Liwa al-Baqir (al-Baqir Brigade)

Key Leaders
- Khalid al-Hassan (aka Khalid al-Mara'i, Khalid Baqir, al-Hajj Khalid) is the top commander
- Hamza al-Hassan (aka Abu al-Abbas, al-Hajj Hamza) is a commander of the militia's special unit
- National Assembly representative Omar Hussein al-Hassan

Political Wing
- None

Weapons
- Has displayed Soviet-era weapons that were available in Syria prior to the war

Atrocities
- Possible role in civilian massacres

Areas of Operation
- Based in Aleppo province, has operated in Hama and Raqqa provinces, participated in the 2017 offensive toward the U.S. base at Tanf

Background and Analysis

Liwa al-Baqir is an Aleppo-based militia that is part of the Local Defense Forces (LDF) network, which Iran helped build. Liwa al-Baqir's members belong primarily to the al-Baqqara tribe, which is concentrated in Aleppo and in eastern Syria.

The tribe claims descent from the fifth Shiite imam, Mohammed al-Baqir, the brigade's namesake. The al-Baqqara are historically Sunni, yet a significant number appear to have converted to Shiism, part of a pre-war Iranian proselytization effort. This may explain why members of the tribe have joined an Iranian-backed force that displays portraits of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah. Liwa al-Baqir also displays portraits of Bashar al-Assad and incorporates the Syrian flag into their imagery. This emphasis is consistent with the status of the LDF as technically part of the Syrian Arab Army. The brigade’s origins are not entirely clear, yet it seems to have existed in some form since 2012. Public statements credit the group’s current commander, Khalid al-Hassan, and his brother Hamza with establishing the group.

As of late 2016, the group claimed to have 251 “martyrs,” i.e. combat fatalities. One Western analyst describes Liwa al-Baqir as “the anchor of Iran's militia network in Aleppo,” consisting of roughly 3,000 fighters in early 2017.

Components of al-Baqir currently operate in eastern Syria, where they became the target of U.S. air strikes launched in retaliation for an attack on forces belonging to the anti-Islamic State coalition. The strikes killed sons of a prominent al-Baqqara tribal leader.

3. One Western analyst describes Liwa al-Baqir as the anchor of Iran’s militia network in Aleppo, consisting of roughly 3,000 fighters in early 2017. Components of al-Baqir currently operate in eastern Syria, where they became the target of U.S. air strikes launched in retaliation for an attack on forces belonging to the anti-Islamic State coalition. The strikes killed sons of a prominent al-Baqqara tribal leader.

3. Al-Baqir's Facebook page includes many such images. For a recent portrait of Khamenei, see: Liwa al-Imam al-Baqir, "Portrait of the LDF as technically part of the Syrian Arab Army"; below image: "The lions of al-Baqir, men of al-Assad"
4. The tribe claims descent from the fifth Shiite imam, Mohammed al-Baqir, the brigade's namesake. The al-Baqqara are historically Sunni, yet a significant number appear to have converted to Shiism, part of a pre-war Iranian proselytization effort. This may explain why members of the tribe have joined an Iranian-backed force that displays portraits of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah.
5. Al-Baqir also displays portraits of Bashar al-Assad and incorporates the Syrian flag into their imagery. This emphasis is consistent with the status of the LDF as technically part of the Syrian Arab Army.
6. @tobiaschneider, “(5) Liwa Imam al-Baqir is a loyalist group of about 3,000 Bagghara tribesmen - and the anchor of Iran's militia network in Aleppo,” Twitter, January 5, 2017. (https://twitter.com/tobiaschneider/status/817348099353255936)