
IRAQ: 'PMF' SHUTS DOWN FAKE OFFICES, ARRESTS COMMANDER WHO CRITICIZED IRAN

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Khafajah tribe denounced the arrest of Aws al-Khafaji, leader of Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas Brigade, and demanded his release two days after the "Popular Mobilization Forces" (PMF) arrested him.

The leader of Khafajah tribe, Ameer Ghani Sikban, denounced in a statement the arrest of Aws al-Khafaji, calling on the government to help in releasing him.

Khafaji, a well-known commander at PMF, criticized the visit of Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif to Iraq and his five days stay.

Sources indicate that Khafaji also accused some PMF leaders of exploiting their positions and taking advantage of the real fighters. Some sources also refer to Khafajis accusations claiming some militias had killed his cousin, the prominent Iraqi novelist Alaa Mushthoub who was slain in Karbala on Saturday.

For his part, the popular crowd confirmed the arrest of al-Khafaji in the Karrada district, and that his arrest came after he refused to close his office.

Thursday evening, the Forces released a statement saying its fighters had closed four offices pretending to belong to the PMF in the Karrada district of central Baghdad.

This move came after a meeting by security heads of the Popular Mobilization with the municipality of Karrada to close centers claiming to belong to the PMF.

The statement also indicated that among the offices were two who claimed they belong to the PMFs 40th Brigade and the headquarters of the so-called Abu al-Fadhli al-Abbas Brigade administered by Sheikh Aws al-Khafaji located in the center of Karrada.

The group noted that its security unit tried to shut down the unauthorized office, but those who were present there stopped us from doing so, and disciplinary action had to be taken against them.

PMF Directorate called on all citizens to "inform the Directorate of any harassment of those who claim to belong to the PMF, to take legal action against them."

According to an Iraqi source, who spoke to Asharq Al-Awsat, the arrest process took place fundamentally after Khafaji refused to comply with the order issued by Baghdad operations and the PMF.

He explained that the Forces want to unify the offices and identify their affiliations, which will include other centers claiming to be part of the groups security system. He noted that the action taken was organizational and does not bear any political consequences and is not related to Khafajis position of this party or that country.

Following the 2014 rise of ISIS, Aws al-Khafaji founded Abu al-Fadhl al-Abbas Brigades, a group of several Shiite factions that fought in Syria.

Abu al-Fadhl al-Abbas Brigades first fought as part of the PMF, but later announced the dissolution of the fighting force after the announcement of ISIS defeat in December 2017, while its office remained in Baghdad until it was closed by the PMF

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