

Advocacy dossier

Hisham al-Hashimi

هشام الهاشمي

Killed Iraq

Hisham al-Hashimi was an Iraqi researcher on armed groups who supported the 2019 protest movement and was shot dead outside his Baghdad home on 6 July 2020. The police officer convicted of the killing in 2023 was acquitted on retrial and released in March 2024, and no one has been held to account.

01

The case at a glance

Hisham al-Hashimi was an Iraqi researcher on armed groups who supported the 2019 protest movement and was shot dead outside his Baghdad home on 6 July 2020. The police officer convicted of the killing in 2023 was acquitted on retrial and released in March 2024, and no one has been held to account.

Status	Country
Killed	**Iraq**

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Order a full, independent, and impartial investigation into the killing of Hisham al-Hashimi, with timely public reporting on findings.

02 Identify and prosecute those responsible, both the direct perpetrators and any state officials who ordered, enabled, or covered up the killing.

03 Provide effective reparation to the family of Hisham al-Hashimi.

04 Take immediate steps to protect other defenders working in the same field from similar attacks.

02

How the case unfolded

November 2019

Threats and intimidation

Reportedly stops speaking to the media after a warning from Kataib Hezbollah

According to The New Arab, Hisham al-Hashimi stopped speaking to the media in November 2019 after a warning from Kataib Hezbollah, an Iran-backed armed group. An activist later shared messages in which he said the group had threatened him. In April 2020 anonymous accounts on Twitter also threatened him.

6 July 2020

Killing

Shot dead outside his home in Baghdad

Hisham al-Hashimi, 47, was shot dead outside his home in the Zayouna area of eastern Baghdad as he got into his car. Gunmen on motorcycles fired at him from a few metres away. He was a researcher on armed groups, an adviser to the government and a supporter of the protest movement that began in October 2019.

7 July 2020

Other act

UN and Iraqi government condemn the killing

Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, head of the UN mission in Iraq, called the killing a despicable act of cowardice and asked the government to identify the perpetrators quickly and bring them to justice. Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi pledged to pursue the killers.

15 November 2020

Other act

Government says the killers have fled the country

On 15 November 2020 the Iraqi government stated that the killers of Hisham al-Hashimi had fled the country. In December 2020 Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Gulf Centre for Human Rights, FIDH, OMCT and Iraqi groups cited his case in a joint call to end impunity for the killing of activists in Iraq.

16 July 2021

Other act

Prime Minister announces arrest of a suspect, a police officer

Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi announced arrests in the case. State television broadcast a brief confession by Ahmed Hamdawi Owaid al-Kinani, a 36-year-old police lieutenant, who said he shot Hisham al-Hashimi with a pistol. An unnamed official said the killers had ties to Iran.

7 May 2023

Conviction

Police officer sentenced to death for the killing

A criminal court in Rusafa, Baghdad, convicted Ahmed Hamdawi Owaid al-Kinani under the counter-terrorism law and sentenced him to death. Media were barred from the hearing. The verdict could be appealed. A relative said the family wanted those who ordered the killing brought to justice as well.

July 2023

Appeal: judgment quashed

Court of Cassation annuls the death sentence

At the end of July 2023 the Federal Court of Cassation annulled the conviction and death sentence and returned the case to a competent investigating court. It found that the committee that had investigated the case had no legal power to do so. Activists said the decision did not surprise them.

March 2024

Acquittal

Retrial ends in acquittal and the accused is released

After a retrial, a Baghdad court acquitted Ahmed Hamdawi al-Kinani for lack of evidence, and he was released. A judiciary spokesperson confirmed the acquittal; his lawyer said the court found his earlier confessions insufficient. A judicial source said the case could be reopened if new evidence emerged. Asharq Al-Awsat reported that the family declined to take legal action, fearing reprisals.

July 2025

Other act

Leaked confession video renews calls for accountability

Around the fifth anniversary of the killing, a video of Ahmed Hamdawi al-Kinani's confession was leaked online. Asharq Al-Awsat reported that in it he named a senior Kataib Hezbollah figure as the person who ordered the killing; the figure was quoted denying involvement. The Supreme Judicial Council condemned the leak and said the video did not match his official testimony. No one has been held to account.

