



Policy Analysis /

# Muqawama Meltdown, Part 2: Drone Attack on the Prime Minister

by [Crispin Smith](#), [Michael Knights](#), [Hamdi Malik](#)

Nov 7, 2021

Also available in

[Arabic](#)

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



### [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](#)

Michael Knights is the Boston-based 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.



### [Hamdi Malik](#)

Hamdi Malik is an Associate Fellow with the Washington Institute, specializing in Shia militias. He earned his doctorate at the school of social, political and global studies, Keele University. 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. He is the coauthor of the Institute's 2020 study "Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces."



Brief Analysis

Part of a series: [Militia Spotlight](#)

or see [Part 1: How to Use Militia Spotlight](#)

---

**Militias followed up Qais al-Khazali's threats against Kadhimi by attacking his residence, shattering the narrative of victimhood they had been building through protests.**

In **Part 1** of this article, Militia Spotlight reviewed the rapid, integrated effort by **Asaib Ahl al-Haq** (AAH) and **Kataib Hezbollah** (KH) to respond to their growing political isolation by launching protests against the government center, attempting to draw security forces into harming protestors. They then mounted an energetic information operations effort to undermine Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi and key military figures, while also warning other *muqawama* (resistance) leaders not to join a new government without AAH and KH.

On November 5, AAH leader Qais al-Khazali **threatened** Kadhimi personally by calling for legal action against him. Yet the first action taken against the premier was anything but legal: early on November 7, two explosive-laden quadcopter drones struck his residence.

## Denying the Attack

On November 7, at approximately 02:30 hours Baghdad time, media channels affiliated with KH broke the news of explosions and gunfire around Kadhimi's residence inside the International Zone, sparking speculation among *muqawama* networks about a potential coup. These outlets quickly began developing a line of argument that portrayed the attacks as a false-flag operation, claiming that Western intelligence agencies or Kadhimi's team had faked a drone attack. Unhelpfully playing into this narrative, Iraq's Joint Operations Command publicly queried why U.S. defense systems in the area did not fire in order to protect the prime minister if there was in fact a drone strike. (These defenses were installed to protect the U.S. embassy and are unlikely to get involved in an incident so far out from the embassy and so close to rooftop level.)

At 04:17 hours on November 7, KH's Abu Ali al-Askari posted a statement claiming that "no Iraqi would desire to expend a drone on the house of the former Prime Minister," going on to note that if anyone did wish to do so, there would be "many less expensive ways to achieve that." At 09.54 hours, Khazali echoed the false-flag narrative, noting that any perpetrators should be investigated because the incident at Kadhimi's residence was "an attempt to shuffle the papers [i.e., muddy the waters] just one day after the clear crime of murdering protestors and assaulting them and burning their tents."

## Quadcopters Used in the Attack

The drones used in the attack were short-range quadcopter systems of a kind seen periodically in Iraq since July 2020:

- July 23, 2020: A quadcopter was discovered on a rooftop in Jadriyah, Baghdad, across the Tigris River from the



Figure 2: Comparison of July 2021 and Nov 2021 drone munitions



Figure 1: Qais al-Khazali drone attack statement, November 7, 2021

U.S. embassy. It was carrying a munition that closely matched an unexploded munition found on the roof of Kadhim's residence on November 7 (see Figure 2, right side).

- March 4, 2021: A quadcopter similar to the July 23 find was used in an attempted overflight of a Kurdish leadership compound in Erbil during a period of tension between Iran-backed *muqawama* elements and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) over Kurdish negotiations with Muqtada al-Sadr ahead of the parliamentary election. A second quadcopter sighting was reported at Kadhim's residence the same night, probably reflecting *muqawama* disquiet over talks between Sadr, Kadhim, and the KDP.
- July 2, 2021: A quadcopter nearly identical to the July 23 drone was found crashed in Baghdad (see Figure 2, left side).
- July 5, 2021: Another nearly identical quadcopter was [shot down](#) by U.S. defenses in Baghdad.

Militia Spotlight assesses that the quadcopters used against Kadhim's residence on November 7 were probably operated by the same user that undertook the previous attacks. Technical features of the drones (appearance, high-quality battery management system, 3D-printed battery case, telemetry system, signature cabling; see Figure 3) suggest a talented engineering team involved in attacks on *muqawama* adversaries in Iraq.



Figure 3: Near-identical quadcopters in use by Iran-backed *muqawama* forces in Iraq and Syria, 2019-2021. Thanks to @arawnsley @CalibreObscura @no\_itsmyturn.

## Political Fallout

The *muqawama* have not presented a unified face regarding the drone attack. The Badr Organization and Nouri al-Maliki condemned the incident as an assault on the prime minister, with Badr leader Hadi al-Ameri [noting](#), "We strongly condemn the targeting that happened last night at the home of the honorable [*muhtaram*] Prime Minister. We call upon the competent authorities to investigate the matter, verify the facts, uncover who is behind it, and hold him accountable, whoever he is. We warn that a third party is behind the incident in order to mix the papers [muddy the waters] and create *fitna* [unrest/sedition]." Although Ameri still hedged by hinting at foreign responsibility, he clearly did not go as far as KH or AAH in disseminating false-flag

conspiracy theories.

If Khazali and KH sought to push *muqawama* elements back together using their protest gambit on November 4-6, the drone attack has undermined this objective. AAH and KH may now be even more isolated, while Kadhim has received strong international support following the attack. This may be a further indicator of political tone-deafness in KH, AAH, or both.



[View/Print Page as PDF](#)

SHARE



EMAIL ALERTS



[Sign Up](#)



TO TOP

## PART OF A SERIES

### Militia Spotlight

#### How to Use Militia Spotlight



#### A Fake KSS Recruitment Drive



#### Ashab al-Kahf's Takeover of the Convoy Strategy

## RECOMMENDED



#### BRIEF ANALYSIS

### Kurds Are Fleeing Iraq in the Face of Uncertainty

Dec 7, 2021

Yerevan Saeed

ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

# Lebanon Stands at a Crossroad Between a Painful Revival and a Complete Submission to Iran

Dec 7, 2021

Hanin Ghaddar



BRIEF ANALYSIS

## The Future of al-Tanf Garrison in Syria

Dec 6, 2021

Grant Rumley,  
David Schenker

### TOPICS

Military & Security

Terrorism

### REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Iran

Iraq

Syria

### STAY UP TO DATE



SIGN UP FOR EMAIL ALERTS



THE  
WASHINGTON INSTITUTE  
*for Near East Policy*

1111 19th Street NW - Suite 500  
Washington D.C. 20036  
Tel: 202-452-0650  
Fax: 202-223-5364

[Contact](#)

[Press Room](#)

[Subscribe](#)

*The Washington Institute seeks to advance a balanced and realistic understanding of American interests in the Middle East and to promote the policies that secure them.*

The Institute is a 501(c)3 organization; all donations are tax-deductible.

[About TWI](#) /

[Support the Institute](#)



© 2021 All rights reserved.

[Employment](#) /

[Privacy Policy](#) /

[Rights & Permissions](#)