



The Nujaba Movement - the Movement of the Noble Ones: One of the dominant pro-Iranian militias in Iraq

May 1, 2023

Overview

- ▶ **The Nujaba Movement (Harakat al-Nujaba), or the Movement of the Noble Ones**, is an Iraqi Shiite pro-Iranian militia established in 2013 by **Sheikh Akram Abbas al-Kaabi**, its secretary-general, and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps' (IRGC's) Qods Force.¹ It is one of the largest militias in the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).² It is operated by the Iranian Qods Force, which provides the funding, weapons, and training of its members. The Nujaba Movement is also supported by the Lebanese Hezbollah, with which Al-Kaabi has maintained close ties for many years.³ The militia adopts the ideology of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and regards Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei as its supreme leader.
- ▶ The Nujaba Movement numbers 8,000-10,000 operatives⁴ organized in three brigades, two based in Iraq and one in Syria, which operates alongside the forces of the Assad regime. The militia fighters in Iraq are deployed mainly in the Shiite area of southern Iraq and in the provinces of Baghdad, Salah al-Din, Diyala, and Nineveh. The militia fighters in Syria are deployed mainly in the provinces of Deir ez-Zor and Al-Raqqah, where they have established positions, headquarters, training camps, and recruitment offices to recruit Syrian residents to its ranks.
- ▶ The weapons at the militia's disposal are varied and include **missiles** (including ballistic missiles), rockets, and **UAVs** of various types. The Nujaba Movement is also able to manufacture weapons in Iraq and Syria, especially rockets. It has become an important

¹ An update for a study published by the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (ITIC) on December 31, 2017, "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""

² The Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) is an umbrella framework of Shiite militias in Iraq consisting of approximately 40 militias, the vast majority of which are Shiite, and the dominant among them being pro-Iranian and supported by Iran. In 2018, the PMF was recognized as an integral part of Iraq's national security establishment and since then it has received budgets from the Iraqi government.

³ For further information, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from February 22, 2018, "The leader of the Movement of the Noble Ones, an Iranian-operated Shi'ite militia in Iraq, said during a memorial ceremony for Imad Mughnieh that the militia would support Hezbollah if Israel attacked it."

⁴ As of 2021.

element in **Iran's forces in the region, and poses a threat to Israel, the United States, and Western interests in the region.**

► Regarding Israel, it should be noted that the militia is part of the Axis of Resistance led by Iran, and **its goal is to act to “liberate” the Golan Heights and destroy the State of Israel.** It uses a blatantly anti-Israel rhetoric, and its secretary-general, Al-Kaabi, who is affiliated with Iran, frequently publishes statements about the militia fighters being ready to participate in the fighting against Israel, both alongside the Lebanese Hezbollah and in the Palestinian arena. The Nujaba Movement even released a video threatening to launch rockets at Israel from Lebanon and Syria and missiles from Iraq.

Background and development of the militia

► **Harakat al-Nujaba** (the **Movement of the Noble Ones**), also called **Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba** (HHN, Movement of Hezbollah's Noble Ones), or by its full name: **Al-Muqawama al-Islamiya Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba** (the Islamic Resistance Movement of Hezbollah's Noble Ones), is an **Iraqi Shiite pro-Iranian militia** established in 2013 by **Sheikh Akram Abbas al-Kaabi**, its secretary-general, and the IRGC's Qods Force. Al-Kaabi has been connected to Iran at least since 2003, since his activity against the US forces in Iraq. Even today, Al-Kaabi is a strong opponent of the American presence in Iraq.

► Al-Kaabi was born in 1977 in the city of Amarah, a Shiite city in southern Iraq. He studied religion in the Shiite holy city of Najaf, where he was a student of Ayatollah Muhammad Muhammad Sadeq al-Sadr (known as an opponent of Saddam Hussein's regime and executed by him in 1999). He served as an imam at a mosque in the city of Musayyib (about 30 km northeast of Karbala). In 2003, he joined the Mahdi Army (Jaysh al-Mahdi) of Shiite leader Moqtada al-Sadr, a pro-Iranian militia (at least in its early years) that carried out attacks against the US forces in Iraq. He was involved (at least in 2006-2007) in the murder of Sunni civilians as part of the Shiite-Sunni sectarian struggle in the country. Al-Kaabi reached senior command ranks in the militia and underwent military and strategic training by Iran. He left the Mahdi Army in 2008, following the announcement by Muqtada al-Sadr that he would stop fighting the Americans, and was one of the founders of the pro-Iranian militia Asaib Ahl al-Haqq (League of the Righteous). Al-Kaabi was in charge of the militia's military wing and even served as its secretary-general in 2008-2010, when the militia's permanent secretary-general Qais al-Khazali was detained by the US forces.



Akram al-Kaabi, the Nujaba Movement's secretary-general (Nabd, January 11, 2020)

► In 2013, with the establishment of the Nujaba Movement, Al-Kaabi added to it loyal Asaib Ahl al-Haqq fighters. As part of his subordination to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, he took part in Iranian assistance to Bashar al-Assad's Syrian regime during the civil war in the country and even operated part of the time from Syria to supervise the militia's activity. In 2014, the Nujaba Movement joined the PMF, which was established to take part in the fight against ISIS alongside the Iraqi Army. In practice, the militia also continued to serve as an arm of Iran promoting its interests in Iraq (Wikipedia; Al-Khanadiq, March 5, 2021).



