

# Update on Houthi Involvement in Iraq

by [Sary Mumayiz \(/experts/sary-mumayiz\)](/experts/sary-mumayiz), [Michael Knights \(/experts/michael-knights\)](/experts/michael-knights), [Hamdi Malik \(/experts/hamdi-malik\)](/experts/hamdi-malik)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Sary Mumayiz \(/experts/sary-mumayiz\)](/experts/sary-mumayiz)

Sary Mumayiz is a research assistant with The Washington Institute's Military and Security Studies Program. He specializes in non-state armed groups, insurgencies, and political violence in the Middle East.




[Michael Knights \(/experts/michael-knights\)](/experts/michael-knights)

Michael Knights is the Jill and Jay Bernstein Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute and cofounder of the Militia Spotlight platform, which offers in-depth analysis of developments related to Iran-backed militias.



[Hamdi Malik \(/experts/hamdi-malik\)](/experts/hamdi-malik)

Hamdi Malik is an associate fellow with The Washington Institute and cofounder of its Militia Spotlight platform.

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

The cessation of Houthi-Iraqi joint strikes on Israel does not mean that Houthi money-movers and trainers have gone home; more likely, they are now a permanent feature of Iraq and merit close scrutiny from counterterrorism analysts.

In September, the *New York Times* [reported \(https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/15/world/middleeast/iran-iraq-hamas-houthis.html\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/15/world/middleeast/iran-iraq-hamas-houthis.html) that Yemeni Houthi officials had quietly opened an office in Baghdad's Jadriyah neighborhood that June, near Iraq's International Zone. The office was headed by Ahmed al-Sharafi (aka Abu Idris), who was reportedly put in charge  [\(https://www.alarabiya.net/arab-and-world/yemen/2024/12/17/%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B4%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%B6%D8%BA%D8%B7-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%83%D9%84-](https://www.alarabiya.net/arab-and-world/yemen/2024/12/17/%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B4%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%B6%D8%BA%D8%B7-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%83%D9%84-)

[%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AC%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%81-%D9%88%D8%AC%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82\)](#) of joint security operations by Houthi forces (aka Ansar Allah) and Iran-backed militias in Iraq. In early July, he [visited \(https://www.newarab.com/news/yemens-houthis-open-office-baghdad-amid-regional-tensions\)](https://www.newarab.com/news/yemens-houthis-open-office-baghdad-amid-regional-tensions) a number of militia offices throughout the country accompanied by high-ranking Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) leaders, where he praised the [Islamic Resistance in Iraq \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-islamic-resistance-iraq\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-islamic-resistance-iraq) (IRI) for their efforts and ensured a strong relationship with the militia umbrella group. He continues to [meet regularly \(https://thenewregion.com/posts/718/al-khazali-expresses-solidarity-with-houthis-after-israeli-airstrikes-on-hodeidah\)](https://thenewregion.com/posts/718/al-khazali-expresses-solidarity-with-houthis-after-israeli-airstrikes-on-hodeidah) with the heads of *muqawama* (resistance) militias, including Qais al-Khazali, the leader of [Asaib Ahl al-Haq \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-asaib-ahl-al-haq-0\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-asaib-ahl-al-haq-0).

Abu Idris has conducted all of these activities despite not being the formal Houthi ambassador to Iraq; that post has been filled by Mohammed al-Qabli (not to be mistaken with Al-Khader Marmash, the internationally recognized Yemeni government's [official \(https://mofa.gov.iq/2021/22514/\)](https://mofa.gov.iq/2021/22514/) ambassador to Iraq). Qabli likewise meets regularly with *muqawama* leaders in Baghdad. In a June 2018 [meeting \(https://al-manara.net/news7129.html\)](https://al-manara.net/news7129.html), he was spotted in front of a sign that read “From Baghdad to Sanaa, One Trench.”

### Pre-Gaza Background of Houthis in Iraq

The Houthis first [began \(https://amwaj.media/article/inside-story-how-yemen-s-houthis-dig-for-strategic-depth-in-iraq\)](https://amwaj.media/article/inside-story-how-yemen-s-houthis-dig-for-strategic-depth-in-iraq) establishing a presence in Iraq in 2011, albeit in a subtle way. Later, in 2016, they [openly sent \(https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iraq-pm-abadi-reportedly-calls-houthi-delegation-representative-yemen\)](https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iraq-pm-abadi-reportedly-calls-houthi-delegation-representative-yemen) a delegation that Iraqi prime minister Haider al-Abadi recognized as a “representative of Yemen.” In 2017, female trainers from Iraq were [sent \(https://alwatannews.net/arab/article/733876/%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%B1---%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD\)](https://alwatannews.net/arab/article/733876/%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%B1---%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD)) to provide weapons proficiency training to Houthi women in Dhamar governorate south of Sanaa.

