

Profile: Directorate of Education, al-Hashd al-Shabi (DEHS)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Brief Analysis

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

or see Part 1: [How to Use Militia Spotlight: Profiles \(/policy-analysis/how-use-militia-spotlight-profiles\)](#)

An Iraqi militia directorate that has grown into a major state-funded educational foundation, arranging university education for students tied to the PMF and sending some to Iran on scholarships paid by Tehran.

Name: Directorate of Education, al-Hashd al-Shabi (DEHS)

Type of movement: Nonkinetic, social, and political organization. Propaganda and counter-narrative operations. Educational program under the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), designed to increase militia members' general knowledge in areas such as science, medicine, math, social science, and military tactics through courses and social events. Military and intelligence-related training is also offered, as well as opportunities for competitive applicants to study in Iran.

Objectives:

- DEHS was created to honor Iraqis who abandoned their jobs (doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc.) to help the PMF fight the Islamic State a decade ago. It is also for former students who dropped out of school to join the PMF, and existing Hashd fighters who do not have any education. The program later evolved to include family members of PMF martyrs. The late militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis started the project in coordination with the director-general of DEHS, Dr. Hussein al-Bukhati, to increase the general knowledge of the average PMF fighter.
- Enrollment in DEHS occurs in four stages:
 1. PMF members are either referred to the program via their brigade supervisor/commander, or they ask permission to enroll. After approval, DEHS coordinates with the member's brigade to facilitate departure to one of the directorate's facilities.
 2. PMF members arrive at the designated DEHS facility and fill out applications.
 3. The soon-to-be students then undergo background checks to verify their identities and achievements, interviews to assess their general knowledge and capacity to learn, psychological evaluations to assess their underlying motivations for seeking this educational opportunity, and religious assessments to test for loyalty to what DEHS calls "intellectual jihad." Within DEHS facilities, the term "student" is often used interchangeably with "mujahid," which means



(<https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100214876#:text=Quick%20Reference,armed%20defense%20of%20Muslim%20lands.>)

“one who struggles on behalf of Islam.”

4. After successful enrollment, the Hashd member is given a start date for beginning classes. Generally, Hashd students are assigned a degree program based on their evaluations during stages one through three, and according to their areas of expertise and interests. Upon finishing all their required classes, PMF members can earn an associate's, bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree. Graduation ceremonies are often hosted by PMF-affiliated universities such as [al-Mustafa International University-Iraq](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-al-mustafa-international-university-iraq) (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-al-mustafa-international-university-iraq>).
- Other than obtaining a degree, the benefits of the program for Hashd members include exemption from military service while taking DEHS courses. Additionally, recent graduates receive a pay increase based on their degree levels and GPAs.



Figure 1: DEHS background check.

History:

- DEHS was formed in 2020. In July of that year, it began calling for [applications](https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=153856672890421&set=a.108157470793675&locale=ar_AR) (https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=153856672890421&set=a.108157470793675&locale=ar_AR) to nominate PMF fighters for the program.
- In August 2020, DEHS launched a COVID-19 response campaign called [Education_Awareness](https://www.facebook.com/100136004929155/videos/343762413337278/?locale=ar_AR) (https://www.facebook.com/100136004929155/videos/343762413337278/?locale=ar_AR). The campaign involved DEHS members, under the authority of Director-General Bukhati, sanitizing the hallways and classrooms of various schools. DEHS also supplied personal hygiene products, gloves, and masks so that students could take their exams “safely.”
- In November 2020, DEHS [announced](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0UjTKNvvPk4bXYNdpjLxRinWYJfUNBu6ibPuu9eRgAXnEPpXht1nSo7EAGaa5ynl&id=100136004929155) (https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0UjTKNvvPk4bXYNdpjLxRinWYJfUNBu6ibPuu9eRgAXnEPpXht1nSo7EAGaa5ynl&id=100136004929155) the availability of 500 scholarships to help the family members of dead PMF fighters obtain a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree in humanities and science. All of these scholarships are fully sponsored by Iran.
- That same month, DEHS began allocating funds to [reduce](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/19M77oJY29/) (<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/19M77oJY29/>) tuition cost for the families of PMF "martyrs" at public and private universities.
- In December 2020, DEHS began [approving](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/15QhiwfBuM/) (<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/15QhiwfBuM/>) applications for PMF members who want to study in Iran. According to the directorate's Facebook group, application threads were banned by Meta, prompting officials to post threads on Telegram channels instead. Opportunities for full-ride scholarships to Iran continued through [2024](https://observeriraq.net/%D8%A5%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85-%D9%87/) (<https://observeriraq.net/%D8%A5%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85-%D9%87/>).
- In February 2021, DEHS began partnering with a prominent youth development organization called the [Public Action Unit](https://www.facebook.com/aleamal24/) (<https://www.facebook.com/aleamal24/>) (PAU) to [disinfect](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/15fs5wGZwW/) (<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/15fs5wGZwW/>) testing facilities and, later, universities (e.g., [al-Salam University](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1EE21m9MAe/) (<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1EE21m9MAe/>)) in Baghdad).
- In March 2021, DEHS [announced](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/19k1FVg9fn/) (<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/19k1FVg9fn/>) opportunities for PMF members to study in any of their affiliated universities as long as they meet age, education-level, and military-service requirements.
- In June 2021, DEHS [partnered](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1EVhaqSDMg/) (<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1EVhaqSDMg/>) with al-Hawra, a center for women's education and development in Iraq. The goal was to enhance women's skills in administrative work.
- In November 2021, DEHS [partnered](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1AZFzsbFWr/) (<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1AZFzsbFWr/>) with the scientific and education department of the Martyrs Foundation, an organization dedicated to providing assistance to families of slain PMF members. The foundation is a governmental institution under the [Iraqi Council of Ministers](https://cabinet.iq/en/) (https://cabinet.iq/en).
- That same month, Director-General Bukhati established the [Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis Cultural Center](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100047378931656&locale=hy_AM) (https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100047378931656&locale=hy_AM) in Baghdad. Afterward, it became common practice for DEHS students, faculty, and PMF leaders to participate in annual events under the center's aegis.