Right: Al-Kaabi next to Qassem Soleimani, former Qods Force commander (Al-Marja', August 13, 2019). Left: Al-Kaabi next to current Qods Force commander Ismail Qaani (Al-Kawthar, October 6, 2021)

► On March 5, 2019, the Nujaba Movement and its secretary-general were designated by the US Department of State as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs) (US Department of State, March 5, 2019).⁵ The US Treasury Department imposed sanctions prohibiting business with the militia and its leader and freezing all property in their possession (US Treasury Department, March 15, 2023).⁶

⁵ <https://2017-2021.state.gov>

⁶ <https://home.treasury.gov>

March 5, 2019	Harakat al-Nujaba (HAN)
March 5, 2019	Akram 'Abbas al-Kabi (HAN)

The Nujaba Movement and its secretary-general, Akram al-Kaabi, as they appear on the US State Department's SDGT list (US Department of State, March 5, 2019)⁷

► Since then, the militia has accelerated its armament, under Iranian sponsorship, with advanced weapons, while continuing to call for the removal of the US presence from Iraq, alongside continuing to call for the elimination of the State of Israel.

Organization, structure, and deployment

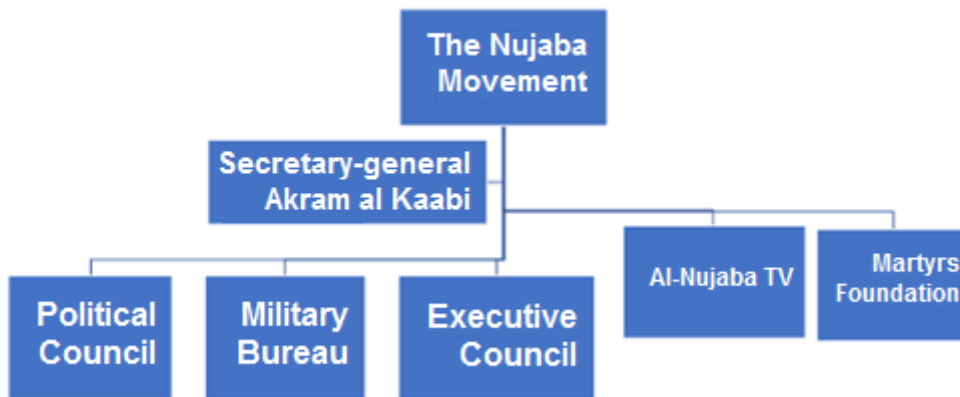
Structure and organization

► Very little is known about the organization's structure since its members maintain secrecy and compartmentalization. However, it is known that this is a hierarchical organization. The militia is headed by its secretary-general, Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi. Underneath Al-Kaabi there is the **Executive Council** (Al-Majlis al-Tanfidhi), which is the militia's executive arm (Al-Mayadeen, August 6, 2022; Mehr News, November 7, 2022). The other two wings are the **Military Bureau** (Al-Maktab al-Askari), which is responsible for the military aspects of the militia's activity and operates offices in various provinces in Iraq, and the **Political Council** (Al-Majlis al-Siyasi; called until 2018 the Political Bureau, Al-Maktab al-Siyasi), which is responsible for the political aspects of the activity. The Nujaba Movement has a **satellite channel, Al-Nujaba TV**,⁸ and a **Martyrs Foundation** (Mu'assassat al-Shuhada), which is responsible for assisting the families of the fallen and wounded among the movement's fighters (IFMAT, August 27, 2019; YouTube channel of the Nujaba Movement's Military Bureau in Basra, May 21, 2017; the Nujaba Movement's Twitter account, April 8, 2023). A prominent figure in the organization is engineer Nasr al-Shammari, who is the Nujaba Movement's deputy secretary-general and chairman of the organization's Executive Council (Mehr News, November 7, 2022).

<https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/126/terror.pdf>

⁷ <https://2017-2021.state.gov>

⁸ For further details, see chapter on media and public relations network below.



**The Nujaba Movement's tree structure (IFMAT, August 27, 2019)
(the movement's Twitter account, April 8, 2023)**



**Engineer Nasr al-Shammari, chairman of the executive council and deputy secretary-general
(Mehr News, November 7, 2022)**

► The Nujaba Movement's military wing consists of three brigade frameworks, two operating in Iraq, the Al-Hamd Brigade and the Al-Imam al-Hassan Brigade, and the **Ammar bin Yasser**⁹ Brigade, which operates alongside the Syrian regime in Syria to suppress the civil war in the country, the establishment of which was announced in May 2013, when the Qusayr campaign began near the Syria-Lebanon border. In November 2013, it was reported that the brigade's forces were concentrated near the city of Aleppo, in northern Syria (Al-Bawaba, December 11, 2013).

⁹ Ammar bin Yasser (567-657 CE) was a member of the Prophet Muhammad's close circle (the *Sahaba*) and a close associate of the fourth caliph, Ali bin Abi Talib. Ammar bin Yasser's tomb in the Al-Raqqah area, in northern Syria, was destroyed by ISIS in 2013.



