

Profile: The Sons of Jazira and Euphrates Movement

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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 Brief Analysis
Part of a series: [Militia Spotlight: Profiles \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight-profiles\)](#)
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This Ougaidat tribal militia has undertaken attacks on multiple Syrian Kurdish and U.S. sites, with support from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the Assad regime.

Name: Harakat Abna al-Jazeera wal-Furat (The Sons of Jazira and Euphrates Movement, or SJEM)

Type of movement:

- Tier 3 *fasaii* (armed group) engaged in kinetic military and paramilitary actions in Syria, particularly in the eastern region, including Deir al-Zour. Primarily focuses on combating the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), with activities aimed at reinforcing Arab tribal power and opposing Kurdish influence. Also known to use nonkinetic information operations such as media activities and propaganda. Occasionally participates in [kinetic domestic counter-U.S. operations \(/node/18441\)](#).

History:

- The movement is drawn from the Ougaidat tribal confederation, the largest in Deir al-Zour province and the strongest in east Syria. According to a [2018 study \(/node/2197\)](#) on local sentiments in this area, "Members of the Ougaidat tribe hold a hostile attitude toward the United States dating to the 2003 invasion of Iraq and overthrow of Saddam Hussein. This negative perception was reinforced by reports from hundreds of Iraqi Sunni officers, as well as Baath and other government officials, who were displaced to Ougaidat area during the war."
- The movement emerged after pro-Assad forces and the SDF converged on Deir al-Zour in 2017. Incorporating former Islamic State elements and other operatives, the movement emerged as a reaction to Kurdish-led SDF administration of Deir al-Zour areas east of the Euphrates River.
- The movement began military operations against SDF positions in 2018. These skirmishes were initially localized but rapidly escalated in intensity and scope during 2019, including ambushes, hit-and-run strikes, and attacks on military convoys and installations. More organized and frequent attacks on SDF targets were seen from late 2019 to 2020, particularly in Deir al-Zour. This period also saw heightened tensions due to perceived marginalization of Arab tribes and local dissatisfaction with the SDF's administrative and military policies.
- The movement boycotted national dialogue conferences held by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) beginning in 2019.
- Exploiting a partial U.S. drawdown from Syria in 2020, the movement began to agitate for removal of the SDF from Deir al-Zour in 2021-22.
- On October 26, 2023, the movement began to [claim rocket attacks on U.S. bases \(/node/18441\)](#) in Deir al-Zour, against Mission Support Site Conoco and Green Village (aka al-Omar gas field).
- In mid-November 2023, Musab al-Hifl, the brother of Ibrahim al-Hifl (aka Abu Khalil, see below), tried to visit northeastern Syria to meet with local officials. The visit was blocked, however, exacerbating tensions between the Ougaidat tribes and the Kurdish de facto authorities.

Objective:

- The movement's objective is to reestablish tribal Arab governance, supported by the Syrian regime, across east Syria, with a specific focus on Deir al-Zour province. It pursues this goal through military action against the SDF, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and other predominantly Kurdish groups.

Chain of command:

- **Sheikh Ibrahim al-Hifl (Abu Khalil):** The leader of the Ougaidat tribes, from the dominant Abu Kamel sub-tribe's chieftom family, al-Hifl. The SDF labeled him as "head of the sedition" in 2019 following his call for an Arab tribal uprising against them. In 2020, he survived an assassination attempt in al-Hawayij, Deir al-Zour, that resulted in his cousin's death; he attributed the attack to the SDF. He has urged the U.S.-led international coalition to back a proposal for establishing a military council of Syrian tribal elders in the east to replace the SDF there. This council, intended to communicate directly with the coalition, aims to enhance regional security, secure the release of tribal Arab prisoners from SDF/Kurdish detention, and curb Kurdish military activities in the area. Since late August 2023, Sheikh Ibrahim has lived under a kind of protective house arrest by the Assad regime in the Mayadin neighborhood of Makhban.
- **Syrian government:** The Assad regime provides material assistance to the movement, including arms and ammunition. In doing so, the regime seeks to reassert its influence in the east, in line with its broader goal of reestablishing authority over all Syrian territories, especially resource-rich ones like Deir al-Zour. Assad forces host and control Ibrahim al-Hifl.
- **Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps:** Iranian aid includes the provision of weapons and military training.



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Sons of Jazira and Euphrates Movement



(/sites/default/files/2024-03/Sheikh%20Ibrahim%20al-Hfi%20with%20Albu%20Jamal%20and%203rd%20Bde.jpg)

Figure 3: Sheikh Ibrahim al-Hfi with commanders of the Albu Jamal and 3rd Brigade units, probably sometime in late February 2024.

Affiliate relationships:

- **Baggara tribe:** The Sons of Jazira have disseminated numerous videos via Facebook showcasing affiliations with tribal leaders beyond their immediate network, most notably from the Baggara tribe, which mainly inhabits the lands west of Deir al-Zour city but also extends into Hasaka east of the Euphrates.
- **Liwa al-Baqir:** On September 8, 2023, the Sons of Jazira Facebook page released a video showing Baggara tribal leader Nawaf Ragheb al-Bashir, who is associated with the Baggara tribe's [Liwa al-Baqir](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-liwa-al-baqir) (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-liwa-al-baqir>), vowing to undertake aggressive actions against the SDF.
- **Alternate Ougaidat tribal confederation leadership.** The Sons of Jazira could be influenced to reduce anti-SDF and anti-U.S. actions through the mediation of alternate Ougaidat leaders such as Sheikh Ibrahim's older brother Musab.

Subordinate relationships:

- The movement has a highly active Facebook page with around 11,000 followers and a Facebook group with over 8,000 members.
- The movement maintains an active Telegram channel with about 1,000 subscribers.
- Reported sub-units or close affiliates may include the Albu Jamal Brigade and the 3rd Brigade of the Ougaidat tribal confederation.



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