

Muqawama Mob Attacks Saudi's MBC Channel in Baghdad

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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)

or see Part 1: [How to Use Militia Spotlight \(/policy-analysis/how-use-militia-spotlight\)](#)

Provocative coverage of terrorist leader deaths to Gulf audiences has resulted in mob violence by Kataib Hezbollah against the network's Baghdad offices.



Figure 1: MBC lauds the deaths of Iran-backed terrorists. October 19, 2024

On October 19, the Saudi state-funded satellite TV channel MBC put out in its “In A Week” program, including a segment with the title “Millennium of Salvation from Terrorists,” showing Iranian-backed militants killed by Israel and the U.S. In front of imagery of Hasan Nasrallah, Ismael Hania, Yahya al-Sinwar, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, and others, the program stated: “The world has rid itself in this millennium of many terrorist figures who terrorized the world and shed blood.” (Figure 1)

Though broadcast from outside Iraq and intended for broader Arab audiences, the daring content quickly captured the attention of the Iraqi *muqawama* media. Calls were made on Telegram accounts to attack MBC headquarters in Baghdad. Most notably [Sabereen News \(/node/16673\)](#)

Sabereen news - صابرين نيوز
يا شباب الاسلام ويا فتية الجهاد يا ابناء قاسم و
قناة MBC السعودية تهاجم وتسيء
لقادتنا الشهداء الابرار وتصفهم بالارهابيين
يا ابناء علي يا غياري العراق يا ابناء
المرجعية والشهداء لاتسمحوا لهذه
القنوات الصهيونية بالتناول على شهدائنا
وعلى شاشاتكم

Figure 2: Sabereen News encouraging the support base to attack MBC

encouraged *muqawama* support base to attack the channel. (Figure 2) Although Iraqi security forces had advanced notice to prepare, and despite the protest being small in size, *muqawama* militants were able to force entry and set fire to the building. Protesters carried [Kataib Hezbollah \(/node/16641\)](#) (KH) and Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) flags during their protest.

Official Saudi and Iraqi efforts to placate militias

عاجل

مجلس المفوضين بهيئة
الإعلام والاتصالات يقرر إلغاء
رخصة قناة MBC الفضائية ويوجه
الجهاز التنفيذي بالهيئة
بإيقافها عن العمل في العراق

 www.imn.iq

الإخبارية

شبكة الإعلام العراقي

Figure 3: IMN reporting the decision of CMC to cancel MBC license.

The Saudi General Authority for Media Regulations put out a statement on October 19, stating: “The General

Authority for Media Regulation refers officials of one of the television channels for investigation due to a report that violated regulations. The General Authority for Media Regulation has referred officials from a television channel for investigation due to a news report that breached the media policies and regulations of the Kingdom, to complete the necessary legal procedures regarding this violation. The Authority confirms that it continues to monitor the compliance of media outlets with the Kingdom's regulations and content guidelines and will not hesitate to enforce the law against any violations.”

In Iraq, the government also disciplined MBC. The state-run Iraqi Media Network reported “the Board of Commissioners of the Communications and Media Commission (/node/17986) (CMC) decided to cancel the license of MBC satellite channel and directs the executive body of the commission to stop its operations in Iraq.” (Figure 3) Although decisions like these are usually published through documents or official statements by the commission, no image of such document was released nor even posted on CMC's social media accounts. Suggesting that the move was an unofficial statement intended to save anger, as of the time of writing, MBC Iraq is still active and airs its programs.



مصطفى جبار سند
@m_j_sanad

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قناة MBC IRAQ المدعومة حكومياً، الموضوع لا ينتهي
بالتكسير أو الحرق، لا مكان لكم في العراق، وسيتم
العمل على إلغاء رخصتكم وأسم العراق لا يتشرف
بالعملاء .

Figure 4: Attention-seeking MP Mustafa Sanad's tweet threatening Saudi TV network, MBC

Political statements followed MBC’s program, but most notably was from KH-leaning MP Mustafa Sanad, who tweeted: “MBC Iraq, which is government-supported: the issue does not end with breaking or burning. You have no place in Iraq, and work will proceed to cancel your license. The name of Iraq does not honor traitors.” (Figure 4)

MBC’s prior problems in Iraq

Although the program was aired on the main MBC channel, Mustafa Sanad linked the MBC Iraq channel to the event. MBC Iraq was launched in 2019 with focus on influencing the Iraqi public with Iraqi shows and programs to compete with the local channels. Since their launch, MBC Iraq has faced significant challenges, with the *muqawama* accusing and intimidating the channel for allegedly portraying the southern Shiite population as less educated.



Figure 5: Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis on MBC as the mastermind of the attack on the Iraqi embassy in Lebanon in 1981

On May 2020, MBC Iraq aired a program showing the life of the famous Arab poet Nazar Qabani, who lost his wife during an Iran-backed terrorist attack on the Iraqi Embassy in Lebanon in 1981. MBC presented Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis as the terrorist who carried out the attack. (Figure 5) The program triggered the *muqawama* protest, which attacked and forced entry to MBC. Following that 2020 event, MBC suspended its operation and closed its office in Baghdad for four months.

Muqawama ability to threaten international targets in Baghdad

Iraq's Iran-backed militia and terrorist groups are able to access many international targets in Iraq -- foreign citizens, media, business-people and investments - that Iran or Lebanese Hezbollah may not want to directly or openly attack, and that the Houthis have limited direct access to. Iraq thus plays a potentially valuable role as a place where foreign equities are still present and can be threatened - loosely held hostage , in effect, by the broader Iran Threat Network.



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