

Kataib Hezbollah Is Part of Iraq's PMF

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

Apr 15, 2024

Also available in

[العربية \(/ar/policy-analysis/ktayb-hzb-allh-jz-mn-qwat-alhshd-alshby-alraqyt\)](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[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.



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

The U.S.-designated terrorist group is the most significant player in the Popular Mobilization Forces, which is supposed to be under the command of Prime Minister Sudani—a fact that U.S. officials sometimes forget.

When American forces killed [Kataib Hezbollah \(/node/16641\)](#) (KH) members in Iraq on February 3 and 7, the Pentagon was at pains to claim, incorrectly, that the United States was not targeting members of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), an institution that is legally under the prime minister's command and funded through the PMF Commission, also under the premier's authority. U.S. officials should be careful not to obfuscate these facts, particularly amid Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani's first White House visit and other significant bilateral discussions.

On February 5, Pentagon press secretary Maj. Gen. Patrick Ryder [stated \(https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3667341/pentagon-press-secretary-air-force-maj-gen-pat-ryder-holds-a-press-briefing/\)](#), “The folks that we're striking are not part of the PMF.” Yet Sudani visited wounded PMF troops after the February 3 strike. Similarly, on February 8, Ryder [noted \(https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3671411/pentagon-press-secretary-air-force-maj-gen-pat-ryder-holds-a-press-briefing/\)](#) that the KH commander killed by the previous day's U.S. airstrike was “not a member of the PMF, he's a Kataib Hezbollah commander.” Again, the facts showed otherwise: the slain official in question, Abu Baqr al-Saeedi, was an advisor to the commander's office at the PMF Central Security Directorate, which is led by the U.S.-sanctioned KH terrorist and human rights abuser [Abu Zainab al-Lami \(/node/17990\)](#) (real name Hussein Falah Aziz al-Lami). Indeed, Abu Baqr's [PMF identification card \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/abu-baqr-al-saeedi-kataib-hezbollah-terrorist-serving-](#)

pmf-official) was shown after his death.

Both during and after Sudani's landmark Washington visit, it is important to restate the facts regarding the direct relationship between KH, the Prime Minister's Office, and the broader Iraqi government:

- The PMF's chief of staff, senior operational commander, and day-to-day leader is the senior KH figure and U.S.-designated terrorist and human rights abuser **Abdul-Aziz al-Mohammadawi (aka Abu Fadak)** (/node/16434). This means that KH is the first and primary recipient of **more than \$2.6 billion** (/node/18158) in annual Iraqi government funding to the PMF. Put another way, the parliament, cabinet, and Prime Minister's Office have each authorized state payments to KH officials. Notably, Abu Fadak **identified** (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/iraqi-pmf-chief-staff-commits-fulfill-iranian-supreme-leaders-plans>) Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei as his commander during public remarks in Tehran on April 5.
- As noted above, the PMF's head of security is U.S.-sanctioned KH member Abu Zainab al-Lami.
- KH operates the **state-funded 45th, 46th, and 47th Brigades of the PMF** (/node/16641). Chain of command nominally runs through the Popular Mobilization Commission in the Prime Minister's Office, then up to the prime minister himself.
- KH also runs the PMF intelligence, missile, and anti-armor departments, plus Unit 313 (special forces) and Unit 101 (intelligence), both under Abu Fadak.

KH is directly responsible for numerous crimes and attacks against American targets, most recently:

- **Killing three Americans** (/node/18621) in Jordan on January 28.
- **Kidnapping Princeton scholar Elizabeth Tsurkov** (/node/18207) in Baghdad last year.
- **Leading scores of drone, missile, and rocket attacks** (/node/18428) on U.S. bases at al-Asad, al-Tanf, and Tower 22 under the "Islamic Resistance in Iraq" umbrella brand.
- Threatening to arm and train insurgents in **Saudi Arabia, Bahrain** (/node/18582), and **Jordan** (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/new-options-iraqs-axis-resistance-players-part-2-opening-jordan-front>).

Again, it is crucial that U.S. officials, congressional representatives, and media organs ask Sudani to clarify his relationship with the designated terrorist group KH. As commander-in-chief of the PMF, he could expel KH members from the force and cease paying them with a mere pen stroke, but he has not done so. Nor has he pursued human rights abusers, killers, and kidnappers within the KH contingent of Iraq's security forces, or secured Elizabeth Tsurkov's release one year after she was seized by a group supposedly under his authority. ❖

PART OF A SERIES

Militia Spotlight (/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight)

How to Use Militia Spotlight

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



Iraqi Fasail Hit Two U.S. Sites in Iraq and Syria

(/policy-analysis/iraqi-fasail-hit-two-us-sites-iraq-and-syria)



Kataib Hezbollah Is Part of Iraq’s PMF

(/policy-analysis/kataib-hezbollah-part-iraqs-pmf)

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Iraqi Fasail Hit Two U.S. Sites in Iraq and Syria

Apr 22, 2024

◆
Michael Knights,
Hamdi Malik,
Crispin Smith,
Alex Almeida

(/policy-analysis/iraqi-fasail-hit-two-us-sites-iraq-and-syria)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Rise and Fall of the AKP’s Islamist Appeal in Türkiye

Apr 22, 2024



Mustafa Gul

(/policy-analysis/rise-and-fall-akps-islamist-appeal-turkiye)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Coordinated Iran Sanctions Require Coordinated Enforcement

Apr 19, 2024



Matthew Levitt

(/policy-analysis/coordinated-iran-sanctions-require-coordinated-enforcement)

TOPICS

Military & Security (/policy-analysis/military-security)

Terrorism (/policy-analysis/terrorism)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Iraq (/policy-analysis/iraq)