

Iraqi PMF Chief of Staff Commits to Fulfill Iranian Supreme Leader's Plans

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

Abu Fadak laid bare the limited extent to which his organization is under Prime Minister Sudani's sovereign control, instead identifying Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei as his commander-in-chief.

On April 5, the chief of staff of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), Abdal Aziz al-Mohammadawi (aka Abu Fadak), stated, "The PMF is a fundamental part of the battle in Gaza and Palestine." At the time, he was in Tehran to participate in a Qods Day march when he stopped to talk to the media.

This statement is a rare public admission by the PMF's highest military commander that his state-funded organization is participating in a regional conflict that the Iraqi state is not party to. Abu Fadak was also very blunt about the fact that he takes orders from a foreign official, Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei: "We are waiting for the [Supreme] Leader to express his view on the next step...What will the response be to the aggression on the Iranian consulate and the killing of some of the [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC] commanders?...After the criminal [attack] on the consulate in Damascus, we came to the Islamic Republic to first express our solidarity with the vision and the plan of the Leader and the Imam...and second is to renew our covenant [i.e., loyalty to the Supreme Leader] and wait for the Leader's decision" (Figure 1).



Figure 2: Nakhleh and Abu Fadak in Tehran on April 5, 2024.

During the march, Abu Fadak appeared to be walking with Ziad al-Nakhleh, head of the terrorist group Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) (Figure 2). Nakhleh told reporters: "We reassure that the resistance front is unified, and their battlefields are unified from Iran to Iraq, Yemen, Palestine, and Syria."

Abu Fadak is also a senior figure within the PMF militia and U.S.-designated terrorist organization [Kataib Hezbollah \(KH\) \(/node/16641\)](#), and his Qods Day remarks seem to reflect recent controversies and uncertainties about this group's role in the "resistance." Since KH [suspended its operations \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/explaining-apparent-muqawama-de-escalation-january-28\)](#) against U.S. forces in February, it has shown many signs of unease regarding its decision to remain relatively passive and not contribute to attacks and provocations abroad, including [recent threats against Jordan \(/node/18699\)](#). Here, Abu Fadak appears conflicted about his role in the Iraqi state

and his responsibilities to Iran's "axis of resistance."

KH avowedly stopped its attacks to "prevent embarrassment to the Iraqi government," as declared in a [January 30 statement \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/kataib-hezbollah-secretary-general-tries-forestall-us-strikes\)](#) by KH secretary-general Ahmad Mohsen Faraj al-Hamidawi (aka Abu Hussein). KH [suffered some chiding \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/resist-or-not-resist-muqawamas-question\)](#) from fellow militia Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba for this decision, and Abu Fadak may be feeling like his and KH's credentials are in doubt.

Counter to the aims of the January 30 ceasefire, Abu Fadak's statement about following the orders of a foreign leader has publicly embarrassed Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani right before his visit to Washington to meet with President Biden. Baghdad's longstanding official position on the PMF is that it is an Iraqi military organization under the command of the prime minister in his capacity as commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

The embarrassing incident seemingly prompted Sudani's office to send advisor Hussein Allawi on a media round to offset the impression given by Abu Fadak's statement. Allawi told the pan-Arab television network al-Hadath, "If you review the video clip carefully, [you will hear] the chief of staff of the PMF expressing his solidarity with the Iranian nation regarding its victims [in the consulate attack], and this is a stance expressed by the Iraqi government." When confronted by an al-Hadath anchor regarding Abu Fadak's clear remarks about



Figure 1: Abu Fadak talking to the media on Qods Day, April 5, 2024.

(/sites/default/files/2024-04/figure%202.%20Nakhala%20and%20Abu%20Fadak%20in%20Tehran.JPG)

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