

## Commenting on Omar al-Nidawi: Abadi and the «PMF»...

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Feb 8, 2018

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### ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Michael Knights is the Jill and Jay Bernstein Fellow of The Washington Institute, specializing in the military and security affairs of Iraq, Iran, and the Persian Gulf states. He is a co-founder of the Militia Spotlight platform, which offers in-depth analysis of developments related to the Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria.



Brief Analysis

**F**ebruary 08, 2018

**This piece (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/abadi-and-the-pmf>)** by Omar Nidawi really hits the nail on the head by looking at a largely unassessed risk: that of moving too hastily against militias in Iraq. There is a lot of external analysis of taking a tougher line with Iran-backed militias in Iraq, but not much about how to assess the risks, sequence and manage the consequences of taking such steps. Nidawi's three policy recommendations are fascinating: advise against rash uncoordinated military action; prioritize and sequence disarmament measures; and have a contingency plan for large-scale armed confrontation with militias. In 2008, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki moved against the militias, and only major U.S. assistance prevented that effort from failing. Whatever steps are taken to make Iraq less vulnerable to militia rule, they must be prudent, patient and persistent.

Nidawi speculates about Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's short-lived partnership with the Iran-backed militias of the Fatih Coalition, suggesting that this may have dented Abadi's credentials as a nationalist, first and foremost. I would add a view drawn from conversations with politicians in Baghdad, where many insiders believe that discrediting Abadi was precisely the reason that the Fatih Coalition publicly engaged Abadi, and then equally publicly backed away a day later. In this version of events, an alliance between Abadi and Fatih was never genuinely possible, but a deliberate smear effort. ❖

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