Figure 2: Abu Muntadher al-Husseini (left), Naim al-Aboudi (center), and Hussein al-Bukhati (right).

Chain of command:

- **Hussein al-Bukhati (Hussein Haider Jassem al-Bukhati):** The founder, spokesman, and director-general of DEHS. He has significant religious and social influence within PMF and Shia religious circles. His doctoral [dissertation \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldBhzsMe5rc\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldBhzsMe5rc) examined the intersection of religion and politics, assessing the role Islam plays in keeping political freedoms in check.
- **Tahseen Matar al-Abboudi (Abu Muntadher al-Husseini):** A [lieutenant general in the PMF \(https://iranpress.com/iraq-s-pmf-assigns-former-head-of-operations-as-secretary-general\)](https://iranpress.com/iraq-s-pmf-assigns-former-head-of-operations-as-secretary-general) who formerly served as the force's secretary-general and head of operations. He graduated from the Iraqi War College in 1981 and worked as a security advisor at the Interior Ministry in 2005. He also served as a member of the Security and Defense Committee in the House of Representatives, and as an assistant to the Accountability and Justice Committee until 2010. Both he and Bukhati [attend \(https://al-hashed.gov.iq/?p=518119\)](https://al-hashed.gov.iq/?p=518119) almost all high-level DEHS [meetings \(https://cois.uobaghdad.edu.iq/?p=40582\)](https://cois.uobaghdad.edu.iq/?p=40582) together, presumably to ensure that the PMF's education wing is on the same page ideologically and militarily with its military wing. Husseini also [served on the Crisis Cell \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/exposing-and-sanctioning-human-rights-violations-iraqi-militias\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/exposing-and-sanctioning-human-rights-violations-iraqi-militias) that arranged the killing of unarmed protesters in 2019.

Affiliate relationships:

- **Badr Organization (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-badr-organization):** There is clear and convincing evidence that DEHS is affiliated with the Iran-backed Badr Organization. Badr secretary-general Hadi al-Ameri attends many high-level [meetings \(https://uodiyala.edu.iq/61456/\)](https://uodiyala.edu.iq/61456/) and conferences alongside Bukhati, while Husseini is a senior commander in Badr. DEHS also uses Badr facilities to host large [celebrations \(https://fb.watch/vIZDjdUqMi/\)](https://fb.watch/vIZDjdUqMi/) intended for DEHS graduates who served in Badr's brigades.
- **Other militias linked to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF):** DEHS has a clear and convincing record of working with various PMF brigades to facilitate the successful enrollment of PMF fighters to this educational opportunity.
- **Popular Mobilization Forces:** The military aspects present in DEHS's curriculum and the constant involvement of Lt. Gen. Husseini suggest a strong relationship between this educational arm and the PMF's military wing.
- **Prime Minister's Martyrs Foundation:** DEHS partners with the scientific and education department of the Martyrs Foundation.
- **Ministry of Education:** Since its inception, DEHS has [coordinated \(https://al-hashed.gov.iq/?p=517891\)](https://al-hashed.gov.iq/?p=517891) with the federal government's Education Ministry by opening centers for literacy, accelerated education, and life skills. They often hold [meetings \(https://al-hashed.gov.iq/?p=518119\)](https://al-hashed.gov.iq/?p=518119) to discuss the topic of "intellectual

terrorism.” This became a [regular](https://cois.uobaghdad.edu.iq/?p=44119) occurrence, with Bukhati and Husseini usually in attendance.

