

KH Publicly Leads Calls for Escalation Against U.S. Presence

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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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After being struck by U.S. forces, Kataib Hezbollah dropped the pretense of the coordination committee and acted unilaterally.

The February 26, 2021, U.S. airstrike on a [Kataib Hezbollah \(/node/16641\)](/node/16641) (KH) outpost on the Iraq-Syria border (involving one KH fatality) has triggered KH media outlets to speak in an unprecedented manner on behalf of the [Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/their-own-words-senior-leaders-admit-membership-tansiqiya\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/their-own-words-senior-leaders-admit-membership-tansiqiya) (al-Haya al-Tansiqiya li al-Muqawama al-Iraqiya, or Tansiqiya for short).

Immediately following the attack, the KH website (see below) issued a statement emphasizing the right to respond to the attack and avenge the killed KH member. Of note, KH did not wait to allow the Tansiqiya to collectively announce the vow of revenge.



Figure 1: KH's statement on the right to "revenge" its killed soldiers, February 26, 2021.

On February 27, one day after the airstrike, the Tansiqiya pushed out a statement that the U.S. attack “will be the most costly [for you], as it ends all the agreements that were accepted with some political parties, and canceled permanently and categorically all rules of engagement imposed by the political agreements after they have proven fruitless and useless.” The communique seems to signal the end of the truce announced in October 2020 in the first Tansiqiya announcement.

The U.S. strike on KH appears to have brought the group out from behind the veil of the Tansiqiya. The February 27 statement is the first time that Unit 10,000 posted a statement of the Tansiqiya, let alone published it as an exclusive (see image below). Also, Kaf, KH’s official media platform, posted the Tansiqiya statement—the first time this has occurred. Until the U.S. strike, KH had publicly supported the truce regarding rocket strikes and had only applauded roadside bomb attacks on supply convoys that service the coalition.



Figure 2: Unit 10,000's Telegram account breaks the exclusive news of Tansiqiya's statement, February 27, 2021.

KH has continued to openly show its hand in the aftermath of the March 3, 2021, rocket attack on al-Asad Air Base,

which led to the death of one American civilian contractor. Quickly after the attack, Unit 10,000 posted: “The equation has changed. Political mediation will not work...This is a new transformation in confronting [the enemy].” When the Tansiqiya itself responded to the al-Asad attack, the message came via the KH channel Kaf on March 4, 2021, one of only two times that Kaf has published statements of the Tansiqiya. The statement noted: “This is a new page in which weapons of the *muqawama* will target all occupying forces and their bases in any part of our home country.”

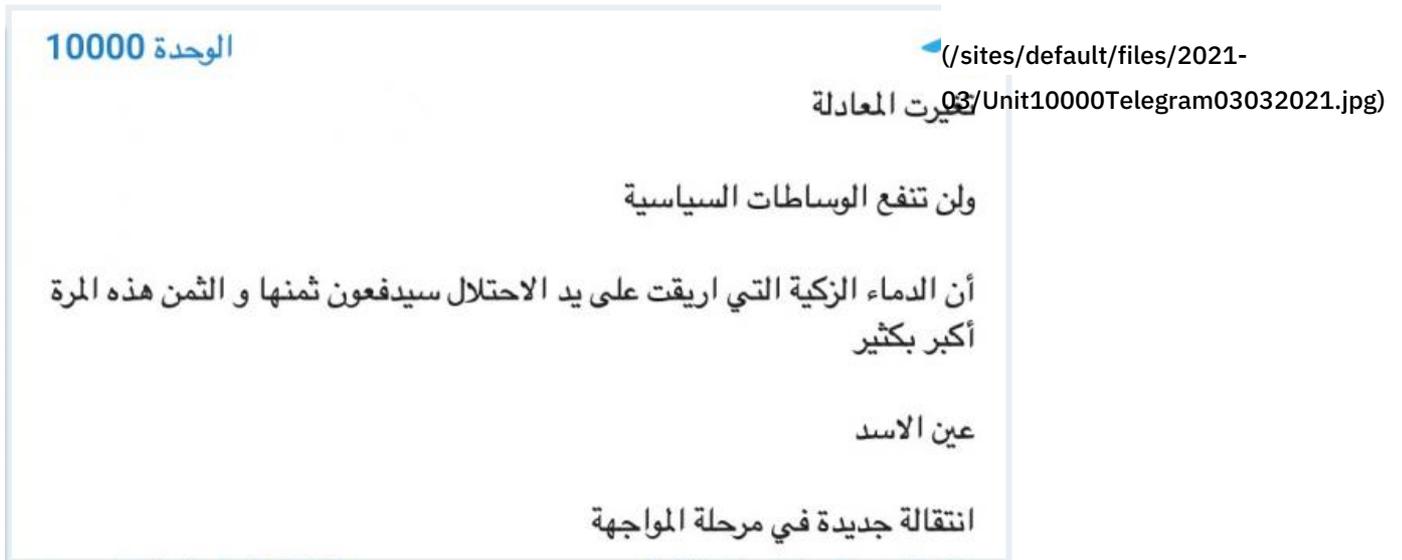


Figure 3: Unit 10,000 warns “the equation has changed,” March 3, 2021.

The February 26 U.S. strike on KH seems to have badly rattled the movement, causing it to drop all pretence of working within a coordination framework and prompting KH media channels like the KH website and Unit 10,000 to precede Tansiqiya statements. When the Tansiqiya spoke, it did so—for the first time—via Kaf, another KH channel.

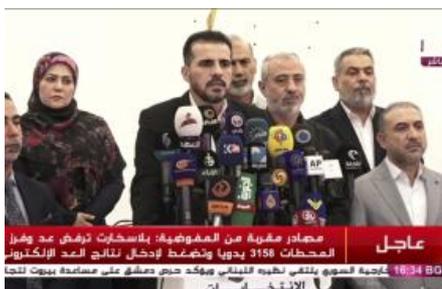
The episode underlines that foreign attacks on the *fasail* can instantly tighten their cohesion, at least temporarily. All other factions seem to follow KH’s lead and stay out of its way. KH has the authority to get ahead of the Tansiqiya. In future cases it will be interesting to note if other groups—specifically [Asaib Ahl al-Haq \(/node/16715\)](/node/16715) (AAH)—get the same consideration from other *fasail* when they are under pressure. ❖

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