Nujaba Movement fighters (Al-Marja', August 13, 201)

- ▶ The Nujaba Movement has a **media and public relations office** (Maktab al-l'lam wal-'Alaqa) **located in Iran** (Al-Alam, August 7, 2021).
- ▶ There is also an office operating **in the Gaza Strip** (Maktab Harakat al-Nujaba fi Filastin). Apparently, this is a very limited group operating alongside other “resistance” organizations, headed by Hamas (Al-Manar, September 11, 2021).
- ▶ The movement also has an office **in Lebanon**, headed by Alaa Hassan, about whom the ITIC has no details (Baheth Center for Palestinian and Strategic Studies, July 26, 2022).

Media and public relations network

- ▶ The Nujaba Movement has an extensive public relations network, which includes a satellite channel, websites, a radio station, and active social media accounts:
 - ◆ **TV channel:** The channel, called Nawat al-Haqiqa (“Seeds of Truth”), has been active since 2013. It also includes a website and a YouTube channel where videos are uploaded under the same name.¹⁰ The channel operates from Baghdad, and its correspondents are spread throughout most of Iraq’s provinces. The channel also has an office and a studio in Tehran. The channel’s director-general is **Amir al-Qurayshi**. The satellite TV channel is a member of the Iraqi Radio and Television Union and the Islamic Radio and Television Union (IRTVU), which belongs to Iran and is the main propaganda arm of the IRGC’s Qods Force. The union supports, and in many cases creates the content broadcast on other channels and media operated by Iran’s proxy organizations. The channel broadcasts, among other things, political, cultural, and religious programs promoting the Axis of Resistance. In March 2019, the US

¹⁰ Satellite channel’s website address: www.alnojaba.tv. YouTube channel’s website address: https://www.youtube.com/@Nawat_alhaqiqa.

Department of State designated this channel as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) entity (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 2, 2021; July 22, 2021).¹¹



Right: Logo of the Nujaba Movement’s satellite TV channel. Left: Akram al-Kaabi in an interview on the channel (Nawat al-Haqiqa YouTube channel, November 28, 2022)¹²

◆ **Arabic-language website:** The Nujaba Movement operates a website that includes, inter alia, information about the militia’s activity, statements by its secretary-general Akram al-Kaabi and senior militia officials, announcements issued by the organization, and information about its dead fighters.¹³



Nujaba Movement’s website (February 23, 2023)

◆ **Hebrew-language website:** On January 18, 2021, the Nujaba Movement launched an official website in Hebrew.¹⁴ According to the movement’s announcement, the objective of the website is to fight the “Zionist enemy” by addressing its public (Nujaba Movement’s website, January 18, 2021).¹⁵

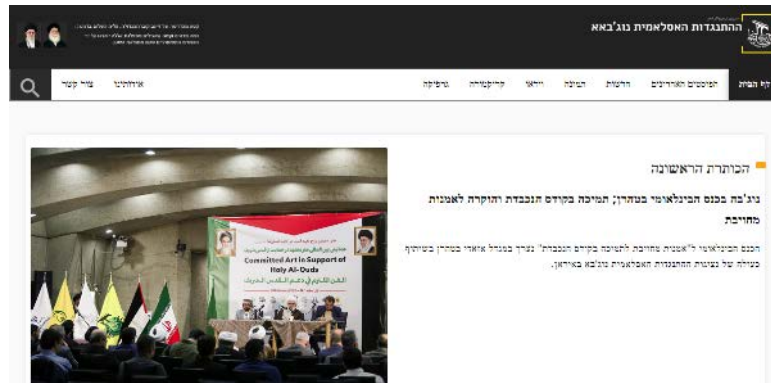
¹¹ <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org>

¹² https://www.youtube.com/@Nawat_alhaqiqa

¹³ Website address: www.alnojaba.com

¹⁴ Website address: <http://alnujaba.info>

¹⁵ <http://www.alnojaba.com/?p=2131>



Homepage of the Hebrew-language website (alnujaba.info, March 2, 2021)

- ◆ **Radio station:** The name of the station is Radio al-Nujaba. It can be listened to via the Internet (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, July 22, 2021).¹⁶
- ◆ **Twitter account of the Nujaba Movement's secretary-general:** The Twitter account of Secretary-General Akram al-Kaabi is quite active and includes statements and tweets dealing with the organization's strategy, support for terrorist organizations operating in Lebanon and Syria (Hezbollah), Yemen (the Houthis), and the Gaza Strip and Judea and Samaria (Hamas and the Islamic Jihad). Al-Kaabi frequently criticizes the US presence in Iraq and calls for the expulsion of all US Army soldiers remaining in the country as advisors as well as the staff at the US Embassy in Baghdad. On December 11, 2022, the day after the 5th anniversary of Iraq's so-called victory over ISIS, a notice was issued with the movement's statement, "We renew our position that rejects the [American] occupation [of Iraq], and we see the only and most effective way to deal with it is the military option and there is no other solution" (Twitter account of Akram al-Kaabi, December 11, 2022).



