

Qais in Tehran, Prominently Seated Behind Khamenei

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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)

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Qais al-Khazali, the leader of Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), was strategically positioned in the front row, a place of significant honor in Muslim tradition, directly behind Khamenei.

On the anniversary of October 7, Qais al-Khazali, the leader of [Asaib Ahl al-Haq \(/node/16715\)](/node/16715) (AAH), delivered a recorded televised speech in which he declared his readiness to follow in the footsteps of the 'axis of resistance' leaders killed by Israel and to become a 'martyr' in the same cause. Khazali also reaffirmed his unwavering loyalty to Ali Khamenei, vowing to fight until final victory is achieved. In a direct message to Imam Mahdi, Khazali proclaimed: "We pledge to you, my master and lord, our obedience to you and to your deputy, the Guardian of the Muslims, Sayyid Khamenei, in obedience and continued sacrifice of wealth and lives, and that we will be fighting soldiers until the complete victory is achieved through the preparation for your sacred appearance, so that the earth may be filled with justice and fairness after the Zionists have filled it with oppression and injustice." (Figure 1).



This speech comes just days after Khazali received special treatment from [Khamenei's office](/sites/default/files/2024-10/2.jpeg) during his attendance at the Friday Prayers in Iran. On October 4, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei [led Friday prayers in Tehran \(https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-leader-khamenei-says-iran-will-not-delay-nor-rush-confront-israel-2024-10-04/\)](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-leader-khamenei-says-iran-will-not-delay-nor-rush-confront-israel-2024-10-04/), marking his first Friday sermon in nearly five years. In a notable and rare occurrence, Qais al-Khazali, was strategically positioned in the front row, a place of significant honor in Muslim tradition, directly behind Khamenei.

In the tradition of the Islamic Republic, when the Supreme Leader leads Friday prayers, the first row is typically reserved for the highest-ranking military and civilian officials. On this occasion, Khazali was positioned next to senior Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) figures, including Brig. Gen. Mohammad

Figure 1: Khazali televised speech, October 7, 2024.

Shirazi, head of the Supreme Leader's military office; Brig. Gen. Ahmad Vahidi, former commander of the IRGC-Quds Force; and Commodore Ali Fadavi, deputy commander-in-chief of the IRGC (Figure 2).

It is difficult to view this placement as coincidental, especially considering that the Islamic Republic was well aware the world would be watching this particular Friday prayer.

Similarly, in May 2024, Khazali was given a prominent position near Khamenei



Figure 2: Friday Prayers led by Khamenei on October 4, 2024. 1. Khazali, 2. Shirazi, 3. Vahidi, 4. Fadavi.

(<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/where-iraqis-landed-supreme-leaders-seating-plan>) during a commemoration ceremony held for the late President Ebrahim Raisi, after the latter died in a helicopter crash.

This positioning is a clear indication of the increasing importance the Islamic Republic places on Qais al-Khazali and his role within their broader regional strategy. It is rare for any foreign figure to be placed in the first row during Friday prayers led by Khamenei. A review of those present in this row during last Friday prayers highlights its significance, including figures such as President Masoud Pezeshkian, Speaker Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf, Chief Justice Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Eje'i, Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi, Commander-in-Chief of Iran's Army and Brig. Gen. Ahmad Reza Radan, head of Iran's Law Enforcement Command.

Despite attempts by other Iraqi militias to downplay AAH's role within the *muqawama* (resistance) framework, Khazali's growing prominence is hard to ignore. In November 2023, Ahmad Mohsen Faraj al-Hamidawi (Abu Hussein), the secretary-general of Kataib Hezbollah (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-kataib-hezbollah>) (KH), issued a statement (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/militia-hair-pulling-over-who-are-truest-muqawama>) thanking various militias that had participated in anti-U.S. operations, notably leaving out AAH.

This omission led to frustration within AAH, which increasingly needed to placate its own militant hardliners. Yet here is another example of Iran rewarding AAH and its leader, for all to see, including AAH hardliners and Iran's other Iraqi proxies. The reason may be that AAH plays an important role in the *muqawama* that Iran fully supports - that of an outwardly non-kinetic movement that plays the leading role in state capture by Iran-backed militias. (For context, another "soft war" practitioner - Kataib Hezbollah ideologue Hashem al-Haidari, head of Ahd Allah ([/node/16734](#)) - was the other Iraqi *muqawama* official positioned in a prominent place, but not in the first row.)

An alternate theory might be that, given the recent setbacks faced by Iran's key militias, Hamas and Hezbollah, AAH may be assigned more significant kinetic roles. While AAH has so far provided logistical support to the Quds Force in orchestrating anti-U.S. and anti-Israeli strikes conducted by other Iraqi militias, the question remains: will AAH begin to take part directly in kinetic operations moving forward? ❖

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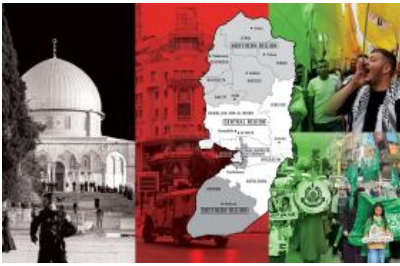
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