

Profile: Ansar Allah al-Awfiya (19th PMF Brigade)

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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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One of the top Iraqi proxies for Iran's IRGC-Qods Force, this Sadrist breakaway faction has long garrisoned the Syrian border and killed Iraqi protesters to demonstrate its loyalty.

Name: Ansar Allah al-Awfiya (AAA, God's Loyal Supporters); 19th Brigade of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)

Type of movement: Tier 2 *fasail* (armed group) and Iraqi government organization. Kinetic military operations against U.S. targets and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Kinetic paramilitary operations and domestic counter-political/social moderate operations, including violent repression of Iraqi human rights and freedom of expression. As of June 17, 2024, AAA is a **U.S.-designated terrorist movement** (<https://www.state.gov/terrorist-designation-of-harakat-ansar-allah-al-awfiya/>).

History and objectives:

- AAA's first appearance was in 2013 as a political entity in Maysan province called Kayan al-Sadiq wa al-Ataa (Honesty and Giving Entity). That party's secretary-general was Haider Ibrahim al-Gharawi, and his deputy was Murtadha Hamood Ali al-Saedi. The party placed fourth in Maysan's 2013 provincial council elections, a showing that enabled Saedi to become head of the council's integrity committee.
- In 2014, the party aligned with former prime minister Ibrahim Jafari to participate in the general election. Later, the group changed its name slightly to Harakat al-Sadiq wa al-Ataa.
- In June 2014, Gharawi formed AAA as a PMF unit. Underlining the Maysan connection, the [PMF office \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/honored-not-contained-future-iraqs-popular-mobilization-forces\)](#) established in that province in 2015 was led by AAA's Haidar Jabbar al-Baidhani.
- In 2018, the AAA political front Harakat al-Sadiq wa al-Ataa participated in the general election with the Fatah Alliance led by [Badr Organization \(/node/17003\)](#) leader Hadi al-Ameri.
- In 2019, AAA became publicly associated with the kidnapping and killing of the Tishreen movement icons [Sajad al-Iraqi \(https://www.menarights.org/en/caseprofile/prominent-activist-dhi-qar-governorate-disappeared-september-19-2020\)](#) (in Nasiriyah) and [Ali Jasb \(https://apnews.com/article/3584dcf607d745d4936bc3e4dd4fe030\)](#) (in Amara). That same year, Abdul Zahra al-Suweidi—a cleric in Muqtada al-Sadr's movement who was serving as AAA's military commander at the time—was expelled by Sadr for "corruption."
- On April 4, 2020, AAA was [one of eight \(/node/1230\) muqawama](#) (resistance) groups to threaten attacks against U.S. targets and prime ministerial candidate Adnan al-Zurfi, whom they accused of being "an American agent."
- Perhaps spurred by court cases and media coverage that named him in relation to the Tishreen killings, Gharawi left his position as commander of the 19th Brigade in May 2021 and was replaced by Ammar al-Lami. Yet Gharawi remained the senior leader of the overall movement.
- In October 2022, AAA parliamentarians helped form Mohammed Shia al-Sudani's "[resistance government \(/node/17868\)](#)," entering the Coordination Framework through the al-Sanad Movement led by Ahmed al-Asadi, the leader of Kataib Jund al-Imam (6th PMF Brigade) and the government's minister of labor and social affairs.
- In early summer 2023, [a reliable open-source article \(https://amwaj.media/article/inside-story-the-secret-arab-visitors-in-iran-and-the-liberation-of-jerusalem\)](#) reported that Gharawi was one of a select group of eight *muqawama* leaders to meet with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in Iran.



Ansar Allah al-Awfiya logo

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(/sites/default/files/2023-11/Gharawi%20and%20Muhandis.png)

Figure 1: Haider al-Gharawi and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, date unknown.

- On November 21, 2023, AAA flags were seen at a funeral for Fadhil al-Maksusi, a [Kataib Hezbollah \(/node/16641\)](#) (KH) fighter killed in a U.S. airstrike. On November 25, KH secretary-general Ahmad Mohsen Faraj al-Hamidawi (aka Abu Hussein) put out a [statement \(/node/18501\)](#) naming AAA as one of the main militias in the "[Islamic Resistance in Iraq \(/node/18416\)](#)" and thanking the group for its operations against Israel and U.S. forces in Iraq.
- The United States [has assessed \(https://www.state.gov/terrorist-designation-of-harakat-ansar-allah-al-awfiya-2/\)](#) that AAA troops were involved in the deadly January 28, 2024, drone attack that killed three U.S. soldiers in Rukban/Tower 22 in Jordan.
- On June 17, 2024, AAA and Gharawi were [designated by the United States \(https://www.state.gov/terrorist-designation-of-harakat-ansar-allah-al-awfiya/\)](#) for terrorist activities.

