



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

December 20, 2017

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

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**.



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

Appendix A

Main points of Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi's interview with the Hezbollah-affiliated al-Mayadeen TV channel



Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi, secretary general of the Movement of the Noble Ones, interviewed by the Lebanese TV channel al-Mayadeen. He gave the interview from Tehran (YouTube channel of al-Mayadeen TV, November 24, 2017).

► **Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi, secretary general of the Movement of the Noble Ones** (*harakat al-nujaba*) was interviewed by the **Hezbollah**-affiliated al-Mayadeen TV station on November 24, 2017. **The interview was held in Tehran.** The topics dealt with were (YouTube channel of al-Mayadeen TV, November 24, 2017):

- ◆ **The Noble Ones will support the Syrian regime in liberating the Golan Heights from Israel:** According to Sheikh al-Kaabi, the Noble Ones **have established the "Golan Liberation Brigade"** whose objective is to fight the jihadist organizations ("*takfir* organizations"), and operate to liberate the Golan Heights if requested by Syria. The Golan Liberation Brigade, he claimed, is currently fully prepared to liberate territories from all the "invading forces" as part of the "resistance axis" [i.e., Iran, Syria and Hezbollah].
- ◆ **Threat against the United States:**
 - Sheikh al-Kaabi began with a survey of the circumstances under which the Noble Ones was established. **He said the basis of its foundation was to resist the American occupation of Iraq, a basis he claimed existed to this day.**

- The sheikh expressed "joy and pride" that his organization had been designated a terrorist organization by the United States. He claimed that if the United States "acted stupidly" and harmed the Noble Ones in Syria or Iraq, **his organization had the capability and experience to harm the United States and its interests all over the globe, both in Iraq and beyond.**

- ◆ **The Noble Ones' order of combat**

- Sheikh al-Kaabi claimed that at the time the Noble Ones had two brigades in Iraq: **Brigade 12 and Brigade 30. Brigade 12 today has 4,500 fighters, and it participated in the campaign against ISIS in Iraq.** Brigade 30, most of whose fighters were Sunni, was disbanded and its fighters spread among the "popular mobilization" [the umbrella organization of Iranian-sponsored Shi'ite militias in Iraq].

- In Syria the Noble Ones had two brigades: **the Ammar ibn Yasir Brigade and the Imam al-Hasan al-Mujtaba Brigade.** Sheikh al-Kaabi claimed because of the war in Iraq [against the Islamic State] the Noble Ones reduced the number of their forces in Syria and left only the Ammar ibn Yasir Brigade. Later, with the victory over the Islamic State [in Iraq], the Noble Ones **founded the Golan Liberation Brigade.**

- ◆ **Noble Ones' involvement in the fighting in Syria**

- According to Sheikh al-Kaabi, **Noble Ones' fighters will deal with any threat to the Islamic world or to the "resistance axis" in Iraq and beyond.** That, he said, was shown by its involvement in the liberation of Albukamal [the event that symbolized the fall of the Islamic State in Syria]. **He thanked Qasem Soleimani [commander of the IRGC's Qods Force]** and said he was the most important commander who led the forces in the liberation of Albukamal. [**Note:** al-Kaabi's portrayal of Qasem Soleimani in the battle to liberate Albukamal was exaggerated, and part of the Iranian campaign to glorify Soleimani.]



Right: Qasem Soleimani, commander of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps' Qods Force, meets with a Noble Ones operative (Enab Baladi, November 17, 2017). The Movement's logo is on the back of his T-shirt. Left: Qasem Soleimani in Albukamal, Syria, communicating with Shi'ite fighters in the city (Twitter account of Hezbollah's central combat information unit, November 20, 2017)

- **Sheikh al-Kaabi claimed the presence of Noble Ones fighters in Syria was legitimate, important and moral**, regardless of the fact that they came from Iraq. That is because they went to Syria without weapons or equipment, **they supported the Syrian regime** and the regime is interested in having them there. The opposite was true, he claimed, of the American forces in Syria, whose presence is not legitimate.
- ◆ **The Noble Ones' ties to Hezbollah**
 - According to Sheikh al-Kaabi, **there are currently Hezbollah advisors present in Iraq** who are helping to liberate the country from ISIS. They play an important role in supporting the Iraqis in their war [against ISIS]. They also support the Noble Ones, for which al-Kaabi thanked them.
 - The Noble Ones will oppose all "Israeli aggression" that harms Hezbollah. **If Israel decides to attack Hezbollah, the Noble Ones will support Hezbollah and fight against it.**
- ◆ **The situation of the jihadist organizations in Syria**
 - **ISIS suffered severe military defeats in Syria and Iraq** and lost most of its territories, but still has a few remaining "enclaves." ISIS operatives are in the deserts west of Anbar Province in Iraq, which poses "a great danger."
 - **The Fateh al-Sham Front** [the Headquarters for the Liberation of al-Sham, formerly the al-Nusra Front] is allegedly supported by the United States, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, endangering the entire region.



