Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba (HHN)

Name: Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba (HHN)

Type of Organization:
- Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)
- “special forces”

Ideologies and Affiliations:
- Iranian-sponsored
- Shiite
- Jihadist
- Khomeinist
- global Islamist revolutionary

Place of Origin:
Nujaba, Iraq

Year of Origin:
2013

Founder(s):

Akram al-Kaabi

Places of Operation:

Iraq and Syria

Overview
Executive Summary

Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba (HHN) is an Iranian-backed, U.S.-designated militia formed in 2013 by Akram al-Kaabi, co-founder of the IRGC-backed Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH).[1] The exact relationship between AAH and HHN remains unclear. Kaabi denies there are any ideological disagreements with AAH, stating that the formation of HHN occurred due to disagreements “on style and how the work should be managed.”[2] HHN is primarily comprised of former members of AAH, Kata’ib Hezbollah (KH), and possibly the “Promised Day Brigades.”[3]

HHN is closely tied to Iran and Hezbollah and has been at the forefront of the fight against ISIS alongside the Syrian army, Hezbollah, and other Iran-backed Iraqi militias.[4] Recent reports indicate that HHN has taken a new central role among the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) following the deaths of IRGC Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani and PMF deputy chief and Kata’ib Hezbollah leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

HHN’s secretary general, Akram al-Kaabi, has long been affiliated with Iranian-backed terrorist groups operating in Iraq. He began as a commander in the Sadrist militia Jaysh al-Mahdi, where he planned and led attacks against both the Iraqi army and coalition forces.[5] In 2008, Kaabi was sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury Department “for threatening the peace and stability of Iraq.”[6] Kaabi formed HHN in 2013 in response to the rise of ISIS in Syria, calling for Iraqi Shiite militias to travel to Syria and fight on the behalf of the Assad regime.[7] At the same time, he threatened to attack Turkish forces operating north of Mosul.[8] HHN fought against Syrian opposition forces in Aleppo city and its countryside during the regime’s 2016 offensive to retake the city.[9] The United Nations accuses HHN of deliberately killing civilians attempting to flee the city during the offensive.[10]

According to Iraqi lawmaker Shakhwan Abdullah, HHN is "helping Tehran create a supply route through Iraq to Damascus."[11] In December 2019, HHN and other pro-Iran PMFs attacked and killed more than 500 peaceful anti-government protestors in Baghdad.[12]

Doctrine

HHN follows a Shiite jihadist ideology rooted in the teachings of Iraqi Ayatollah Mohammed al-Sadr and Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.[13] While HHN spokesman Hashim alMousawi has downplayed the group's loyalty to Khamenei, HHN leadership has praised the Quds Force and declared "complete solidarity and support" with Hezbollah.[14] Furthermore, in August 2016, HHN leader Akram al-Kaabi spent a week in Iran meeting with top Iranian government officials and clerics, including the secretary of Iran's Expediency Council, Mohsen Rezaei.[15]

In January 2020, Kaabi visited the family of Quds Force Commander Qasem Soleimani after his assassination, and met with Soleimani's successor, Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani.[16] At the same time, the group stated its willingness to oust any government in Baghdad that opposed Iran.[17]

Organizational Structure

A Washington Institute for Near East Policy report describes HHN as a "front group for Harakat Hezbollah and AAH to send forces to Syria."[18] The group fielded an estimated 10,000 fighters in 2019 and is reportedly part of the 12th Brigade of the PMF.[19] Despite this, Kaabi claims that HHN is "not affiliated with the [PMF] organizationally."[20]

In 2013, the group contained three subunits: Liwa al?Hamad, Liwa Ammar Ibn Yasir, and Liwa al?Imam al?Hassan al?Mujtaba—all of which were formed in or deployed to Syria.[21] In 2015, Kaabi said the group also contained a fourth subunit, the Golan Liberation Brigade, as well as a the reserve al-Tabia forces, a paramilitary volunteer militia established by Iran's first supreme leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.[22]

Liwa Ammar Ibn Yasir

In June 2013, HHN announced the formation of the subgroup Liwa Ammar Ibn Yasir (LAIY).[23] The name refers to the Shia Ammar ibn Yassir shrine in Raqqa, Syria, that was destroyed by Sunni rebels.[24] In spring 2014, the group was deployed in Iraq, despite its stated purpose of defending the Shia Sayyeda Zainab shrine in Damascus.[25] In December 2016, Kaabi said that LAIY had 3,000 fighters in Aleppo.[26] LAIY was also shown in Aleppo on social media posts in February and March 2014.[27]

