



COI QUERY

Country of Origin	IRAQ
Title	Activities of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) in relation to coercion, extortion, and property-related practices
Reference period	January 2023 to January 2026
Topic(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">Presence, influence, and areas of operation of Asa'ib Ahl al-HaqReports of alleged involvement by AAH in coercion, extortion, or other criminal activities related to property or real estateConsequences faced by individuals who refuse to cooperate with AAH, including access to state protection
Date of completion	29 January 2026
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COI QUERY RESPONSE – Iraq

Activities of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) in relation to coercion, extortion, and property-related practices

1. Presence, influence, and areas of operation of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq

For information about the presence, influence, and areas of operation of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq see the EUAA Query response titled [Iraq: Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq militia](#), published on 30 September 2025.

2. Reports of alleged involvement by AAH in coercion, extortion, or other criminal activities related to property or real estate

Sources indicate that various Iraqi militias affiliated with the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)¹ have been involved in criminal activities related to real estate.² Despite a legal ban on expropriation, such cases were 'regularly' reported by minorities in Iraq, as well as property seizures by armed militias aligned with Iran.³

Sources reported on the targeting of real estate owned by religious minorities, particularly Christians.⁴ According to a representative of the Baghdad municipality, in 2015, some 70 % of Christian-owned properties in the city had been seized. Property deeds had been falsified, and properties were unlawfully given to other Iraqis.⁵ An Open Doors⁶ report alleged that in Nineveh province, PMF demanded bribes and 'controlled real estate in Christian areas'.⁷ The

¹ It should be noted that the term PMF is commonly used as an umbrella term describing several Iran-backed militias in Iraq. AAH is considered one of 'the most prominent Shia factions operating under the PMF'. See: Kulić, S., Bolhuis, M.P., The persistence of organized crime in post-caliphate Iraq: a case of crime-terror convergence?. in: Crime Law Soc Change, December 2023, [url](#), and TWI, Profile: Asaib Ahl al-Haq, updated 21 October 2023, [url](#)

² Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2024 - Iraq, 2024, [url](#); Open Doors International, Iraq: Persecution Dynamics, December 2024, [url](#), p. 19; SyriacPress, Catholicos-Patriarch of Assyrian Church of the East Mar Awa III Royel: Illegal Iraqi parties seizing property of Christians in Baghdad, 3 August 2023, [url](#); TWI, Coordination Framework Militias Exposed for Stealing Baghdad Real Estate, 31 August 2023, [url](#)

³ USDOS, Report to Congress on The Status of Land Seizures in Iraq Targeting Minority Communities, [2025], [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁴ NIRIJ, The story of the real estate theft in Mosul, 19 March 2023, [url](#); Open Doors International, Iraq: Persecution Dynamics, December 2024, [url](#), pp. 19, 24; SyriacPress, Catholicos-Patriarch of Assyrian Church of the East Mar Awa III Royel: Illegal Iraqi parties seizing property of Christians in Baghdad, 3 August 2023, [url](#); USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom - Iraq, June 2024, [url](#), p. 2

⁵ Open Doors International, Iraq: Persecution Dynamics, December 2024, [url](#), p. 24

⁶ Open Doors is a Christian organisation present in over 70 countries that aims to support Christians by 'supplying Bibles, training church leaders, providing practical support and emergency relief, and supporting Christians who suffer persecution and discrimination for their faith.' The organisation also includes the World Watch Research (WWR), a research department consisting of researchers working 'closely with other experts operating at regional, national and sub-national level' and producing country reports and thematic reports. See: Open Doors, How we support, n.d., [url](#) and Open Doors, Research & Reports, n.d., [url](#)

⁷ Open Doors International, Iraq: Persecution Dynamics, December 2024, [url](#), p. 19



same report indicated that the perpetrators of property confiscations have not been brought to justice.⁸

