

Nujaba's Regime Change Threat to the Kurdistan Democratic Party

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Brief Analysis

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With its first Kurdish-language video, the militia has upped the stakes by hinting at regime change in Iraqi Kurdistan.

In a video clip published on March 16, the militia [Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba \(/node/16716\)](#) (HaN) has threatened the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), calling for a change in the status quo in Iraqi Kurdistan just three days after Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) launched missiles [against the Kurdish capital of Erbil \(/node/17343\)](#). The targets of that strike included a lavish villa belonging to Baz Karim, the CEO and founder of the energy company KAR Group, which is affiliated with the KDP. Iran and its proxies have accused Karim of providing a base for the Israeli Mossad.

Titled "Iraqi Kurdistan: The Oligarchy's Losing Bet," the video is HaN's first Kurdish-language production. At one point in the clip, the narrator claims that the people of Kurdistan "have been taken hostage by a family-run government." The reference to the KDP is made clear when the accompanying footage shows party leader Masoud Barzani (Figure 1).



The clip goes on to argue that the KDP-led government in Erbil "bets on the wrong horse," and that it "used to be Saddam's ally but did not learn the lesson from history." This is particularly meaningful because the beginning of the clip shows footage of the Anfal campaigns, Saddam's genocidal counterinsurgency operation that led to the deaths of tens of thousands of Kurdish civilians in the 1980s—including the chemical bombing of the Kurdish city of Halabja in 1988, which killed 5,000 people (Figure. 2).

HaN's clip then shows pictures of a meeting between Donald Trump and Nechirvan Barzani, the president of the Kurdistan Region (Figure 3), implying that the family's friendship with the United



Figure 1: Masoud Barzani in HaN video clip, March 16, 2022

Figure 2: HaN clip showing footage of bombardment of Kurdish cities in the 1980s, March 16, 2022

States—much like their alleged alliance with Saddam—will only bring them misery. According to the video, allowing U.S. forces to establish bases in the Kurdistan Region has “not only failed to bring security to the region, but also rendered it a legitimate target for the factions who oppose the American occupation.” Following this blatant threat to launch more attacks on Erbil, the video proceeds to talk about the “U.S. betrayal of the Kurdish people” in Iraq and Syria. It even reiterates the Iranian claim that the KDP-led government has allowed Mossad to establish bases in Kurdistan.



Figure 3: Nechirvan Barzani and Donald Trump in HaN video clip, March 16, 2022

HaN's clip also notes that the “Kurdish nation’s anger toward the ruling oligarchy became clearer than ever last year.” This argument sets the scene for offering “solutions” to Kurdistan’s problems—namely, allowing the *muqawama* (resistance) to expand its influence there.

The clip goes on to say that the late *muqawama* icons Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis “helped the Peshmerga” in their fight against the Islamic State, claiming that HaN “has always defended the Kurdish people’s legitimate rights” and “treats the people of Erbil and Sulaymaniyah the same as the people of Basra and Nasiriyah.” This segment is followed by the clip’s main message: “It

is time to change the status quo!” This is a clear threat against the stability of KDP-controlled areas.

Given Iran’s narrative surrounding the Erbil missile attack and its ongoing diplomatic pressure to force the KDP out of Muqtada al-Sadr’s proposed “national majority government,” it is reasonable to view HaN’s unprecedented threats as an IRGC-directed information operation. The timing of the March 13 missile attack and March 16 video clip is important too, with Iraq’s parliament convening on March 26 to elect the new president. The KDP is under increasing pressure to change its position on government formation and allow Iran-backed groups allied with the *muqawama* to have a meaningful presence in the next administration.



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