

Atabat Leader from al-Muthanna Takes on Iran-Backed Militia Interests

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Brief Analysis

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

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The commander of Iraq's influential "shrine militias" signaled that the religious establishment is still willing to push back against the Coordination Framework and Tehran's other "resistance" proxies.

Recent months have seen more public discord between different arms of the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq's al-Muthanna province, the location of large land grants to the PMF's [Muhandis General Company \(/node/18124\)](#). The focus of the discord has been Hamid al-Yasiri, head of Ansar al-Marjaiya (the PMF's 44th Brigade) and a senior commander in the Atabat—the so-called "shrine militias" that take direction from Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and the Ministry of Defense, not the PMF Commission.



Figure 1: Hamid al-Yasiri meeting with Judge Haidar Hanoun, the Badr-controlled head of the federal Commission of Integrity in Baghdad, June 2024.

Yasiri Pushes Back on New Local Council

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[07/Yasiri%20meeting%20with%20the%20head%20of%20the%20Federal%20Commission%20of%20Integrity%20in%20Baghdad%20before%20meet](#)

Last month, Yasiri mobilized supporters to seek the removal of al-Muthanna's governor and provincial council on allegations of corruption, lobbying Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani to appoint a military governor in their place. Yasiri is a very well-connected religious-military leader, so his call for action against the newly formed local government gained him an audience with Sudani on June 9. Sudani made several promises to Yasiri, including that he would allocate funds to the province to be spent by a committee within the prime minister's office, so that neither the governor nor the council could access them. While Yasiri was in Baghdad, he met with several officials, including Hossein Moanes, leader of the U.S.-designated terrorist movement [Kataib Hezbollah \(/node/16641\)](#)'s political front, the [Hoquq Movement \(/node/18667\)](#).

Yasiri seems to have gotten his way. He was invited to meet with the head of the Iraqi [Commission of Integrity \(/node/18274\)](#), run by the Badr Organization (Figure 1). Judicial summons were then issued against various provincial officials in al-Muthanna, including the governor's assistant.

Reawakened Spat Between Yasiri and Khazali

A new front then opened between Yasiri and the Iran-backed *muqawama* (resistance) on July 9, when an anchor on Dijlah TV asked Yasiri about an old feud involving Qais al-Khazali, the U.S.-designated terrorist who heads the militia [Asaib Ahl al-Haq \(/node/16715\)](#) (AAH). The conversation related to accusations that Yasiri made on August 13, 2021, that the *muqawama* had killed peaceful demonstrators in Rumaythah in the name of Shia Islam. Alluding to Iran, Yasiri called those militias treasonous for taking orders from abroad; he also predicted that Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei would one day order his killing.

Two days after these 2021 accusations, Khazali angrily argued that Yasiri had misinterpreted religious teachings related to Imam Hussein. A few months later, on January 17, 2022, Yasiri's residence in Rumaythah was raked with bullets, albeit without causing injury.

When asked about the disagreement during his recent Dijlah appearance, Yasiri did not hold back: "I tell Qais al-Khazali that you have ideological connections with the guardian of the jurist [i.e., Iran's Supreme Leader], and we don't have a problem with that, but I consider designing political decisions with external enforcement to be treason. Whatever is forced politically on the Iraqi politicians from abroad, I consider treason" (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Hamid al-Yasiri attacking Khazali in July 2024.

Yasiri also underlined the difference between the Iran-backed Coordination Framework (CF) on the one hand, and the Atabat and Muqtada al-Sadr's movement on the other: "The commonality between us and the Sadrists is that the Sadrist movement is a national movement that believes in running the country within the borders. The nationalist things I call for, and not listening to what comes from abroad, bring us very close to the brothers in the Sadrist movement."

The interview attracted widespread attention, since no one risks addressing Khazali directly in the media in this manner, not even Sadr. Yasiri is now throwing down challenges to multiple power centers within the CF—to Khazali and AAH (who control the deputy governorship of al-Muthanna via Ahmad Daryul), to KH and the Muhandis General Company's projects in al-Muthanna, and to the province's governor, CF politician Muhannad al-Itab of the Islamic Fadhila Party. Charismatic and apparently fearless, Yasiri is risking his life to speak out against Iran-backed militias, and his fate bears close watching. ❖

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