In August 2023, Syriac Press reported on an ‘alarming trend’ involving the seizure of properties belonging to ‘Chaldeans–Syriacs–Assyrians’, particularly those owned by individuals who had left the country due to threats from ‘various groups’, which were not specified.⁹ This phenomenon occurred mostly in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and Baghdad.¹⁰ The 2023 report on religious freedom by the United States Department of State (USDOS) stated that the 30th and 50th PMF Brigades were conducting land sales with the ‘aim of reducing Christian demographics in the Ninewa Plain’ and that they supported Shia Iraqis in seizing Christian properties.¹¹ According to Yezidi representatives, militias supported by Iran were encouraging sales of properties owned by Yezidis and Sunni Arabs in order to increase Shia presence in Sinjar.¹² In 2023, sources indicated that the 50th PMF Brigade¹³ was the main perpetrator of illegal confiscation and sale of land in Nineveh,¹⁴ accompanied by ‘intimidation, extortion, and harassment of women.’¹⁵

According to USDOS, cases of property seizures decreased in 2023 compared to previous years, especially those affecting ethnic and religious minorities and suspected ISIL supporters.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the same source regarding properties previously seized indicated that ‘many of those who confiscated the homes still occupied them or claimed ownership to the property’.¹⁷ According to an investigation by the news outlet BasNews released in September 2025, illegal confiscations of Christian land by PMF forces in Nineveh continued, with the report specifically mentioning the 50th Brigade.¹⁸ The source also indicated that the state protections have not been enforced in these cases and the authorities did not take any ‘practical measures’, and those affected did not receive any compensation.¹⁹

⁸ Open Doors International, Iraq: Persecution Dynamics, December 2024, [url](#), p. 25

⁹ SyriacPress, Catholicos-Patriarch of Assyrian Church of the East Mar Awa III Royel: Illegal Iraqi parties seizing property of Christians in Baghdad, 3 August 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰ SyriacPress, Catholicos-Patriarch of Assyrian Church of the East Mar Awa III Royel: Illegal Iraqi parties seizing property of Christians in Baghdad, 3 August 2023, [url](#)

¹¹ USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom - Iraq, June 2024, [url](#), p. 2

¹² USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom - Iraq, June 2024, [url](#), p. 2

¹³ Also referred to as the Babylon Brigade or Kataib Babiliyoun. See: Wilson Center, 10 Years After ISIS Genocide, Christians Are Under Threat, 19 August 2024, [url](#). According to the TWI, even though the brigade poses as a ‘local Christian unit’, in fact, ‘its members have been recruited from Shia Muslim communities in southern Iraq with the goal of dominating the strategic Nineveh Plains region.’ See: TWI, Profile: Kataib Babiliyoun (50th PMF Brigade), 16 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴ TWI, Blunting the Militia Campaign Against Iraq’s Christian Leaders, 25 July 2023, [url](#); USDOS, Report to Congress on The Status of Land Seizures in Iraq Targeting Minority Communities, [2025], [url](#), pp. 2-3

¹⁵ USDOS, Report to Congress on The Status of Land Seizures in Iraq Targeting Minority Communities, [2025], [url](#), pp. 2-3

¹⁶ USDOS, Report to Congress on The Status of Land Seizures in Iraq Targeting Minority Communities, [2025], [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷ USDOS, Custom Report Excerpts: Iraq, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸ BasNews, Christians Accuse Militias Of Seizing Lands In Iraq, 11 September 2025, [url](#)

¹⁹ BasNews, Christians Accuse Militias Of Seizing Lands In Iraq, 11 September 2025, [url](#)



The Washington Institute for Near East Policy (TWI) described the 50th PMF Brigade, implicated in the cases mentioned above, as a ‘local auxiliary unit linked to’ AAH.²⁰ Corroborating information on this affiliation could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints. It should be noted that according to the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD)’s Long War Journal’s analysis, AAH commands the 41st, 42nd, and 43rd PMF Brigades,²¹ while another source states that AAH controls ‘at least three brigades’ within the PMF, without specifying which ones.²² Additionally, as reported by an Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) publication from May 2023, there are also several AAH ‘facade groups’ in Iraq, meaning groups that operate on AAH’s behalf under other names. These include Ashab al-Kahf, Awliya al-Dam, and Saraya Ababil.²³

Within the reference period, sources reported on two major incidents directly involving the AAH militia, occurring in Baghdad and in Mosul, respectively.²⁴