Pictures of Noble Ones operatives shown during the al-Mayadeen interview with Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi. No location was given (YouTube channel of al-Mayadeen, November 24, 2017).

Appendix B

Portrait of the Movement of the Noble Ones

Overview

The Movement of the Noble Ones, whose full name is Movement the Noble Ones Hezbollah (*harakat hezbollah al-nujaba*), is an Iraqi Shi'ite militia established in 2013 and headed by **Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi**. Most of its fighters are apparently Iraqi. Many of them fought in the **League of Righteous People** (*asa'ib ahl al-Haq*), an Iraqi Shi'ite militia which **played an important role in the fighting against the American army in the Iraq war**. In recent years the Noble Ones have supported the Iraqi army in fighting ISIS, and the Syrian army in fighting ISIS and the rebel organizations. Apparently the Noble Ones **are subordinate to the Iraqi "popular mobilization," but in reality are handled by the IRGC's Qods Force in accordance with Iran's local and regional interests**.

Source and significance of the name and logo

The Movement of the Noble Ones



Hezbollah



Right: The logo of Hezbollah in Lebanon. Left: The logo of the Movement of the Noble Ones (IRNA, November 7, 2017). There are similar features in both logos. At the center of the Noble Ones logo is the world "Hezbollah." Above it is an upraised arm holding an assault rifle, similar to the one in the Hezbollah logo. Above the rifle is Qur'an verse 78 from Sura 22 (al-Hajj): "Fight the holy war [against infidels] for the sake of Allah with the striving due to him, for he has chosen you."² On the Hezbollah logo verse 56 from Sura 5 (al-Ma'ida) also appears: "The party of Allah is sure to triumph."³ The globe appears in both logos, symbolizing their aspiration to take over the world.

- The significance of the name Hezbollah al-Nujaba (Hezbollah the Noble Ones)

² quran.com

³ Ibid

- ◆ The term **Hezbollah al-Nujaba** is taken from a sermon given by **al-Set Zaynab**,⁴ the daughter of Ali, the fourth Sunni caliph and the first Shi'ite imam, Ali ibn Abi Talib and his wife Fatma (the beloved daughter of the prophet Muhammad). The sermon was given in the court of Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah, the Umayyad caliph, after Zaynab was taken with other captives by ibn Mu'awiyah's forces **during the battle of Karbala** (fought in 680 CE, where many descendants of Ali ibn Abi Talib were killed).
- ◆ When Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah surveyed the prisoners, Zaynab rose and accused him of sinning, and of ill-treating the prisoners and "the children of the holy prophet." In the speech she referred to herself and others as *hezbollah al-nujaba*, and called Yazid and his followers "the partisans of Satan."⁵

The name Movement of the Noble Ones is **significant for internal Iraqi politics. In ITIC assessment it was chosen as an excuse to give legitimacy to the involvement of the Iraqi Shi'ite militias in the Syrian civil war** in the defense of the shrine of al-Set Zaynab (in which Hezbollah operatives also participated). Immediately upon its founding the Noble Ones sent forces to defend the shrine, and later expanded their objective to defending the Syrian regime.

⁴ **The shrine of al-Set Zaynab** (or al-Sayyida Zaynab) is located south of Damascus and considered the most holy Shi'ite site in Syria. It allegedly holds the grave of Zaynab, the daughter of Ali ibn Abi Talib. She is considered an important Shi'ite figure and role model. The shrine was repeatedly attacked by the rebel organizations, especially the jihadist organizations. The slogan "Zaynab will not fall again" became the war cry of Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Shi'ite militias defending the shrine during the Syrian civil war. **Defense of the shrine was the initial justification for the direct involvement of Hezbollah and the Shi'ite militias in the Syrian civil war.**

⁵ <https://www.al-islam.org/probe-history-ashura-dr-ibrahim-ayati/chapter-32-sermon-lady-zaynab-court-yazid>

Movement of the Noble Ones leader Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi and the movement's roots



Right: Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi, secretary general of the Movement of the Noble Ones, dressed in traditions Shi'ite garb during an interview (YouTube Beladi TV channel, November 7, 2015). Left: Sheikh al-Kaabi in military uniform (YouTube al-Sumaria channel, November 6, 2016).

