

## APPENDIX 2

# Understanding the Organizations Deployed to Syria

### **Asaib Ahl al-Haqq (League of the Righteous; AAH)**

Establishing itself as a splinter from Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army, the Iraq-based AAH was created with the help of Lebanese Hezbollah and the IRGC. During the Iraq War, AAH was responsible for a number of high-profile attacks on coalition forces, including kidnappings and the use of advanced explosively formed penetrators (EFPs) against armored vehicles. Following the pullout of U.S. soldiers from Iraq, the group claimed it would consider giving up its arms and pursue a political strategy but ultimately retained its militia and has been sending forces into Syria. AAH has been the main source for LAFA, a prominent foreign-staffed militia in Syria.

**Badr Organization** Initially formed as the Badr Brigades, this Iraq-based group was transformed into an ideologically loyal and well-trained proxy of Iran that accepted and pushed the Khomeinist ideology of absolute *velayat-e faqih*. While publicly quiescent toward the U.S. presence during the Iraq war, Badr published videos online in 2013–2014 claiming it had created a “secret unit” targeting U.S. and coalition targets with rockets and IEDs. In July 2013, several months later than other Iranian proxies, the Badr Organization formally announced its involvement in Syria through martyrdom statements. But the group had offered hints earlier, such as in a song posted by supporters on April 22 with the lyrics “We will issue a death sentence against the Free Syrian Army [Jaish al-Hurr] and no one will be able to defeat us.” The first deaths reported by Badr included Abu Dhar al-Sawdi and Abu Sajad al-Hawli, announced on July 21 and 28, respectively.<sup>1</sup> In July, social media pages belonging to the group claimed Badr had sent 1,500 fighters to Syria.

### **Faylaq Waad al-Sadiq (Truthful Promise Corps; FWS)**

A direct Iraqi Shiite proxy of Iran that backs *velayat-e faqih*, FWS and has sent fighters to Syria and was notably called out by Muqtada al-Sadr in the Shiite cleric's efforts to disavow the Syrian Shiite jihad.

### **Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba (Movement of the Party of God the Outstanding; HHN)**

A front group for Harakat Hezbollah and AAH to send forces to Syria, HHN encompasses a diverse network of fighters and units, with the front model mirroring that developed by the IRGC with the

Badr Organization. Akram Kaabi, a well-known AAH spokesman and founder, was announced in June 2013 as HHN's leader. In one report, it was claimed that Kaabi was keen on fighting Syrian rebel forces outside the zone of Sayyeda Zainab, something his LAFA cohorts did not support. He then left to create the Haidar al-Karrar Brigade,<sup>2</sup> although this brigade has been more closely linked with Liwa Dhulfiqar.

HHN was initially linked to the submilitia **Liwa Ammar Ibn Yasir (Ammar Ibn Yasir Brigade; LAIY)**, whose fighters had been an active in Aleppo, helping seize the city's among other actions. LAIY- and other HHN-associated fighters have also reportedly been present in the northern Syrian Shiite towns of Nubl and Zahra.<sup>3</sup> Another HHN subsidiary, **Liwa al-Hamad (Praise Brigade)**, was announced in July 2013, but its activities have been relatively obscure. Still another outgrowth, **Liwa al-Imam al-Hassan al-Mujtaba (Brigade of Imam Hassan the Chosen; LIHM)**, is based in the Damascus area and fought in East Ghouta. Unlike other Shiite militia groups, LIHM publicized the activities of its subunits, including its rapid reaction unit Kataib al-Ashtar (Ashtar Battalion), the “mortar and rocket battalion” Kataib abu Hamr (Abu Hamr Battalion), the Martyr Ahmed Kayara unit.<sup>4</sup> According to an *an-Nahar* report, new recruits, even those who did not wish to join the group or do anything beyond defend Sayyeda Zainab, were filtered through Iranian training camps, deployed to the Aleppo area, and then placed in HHN ranks.<sup>5</sup> During the fighting in Iraq, Liwa al-Hamad and LIHM subgroups have seen little mention, although claims have located LAIY fighters at battles near Amerli. HHN has also actively promoted its popular committee, which, like many of its reported deployments in Syria, is formed from new recruits. Ideologically, HHN has been solidly Khomeinist, but fighters such as one named Abu Fadik al-Mayahi indicate ties to Sheikh Qasim al-Tai, who now leads LAFA-Iraq.<sup>6</sup>

**Harakat al-Talia al-Islamiyah** This party spawned **Saraya Talia al-Khurasani** (Khurasani Vanguard), a group whose blatant identification with Iran has been demonstrated in appropriation of the IRGC logo and promotion of Ayatollah Khamenei.

