

Profile: Saraya Talia al-Khurasani

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Brief Analysis

Part of a series: [Militia Spotlight: Profiles \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight-profiles\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight-profiles)

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A longstanding partner to IRGC-QF and Lebanese Hezbollah, STK is one of the most notorious Iraqi militias in terms of its involvement in human rights abuses and rampant criminality.

Name: *Saraya Talia al-Khurasani* (Khorasani Vanguard Companies, or STK). Named after Abu Muslim al-Khorasani, a medieval Persian general who led the Abbasid Revolution that toppled the Umayyad Caliphate, leading to the establishment of the Abbasid Caliphate.

Type of movement: Armed group (fasail) and political/social organization. Focuses on social and economic operations but has extensively [facilitated \(https://www.arabnews.com/node/2287846\)](https://www.arabnews.com/node/2287846) kinetic military operations against U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria as well. Has also undertaken domestic counter-political/social moderate operations and threatened to carry out counter-Israel operations abroad. Has targeted human rights and freedom of expression among Iraqis.

History:

- The anti-Saddam resistance group, originally [established \(https://alkhanadeq.org.lb/post.php?id=619\)](https://alkhanadeq.org.lb/post.php?id=619) in 1986 as the "al-Karrar Brigade," was led by Yassin al-Musawi under the aegis of Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, a now deceased Shia Iraqi theologian who led the Iran-formed Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq. With Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps – Qods Force (IRGC-QF) backing, the group [opposed \(https://jihadology.net/2013/10/29/hizballah-cavalcade-sariyya-al-talia-al-khurasani-a-new-combat-tested-shia-militia-in-syria/\)](https://jihadology.net/2013/10/29/hizballah-cavalcade-sariyya-al-talia-al-khurasani-a-new-combat-tested-shia-militia-in-syria/) the Baathist regime, engaging in guerrilla warfare within the southern marshes, especially in the Chibayish and al-Nasiriyah marshes in Dhi Qar and Basra. The guerrilla group was evicted into Iran (and reportedly to parts of the Najaf and Karbala deserts) after the draining of Iraq's marshes, and rebranded in 1995 as the "Islamic Vanguard Party (Hezb al-Talia al-Islamiyah)"
- In 2004, the Islamic Vanguard Party officially [submitted \(https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep13627.6?seq=2#metadata_info_tab_contents\)](https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep13627.6?seq=2#metadata_info_tab_contents) its credentials to the new Iraqi parliament as an official political party and participated in the first post-Saddam parliamentary election in January 2005 under the name of Ahabab Nasrallah.



Saraya Talia al-Khurasani (STK) logo



(/sites/default/files/2024-09/islamic%20vanguard%20party%20logo.jpg)

Figure 1: Islamic Vanguard Party logo.

- In 2013, the party **established** (<https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/2024/2/22/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86>) its official organized militia, Saraya Talia al-Khorasani (STK), with extensive IRGC-QF help under the leadership of Hamid Taqavi, an Iranian-Arab brigadier-general in the IRGC known as Abu Miriam. At the time of the **establishment** (<https://www.alshiraa.com/posts/mn-fsayl-alhshd-alaaraky-alshraaa-27-kanon-althany-2024-755>), STK had a reported three thousand personnel, though the actual total is likely much lower.
- In the fall of 2013, STK forces began **deploying** (<https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2016-11-24-syria-iraq-struggle-for-power-intertwined-futures-al-khoei.pdf>) to Syria to join ranks with other Iraqi Shia militias to assist the Assad regime and protect the Shia shrines in Damascus, particularly the Sayyidah Zainab Shrine. In August of 2013, STK was **involved** (https://orient-news.net/ar/news_show/7109) in massacres against Syrian civilians in Damascus' countryside.
- After the ISIS seizure of Mosul, STK were one of the factions that exploited Ali Sistani's defensive fatwa to form a Popular Mobilization Force (PMF) unit, Saraya Talia al-Khorasani (PMF Brigade 18). Underlining its strong IRGC-QF support, STK was able to register almost 100% of its 3,200 Iraqi government-paid billets immediately in 2014-2015, while many PMF units could only get part of their manpower registered.
- STK took part in **counter-ISIS battles** (<https://aawsat.com/home/article/632431/%C2%AB%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%C2%BB-%D8%AA%D8%A3%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D9%88%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A>) in Jurf al-Sakhar, other Baghdad Belts, Diyala, and Tikrit. An ISIS sniper **killed Hamid Taqavi** (<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2017/3/31/%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%B8%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84-%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D9%85%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%A7>) in Samarra in September 2014, resulting in Iraqis (Ali al-Yasiri with Hamid al-Jazaeri) leading the organization. In 2015, Human Rights Watch **published** (<https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/09/20/ruinous-aftermath/militias-abuses-following-iraqs-recapture-tikrit>) a report in which they listed STK's humanitarian violations in Iraq as well as Syrian-based crimes. Within Iraq, STK was viewed (even within the PMF) as a particularly **problematic and criminally-focused PMF unit**. (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/sites/default/files/pdf/PolicyFocus163-KnightsMalikTamimi-v3%281%29.pdf>)
- In 2019-2020, STK and its leaders also led the **mass killing of unarmed Iraqi protestors** (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-protests-iran-sniperexclusive/exclusive-iran-backed-militias-deployed-snipers-in-iraq-protests-sourcesidUSKBN1WW0B1/>). After this, the group lowered its profile in Iraq and seemed to focus its visible activities in Syria. **On-the-ground tactical leadership in Baghdad was provided by** (<https://ctc.westpoint.edu/soleimani-dead-road-ahead-iranian-backed-militias-iraq/>) Hamid al-Jazaeri, while Ali al-Yasiri held down protests in southern Baghdad.

