The Dual Face of Qais al-Khazali: Extremist at Heart, Politician by Necessity

by Hamdi Malik **(/experts/hamdi-malik)**

Mar 17, 2025

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Brief Analysis

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Khazali presents himself as a mainstream political figure, but his internal narrative reveals unwavering loyalty to Iran's "axis of resistance" and a deeply entrenched extremist ideology opposed to the West.

Qais al-Khazali, leader of the Iraqi militia **Asaib Ahl al-Haq (/node/16715)** (AAH), used the month of Ramadan to maintain his connection with his support base and reaffirm the ideological framework guiding his group. In his first Ramadan sermon—titled "The Struggle Between Truth and Falsehood," posted on March 6 across AAH's social media platforms—he provided a "religious historical" overview of this "struggle," tracing it back to the creation of the first human, the Prophet Adam, according to Islamic belief (Figure 1).

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Figure 1: Photo of Khazali during his Ramadan sermon, posted March 6, 2025.

He then linked Iran's "axis of resistance" and its hostility toward the West to Shia millenarian beliefs and the anticipated advent of Imam Mahdi: "We have reached...the final round...in the struggle between truth and falsehood, which unfolds in the era of Imam al-Mahdi...His sacred occultation [hidden existence]...has been marked by continuous struggles and accumulated outcomes leading to this moment. The stage we have now reached in this struggle—where Ahl al-Haq (People of Truth), represented by the Axis of Resistance, have attained this level of strength—is the result of immense effort, perseverance, and great sacrifices stretching back to the time of Prophet Adam...and especially throughout the period of occultation. Now we have entered an advanced stage...a direct confrontation with Rome—which, based on [interpretations of] the Islamic narrations, refers to the modern-day America and Europe."

Building on this narrative, Khazali drew historical parallels to past confrontations between Islamic and Western forces: "We have entered the most difficult stage in the struggle between truth and falsehood—the confrontation with Rome. The Messenger of God [Prophet Muhammad]...in all his greatness...engaged in a military confrontation with Rome but did not achieve victory. According to [Shia Muslim] narrations, the ultimate victory over Rome will be achieved at the hands of the Master of the Age [Imam al-Mahdi]." Khazali was referring to the Battle of Mutah, fought in 629 AD—the first major confrontation between Islamic forces and the Byzantine Empire and their Ghassanid vassals. In this battle, Islamic forces suffered a severe defeat. It was the only significant clash between a Muslim and Christian army during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad, as he passed away a few years later.

Notably, in a March 2 interview on al-Iraqiya TV that took place before his Ramadan sermon, Khazali had struck a noticeably softer tone. Rather than emphasizing conflict, he appeared cautious, seemingly aiming to avoid provoking the Trump administration: "If there is something Trump wants that does not conflict with our interests, then there is no problem. [The United States] is an important country...However, if there is something that conflicts with our interests, we prioritize our interests and the interests of our people over what Trump wants" (Figure 2). He added, "We do not harbor enmity toward [the United States]...We are sitting in our country keeping quiet and have become nice."

In al-Iraqiya TV interview Khazali was unequivocal about his allegiance to the Iranian regime. He reaffirmed his belief in *velayat-e faqih* (guardianship of the jurist) and his adherence to the leadership of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader. In an apparent effort to counter criticism over his loyalty to a foreign leader, Khazali also stated that he follows any instructions issued by Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani on public matters.

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Figure 2: Khazali during an interview on al-Iraqiya TV, March 2, 2025.

Khazali's contrasting rhetoric suggests he is employing *taqiyya*—the practice of strategic dissimulation—to navigate political realities, a well-defined concept in Shia jurisprudence. While he passionately frames the struggle between the "axis of resistance" and the West as an eschatological battle culminating in Imam Mahdi's victory, he simultaneously adopts a pragmatic tone in public discourse, downplaying hostility toward the United States to avoid provocation. This demonstrates that despite Khazali's attempts in recent years to present himself as a mainstream political actor in Iraq, he remains ideologically committed to an Iranian school of thought that is deeply hostile not only toward the West, but toward anyone who does not share this framework.

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