- ▶ **Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi, the leader the Noble Ones**, was born in Baghdad on July 17, 1977. He studied religion at a Shi'ite institution and served as the imam of a mosque in the city of Musayib, about 30 kilometers (about 18 miles) northeast of Karbala, a city holy to the Shi'ites. Later he studied Islam at several prestigious religious colleges (*madrasas*) in Najaf, another city holy to Shi'a and a stronghold of Shi'ite political power in Iraq. At the beginning of the nineteen nineties he served in the Iraqi army. However, he deserted the army and joined the ranks of **Sheikh Muhammad Muhammad Sadeq** al-Sadr, who was a senior Iraqi Shi'ite religious figure and had opposed Saddam Hussein's Baath regime. Muhammad al-Sadr was the father of **Muqtada al-Sadr**, who today is a prominent Shi'ite political leader in Iraq.
- ▶ On February 19, 1999, Sheikh Muhammad al-Sadr was assassinated by the Saddam Hussein regime. **al-Kaabi continued in the ranks of his son, Muqtada al-Sadr, along with Qais al-Khazali**, and the two became the companions of Muqtada al-Sadr. In 2003 (the year the Americans invaded Iraq) **Muqtada al-Sadr founded a militia called "the Army of the Mahdi,"** which both al-Kaabi and al-Khazali joined. **From the beginning, the Army of the Mahdi was connected to and supported by the Iranian IRGC.**
- ▶ **Between 2006 and 2007 the Army of the Mahdi was deeply involved in the Shi'ite-Sunni civil war in Iraq**, clashing with and killing Sunnis for sectarian reasons. Akram al-Kaabi commanded the Army of the Mahdi in the confrontation with the Americans called the "second battle of Najaf." The Army of the Mahdi suffered heavy losses. In the spring and summer of 2008 the Iraqi army forces, with American support, **attacked the Army of the Mahdi** and other Iranian-support Shi'ite militias. In the attack more than 2,000 Army of the

Mahdi fighters were killed and thousands were wounded. **As a result, Muqtada al-Sadr was forced to agree to a ceasefire and disband the Army of the Mahdi**, and he began engaging in **political and social activity**.

► Several Army of the Mahdi leaders refused to agree to the ceasefire and the disbanding of the militia. Among them were **al-Khazali and al-Kaabi, who, with the support of the Iranian Qods Force and Hezbollah in Lebanon, founded the League of Righteous People (*asa'ib ahl al-Haq*). Qais al-Khazali became its secretary general and al-Kaabi was in charge of military affairs** (second in command in the organization). As one of his duties, **al-Kaabi went to Iran** with forty organization staff operatives, where they gave instructions in how to fire heavy artillery, fire rockets and prepare car bombs. He returned to Iraq accompanied by Iranian instructors and experts, who **trained the League of Righteous People operatives**.

► **The League of Righteous People**, headed by Qais al-Khazali, **played a central role in the fighting against the American army and coalition forces in Iraq**. They were particularly proficient in placing deadly explosively formed projectiles (EFPs) along the roads used by American and coalition vehicles. In January 2008 Qais al-Khazali was taken prisoner by the coalition, **along with senior Hezbollah operative Ali Daqduq. Al-Kaabi** replaced Qais al-Khazali as **League of Righteous People commander**. According to a Congressional report, al-Kaabi participated in many mortar and rocket attacks on the international zone (the Green Zone)⁶ in Baghdad at the beginning of 2008. In 2010 Qais al-Khazali was released in a prisoner exchange deal for British computer expert Peter Moore. When the American forces left Iraq in 2011, Akram al-Kaabi left the League of Righteous People and returned to religious studies.

In 2013 Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi founded a new militia called the Movement of the Noble Ones. It is unclear why he left the League of Righteous People but it can be assumed he did not want to continue as the second in command, preferring to head a militia of his own. **The Syrian civil war provided him with a good excuse to found a new militia and find a niche with the Iranians**, who had a policy of handling Shi'ite militias in Syria. According to reports, after founding the Noble Ones, **al-Kaabi moved to Syria to command the militia's military activities himself** (Sumerian Priest blog, September 9, 2014). However, the Iranians

⁶ A 10-square-kilometer (3.9 square mile) area in the Karkh district of central Baghdad, Iraq, that was the governmental center of the Coalition Provisional Authority during the occupation of Iraq after the American-led 2003 invasion (Wikipedia), home to the American, British, Australian and Egyptian embassies.

increased military support for both militias, **which held the position of Iran's most favored proxies.**

Movement of the Noble Ones manpower and weapons

Sheikh al-Kaabi, during an interview with Iranian Press TV, said there were **three brigades composed of 3,000 fighters each**. Thus the total number of the Noble Ones is **about 10,000**, including administration personnel. There are also several thousand volunteer reserve operatives (Rai al-Youm, September 1, 2016). In Syria there were formerly two Noble Ones' brigades; **today there is one** (with the Golan Liberation Brigade currently under construction). **In Iraq** there are currently two brigades, one a territorial brigade (defending the region liberated from the Islamic State) and the other which operates near the Syria-Iraq border.

Equipment and weapons

► The Noble Ones have published pictures and videos, primarily dealing with the fighting against ISIS **in urban areas**. Its operatives are mostly photographed riding in **pickup trucks**. They also apparently have **armored vehicles and old tanks**. They have been photographed firing **anti-tank missiles, light arms, mid-range machine guns, mortars and rocket launchers mounded on vehicles, including 107mm rockets fired from twelve-barrel rocket launchers.**



Right: A column of Noble Ones fighters driving pickup trucks to a battle site. Left: Movement of the Noble Ones fighters drilling with flags [no location noted, apparently in Iraq] (satellite al-Nujaba Channel 2, YouTube al-Nujaba channel, February 21, 2015).