Liwa al?Imam al?Hassan al?Mujtaba

On July 23, 2013, the creation of Liwa al-Imam al-Mujtaba (LIHM) was officially announced on social media.[28] This group claims to predominantly protect the Damascus Airport and sections of rural Ghouta.[29] LIHM also has publicized subunits: Kata'ib al-Ashtar (Ashtar Battalion), the "mortar and rocket battalion" Kata'ib abu Hamr (Abu Hamr Battalion), and the Martyr Ahmed Kayara unit.[30] The Ahmed Kayara unit was named after Abu Hamza, a commander in the largely Iraqi Liwa Abu Fadl al-Abbas.[31] The Kata'ib al-Ashtar unit has been described as a "rapid response unit" and was reportedly deployed to al-Buidha, Rif Dimashq.[32] LIHM also fought in the southern Damascus suburb of Hajira and the southeast suburb of Jaramana in November 2013.[33]

Liwa al?Hamad (Praise Brigade)

Liwa al-Hamad, or the Praise Brigade, was first announced in a YouTube video in July 2013.[34] The group is less present on social media than other HHN subunits and little is known about the group's activities. The Praise Brigade was reportedly in Aleppo in January, March, April, and May of 2014, according to the group's Facebook posts.[35]

Golan Liberation Brigade

In 2017, HHN media announced the formation of the Golan Liberation Brigade.[36] Upon its formation, Kaabi stated that the group was prepared to work with the Syrian Arab Army to "liberate" the Golan Heights from Israel.[37] He claimed the unit was well equipped and included "special forces" fighters.[38]

Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba (HHN)

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq (IRI)

Following the onset of the Hamas-Israel war in the Gaza Strip in early October 2023**,** an umbrella group called the Islamic Resistance in Iraq (IRI) claimed responsibility for an October 17 failed drone strike on an U.S. air base in Irbil, Iraq. The IRI is reportedly a coalition of all Iran-backed Shiite militias operating in Iraq. Among the groups included are HHN, Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada, Kataib Hezbollah (KH), and Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), as well as lesser-known militias such as Tashkil al-Waritheen. The IRI targets U.S. elements across Iraq and Syria in retaliation for the United States' perceived role in the Gaza crisis. The IRI carried out at least 20 more attacks by the end of October.[39]

Financing

HHN was formed in 2013 with direct support from the IRGC.[40] Kaabi openly admitted in 2015 that "technical and logistical support comes from the [Iranian] Islamic Republic."[41] In a 2015 interview, Kaabi acknowledged that HHN "received military and logistical support from the Republic [of Iran] in continuing form and according to the needs of the fronts."[42] He also confirmed the gifting of a reconnaissance aircraft (known as Yasir) by the IRGC to the group.[43]

In May 2019, a report by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy stated that U.S. and Israeli intelligence were concerned that Iran was supplying "long-range artillery rockets" to its Iraqi proxies, including HHN.[44] The report claimed that HHN and other Iranian-backed PMFs are able to import missiles and equipment from Iran without Baghdad's knowledge.[45] Additional funding comes via the Iraqi government, thanks to HHN's membership in the PMF system.[46]

Recruitment

The group has been described as a "leading network of recruiters for foreign fighters in Syria" and a "pioneer of online recruitment for foreign fighters."[47] New recruits reportedly began in Iranian training camps before deploying to Aleppo, Syria, where they were then placed in HHN.[48] It is unclear if this system continued after the Assad regime's capture of Aleppo city in December 2016.

Training

In a January 2019 interview, Kaabi openly stated that the group receives "all levels of training, arming and the provision of advice through the presence of leaders and field advisers from the brothers in the Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guards," as well as from Hezbollah.[49] Kaabi further stated that the group received a reconnaissance aircraft from the IRGC, as well as training to use it.[50]

Also Known As:

- Harakat al-Nujaba[51]
- Nujaba Movement[52]
- Hezbollah al-Nujaba[53]
- Harakat Hizbollah al-Nujaba[54]
- Movement of the Noble of the Party of God[55]
- Ammar ibn Yasir Brigade[56]
- Imam al-Hasan al-Mujtaba Brigade[57]
- al-Hamad Brigade[58]
- al-Nujaba TV[59]
- Liwa Ammar bin Yasir[60]

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58 Public Notice No. 10,703, 84 Fed. Reg. 9585 (March 15, 2019), https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/03/15/2019-04508/designation-of-harakat-al-nujaba-aka-harakat-hezbollah-al-nujaba-aka-movement-of-the-noble-ones.

[59] Public Notice No. 10,703, 84 Fed. Reg. 9585 (March 15, 2019), https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/03/15/2019-04508/designation-of-harakat-al-nujaba-aka-harakat-hezbollah-al-nujaba-aka-movement-of-the-noble-ones.

[60] Aymenn Jawad al- Tamimi, "Interview with the Leader of Harakat al-Nujaba: Interview and Analysis," Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's Blog, April 15, 2015, http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/04/interview-with-the-leader-of-harakat-al-nujaba.

