

Atabat Leader from al-Muthanna Takes on Iran-Backed Militia Interests

by [Ameer al-Kaabi \(/experts/ameer-al-kaabi\)](#), [Michael Knights \(/experts/michael-knights\)](#)

Jul 16, 2024

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[Ameer al-Kaabi \(/experts/ameer-al-kaabi\)](#)

Ameer al-Kaabi is an Iraqi analyst with a decade of experience examining the country's security and political events. He specializes in intra-Shia political affairs and the activities of Iran-backed militias.



[Michael Knights \(/experts/michael-knights\)](#)

Michael Knights is the Jill and Jay Bernstein Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute and cofounder of the Militia Spotlight platform, which offers in-depth analysis of developments related to Iran-backed militias.

Brief Analysis

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

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

The commander of Iraq's influential "shrine militias" signaled that the religious establishment is still willing to push back against the Coordination Framework and Tehran's other "resistance" partners.

Recent months have seen more public discord between different arms of the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq's al-Muthanna province, the location of large land grants to the PMF's [Muhandis General Company \(/node/18124\)](#). The focus of the discord has been Hamid al-Yasiri, head of Ansar al-Marjaiya (the PMF's 44th Brigade) and a senior commander in the Atabat—the so-called "shrine militias" that take direction from Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and the Ministry of Defense, not the PMF Commission.



Figure 1: Hamid al-Yasiri meeting with Judge Haidar Hanoun, the Badr-controlled head of the Federal Commission of Integrity in Baghdad, June 2024.

Yasiri Pushes Back on New Local Council

Last month, Yasiri mobilized supporters to seek the removal of al-Muthanna's governor and provincial council on allegations of corruption, lobbying Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani to appoint a military governor in their place. Yasiri is a very well-connected religious-military leader, so his call for action against the newly formed local government gained him an audience with Sudani on June 9. Sudani made several promises to Yasiri, including that he would allocate funds to the province to be spent by a committee within the prime minister's office, so that neither the governor nor the council could access them. While Yasiri was in Baghdad, he met with several officials, including Hossein Moanes, leader of the U.S.-designated terrorist movement [Kataib Hezbollah \(/node/16641\)](#)'s political front, the [Hoquq Movement \(/node/18667\)](#).

Yasiri seems to have gotten his way. Upon his return to al-Muthanna, he met with the head of the Iraqi [Commission of Integrity \(/node/18274\)](#), run by the Badr Organization (Figure 1). Judicial summons were then issued against various provincial officials, including the governor's assistant.

Reawakened Spat Between Yasiri and Khazali

A new front then opened on July 9, 2024 between Yasiri and the Iran-backed *muqawama* when a television anchor on Djila TV asked Yasiri about an old feud involving Qais al-Khazali, a U.S.-designated terrorist and head of the group [Asaib Ahl al-Haq \(/node/16715\)](#) (AAH). The conversation related to August 13, 2021 accusations made by Yasiri in Rumaytha, Muthanna, that the *muqawama* had killed peaceful demonstrators in the name of Shia Islam. Alluding to Iran, Yasiri accused those militias of treason and receiving their orders from abroad, and predicted that Iraq's Supreme Leader would one day order Yasiri's killing.

At the time, on August 15, 2021, U.S.-designated terrorist Qais al-Khazali (head of the terrorist group [Asaib Ahl al-Haq \(/node/16715\)](#) (AAH) made an angry response in which he accused Yasiri of misinterpreting religious teachings related to Imam Hussein bin Ali. On January 17 2022, Yasiri's resident in Rumaytha was raked with bullets, albeit without causing injury.

When asked about the disagreement with Qais al-Khazali, Yasiri did not hold back from reigniting the feud: "I tell Qais al-Khazali that you have ideological connections with the guardian of the jurist (Iranian supreme leader), and we don't have a problem with that, but designing political decisions with external enforcement I consider it treason; I consider it treason. Whatever is forced politically on the Iraqi politicians from abroad, I consider treason." (Figure 2)

Yasiri furthermore underlined the difference between the Iran-backed Coordination Framework and both the Atabat and the Sadrist movement of Moqtada al-Sadr. "The commonality between us and the Sadrists," he noted, "is that the Sadrist movement is a national movement that believes in running the country within the borders. The nationalist things I call for and not listening to what comes from abroad bring us very close to the brothers in the Sadrist movement."

The interview attracted widespread attention since no one nowadays risks addressing Khazali directly in the media in this way, not even Moqtada al-Sadr. Yasiri is now throwing down challenges to multiple poles within the Coordination Framework – to Qais al-Khazali and AAH (who control the deputy governorship of al-Muthanna via Ahmad Daryul), to KH and the Muhandis General Company projects in Muthanna, and to Muthanna governor and Coordination Framework (Fadhila) politician Muhannad al-Itab. Charismatic and apparently fearless, and risking his life to speak out against the militias, Yasiri's fate is worth watching closely. ❖



Figure 2: Hamid al-Yasiri attacking Khazali in July 2024.

PART OF A SERIES

Militia Spotlight (/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight)

How to Use Militia Spotlight

(/policy-analysis/how-use-militia-spotlight)



Akram Kaabi Shown Pretending to Assemble a Drone Fired at Israel

(/policy-analysis/akram-kaabi-shown-pretending-assemble-drone-fired-israel)



Atabat Leader from al-Muthanna Takes on Iran-Backed Militia Interests

(/policy-analysis/atabat-leader-al-muthanna-takes-iran-backed-militia-interests)

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Israel and the ICJ: Comparing International Court Cases During the Gaza War

Jul 18, 2024

Alexander Loengarov

(/policy-analysis/israel-and-icj-comparing-international-court-cases-during-gaza-war)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Iran's Evolving Strategy in Eastern Syria

Jul 18, 2024

Omar Abu Layla

(/policy-analysis/irans-evolving-strategy-eastern-syria)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Akram Kaabi Shown Pretending to Assemble a Drone Fired at Israel

Jul 17, 2024

Michael Knights

(/policy-analysis/akram-kaabi-shown-pretending-assemble-drone-fired-israel)

TOPICS

Military & Security (/policy-analysis/military-security)

Terrorism (/policy-analysis/terrorism)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Iran (/policy-
analysis/iran)

Iraq (/policy-
analysis/iraq)