

Iraqi Fasail Hit Two U.S. Sites in Iraq and Syria

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

The Iran-backed militias have adopted tight message discipline so far, not claiming either of the attacks on Kharab al-Jir in Syria or Al-Asad airbase in Iraq. Efforts have been made to avoid U.S. retaliation while warning PM Sudani to keep pushing for U.S. withdrawal.

Two U.S. bases – one in Syria (Kharab al-Jir) and one in Iraq (Al-Asad) – have been attacked in the last day. Open source reporting, including press agency reporting that quotes unnamed U.S. officials – gives sufficient confidence that rockets and drones were used on U.S. bases in Iraq and Syria for the first time since February 4, 2024.

The first attack was a nocturnal (21:50hrs Baghdad time, April 21) rocket launch from Ahmed Agha, in northern Nineveh, Iraq, to the Kharab al-Jir (Rmeilan Landing Zone) in northeastern Syria. This attack, seemingly a high-angle 122mm launch, saw at least five projectiles fired towards Syria. Iraqi Security Forces claimed that they burned the launch vehicle but video suggests it caught fire during the launch. (Figure 1) Kharab al-Jir is a target location that has been



(/sites/default/files/2024-04/1.jpg)

Figure 1: A screen-grab of the video of the rocket launches towards Kharab al-Jir. After five launches, the vehicle catches fire and explodes, April 21, 2024.

almost exclusively associated with [Harakat al-Nujaba \(/node/16716\)](#) (HaN).

The second attack was a drone attack on Al-Asad airbase in Anbar, Iraq, originating from an unknown launch-point in Iraq or Syria.

Al Asad is a target location that has been almost

exclusively associated with [Kataib Hezbollah \(/node/16641\)](#) (KH). Possibly connected, a Shahed-101 drone that might have been part of the same daylight attack stream was found on April 22, crashed in Madain, at the western edge of Wasit province.

Muqawama reporting on the Kharab al-Jir attack

Starting around 22:00hrs Baghdad time (on April 21) the Kharab al-Jir strike was initially reported as a drone attack by most *muqawama* Telegram accounts (Figure 2), but then a Reuters account released at 23:15hrs (on April 21) quoted security sources as saying the strike was a rocket attack. After the Reuters report was published, the *muqawama* social media reported the incidents as a rocket attack, rather than a drone attack (Figure 3).



Figure 2: The Telegram channel belonging the iNews TV affiliated with Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada reports a drone attack on Kharab al-Jir, April 21, 2024 at 22:38 Baghdad time.



(/sites/default/files/2024-04/3_2.jpeg)

Figure 3: A muqawama Telegram channel posts a screenshot of Reuters' news of the rocket attack on Kharab al-Jir, April 21, at 23:21 Baghdad time.

At 04:31hrs Baghdad time (on April 22), [Sabereen News \(/node/16673\)](#) then noted explicitly that Kataib Hezbollah (which has been under a self-imposed truce with U.S. forces (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/new-options-iraqs-axis-resistance-players-part-2-opening-jordan-front>) since KH killed three Americans on January 28) had not taken any responsibility, saying that the terrorist group did not “issue any statement in the past 48 hours” (Figure 4). This was in response to social media posts claiming that KH had taken responsibility for Kharab al-Jir attack.

Similarly the [Islamic Resistance in Iraq \(/node/18416\)](#) (IRI) have not taken responsibility for either attack yet, nor even made any comments about the strikes. Since KH halted its attacks in late January, the original IRI Telegram account was abandoned and a new one under the control of Harakat al-Nujaba was created in early February. The new IRI account has exclusively taken responsibility for claimed drone and cruise missile attacks against Israel.

The Al-Asad drone strike

On April 22, Reuters quoted a U.S. official saying that the al-Asad air base in western Iraq was targeted with an explosive drone. Curiously, this attack went largely unreported by the *muqawama* social media which is usually very quick to report and amplify news of such attacks. No *muqawama* social media account foreshadowed the attack, which they commonly have in the past.

Is the ceasefire over?

Militia Telegram channels have expressed growing frustration towards the coalition in recent days (relating to perceived delays in the withdrawal of coalition forces and the US and coalition role in supporting Israel against Iran), which (on the surface) suggests a fraying of grassroots acceptance of maintaining the ceasefire.

In Militia Spotlight's view, the two attacks were not a breach of discipline but rather a coordinated act by Nujaba and KH, likely with the approval of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force (IRGC-QF). The objective was likely to signal disapproval to PM Sudani as he returned to Iran from Washington DC, to remind him who rules Iraq, and to encourage him to press the coalition for a concrete withdrawal timeline.

Evidence of coordination - which tends to reflect IRGC-QF involvement - is visible in the operational space (one target each



Figure 4: Sabereen news post emphasizing that KH has not issued any statements in the "past 48 hours", April 22, 2024.

associated strongly with one of the two main kinetic actors, Nujaba and KH) and in the online space (with message discipline). The action was also carefully executed, with no U.S. casualties, no inferred claims of responsibility and indeed a denial of involvement. Efforts were thus made to avoid escalation that might draw KH and Iran into danger.

No humble-bragging allowed

The *muqawama* media behavior surrounding these two events may suggest a new approach that has been adopted across the networks, including both KH and Nujaba sub-networks, which is often indicative of coordination by IRGC-QF. The armed groups may be testing U.S. resolve, and doing so in a way that makes it easier for the U.S. to ignore: with attacks well below the typical U.S. retaliatory threshold, that are not celebrated by major *muqawama* channels. At this stage, Iran, Nujaba and KH may value complete plausible deniability above other considerations, making it harder for the U.S. to attribute the attacks to a particular militia, and therefore may have tightened their social media space. ❖

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