Key Leaders



Akram Al-Kaabi

Co-founder; former commander of Syrian branch



Nasr al-Shammary

Deputy secretary-general



Hashim al-Mousawi

Spokesperson



Bashar al-Saidi

Spokesperson



Ali al-Asadi

Head of HHN political council

Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba (HHN)

History:

- **January 4, 2024:** The U.S. military launches an air strike on HHN's logistics headquarters in central Baghdad.
  The strike kills and injures several members, including high-ranking HHN official Mushtaq Taleb al-Saidi. Also known as Abu Taqwa, al-Saidi served as the deputy head of operations in Baghdad of the Popular Mobilization Units and also as an HHN commander. According to Pentagon Press Secretary Major General Pat Ryder, al-Saidi was "actively involved in planning and carrying out attacks against" the U.S. military in the region. The *Financial Times* has called HHN one of the strongest factions of the Shiite opposition group, the Islamic Resistance in Iraq (IRI). Source: Raya Jalabi and Felicia Schwartz, "US air strike kills commander of Iran-backed militia in Baghdad," *Financial Times*, January 4, 2024, https://www.ft.com/content/6c70205d-e2b0-4f1a-bb19-835f7aa2b268.

- **November 1, 2023:** Kaabi releases a statement on Twitter claiming the "Iraqi Islamic resistance…[will] militarily liberate Iraq….
  What is to come will be grandiose. Blessed are the heroic mujahideen, blessed are the participants, blessed are the supporters. Victory for Islam. No stopping, no truce, no retreat." According to the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), Kaabi's statement can be equated to HHN declaring war against U.S. forces in Iraq. Source: "Leader Of Iraqi Shi'ite Al-Nujaba Movement: Iraqi Islamic Resistance Has Decided To 'Militarily Liberate Iraq,'" Middle East Media Research Institute, November 1, 2023, https://www.memri.org/reports/leader-iraqi-shiite-al-nujaba-movement-iraqi-islamic-resistance-has-decided-militarily.

- **October 17, 2023:** An umbrella group called the Islamic Resistance in Iraq (IRI) makes its first official claim of responsibility for an October 17 failed drone strike on an U.S. air base in Irbil, Iraq.
  The IRI is reportedly a coalition of all Iran-backed Shiite militias operating in Iraq, including HHN, Kata'ib Sayyid al Shuhada (KSS), Kataib Hezbollah (KH), and Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) as well as lesser-known militias such as Tashkil al-Waritheen. The IRI targets U.S. elements across Iraq and Syria in retaliation for the United States' perceived role in the Gaza crisis. Source: Hamdi Malik and Michael Knights, "Profile: The Islamic Resistance in Iraq," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 21, 2023, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-islamic-resistance-iraq.

- **May 6, 2023:** Shammary declares HHN has not reached any negotiated agreement with the United States and will continue to target U.S. forces.
  Shammary calls American soldiers a legitimate target as long as they are on Iraqi soil.Source: "Iraqi resistance group: 5,000 operations carried out against occupying US forces," Press TV, May 7, 2023, https://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2023/05/07/702899/Iraqi-resistance-group-operations-against-US-occupiers.

- **April 13, 2023:** HHN releases a video on Telegram threatening a drone strike on Israel.
  In the video, with Hebrew subtitles, a narrator says, "Our souls are deeply connected to Jerusalem."Source: Seth J. Frantzman, "Pro-Iran Nujaba militia in Iraq threatens Israel with drone," *Jerusalem Post*, April 14, 2023, https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-739206.

- **February 12, 2023:** During a meeting with injured HHN fighters, Kaabi warns the United States is an enemy and U.S. forces cannot stay in Iraq under any circumstances.
  Kaabi accuses the United States "and Israeli Zionism" of fighting "against God, religion and humanity." He says HHN and other militias will never change their positions regarding the United States.Source: "No Friendship with America, Iraqi Resistance Group Reiterates," Tasnim News Agency, February 13, 2023, https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2023/02/13/2852695/no-friendship-with-america-iraqi-resistance-group-reiterates.

- **December 7, 2022:** During an interview with a local Iraqi TV station, Iraqi parliamentary speaker Mohamed Al-Halbousi confirms Iran-backed militias kidnapped and killed hundreds of thousands of people between 2014 and 2016.
  According to Amnesty International, after the U.S.-led coalition, alongside Iraqi and Kurdish forces, launched the August 2015 battle for Mosul, Shiite paramilitary groups and government forces began executing revenge attacks on Sunni Arabs suspected of supporting ISIS. Media reports point out HHN, Kata'ib Hezbollah, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, Badr Organization, and Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada are accused of responsibility for the mass killings. Al-Halbousi calls on the Iraqi government to provide compensation to the victims' families.Source:"Iraq's Parliament Speaker Confirms Killing Of Thousands By Iran-Backed Militia," Iran International, December 11, 2022, https://www.iranintl.com/en/202212114092.