Syria

► The following is information about the brigades that fought in Syria and those that were dismantled after a tour of fighting or returned to Iraq:

- ◆ **The Ammar ibn Yasir Brigade**, currently operating in Syria, named for one of the close companions of the Imam Ali. At first the brigade was devoted to defending the

shrine of al-Set Zaynab south of Damascus (see below). Later it fought in northern Syria, primarily in Aleppo, and supported the Syrian army in besieging the city. It also participated in the liberation of the Shi'ite villages Nubl and Zahra. Brigade fighters participated in clearing ISIS out of the Deir al-Zor region and in the conquest of Albukamal. **It is the main Noble Ones force operating in Syria today.**



The logo of the Ammar ibn Yasir Brigade (jihadology.net). The green Arabic inscription reads, "the Islamic resistance." The logo is similar to those of the Iranian IRGC and Hezbollah.



Death notice for Durayed Hamid Majid al-Kaabi, commander of operations of the Ammar ibn Yasir Brigade, killed in Syria on February 5, 2014, defending the shrine of al-Set Zaynab (Sumerian Priest blog, September 9, 2014). Given his last name, he may be related Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi. At the lower right is a picture of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and above him is Iraqi Shi'ite leader Muhammad Muhammad Sadeq, both sources of authority for Sheikh al-Kaabi and the Movement of the Noble Ones.

- ◆ **The Imam al-Hasan al-Mujtaba Brigade** is named for the imam al-Hasan ibn Abi Talib, the second Shi'ite imam, called *al-mujtaba*, that is, "the chosen one." The brigade operated in Syria, mainly in the rural area east of Damascus (the eastern *ghoutah*). The brigade participated in the defense of the shrine of al-Set Zaynab, and in securing the road leading to the Damascus international airport. It can be inferred from the speech given by Sheikh al-Kaabi (November 24, 2017) that the **brigade was returned to Iraq.**



Logo of the Imam al-Hasan al-Mujtaba Brigade (jihadology.net)

- The al-Hamd Brigade ("Praise Brigade," i.e., "praise for Allah") was founded in July 2013. It has participated in missions with the Ammar ibn Yasir Brigade. It operated in Syria, where among its missions was the defense of the shrine of al-Set Zaynab. The brigade commander was Sheikh Haidar al-Gharawi, who left the Noble Ones in 2014 and founded a new militia (Sumerian Priest blog, September 9, 2014). The brigade has apparently disbanded.



The logo of the al-Hamad Brigade. The dome of the shrine of al-Set Zaynab is in the background, the middle ground is a map of Iraq and in the foreground on the right is an upraised arm with an assault rifle and on the left the sword of Ali Ibn Abi Talib. At the top is a red flag inscribed "Oh, Husayn," for Husayn ibn Ali, an important figure in Shi'a Islam (jihadology.net).



Right: Russian T-55 tank used by the al-Hamad Brigade. Left: al-Hamad Brigade fighter aims a mortar (Sumerian Priest blog, September 9, 2014).



Sheikh Haidar al-Gharawi, commander of the al-Hamad Brigade which split from the Noble Ones and formed a new militia (Sumerian Priest blog, September 9, 2014).



Recruitment poster for "the Islamic resistance, the Movement of the Noble Ones," with a telephone number (apparently a poster from 2015).

The Establishment of the Golan Liberation Brigade

► On March 8, 2017, Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi released a recording announcing the **establishment of the Golan Liberation Brigade**. According to al-Kaabi, ISIS's terrorism is part of an American-supervised "Zionist plot" carried out by the United States and the Gulf States. He said that "the presence [of the Noble Ones] in Syria was intended to counter the plot, whose purpose is to set fire to the lands of the Muslims [...]." According to al-Kaabi, his forces in Syria are **ready to liberate the Golan Heights together with the Syrian Army when the campaign against terrorism is over**. According to a video published by the Noble Ones' combat information, the purpose of the Golan Liberation Brigade is **to assist the Syrian Army in regaining the Golan Heights as the first step in the liberation of the holy sites in occupied Palestine and the elimination of Israel** (The Noble Ones' combat information, March 10, 2017).

► Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi said that **the Golan Liberation Brigade was not media propaganda but rather a real objective of the movement**. On the other hand, al-Arabiya reported that **the establishment of the Golan Liberation Brigade was yet another way for Iran to justify its presence in Syria and to increase its influence on the Syrian regime** (alrabiya.net, March 31, 2017).

► Photos published by the Noble Ones' combat information when the establishment of the brigade was announced would seem to indicate that it does not exist only on paper. In Syria, there is apparently a core of fighters who belong to the Brigade (in an unknown location). At this stage the ITIC does not have updated information about the Brigade's organizational or operational status. However, it appears that the brigade **is still under construction** and is not operative.