Concerning incident in Baghdad, the annual reports on Iraq covering 2022 and 2023 by Freedom House, stated that ‘pro-Iranian militias have used threats and violent intimidation to force owners of large homes to give up their property, expanding a practice previously employed against Sunnis and Christians’ in middle- and upper-class neighbourhoods of Baghdad.²⁵ In August 2023, property thefts by militia groups in Baghdad’s Jadriyah neighbourhood, allegedly involving AAH, were reported.²⁶ In reaction to the affair, which received significant media coverage in Iraq, the Grand Ayatollah of Iraq Ali al-Sistani met with affected residents in Jadriyah and Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani ordered an investigation into the matter. Several PMF militia members were accused but none were identified as being from AAH, and the militia publicly denied having used ‘any threats or extortion’ against residents.²⁷ The armed groups involved, apart from the AAH militia, included Kata’ib Hizballah and the Badr Organization, which are affiliated with PMF.²⁸ Al-Sistani condemned the property seizures and stated that the government must protect citizens’ rights against such practices, especially when ‘intimidation and coercion’ were used by people in official positions.²⁹ According to USDOS, the investigation’s results ‘have not been publicly disclosed.’³⁰ Additional and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints.

²⁰ TWI, Profile: Kataib Babiliyoun (50th PMF Brigade), 16 March 2023, [url](#)

²¹ FDD’s Long War Journal, The role of Iraqi Shia militias as proxies in Iran’s Axis of Resistance, 14 January 2025, [url](#)

²² Jummar, Qais Al-Khazali: Jumping to the Front of the Line, 20 June 2024, [url](#).

²³ ACLED, The Muqawama and Its Enemies: Shifting Patterns in Iran-Backed Shiite Militia Activity in Iraq, 23 May 2023, [url](#)

²⁴ NIRIJ, The story of the real estate theft in Mosul, 19 March 2023, [url](#); TWI, Coordination Framework Militias Exposed for Stealing Baghdad Real Estate, 31 August 2023, [url](#)

²⁵ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2024 - Iraq, 2024, [url](#); Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 - Iraq, 2023, [url](#)

²⁶ TWI, Coordination Framework Militias Exposed for Stealing Baghdad Real Estate, 31 August 2023, [url](#)

²⁷ TWI, Coordination Framework Militias Exposed for Stealing Baghdad Real Estate, 31 August 2023, [url](#)

²⁸ USDOS, Report to Congress on The Status of Land Seizures in Iraq Targeting Minority Communities, [2025], [url](#), pp. 2-3

²⁹ Stimson, Reforming Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces: From Liability to National Asset, 8 May 2025, [url](#).

³⁰ USDOS, Report to Congress on The Status of Land Seizures in Iraq Targeting Minority Communities, [2025], [url](#), pp. 2-3



Concerning the incident in Mosul, a March 2023 investigative report on land theft in Mosul by the Network of Iraqi Reporters for Investigative Journalism (NIRIJ) reported that, following a ferry accident in March 2019 in the Tigris river killing 130 people, the governor of Mosul stated that AAH ‘had seized properties in Mosul, including a share in the tourist island area where the ferry accident occurred’.³¹ USDOS reported that some 5 000 properties had been seized by PMF militias’ members in Mosul following the escape of the residents after the ISIL offensive in the city.³² According to one member of the parliament quoted in the NIRIJ report, some ‘9,000 properties in Nineveh have been illegally obtained and their records have been tampered with.’³³ Another member of parliament stated that the influence of the perpetrators, without naming any specific actors, ‘makes it impossible to hold them accountable’ even though ‘everyone knows who is responsible’.³⁴ The investigation has also found that local employees received ‘threats of liquidation against them and their families’ if they wanted to speak against the beneficiaries of the real estate fraud.³⁵

3. Consequences faced by individuals who refuse to cooperate with AAH, including access to state protection

Information was scarce among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints. However, the following information may be relevant.