- **October 5, 2022 - October 6, 2022:** Following a violent confrontation on October 5 between gunmen from Saraya Salam and AAH, Sadr orders all armed factions in Iraq to freeze their activities.
  He also orders a ban on "the use of weapons in all provinces except for Salah al-Din, (Samarra and its surroundings) or as directed by the current commander-in-chief of the armed forces." Sadr calls on Kadhimi to "rein in the insolent militias…and their ilk, as they know only terrorism, money and power."Source: "Sadr suspends all armed factions, including Peace Brigades," Arab Weekly, October 7, 2022, https://thearabweekly.com/sadr-suspends-all-armed-factions-including-peace-brigades.

- HHN unveils the Jamal-69, a new missile with a reported range of 435 miles, capable of reaching Israel.
  Shammary tells *Newsweek* HHN "has strong relations and high coordination with the Lebanese resistance and the Palestinian resistance movements." The missile is also displayed at an April 29 arms exhibition in Tehran.Source: Tom O'Connor, "Amid Unrest in Israel, Iraq's Iran Allies Tout Missiles That Can Hit Foe," *Newsweek*, April 29, 2022, https://www.newsweek.com/amid-unrest-israel-iraqs-iran-allies-tout-missiles-that-can-hit-foe-1702211.

- **March 16, 2022:** HHN releases a video, called "Iraqi Kurdistan: The Oligarchy's Losing Bet," calling for a change in the status quo in Iraqi Kurdistan in a reported threat to the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).
  The video is released three days after the IRGC launched missiles against the Iraqi Kurdistan capital of Irbil. It is HHN's first Kurdish-language video.Source: Hamdi Malik, "Nujaba's Regime Change Threat to the Kurdistan Democratic Party," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 21, 2022, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/nujabas-regime-change-threat-kurdistan-democratic-party.

- **December 9, 2021:** The United States announces it has ended its combat missions in Iraq. Approximately 2,500 U.S. forces remained in the country acting in a training and advisory role to Iraqi forces.
  HHN issues a statement saying its "resistance" against the coalition will continue "until the American occupation is removed from Iraq." HHN says if U.S. forces do not hold to a December 31 deadline to withdraw, "it can be defined only as an occupation." HHN calls targeting the U.S. occupation "a great honor" and promises to continue supporting groups that do so.Sources: Louisa Loveluck, "In attempt to ease pressure, Iraq announces end to U.S. 'combat' mission," *Washington Post*, December 9, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iraq-says-us-combat-over/2021/12/09/a40efd02-590b-11ec-a219-9b4ae96da3b7_story.html;
  Jane Arraf, "U.S. Announces End to Combat Mission in Iraq, but Troops Will Not Leave," *New York Times*, December 9, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/09/world/middleeast/us-iraq-combat-mission.html.

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- On November 19, the Iraqi Resistance Coordination Commission calls on the United States to hold by a December 31 deadline to withdraw from Iraq or the weapons of Iraqi militias "will be ready to dismember the occupation."
  After the announcement, HHN's Nasr al-Shammary tells Newsweek the Iraqi "resistance" is stronger than it was when it "forced" a U.S. withdrawal in 2011 and is ready to confront the United States if it remains in Iraq beyond December 31.Source: Tom O'Connor, "Iraq Militias, Seeing Taliban's Success, Plan to Force U.S. Troops Out After Dec. 31," *Newsweek*, November 22, 2021, https://www.newsweek.com/iraq-militias-seeing-talibans-success-plan-force-us-troops-out-after-dec-31-1652065.

- **June 13, 2021:** Militant groups within the PMF display new long-range unmanned aerial vehicles.
  The new UAVs are capable of striking other countries in the region, including Israel. Source: "Iraq's 'Hezbollah Brigades' Militia Digs Tunnels East of Raqqa, Sets Up New Camp," *Asharq al-Awsat* (London), June 16, 2021, https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3030646/iraq%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%98hezbollah-brigades%E2%80%99-militia-digs-tunnels-east-raqqa-sets-new-camp.

- HHN reportedly opens a financial center and affiliation office near Syria's Deir Ezzor.
  Source: "Iraq's 'Hezbollah Brigades' Militia Digs Tunnels East of Raqqa, Sets Up New Camp," *Asharq al-Awsat* (London), June 16, 2021, https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3030646/iraq%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%98hezbollah-brigades%E2%80%99-militia-digs-tunnels-east-raqqa-sets-new-camp.

- **May 24, 2021:** Iran-backed Iraqi militias declare they are ending the unofficial truce they had announced in October 2020 and would resume attacks on U.S. forces.
  The militias make the decision because of "the lack of seriousness of the Iraqi and US governments in scheduling the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq," one commander tells international media. Source: Suadad al-Salhy, "Iraq: Armed factions end truce with US over failure to withdraw troops," Middle East Eye, May 24, 2021, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iraq-armed-factions-truce-us-over-vow-increased-attacks.