In 2019, Qabli held [talks \(https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2019/05/11/2008991/iraq-s-nujaba-yemen-s-ansarullah-discuss-us-threats/amp\)](https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2019/05/11/2008991/iraq-s-nujaba-yemen-s-ansarullah-discuss-us-threats/amp) with officials from the Iraqi militia [Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-harakat-hezbollah-al-nujaba\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-harakat-hezbollah-al-nujaba) regarding ways to “support the Yemeni people” in their war against the Saudi-led coalition. In 2022, he was [spotted \(https://www.shabestan.news/news/1216291/%D9%BE%DB%8C%D8%B4-%D9%87%D9%85%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%B9%DB%8C%D9%86-%D9%88-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D8%AF\)](https://www.shabestan.news/news/1216291/%D9%BE%DB%8C%D8%B4-%D9%87%D9%85%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%B9%DB%8C%D9%86-%D9%88-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D8%AF) at the “Arbaeen and Soldiers of the Resistance” conference in Karbala, an event focused on honoring two late “resistance” leaders: Qasem Soleimani, the head of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF), and Iraqi militia commander Abu

Mahdi al-Muhandis. During a speech at the conference, Qabli **praised**

**(<https://defapress.ir/fa/news/503219/%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%B4%D9%87%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%B3%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%A2%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%82%D8%AF%D8%B3-%DA%AF%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA>)** both leaders for their "sacrifice."

### **Increased Role During the Gaza War**

In April 2024, Qabli participated in a conference at Badr al-Kubra Hall in Baghdad that focused on condemning U.S. and Israeli actions related to the war in Gaza. According to **Shafaq News** (<https://shafaq.com/en/Iraq/Leaders-of-Resistance-Axis-in-Baghdad-reiterate-support-for-Palestinian-cause>), the event included top-level officials in Iran's "axis of resistance"—from **Badr Organization** (</node/17003>) leader Hadi al-Ameri to key foreign figures who would be killed later that year, such as Lebanese Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah (via video call) and Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh.

That June, Qabli was **spotted** (<https://al-hashed.gov.iq/?p=523708>) in Baghdad at an exclusive screening of the movie *The Agent*, alongside U.S.-designated human rights abuser Faleh al-Fayyad and other PMF leaders. The **movie** (<https://www.azzaman.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D9%86%D9%83%D9%87%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%A8/>), which was presented by the PMF Media Directorate, focused on memorializing the "sacrifices made by the PMF." Later that year, Qabli joined supporters of the militia **Kataib Hezbollah** (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-kataib-hezbollah>) to lead demonstrations (<https://a5r5br.net/iraq/local-news/3924092-%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%B6%D9%88%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%85%D8%AB%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%86%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%B1>) in Baghdad's Tahrir Square demanding the expulsion of U.S. forces from Iraq and denouncing the U.S.-led air campaign in Yemen.

Iran's IRGC-QF also appears to have actively mixed Houthi and Iraqi factions during various points in the Gaza war. In Militia Spotlight's view, one of the key drivers behind the Houthis forging stronger ties with Iraqi *muqawama* (especially Kataib Hezbollah) is the growing local role of Qods Force general Reza Shahlai in 2023-24, who brought his preexisting deep ties with the Houthis to the Iraq file.

### **The Future of Houthi Operations in Iraq**

Iraqi militias operating under the IRI umbrella ceased attacking Israel last November following statements by Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and Israeli warnings at the UN that retaliation would soon fall inside Iraq. This cessation also meant an end to joint Houthi-Iraqi military operations, which had seen a senior Houthi drone specialist **killed on July 30** (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/houthi-missile-forces-colonel-killed-iraqi-government-base-jurf-al-sakhar>) while operating alongside Iranian and Iraqi personnel at Jurf al-Sakhar.

Yet analysts should not assume that this means the end of Houthi basing at facilities belonging to the Iraqi government and designated Iraqi terrorist groups. Key areas to watch include drone storage and training sites such as Jurf al-Sakhar (run by Kataib Hezbollah) and Camp Ashraf (run by the Badr Organization), plus border locations

such as the PMF facilities in al-Muthanna (facing Saudi Arabia) and Trebil (facing Jordan, and thus Israel).

Moreover, the Houthis will likely be part of the terrorism threat financing landscape in Iraq for the foreseeable future, similar to how Lebanese Hezbollah carved out money-making opportunities in Baghdad from the mid-2000s onward. The Houthis can use Iraq to move money (<https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/02/leverage-beyond-yemen-ansar-allah-and-its-iraqi-alliances?lang=en>), especially now that their recent U.S. re-designation as a Foreign Terrorist Organization reduces their connectivity to global financial systems at home. In collusion with militia-controlled officials in the Iraqi Ministry of Oil, the Houthis can also use Iraqi waters to move Iranian-provided oil and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) to world markets, with the materials relabeled as Iraqi products and fraudulently sold to unsuspecting customers. ❖

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