◆ **Telegram channels:** According to an American research institute, there is proof that the Nujaba Movement controls the Telegram channels “Jehad Brothers Electronic Team” (Fariq Ikhwat al-Jihad al-Electruni), which has about 10,000 subscribers, and the “ج ن” (N.J.) channel (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 27, 2021).

The militia’s youth movement

► The Nujaba Movement has a youth movement called the Association of the Nujaba (Noble) Youth Scouts (Jam’iyyat al-Fitya al-Nujaba al-Kashafiya), which is similar to Hezbollah’s Imam al-Mahdi Scout Movement in Lebanon. Like Hezbollah’s Imam al-Mahdi Scout Movement in Lebanon, that youth movement was intended for recruiting young people and training them as the next generation of fighters while strengthening their belief in the organization’s ideology. For example, the youth movement held a ceremony on March 9, 2023, during which youths were documented walking over Israeli and American flags and chanting “Step on America, step on Israel” (the militia’s Facebook page, March 9, 2023). In another event, the youth movement held a commemoration ceremony for Qassem Soleimani, Qods Force commander, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, PMF deputy commander in Iraq (the militia’s Facebook page, January 7, 2023). The two were killed in a targeted killing carried out by the US on January 3, 2020.



Right: Young members of the youth movement walking over Israeli and American flags (the militia’s Facebook page, March 9, 2023). Left: Youth movement at a ceremony commemorating Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis (the militia’s Facebook page, January 7, 2023)

► **The Martyrs Foundation (Mu’assassat al-Shuhada):** responsible for assisting the families of the Nujaba Movement’s fallen and wounded members. The foundation has offices in various provinces throughout Iraq, and its personnel conduct home visits to the families of the fallen and wounded in the organization, as well as to the schools attended by the children of the fallen. On January 22, 2022, an apartment was given to the family of one of the organization’s fallen, Muhammad Hussein, in Diyala Province, in the presence of the

organization's secretary-general, Akram al-Kaabi. In another video, posted on November 11, 2021, Yassin al-Qara Ghouli, head of the Martyrs Foundation in the Wasit Province, is seen visiting a wounded militia operative and a school (Nawat News YouTube channel, November 11, 2021; January 22, 2022; July 23, 2022).



Right: Al-Kaabi visiting the new apartment given to the family of organization's martyr Muhammad Hussein (Nawat News YouTube channel, January 22, 2022). Left: Yassin al-Qara Ghouli, head of the Nujaba Movement's Martyrs Foundation in the Wasit Province (Nawat News YouTube channel, November 11, 2021)

Domestic politics

► The militia claims that it does not take part in Iraqi domestic politics. Ali al-Assadi, head of the Nujaba Movement's Political Bureau, said in an interview given in April 2022 that the movement did not take part in the elections (Al-Sumaria, April 28, 2022). However, it receives support from the Al-Fatah Coalition (I'tilaf/Tahaluf al-Fatah, also called the Fatah bloc), the PMF's political wing, most of whose members are pro-Iranian. The militia's leaders, especially Al-Kaabi, sometimes express their opinion on the nature of the regime they consider appropriate in Iraq or make statements condemning and threatening Israel and the United States, which are certainly political statements.

Deployment of troops and weapons

Deployment of militia forces in Iraq

► The Nujaba Movement's fighters are deployed in the provinces of Salah al-Din, Nineveh, Baghdad, Najaf, Karbala, and Diyala. They mainly man positions and checkpoints and take part in the fight against ISIS. The militia operates at least one training camp in Diyala Province (Nujaba Movement's website, July 11, 2022; Nujaba Movement's Twitter account, June 21, 2022).



**Nujaba Movement fighters' deployment areas in Iraq, marked in green
(Google Maps and Internet sources)**

Weapons

► The militia uses a variety of weapons, including unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), surface-to-surface missiles, ballistic missiles, anti-tank missiles, and rockets. It may also possess anti-aircraft missiles, but the ITIC has not detected any. Against the backdrop of calls by political elements in Iraq to disarm the PMF, claiming that the Iraqi Army is capable of maintaining the security of the country alone after the defeat of ISIS, Al-Kaabi categorically refused to disarm the militia. According to him, “the weapon of resistance will not be handed over to anyone except its owner, who is the 12th Imam [the Hidden Imam, who according to Twelver Shia tradition will appear as Mahdi in the end of days]” (Nawat News Channel, November 28, 2022). This situation leaves the pro-Iranian militias undermining Iraq’s stability and cohesion since these militias are loyal first and foremost to Iran and not to the Iraqi government.

► **Unmanned aerial vehicles:** The Nujaba Movement possesses Iranian-made drones designed for observation, intelligence-gathering, and attack purposes. These drones were operated against ISIS in some of the militia’s areas of activity in Iraq. The militia’s drones are Ababil 3 and Yasser.

- ◆ **Ababil 3:** It can carry guided missiles and night vision devices that can transmit images to ground stations. Its operating range is about 250 km, it has a maximum

speed of about 200 km/h, and a cruising altitude of about 5 km (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, July 17, 2022; Fars, August 11, 2019).