- **- :** Rocket attacks continue to target U.S. troops and other foreign targets in Iraq.
  In late September, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo threatens to close the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad if the Iraqi government does not confront militias. On October 10, representatives from various militias, calling themselves the Iraqi Resistance Coordination Commission, publish a joint statement agreeing to suspend attacks in exchange for the Iraqi government presenting a plan for a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. The commission includes KH, Asa'ib Ahl Al Haq, KSS, and HHN. On October 11, HHN and other Iran-backed Shiite militia factions announce a conditional ceasefire and agree not to target U.S. interests on the condition that the Iraqi government work toward a full U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei reportedly ordered the factions to stand down. On October 27, Kaabi speaks at a press conference hosted by Iranian media and warns that attacks will resume if the United States does not swiftly withdraw its troops from Iraq. Kaabi accuses the United States of seeking to "plunder and loot the resources of Iraq." Sources: John Davison, "Iraqi militias say they have halted anti-U.S. attacks," Reuters, October 11, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-iraq-militias/iraqi-militias-say-they-have-halted-anti-us-attacks-idUSKBN26W0IT?utm_source=iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=1604119_; Edward Wong, Lara Jakes, and Eric Schmitt, Pompeo Threatens to Close U.S. Embassy in Iraq Unless Militias Halt Attacks," *New York Times*, September 29, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/29/us/politics/pompeo-embassy-baghdad-iraq.html?utm_source=iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=1570526_; "We'll cut the ground from under Americans: Iraqi resistance leader," *Tehran Times*, October 28, 2020, https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/454043/We-ll-cut-the-ground-from-under-Americans-Iraqi-resistance-leader; Suadad al-Salhy, "EXCLUSIVE: Iran's Khamenei ordered end to Iraqi attacks on US interests," Middle East Eye, October 22, 2020, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iran-khamenei-iraq-attacks-us-interests-end; Sinan Mahmoud, "Militias threaten to increase attacks on US assets in Iraq," *National* (Abu Dhabi), May 23, 2021, https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/iraq/militias-threaten-to-increase-attacks-on-us-assets-in-iraq-1.1228054.

- Kaabi is pictured with Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani's successor, Brigadier-General Esmail Ghaani.
  Tamer Badawi, "What is Role of Haraket Hezbollah al-Nujaba in Uniting PMU?," Al-Monitor, January 28, 2020, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/01/iraq-iran-pmu-nujaba-muqtada.html.

- Kaabi visits the family of assassinated Quds Force Commander Qasem Soleimani.
  Kaabi also threatens revenge against U.S. forces for the U.S. airstrike that killed Soleimani on January 3.Sources: "Iraq's Pro-Iran Factions Ramp Up Threats to US after Iran Missile Strikes," Agence France-Presse, January 8, 2020, https://www.timesofisrael.com/iraqs-pro-iran-factions-ramp-up-threats-to-us-after-iran-missiles/; "Commanders of Shi'ite Militias in Iraq Continue to Threaten U.S. Forces While Seeking to Mend Internal Rifts," Middle East Media Research Institute, January 13, 2020, https://www.memri.org/reports/commanders-shiite-militias-iraq-continue-threaten-us-forces-while-seeking-mend-internal.

- **November 28, 2017:** A prominent Shiite leader in Qom, Iran, Grand Ayatollah Kazem al-Haeri, condemns the U.S. sanctions on HHN.
  Source: Ahmad Majidyar, "Qom-Based Cleric Lashes Out at U.S. for Blacklisting Harakat al-Nujaba," Middle East Institute, November 28, 2017, https://www.mei.edu/publications/qom-based-cleric-lashes-out-us-blacklisting-harakat-al-nujaba.

- **November 23, 2017:** An HHN spokesman claims that the group would give any heavy weapons it had to the Iraqi military once ISIS was defeated and rejected proposed U.S. legislation designating it a terrorist group.
  Source: Ahmed Aboulenein, "Iraqi Militia Indicates Will Hand Heavy Guns to Army after Islamic State Quashed," Reuters, November 23, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-nujaba/iraqi-militia-indicates-will-hand-heavy-guns-to-army-after-islamic-state-quashed-idUSKBN1DN1JY.

- **November 3, 2017:** The U.S. House of Representatives introduces a new bill to sanction HHN entitled the "Iranian Proxies Terrorist Sanctions Act of 2017."
  Source: Ahmad Majidyar, "Qom-Based Cleric Lashes Out at U.S. for Blacklisting Harakat al-Nujaba," Middle East Institute, November 28, 2017, https://www.mei.edu/publications/qom-based-cleric-lashes-out-us-blacklisting-harakat-al-nujaba.