**Hezbollah (a.k.a. Lebanese Hezbollah)** Established in southern Lebanon in the early 1980s, this Iran-sponsored group was responsible for many of the spectacular embassy attacks and airline hijackings of the subsequent years. More recently, the “Party of God” has established itself as a potent force within the Lebanese parliament. In spring 2013, around the time of the battle of al-Qusayr, Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah announced the group’s involvement in the Syrian war in support of the Assad regime. Its role in the “Sayyeda Zainab defense” narrative has also been central. Hezbollah has thus undertaken an outsize role in the security, ideology, and overall future of Syria’s small Shiite community.

**Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)** Iran’s IRGC has lost a number of commanders and foot soldiers in the Syria fight. While simultaneously denying a direct presence on the ground, the group has described many of these fighters as giving their lives to “defending Sayyeda Zainab.”<sup>7</sup> Some were styled as “volunteers.” Mohammad Jamalizadeh, for instance, an IRGC commander killed in early November 2013, was described as a volunteer defending the shrine. He had previously served in the 1980–1988 war with Iraq.

**Kataib Hezbollah** One of the more secretive Iraq-based Iranian proxies operating in Syria, Kataib Hezbollah fields highly experienced personnel, some of whom fought against U.S. and coalition forces during the Iraq war. Since it began reporting Syria casualties in early 2013, the group has publicly claimed to have lost more than thirty members. According to a 2010 assessment by Washington Institute fellow Michael Knights, the group is “firmly under IRGC Qods Force control and maintains relatively good operational security.”

**Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada (Master of the Martyrs Brigade; KSS)** Beginning in February 2013, some reports claimed splits had emerged within Kataib Hizballah, leading to the expulsion of Abu Mustafa al-Sheibani as its leader.<sup>8</sup> Sheibani was a longtime member of the Badr Brigades whose Shiite militiamen and supply lines became known collectively as the “Sheibani Network,” which maintained links to AAH and to Kataib Hezbollah.<sup>9</sup> KSS emerged from this network with Sheibani as its purported leader; the group announced itself at funerals in May 2013, with limited propaganda championing its plans to defend Sayyeda Zainab.<sup>10</sup> By August 2013, the group claimed to have sent five hundred members to Syria,<sup>11</sup> with recruitment continuing well into 2014. Falah Hasan Jassim al-Harishawi (a.k.a. Mustafa al-Khazali), who was wounded during the Syria fighting, would later seemingly succeed Sheibani, holding the title secretary-general. The group’s military activities have taken place around Damascus, primarily in East Ghouta.<sup>12</sup> The group has also seen action in Iraq.

**Liwa Abu Fadl al-Abbas (LAFa)** Led by a fighter known as Abu Ajeeb Abu Hajjar, this prominent group has served both as a hub for the broader Shiite narrative in Syria and as an expanding network of militant Shiite groups. The group’s first official statement, released June 4, 2013, claimed that its only goal was to “defend holy sites in Syria.”

LAFa’s early connections to Lebanese Hezbollah are embodied at the gravesite of what appears to be Ajeeb’s brother, Husayn Ajeeb Jadha, who died during fighting in winter 2012 and whose tombstone features his face superimposed on Hezbollah and the Assad regime flags.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the group has been closely linked to AAH propaganda materials. One particular image shows Abu Ajeeb alongside AAH leader Qais al-Khazali, intimating Abu Ajeeb could be an AAH member.<sup>14</sup>

Contradicting its claim of seeking only to defend holy sites, LAFa has at times allied with the less-sectarian Assad narrative; in a summer 2013 announcement on the group’s official website, it claimed to have “volunteers from all denominations.”<sup>15</sup> LAFa even praised a Christian and presumably Sunni Palestinian for being “martyr defenders of Sayyeda Zainab.” Nevertheless, LAFa’s Khomeinist orientation became more transparent following the outburst of fighting in Iraq.

**Liwa Abu Fadl al-Abbas Tashkil Iraq (Abu Fadl al-Abbas, Iraq Formation) and Qaeda Quwet abu Fadl al-Abbas (Abu Fadl al-Abbas, Central Force; QQaFA)** These two LAFa-style organizations used the name’s cachet, fighters affiliated with its original Syrian base, and leadership within Iraq to create Iraq-based fighting groups. The former is led by Sheikh Qasim al-Tai and the latter is advised by AAH’s Sheikh Abu Kamil al-Lami and pro-Muqtada al-Sadr cleric Auws al-Khafaji.

