

Profile: Saraya al-Jihad

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Articles & Testimony

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Saraya al-Jihad is a low-profile, deeply IRGC-QF-linked militia with important roles in Iran-provided advanced conventional weapon storage and in the suppression of Iraqi moderates.

Name: Saraya al-Jihad (Jihad Brigades, or SJ).

Type of movement: Political, armed (fasail), and social group. Full spectrum of kinetic military operations, information operations (media activities and propaganda), and social operations. Information operations against U.S. and Iraqi government. Logistical support to kinetic military operations against the same. Domestic counter-moderate (protestor) operations and counter-U.S. operations.

History and objectives:

- Saraya al-Jihad (SJ) was [considered \(https://alkhanadeq.org.lb/post/187/%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF\)](https://alkhanadeq.org.lb/post/187/%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF) to be the military wing for Harakat al-Jihad wa al-Bina' (Jihad and Construction Movement). The Jihad and Construction Movement was created in 2008 by Hassan al-Sari, and was a member of the [National Wisdom Movement \(https://www.alhikmae.org/\)](https://www.alhikmae.org/) (Hikma), previously the [Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq \(ISCI\) \(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_Supreme_Council_of_Iraq\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_Supreme_Council_of_Iraq).
- SJ formed the PMF brigade 17 in 2014, operating mainly in western Iraq. In July 2014, SJ [announced \(https://www.pukmedia.com/AR/details/?Jimare=38472\)](https://www.pukmedia.com/AR/details/?Jimare=38472) that it had participated in the cleansing of the al-Muthanna area, which was ISIS' regional HQ in Latifiya, south of Baghdad.
- In 2015, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis specifically praised SJ, and honored the martyrs of SJ. Hassan al-Sari was standing next to him as he [delivered \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSsmxc3EgrE\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSsmxc3EgrE) those remarks.
- In June 2016, Asharq Al-Awsat reported that 80 Iranian military advisors [arrived \(https://24.ae/article/252712/Iraq-Arrival-of-80-Iranian-military-advisers-to-Fallujah\)](https://24.ae/article/252712/Iraq-Arrival-of-80-Iranian-military-advisers-to-Fallujah) in Iraq to support SJ and other factions in the battle for Fallujah.
- In 2017, SJ announced it will be [separating \(https://www.alsumaria.tv/news/politics/216789/%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%81%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89\)](https://www.alsumaria.tv/news/politics/216789/%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%81%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89) from the Jihad and Construction Movement and the ISCI. During the announcement, SJ pledged that they will maintain a close working relationship with these two entities despite the separation.
- In 2017, a split began to form in SJ, with its military commander Abu Kadhim al-Mayyahi removing as many of 1,600 troops from the main SJ bases in Anbar and relocating them in Karbala.



Saraya al-Jihad logo

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- In 2019, Hassan al-Sari announced SJ's official [disengagement](https://www.alsumaria.tv/news/politics/224614/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D9%81%D9%83-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B7-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1) (<https://www.alsumaria.tv/news/politics/224614/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D9%81%D9%83-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B7-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1>) from the Jihad and Construction political movement. SJ provided [election security](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLNdnrZhiI&t=303s) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLNdnrZhiI&t=303s>) services in al-Qaim, Anbar. SJ also provided Muharram security in neighboring Karbala.
- In the 2019 Tishreen protests, SJ [ran a secret prison](https://ctc.westpoint.edu/back-into-the-shadows-the-future-of-kataib-hezbollah-and-irans-other-proxies-in-iraq/) (<https://ctc.westpoint.edu/back-into-the-shadows-the-future-of-kataib-hezbollah-and-irans-other-proxies-in-iraq/>) on the south side of the Karrada Peninsula in Dora, Baghdad that belongs to Hassan al-Sari, in which youth protestors were illegally detained, tortured, and in some cases executed.
- In the anti-U.S. rocket and drone strikes since 2019, SJ has [maintained stores of Iran-provided advanced conventional munitions](https://ctc.westpoint.edu/back-into-the-shadows-the-future-of-kataib-hezbollah-and-irans-other-proxies-in-iraq/) (<https://ctc.westpoint.edu/back-into-the-shadows-the-future-of-kataib-hezbollah-and-irans-other-proxies-in-iraq/>) for the attacking militias, serving the role long played by Hassan al-Sari of militia logistician.
- In 2020, a high-ranking SJ leader, Hussein al-Asadi, [threatened](https://www.alahednews.com.lb/article.php?id=14836&cid=125) (<https://www.alahednews.com.lb/article.php?id=14836&cid=125>) (then) U.S. President Donald Trump and U.S. forces in Iraq (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Hussein al-Asadi, a high-ranking SJ leader, on the Asaab Ah al-Haq (AAH)-owned Al-Ahad TV threatening to retaliate against (then) U.S. President Donald J. Trump and U.S. forces in Iraq in the aftermath of the 2020 Soleimani-Mohandis airstrike in Baghdad. (January 5, 2020).

