

# Maliki Government's Whitewashing of Hezbollah

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**Ali Musa Daqduq's release from Iraqi custody is an ominous sign of the direction in which the Maliki government is taking Iraq and underscored how quickly Washington's influence over its erstwhile ally in Baghdad has waned.**

**Y**esterday, the Treasury Department designated Ali Musa Daqduq, "a senior Hizballah commander responsible for numerous attacks against Coalition Forces in Iraq, including planning an attack on the Karbala Joint Provincial Coordination Center (JPCC) on January 20, 2007, which resulted in the deaths of five U.S. soldiers."

Daqduq came to Iraq, Treasury revealed, because Iran asked Hezbollah to train Iraqis to fight Coalition Forces in Iraq. In response, Hezbollah general secretary Hassan Nasrallah established a covert Hezbollah unit to train and advise Iraqi Shia militants.

Last week, Daqduq was released from Iraqi custody and returned to Lebanon, despite a formal U.S. request to extradite him to the United States to face murder, terrorism and other charges filed against him in a U.S. military commission. "The United States is extremely disappointed he was allowed to go free and we will continue our efforts to bring him to justice," said Undersecretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David S. Cohen. Washington should also be concerned that this episode seems to suggest that the Maliki government is increasingly coming under the control of its patrons in Iran.

Iraqi courts dropped charges against Daqduq in May, leading to the release of one of the most senior and dangerous Hezbollah commanders ever apprehended. In the words of one former CIA officer, Daqduq is "the worst of the worst. He has American blood on his hands. If released, he'll go back to shedding more of it."

In the early evening of January 20, 2007, American military officers and their Iraqi counterparts met at the Provisional Joint Coordination Center in Karbala, about 30 miles south of Baghdad, to coordinate local security operations. A short time later, a five-car convoy of black GMC Suburban trucks carrying about a dozen English speaking militants dressed in U.S. military fatigues and carrying American-type weapons and fake identity cards

was waived through three checkpoints and allowed access to the base.

The assailants headed directly for the American soldiers, then threw grenades and opened fire with automatic rifles, killing one U.S. soldier and injuring three more. They grabbed four American soldiers and fled the compound. When Iraqi police caught up with the assailants' abandoned vehicles they found discarded uniforms, boots, radios, and a rifle, along with the bodies of three of the abducted U.S. soldiers. The fourth soldier died on the way to the hospital. Two months later, British Special Forces raided a home in Basra and arrested Daqduq—who pretended to be deaf and mute—along with two other wanted militants, brothers Qais and Laith Khazali.

The contention of Iraqi courts that terrorism and forgery charges against Daqduq had to be dropped for lack of evidence is spurious. At the time of his capture, Daqduq claimed to be an Iraqi named Hamad Mohamed Jabarah Alami. He held multiple false identity cards featuring his photograph and depicting him as an employee of various Iraqi government agencies, including one for the Iraqi Council of Ministers and another for the Iraqi Ministry of Agriculture. The hard evidence underpinning the forgery charge was seized at the time of his arrest and speaks for itself.

As for the terrorism charge, documents found in Daqduq's possession at the time of his capture detail a variety of attacks targeting coalition and Iraqi forces, including IED attacks, kidnapping plots, attacks on helicopters, and small arms assaults. As a master trainer, Daqduq was heavily involved in training special group operatives to execute such attacks, and was even involved in some of them himself.

In his diary, Daqduq recorded his involvement in a plot to kidnap a British soldier. "The Operation is to infiltrate two brothers to the base to detain a British soldier in the first brigade from the bathrooms by drugging him," Daqduq wrote. This was not the only attack targeting British forces in which he was involved. Other documents refer to attacks on British bases at the Basra Palace and Shatt al-Arab Hotel. In another entry, Daqduq recorded meeting with special group operatives who were involved in IED bombings and small-arms fire attacks on Iraqis and coalition forces in Diyala Province, adding "We conducted eight explosive charge operations on both sides." Daqduq's writing about IED bombings in the first person suggests that he was either personally involved in the attacks or, at a minimum, saw himself as an integral part of the plot.

But what most grabbed the attention of senior coalition leadership was an "in-depth planning-and-lessons-learned document" about the attack on the Karbala Provincial Coordination Center. The document laid bare the extensive pre-operational surveillance, logistical preparation, and tactical drills that were carried out. Later, both Daqduq and Khazali would concede "that senior leadership within the Qods Force knew of and supported planning for the eventual Karbala attack." According to Daqduq, "The Iraqi special groups could not have conducted this complex operation without the support and direction of the Qods Force."

In late February 2012, the U.S. government publicly announced the filing of military commission charges against Daqduq. The eight-page charge sheet, issued secretly just days after Daqduq was turned over to Iraqi authorities, accused Daqduq of murder, terrorism, spying, and other charges. Under the Iraqi judicial system, the Iraqi court's May 29 decision to release Daqduq was automatically appealed. On June 25 the decision to free Daqduq was upheld, by which time Washington had lodged a formal request for Daqduq's extradition.

It is possible a fair trial would have ended in Daqduq's acquittal on some or all of the charges. But summarily releasing him on the basis of patently false procedural grounds suggests that something other than the rule of law was at play in the Iraqi judicial system. Daqduq's release is an ominous sign of the direction in which the Maliki government is taking Iraq. It also underscored how quickly Washington's influence over its erstwhile ally in Baghdad has waned.

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