Ababil-3 UAV (Wikipedia)

◆ **Yasser:** It is intended for collecting visual intelligence and is considered the most modern of its kind in the Iranian army. The UAV is an Iranian version of the US-made Scan Eagle UAV which the IRGC seized on December 5, 2012, after it entered Iranian airspace over the Persian Gulf. It is a light aircraft with a wingspan of about 3 m and a cruise ceiling at a height of 4.5 km at a speed of up to 200 km/h for eight hours. On the front of the aircraft are installed devices that allow communication with the ground station as well as night vision cameras. The aircraft is launched by a ground launcher or from a vessel (Alliance Defense Science Forum, May 15, 2019). In June 2015, photos were published showing an Iranian Yasser observation drone with the Nujaba Movement's logo at the top of the wing. The photos were taken when the aircraft was being prepared for locating ISIS terrorist centers (@al_moshashae Twitter account, June 11, 2015).



Iranian Yasser observation drone (photo from the Tasnim website, published by Alliance Defense Science Forum, May 15, 2019)



**Iranian Yasser observation drone with the Nujaba Movement's logo
(@al_moshashae Twitter account, June 11, 2015)**

► **Surface-to-surface missiles, ballistic missiles, and rockets:** It is reasonable to assume that all types of missiles used by the militia are made in Iran.

◆ On April 29, 2022, the International Jerusalem Day march was held in Tehran. At the same time, a weapons exhibition was held, displaying missiles, cruise missiles, and rockets, including **the Nujaba Movement's new Jamal 69 ballistic missile** (Fars, April 29, 2022). This solid-fuel ballistic missile has a range of 700 km and carries a warhead weighing 450 kg. The missile was named Jamal after Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, PMF's deputy commander (who was killed in January 2020). The number 69 is derived from the numerical value of the name Zaynab, Prophet Muhammad's granddaughter (Arab Journal, August 28, 2022).



Jamal 69 ballistic missile (Allah 313 Mahabba YouTube channel, May 10, 2022)

◆ In another reference to the use of surface-to-surface missiles and rockets by the Nujaba Movement, it was noted that the movement's fighters conducted a test on May 25, 2022, during which they launched five long-range surface-to-surface missiles and eight self-manufactured short-range rockets from the Al-Rasafah desert, about 40 km southwest of Al-Raqqah, towards the Al-Makman Desert, about 90 km northeast of Al-Raqqah. The purpose of the test was to train groups of fighters in launching missiles

and rockets before they were sent to the front in the rural area of Aleppo (Al-Khabur, May 25, 2022).

◆ The militia also has short-range 107mm rockets launched from multi-barrel launchers (12 barrels) carried on the organization's off-road vehicles (Nujaba Movement's Twitter account, June 11, 2022). Apparently, these rockets are Iranian-made or self-manufactured under Iranian guidance.



107mm rocket being launched from a multi-barrel launcher carried on an off-road vehicle (Nujaba Movement's Twitter account, June 11, 2022)

► **Anti-tank missiles and RPG rockets:** Both weapons are used by the Nujaba Movement in ground combat.

◆ Russian-made Kornet anti-tank missiles (Nujaba Movement's Twitter account, June 24, 2022).



Anti-tank missile launch (Nujaba Movement's Twitter account, June 24, 2022)

◆ RPG rockets: RPG launchers and rockets, apparently made in Iran (Nujaba Movement's Twitter account, June 24, 2022).



Nujaba Movement fighter carrying a launcher armed with a rocket (Nujaba Movement's Twitter account, June 24, 2022)

► **Sniper rifles:** The militia has a sniper unit using sniper rifles of various calibers, apparently made in Iran (Nujaba Movement's Twitter account, June 17, 2022).



Right: Sniper carrying a sniper rifle, and next to him a large-caliber sniper rifle (Nujaba Movement's Twitter account, June 17, 2022). Left: Sniper pointing a sniper rifle with a lookout next to him (Nujaba Movement's Twitter account, June 17, 2022)

► **M-16 rifle made in the USA:** A very small part of the militia fighters have M-16 rifles made in the United States. It seems that the rifles reached the militiamen through the Iraqi Army (Nujaba Movement's Twitter account, June 24, 2022). Additional US Army equipment may have reached the militiamen from the Iraqi Army.



Nujaba Movement fighter shoots an M-16 (Nujaba Movement's Twitter account, June 24, 2022)

► **Heavy rockets:** The Nujaba Movement uses heavy rockets, apparently self-manufactured, launched from a double-barreled launcher carried on off-road vehicles (Twitter account of the Nujaba Movement - Lebanon, March 7, 2023).



Rocket being launched from a double-barreled launcher carried on a Nujaba Movement's off-road vehicle in Syria or Iraq (Twitter account of the Nujaba Movement - Lebanon, March 7, 2023)

► **Artillery:** The militia uses trailing artillery made in Russia or Eastern Europe in Syria and/or Iraq (Twitter account of the Nujaba Movement – Lebanon, March 7, 2023).



