

Kataib Hezbollah's Raba Allah Undertakes Unclaimed Attacks on U.S. Brands

by [Michael Knights \(/experts/michael-knights\)](#), [Ameer al-Kaabi \(/experts/ameer-al-kaabi\)](#), [Hamdi Malik \(/experts/hamdi-malik\)](#)

May 30, 2024

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Michael Knights \(/experts/michael-knights\)](#)

Michael Knights is the Jill and Jay Bernstein Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute and cofounder of the Militia Spotlight platform, which offers in-depth analysis of developments related to Iran-backed militias.

[Ameer al-Kaabi \(/experts/ameer-al-kaabi\)](#)

Ameer al-Kaabi is an Iraqi analyst with a decade of experience examining the country's security and political events. He specializes in intra-Shia political affairs and the activities of Iran-backed militias.



[Hamdi Malik \(/experts/hamdi-malik\)](#)

Hamdi Malik is an associate fellow with The Washington Institute and cofounder of its Militia Spotlight platform.



Brief Analysis

Part of a series: [Militia Spotlight \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight)

or see [Part 1: How to Use Militia Spotlight \(/policy-analysis/how-use-militia-spotlight\)](#)

The vigilante group appears to have targeted American-branded businesses in Baghdad while taking pains not to claim the attacks, which embarrassed the Iraqi government.

Since May 24, a range of U.S.-linked brands have been subjected to attacks and blockades in Baghdad:

Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) outlets in Baghdad. On May 26, two attackers on a motorbike fired guns and threw a bomb at a KFC branch on Palestine Street, with no injuries recorded (Figure 1). On May 27, masked militiamen riding in seven SUVs and armed with sticks ransacked another KFC restaurant in Baghdad's Karrada neighborhood (Figure 2). The style of the attack and apparel of the perpetrators resemble that seen in past incidents involving [Raba Allah \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-raba-allah\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-raba-allah), a vigilante group run by the militia [Kataib Hezbollah \(/node/16641\)](#) (KH). The latest attacks were portrayed on *muqawama* (resistance) social media as organic instances of "angry youths" protesting the Gaza war.



Figure 1: The aftermath of the KFC attack on Palestine Street, Baghdad, May 26, 2024.

[/sites/default/files/2024-05/figure%201.%20The%20aftermath%20of%20the%20attack%20on%20KFC%20in%20Baghdad%20May%2026%202024.jpg](#)

Two other U.S.-linked restaurants. Also on May 26, two suspects on a motorbike threw hand grenades at the U.S.-branded establishments Chili House and Lee's on Palestine Street. These incidents received little open support from *muqawama* media, but ground contacts indicate that Raba Allah undertook at least one of the attacks.



Figure 2: Suspects trashing a KFC in Karrada, Baghdad, on May 27, 2023.

[/sites/default/files/2024-05/figure%202.%20Muqawama%20thugs%20destroying%20KFC%20in%20Karrada%20Baghdad%20May%2027%202023.jpg](#)

Caterpillar. On May 30, the Caterpillar construction equipment company in Baghdad's Jadriyah neighborhood was targeted with a stun grenade or similar "sound bomb" device.

British Cambridge Institute. On May 30, the British Cambridge Institute on Palestine Street was also targeted with a sound bomb.

Conversely, a May 28 incident at the Baghdad Soft Drinks Company (which bottles Pepsi and 7-Up) was only a protest over a worker dispute, not a militia vigilante incident.

The *muqawama* information space surrounding these incidents has been suspiciously quiet and well-organized. The situation embarrassed the government and ran counter to its pro-investment message—in response, the Interior Ministry strongly condemned the attacks and sacked various division and brigade commanders at the Federal Police. In addition, one person

linked to Raba Allah was arrested, only to be released after KH secretary-general Abu Hussein (aka Ahmad Mohsen Faraj al-Hamidawi) intervened directly with Interior Minister Abdul Amir al-Shammari.

KH attacks on American brands by *muqawama* mobs is somewhat ironic considering it was KH that set up the first unauthorized Starbucks coffee outlet in Baghdad – literally emptying the shelves of Jordanian Starbucks outlets to get all the necessary materials to complete a convincing-looking clone of a Starbucks store in Baghdad in 2020. KH even intimidated the Iraqi lawyers hired to contend the trademark infringement, who dropped Starbucks as a client within a day of them being hired by one of the world's most famous brands, a good illustration of the negative effects that militias have on Iraq's commercial success. Now, in the face of rising anger at the U.S., KH appears to have rebranded its outlet, an interesting case of a U.S.-designated terrorist organization distancing itself from U.S. brands due to the potential reputational damage of too close a connection. ❖

PART OF A SERIES

[Militia Spotlight \(/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight\)](#)

[How to Use Militia Spotlight](#)

[\(/policy-analysis/how-use-militia-spotlight\)](#)



[Kataib Hezbollah's Raba Allah Undertakes Unclaimed Attacks on U.S. Brands](#)

[\(/policy-analysis/kataib-hezbollahs-raba-allah-undertakes-unclaimed-attacks-us-brands\)](#)



[The PMF Represents Iraq at the Axis of Resistance Conference in Tehran](#)

[\(/policy-analysis/pmf-represents-iraq-axis-resistance-conference-tehran\)](#)

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Pursuing a Stable Peace in Yemen that Preserves U.S. Interests](#)

May 31, 2024

•
Nadwa Al-Dawsari,
Steven Fagin

[\(/policy-analysis/pursuing-stable-peace-yemen-preserves-us-interests\)](#)



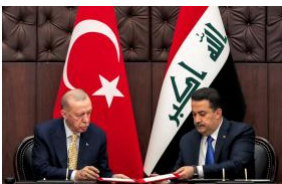
BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Beyond the Ballot Box: U.S. Priorities in North Africa's 2024 Elections](#)

May 30, 2024

•
Sabina Henneberg,
Amine Ghoulidi

[\(/policy-analysis/beyond-ballot-box-us-priorities-north-africas-2024-elections\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

The Iraq-Turkey Reset

May 29, 2024

•
Soner Cagaptay,
Setin Uysal,
Bilal Wahab

(/policy-analysis/iraq-turkey-reset)

TOPICS

Military & Security (/policy-analysis/military-security)

Terrorism (/policy-analysis/terrorism)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Iraq (/policy-analysis/iraq)