Militia Hair-Pulling Over Who Are "The Truest Muqawama"

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Brief Analysis

Part of a 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)

Amid their ceasefire in solidarity with events in Gaza, Iraqi "resistance" leaders went back to their old habits of diminishing each other and spilling their secrets, with interesting results.

n November 25, the secretary-general of <u>Kataib Hezbollah (/node/16641)</u> (KH), Ahmad Mohsen Faraj al-Hamidawi (aka Abu Hussein), issued a statement announcing a reduction in Iraqi *muqawama* (resistance) attacks against U.S. bases in Iraq and Syria. His words were telling in several regards.

Making a List, Checking It Twice

Abu Hussein's statement specifically named the militias that took part in the latest anti-U.S. strikes. He thanked "the Mujahedin brothers who participated in military jihad operations," naming Ansar Allah al-Awfiya (/node/18506). Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba (/node/16716) (HaN), Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada (/node/16731) (KSS), and KH, noting that their attacks were carried out under "the banner of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-islamic-resistance-iraq)" (Figure 1). Arguably, he listed the factions in what he views as reverse order of significance, giving prime placement to KH and KSS (reflecting the U.S. government's apparent focus as well, if recent sanctions and airstrikes are any indicator).

In "outing" the club of militant players involved in anti-U.S. attacks since
October 17, Abu Hussein seemed to deliberately leave out Asaib Ahl al-Haq
(/node/16715) (AAH). Yet while AAH has not undertaken any known attacks at
home during the current campaign, it may be playing an important role in
consolidating Iran's influence next door in Syria by providing transportation and
logistics services. This could explain why two AAH fighters were killed in a

كاف - Kaf /sites/default/files/2023-ى المستكبرين، والمستضعفين، مذل المستكبرين، والصلاة والسلام O.jpeg) عادًا بين والمدين وال إنه لمن دواعي الفخر والاعتزاز أن تشارك المقاومة الإسلامية في العراق بمعركة الحق ضد الباطل، مُصرّة على المضي في هذا النهج، غير أبهة بما نالها مز ضغوط وعقبات واعتداءات، متحملة ضريبة عملها المقاوم، ثابتة على طريق كم شوكة الاحتلال، وطرده من العراق. . إن استمرار الاحتلال في التعدي على السيادة العراقية، وهنك الأجواء، سواء بالطائرات التجسسية المشيرة أو المقاتلة، أو بالتدخل الفاضح للسفيرة الأمريكية . في المشهد الحكومي، يستلزّم منا (تغيير بعض قواعد الاشتباك) لحفظ البلاد وتطهيرها من رجس المحتلين. إننا إذ نعلن خفض وتيرة تصعيد العمليات على قواعد الاحتلال الأمريكي في المُنطقة، وإيقافها ضد الكيان الصهيوني لحين انتهاء مدة الهدنة، أو القتالُ في فلسطين وحدودها مع لبنان، نؤكد بأن المواجهات مع القوات المحتلة للعراق لن تتوقف إلا بتحريره، وهو قرار لن نحيد عنه مهما غلت التضحيات. تحية إجلال وإكبار للإخوة المجاهدين الذين شاركوا في العمليات الجهادية العسكرية (أنصار الله الأوفياء، حركة النجباء، كتائب سيد الشهداء، كتائب حز، الله) تحد رأية المقاومة الإسلامية في العراق للنيل من العدو، وأخرى للجمهورية الإسلامية والمقاومة في لبنان، ورجال الله في يمن الصمود والشجاعة على ثبات مواقفهم الجهادية، وتنفيذ العمليات المميزة ضد الأعداء، كما وندعو إخوتنا في الداخل العراقي ممن خبرتهم سوح الجهاد إلى الالتحاق بصفوف المقاومة. وتحرير البلاد من سطوة الاحتلال (أَنْنَ لِلَّذِينَ يُقَاتَلُونَ بِأَنْهُمْ ظَلِمُولَ وَإِنْ اللهُ عَلَى نَصْرِهِمْ لَقَدِيرٌ). الشكر والتَّقدير للجهود المبذولة من الحكومة العراقية، والأحزاب السياسية، وعشائر العراق الكريمة، في تسجيل المواقف الرافضة للعدوان الأمريكي الصهيوني، ونتقدم بالثناء على رجال الدين وخطباء المنابر، والمجاهدين الذين سموا على الحدود مع الأردن، وكل الفعاليات الداعمة للشعب الفلس وآخر دعوانا أن الحمد لله رب العالمين ونسأله أن يلحق شهداء المقاومة الإسلامية والحشد الشعبي بالنبيين والصالحين، وأن يلهم عوائلهم الص ويجزيهم خير الدنيا والآخرة، وأن يمن على من نالوا أوس المعركة ضد الباطل بالشفاء، وأن تكون شافعة لهم يوم (تُوَفِّي كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا كُسَ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلِّمُونَ). الأمين العام لكتائب حزب الله أبو حسين الحميداوي