Operative preparing to fire artillery with a 152mm field cannon in Syria or Iraq (Twitter account of the Nujaba Movement – Lebanon, March 7, 2023)

Relations with the IRGC and Lebanese Hezbollah

► **There are many similarities between the Nujaba Movement's emblem and those of the IRGC's Qods Force and the Lebanese Hezbollah.** The three emblems have the same motifs: in the center of the emblem, there is the hand holding an assault rifle, and above the rifle a Quran verse. The emblem of the IRGC's Qods Force reads: "And prepare against them whatever you are able of power and steeds of war."¹⁷ The Nujaba Movement's emblem reads: "And strive for Allah with the striving due to Him. He has chosen you."¹⁸ The Lebanese Hezbollah's emblem reads: "And whoever is an ally of Allah and His Messenger and those

¹⁷ Surat al-Anfal, 8, verse 60, Sahih International's Quran translation.

¹⁸ Surat al-Hajj, 22, verse 78, Sahih International's Quran translation.

who have believed – indeed, the party of Allah – they will be the predominant.”¹⁹ In addition, each of the three emblems includes the earth, symbolizing the striving for world hegemony.



From left to right: The Nujaba Movement’s emblem, Hezbollah’s emblem, and the Qods Force’s emblem (IRNA News Agency, November 7, 2017)

► On November 4, 2015, Al-Kaabi said in an interview with the Iraqi Al-Sumaria TV channel that he would obey any order issued by the “Supreme Leader of Iran,” Ali Khamenei, including an order to topple the Iraqi government or participate in any war outside Iraq. According to another announcement by the militia, issued in April 2018, it receives orders from Qassem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC’s Qods Force, and from the Iraqi prime minister, and it is committed to the ideology of the Islamic revolution according to Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic revolution in Iran (Shabakat Akhbar al-Iraq, April 1, 2018). On June 27, 2022, the anniversary of the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Al-Kaabi noted that Khomeini “was a distinguished personality who changed the face of the [Islamic] nation, reversed the balance of power, and established [the conditions for] the sacred appearance of our Imam, Mohammad bin al-Hassan [as a Mahdi, i.e., the Islamic Messiah].” He added that Khomeini had dedicated his life to promoting the truth [i.e., Islam] and removing oppression from the oppressed (iranalyoum.com, June 27, 2022).

► The militia’s relations with the Lebanese Hezbollah are close, coming into expression in the militia’s name, Hezbollah al-Nujaba (IFMAT, November 30, 2018). The term “Hezbollah al-Nujaba” is deeply embedded in Shiite history. It was taken from a speech given by Zaynab

¹⁹ Surat al-Maeda, 5, verse 56, Sahih International’s Quran translation.

bint Ali, daughter of the fourth Sunni caliph and the first Shiite imam, Ali bin Abi Talib, and Fatima, the beloved daughter of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad.²⁰ Her speech was addressed to Yazid bin Mu'awiya, the Umayyad caliph, the rival to the House of Ali, after Zaynab and the other pro-Ali prisoners who participated in the Battle of Karbala (680 CE, in which many descendants of Ali bin Abi Talib were killed) were taken to Damascus. Zaynab blamed Yazid for his behavior towards the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. During her speech, she used the term "Hezbollah al-Nujaba," saying: "Isn't it most puzzling to kill [members of] the party of Allah, the nobles [originally: "Hezbollah al-Nujaba"] by means of Satan's party [alluding to the fighters of the Yazid camp]?" (Al-Maaref al-Islamiyya, December 7, 2011). It should be noted that with its establishment, the Nujaba Movement hastened to send forces to Syria to defend the Holy Shrine of Sayyida Zaynab in the Damascus area, and later expanded its activity to defend the Syrian regime as part of the Iranian-led Axis of Resistance.

► The militia's close relations with Lebanese Hezbollah have also been reflected in statements made by the militia's secretary-general. For example, on February 13, 2018, during a visit by the Nujaba Movement's secretary-general to the southern suburb of Beirut, Hezbollah's stronghold in Lebanon, he said that his organization was committed to standing by Hezbollah against any attack by Israel. "We, the [Islamic] resistance in Iraq, will stand by Hezbollah against any attack by Israel and against any Israeli move against Hezbollah. We will act alongside Hezbollah [in Lebanon], just as we operated together in Iraq and Syria, and just as we fought against the takfiri organizations [ISIS and other jihadi organizations]" (Nujaba Movement's website, February 14, 2018).²¹

²⁰ Granddaughter of the Prophet Muhammad, buried south of Damascus. She is a role model especially for Shiites, and her burial place is a pilgrimage site.

²¹ For further information, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from February 22, 2018, "The leader of the Movement of the Noble Ones, an Iranian-operated Shi'ite militia in Iraq, said during a memorial ceremony for Imad Mughnieh that the militia would support Hezbollah if Israel attacked it."



Al-Kaabi meets with Nasrallah (NAS, August 13, 2019)

Activity in Syria

► The Nujaba Movement was one of the first Shiite-Iraqi militias to be sent to Syria, apparently following an Iranian decision. Shortly after its establishment in 2013, the Nujaba Movement announced that it had a presence in Syria, intended to assist the Bashar Assad regime.²² The first forces of the movement were sent to defend the Holy Shrine of Sayyida Zaynab south of Damascus, but later forces were dispatched to additional fighting scenes in Syria. For example, it was reported that in April 2022, the Nujaba Movement sent reinforcements, including fighters and military equipment, to the Aleppo region, at the same time as reinforcements were sent to Idlib (Al-Khabur, May 25, 2022). The militia has a training camp around the city of Ma'adan (about 60 km southeast of Al-Raqqah), in an area controlled by the Syrian Army. The training camp is used to conduct military courses and instill the Nujaba Movement's ideology in the new recruits (Al-Khabur, April 9, 2021). The militia fighters in Syria are deployed along the Euphrates River, in the provinces of Al-Raqqah and Aleppo, and in the desert area (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, July 23, 2022).

