

Asaib Ahl al-Haq (League of the Righteous)



Logo: Victory sign over silhouette of Iraq; image of AK-47 was removed from logo in 2017

Flag Text: On book: “They were youths who believed in their Lord” (Quran 18:13); below book: “Asaib Ahl al-Haq”

FOUNDING

- 2006

SIZE

- Estimated at 1,000 – 5,000 in 2014
- Allegedly grown to 10,000 by 2015

KEY LEADERS

- Qais al-Khazali, commander
- Hassan Salem, chairman of parliamentary bloc

IDEOLOGICAL ALLEGIANCE

- Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei
- Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr (d. 1999)

POLITICAL WING

- Al-Sadiqun bloc holds one seat in Iraqi parliament

WEAPONS

- Has publicized the use of U.S.-made M113 armored personnel carriers; has access to Iranian-produced arms as well as Soviet-era vehicles, tanks, and light arms

ATROCITIES

- Political assassinations; sectarian abuse and killing, including the death of 109 Sunnis in 2014; abuses continued into 2016

LEGAL STATUS IN IRAQ

- The 42nd, 52nd, and 43rd brigades of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) consist of Asaib Ahl al-Haq fighters

AREAS OF OPERATION

- Primarily based out of Baghdad; maintains political offices in various Iraqi cities and in Beirut, Lebanon; has operated across Iraq and in Syria, including in Aleppo

CONNECTIONS TO OTHER MILITIAS

- Supported by Lebanese Hezbollah, Kataib Hezbollah

CURRENT DESIGNATIONS

- Proposed target of terrorism sanctions under House bill H.R. 4238

SOCIAL MEDIA

- www.ahluahq.com; some leaders have Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube accounts



BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Asaib Ahl al-Haq is an Iranian proxy force in Iraq with military, political, religious, and charitable components. The group began to receive training and support from the IRGC-Quds Force and Lebanese Hezbollah in 2006, when it splintered off from another Tehran-backed insurgent group.¹ The group would go on to claim more than 6,000 attacks on U.S. troops in Iraq, including many with explosively formed penetrators (EFPs).

Shortly after the departure of U.S. forces from Iraq in 2011, Asaib Ahl al-Haq opened political offices in major cities, launched a network of religious schools, and began to provide social services to poor Shiites.² Since its founding, the group's leader has been Qais al-Khazali, who spent three years in prison for his role in an attack that killed five American soldiers in 2007.³

After the outbreak of war in Syria, the group played an important role in recruiting Iraqis to fight in Syria.⁴ Following the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq, Asaib Ahl al-Haq became a leading element within the newly organized Popular Mobilization Forces.

The group's political wing, al-Sadiqun (“the honest ones”) captured a single seat in the Iraqi parliament in the 2014 elections as part of Nuri al-Maliki's Iraqi National Alliance.⁵ In 2017, Khazali visited the Israeli border in Lebanon accompanied by Hezbollah fighters, highlighting his group's ties to Tehran's “axis of resistance,” despite efforts to present a more moderate face.⁶

In early 2018, Asaib Ahl al-Haq joined the Fatah al-Mubin (Manifest Victory) electoral coalition comprised of Iranian-backed militia groups.⁷

1. The most comprehensive study of Asaib Ahl al-Haq is: Sam Wyer, “The Resurgence of Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq,” *Institute for the Study of War*, December 2012. (<http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ResurgenceofAAH.pdf>); For developments since 2012, see the Asaib Ahl al-Haq webpage maintained by the Counter Extremism Project: <https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/asaib-ahl-al-haq>

2. Liz Sly, “Iranian-backed militant group in Iraq is recasting itself as a political player,” *The Washington Post*, February 18, 2013. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/iranian-backed-militant-group-in-iraq-is-recasting-itself-as-a-political-player/2013/02/18/b0154204-77bb-11e2-b102-948929030e64_story.html?utm_term=.da531e5e6893)

3. Sam Wyer, “The Resurgence of Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq,” *Institute for the Study of War*, December 2012. (<http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ResurgenceofAAH.pdf>)

4. Martin Chulov, “Controlled by Iran, the deadly militia recruiting Iraq's men to die in Syria,” *The Guardian* (UK), March 12, 2014. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/12/iraq-battle-dead-valley-peace-syria>)

5. Renad Mansour and Faleh A. Jabar, “The Popular Mobilization Forces and Iraq's Future,” *Carnegie Middle East Center*, April 2017. (http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CMEC_63_Mansour_PMF_Final_Web.pdf)

6. “Lebanon's Hariri denounces Iraqi Shi'ite paramilitary's visit to border,” *Reuters*, December 9, 2017. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mid-east-crisis-lebanon-iraq/lebanons-hariri-denounces-iraqi-shiite-paramilitarys-visit-to-border-idUSKBN1E30FL>)

7. Amir Toumaj and Romany Shaker, “Iranian-backed Iraqi militias form coalition ahead of parliamentary elections,” *FDD's Long War Journal*, January 25, 2018. (<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/01/iranian-backed-iraqi-militias-form-coalition-ahead-of-parliamentary-elections.php>)