

Iraqi Militias Show Off Iranian Anti-Air Missile

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

Oct 21, 2021

Also available in

[العربية \(/ar/policy-analysis/almylyshyat-alraqyt-tstrd-alswarykh-alayranyt-almdadtt-lltayrat\)](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[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 \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight\)](#)

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

Iran-backed resistance groups are seemingly staging missile "discoveries" as a way of warning off coalition air forces.

On October 21, Shafaq News (a Kurdish-backed mainstream outlet) [announced \(https://shafaq.com/ar/%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%80%D9%86/%D8%AD%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B7-%D9%87%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%85-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%85%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A\)](#) that a missile had been found by the 52nd Brigade of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) in the vicinity of the Tuz Khormatu military airfield, in a hamlet called Albu Sabah. For context, the 52nd Brigade is a Shia Turkmen group that goes by the name "Fawj Amerli" and is close to the major Iran-backed militia [Kataib Hezbollah \(/node/16641\)](#). The brigade controls the so-called "Martyr's Camp" ten miles from where the missile was found. This camp is a key link in the system used by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force to supply Iraqi militias with drones and rockets.



Figure 1: Martyr's Camp, near Amerli.

The missile in question was an [Iranian-made "358" surface-to-air system \(https://twitter.com/arawnsley/status/1451282954995515398\)](#) (Figure 3), a type that has previously been [captured \(https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/19/us/iran-missiles-yemen.html\)](#) in Iranian arms shipments bound for Yemen (e.g., on November 25, 2019, and February 9, 2020), and thereafter [publicly displayed](#)



Figure 2: Tuz Khormatu airfield (formerly FOB Bernstein). Note Albu Sabah in the top-right.

[\(https://www.centcom.mil/Portals/6/Documents/Reports/20FEBSlides.pdf\)](#) and assessed to be of Iranian origin by the [UN Panel of Experts on Yemen \(https://undocs.org/en/S/2021/79\)](#). A similar ground-attack version of the 358 was used by Iran-backed militias in Idlib, Syria, on September 23, 2021.



Figure 3: Shafaq News image of 358 missile in Tuz, Oct 20, 2021.

Interestingly, Shafaq News reported that the 52nd Brigade claimed the missile was "directed at" the airfield. This could be a laughably clumsy attempt at disinformation: consider, one of the PMF units closest to Iran's

Qods Force announces that it found an Iranian-made missile pointing at an Iraqi army and PMF camp. Alternately, the *muqawama* (resistance) may be trying to lay the groundwork for denying that they are responsible for any future uses of 358 missiles, since a 358 was allegedly "directed at" them from Albu Sabah.

In Militia Spotlight's view, the "outing" of the 358 in Tuz Khormatu is probably a coded communication of anti-air threats in the close vicinity of coalition aircraft. Open-source transponder tracking services (Figure 4) show that Tuz is a [waypoint \(https://twitter.com/GDarkconrad/status/1219599358972305408/photo/1\)](#) on the routing of most coalition intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) aircraft and drones as they circuit through northern Iraq, presumably due to the presence of Islamic State hotspots in the area. The 358 is [designed \(https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/new-iranian-missile-reported-to-be-loitering-sam\)](#) specifically to attack such low-flying surveillance platforms and has been used in Yemen to target U.S. and Saudi drones [\(https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-usa-drone/u-s-drone-shot-down-over-yemen-officials-idUSKCN1VB180\)](#).

Currently, Militia Spotlight believes that the *muqawama* are more likely to threaten anti-air attacks than undertake them, with the aim of deterring or complicating coalition assistance to Iraq. This was our [assessment \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/assessing-militia-threats-coalition-aircraft\)](#) in July, when previous anti-air threats were aired by the facade group [Saraya Awliya al-Dam \(/node/16626\)](#). The *muqawama* still seem hesitant to maximize the lethality of their attacks, and striking a manned platform would be exceedingly provocative. Yet attacks on unmanned U.S. drone systems could be attempted. Whatever the case, the *muqawama* will no doubt continue to deploy threats in a manner intended to reduce freedom of movement for coalition personnel and international organizations,

including claimed or actual attacks against ISR aircraft hangars and airborne assets or [threats against election observers and diplomats \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight) [and-uae\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/muqawamas-post-elections-threats-against-unami-and-uae).

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)

[\(/policy-analysis/how-use-militia-spotlight\)](/policy-analysis/how-use-militia-spotlight)



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

[\(/policy-analysis/kataib-hezbollah-behind-grassroots-iraqi-fundraising-yemen\)](/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?)

[\(/policy-analysis/militia-lionization-esmail-qaani-consolidation-or-covering-embarrassment\)](/policy-analysis/militia-lionization-esmail-qaani-consolidation-or-covering-embarrassment?)

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Targeting the Islamic State: Jihadist Military Threats and the U.S. Response](/policy-analysis/targeting-islamic-state-jihadist-military-threats-and-us-response)

February 16, 2022, starting at 12:00 p.m. EST (1700 GMT)

◆
Ido Levy,
Craig Whiteside

[\(/policy-analysis/targeting-islamic-state-jihadist-military-threats-and-us-response\)](/policy-analysis/targeting-islamic-state-jihadist-military-threats-and-us-response)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Challenges to Taliban Rule and Potential Impacts for the Region](/policy-analysis/challenges-taliban-rule-and-potential-impacts-region)

Feb 9, 2022

◆
Mohamed Mokhtar Qandil

[\(/policy-analysis/challenges-taliban-rule-and-potential-impacts-region\)](/policy-analysis/challenges-taliban-rule-and-potential-impacts-region)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

The Middle East at the Olympics: Six Countries Compete While Great Power Politics on Display

Feb 9, 2022

◆
Carol Silber

(/policy-analysis/middle-east-olympics-six-countries-compete-while-great-power-politics-display)

TOPICS

Military & Security (/policy-analysis/military-security)

Proliferation (/policy-analysis/proliferation)

Terrorism (/policy-analysis/terrorism)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Iran (/policy-analysis/iran)

Iraq (/policy-analysis/iraq)

Syria (/policy-analysis/syria)