KH Escalates, But Accepts

recent Israeli airstrike in Syria and mourned by AAH leader Qais al-Khazali

Abu Hussein also pointed out the reason behind the reduction in attacks: "The occupation's continued infringement on Iraqi sovereignty and the violation of the [Iraqi] airspace, whether by reconnaissance drones or fighter planes, or by the scandalous interference of the American ambassador in the governmental scene, requires us to change some of the rules of engagement to preserve the country and purge it from the abomination of the occupiers...We declare the reduction of the pace of



Figure 2: Khazali mourning two AAH fighters killed in Syria, November 23, 2023.

Figure 1: Abu Hussein's statement, November 25, 2023.

escalation of operations against the American occupation bases in the region, and to stop them against the Zionist entity until the end of the truce, or the fighting in Palestine and its borders with Lebanon." That is, even as he linked the decision to the truce in Gaza, he also noted that KH attacks "against the occupying forces in Iraq will never stop until Iraq is liberated," suggesting that strikes will resume after the ceasefire.

HaN Calls for Full-Throttle Escalation

Abu Hussein's statement seemed to supersede one published two days earlier by HaN secretary-general Akram Kaabi, who responded to <u>U.S. strikes</u> (https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iraqs-kataib-hezbollah-militia-says-5-killed-by-usstrikes-2023-11-22/) against KH bases in Jurf al-Sakhar by stating, "It has become a duty for everyone to declare war on America and remove it, humiliated, from Iraq. There is no excuse for anyone after today" (Figure 3). Kaabi's statement came at a time when the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas was imminent, yet he still called for escalation.

> Additionally, the fact that the announcement regarding a reduction in attacks was announced by Abu Hussein and not Kaabi is another indication of their groups' different roles in the recent kinetic campaign. Kaabi, as secretary of the <u>Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee</u>

(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/when-tansiqiyaspeaks-aahs-absence) (al-Haya al-Tansiqiya lil-Muqawama al-Iraqiya), is usually responsible for announcing such stances.

AAH Reacts to KH's Snub

AAH was quick to show its dissatisfaction with Abu Hussein's statement. AAH security chief Jawad al-Talibawi responded directly with a tweet: "It is strange that, despite the knowledge of



Figure 4: Talibawi's tweet, November 26, 2023.

الشيغ أكرم الكعبي @Akram_alkabee the person who wrote the

203(/sites/default/files/2023statement about the facts on the ground, he deliberately mentioned the names of

11/2_0.jpeg) and left out others, without justification or a real sense of

_ = / - -وَنَ تُرْكَنُـوا إِنِّـى الَّذِيـنَ ظُلُقـوا فَلْقَشَـكُمُ النَّـارُ وَمَا لَكُمْ مِـنَ دُونِ النَّـهِ مِنْ أُونِيَاءُ ثُمْ لَا ثُنْضُرُونَ صحق الله العلي العظيم صحق الله العلي العظيم

