

Spring Awakening: A New Wave of Militia Strikes or Just a Blip?

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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)

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Militia groups appear to be increasingly exercising their different kinetic capabilities in Iraq and Syria, but why now?

Since March 30, *muqawama* (resistance) groups in Iraq and Syria have undertaken a wider variety of kinetic activities than has been typical in recent months, suggesting an exercising of capabilities that may presage the beginning of a new kinetic campaign. The catalog of attacks includes:

- Four separate rocket strikes involving a total of seventeen 107 mm and 122 mm munitions were directed at the Turkish base at Zilkan on Mount Bashiqa northeast of Erbil, spanning March 30 to April 4. The rockets were fired from typical *muqawama*-controlled areas of the Nineveh Plains.
- Four 122 mm rockets were fired at the Khabat refinery on April 6, again from the Nineveh Plains area.
- The U.S. base known as Green Village (in Syria's al-Omar oil field) was targeted by four 107 mm rockets on April 7, injuring four American personnel.
- A coalition resupply convoy was struck by a roadside bomb in Syria's Hasaka province on April 7, with exclusive video footage of the destroyed vehicle being aired by [Ashab al-Kahf \(/node/16638\)](#).
- Al-Asad Air Base, which hosts coalition and Iraqi forces, was attacked by two drones on April 8, with both aircraft intercepted by the base's counter-rocket, artillery, and mortar (C-RAM) system.

The burst of attacks is by no means unprecedented, but in recent months it has been rare for the *muqawama* to be so active, especially across widely spread locations and using so many different tactics. As Figure 1 shows, their overt kinetic operations in Iraq previously hovered at a low level, with rocket and drone attacks on U.S. points of presence falling off entirely for most of the first quarter of 2022. Even convoy attacks—which cannot hurt U.S. personnel as none are present on the vehicles—had almost ceased. In Syria, the trends were similar: six rocket attacks on U.S. bases in January dropped to two in February and one in March. The April 7 convoy attack was the first such attack in Syria this year.

Even more unusual, the rise in kinetic activity has coincided with a rare reduction in militia media activity.

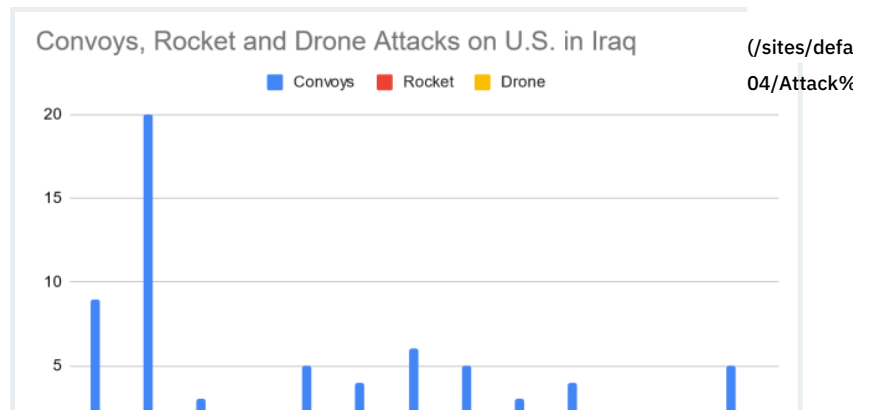
While militia-affiliated social media accounts have continued to report excitedly on each new attack, key media players—most notably, [Sabereen News \(/node/16673\)](#)—have been conspicuous by their (likely enforced) silence. For instance, Sabereen went on an eleven-day hiatus between March 28 and April 8.

Still, some major propagandists have continued to post:

on April 3, for example, Ashab al-Kahf released a statement blaming the United States for Iraq's recent political chaos and economic struggles, calling on "every believer who loves Islam and the homeland to assist in launching military operations against the convoys of the American occupation." Immediately afterward, the outlet (which is generally considered an affiliate of the militia [Asaib Ahl al-Haq \(/node/16715\)](#)) claimed a convoy attack in Salah al-Din governorate. But the absence of key media channels and amplifiers in recent days has left smaller, less coordinated networks to try filling the void.

It is easy to speculate about possible reasons for the dip in kinetic activity in February-March and the increase in early April, focusing on the performative nature of these so-called "resistance" attacks and the lack of motive to undertake them if practically no one is noticing them. A

reduction in "mainly for show" kinetic acts might be tied to several factors: the Ukraine crisis distracting potential viewers and militia propagandists; the major outlet Sabereen suffering [substantial disruption recently \(/node/17381\)](#); and/or the possible need to keep things quiet in Iraq while Iran attempts to secure sanctions relief in nuclear talks with the United States. If the recent kinetic tempo is maintained, however, then it may mean that previous restraining factors are now weakening. ❖



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