

Profile: Iraqi Basij

by [Amir al-Kaabi \(/experts/amir-al-kaabi\)](#), [Hamdi Malik \(/experts/hamdi-malik\)](#), [Michael Knights \(/experts/michael-knights\)](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[Amir al-Kaabi \(/experts/amir-al-kaabi\)](#)

Amir al-Kaabi is an Iraqi expert on Shia militant groups in Iraq and Syria.



[Hamdi Malik \(/experts/hamdi-malik\)](#)

Hamdi Malik is an associate fellow with The Washington Institute and cofounder of its Militia Spotlight platform.



[Michael Knights \(/experts/michael-knights\)](#)

Michael Knights is the Jill and Jay Bernstein Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute and cofounder of the Militia Spotlight platform, which offers in-depth analysis of developments related to Iran-backed militias.



Brief Analysis

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

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Formed by Ashab al-Kahf and Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba, this Persian-named violent protest movement has been used to carry out threats against the U.S. embassy in Baghdad.

Name: Al-Tabea al-Shabiya fil Iraq (Popular Mobilization in Iraq, aka the Iraqi Basij). Basij is a Persian word that means "mobilization"; it is also the overarching name of Iran's numerous paramilitary forces, which are closely associated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), a U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization.

Type of movement:

Facade group, undertaking kinetic paramilitary operations and social mobilization, focused initially on domestic counter-U.S. operations and domestic counter-political/social moderate operations.

History:

- On July 14, 2023, a Telegram account was created called "Basij-Popular Mobilization of Iraq." The account claimed that the new "Iraqi Basij" would target the U.S. embassy in Baghdad.
- The group was created when the Iraqi militia group [Ashab al-Kahf \(/node/16638\)](#) (AK) asked its followers to [protest at the embassy \(/node/18218\)](#). Although the group was purportedly created just before the event, its flags and logo were widely distributed at the July 14 protest in a slick and well-resourced operation.
- Several dozen demonstrators identifying themselves as members of Asaib Ahl al-Haq and the Iraqi Basij front group blocked the Erbil-Kirkuk highway with rocks and burning tires on the evening of August 28, 2023. The demonstrators opposed the return of the Kurdistan Democratic Party branch office to Kirkuk ahead of provincial elections.

Objectives:

On July 16, 2023, the Iraqi Basij account declared its six main objectives as follows:

- Cultural work and fighting impure thoughts.
- Defending the holy Quran and the Prophet Muhammad's great Islam.
- Defending the ideology of the resistance and moving away from concessions and compromises.
- The resistance and our great religious authorities are red lines. Defending them is within our religious obligation.
- Fighting impure movements against the great Muhammad's Islam.
- Fighting whoever wants to harass our ideologies through organizations (i.e., NGOs) or other means (Figure 1).

Chain of command:

There is a direct link between AK and the Iraqi Basij, which also suggests a tight connection between the latter group and AK's parent militia, [Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba \(/node/16716\)](#). In the days



Figure 1: Iraqi Basij objectives published on July 16, 2023.



before the group was first announced on AK's Telegram account, AK sister channels began advertising the embassy protest on social media using the hashtag "حاصروا السفارة" (besiege the embassy). On the morning of July 14, AK's main social media channel posted a message asking *muqawama* (resistance) supporters to storm the embassy.

At the protest itself, AK and Iraqi Basij flags were prominently raised and waved together. Yet the new group's flags were not displayed alongside those of any other *muqawama* facade brands (Figure 2).

AK apparently established the Iraqi Basij to serve a role similar to that of the [Kataib Hezbollah \(/node/16641\)](#) (KH) vigilante group [Raba Allah \(/node/16671\)](#), which was created to pressure political rivals but backfired when it staged armed displays in Baghdad that resembled Islamic State parades in Mosul.

Affiliate relationships:

- The Iraqi Basij receives support from Iranian entities, and Iranian phone numbers are provided in its Telegram messages regarding free transportation to attend Muharram mourning ceremonies in Karbala. AK also has some friendly ties to KH's [Hoquq \(/node/17048\)](#) parliamentary bloc. On July 14, 2023, the Iraqi Basij thanked Hoquq head Saud al-Saedi for his support. The group also thanked Hassan Salim, a parliamentarian from [Asaib Ahl al-Haq \(/node/16715\)](#)'s al-Sadiqoun bloc (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Iraqi Basij thanks KH and AAH parliamentarians for supporting their July 14, 2023, protest.

Figure 2: Ashab al-Kahf and Iraqi Basij flags raised together near the U.S. embassy in Baghdad, July 14, 2023.

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