



The Movement of the Noble Ones (harakat al-nujaba)

Portrait of an Iraqi Shi'ite militia, operated in Iraq and Syria
by Iran and intended for future "strategic missions"

December 20, 2017

Overview *

- ▶ **The Movement of the Noble Ones** (*harakat al-nujaba*) [henceforth "the Noble Ones"] is an Iraqi Shi'ite militia **established in 2013 by Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi**. The sheikh had close relations with Iran during his extensive guerrilla attacks against the American forces when they were in Iraq. Ostensibly the Noble Ones are subordinate to the "popular mobilization," an umbrella organization of Shi'ite militias in Iraq, most of which are sponsored by Iran.
- ▶ However, in reality the **Noble Ones are handled by the Iranian Qods Force, from which, in ITIC assessment, it receives preferential treatment in the allotment of resources. The Noble Ones are also supported by Hezbollah**, with which Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi has had close relations for many years. Iranian and Hezbollah support turned the Noble Ones into one of the **most powerful and important Shi'ite militias in Iraq**.
- ▶ **The Noble Ones have three brigades totaling about 9,000 fighters, two deployed in Iraq and one in Syria**. Noble Ones' forces support the Syrian army in fighting the rebel organizations and ISIS in the regions of Aleppo, Damascus and Deir al-Zor. The Noble Ones supported the Iraqi army in fighting ISIS, including expelling ISIS operatives from **the border region between Iraq and Syria** (where Iran has long-term strategic aspirations).
- ▶ The Noble Ones have **an extensive media network (TV channel, website, social networks) serving Iran's propaganda agenda**. It is larger and of higher quality than the media networks of the other Iraqi Shi'ite militias. That is another indication of **the preferential treatment and resources the Iranian regime and Qods Force give the Noble Ones**.

*The full version is being translated into English and will shortly be available on our website.



Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi, secretary general of the Party of the Noble Ones (right) with Qasem Soleimani, commander of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps' Qods Force (Movement of the Noble Ones website, April 12, 2015).

Based on ITIC information, in return for preferential treatment, **in the future the Noble Ones will carry out "strategic missions" for Iran**, for example, securing the Iraqi-Syrian border and securing the Iraqi section of the supply route from Baghdad to Damascus. It is also possible that the **Iranians intend to involve the Noble Ones in the conflict with Israel, and to that end established the "Golan Liberation Brigade."**

► On March 8, 2017, Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi announced the establishment of **the Golan Liberation Brigade**. He stated that Noble Ones' forces in Syria would be prepared, **alongside the Syrian army, to liberate the Golan Heights when the campaign against terrorism ended**. On November 24, 2017, Sheikh al-Kaabi was interviewed by the Hezbollah-affiliated al-Mayadeen TV channel. During the interview he said the Noble Ones had established the Golan Liberation Brigade to fight the jihadist organizations ["*takfir* organizations"] allegedly operated by Israel ["the Zionist entity"]. He added that **if requested, the brigade would help the Syrian army to liberate the Golan Heights**. Apparently the brigade is still under construction (its operational status is currently unclear).



**Golan Liberation Brigade operatives demonstrate with their brigade flags
(Tasnim News Agency in English, Iran, March 15, 2017).**

- ▶ **Sheikh al-Kaabi and the Noble Ones have been militantly anti-American and anti-West since the time of the American army fighting in Iraq. At that time close relations were formed with the Iranian Qods Force and Hezbollah. On November 6, 2017, the American Congress passed a bill that would impose "terrorism related sanctions" on the Movement of the Noble Ones. In a speech given on November 24, 2017, Sheikh al-Kaabi responded with a threat to harm the United States and its interests everywhere around the globe if America "acted stupidly" and harmed the Noble Ones in Syria and Iraq.**
- ▶ **The Noble Ones are an Iraqi Shi'ite militia handled by the Qods Force as part of an Iranian strategy to use sectarian Shi'ite forces in various countries to promote Iran's local and regional interests. Iran regards the Noble Ones and other Iraqi Shi'ite militias as important tools for preserving and increasing its influence in Syria, Iraq and other countries. By doing so it will not have to deploy its own forces in other countries or be directly involved in the internal struggles and in the conflict with Israel. Thus, in ITIC assessment, Iran will preserve the Noble Ones and other Iraqi Shi'ite militias, and find a way to justify their continued existence, especially in the Syrian arena, in view of the calls in Iraq to disarm the Shi'ite militias** (senior figures in the Noble Ones have already issued public justifications for the Noble Ones' continued existence in Syria, and even in Iraq).

The Noble Ones, and other Iraqi Shi'ite militias (such as the "**League of Righteous People**" [*asa'ib alh al-haqq*]), may, in certain circumstances, be handled by Iran against the **United States or Israel**. Two possible scenarios:

- ◆ **If the situation between Israel and Iran and/or Hezbollah deteriorates**, the Noble Ones (and other Shi'ite militia) fighters **may join military activities against Israel in the Golan Heights or be sent by Iran to Lebanon**.¹ A year ago Sheikh al-Kaabi said, "**We will participate in halting all Israeli aggression against Hezbollah.**"
- ◆ **If there is a continued American military presence in Iraq (or Syria, now that the campaign against the Islamic State has ended)**, the Party of the Noble Ones and other Shi'ite militias handled by the Qods Force are **liable to be used by Iran as available tools for guerrilla attacks against the United States army and American targets, as they were when American forces were in Iraq**.

Appendices

► This report has **two appendices**:

- ◆ **Appendix A** – The main points the interview of Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi, leader of the Movement of the Noble Ones, held in Tehran with Hezbollah-affiliated al-Mayadeen TV, November 24, 2017.
- ◆ **Appendix B** – A portrait of the Movement of the Noble Ones
 - Overview
 - Source and significance of the name and logo
 - Leader Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi and the Noble Ones' roots
 - Manpower and weapons
 - Movement of the Noble Ones fighting in Syria
 - Movement of the Noble Ones military activities in Iraq
 - Movement of the Noble Ones' propaganda network
 - Iran's ties with the Movement of the Noble Ones
 - Hezbollah's ties with the Movement of the Noble Ones
 - Sanctions imposed on the Movement of the Noble Ones by Congress

¹ **Qais al-Khazali is the commander of the Iraqi Shi'ite militia League of Righteous People, which is also handled by the Iranian Qods Force.** On December 8, 2017, he visited the Israeli-Lebanese border accompanied by Hezbollah operatives. Reaching the Fatima Gate (in the town of Kafr Qila) he stated he was prepared to "stand shoulder to shoulder with the Lebanese people and the Palestinian people to face the Israeli occupation..." (al-Jazeera, December 8, 2017).

- Arguments aimed to justify the Movement of the Noble Ones' continued presence in Syria