-tracking has now begun.

Fast-Tracking PMF Officer Training

The first large intake of PMF officer candidates was ordered by the commander-in-chief on May 23, 2022 (see Figure 1), and 412 trainees were approved by MoD on October 20. Previously, most of the small number of PMF attendees were from the Abbas Combat Division, a non-*muqawama* PMF unit comprising followers of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and commanded by Maytham al-Zaidi (see Figure 2). The 412-strong intake of PMF troops means the proportion has reversed. For at least two intakes in 2023, the PMF will be trained largely on their own, while al-Abbas troops will be the minority; the intake will be selected from among all PMF brigades, including U.S.-designated terrorist entities.

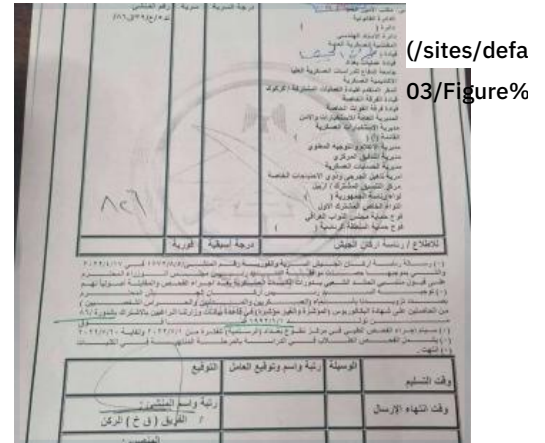


Figure 1: May 23, 2022, order from the commander-in-chief to dedicate an officer training intake to PMF trainees.



Figure 2: Al-Abbas Combat Division celebrates graduation of its officers, January 3, 2023.

According to the [investigative report](https://www.iraqoilreport.com/news/iraq-increases-training-of-hashid-paramilitary-officers-45535/) (/sites/default/files/2023-03/figure%203%20.jpg)

[\(https://www.iraqoilreport.com/news/iraq-increases-training-of-hashid-paramilitary-officers-45535/\)](https://www.iraqoilreport.com/news/iraq-increases-training-of-hashid-paramilitary-officers-45535/) issued by the award-winning Iraq Oil Report on

March 5, the selection of the 412 candidates was decided at the PMF headquarters level, and the redistribution of PMF lieutenants will be guided at that same level. This mixing of PMF units under the control of PMF vice chair Abdul-Aziz al-Mohammadawi (aka Abu Fadak), a U.S.-designated terrorist and human rights abuser from Kataib Hezbollah, is exactly what his predecessor, Muhandis, had in mind as a method of tightening control over the PMF by Iran-backed terrorist leaders. Indeed, Iraq Oil Report quoted one officer

cadet describing the training as "the fruit that Hajj Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis and Qasem Soleimani...put in so much effort to achieve," referring to the late Iranian general killed alongside Muhandis in 2020. The 4th Military Training College at Nasiriyah was chosen because "all the trainers in this college are cooperative," according to a PMF intelligence officer interviewed by Iraq Oil Report.

The Next Step: A PMF Academy?

On February 8, PMF chairman and U.S.-designated human rights abuser Faleh al-Fayyad suggested that a proposed amendment to the 2016 PMF law would include establishing a military academy for the Hashd. This would align with what Muhandis intended, as encapsulated in Executive Order 331 on September 17, 2019 (reproduced in Annex O [here](#)

<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/sites/default/files/pdf/PolicyFocus163-KnightsMalikTamimi-v3%281%29.pdf#pdfjs.action=download>)—the late leader's blueprint for consolidating the PMF as Iraq's primary military force.

This order envisaged an expanded PMF training directorate with six sub-directorates that included a PMF command and staff college and a military academy. Media reports suggest the proposed amendment, which is not yet public, may contain a directive to establish such facilities.



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