► On September 2, 2022, a Nujaba Movement's force which included dozens of fighters and several vehicles equipped with medium machine guns entered Syria from Al-Qaim in Iraq (through the Al-Sikak crossing, about 5 km southeast of Albukamal) towards the rural area west of Deir ez-Zor (Baladi, September 3, 2022). It should be noted that on March 25, 2022, it was reported that the railway crossing was opened by the decision of Haj Askar, the IRGC security and military commander in the Albukamal area, and that fighters of pro-Iranian militias (the Iraqi Hezbollah Brigades and fighters of the Shiite-Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade)

²² For further information, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from December 31, 2017, "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""

were supervising the crossing. It was noted that the border crossing is used by Iranian and Iraqi militias for smuggling purposes (Baladi, March 25, 2022).



The Nujaba Movement fighters' deployment areas in Syria, in a red circle (Google Maps and web sources)



Qassem Soleimani, former commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, alongside a Nujaba Movement fighter in the Albukamal region in Syria in 2017 (Enab Baladi, November 17, 2017)

► **To recruit fighters to its ranks in Syria**, for the first time in April 2021, the Nujaba Movement opened a recruitment office in the town of Al-Sabkha, about 25 km southeast of Al-Raqqah, in an area controlled by the Syrian army. It was reported that the recruits would receive a monthly salary of up to 250,000 Syrian pounds (about \$100). It seems that the militia tried to take advantage of the difficult economic situation that prevailed in the region

to lure new recruits into its ranks (Al-Khabur, April 9, 2021). After that, additional recruitment bureaus were established. In August 2021, it was reported that the Nujaba Movement took over two apartments in the town of Ma'adan Atiq (about 50 km northwest of Deir ez-Zor) and began work to turn them into headquarters and recruitment offices. It was also reported that the logistical equipment for setting up these offices came from Iraq. It will be the seventh headquarters established by the movement in the rural area west of Deir ez-Zor (Al-Hadath al-Suri Facebook page, August 21, 2021).

Weapons in the possession of the forces in Syria

► **Unmanned aerial vehicles:** In March 2022, it was reported that the IRGC had begun to provide new intensive courses for commanders and operatives of the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Nujaba Movement, and the Fatemiyoun Brigade (which is composed of Shiite Afghan fighters operating alongside the Iranian regime) in the operation of Iranian-made UAVs. The courses take place in the Al-Tibni Desert, about 40 km northwest of Deir ez-Zor (Ayn al-Furat, March 26, 2022). According to another report, the Nujaba Movement's forces in the Al-Mazare' area in the Al-Mayadeen Desert (about 40 km southeast of Deir ez-Zor) carried out and experimented with launching Iranian-made Ababil-3 UAVs that took off from the area towards the desert region and apparently attacked ISIS targets (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, July 17, 2022).

► **Surface-to-surface missiles:** On January 29, 2021, Nujaba Movement fighters in Syria reportedly received a shipment of 56 Iranian short- and medium-range surface-to-surface missiles. The missiles reached Syria from Iraq in disguise in civilian trucks through unofficial border crossings to the area of the town of Al-Tibni, where militia fighters are concentrated (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, January 29, 2021).

► **Ammunition production:** In October 2021, the Nujaba Movement reportedly began the construction of a factory for the production of mortar shells, launching pads for surface-to-surface missiles, and ammunition of various calibers. The production is carried out on agricultural farms belonging to Syrian citizens who are outside the country, which were previously taken over by pro-Iranian militias. These farms are located on the outskirts of the city of Ma'adan, about 50 km southeast of Al-Raqqah (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, October 16, 2021).

Presence in Lebanon

► Not much is known about the Nujaba Movement’s bureau and leadership in Lebanon. It operates an official Twitter account that has been active since November 2021 and, **because of the incidents on the Temple Mount during the month of Ramadan, has issued threats of drone attacks on Israel as part of the Axis of Resistance.** A video was posted on Twitter threatening Israel in Hebrew that “**Iraqi Ababils [the Ababil drone, especially Ababil 3 used by the militia] are on their way [to Israel].**” The video documents the clashes on the Temple Mount, alongside the caption, “Occupied Jerusalem – an attack on worshippers at the Qibli Mosque [i.e., the Al-Aqsa Mosque] – our souls depend on Al-Quds, our souls yearn for it, and our hands are still on the weapons.”

► Subsequently, the **movement’s “operations room” is shown; its commanders spread a satellite map of Israel on the table and mark targets, one of them being the port of Haifa, and an inscription appears, “The zero hour of the drone attack [is coming].**” At the end of the video, the caption reads, “This is the voice of the curse in the eighties [i.e., in the eighth decade of the State of Israel]” (Twitter account of the Nujaba Movement – Lebanon, April 13, 2023). The video also includes the caption, “The Golan Liberation Brigade,” which could suggest that this brigade, whose establishment was announced by the Nujaba Movement in 2017, operates in Lebanon and apparently in Syria as well.



