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 (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/muqawama-meltdown-part-1-protest-strategy-nov-4-6-2021), of this article, Militia Spotlight reviewed the rapid, integrated effort by Asaib Ahl al-Haq (node/16715) (AAH) and Kataib Hezbollah (node/16643) (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 (https://t.me/asabahlualhaq/11269) 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. 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 Jadiyah, Baghdad, across the Tigris River from the U.S. embassy. It was carrying a munition that closely matched an unexploded munition found on the roof of Kadhimi’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 over talks between Sadr, Kadhimi, and the KDP.
- July 23, 2020: 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 over talks between Sadr, Kadhimi, and the KDP.
- July 23, 2020: 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 over talks between Sadr, Kadhimi, and the KDP.
- July 23, 2020: 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 over talks between Sadr, Kadhimi, and the KDP.
- July 23, 2020: 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 over talks between Sadr, Kadhimi, 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 Kadhimi’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.

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 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 and create unrest [fitna].” 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 Kadhimi has received strong international support following the attack. This may be a further indicator of political tone-deafness in KH, AAH, or both.

RECOMMENDED

Iran Takes Next Steps on Rocket Technology

Feb 11, 2022

Farzin Nadimi