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.¹

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.²

Muhandis is the de-facto deputy of Quds Force chief Qassem Soleimani in Iraq; the Iranian general has called Muhandis a “living martyr.”³ 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.⁴

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.⁵ Along with other Iranian-backed militias, Kataib Hezbollah has begun to fill the power vacuum created by the fall of the Islamic State caliphate.