From the threatening video: “Iraqi Ababils are on their way [to Israel]” and “The zero hour of the drone attack [is coming]” (Twitter account of the Nujaba Movement – Lebanon, April 13, 2023)

► The Nujaba Movement’s bureau in Lebanon is headed by **Alaa Hassan**, about whom the ITIC has no further details (Baheth Center for Palestinian and Strategic Studies, July 26, 2022).



**Alaa Hassan, director of the Nujaba Movement's bureau in Lebanon
(Baheth Center for Palestinian and Strategic Studies, July 26, 2023)**

Relations with foreign officials

► Apparently, following the rapprochement between Iran and Russia over the past year, against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine, Al-Kaabi met with Mikhail Bogdanov, deputy foreign minister of Russia and Russian President's special envoy to the Middle East and Africa. Al-Kaabi briefed him on security and political issues, stressing the need not to allow the United States to leave forces in Iraq and "steal its treasures." Bogdanov praised the Nujaba Movement's role in the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria and stressed the need to strengthen ties with Iraq at all political, economic, and cultural levels (Jehad Brothers Team Telegram channel, November 26, 2022).



**Al-Kaabi meeting with Bogdanov in Moscow
(Jehad Brothers Team Telegram channel, November 26, 2022)**

Threats against Israel

► The militia leaders often make threats against Israel and refer to it, as well as the United States, as elements that destabilize Iraq and the entire region. Against this background, the militia seeks to isolate Israel in the region, and its secretary-general even emphasized that

any Arab element that normalized relations with Israel (the “occupying entity”) would be fair game.

► Akram al-Kaabi accused Israel in November 2022 of increasing involvement in Iraq and creating a civil war in the country through intelligence activity and through the Kurdish government in Erbil. According to him, the danger posed by Israel to Iraq is greater than the American danger since the power of the Americans in Iraq has weakened to a great extent. He noted that **it was necessary to fight against Israel’s involvement in Iraq and subordinate the Kurdish government to the Iraqi government**. He also added that any Iraqi citizen who promoted normalization with Israel would be targeted by the “resistance” (Nawat al-Haqiqa TV, November 28, 2022).

► On April 29, 2022, Al-Kaabi referred to International Jerusalem Day, established by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979, which is marked on the last Friday of Ramadan. According to Al-Kaabi, Jerusalem is the first and foremost issue and it must be conquered and saved from Israel (“the Zionist enemy”). **Al-Kaabi wished for the destruction of Israel** and noted that his movement was fully ready to participate in the “holy liberation” [of Jerusalem] (Akram al-Kaabi’s Twitter account, April 29, 2022).



**Remarks by the Al-Kaabi on International Jerusalem Day
(Akram al-Kaabi’s Twitter account, April 29, 2022)**

► On May 10, 2021, during Operation Guardian of the Walls, Al-Kaabi noted that “the [Palestinian] issue is one, victory is one, and the land is one. Baghdad is Jerusalem, and Jerusalem is Baghdad, and the enemy is one, whether it is Zionist or American.” Al-Kaabi mentioned that the Nujaba Movement had indicated in the past that it was standing by the Palestinians in defending the holy places and that it was waiting for a signal from the Palestinians **to take part together with them in actions against Israel**. Addressing the

Palestinians, he said that they could rely on him in all areas of [intelligence] aid, equipment, and information and that the Nujaba Movement’s fighters had been waiting for many years to fight against the occupier of their lands (i.e., Israel) (Akram al-Kaabi’s Twitter account, May 10, 202).

Threats against countries that have normalized relations with Israel

► Addressing the Saudi announcement in July 2022 that the airspace above Saudi Arabia would be opened to Israeli planes, Al-Kaabi noted that they regard anyone who dares to normalize relations with Israel (the “occupying entity”) as fair game and will treat him as they do against Israel. A poster shows Al-Kaabi marching with the organization and Iraqi flags against the background of the Nujaba Movement fighters, and the figure of a leader in a suit (whose face was concealed by a question mark) sitting in an armchair, on fire (the Nujaba Movement’s Twitter account, July 15, 2022).



Al-Kaabi threatens to act against anyone who normalizes relations with Israel (the Nujaba Movement’s Twitter account, July 15, 2022)

Summary

- The Nujaba Movement holds an extremist Shiite Islamic ideology, based on the principles of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. The fact that it possesses sophisticated weapons, along with being very hostile to Israel and the United States, poses a danger to the interests of these countries as well as the moderate countries in the region that oppose the pro-Iranian axis.
- The fact that the militia’s secretary-general Akram al-Kaabi expresses support for Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and the Palestinian “resistance” in the Gaza Strip, Judea, and Samaria, while expressing his willingness to make his operatives available to Hezbollah and the Palestinian terrorist organizations in any future confrontation with Israel, reinforces the above argument.

► In addition, the militia poses a real threat to Iraq's political stability and its future as an independent state and endangers Iraq's ties with the West since this militia, along with other militias operated by Iran in Iraq, are subordinate first and foremost to Iran's interests and not to Iraq's national interests.