Chain of command:

- **Ali al-Yasiri:** The group's secretary-general, an Iran-backed anti-Saddam guerrilla fighter and a wala'i loyalist of Ali Khamenei. He **models** (<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/profiles-irans-militia-allies-iraq>) his leadership after Hamid Taghavi whom he described as having a "magical" effect on people. Ali al-Yasiri was briefly arrested in December 2020 along with Hamid al-Jazaeri after STK fighters attacked and killed protesters in Iraq.
- **Hamid al-Jazaeri:** One of the **founders** (<https://ctc.westpoint.edu/soleimani-dead-road-ahead-iranian-backed-militias-iraq/>) of STK, al-Jazaeri is also an Iran-backed anti-Saddam guerrilla fighter. During the 2019-2020 Iraqi protests, al-Jazaeri played a prominent, often publicly broadcast, role in suppressing protests in Iraq. The Iraqi government **arrested** (<https://arabi21.com/story/1322050/%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82>) Jazaeri briefly for military units without prior approval from the Joint Operations Command. The PMF Security Directorate also disciplined Jazaeri for acting without obtaining official approvals.



Figure 2: Saraya Talia al-Khurasani (STK) leaders Ali al-Yasiri (left) and Hamid al-Jazaeri (right) with Qassem Soleimani (center).

(/sites/default/files/2024-09/Saraya%20Talia%20al-Khurasani%20%28STK%29%20leaders%20with%20Qassem%

- IRGC-QF:** Within Syria, STK has been funded (<https://aawsat.com/home/article/632431/%C2%AB%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%C2%BB-%D8%AA%D8%A3%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D9%88%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A>) and equipped by Iran since 2013, receiving (<https://www.zamanarabic.com/2015/03/14/%d8%a5%d9%8a%d8%b1%d8%a7%d9%86-%d8%aa%d8%a4%d8%b3%d8%b3-%d8%b3%d8%b1%d8%a7%d9%8a%d8%a7-%d8%b7%d9%84%d9%8a%d8%b9%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ae%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%b3%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%8a-%d9%84%d9%85%d9%88/>) both financial support and medium to heavy weaponry.
- Lebanese Hezbollah:** According to Hisham al-Hashemi, the Iraqi paramilitary expert murdered by militias in June 2021, Yasiri models his leadership style (<https://arabi21.com/story/1322050/%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82>) on Lebanese Hezbollah commander Hassan Nasrallah, and it is notable that the movement's first post-2003 branch in Iraq was dedicated in Nasrallah's name (Ahhab Nasrallah). Within Syria, Lebanese Hezbollah leaders frequently met (<https://www.alquds.co.uk/%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AE-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9/>) in Syria and the meetings were held in al-Hujaira, al-Baramkeh, al-Muhajireen, and Sayyida Zainab in Damascus. Cooperation between STK and Lebanese Hezbollah is especially strong now in Qamishli, where Lebanese Hezbollah pays STK troops directly.

Affiliate relationships:

- PMF militias in Iraq:** Since 2019, STK operates (<https://ctc.westpoint.edu/irans-expanding-militia-army-iraq-new-special-groups/>) along the critical Iraqi-Syrian border region between the Walid border crossing and Al-Qaim district, an area vital for the Baghdad-Damascus highway crossings. In this area, STK works closely with Ansar Allah al-Awfiya (PMF Brigade 19) and Liwa al-Tafuf (PMF Brigade 13). STK in particular is reported, to have shared a training camp (<https://justpaste.it/tafufcamp18brigademay>) with Liwa al-Tafuf as recently as 2019. STK leaders have attended meetings of anti-U.S. militants in Iraq convened by Shibl al-Zaidi, the U.S.-designated (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm546>) leader Kataib al-Imam Ali (KIA, PMF Brigade 40) (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-kataib-al-imam-ali>).
- PMF militias in Syria:** In Syria, STK has also operated alongside U.S.-designated terrorist groups Kataib Hezbollah (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-kataib-hezbollah>) (PMF Brigades 45, 46, 47), Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-kataib-sayyid-al-shuhada>) (PMF Brigade 14), and Harakat al-Nujaba (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-harakat-hezbollah-al-nujaba>) (PMF Brigade 12), plus the non-designated Kataib Jund al-Imam (PMF Brigade 6).
- Syria's National Defense Forces (NDF):** The NDF have become deeply intertwined (<https://www.alquds.co.uk/%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AE-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9/>) with STK throughout Syria as a whole but within Eastern Syria in particular. In al-Hasakah Governorate, the IRGC and Lebanese Hezbollah have strategically deployed the STK, leveraging local NDF leaders like Abdul Qader Hammou and Bassam al-Arsan to expand its influence.

Subordinate relationships:

- STK controls two training camps in Iraq, in Karbala and Anbar, the latter called the "Sheikh Haji Hamid Taqavi Training Center." (<http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/09/iraqi-shiite-militia-promotes-train->) named after Hamid Taqavi.
- STK has established a headquarters within Hasakah's security square in Qamishli, Syria.
- STK's social media presence is small with no prominent dedicated accounts. STK has an official Facebook group with a small following. There is also another very small Facebook group with a "STK South Office" designation.
- Famous Iraqi singer and songwriter Mahdi Al-Aboudi occasionally produces pro-STK songs that promote the militia's narrative. STK is sometimes praised by the Al-Taliah Satellite channel and the Nour al-Wilaya Foundation. STK has two official but inactive Telegram channels with practically no followers.



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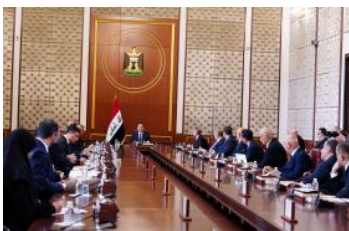
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