

## Kataib Hezbollah (Hezbollah Brigades)



**Logo:** Raised fist with AK-47, similar to the IRGC logo

**Flag Text:** Above rifle: “Fight ye the chiefs of Unfaith: for their oaths are nothing to them” (Quran 9:12); below map: “Hezbollah Brigades”

### FOUNDING

- Originally 2003, assumed present form in 2007

### KEY LEADERS

- Senior commander Jamal Jaafar Ibrahim, aka Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis (“the engineer”)
- Secretary General Seyyed Hashem al-Haydari

### SIZE

- Estimated between 1,000 – 3,000 in 2014

### IDEOLOGICAL ALLEGIANCE

- Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

### POLITICAL WING

- None

### WEAPONS

- Has publicized its use of U.S.-made vehicles such as MRAPs, HUMVEEs, and M113 armored personnel carriers in Iraq; has access to Iranian and Soviet-era weapons and vehicles

### ATROCITIES

- Witnesses accuse Kataib Hezbollah of killing and abusing numerous Sunni civilians during the war against the Islamic State

### LEGAL STATUS IN IRAQ

- The 45th Brigade of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)

### AREAS OF OPERATION

- Apparent headquarters in Baghdad; has operated across Iraq; in Syria, operated in Damascus and Aleppo

### CONNECTIONS TO OTHER MILITIAS

- In his role as operations chief for the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), Muhandis has ties to numerous militias, as well as Yemen’s Houthi rebels

### CURRENT DESIGNATIONS

- U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization; Muhandis designated for his role in the pre-2011 Iraqi insurgency

### SOCIAL MEDIA

- kataibzbollah.com; previously used Facebook



## BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Kataib Hezbollah is a relatively small Iraqi Shiite militia that serves as a vehicle through which the IRGC-Quds Force projects power in Iraq. Originally formed in 2003, Kataib Hezbollah was an umbrella organization for several Shiite militant groups until 2007, when it issued a statement announcing a merger.<sup>1</sup>

The group gained notoriety that same year after attacking American and coalition forces using Iranian-supplied explosively formed penetrators (EFPs), a lethal type of improvised explosive device (IED). Kataib Hezbollah recognizes Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei as “Imam,” a title used by Khamenei’s most ardent followers.

Little is publicly known about the group’s command structure, but its chief, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, is currently Iraq’s deputy national security adviser as well as an operational leader of the PMF. Born in Basra in 1953, Muhandis has worked for decades with the IRGC, including his participation in the 1983 bombing of the U.S. and French embassies in Kuwait that killed six and injured 90 others.<sup>2</sup>

Muhandis is the de-facto deputy of Quds Force chief Qassem Soleimani in Iraq; the Iranian general has called Muhandis a “living martyr.”<sup>3</sup> Kataib Hezbollah was among the earliest Iraqi groups to dispatch fighters to Syria, where it helped organize groups including Liwa Abu-Fadl al-Abbas, a militia composed of Iraqi Shiites.<sup>4</sup>

In 2015, a Kataib Hezbollah official told the *Washington Post* that Kataib Hezbollah had sent 1,000 fighters to Aleppo in response to a direct request by Soleimani.<sup>5</sup> Along with other Iranian-backed militias, Kataib Hezbollah has begun to fill the power vacuum created by the fall of the Islamic State caliphate.

1. “تسمية كتائب حزب الله” (The naming of Kataib Hezbollah), *Kataib Hezbollah*, August 21, 2007. (<http://www.kataibzbollah.com/statment/1170>). The precursor groups were Kataib Karbala, Kataib Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas, Kataib Zeid Ibn Ali, Kataib Ali al-Akbar, and Kataib al-Sajjad.

2. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Designations Individual, Entity Posing Threat to Stability in Iraq,” July 2, 2009. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg195.aspx>)

3. Amir Toumaj, “Iran’s Qods Force chief calls Iraqi militia leader a ‘living martyr,’” *FDD’s Long War Journal*, July 13, 2017. (<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/07/irans-qods-force-chief-calls-iraqi-militia-commander-living-martyr.php>); See also: Amir Toumaj, “Qassem Soleimani spotted in Karbala, Iraq,” *FDD’s Long War Journal*, June 16, 2017. (<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/06/qassem-soleimani-spotted-in-karbala-iraq.php>)

4. Philip Smyth, “How Iran is building its Syrian Hezbollah,” *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, March 8, 2015. (<http://www.washington-institute.org/policy-analysis/view/how-iran-is-building-its-syrian-hezbollah>)

5. Loveday Morris and Mustafa Salim, “Iran backs Assad in battle for Aleppo with proxies, ground troops,” *The Washington Post*, October 19, 2015. ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/iran-backs-assad-in-battle-for-syrias-aleppo-with-proxies-ground-troops/2015/10/19/b8bec268-765f-11e5-a5e2-40d6b2ad18dd\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.38d1b2b9ca92](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/iran-backs-assad-in-battle-for-syrias-aleppo-with-proxies-ground-troops/2015/10/19/b8bec268-765f-11e5-a5e2-40d6b2ad18dd_story.html?utm_term=.38d1b2b9ca92))