- Kaabi sends a letter to Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah declaring HHN's "complete solidarity and support with your loud cry against the oppressive Zionist regime."
  Source: Babak Dehghanpisheh, "The Iraqi Militia Helping Iran Carve a Road to Damascus," Reuters, September 22, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/mideast-crisis-iraq-nujaba/.

- Kaabi visits militants in Qayrawan, an Iraqi town near the Syrian border that HHN had captured from ISIS.
  Source: Babak Dehghanpisheh, "The Iraqi Militia Helping Iran Carve a Road to Damascus," Reuters, September 22, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/mideast-crisis-iraq-nujaba/.

- Kaabi vows to "break the siege of the Shiite towns of Fuaa and Kafriyeh" in Syria.
  Source: Albin Szakola, "Iraq Militia Sets Sights on Encircled Idlib Towns," NOW News, December 14, 2016, http://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/NewsReports/567553-iraq-militia-sets-sights-on-encircled-idlib-towns.

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- Kaabi meets with the secretary of Iran's Expediency Council, Mohsen Rezaei, in Tehran.
  Source: "Iraqi Official Warns of US Plans for Permanent Military Base in Mosul," Tasnim News Agency, September 4, 2016, https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2016/09/04/1178182/iraqi-official-warns-of-us-plans-for-permanent-military-base-in-mosul.

- Kaabi declares that his followers adhere to the Khomeinist interpretation of *Velayat-e Faqih* (Guardianship of the Jurist), which, according to former Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, mandates rule by an Islamic religious authority figure over all parts of the government.
  Source: Babak Dehghanpisheh, "The Iraqi Militia Helping Iran Carve a Road to Damascus," Reuters, September 22, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/mideast-crisis-iraq-nujaba/.
- Kaabi spends a week in Iran meeting with top Iranian regime officials and clerics, briefing them about his group's activities in Iraq and Syria.
  Source: Amir Toumaj, "Iraqi Militia Leader Receives Warm Reception in Tehran," Long War Journal, September 9, 2016, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/09/iraqi-militia-leader-receives-warm-reception-in-tehran.php.

- Kaabi accuses Israel of attacking HHN in a speech to militants in Aleppo.
  Source: Roi Kais, "Iranian Backed Militia Forms Golan Liberation Brigade," *Yedioth Ahronoth* (Tel Aviv), March 12, 2017, https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4934399,00.html.

- Kaabi vows revenge "in a timely manner" against the U.S. after an explosion near Abu Ghraib in Iraq kills 10 members of AAH.
  Source: Bill Roggio, "Iraqi Shiite Militia Commander Threatens to Attack US," Long War Journal, June 9, 2015, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/06/iraqi-shiite-militia-commander-threatens-to-attack-us.php.

- HHN announces the formation of the subgroup Liwa Ammar Ibn Yasir (LAIY), named for a Shiite shrine in Raqqa, Syria.
  Source: Phillip Smyth, *The Shiite Jihad in Syria and its Regional Effects* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2015), 5, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus138_Smyth-2.pdf.

- HHN officially announces its presence in Syria.
  Source: Phillip Smyth, *The Shiite Jihad in Syria and Its Regional Effects* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2015), Appendix 1, 1, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PF138Appendices/PF138_Appendix_1.pdf.

Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba (HHN)

Violent history:

A bill introduced in the U.S. Congress in November 2017 cited allegations by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights that HHN participated in the 2016 siege of Aleppo, where "pro-Iraq militia groups executed dozens of civilians."[61] U.N. spokesman Rupert Colville said that civilians were "being shot in the street trying to flee and shot in their homes" during the Aleppo siege. He went on to specifically name HHN as one of the Iraqi militias involved.[62]

- **December 27, 2023:** The IRI releases a statement claiming responsibility for attacking an undisclosed target in the Israel-held Golan Heights. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) reportedly locates an explosive-laden drone that was launched from Syrian territory. Media reports speculate that the IRI's failed attack could be in response to Israel's targeted killing of Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp (IRGC) officer Reza Mousavi in Damascus, Syria, on December 25.[63]
- **October 2023:** The IRI claims responsibility for a failed drone strike on an U.S. air base in Irbil on October 17. The IRI is reportedly a coalition of all Iran-backed Shiite militias operating in Iraq, including HHN, who target U.S. elements across Iraq and Syria in retaliation for the U.S.'s role in the Gaza crisis. The IRI carries out twenty more attacks across Iraq and Syria by the month's end, however, no casualties are reported.[64]
- **December 2019:** HHN is named as one of the militias that participated in the killing of more than 500 peaceful protesters in Baghdad.[65]
- **2019:**HHN reportedly takes part in the murder of two Kurdish civilians.[66]
- **July 2017:** HHN fighters launch an offensive against ISIS in southeast Syria.[67]
- **August 2016 – December 2016:** HHN announces the deployment of 2,000 fighters to southern Aleppo in support of the Syrian regime's offensive. HHN forces in Aleppo are reportedly led by IRGC officers.[68]
- **November 2015:** Kaabi states in an interview that the PMF would overthrow the Iraqi government if ordered by Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.[69]
- **September – November 2015:** HNN members are seen fighting in the Kweiris offensive in the southeast of Aleppo's countryside alongside Hezbollah, Iranian militias, Iraqi forces, and SAA units.[70]
- **March 2015:** Kaabi states that "operations to liberate the city of Salahuddin with the participation of our brothers in the resistance factions" has started.[71]

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61 Iranian Proxies Terrorist Sanctions Act, H.R. 4238, 115th Cong. (2017), https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/4238/text?r=2&s=1.