- **Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research** (<https://mohehr.gov.iq/en/>): Education Minister Naim al-Aboudi, a member of the militia Asaib Ahl al-Haq, [also interacts](#) (/node/19009) with DEHS.
- **Ministry of Finance:** DEHS worked closely with the federal government's Finance Ministry to allocate and distribute funding for the program.
- **Other ministries:** Delegations from DEHS, led by Bukhati, engage with various government entities (e.g., the **Ministry of Education** (<https://epedu.gov.iq/>), **Ministry of Defense** (<https://mod.mil.iq/?topic=59>), and **Ministry of Youth and Sports** (<https://moys.gov.iq/en/>)) as well as various universities to produce educational content for PMF fighters.
- **Al-Mustafa International University-Iraq:** The PMF has been in close [coordination](http://miuiraq.net/?p=2630) (<http://miuiraq.net/?p=2630>) with **al-Mustafa International University-Iraq** (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-al-mustafa-international-university-iraq>) to devise educational content for various PMF departments. The university hosts many [conferences](http://miuiraq.net/?p=1726) (<http://miuiraq.net/?p=1726>) in which religious leaders from various schools discuss the importance of religion in these institutions. Bukhati is a regular attendee of these conferences, as well as other events hosted by Al-Mustafa University such as [graduation ceremonies](https://en.hawzahnews.com/photo/366430/Photo-Al-Mustafa-Higher-Education-Institute-of-Islamic-Sciences) (<https://en.hawzahnews.com/photo/366430/Photo-Al-Mustafa-Higher-Education-Institute-of-Islamic-Sciences>) (including summer [graduations](http://miuiraq.net/?p=2624) (<http://miuiraq.net/?p=2624>)).
- **University of Technology:** DEHS [works](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYrniURfSa4) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYrniURfSa4>) very closely with the **University of Technology** (<https://uotechnology.edu.iq/index.php/ar/>) to educate and train the administrators who manage various DEHS locations around Iraq.
- **University of Tehran:** DEHS collaborates with the **University of Tehran** (<https://ut.ac.ir/en>) in Iran. In July 2023, it reached an [agreement](https://www.radiofarda.com/a/32495380.html) (<https://www.radiofarda.com/a/32495380.html>) with the university to send ninety-five PMF students to study there. In addition, the university's president [meets](https://www.iranintl.news/ar/202307093038) (<https://www.iranintl.news/ar/202307093038>) regularly with Bukhati to ensure that DEHS members are being held to the highest standards of science.
- **University of Diyala and Baghdad University:** The **University of Diyala** (<https://uodiyala.edu.iq/en/home-2/>) enjoys hosting scientific [conferences](https://uodiyala.edu.iq/61456/) (<https://uodiyala.edu.iq/61456/>) on strategies to improve intellectual security, confront extremism, and achieve community peace. Bukhati attends such conferences along with Badr Organization secretary-general Hadi al-Ameri. **Baghdad University** (<https://en.uobaghdad.edu.iq/>) holds similar [conferences](https://cois.uobaghdad.edu.iq/?p=40582) (<https://cois.uobaghdad.edu.iq/?p=40582>) at the College of Islamic Sciences Department, where they discuss topics such as fighting against “intellectual terrorism.” Bukhati and Abu Muntadher al-Husseini are regular attendees.
- **National Defense University for Military Studies:** DEHS [worked closely](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/15AZFtxex3/) (<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/15AZFtxex3/>) with Iraq's **Defense University** (<https://mod.mil.iq/?topic=59>) for Higher Military Studies to devise a curriculum for the military training portion of the program. They [partnered](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/14h9UXa4foM/) (<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/14h9UXa4foM/>) with **Baghdad Operations Command** (<https://aoav.org.uk/2016/baghdad-operations-command/>) and Rafidayn Operations Command to generate development courses for PMF students who are interested in studying military tactics.
- **Al-Hawra Center** for women's education and development in Iraq.
- **Al-Jawadain Seminary** (<https://alshirazi.org/news-item/34461?lang=EN>): This school hosts religious events, talks, and [ceremonies](http://miuiraq.net/?p=2624) (<http://miuiraq.net/?p=2624>) where senior DEHS members are present.
- **News channels:** **Al-Etejah Satellite Television** (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-al-etejah-satellite-television>) often [features](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1ATcdbSYeL/) (<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1ATcdbSYeL/>) Bukhati as the official spokesman for DEHS, while the **International Quran News Agency** (<https://iqna.ir/ar>) features his religious [speeches](https://iqna.ir/ar/news/3489327/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D8%AF%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D9%82%D8%B7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A3%D8%AC%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%88) (<https://iqna.ir/ar/news/3489327/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D8%AF%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D9%82%D8%B7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A3%D8%AC%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%88>).

Subordinate relationships:

- The main DEHS educational facility is in Baghdad, but the directorate aims to establish facilities in each of Iraq's eighteen provinces to make the program more accessible to PMF members and their families.
- **Facebook:** DEHS has two official Facebook groups. The oldest has been around since the directorate's inception and has around 3,000 followers. The more recently activated one has around 1,600 followers.
- **Telegram:** DEHS has one official Telegram channel with around 1,400 subscribers.
- **Instagram:** DEHS has many Instagram accounts, usually affiliated with the provinces where their facilities are located.
- **YouTube:** Although the official DEHS YouTube channel has only 216 subscribers as of this writing, the directorate has been featured many times on the broader PMF YouTube channel, which has around 220,000 subscribers.
- **WhatsApp:** DEHS has one official WhatsApp group.
- **TikTok:** DEHS is featured many times on the PMF TikTok account, which has around 90,200 followers.
- **Linktree:** DEHS has one Linktree account.



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Nov 19, 2024



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