

Treasury Targets Kata'ib Hizballah Leaders and Airline Enabling IRGC-QF and Militant Proxy Groups

January 22, 2024

WASHINGTON — Today, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated Iraqi airline Fly Baghdad and its CEO for providing assistance to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF) and its proxy groups in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. OFAC is also designating three leaders and supporters of one of the IRGC-QF's main Iran-aligned militias in Iraq, Kata'ib Hizballah (KH), as well as a business that moves and launders funds for KH. Today's action underscores the ongoing threat the IRGC-QF and its proxy network pose to U.S. personnel and the region. KH has carried out a series of sharply escalating drone and missile attacks against U.S. personnel in Iraq and Syria since Hamas's horrific attack on Israel on October 7. KH and other Iran-aligned militia groups in Iraq have consistently issued statements in support of Hamas's terrorism and declared their commitment to attacking U.S. personnel.

"Iran and its proxies have sought to abuse regional economies and use seemingly legitimate businesses as cover for funding and facilitating their attacks," said Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, Brian E. Nelson. "The United States will continue to disrupt Iran's illicit activities aimed at undermining the stability of the region."

Today's action is being taken pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13224, as amended, which targets terrorists and their supporters. The Treasury Department designated the IRGC-QF as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) pursuant to E.O. 13224 on October 25, 2007 for providing support to multiple terrorist groups, and the Department of State designated the group as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) pursuant to the Immigration and Nationality Act on April 8, 2019. State designated KH as an SDGT pursuant to E.O. 13224 and as a FTO pursuant to the Immigration and Nationality Act on July 2, 2009.

FLY BAGHDAD

For several years, Iraqi airline **Fly Baghdad** has supported the operations of the IRGC-QF and its proxies by delivering materiel and personnel throughout the region. Fly Baghdad flights

have delivered shipments of weapons to Damascus International Airport in Syria for transfer to members of the IRGC-QF and Iran-aligned militia groups on the ground in Syria, including the Syrian Arab Republican Guard, Lebanese Hizballah, KH, and the KH-affiliated Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas Brigade. OFAC designated the Syrian Arab Republican Guard in 2016 for its role in perpetuating violence on the Syrian people, and State designated Hizballah as an FTO in 1997 and as an SDGT in 2001 for engaging in acts of terror. Fly Baghdad has delivered to these groups operating in Syria a range of weapons, including Iranian-made Fateh, Zulfiqar, and al-Fajr series missiles, as well as AK-47s, RPG-7s, and other grenades and machine guns.

KH has been using Fly Baghdad to transport fighters, weapons, and money to Syria and Lebanon to prop up the Syrian regime. KH leaders used Fly Baghdad flights on multiple occasions to transport bags of U.S. currency and U.S.-made weapons obtained through battlefield collection from Iraq to Lebanon. KH sent fighters from Iraq to Lebanon on flights operated by Fly Baghdad and U.S.-designated Al-Nasr Wings to attend special operations training run by Hizballah. In October 2023, following Hamas's horrific terrorist attack on Israeli civilians, Fly Baghdad was involved in the transfer of hundreds of Iraqi fighters, including fighters affiliated with U.S.-designated terrorist organization and Iranian proxy militia Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), in support of the Iranian proxies' attacks on Israel.

Fly Baghdad is being designated for having materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of, the IRGC-QF.

Basheer Abdulkadhim Alwan al-Shabbani (al-Shabbani) is the CEO of Fly Baghdad. Al-Shabbani is being designated for owning or controlling, directly or indirectly, Fly Baghdad.

OFAC is also identifying two Iraq-registered aircraft owned by Fly Baghdad, with tail numbers **YI-BAF** and **YI-BAN**, as blocked property in which Fly Baghdad has an interest.

KATA'IB HIZBALLAH

Hossein Moanes al-Ibudi — known publicly as **Hossein Moanes** — is a senior member of KH and currently the head of KH's political party, Harakat Hoquq. Hossein Moanes was previously KH's chief of government relations, and in that capacity was involved with many aspects of KH's activities, including KH's plans for gathering intelligence on, kidnapping, or even assassinating Iraqis identified as working with the United States as well as planning terrorist attacks on civilian targets with the help of the IRGC-QF.

Riyad Ali Hussein al-Azzawi (al-Azzawi) is an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) specialist and an engineer for the Popular Mobilization Committee's (PMC) Directorate of Technical Equipment (DTE), which is headed by U.S.-designated terrorist and former KH official Salah Mahdi Hantush al-Maksusi (al-Maksusi). OFAC designated al-Maksusi in 2012 for his involvement in KH's attacks on U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq. Al-Azzawi and the PMC DTE maintain links with KH and are involved in training Iraqi fighters on a wide range of procured or manufactured weapons. Al-Azzawi's fingerprints were found on an Iranian missile that was launched in the vicinity of U.S. forces in Iraq in 2021.

Awqad Muhsin Faraj al-Hamidawi (Awqad al-Hamidawi), the youngest brother of U.S.-designated KH Secretary General Ahmad al-Hamidawi, directs KH's businesses and aspects of KH's financial portfolio. He raises funds for KH through commercial businesses, manages KH's money laundering operations, and is involved in KH's cross-border smuggling activities. Awqad al-Hamidawi manages Baghdad-based **Al-Massal Land Travel and Tourism Company (Al-Massal)**, which KH uses to generate revenue and launder money. KH has used Al-Massal to evade taxes on large quantities of illegal imports and to illegally confiscate land and other physical property from Iraqis for KH's use.

Hossein Moanes, al-Azzawi, and Awqad al-Hamidawi are being designated pursuant to E.O. 13224, as amended, for having materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of, KH. Al-Massal is being designated pursuant to E.O. 13224, as amended, for being owned, controlled, or directed by Awqad al-Hamidawi.

SANCTIONS IMPLICATIONS

As a result of today's action, all property and interests in property of the designated persons described above that are in the United States or in the possession or control of U.S. persons are blocked and must be reported to OFAC. In addition, any entities that are owned, directly or indirectly, individually or in the aggregate, 50 percent or more by one or more blocked persons are also blocked. Unless authorized by a general or specific license issued by OFAC, or exempt, OFAC's regulations generally prohibit all transactions by U.S. persons or within (or transiting) the United States that involve any property or interests in property of designated or otherwise blocked persons.

In addition, financial institutions and other persons that engage in certain transactions or activities with sanctioned entities and individuals may expose themselves to sanctions or be

subject to an enforcement action. The prohibitions include the making of any contribution or provision of funds, goods, or services by, to, or for the benefit of any designated person, or the receipt of any contribution or provision of funds, goods, or services from any such person.

The power and integrity of OFAC sanctions derive not only from OFAC's ability to designate and add persons to the Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List (SDN List), but also from its willingness to remove persons from the SDN List consistent with the law. The ultimate goal of sanctions is not to punish, but to bring about a positive change in behavior. For information concerning the process for seeking removal from an OFAC list, including the SDN List, please refer to [OFAC's Frequently Asked Question 897 here](#). For detailed information on the process to submit a request for removal from an OFAC sanctions list, please [click here](#).

[Click here for identifying information on the individuals and entities designated today.](#)

###