Chain of command:

- **Hassan al-Sari (Hassan Radhi Kazim Kattaa al-Sari):** Al-Sari is the commander of the Saraya al-Jihad forces and the ex-Secretary-General of the Jihad and Construction Movement. He was born in Maysan in 1961 and [fought](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XP0fky78Bx4) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XP0fky78Bx4>) Saddam forces from 1979 until his capture in 1988. Al-Sari then served as a key logistics expert for the IRGC Qods Force (IRGC-QF) since the early 2000s, working under IRGC-QF Brigadier General Ahmad Forouzandeh, who commanded the southern Iraq axis of IRGC-QF operations in Iraq since 2002. Hassan al-Sari has functioned since the early 2000s as the key southern Iraq logistician for the Special Groups and then [Kataib Hezbollah](https://www.alahednews.com.lb/node/16641) ([/node/16641](https://www.alahednews.com.lb/node/16641)) (KH), playing an important role in the Special Groups and Sheibani Network.
- **Sayyed Jabar al-Haydari.** On October 7, 2023, the prior commander of SJ (Abu Kadhim al-Mayyahi) was formally replaced by Sayyed Jabar al-Haydari. The former head of operations on the PMF brigade 17, al-Haydari is very close to IRGC-QF, KH, and [Badr](https://www.alahednews.com.lb/node/17003) ([/node/17003](https://www.alahednews.com.lb/node/17003)). Two of al-Haydari's brothers were killed and one wounded in service of the PMF.
- **IRGC-QF:** Saraya al-Jihad is built from a leadership cadre that was shaped by the IRGC in the 1980s, first as Badr and then ISCI. SJ leaders like Hassan al-Sari and Jabar al-Haydari have long-lasting ties to IRGC-QF. Many SJ leaders have lived and intermarried in Iran, hold property in Iran, have strong commitment to the Iranian ideological concept of wilayat al-faqih (guardianship of the Islamic jurist), and maintain [close relationships](https://raseef22.net/article/9145-iraqi-militias-identity-and-affiliation) (<https://raseef22.net/article/9145-iraqi-militias-identity-and-affiliation>) with the office of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. In Syria, the IRGC-QF directly pays the Liwa al-Sayyida al-Shuhada sub-group of SJ.
- **Popular Mobilization Forces.** The military aspects of Saraya al-Jihad, as PMF brigade 17, are formally under the command and control of the Iraqi prime minister and the PMF leadership, including [U.S.-designated human rights abuser PMF chairman Falah al-Fayyadh](https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1231) (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1231>) and [U.S.-designated terrorist PMF deputy chair Abdal Aziz al-Mohammadawi](https://2017-2021-translations.state.gov/2021/01/13/terrorist-designation-of-abd-al-aziz-malluh-mirjirash-al-muhammadawi/) (aka Abu Fadak). (<https://2017-2021-translations.state.gov/2021/01/13/terrorist-designation-of-abd-al-aziz-malluh-mirjirash-al-muhammadawi/>)

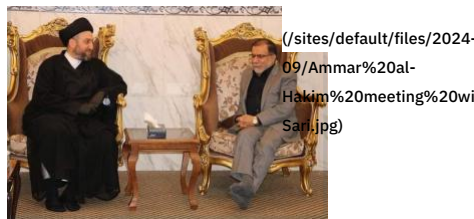


Figure 2: Ammar al-Hakim (left) meeting (https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=125971519085719&id=100478011635070) with Hassan al-Sari (right) in May 2020.