The AAH militia was reported to have used deadly violence against Iraqi civilians during demonstrations in 2019.³⁶ As a result, two leaders of AAH, brothers Qais al-Khazali and Laith al-Khazali, were designated by the US government’s Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control for their involvement in ‘serious human rights abuse’ in the same year.³⁷ Furthermore, in 2020, the AAH and both its leaders were designated as a ‘Foreign Terrorist Organization’.³⁸ According to an analysis by the Hudson Institute published in October 2024, AAH ‘has not fundamentally rejected the use of terrorism against innocent civilians and other targets’.³⁹

³¹ NIRIJ, The story of the real estate theft in Mosul, 19 March 2023, [url](#)

³² USDOS, Custom Report Excerpts: Iraq, n.d., [url](#)

³³ NIRIJ, The story of the real estate theft in Mosul, 19 March 2023, [url](#)

³⁴ NIRIJ, The story of the real estate theft in Mosul, 19 March 2023, [url](#)

³⁵ NIRIJ, The story of the real estate theft in Mosul, 19 March 2023, [url](#)

³⁶ Hudson Institute, Embracing Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq: Pragmatism or Naiveté?, 9 October 2024, [url](#); US Department of Treasury, Treasury Sanctions Iran-Backed Militia Leaders Who Killed Innocent Demonstrators in Iraq, 6 December 2019, [url](#). The aforementioned source has been included due to its relevance despite occurring prior to the reference period of the query.

³⁷ US Department of Treasury, Treasury Sanctions Iran-Backed Militia Leaders Who Killed Innocent Demonstrators in Iraq, 6 December 2019, [url](#). The aforementioned source has been included due to its relevance despite occurring prior to the reference period of the query.

³⁸ USDOS, State Department Terrorist Designations of Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq and Its Leaders, Qays and Laith al-Khazali, 3 January 2020, [url](#). The aforementioned source has been included due to its relevance despite occurring prior to the reference period of the query.

³⁹ Hudson Institute, Embracing Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq: Pragmatism or Naiveté?, 9 October 2024, [url](#); US Department of Treasury, Treasury Sanctions Iran-Backed Militia Leaders Who Killed Innocent Demonstrators in Iraq, 6 December 2019, [url](#). The aforementioned source has been included due to its relevance despite occurring prior to the reference period of the query.



Sources indicated that AAH has turned the focus from fighting the United States to maintaining its political power,⁴⁰ while also keeping active its military wing.⁴¹ It currently controls the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Higher Education, and commands at least three PMF brigades.⁴² Since 2022, AAH and other militias effectively took control of the Iraqi Communications and Media Commission (CMC) by appointing board members affiliated with them, including one from the AAH political wing. According to sources, this allows the CMC to silence critics and exert control over media.⁴³ Aside from the CMC, AAH also has influence in the Iraqi Media Network (IMN).⁴⁴

Additional information on the activities of the AAH militia can be found in the EUAA Query response titled [Iraq: Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq militia](#), published on 30 September 2025.

⁴⁰ Epic, ISHM Reference Guide, last updated August 2025, [url](#); FDD's Long War Journal, The role of Iraqi Shia militias as proxies in Iran's Axis of Resistance, 14 January 2025, [url](#); Jummar, Qais Al-Khazali: Jumping to the Front of the Line, 20 June 2024, [url](#); Hudson Institute, Embracing Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq: Pragmatism or Naiveté?, 9 October 2024, [url](#)

⁴¹ CTC Sentinel, Iraq's New Regime Change: How Tehran-Backed Terrorist Organizations and Militias Captured the Iraqi State, December 2023, [url](#), p. 16; TCF, Integrate, Normalize, or Fight: Choices Facing the Shia Armed Factions in Iraq, 6 October 2025, [url](#)

⁴² Jummar, Qais Al-Khazali: Jumping to the Front of the Line, 20 June 2024, [url](#).

⁴³ Just Security, Remaking Iraq: How Iranian-Backed Militias Captured the Country, 20 March 2023, [url](#). See also: TWI, Iraq's "Muqawama Government" Drives Out Prominent LGBTQ Advocate, 10 February 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁴ Jummar, Qais Al-Khazali: Jumping to the Front of the Line, 20 June 2024, [url](#)



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Middle East and North Africa; DARAJ; Germany – Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF); Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ); Institute For The Study Of War; International Crisis Group; Iran International; Iraqi News Agency (INA); Jamestown; Janes; The Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (JISS); Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS); Kurdistan24; The Media Line; Middle East Eye (MEE); The National; Nordic Monitor; Pax for Peace; Refworld; Rudaw; USCIRF; United Nations – Security Council, UNHCR, UNOCHA