03
The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: more than six years after Hisham al-Hashimi was shot dead in Baghdad, no one has been held to account. The only person convicted, a police officer, was acquitted on retrial and released in March 2024; we found no later judicial step in a trusted source.

Background and Work

Hisham al-Hashimi was an Iraqi historian and researcher on armed groups, born in Baghdad. He was widely regarded as an authority on the Islamic State group and other Sunni armed groups, and he also wrote and spoke about Iran-aligned Shia armed factions within the Popular Mobilisation Forces. He published several books on jihadist movements, worked with research centres including Chatham House and the Center for Global Policy in Washington, and advised the Iraqi government on countering the Islamic State group. Rival parties and armed groups trusted him as a mediator.

When mass protests against corruption and foreign interference began in Baghdad and southern Iraq in October 2019, he supported the movement publicly. Hundreds of protesters were killed in the months that followed. According to The New Arab, he stopped speaking to the media in November 2019 after a warning from Kataib Hezbollah, and in April 2020 anonymous accounts threatened him on Twitter. Weeks before his death he told people close to him that he feared Iran-backed groups were targeting him.

The Killing

On 6 July 2020 Hisham al-Hashimi was shot dead outside his home in the Zayouna area of eastern Baghdad as he got into his car. He was 47. Gunmen on motorcycles fired at him from a few metres away. He left his wife and four children. The UN Special Representative for Iraq, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, called the killing a despicable act of cowardice, and Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi pledged to pursue the killers. No group claimed responsibility, and Iran-aligned factions denied any role.

On 15 November 2020 the government stated that the killers had fled the country. In December 2020 Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Gulf Centre for Human Rights, FIDH, OMCT and Iraqi organisations cited his case in a joint statement calling for an end to impunity for the killing of activists in Iraq.

Legal Proceedings

On 16 July 2021 Prime Minister al-Kadhimi announced arrests in the case. State television broadcast a short confession by Ahmed Hamdawi Owaid al-Kinani, a 36-year-old police lieutenant, who said he had shot Hisham al-Hashimi with a pistol. An unnamed official said the killers had ties to Iran; analysts questioned why the announcement came a year after the killing and gave no detail about who ordered it.

On 7 May 2023 a criminal court in Rusafa, Baghdad, convicted him under the counter-terrorism law and sentenced him to death, at a hearing closed to the media. At the end of July 2023 the Federal Court of Cassation annulled the conviction and sentence and returned the case to an investigating court, finding that the special committee that had investigated it,

set up under Prime Minister al-Kadhimi, had no legal power to do so. After he withdrew his earlier confessions, new lawyers were assigned and the case was reinvestigated.

In March 2024, after a retrial lasting about a week, a Baghdad court acquitted him for lack of evidence and he was released. A judiciary spokesperson confirmed the acquittal, and his lawyer said the court had found his confessions insufficient for a conviction. A judicial source said the case could be reopened if new evidence emerged. Asharq Al-Awsat reported that the family had declined to take further legal action, fearing reprisals, and a security source told the paper that he had returned to work at the Interior Ministry.

Around the fifth anniversary of the killing, in July 2025, a video of his confession circulated online. According to Asharq Al-Awsat, he named in it a senior Kataib Hezbollah figure as the person who ordered the killing; that figure was quoted denying involvement. The Supreme Judicial Council condemned the leak as unlawful and said the video did not match the testimony he gave to the judicial committee. Judicial sources told the paper that a retrial was unlikely.

International Response

The United Nations mission in Iraq and the United States condemned the killing in July 2020. Human rights organisations have since cited it as an example of impunity for attacks on researchers, journalists and protest activists in Iraq. After the acquittal in 2024, Iraqi rights activists called for the decision to be reversed and for those who ordered the killing to be identified.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/hisham-al-hashimi/

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