Photos published by the Noble Ones' combat information when the establishment of the Golan Liberation Brigade was announced. Right: Brigade fighters holding green ribbons bearing the words "The Golan Liberation Brigade" before tying them around their heads. The Arabic inscription on the bottom (in all the posters) reads, "The Golan Liberation Brigade, the Islamic Resistance, the Noble Ones." Top left: Brigade fighters waving a flag with an inscription in Arabic reading "Israel will be destroyed." Bottom: Brigade fighters waving yellow flags of the Golan Liberation Brigade, the Noble Ones (Iran's English-language Tasnim News Agency, Iran (March 15, 2017).

The fighting of the Noble Ones in Syria

The Movement of the Noble Ones was one of the first Iraqi-Shi'ite militias to send fighters to Syria. In ITIC assessment, that was the result of an Iranian decision. The first Noble Ones forces were sent to defend the shrine of al-Set Zaynab, south of Damascus, but subsequently Noble Ones' forces were sent to the various battlefields in Syria. Shortly after the movement's establishment in 2013, the Noble Ones announced they had sent a force to Syria to **support the regime of Bashar Assad**. Previously there were two brigades of the Noble Ones in Syria but now there is only **one** (with an additional brigade **in the process of being formed**).

► **The Noble Ones were used to support the Syrian army in significant combat zones – in the areas of Damascus and Aleppo and in eastern Syria.** A Noble Ones force supported the Syrian army in **the takeover of Aleppo** (October 2015 – February 2016). A Noble Ones force participated in **lifting the siege on two Shi'ite towns, Nubl and al-Zahra**, northwest of Aleppo. The Noble Ones also took part in an attack on the bases of the rebel organizations **in**

the rural area east of Damascus (October – November 2017). A Noble Ones force participated in the **campaign to take control over Albukamal**, the Islamic State's last remaining stronghold in Syria (November 2017).

Photos of Noble Ones operatives from the areas of Aleppo and Damascus

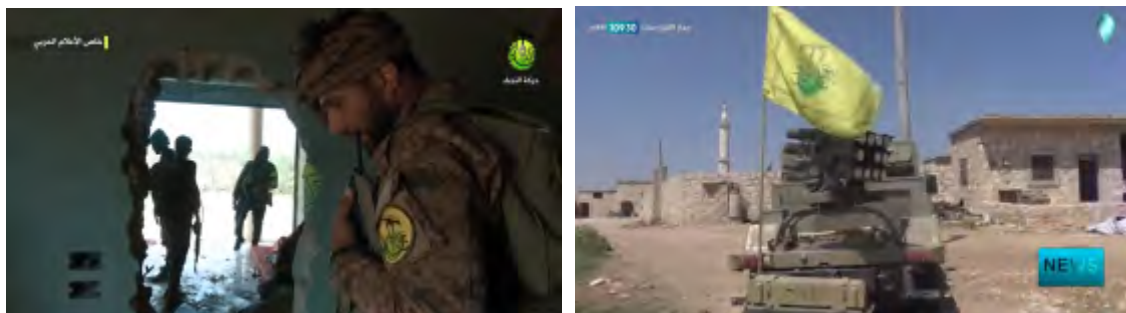


Noble Ones fighter killed in the battle for Aleppo. The militia's insignia can be seen near his right shoulder. The Noble Ones sustained heavy losses in the battle over Aleppo (Micro Syria, October 17, 2016).



Funeral procession in Najaf for nine Noble Ones operatives killed defending the shrine of al-Set Zaynab (Noble Ones website, July 23, 2017)

Photos from the battle over Albukamal, from a video released by the Noble Ones⁷



Right: The Noble Ones flag flying near rocket launchers mounted on a military vehicle. Left: Noble Ones commander (on the right, with the movement's insignia below his left shoulder) talking on a radio transceiver during fighting in a built-up area.



Noble Ones operatives during the operation to take over Albukamal.



Right: Noble Ones fighters approaching a staging zone of their forces, including two APCs. Left: Noble Ones operatives moving on foot behind their APC.

⁷From a video released by the Noble Ones on the YouTube channel of their combat information. The video consists of segments and shorter videos, mainly those posted on the same YouTube channel as early as November 21, 2017 (two days before the final takeover of Albukamal).



Right: Noble Ones commanders (in the center and on the left) and another fighter on the right approaching an APC and a Humvee mounted with a portable machine gun. Left: Noble Ones operative near a double-barreled anti-aircraft gun mounted on an SUV during the fighting in a built-up area.



Right: Noble Ones commander (on the right, with the Noble Ones' insignia below his left shoulder) and a fighter near a recoilless rifle mounted on a military vehicle during the fighting in a built-up area. Left: Noble Ones fighters firing light arms and launching a rocket from an RPG launcher.



Right: Noble Ones sniper (holding a Dragonov sniper rifle) near two other fighters of the Noble Ones during the fighting in a built-up area. Left: Noble Ones fighter firing a heavy machine gun mounted on an SUV.



A Syrian force, which included soldiers from the Syrian army, Hezbollah and the Noble Ones, reached the Syrian-Iraqi border during the battle for Albukamal. The force joined with the Iraqi army, which also included an Iranian-affiliated Shi'ite militia (Twitter account of the Syrian army's combat information, November 8, 2017). The upper flag in the center is the Syrian flag, with the flag of the Noble Ones below it and the flag of the Lebanese Hezbollah organization above it.