62 Stephanie Nebehay and Tom Miles, "Syrian Army, Iraqi Militia Accused of 'Slaughter' of Civilians in Aleppo," Reuters, December 13, 2016, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-aleppo-un/syrian-army-iraqi-militia-accused-of-slaughter-of-civilians-in-aleppo-idUSKBN1420ZX.

63 Joe Truzman and Bill Roggio, "Network of Iraqi militias claim responsibility for attack in Israel," Long War Journal, December 28, 2023, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2023/12/network-of-iraqi-militias-claim-responsibility-for-attack-in-israel.php.

64 Hamdi Malik and Michael Knights, "Profile: The Islamic Resistance in Iraq," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 21, 2023, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-islamic-resistance-iraq.

65 Seth J. Frantzman, "Iraq's Government Linked to Murder as Protest Leaders Assassinated," *Jerusalem Post*, December 17, 2019, https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Iraqs-government-linked-to-murder-as-protest-leaders-assassinated-611217.

66 Kosar Nawzad, "Iraqi Shia Militias Kill Two Unarmed Kurds in Iran: Rights Group," Kurdistan 24, May 2, 2019, https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/8b22ff69-6d4d-4d70-92f5-a2c820e125ef.

67 Ahmad Majidyar, "Iran-Backed Iraqi Group Seizes 'Large' Areas in Southeastern Syria," Middle East Institute, July 14, 2017, https://www.mei.edu/publications/iran-backed-iraqi-group-seizes-large-areas-southeastern-syria.

68 Maks Czuperski, Emma Beals et al, "Foreign Fighters—From Many Lands," in *Breaking Aleppo* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2017), https://www.publications.atlanticcouncil.org/breakingaleppo/militant-groups/; Amir Toumaj, "Iraqi PMF Attempts to Cut Off Islamic State in Mosul," Long War Journal, November 4, 2016, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/11/iraqi-popular-mobilization-forces-attempt-to-cut-off-islamic-state-in-mosul.php.

69 Bill Roggio and Caleb Weiss, "Iraqi Shiite Militia Leader Says He Would Overthrow Government If Ordered by Iran's Supreme Leader," Long War Journal, November 12, 2015, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/11/us-designated-terrorist-of-iraqi-militia-reportedly-in-aleppo.php; Thomas Joscelyn, "Assad Regime, Allies Break Islamic State's Siege of Air Base in Aleppo," Long War Journal, November 11, 2015, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/11/assad-regime-allies-break-islamic-states-siege-of-air-base-in-aleppo.php.

70 Amir Toumaj and Caleb Weiss, "Iraqi Militia Parades in Southern Aleppo," Long War Journal, August 12, 2016, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/08/iraqi-militia-parades-in-southern-aleppo.php; Scott Lucas, "Syria Daily, Oct 20: Regime-Russia-Iran Press for Breakthrough Near Aleppo," EA Worldview, October 2, 2015, https://eaworldview.com/2015/10/syria-daily-regime-russia-iran-press-for-breakthrough-near-aleppo/.

71 Ali Hashem, "Iraq's Shiite Forces Claim Victory over IS," Al-Monitor, March 16, 2015, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/iraq-shiite-hezbollah-nujaba-victory-islamic-state.html.

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Designations:
Designations by U.S. Government:

- Designated as a terrorist organization by the United States on March 7, 2019.[72]

[72] Public Notice 10,703, 84 Fed. Reg. 9585, https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2019-03-15/pdf/2019-04508.pdf.