**Liwa Assad Allah al-Ghalib (Brigade of the Conquerors for Allah; LAAG)** Abu Fatima al-Mousawi, another well-known commander within LAFa, was named LAAG commander in December 2013. The group, like many others, announced itself via Facebook posts. In a June 12, 2014, communique, LAAG blamed the crisis in Iraq on a conspiracy led by the “Great Satan,” referring to the United States. On July 1, the group announced that its command in Iraq had been transferred to Sayyed al-Hajj Safa al-Basarawi.<sup>16</sup>

**Liwa Dhulfiqar** This group, which announced its existence via Facebook in June 2013, was the second publicly announced Shiite Islamist militia fighting in Syria under the “defending Sayyeda Zainab” rubric. It was founded and by Fadhel Subhi (Abu Hajjar) and his deputy commander, Haydar al-Jabouri, both early leaders in (and Subhi a cofounder of) LAFa.

After initially playing down the ideological leanings of its members, the group took on a decidedly more Sadrist appearance following the deteriorating security situation in Iraq. The group's direct ties to Iran, meanwhile, were evidenced by a publicized visit Subhi made to Iran in 2013. Additionally, Jabouri told Iranian media that he was willing to die for Islam's "vanguard." Subhi himself was killed during heavy fighting in the southern city of Deraa in September 2013, after which Jabouri took control. Reflecting the group's broad geographic deployment in Syria in 2013–2014, Jabouri himself was reportedly photographed in the Golan Heights in the strategic town of al-Nabak and involved in other operations in and around Damascus.

Within Iraq, Liwa Dhulfiqar appears to have a base of support within the city of Diwaniyah, where in January 2014 a large public rally was held to celebrate the organization and Jabouri.<sup>17</sup> In keeping with the group's likely Sadrist splinter roots, other splinters formed during summer 2014 in Diwaniyah, including Qaeda Quwet Abu Fadl al-Abbas, which has commanders from AAH and fighters who have been involved with Liwa Dhulfiqar.<sup>18</sup> Prominent Liwa Dhulfiqar figures with links to QQAFA may include Salam Asafir.

Other ties established by the group appear to include those to Liwa al-Youm al-Mawud (Promised Day Brigade), which helps the group build cohesion, and Muqtada al-Sadr's Saraya al-Salam, created in June 2014, which has helped the group reaffirm its Sadrist connections. Saraya members have also posted material supportive of Liwa al-Youm al-Mawud.

In May 2013, reflecting the growing crisis in Iraq, the group changed its name to Liwa Dhulfiqar al-Mudafaan al-Muqadassat fi al-Iraq w al-Sham (Dhulfiqar Battalion, the Defender of Holy Sites in Iraq and the Levant).

**Liwa Fatemiyoun (Brigade of the Fatimids)** Established in late 2013, this brigade has since claimed to recruit more than just the sizable Afghan Shiite community, but materials released by its supporters emphasize the targeting of that constituency. Demonstrating links between the group and Tehran, funeral processions for fallen members have regularly included uniformed IRGC soldiers and posters featuring an Iranian government agency. Despite forming their own group, Afghan Shiite militants continue to coordinate and regularly fight side by side with other pro-regime Shiite groups.

**Liwa al-Imam al-Hussein (LIH)** Led by Sheikh Abu Karar al-Bahladi, LIH is an outgrowth of the Syrian-established LAFA network. But demonstrating the group's ideological breadth, fighters also swear an oath to Bashar al-Assad. Like Liwa Dhulfiqar, LIH has been heavily marketed as a Sadrist group. Further, ties to the Iraqi military have been apparent in army fatigues worn by figures such as commander Abu Dhima al-Amr.

**Liwa al-Youm al-Mawud (Promised Day Brigades)** An elite fighting group trained and equipped by Iran, Liwa al-Youm al-Mawud is the successor to Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army, with its commanders reportedly pulled from Liwa Dhulfiqar. The group's commitment to fighting in Syria, however, is perhaps not as solid as that of its peers: Sayyeda Zainab imagery is absent, and Muqtada al-Sadr himself has failed to back the Syrian Shiite jihad.

**Rapid Reaction Forces (RRF)** Known alternatively as Afwaj al-Kafil and officially created in June 2013, the RRF previously operated under names and affiliations associated with other Syria- and Iraq-based militias. Initially, the group's core members simply referred to themselves as part of LAFA, for which the RRF's future commander, Ahmed Hajji Saadi, had also commanded forces. Other groups initially tied to the RRF have included Liwa Dhulfiqar and LIF. The RRF has links to the Iraqi security establishment, with its name essentially echoing the Iraqi military's and ISF's own "emergency response units," which are manned by Muqtada al-Sadr supporters and particularly fighters loyal to the Badr Organization.

