

The Fatemiyoun Division



Logo: The name “Fatemiyoun” with AK-47 rising and globe in the background, similar to the IRGC logo

Flag Text: “If God should aid you, no one can overcome you” (Quran 3:160)

FOUNDING

- 2013

KEY LEADERS

- Former leader Ali Reza Tavasoli, aka Abu Hamed (d. 2015)

SIZE

- Estimated between 6,000 – 8,000
- Frequent claims of 12,000 – 14,000 or even 20,000

POLITICAL WING

- None

IDEOLOGICAL ALLEGIANCE

- Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei

ATROCITIES

- Has recruited Afghan boys as young as 13 to fight in Syria

WEAPONS

- Soviet light weapons, vehicles, and tanks

CONNECTIONS TO OTHER MILITIAS

- Lebanese Hezbollah assists in training
- Fought alongside Iranian-backed militias in Syria, including the Zeynabiyoun Brigade

CURRENT DESIGNATIONS

- None

AREAS OF OPERATION

- Regions across Syria, including Aleppo and Deir al-Zour
- Receives training inside Iran and Afghanistan
- Some fighters deployed to Yemen to fight with Houthi rebels

SOCIAL MEDIA

- Telegram
- Facebook



CONNECTIONS TO THE IRGC

Under command and control of the IRGC Quds Force, led by Iranian Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

The IRGC has raised a militia of Shiite Afghans to fight on its behalf in Syria, organizing them into the Fatemiyoun Division. Put on the front lines with as little as 25 to 35 days of training, the Fatemiyoun have taken very heavy casualties.¹

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei has met personally with the families of slain fighters, for whom there have been more than 800 documented funerals; a militia commander recently said the actual total number is 2,000, with 8,000 injured.² The tombstones of Afghan boys as young as 14 have been identified.³ Survivors have claimed they are used as cannon fodder.⁴

Now dead, the Fatemiyoun’s first Afghan leaders originally fought as auxiliaries for the IRGC during the Iran-Iraq War and the Soviet-Afghan war. When the number of Afghans grew, the IRGC formed the Fatemiyoun brigade in late 2013, later designating it a division.⁵

The Fatemiyoun recruit heavily from the poor Afghan migrant community in Iran, which numbers roughly 3 million, most of whom are undocumented. There is also direct recruitment in Afghanistan. Incentives include salaries of \$500 to \$700 per month, legal residency permits, and housing. Fighters report being subject to coercion and intimidation, including threats of deportation. Their training includes extensive ideological indoctrination.⁶

After the IRGC declared “victory” against the Islamic State in November 2017, IRGC media published a statement attributed to the Fatemiyoun Division, in which the militia vowed its readiness to fight anywhere the IRGC orders it.⁷

1. Scott Peterson, “Iran steps up recruitment of Shiite mercenaries for Syrian war,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 12, 2016. (<https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2016/0612/Iran-steps-up-recruitment-of-Shiite-mercenaries-for-Syrian-war>)

2. Political scientist Ali Alfoneh maintains a data set on funerals and updates his totals via Twitter. The current total is 844. @Alfoneh, “Shiite Afghan combat fatalities in Syria since August 23, 2013: 844. January 2018: 13,” *Twitter*, January 20, 2018. (<https://twitter.com/Alfoneh/status/954653504873824256>); For video of Khamenei’s meeting, see: Ali M. Latifi, “How Iran Recruited Afghan Refugees to Fight Assad’s War,” *The New York Times*, June 30, 2017. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/30/opinion/sunday/iran-afghanistan-refugees-assad-syria.html>); “مستول لشکر فاطمیون در ایران: نیروهای افغان ‘دو هزار کشته’ داده‌اند” (Official for the Fatemiyoun Division in Iran: Afghan Forces Have Experienced ‘2,000 Deaths’), *BBC Persian*, January 6, 2018. (<http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-42590722>)

3. “Iran: Afghan Children Recruited to Fight in Syria,” *Human Rights Watch*, October 1, 2017. (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/10/01/iran-afghan-children-recruited-fight-syria>)

4. Mujib Mashal and Fatima Faizi, “Iran Sent Them to Syria. Now Afghan Fighters Are a Worry at Home,” *The New York Times*, November 11, 2017. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/30/iran-covertly-recruits-afghan-soldiers-to-fight-in-syria>)

5. Amir Toumaj, “IRGC commander discusses Afghan militia, ‘Shia liberation army,’ and Syria,” *FDD’s Long War Journal*, August 24, 2016. (<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/08/irc-commander-discusses-afghan-militia-shia-liberation-army-and-syria.php>)

6. Kathy Gannon, “Iran recruits Afghan and Pakistani Shiites to fight in Syria,” *Associated Press*, September 16, 2017. (<https://apnews.com/4731b95dae684f77b27d83c26e72a276/Iran-recruits-Afghan-and-Pakistani-Shiites-to-fight-in-Syria>)

7. Ahmad Majidiyar, “After ISIS, Fatemiyoun Vows to Fight with ‘Axis of Resistance’ to Destroy Israel,” *Middle East Institute*, November 22, 2017. (<http://www.mei.edu/content/article/io/after-isis-fatemiyoun-vows-fight-axis-resistance-destroy-israel>)