

Profile: Saraya Awliya al-Dam

by [Crispin Smith \(/experts/crispin-smith\)](#), [Hamdi Malik \(/experts/hamdi-malik\)](#), [Michael Knights \(/experts/michael-knights\)](#)

Mar 29, 2021

Also available in

[العربية \(/ar/policy-analysis/lmht-amt-n-sraya-awliya-aldm\)](#)

Updated June 27, 2024; originally published Oct 24, 2023

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Crispin Smith \(/experts/crispin-smith\)](#)

Crispin Smith is an associate at a Washington-based national security law group, focusing on Iraqi security, human rights, and law of armed conflict issues. He is a cofounder of the Militia Spotlight platform.



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

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



[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.



Brief Analysis

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

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

This minor facade group is occasionally used to claim bombing attacks on U.S. supply convoys and rocket attacks on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Name: Saraya Awliya al-Dam (SAD) (Companies of the Guardians of Blood).

Type of movement: Minor facade group. Kinetic military operations. Domestic counter-U.S. operations.

History and objectives:

- SAD first came to attention when it claimed an August 24, 2020, attack on a convoy of Iraqi trucks allegedly carrying U.S. goods. Dramatic video of the incident was posted to the group's own channel. SAD claimed another convoy attack the following month, this time via a branded statement posted to [Sabereen News \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-sabereen-news\)](#) on September 8.
- By October 2020, the group appeared to be defunct, but on January 26, 2021, Sabereen posted claims that SAD had once again targeted U.S. convoys. Further claims were posted on February 2, this time accompanied by a branded statement.



Saraya Awliya al-Dam logo

(/sites/defa
03/SaD%2C

- In the early hours of February 16, 2021, Sabereen broke the news that SAD was claiming [a rocket attack on coalition forces in Erbil](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/attributing-erbil-attack-role-open-source-monitoring) (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/attributing-erbil-attack-role-open-source-monitoring>). One minute later, the Sabereen account posted a statement purporting to be from SAD and formally claiming responsibility. An official, branded statement by SAD was posted later that day, again via Sabereen. Yet Kurdish intelligence later extracted confessions from accused perpetrators who claimed to belong to [Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-kataib-sayyid-al-shuhada) (KSS). The U.S. government has stated that it believes KSS and [Kataib Hezbollah](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-kataib-hezbollah) (KH) carried out the Erbil attack.



(/sites/default/files/2024-
/SAD%20101%202.jpg)

Figure 1: Saraya Awliya al-Dam twin-drone display from its May 30, 2024, claim of a double attack on Israel

- On May 30, 2024, SAD issued imagery (Figure 1) of two Iranian-made Shahed-101 X-wing drones and claimed to have attacked "two separate vital targets in Haifa harbor." There was no independent confirmation of this attack on Israel, and the Iraqi umbrella group [Islamic Resistance in Iraq \(/node/18416\)](/node/18416) did not claim such an attack on that day. The three clerics shown in photographs on the wall behind the drones are Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, the late Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi, and Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani of Iraq.
- In June 2024, subsequent SAD videos were released showing other martyr images in the same underground den, apparently with the same two Shahed-101 drones.

Chain of command:

- The preponderance of evidence shows that SAD is linked to KSS and KH given each group's apparent involvement in the February 2021 Erbil attack.

Affiliate relationships:

- [Sabereen News \(/node/16673\)](/node/16673)

Subordinate elements:

- SAD has a media channel on Telegram that appears to be official. This channel is not influential, however, posting just four statements and one attack video between August 2020 and March 2021. The majority of the group's claims and statements are published by Sabereen News, which has a vastly larger audience.



PART OF A SERIES

[Militia Spotlight: Profiles \(/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight-profiles\)](/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight-profiles)



How to Use Militia Spotlight: Profiles

(/policy-analysis/how-use-militia-spotlight-profiles)



Profile: Abna al-Muhandis

(/policy-analysis/profile-abna-al-muhandis)



Profile: Lions of the Ougaidat Brigade

(/policy-analysis/profile-lions-ougaidat-brigade)

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Countering the Islamic State's Gendered Violence and Minority Persecution

August 1, 2024, starting at 11:00 a.m. EDT (1500 GMT)

◆
Pari Ibrahim,
Devorah Margolin,
Gina Vale

(/policy-analysis/countering-islamic-states-gendered-violence-and-minority-persecution)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Responding to the Islamic State Attack in Oman

Jul 24, 2024

◆
Aaron Y. Zelin,
Elizabeth Dent

(/policy-analysis/responding-islamic-state-attack-oman)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

The Netanyahu Visit, U.S.-Israel Ties, and the War on Hamas

Jul 23, 2024



Morgan Viña,
Stuart Eizenstat,
Dennis Ross

(/policy-analysis/netanyahu-visit-us-israel-ties-and-war-hamas)

TOPICS

[Military & Security \(/policy-analysis/military-security\)](/policy-analysis/military-security)

[Terrorism \(/policy-analysis/terrorism\)](/policy-analysis/terrorism)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

[Iraq \(/policy-analysis/iraq\)](/policy-analysis/iraq)

[Turkey \(/policy-analysis/turkey\)](/policy-analysis/turkey)