Affiliate relationships:

- **Badr Organization:** As noted, SJ leaders are closely related through their original membership of [Badr](https://www.alahednews.com.lb/node/17003) ([/node/17003](https://www.alahednews.com.lb/node/17003)) and ISCI.
- **Jihad and Construction Movement:** Although SJ officially split from Jihad and Construction Movement in 2019, in order to separate the PMF unit from direct involvement in politics, the two entities appear to still have strong ongoing ties. This is evident from footage of [Jihad and Construction Movement head](https://presidency.iq/EN/Details.aspx?id=4249) (<https://presidency.iq/EN/Details.aspx?id=4249>) Abu Kawthar al-Fayyadh [talking](https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=236983670499670) (<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=236983670499670>) to SJ in Karbala.
- **Saraya Ashura (PMF brigade 8):** Beginning in 2015, SJ [worked](https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=713006448826844) (<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=713006448826844>) closely with Ammar al-Hakim's Saraya Ashura on military operations in Fallujah and Anbar.
- **Other IRGC-QF-linked militias.** SJ has a clear and convincing record of cooperation within Anbar province (<https://ctc.westpoint.edu/irans-expanding-militia-army-iraq-new-special-groups/>) and inside Syria with Harakat al-Abdal (PMF brigade 39), [Liwa al-Tafuf](https://www.alahednews.com.lb/node/18615) ([/node/18615](https://www.alahednews.com.lb/node/18615)) (PMF brigade 39), and the less capable Liwa al-Muntadher (brigade 7), [Ansar Allah al-Awfiya](https://www.alahednews.com.lb/node/18506) ([/node/18506](https://www.alahednews.com.lb/node/18506)) (brigade 19), Saraya Ansar al-Aqeeda (brigade 28), Kataib Ansar al-Hujja (brigade 29), Quwwat al-Shahid al-Sadr al-Awwal (brigade 25), Quwwat al-Shahid al-Sadr (brigade 35), and Kataib al-Tayyar al-Risali (brigade 31).
- **Ammar al-Hakim:** The head of the Hikma National Movement has a working relationship with Hassan al-Sari and has met him on a number of [occasions](https://www.alsumaria.tv/news/103210/alsumaria-news/ar) (<https://www.alsumaria.tv/news/103210/alsumaria-news/ar>). (Figure 2).

Subordinate relationships:

- SJ has frontline camps in Akashat and in Anbar's upper Euphrates River Valley.

- SJ also controls ([incorporation](https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=d4927bc780c8916e&sca_upv=1&rlz=1C1JSBI_enUS1115US1115&sxsrf=ADLYWILqNmQKxA0blQ0PAMEdGCS-uyWdUg:1726003102968&q=%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7+%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF+%D9%81%D9%8A+%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%x2jrJh7Dt5wV71ckxEPe_0GQyc61_Jkg5ZI9z4zNW20fWd2tUn_HrTAULuFP7u75dytEkiWC15l7moHi_nYsx6bYU7gYxjHncfuRcjwgxBvi-2dbm91Px5JKg1Jotj8vdUSEMemJ8XA6RB42LqHkYBEFrl5n20w&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiak9XOprmiAxUgElkFHT8OLSc4FBDSIAI6BAgOEAE&biw=1920&bih=911&dpr=1#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:al-Quds camp in Kumayt (near Amarah, in al-Sari's native Maysan), a training base for both PMF troops and foreign jihadists from Bahrain and other Gulf States. The base is a storage point for Iran-provided advanced conventional munitions.)
• Saraya al-Jihad's <a href=) (<http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep17566.7>) of Liwa al-Sayyida al-Shuhada, SJ's Syria-based group, works under the directives of the IRGC-QF.
- SJ has a very limited media presence: one active Telegram channel with under 400 followers, an official Facebook page with 2,600 followers, plus a dedicated Youtube channel with 239 subscribers and a Youtube channel dedicated to their media wing, with videos that appear to be of a higher quality and around 1,700 followers.

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