

What To Make of Recent Attacks on Coalition Bases 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)

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The attacks are not yet numerous enough to form a real pattern but they probably do reflect a deep division within the muqawama over whether to renew anti-U.S. attacks and whether to hit coalition sites during anti-Israel retaliation.

On August 5, Al-Asad Air Base was struck at least once, with one known rocket attack that reportedly wounded five U.S. personnel. The attack was ([by the Washington Institute's count \(/node/18428\)](#)) the 189th attack on U.S. forces in Iraq, Syria and Jordan since October 2023. The new attack followed a July 30 airstrike on the [Kataib Hezbollah \(/node/16641\)](#) (KH) base in Jurf as-Sakr, which itself followed a July 25 rocketing of Al-Asad with 122mm rockets. In-between the two Al-Asad strikes, there was a similar tit-for-tat series involving two July 25-26 militia rocket strikes on the Conoco coalition base in Syria and one U.S. immediate defensive strike on a rocket truck.

The first July 2024 strikes on Al-Asad and Conoco echoed the the pattern seen after Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani's return from the U.S. in April 2024, when militias launched one attack on U.S. base in Iraq (Al-Asad) and one in Syria, reminding Sudani and the world that the self-styled *muqawama* (the Iran-backed resistance) did not approve of ongoing U.S. presence. The quite heavy U.S. retaliation on July 30 – which reportedly targeted a drone being prepared use and which [killed one Houthi specialist as well \(https://x.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1820148034140832228\)](https://x.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1820148034140832228) – seemed to have started a new tit-for-tat on August 5, which itself will probably draw a U.S. lethal response in Iraq. If, as reported, U.S. troops are wounded, the *muqawama* effort either failed to mount a token aim-to-miss (i.e, they failed to miss) or the August 5 strike was intended to risk escalation.



Figure 1: KH funeral following the July 30, 2024 strikes on Jurf as-Sakr.

(/sites/default/files/2024-08/KH%20funeral%20following%20the%20July%2030%2C%20

The claimant: The Islamic Resistance in Iraq – Al-Thawrayun (Revolutionaries)

Only one online brand has thus far claimed the four new attacks: The Islamic Resistance in Iraq – Al-Thawrayun (Revolutionaries). This would not be the first time an IRI branding has received a subtitle: there was a duo of mortar attacks on Al-Asad claimed by The Islamic Resistance in Iraq - Dhafreen Group on November 5 and 12, 2023.

In each new claim, Al-Thawrayun end their standardized communiques with the promise that their attacks will not cease “until the last American soldier leaves the land of our beloved Iraq”. The Telegram account has a mere 75 subscribers, which is very few for a group claiming four anti-U.S. attacks in just 12 days, possibly because no major *muqawama* propaganda outlets yet repost their claims (as of the evening

of August 5).

What can we make of this burst of anti-U.S. strikes? It is clear that there are elements among the *muqawama* in Iraq – especially within KH - who are **frustrated to be neither be doing appreciable damage to Israel nor being free to attack U.S. bases since (/node/18501)** the heavy U.S. retaliation and embarrassment to the Sudani government from the flurry of strikes in January and early February 2024. This faction may have underestimated the U.S. sensitivity to new probes of American red lines, and now finds itself locked in a sequence of tit-for-tat, and through either bad luck or deliberate provocation, is now bracing for new U.S. strikes.

The lack of reposting of claims by the Islamic Resistance in Iraq – Al-Thawrayun could reflect that the online brand is simply a tribute effort, unrelated to any actual kinetic operators, More likely, it reflects that the militants controlling Al-Thawrayun brand are not widely supported in carrying out the current attacks by the *muqawama* establishment - personified by **Sabereen News (/node/16673)** - and that the Thawrayun does not tend towards the **Harakat al-Nujaba (/node/16716)** part of the *muqawama* – which is propagandized by outlets such as Jihad Brothers.

The July-August attackers are, on the balance of evidence, a part of Kataib Hezbollah that seeks a greater role in the current regional struggle – something that the PMF’s operational commander, U.S.-sanctioned KH commander Abdul-Aziz al-Mohammadawi (aka Abu Fadak) **has stressed in public addresses recently. (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/iraqi-pmf-chief-staff-commits-fulfill-iranian-supreme-leaders-plans)** This camp could want to draw Iraq deeper into a clash with the U.S. that could trigger the withdrawal of U.S. forces. If a cross-Axis of Resistance strike is out into Israel in the coming days, this camp could also seek to maximize Iraqi involvement and put in some bonus hits on U.S. bases at Al-Tanf and Erbil (both of which are seen as playing a role in Israel's defense) and perhaps even other bases like Al-Asad and the Syrian coalition sites east of the Euphrates.



Figure 2: Telegram message on August 5, 2024 from The Islamic Resistance of Iraq - Al-Thawrayun.

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