The military activity of the Noble Ones in Iraq

In Iraq, the Noble Ones have a military force consisting of two brigades which supported the Iraqi army in the campaign against the Islamic State. In recent months, one of the brigades was engaged mainly in **clearing the area near the Iraqi-Syrian border of ISIS operatives**. It is an area **considered important by Iran and the Iranian-supported Shi'ite militias (on both sides of the border)**. According to an American Congressional report and reports in the Arab media, there is evidence that **the Noble Ones are playing a key role in securing the land route between Iran and Lebanon**, which will be used for supplying military aid to Hezbollah (Congress website, November 6, 2017)⁸.

⁸ According to **al-Sharq al-Awsat** (December 4, 2017), a number of researchers and experts on Iraq said that the IRGC had given the Noble One the **“strategic mission” of establishing a supply route from Damascus through Iraq**. This “strategic mission” was apparently given exclusively to the Noble Ones, in view of the lack of a unified position among other militias involved in the “popular mobilization”. A Reuters reporter, relying on several Iraqi sources, also reported that **the Noble Ones were supporting Iran in the establishment of a supply route from Iraq to Damascus** (Reuters, September 22, 2017).



Right: Noble Ones SUVs at a distance of around 10 km from the Iraqi-Syrian border, during the operation to mop up the area from the presence of ISIS operatives. Left: Columns of Noble Ones vehicles during the clearing of the border area of ISIS operatives (Mehr, June 24, 2017).



Noble Ones operatives receiving the organization's insignia in Iraq (Mehr News Agency, June 24, 2017)

► **The 12th Brigade of the Noble Ones, under the command of Abu Taqwa, is a territorial brigade responsible for securing the area north of the oil city of Baiji.** On October 2, 2017, the Noble Ones released a video showing **Abu Ali al-Muhandis**, deputy commander of the "popular mobilization" (the umbrella organization of Iran's Shi'ite militias), **during a visit to the 12th Brigade.** The brigade is reportedly in charge of the **Makhoul Mountain sector**, approximately 14 km north of Baiji. Speaking in an interview, al-Muhandis said that the area had been **liberated from ISIS in early 2015 as part of the operation for the takeover of Baiji. According to him, since then Brigade 12 has been deployed in the region** (YouTube, al-Nujaba satellite channel, October 2, 2017).



The Makhoul Mountain area where Brigade 12 of the Noble Ones (in red) is deployed (Google Maps)



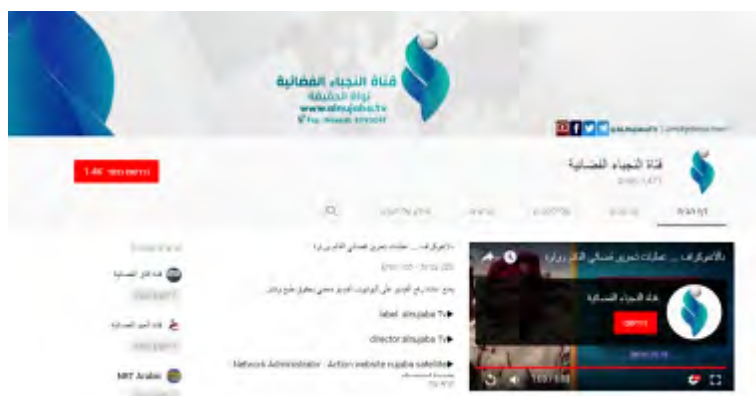
Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy commander of the "popular mobilization", interviewed during a visit to Brigade 12 of the Noble Ones, which is in charge of the Makhoul Mountain area (YouTube, al-Nujaba satellite channel, October 2, 2017)

The media infrastructure of the Noble Ones

The Noble Ones **have an extensive media infrastructure, whose scope and quality exceed that of the media networks of other Shi'ite militias.** It is clear that Iran has invested large amounts of money in setting up the infrastructure (as it did in setting up Hezbollah in Lebanon's media infrastructure). **Noble Ones propaganda serves the propaganda of the Iranian regime both in the domestic Iraqi arena and in the regional-international arena.**

- The media outlets of the Noble Ones are the following:

- ◆ **TV channel and website:** The Noble Ones operate a **satellite TV channel, al-Nujaba TV:** www.alnujaba.tv. This channel includes the **Military Documentation Department**, which has been operating since at least 2017.