بعــد أن أقدمــت قــوات الاحتــلال الأمريكــي علـــى جريمــة إراقــة الدمــاء الزاكيــات لأبطــال المقاومــة الإســنامية والحشــد الشــعبي الذيــن قاتلــوا داعـش الإرهابــي صنيعــة أمريــكا الشــر، صــار واجبــا علـــى الجميــع إعــلان الحرب على أمريكا وإذراجها ذليلة من العراق ولا عـذر لأحـد بعـد اليـوم. وعلـــى كل المعنييـــن بالشـــأن السياســـي العمــل الجــاد والواضــح لإنهــاء الاتفاقيــة المشــؤومة مــع الاحتـــال، وعــدم الاكتفــاء بمواقــف وإجــراءات شكلية كرفع دعـاوى قضائيــة او الاكتفـاء بعبــارات الشــجب والاســتنكار او الاحتفاظ بحـق الـرد والتـي لا تنسـجم مـع العـراق المقتــدر وفـرض السـيادة مـع مجـرم عالمــى لا يعتــرف بالقضــاء، فــلا يمكــن القبــول بــأى وجــود أمريكــي وبــأي شــكل مــن الأشــكال ســواء كان بصفــة قــوات قتاليــة او مستشارین او فنییـن، فـإن ذلـك یعـد وجـودا معادیـا مـن دولـة متغطرسـة معاديـة للعـراق خموصـا وللقيـم والمبـادئ الإنسـانية فـي العالـم عموما، ومــا جريمتهــم الأخيــرة إلا امتــداد لجرائمهــم الســابقة فـــي اســتهداف القــادة والمجاهديــن فـــى العــراق وجرائمهــم الحاليــة فـــى اســتهداف الأطفــال والنســاء والعوائــل الآمنــة فــي فلسـطين المحتلــة ودعمهــ للكيــان الصهيونــي الفاصـب وســينالون عقــاب جرائمهــم، وإن المقا الإسلامية في العراق ستترجم أقوالها وإرادتها في الميدان.

responsibility...We hope that such statements from our brothers in jihad will not be repeated" (Figure 4).

A similar but more subtle argument broke out between AAH and HaN. Kaabi was seemingly addressing AAH and certain other groups in a scolding tone when he stated "there is no excuse for anyone after today." This reprimand apparently did not sit well with Khazali. One day after Kaabi's statement, Khazali appeared on the Harakat al-Jihad wa al-Bina outlet al-Janoub TV and emphasized that the *muqawama* attacks in Iraq did not kill any U.S. soldiers (Figure 5). On the surface, he was critiquing the United States for killing Iraqi fighters in response to attacks that did not result in U.S. fatalities, but he also seemed to be mocking the militias who carried out the attacks. AAH has employed this tone before in critiquing KH for "performative resistance," most notably during the 2021 "tuna and noodles" saga (/node/16607), when AAH responded to KH mockery its nonlethal rocket attacks with scathing criticism of KH's convoy strategy of blowing up Iraqi trucks carrying "tuna and noodles" to the U.S. embassy in Baghdad.

Figure 3: Kaabi's statement, November 23, 2023.



Figure 5: Khazali on al-Janoub TV, November 24, 2023.

What Have We Learned (/sites/default/files/2023-About the Muqawama?

%2024.11The recent hair-pulling between *muqawama* siblings shows that the briefest respite in operations will usually reopen schisms between them. KH was showing off its

discipline, ramping up or pausing attacks in sync with Iran's broader "axis of resistance." HaN seemed to accept this show of seniority by KH and let it pass—while underlining its potentially unparalleled aggressiveness if allowed free rein to attack U.S. forces. Both KH and HaN took swipes at AAH, casting doubt on its status as a "true *muqawama*" faction involved in kinetic resistance activities. Khazali has long struggled (/node/16711) to toe the line between politician and *muqawama* leader (/node/16814), and in the current crisis he has even fallen behind the Badr Organization (/node/17003) in terms of rhetorical vigor. (/node/18454)

The fact that Abu Hussein took the unusual step of naming the militias who participated in this military campaign shows that the old argument between various Iran-backed militias about who <u>truly belongs to the *muqawama* (/node/16780)</u> is still very fresh. It also underlines that working within the "Islamic Resistance in Iraq" system of shared attack claims has been taxing for the factions, who still want individual recognition for the militant work they do. The facade strategy requires a sacrifice of ego, which is not something they can keep up for very long. •

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