

Nineveh Plains Christians Defend Against the Babiliyoun Militia

by [Yaqoub Beth-Addai \(/experts/yaqoub-beth-addai\)](#)

Mar 16, 2023

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[Yaqoub Beth-Addai \(/experts/yaqoub-beth-addai\)](#)

Yaqoub Beth-Addai is an Iraqi expert on Iraqi militias active in the Nineveh Plains and Mosul.



Brief Analysis

Part of a series: [Militia Spotlight \(/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight\)](#)

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

An Iran-backed militia run by a notorious human rights abuser was kicked out of a Christian town after it tried to replace local police leaders.

On March 11, 2023, protests broke out in the Iraqi town of Baghdeda (aka Qaraqosh) in the Hamdaniya district of the Nineveh Plains, with the local Christian population rebuffing an attempted takeover by the militia [Kataib Babiliyoun \(KB\) \(/node/18006\)](#), the 50th Brigade of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). The proximate cause of the clash was an effort by KB commander Osama al-Kildani, brother of the U.S.-designated human rights abuser Rayan al-Kildani, to take command of a base belonging to the Emergency Response Unit of the Nineveh Plains Protection Units (NPU), an approximately 500-strong Christian regiment made up of local men.

Acting with the backing of Archbishop Younan Hanno and all the other top Christian leaders in the Nineveh Plains, local citizens gathered at the Bishopric of the Syriac Catholic Church in Baghdeda and marched against the KB convoy, forcing them out of the town. Public anger toward the militia has steadily grown on account of its longstanding involvement in the corrupt shakedown of locals at checkpoints, its harassment of women, and its attempts to replace local officials with KB loyalists. These abuses formed the basis of a U.S. [designation \(/home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm735\)](#) of the brigade's founder, Rayan al-Kildani, on July 18, 2019.

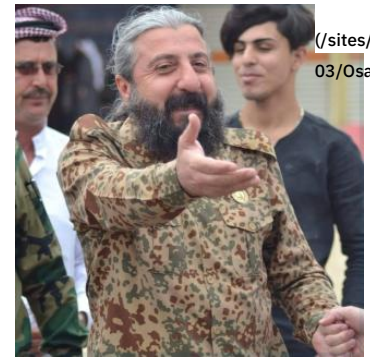


Figure 1: Osama al-Kildani, the head of Kataib Babiliyoun.



Figure 2: Designated human rights abuser Rayan al-Kildani (far right) next to UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres on March 2, 2023. Second from left is designated terrorist and human rights abuser Qais al-Khazali.

Despite the Christian facade provided by the Kildani family and some unit commanders, KB is not the Christian brigade it portrays itself to be. It is manned almost exclusively by non-Christians, mostly Shia Muslims from southern Iraq. Using financial support from Iran and an election campaign centered on vote-buying, KB's political branch, the Babylon Movement, was able to double its national parliamentary representation in the 2021 polls and now controls four of the five seats reserved for Christians.

Christian antipathy toward KB has been building ever since Iraqi forces liberated the area from the Islamic State in 2017. At the time, KB personnel were proven to have looted Christian artifacts from the Mar Behnam Monastery, spurring the prime minister to expel the militia from the entire Hamdaniya district. Yet KB retained control over the heavily Christian Tal Kayf district. Following the 2021 election, KB once again sought to expand its military presence in Hamdaniya, where the NPU was reorganized into a sub-unit of the brigade that year against the wishes of NPU personnel. Aiming to exploit international inattention, KB has been preparing a wider move against the NPU and recently engaged in a public spat with Patriarch of the Chaldean Catholic Church, Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako.



(/sites/default/files/2023-03/335506:)

Bolstered by strong solidarity among the Christian community and the leading bishops of the Nineveh Plains, the NPU submitted a petition on March 13 to be removed from the KB brigade's order of battle and restored to its prior status: as a Tribal Mobilization Force under the Nineveh Operations Command. Yet during the March 14 separation negotiations at the PMF provincial office in Mosul, seven members of the NPU delegation were seized under charges of insulting the PMF and sent to Baghdad. Although they were released two days later, this is unlikely to be the last retaliatory action by Kataib Babiliyoun. ❖

PART OF A SERIES

[Militia Spotlight \(/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight\)](/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight)

[How to Use Militia Spotlight](/policy-analysis/how-use-militia-spotlight)

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



[Nineveh Plains Christians Defend Against the Babiliyoun Militia](/policy-analysis/nineveh-plains-christians-defend-against-babilyoun-militia)

(/policy-analysis/nineveh-plains-christians-defend-against-babilyoun-militia)



[Mainstreaming Hashd Commanders \(Part 2\): Fifty-Fold Increase in Officer Training](/policy-analysis/mainstreaming-hashd-commanders-part-2-fifty-fold-increase-officer-training)

(/policy-analysis/mainstreaming-hashd-commanders-part-2-fifty-fold-increase-officer-training)

RECOMMENDED

ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[Neglect for Human Rights Helped Produce the Crisis in Tunisia](/policy-analysis/neglect-human-rights-helped-produce-crisis-tunisia)

Mar 17, 2023

◆
Sabina Henneberg

(/policy-analysis/neglect-human-rights-helped-produce-crisis-tunisia)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Turkey's Opposition, Straining at the Seams](/policy-analysis/turkeys-opposition-straining-seams)

Mar 16, 2023

◆
M. Bahadırhan Dinçaslan

(/policy-analysis/turkeys-opposition-straining-seams)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Profile: Kataib Babiliyoun \(50th PMF Brigade\)](/policy-analysis/profile-kataib-babilyoun-50th-pmf-brigade)

Mar 16, 2023

◆
Michael Knights,
Yaqoub Beth-Addai

(/policy-analysis/profile-kataib-babilyoun-50th-pmf-brigade)

TOPICS

[Military & Security \(/policy-analysis/military-security\)](#)

[Terrorism \(/policy-analysis/terrorism\)](#)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

[Iraq \(/policy-analysis/iraq\)](#)