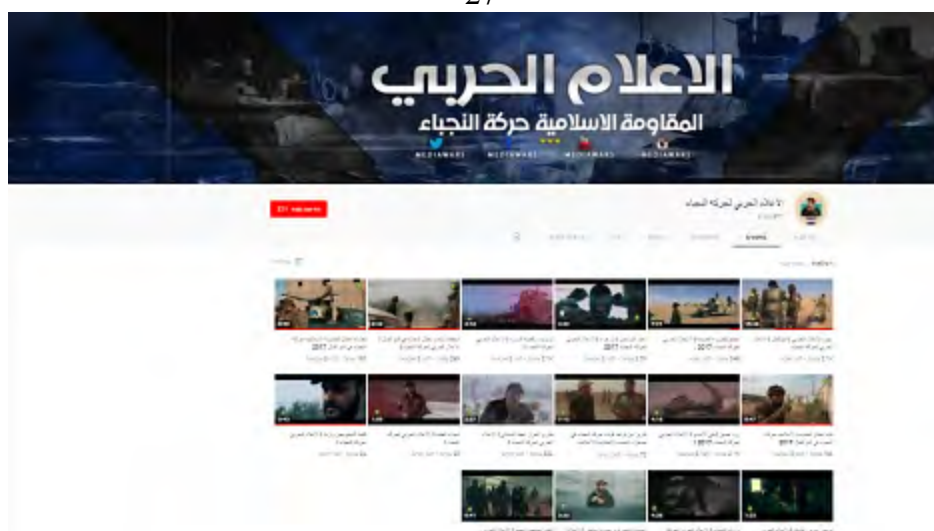


The first page of the YouTube account: al-Nujaba satellite channel broadcast on Nilesat, frequency 10930 H. The channel continues to broadcast on Nilesat despite the decision by the Arab League (November 29, 2017) banning satellite broadcasts funded and sponsored by Iran on Arab channels.



Introduction of the Military Documentation Department Of the al-Nujaba satellite channel (YouTube, al-Nujaba satellite channel, October 2, 2017)

- ◆ **YouTube channels:**
 - The Noble Ones **operates a YouTube channel** showing videos from the **al-Nujaba satellite channel**, broadcast on Nilesat, frequency 10930 H. Channel address: .
 - YouTube channel called **The Military Information Office of the Noble Ones**. It is a relatively new YouTube channel, which began operating on October 15, 2017 and has since broadcast 16 videos.



Video page of the combat information of the Noble Ones YouTube channel.

- ◆ **Two Twitter accounts** managed by the **private media office of Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi**, secretary general of the Noble Ones. The first account is from 2016 and the second is from 2017:

- **The first account:** URL: <https://twitter.com/Akremalkaabe> This account is managed by the **Private Media Office** of Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi [it began operating in September 2016 and the last tweet was on October 3, 2016] (Twitter account akremlkaabi@).



Theme photo and profile photo of the Twitter account managed by the Private Media Office of Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi (Akram al al-Kaabi) (Twitter)

- **The second account:** URL: https://twitter.com/Akram_abbas_313. The account is managed by the **Private Media Office** of Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi. It began operating in February 2017. The last Tweet was on July 2, 2017 (Twitter).



Profile photo of the Twitter account managed from Iraq by the Private Media Office of Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi (Twitter).

Iran's ties with the Noble Ones

The IRGC provide the **Noble Ones with financial support, training and military equipment**. Sheikh al-Kaabi said that “the assistance that the Noble Ones receives from the Revolutionary Guards is good on all levels” (al-Sharq al-Awsat, December 4, 2017). According to a Congressional report (November 6, 2017), the Noble Ones receive **training, weapons and financing** from the Qods Force. According to the report, Sheikh al-Kaabi and other Noble Ones commanders claimed that **they took orders only from Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader**.⁹

► **The Noble Ones** are nominally subordinate to the "popular mobilization" but are **actually handled by the IRGC's Qods Force**. The strategic decisions regarding the Noble Ones **come from Tehran**, although the **routine handling** of the two brigades deployed in Iraq is carried out by the "popular mobilization". That was explained by Sheikh al-Kaabi, who said the Noble Ones **are not subject to the "popular mobilization", but the "popular mobilization" handles two of their brigades** [as part of the campaign against ISIS]. When asked about **his ties with Qassem Soleimani**, the commander of the Qods Force, he replied, “It is an honor for us to belong to the same military-ideological school” (al-Sharq al-Awsat, December 4, 2017).

⁹ Reuters, quoting the Iranian Tasnim News Agency, reported that Sheikh al-Kaabi had reiterated that he regarded **the Iranian leadership as the source of his Sharia authority** (Reuters, September 22, 2017). That is also evident in posters of the Noble Ones showing Khamenei and Khomeini (see below).

► **The Noble Ones have an extensive media network that serves Iranian propaganda and emphasizes the close connection between the movement and the Iranian leadership.** A recent example can be found **in the announcement published by the Noble Ones on December 8, 2017**, denouncing the statement by the US recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. The Noble Ones stressed their adherence to **“the continuation of jihad and the opposition to American-Zionist control.”** The announcement stated, **“We will not refrain from carrying out our sacred duty to prepare and mobilize for the liberation of Palestine and Holy Jerusalem”** (Fars News Agency in Arabic, December 9, 2017).