**Saraya al-Aqidah** Also known as Saraya al-Nasr al-Aqidah, this group has links to the Badr Organization and was reportedly deployed to Syria around February 2014. Following ISIS's summer 2014 advance in Iraq, Saraya al-Aqidah implied a far more publicly pro-Iranian stand by uploading imagery supportive of AAH, the Badr Organization, Kataib Hezbollah, and other Shiite proxy groups.

**Saraya al-Dafa al-Shabi (Popular Defense Brigades; SDS)** Introduced in spring 2014, Saraya al-Dafa al-Shabi is the product of a recruitment program created by Kataib Hezbollah in Iraq. The group is organized based on a popular committee type structure, and although describing itself as defensive in nature, other indications suggest that it has been used to support Iraqi military and police units.

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<sup>1</sup> Phillip Smyth, "Breaking Badr, The New Season: Confirmation of the Badr Organization's Involvement in Syria," Hizballah Cavalcade, *Jihadology* (blog), <http://jihadology.net/2013/08/12/hizballah-cavalcade-breaking-badr-the-new-season-confirmation-of-the-badr-organizations-involvement-in-syria/>.

<sup>2</sup> Omar al-Jaffal, "Iraqi Shiites Join Syria War," Al-Monitor, October 29, 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/10/iraqi-shiites-join-syrian-war.html>.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 7: Shiite Militia Geography.

<sup>4</sup> Phillip Smyth, "Liwa'a al-Imam al-Hasan al-Mujtaba: A Shia Militia Fighting in Rif Dimashq/Ghouta," *Jihadology* (blog), October 5, 2013, <http://jihadology.net/2013/10/05/hizballah-cavalcade-liwaa-al-imam-al-hasan-al-mujtaba-a-shia-militia-fighting-in-rif-dimashqghouta/>.

<sup>5</sup> Fadel al-Nashimi, "A'atir afat Iraqi Shi'ai yuqatl fi Suriyya," *an-Nahar*, April 5, 2014, <http://washin.st/1591rTi>.

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Images/Books/Smyth/Combined/A2-6ab.jpg> for photos (a) and (b).

<sup>7</sup> Phillip Smyth, "Iran's Losses in the '35th Province' (Syria), Part 1," *Jihadology* (blog), June 14, 2013, <http://jihadology.net/2013/06/14/hizballah-cavalcade-irans-losses-in-the-35th-province-syria-part-1/>.

<sup>8</sup> "Anshaqaq amin 'alam Kata'ib Hizballah al-Iraq w tashkiil Kata'ib 'Sayyid al-Shuhada,'" *al-Masalah*, April 14, 2013, <http://almasalah.com/ar/PrintNewspage.aspx?newsid=10285>; and "Anshiqaqat fi Hizballah al-Iraq w Tehran tasa' al-amlama sham-la," *Kitabat*, February 21, 2013, <http://washin.st/1IDZXz8>.

<sup>9</sup> United Press International, "Iraq: Return of Sheibani's Killer Squads," September 30, 2010, [http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/Special/2010/09/30/Iraq-Return-of-Sheibanis-killer-squads/UPI-36301285859253/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2010/09/30/Iraq-Return-of-Sheibanis-killer-squads/UPI-36301285859253/).

<sup>10</sup> "Tashiyya' 4 min 'anasar Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada fi muhafadha al-Basra junooobi al-Iraq qatalua birif Dimashq," al-Sharqiya TV, August 27, 2013, <http://washin.st/1CsixuE>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix 7: Shiite Militia Geography.

<sup>13</sup> YouTube video, 0:55, August 16, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JDwcZn2Ku1E>.

<sup>14</sup> See <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Images/Books/Smyth/A2-14-2.jpg> for photo.

<sup>15</sup> The statement, on [www.Kafel-Zinab.com](http://www.Kafel-Zinab.com), was viewed September 20, 2013, but has since been removed.

<sup>16</sup> See <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Images/Books/Smyth/A2-16-2.jpg> for photo.

<sup>17</sup> Liwa Dhulfiqar member Salam Asafir, post to Facebook page, January 29, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=259497054215496&set=pb.100004656092392.-2207520000.1408134797.&type=3&theater>.

<sup>18</sup> See <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Images/Books/Smyth/A2-18.png> for photo.