Associations:

Ties to Extremist Entities:

- **Mahdi Army**

  Kaabi was the military commander of Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army until 2007.[73] Kaabi was also a student of Sadr's father, Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Sadeq al-Sadr, and maintains important relationships with other Sadrists in the Madhi Army.[74]
- **Hezbollah**

  Kaabi was pictured with Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah during a visit to Lebanon in 2018.[75] He has since returned for subsequent visits. Kaabi has declared HHN's "complete solidarity and support" with and for Hezbollah.[76] In an interview with Al-Nujaba TV, Kaabi stated, "Both Nasrallah and Mughniyah sympathized with us. Both said that they had tried to contact us many times prior to the events in Najaf, and that had they succeeded we would have been able to accomplish greater victories, and to change the balance of power significantly. But they said that this was the will of the Lord and that Hizbullah will not deny us anything. They said: 'All of our capabilities and expertise are at your disposal.'"[77]
- **Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)**

  The IRGC-Quds Force provided direct support to HHN, which included a visit by commander Qasem Soleimani to HHN positions in Aleppo in 2016.[78] HHN was formed in 2013 with direct support from the IRGC.[79] Kaabi openly admitted in 2015 that "technical and logistical support comes from the [Iranian] Islamic Republic."[80] In a 2015 interview, Kaabi acknowledged that they "received military and logistical support from the Republic [of Iran] in continuing form and according to the needs of the fronts."[81] He also confirmed the gifting of a reconnaissance aircraft (known as Yasir) from the IRGC.[82] After Soleimani's death, Kaabi was pictured with the new Quds Force commander, Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani, in January 2020.[83]
- **Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH)**

  HHN is often described as a breakaway group from AAH, which Kaabi co-founded alongside current AAH leader Qais al-Khazali.[84] Kaabi led AAH from 2007 to 2010 while Khazali was in an Iraqi prison.[85]
- **Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH)**

  KH representatives were seen at a PMF meeting after U.S. forces killed the leader of KH in January 2020.[86] Al-Monitor analyst Tamer Badawi claims that HHN has been chosen by the IRGC to lead a new unifying process between all Iranian-backed PMF groups after Soleimani's death.[87] KH's presence at the meeting indicates an intrinsic link between the two groups with potential for greater collaboration.[88]

Ties to Extremist Individuals:

- **Qasem Soleimani**

  Qasem Soleimani was pictured inspecting HHN positions in Aleppo in 2016 and participated in HHN-IRGC meetings on at least five occasions.[89] After Soleimani's death in January 2020, Kaabi visited his family.[90]
- **Qais al-Khazali**

  Kaabi co-founded AAH alongside current AAH leader Qais al-Khazali and led the organization from 2007 to 2010 while negotiating for Khazali's release from an Iraqi prison.[91]

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Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba (HHN)

Rhetoric:

HHN Secretary-General Akram al-Kaabi, November 1, 2023

Statement on Twitter threatening U.S. forces in Iraq:

"Iraqi Islamic resistance…[will] militarily liberate Iraq…. What is to come will be grandiose. Blessed are the heroic mujahideen, blessed are the participants, blessed are the supporters. Victory for Islam. No stopping, no truce, no retreat."[92]

Nasr al-Shammary, May 6, 2023

"Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba does not adhere to any political agreement that includes a ceasefire or reduction of tensions with American occupation forces. Our official position concerning the deployment of US forces to Iraq has not changed at all.

"We reiterate once again that the occupation forces are a legitimate target in Iraq and elsewhere across the West Asian region as long as they are present in Iraqi territories."[93]

Akram al-Kaabi, April 14, 2023

Speaking at a Quds Day rally in Baghdad:

"Americans and Zionists should know that we are not afraid of their threats. Our goals are sacred and we will not withdraw or compromise them."[94]

Akram al-Kaabi, February 12, 2023

"The path of crusade continues and the fronts are active as the enemy is still present. As long as the US and Israeli Zionism are fighting against God, religion and humanity, the believers in sanctities and authentic values should stand up to them.

"There is no friendship with America. The US is an enemy and will remain an enemy. We do not accept the staying of American forces, including advisers, technicians and combat forces. The resistance has no other position and will never change it."[95]

Akram al-Kaabi, November 28, 2022

"As the Iraqi resistance, we adhere to the military option. We believe that the military option is the only solution, and that the political option has always been, and will always be, useless.

…

"The resistance has been, and still is, active on the ground. The resistance continues to act against the U.S. occupation. Therefore, we are convinced that the military option, or the military solution, which caused the Americans to pull out of Iraq in the past, is the only way to force their withdrawal from Iraq. In the past, the President of the United States declared that they had not come to Iraq in order to withdraw, but they were forced to withdraw from Iraq, by the blows they were dealt by the resistance factions. The same is true now. The (military) option should be the basic – and only – option. This is even in the best interests of the Iraqi government, because if the Iraqi government wants to negotiate with the Americans, and reach understandings about their withdrawal, then in order for it to be in a strong position, there must be resistance on the ground that will deal painful blows to the American occupation, so that it will be forced to seek (negotiations) with the Iraqi government and sign an agreement about the withdrawal of (U.S.) forces, like in the past.

…

"With regard to the weapons of the resistance, it is our (Shi'ite) religious belief that these weapons belong to the Twelfth Imam. Thus, the weapons of the resistance will only be handed over to their rightful owner. Any talk about the weapons of the resistance is nothing but a futile media campaign. (Handing it over) will not happen."[96]

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