The first and best-known of the facade groups that Iran-backed militias use to conceal their involvement in operations, Ashab al-Kahf has a particularly strong connection to Asaib Ahl al-Haq.
**Name:** Ashab al-Kahf (AK) (Companions of the Cave).

**Type of movement:** Facade group. Kinetic military operations. Domestic counter-U.S. operations.

**History and objectives:**

- AK is the oldest of the current militia facade groups, first appearing in 2019 and remaining continually active ever since. Among Iraqis, it is one of the best-known facade groups, and its name is sometimes used as shorthand for new militia groups.

- AK claims responsibility for attacks carried out by *fasail* (armed groups). It has claimed improvised explosive device attacks on convoys since March 2020, and at least two rocket attacks (one on the U.S. embassy (November 17, 2020) and one against Turkish forces (February 15, 2021)).

- The group primarily communicates through branded statements published online, which are then quickly reposted across the militia networks.

- AK initially appeared to have less of a kinetic focus than *Usbat al-Thaireen* (UT) or *Qasem al-Jabbarin*, but claimed increasing numbers of convoy attacks from November 2020 onward. This may have coincided with a rift between *Kataib Hezbollah* (KH) and *Asaib Ahl al-Haq* (AAH) over strategy.

- On December 25, 2020, AK joined the fierce media campaign to release an imprisoned AAH operator, issuing statements confirming its readiness to take to the streets if so ordered by the AAH leadership.

- In December 2020 and early January 2021, affiliated media accounts issued thinly veiled criticisms of KH's militia strategy. This rift seemed to close around January 6. Meanwhile, AK changed its logo to an image closer in style to other *muqawama* (resistance) groups.

- AK took over from Qasem al-Jabbarin as the primary claimant of convoy attacks in October 2021.

**Chain of command:**

- The preponderance of the evidence shows AK to be an affiliate of Asaib Ahl al-Haq. This is based on:
  - Analysis of posts and accounts promoting AK activity (AAH-affiliated media accounts appear to have a particularly close affinity with AK).
  - The content of AK’s statements.
  - The fact that claimed AK attacks are close to AAH areas of control such as Balad, northern Baghdad, Nineveh Plains and parts of Babil.

- AK convoy attacks are nominally under the *Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee* (al-Haya al-Tansiqiya lil-Muqawama al-Iraqiya, or Tansiqiya for short).

**Affiliate relationships:**

- Close links with Asaib Ahl al-Haq. AK channels have expressed affinity for AAH and its leader Qais al-Khazali. In addition, "Ashab al-Kahf" was an early (pre-2010) name used by the AAH network.

- *Sabereen News* appears to post some AK claims and statements on the group's behalf.

- During spring and summer 2020, AK and Usbat al-Thaireen appeared to have a close and complementary relationship as the two primary facade groups claiming responsibility for attacks on the coalition while disseminating *muqawama*.
Subordinate elements:

- AK operates its own media channels on Telegram and Twitter.
- AK may directly control roadside bombing and rocket crews drawn from AAH networks, or it may strictly be a media operation.
RECOMMENDED

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