

Rijal Allah Claims the Baghdad Airport Attack

by [Crispin Smith \(/experts/crispin-smith\)](/experts/crispin-smith), [Michael Knights \(/experts/michael-knights\)](/experts/michael-knights)

Apr 24, 2021

Also available in

[العربية \(/ar/policy-analysis/fsyl-rjal-allh-ydwy-mswwlyth-n-alhjwm-ly-mtar-bghdad\)](/ar/policy-analysis/fsyl-rjal-allh-ydwy-mswwlyth-n-alhjwm-ly-mtar-bghdad)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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

Crispin Smith is an associate at a Washington-based national security law group. His research focuses on Iraqi security, human rights, and law of armed conflict issues. He is a co-founder of the Militia Spotlight platform, which offers in-depth analysis of developments related to the Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria.



[Michael Knights \(/experts/michael-knights\)](/experts/michael-knights)

Michael Knights is the Jill and Jay Bernstein Fellow of The Washington Institute, specializing in the military and security affairs of Iraq, Iran, and the Persian Gulf states. He is a co-founder of the Militia Spotlight platform, which offers in-depth analysis of developments related to the Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria.



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)

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

A new online facade group has undermined Kataib Hezbollah's conspiracy-laden narrative blaming the April 22 rocket strike on Iraqi Kurds.

At least three rockets landed in the perimeter of Baghdad International Airport on April 22, 2021. According to Iraqi security officials, they landed near the area that houses U.S. forces but caused no casualties. Although the attack was quickly covered by *muqawama* (resistance) media, no group claimed it at first. In fact, a number of attacks on coalition forces have gone unclaimed in recent weeks (including an April 14 strike on Erbil airport), while reports of fake attacks are on the rise in militia social media accounts.

The earliest “claim” attributing the April 22 attack came on April 24. At 05:22 local time, the [Unit 10,000 \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-unit-10000\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-unit-10000) Telegram account posted that Baghdad Airport had been struck by a Kurdish group. Unit 10,000 is an influential media account believed to be affiliated with [Kataib Hezbollah \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-kataib-hezbollah\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-kataib-hezbollah) (KH) and privy to insider information on the *muqawama*. It also known for spreading disinformation.

The Arabic-language post read: “Kurdish armed groups calling themselves the 'Protectors of the Kurdistan State' claimed responsibility for the attack at Baghdad Airport yesterday, they consider it a response to the targeting of Erbil Airport and vowed more attacks on Baghdad!” A document written in Sorani Kurdish was attached, with a logo at the top depicting the shape of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) in the colors of the Iraqi Kurdish flag, with the words “*parezarani gal-i Kurdistan*” (“protectors of the people of Kurdistan”).

The Unit 10,000 claim was repeated by a handful of smaller Telegram channels, several of which are likely Unit 10,000 proxy accounts.

Later on April 24, a competing claim emerged. At 19:42 local time, a new Telegram channel, “Fasail Rijal Allah”



Fake claim of the Baghdad Airport attack by "Protectors of the People of Kurdistan."

("Faction of the Men of God")
 (/sites/default/files/2021-04/Fake%20Kurdish%20message.JPG) posted a Quranic verse, followed a minute later by an Arabic

statement claiming the April 22 attack:

"In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, it is they who will suffer a dreadful torment [note: this Quranic quote is from Surat al-Naml, verse 5].

Trust in God Almighty.

At exactly 23:50 hours on 4/22/2021, your sons in the Men of God [Rijal Allah] faction were able to target the American occupation base in Baghdad (Victoria) with eight 107mm rockets that hit the targets with high accuracy. This is the base in which the U.S. occupation takes refuge from our anger, and we promise you we will pursue them so that its protection is no protection from God's command."
 [note: "Victoria Camp" is the preferred *muqawama* term for U.S. forces at Baghdad



Rijal Allah logo

(/sites/default/files/2021-04/Rijal%20

Airport, recalling the pre-2011 U.S. labeling of segments of the airport as "Camp Victory"]

The statement inaccurately claims that eight rockets hit targets. Although the perpetrator attempted to fire eight rockets, only three were successfully launched, the remainder failed to fire.



Baghdad Airport rocket launcher, April 22, 2021. Note the three unlaunched rockets. Credit to @CalibreObscura (<https://twitter.com/CalibreObscura>)

Just minutes after this post, at 19.53 local time, [Sabereen News](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-sabereen-news) (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-sabereen-news>) and the "Team of Brothers of Electronic Jihad" Telegram accounts simultaneously rebroadcast the Rijal Allah claim.

