

What Basrawi Politican is Behind Kataib al-Mustafa?

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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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A strange little militia, Kataib al-Mustafa, announced itself to great fanfare in Basra. Judging by its media reception, it has an important mystery backer.

On September 29, 2024, a little-known Iraqi armed group called Kataib al-Mustafa (KM) held a press conference in Basra. Nine masked men entered what seemed to be a mosque, and the speaker read out a poorly-written statement, declaring their readiness to “break the backbone of the Zionists.” He continued: “you sons of Marhab (the Jews) You will not see peace, because our long-range missiles will reach the Zionists' burrows. The enemy will be surprised with [our] biological capabilities and advanced weaponry such as missiles and drones type HD, RQ, 4U and locally manufactured long-range [missiles] type Muhandis and Qasem” He added “we affirm that the American evil bases in the region are under the range of our missiles...” (Figure 1).



Figure 1: KM's press conference, September 29, 2024.

Observations

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The posture, equipment and attire of the militants resembled that of Iraqi tribal fighters.

Unlike similar groups, KM conducted their press conference in a well-lit religious building rather than a dark, unspecified location.

KM successfully convinced at least seven Iraqi media outlets to attend their press conference, including [al-Nujaba SatelliteTV \(/node/16912\)](#) belonging to [Harakat al-Nujaba \(/node/16716\)](#); iNEWS affiliated with [Kataib Sayed al-Shuhada \(/node/16731\)](#);

[al-Ghadeer TV of the Badr Organization \(/node/17003\)](#); [al-Jonoub TV run by Saraya al-Jihad \(/node/18963\)](#); and [al-Rabiaa TV](#) which is known to be close to Iran-backed militias. This exposure led to their conference being viewed around 850,000 times (as of September 30) only on al-Rabiaa TV's YouTube channel and X account.

Who is behind KM?

The name Kataib al-Mustafa first appeared in June 2023. Their first announcement, like the September 29, 2024 statement, was poorly-written and used highly-charged language to threaten the U.S. (Figure 2). Based on an analysis of KM's Telegram channel, the key figures behind KM are Shubar al-Musawi and Saif al-Maryani al-Musawi, both probably Basrawis.



Figure 2: KM's first post, June 21, 2023.

Saif al-Maryani held a press conference on June 14, 2024, denouncing the Haditha-Aqaba pipeline project, which is intended to channel Iraqi oil to Jordan (i.e., to pro-U.S. Jordan, instead of the militias' preferred outlet, Syria). In the social media post which published his presser, he was introduced as “one of the heroes of Kataib al-Mustafa in Basra.” (Figure 3)



The voice, writing style, and delivery in the September 29, 2024 and June 14, 2024 pressers are strikingly similar, indicating that Saif al-Maryani likely read both messages, threatening to attack Israel and U.S. bases. KM however did not post this September 29 presser on their own Telegram channel, probably to conceal the link between Saif al-Maryani (whose messages were reposted on the Telegram channel) and the threats against Israel and the United States.

In the June 14, 2024 presser, Saif also managed to attract a large number of Iraqi satellite TV channels. This suggests that, while his group may not be a real militia with actual military capabilities, Saif has effectively mastered the art of media engagement, gaining significant coverage for his group despite its limited status. KM looks to be a propaganda-only effort, but for what purpose and to whose benefit remains unclear. The gathering-together of so many prominent television stations to cover the underwhelming event in Basra strongly suggests the group has backing from a major Basra politician. ❖

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