

IRANIAN PROXY GROUP KIDNAPS U.S. CONTRACTOR IN IRAQ

- Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), or the League of the Righteous, has claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of Issa T. Solomi, a U.S. military contractor who has been missing since January 23 2010.¹
- AAH is an Iranian-backed militia group that is led by Qais Khazali, who founded AAH in 2006 following a split from Muqtada al-Sadr and his Jaysh al-Mahdi.² Qais was a long-time associate of Muqtada and a student of his father, Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr. Qais and the AAH challenged Muqtada for leadership of the Sadr movement and its militant wing.
- AAH is responsible for some of the most lethal and complex attacks in Iraq.
 - Under the leadership of Qais Khazali, AAH conducted a number of attacks against Coalition and Iraqi forces using rocket fire, explosively-formed projectiles (EFPs), and small arms fire.
 - On January 20, 2007, AAH gunmen with “American-looking uniforms, vehicles and identification cards” successfully attacked the Karbala Provincial Joint Coordination Center (PJCC) where U.S. and Iraqi officials were holding a meeting.³ The gunmen killed five U.S. Soldiers and wounded three more in the well-planned and executed attack.⁴
 - Qais Khazali had received extensive assistance from the Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF) in planning the Karbala attack.⁵
 - Intelligence gathered from the attack ultimately led to the capture of Qais Khazali, his brother Laith Khazali, and Lebanese Hezbollah member Ali Mussa Daqduq in Basra on March 20, 2007.⁶
 - Qods Force Commander Qassem Sulleimani assigned Ali Mussa Daqduq as the liaison between AAH and the Qods Force, and gave him the mission of providing training, weapons, and funds to AAH.
 - In May 2007, just two months after the arrest of the Khazali brothers and Daqduq, AAH conducted another brazen attack in which roughly 100 men in military uniforms stormed the Iraqi Finance Ministry, kidnapping British IT consultant Peter Moore and his four bodyguards in a daytime raid.⁷ As in the PJCC attack, AAH received significant assistance from the IRGC-QF in planning and orchestrating the attack.⁸
- In March 2009, reports revealed that AAH and the Government of Iraq were involved in negotiations aimed at bringing the militant group into the political process. The negotiations included discussions on a phased release of the five British hostages in exchange for the release of top AAH members that were being held in U.S. custody. AAH had also reportedly issued a ceasefire for all active group members during its negotiations with the Iraqi government.⁹
 - In June 2009, Laith Khazali was transferred from U.S. to Iraqi custody and subsequently released.¹⁰

- From June to September 2009, AAH handed over the corpses of three of Moore's bodyguards to the Iraqi government, and more than 450 supporters of Khazali and AAH were released from detention in August.¹¹
 - Qais Khazali was transferred from U.S. to Iraqi custody in late December 2009. He was released on January 5, 2010 and traveled to Qom, Iran shortly thereafter.¹²
 - Peter Moore was handed over to the Iraqi government at the time of Qais Khazali's release. AAH portrayed his release as a hostage exchange. General David Petraeus, when asked directly whether Qais was exchanged for Peter Moore, replied, "No. His release was part of an overall effort led by Prime Minister al-Maliki and the Iraqi Government to reconcile with a group of that he led."¹³
 - AAH is also negotiating with the Government of Iraq over the release of the body of U.S. Army Sergeant Ahmed al-Taie, who has been missing since October 2006.¹⁴ AAH stated that al-Taie had been kidnapped and killed by another militant group, though this claim could not be verified.¹⁵
- The timing of the January 23, 2010 kidnapping, which occurred just weeks after the release of Qais Khazali and following an almost year-long AAH ceasefire, suggests an attempt by Qais Khazali to reinvigorate the militant group after his release.

ENDNOTES

¹ Ernesto Londoño and Leila Fadel, "Officials confirm kidnapping of U.S. contractor in Iraq," *The Washington Post*, February 6, 2010.

² Marisa Cochrane, "The Fragmentation of the Sadrism Trend," Iraq Report 12, Institute for the Study of War, January 2009.

³ Brig. Gen. Kevin Bergner, Spokesman, "Press Briefing, July 2," Multi-National Force - Iraq, July 2, 2007; "Karbala attackers posed as U.S. military officials," *CNN*, January 23, 2007.

⁴ "Karbala Provincial Joint Coordination Center attacked by militia," Multi-National Division - Baghdad PAO, Press Release No. 20070121-01, January, 21, 2007. Marisa Cochrane, "The Fragmentation of the Sadrism Trend," Iraq Report 12, Institute for the Study of War, January 2009; Brig. Gen. Kevin Bergner, Spokesman, "Press Briefing, July 2," Multi-National Force - Iraq, July 2, 2007.

⁵ Marisa Cochrane, "The Fragmentation of the Sadrism Trend," Iraq Report 12, Institute for the Study of War, January 2009; Brig. Gen. Kevin Bergner, Spokesman, "Press Briefing, July 2," Multi-National Force - Iraq, July 2, 2007.

⁶ Briefing slides from the press briefing with Brig. Gen. Kevin Bergner, Spokesman, "Press Briefing, July 2," Multi-National Force - Iraq, July 2, 2007. Marisa Cochrane, "The Fragmentation of the Sadrism Trend," Iraq Report 12, Institute for the Study of War, January 2009.

⁷ Saad Abdul-Kadir, "Iraqis free militant tied to kidnapping; Shi'ite leader's group took five Britons hostage," Associated Press, January 6, 2010; Mona Mahmood, Maggie O'Kane, Guy Grandjean, "Revealed: hand of Iran behind Britons' Baghdad kidnapping," *The Guardian*, December 30, 2009.

⁸ Mona Mahmood, Maggie O'Kane, Guy Grandjean, "Revealed: hand of Iran behind Britons' Baghdad kidnapping," *The Guardian*, December 30, 2009.

⁹ Alissa Rubin and Michael Gordon, "U.S. Frees Suspect in Killing of 5 G.I.s," *The New York Times*, June 8, 2009.

¹⁰ "Militant linked to British kidnappings handed to Iraq," *Agence France Presse - English*, June 9, 2009; Qassim Abdul-Zahra and Robert H. Reid, "Iraqi accused in 5 US soldier deaths freed," *Associated Press*, June 9, 2009.

¹¹ Oliver August, "US to release members of Iraqi group that kidnapped five Britons," *The Times (UK)*, August 19, 2009; "Freed British hostage Peter Moore 'held in Iran'," *BBC*, December 31, 2009.

¹² Yusif Salman: "Leading Figure in the Al-Sadr Trend to Al-Mashriq: Al-Sadr Met Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq Leader in Qom," *Al-Mashriq*, January 18, 2010, translated by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, January 22, 2010; Martin Chulov, "Qais al-Khazali: from kidnapper and prisoner to potential leader," *The Guardian*, December 31, 2009.

¹³ General David Petraeus, Interview with Kimberly Kagan at the Institute for the Study of War, January 22, 2010. Transcript available at: <http://www.understandingwar.org/press-media/webcast/centcom-2010-views-general-david-h-petraeus-video>.

¹⁴ "Iraq Group Says It Has Kidnapped U.S. Contractor," *Reuters*, February 6, 2010; "We Will Never Forget Sgt. Ahmed Altaie," *Fallen Heroes*, U.S. Army Reserve Website.

¹⁵ "Iraq Group Says It Has Kidnapped U.S. Contractor," *Reuters*, February 6, 2010; "We Will Never Forget Sgt. Ahmed Altaie," *Fallen Heroes*, U.S. Army Reserve Website.