Despite Sabereen's prominence as a source of militia information, only a handful of accounts reposted or commented on the attack, perhaps indicating some kind of dissonance about the validity or wisdom of making the claim.

This is not the first time Sabereen has posted claims that other *muqawama* media fail to echo. Although some of its claims are rebroadcast by many militia media accounts, including high-profile outlets like Unit 10,000, at other times Sabereen will post a claim by a facade group (with an accompanying unique Telegram channel and logo) that others largely ignore. This was the case with the February Erbil attack, where Sabereen broadcast claims by [Saraya Awliya al-Dam](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-saraya-awliya-al-dam) (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-saraya-awliya-al-dam>) while KH-affiliated channels ignored them.

In the Baghdad Airport case, Rijal Allah's claim undermined the rather poor effort to blame the attack on Kurdish militants, which would have been an unprecedented development. Instead, that narrative was clearly the invention of *muqawama* groups seeking to foment anger toward Iraqi Kurds and justify rocket and drone attacks against the KRI.

This episode may also suggest an effort by KH-affiliated channels to push the Kurdish angle, while [Asaib Ahl al-Haq](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-asaib-ahl-al-haq-0) (AAH) preferred to have its channel Sabereen announce that a *muqawama* faction was openly claiming the attack. This would fit with AAH's penchant for independent action that undermines KH's leadership of the *muqawama*.

As for the wider trend of rocket attacks on U.S. forces going unclaimed, it is possible that militias have moved to a model of deception in which they saturate the information environment with fake attacks. Fake and unclaimed attacks are not new, but they have

become increasingly common ever since the April explosion at Iran's Natanz nuclear facility ([read more about the potential connections \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/how-iran-employed-iraqs-muqawama-its-post-natanz-response\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/how-iran-employed-iraqs-muqawama-its-post-natanz-response) between that incident and Iran-backed activities in Iraq). In all likelihood, the *muqawama* and Iranian elements recognize that named facade groups are increasingly helping with attribution rather than hindering, even as Iranian officials protest the increased attribution of militias as "Iran-supported." A similar "fake saturation" model was previously used [with convoy attacks \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/rising-profile-fasail-al-muqawama-al-duwaliya-convoy-bombings\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/rising-profile-fasail-al-muqawama-al-duwaliya-convoy-bombings), though facade groups continue to openly claim these types of attacks in both Syria and Iraq. ❖

PART OF A SERIES

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

[How to Use Militia Spotlight](/policy-analysis/how-use-militia-spotlight)

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



[Kataib Hezbollah Behind "Grassroots" Iraqi Fundraising for Yemen](/policy-analysis/kataib-hezbollah-behind-grassroots-iraqi-fundraising-yemen)

(/policy-analysis/kataib-hezbollah-behind-grassroots-iraqi-fundraising-yemen)



[Militia Lionization of Esmail Qaani: Consolidation or Covering Embarrassment?](/policy-analysis/militia-lionization-esmail-qaani-consolidation-or-covering-embarrassment?)

(/policy-analysis/militia-lionization-esmail-qaani-consolidation-or-covering-embarrassment)

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Iran Takes Next Steps on Rocket Technology](/policy-analysis/iran-takes-next-steps-rocket-technology)

Feb 11, 2022

◆
Farzin Nadimi

(/policy-analysis/iran-takes-next-steps-rocket-technology)



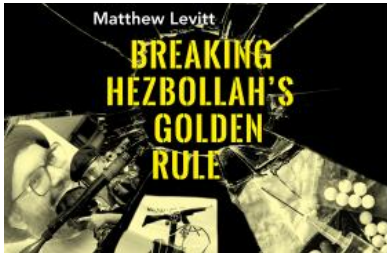
BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Saudi Arabia Adjusts Its History, Diminishing the Role of Wahhabism](#)

Feb 11, 2022

◆
Simon Henderson

[\(/policy-analysis/saudi-arabia-adjusts-its-history-diminishing-role-wahhabism\)](/policy-analysis/saudi-arabia-adjusts-its-history-diminishing-role-wahhabism)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[Podcast: Breaking Hezbollah's Golden Rule](#)

Feb 9, 2022

◆
Matthew Levitt

[\(/policy-analysis/podcast-breaking-hezbollahs-golden-rule\)](/policy-analysis/podcast-breaking-hezbollahs-golden-rule)

TOPICS

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

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

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

[Iran \(/policy-analysis/iran\)](/policy-analysis/iran)

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