A photograph that accompanied the Noble Ones’ announcement. it shows the flags of the Noble Ones, with a poster on the bottom, bearing the inscription, **“We shall not forget our Jerusalem.”**

On the sides of the poster (from left to right) are the Ayatollah Khomeini, senior Iraqi Shi'ite cleric Mohammad Sadeq (Sheikh al-Kaabi is one of his followers), Noble Ones Secretary General Sheikh al-Kaabi, and Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei (Twitter account of the Iranian Fars News Agency, December 9, 2017).

Hezbollah’s ties with the Noble Ones

► Akram al-Kaabi **has been personally acquainted with Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah** and senior members of the organization since the fighting against the American armed forces in Iraq. In the past, he said that the **Noble Ones regarded Hezbollah as an example and an ideal** (al-Sharq al-Awsat, December 4, 2017). **Hezbollah has supported the Noble Ones** since the movement’s inception. Its support consists mainly of **sending military instructors to Iraq** (as Sheikh al-Kaabi admitted in his speech on November 24, 2017). According to al-Kaabi, there are currently Hezbollah operatives in Iraq **who also serve as advisors to the Noble Ones.**



Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah and Noble Ones Secretary General Akram al-Kaabi at one of their meetings in the past (website of the Noble Ones, November 18, 2015)

- On November 26, 2017, it was reported that Noble Ones Secretary General Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi had said in a TV interview: **“We will take part in halting any Israeli aggression against Hezbollah”** (Twitter account [of an Iranian media figure], November 26, 2017).



Noble Ones Secretary General Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi in a TV interview, “We will take part in halting any Israeli aggression against Hezbollah” (Twitter account [of an Iranian media figure], November 26, 2017).

Imposition of sanctions on the Noble Ones by the US Congress

- On November 6, 2017, the US Congress approved a bill to impose terrorism-related sanctions due to terrorism **on two Iranian-controlled militias: The Noble Ones** (Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba’) and **the League of the Righteous** (*asa’ib ahl al-haq*). It was decided that the sanctions would begin 90 days after the bill was passed.

115TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 4238

To impose terrorism-related sanctions with respect to As-Saib Ahl Al-Haq and Harakat Hizballah Al-Nujaba, and for other purposes.

The wording of the bill (US Congress website, November 6, 2017)

(2) AAH and Nujaba are provided training, funding, and arms by the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), IRGC-Quds Force, and mentored by Lebanese Hizballah. AAH leader, Qais Khazali, has pledged allegiance to Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

The ties between the Noble Ones and the League of the Righteous, on the one hand, with Iran and Hezbollah on the other, as described in the bill (website of the American Congress, November 6, 2017)

Arguments intended to legitimize the continued existence of the Noble Ones

Following the fall of the Islamic State, there were those in Iraq who said that **the role of the Shi'ite militias was over and that they should disarm themselves and hand over their arms to Iraq. Iran opposes** this because it receives the Shi'ite militias as an **effective tool for promoting its interests in Iraq and Syria.**

► For example, prominent Shi'ite leader **Muqtada Sadr** called on his forces to hand over their weapons to the state and dismantle most of their posts, announcing that the war against ISIS was over (al-Nahar, December 11, 2017). **Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council**, recently met in Tehran with chairman of the Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq and deputy speaker of the Iraqi parliament (the Majlis) **Sheikh Humam Hamoudi**. At their meeting, **Shamkhani warned against disbanding the Shi'ite militias in Iraq. He noted that the campaign against ISIS at the security, cultural and religious levels had to continue** and that the elimination of the "roots of the thinking" of

ISIS, which is supported by some of the countries in the region, **required an ongoing struggle** (ISNA, December 4, 2017).

► **The Iranian argument was echoed** by **Abu Taqwa**, commander of Brigade 12 of the Noble Ones. As part of the celebrations of the “victory over ISIS” held in the Salah al-Din Province in Iraq, he declared that “after ISIS comes to an end and ceases [to exist] on the ground, [the Noble Ones] will fight it ideologically to **eradicate its radical thinking**” (Noble Ones Movement website, December 14, 2017).

► **In practical terms, Noble Ones spokesman Hashem al-Musawi** announced the movement’s willingness to **hand over its heavy weapons to the Iraqi government after the defeat of ISIS** (in ITIC assessment, that refers to armored vehicles and artillery in the possession of the Noble Ones) (NRT website, December 14, 2017). The spokesman’s announcement made **no mention** of the light and medium weapons in the possession of the Noble Ones. **That may indicate that completely disbanding the movement's military frameworks is not on the agenda.**



Noble Ones spokesman Hashem al-Musawi (Noble Ones website, October 22, 2017)

Moreover, Noble Ones spokesman Hashem al-Musawi made a distinction between Iraq and Syria. In his announcement, he said that **the heavy weapons would be handed over without compromising the Noble Ones' military operations and activities in Syria** (NRT website, December 14, 2017). That suggests that the Noble Ones (possibly inspired by the Iranians) **distinguish between their forces stationed in Iraq and those in Syria to remove the forces of the Noble Ones in Syria from the internal Iraqi dispute over the disarmament of the militias in order to maintain their long-term presence in Syria.**