Chain of command:

- Iran.** AAA is a Khomeinist militia that subscribes to the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* and therefore follows the dictates of Iran's top jurist, currently Khamenei. Originally, the group identified Ayatollah Kadhim al-Haeri as its object of emulation, much like many Sadrist movements, before Haeri encouraged his followers to transfer their emulation to Khamenei. AAA has provided unstinting service to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF) in Iraq and Syria, and its members have met with IRGC commanders.
- Haydar Muzhir Malak al-Saidi** (aka Haydar al-Gharawi) remains the most important leader within AAA. He was identified by the U.S. government as the leader of AAA in his [terrorism designation \(https://www.state.gov/terrorist-designation-of-harakat-ansar-allah-al-awfiya/\)](#) on June 17, 2024.
- Ammar al-Lami** is the current commander of the AAA's PMF brigade. Adel al-Gharawi is the group's current spokesman.

Affiliate relationships:

- In November 2023, AAA was included in a [select list \(/node/18501\)](#) of "Mujahedin brothers who participated in military jihad operations" spurred by Israel's military campaign in Gaza. Issued by Abu Hussein, the list also named [Harakat Hezbollah al-Mujaba \(/node/16716\)](#) (HaN), Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada (KSS), and KH, noting that they "carried out their attacks under] the banner of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq."
- Likewise, [in summer 2023 \(https://amwaj.media/article/inside-story-the-secret-arab-visitors-in-iran-and-the-liberation-of-jerusalem\)](#), AAA was included among the top eight *muqawama* groups to meet with Khamenei, alongside U.S.-designated terrorist Qais al-Khazali of Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), U.S.-designated human rights abuser and PMF chairman Faleh al-Fayyad, U.S.-designated KH members Abu Hussein and Abdul-Aziz al-Mohammadawi (Abu Fadak), Badr Organization leader Hadi al-Ameri, U.S.-designated HaN leader Akram Kaabi, and U.S.-designated KSS leader Abu Alaa al-Walal.
- In [April 2020 \(/node/1230\)](#), AAA joined other groups in calling for attacks on U.S. targets and Iraqi politician Adnan al-Zurfi, including AAH, KSS, HaN, Jund al-Imam, Kataib al-Imam Ali (40th PMF Brigade), Saraya al-Ashura (8th PMF Brigade), and Saraya Talia al-Khurasani (18th PMF Brigade).
- AAA maintains a close partnership with KH, especially in their areas of operations in Anbar province. The group also [worked closely \(/node/4533\)](#) along the Iraq-Syria border and inside Syria with other PMF brigades: Saraya Talia al-Khurasani (18th Brigade), KSS (14th), Saraya al-Jihad (17th), Liwa al-Tafuf (13th), Kataib Ansar al-Hujja (29th), and Liwa al-Muntadher (7th).
- Murtadha Ali Hamod al-Saedi (head of parliament's al-Sanad movement and first deputy of its legal committee) is the senior of AAA's two parliamentarians, who compete under the party name Harakat al-Sadiq wa al-Ataa.



(/sites/default/files/2023-11/Asadi%20and%20Gharawi%20side%20by%20side%20in%20a%20funeral)

Figure 2: Ahmed al-Asadi (left) and Haider al-Gharawi (right) attend a funeral for a KH fighter, November 18, 2023.

- AAA has a political partnership with Ahmed al-Asadi and his militia Kataib Jund al-Imam (6th PMF Brigade). AAA participated in the previous parliamentary election with Asadi and was slated to participate in the December 2023 provincial council elections with him as well, once again within the Nabni coalition (Figure 1).
- On June 17, 2024, the United State [identified \(https://www.state.gov/terrorist-designation-of-harakat-ansar-allah-al-awfiya/\)](#) AAA as a member of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq.

Subordinate elements:

- AAA has a Telegram channel under the name "FAA" with more than 13,000 followers. The channel promotes the group's leader and political representatives.
- AAA owns a radio station under the name "Atheer al-Awfiya."
- During the war against the Islamic State, AAA had a subordinate regiment called Kataib al-Shahid al-Awal led by tactical commander Wathiq al-Fartousi. The unit had a longstanding connection to the Kilo 160 base in western Anbar and to the Baghdadi area near al-Asad Air Base.



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