

## Profile: Ahrar Sinjar

by [Hamdi Malik \(/experts/hamdi-malik\)](/experts/hamdi-malik), [Michael Knights \(/experts/michael-knights\)](/experts/michael-knights), [Alex Almeida \(/experts/alex-almeida\)](/experts/alex-almeida), [Anwar al-Zamani \(/experts/anwar-al-zamani\)](/experts/anwar-al-zamani)

Jun 8, 2022

Also available in

[Farsi \(/fa/policy-analysis/prwfayl-ahrar-snjar\)](/fa/policy-analysis/prwfayl-ahrar-snjar)

Updated November 5, 2024

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS



#### [Hamdi Malik \(/experts/hamdi-malik\)](/experts/hamdi-malik)

Hamdi Malik is an associate fellow with The Washington Institute and cofounder of its Militia Spotlight platform.



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

Michael Knights is the Jill and Jay Bernstein Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute and cofounder of the Militia Spotlight platform, which offers in-depth analysis of developments related to Iran-backed militias.

#### [Alex Almeida \(/experts/alex-almeida\)](/experts/alex-almeida)

Alex Almeida is the head security analyst at a leading risk advisory firm.

#### [Anwar al-Zamani \(/experts/anwar-al-zamani\)](/experts/anwar-al-zamani)

Anwar al-Zamani is an Iraqi expert on Iran-backed militias and their use of drones and other technologies. He is a contributor to 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: Profiles \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight-profiles\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight-profiles)

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

## This facade group is used to brand "resistance" attacks on Turkish targets and purportedly link the strikes to Yezidi grievances toward Turkey.

**Name:** Ahrar Sinjar (Free People of Sinjar).

**Type of movement:** Facade group. Nonkinetic support to kinetic military operations. Foreign counter-Turkey operations. Domestic counter-Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) operations.

### History and objectives:

- The first mention of Ahrar Sinjar was in a statement issued on February 3, 2022, claiming a rocket attack on Turkey's base at Zilkan in Bashiqa, northeast of Mosul.
- The statement claimed that "brave and fearsome men from Sinjar rose to fend off and stop Turkey's aggression".

- Ahrar Sinjar's logo which includes images of Tawus Melek, one of the central figures in the Yezidi religion and the statement claiming that Ahrar Sinjar fighters are from the Yezidi city of Sinjar, suggest that Ahrar Sinjar is a Yezidi militia.
- Additionally, Ahrar Sinjar has a military spokesman persona that uses the name Darman Tawus Melek. This name was seemingly chosen to persuade Ahrar Sinjar's audience that the group is a Yezidi militia. But, according to Yezidis, Tawus Melek is a holy name and, based on the Yezidi religion, it is not permissible for human beings to be named Tawus Melek. This is evidence that those behind this online facade group are unlikely to be Yezidi or expert in the Yezidi culture.



Ahrar Sinjar Logo

- Ahrar Sinjar has so far claimed responsibility for four rocket and drone attacks against Turkey's base at Zilkan. These are:
  - February 3, 2022, seventeen-round truck-based 122mm rocket attack on Zilkan (mentioned above) following Turkish strikes on PMF Brigade 80 locations and leaders the prior night. Unlike previous attacks on Zilkan, the February 3 attack was launched at long range from west of the Tigris inside Mosul city.
  - April 3, 2022 rocket attack on Zilkan - which could be either or both the four-round 122mm rocket attack on Zilkan launched at long range from west of the Tigris inside Mosul city and/or the seven-round truck-based 122mm rocket attack on Zilkan fired from the Nineveh Plains.
  - April 4 2022, failed single rail-launched 122 mm rocket attack on Zilkan fired from the Nineveh Plains. This appears to be a remaining un-fired rocket from the previous day's operations.
  - May 21, 2022, claim of a multi-drone (4-10 drones) attack on Zilkan, which killed one Kurdish man.
- Weapons intelligence found at a the April 3, 2022 truck launcher (green timers with white tape) match with a January 15 attempted four-round 107mm rail-launched rocket attack from within the Kurdistan Region on Zilkan. The timers also match with a May 16 Kurdish intelligence video showing an arrested cell of Yezidis who brought 107mm rockets into the Kurdistan Region with the intent of rocketing dams, power stations and buildings. Two of the May 16 detainees claimed to have been trained in rocket attacks at the base of Popular Mobilization Force (PMF) Brigade 53 (see below) and one of the May 16 detainees claimed to have been trained on rocket attacks by [Kataib Hezbollah \(/node/16641\)](#) (KH) at the base. These indicators suggest a nexus between PMF Brigades 53, KH, and rocket cells whose attacks are sometimes claimed by Ahrar Sinjar,

#### Chain of command:

The preponderance of evidence shows that Ahrar Sinjar is a facade group that claims at least some of the attacks undertaken by KH-trained, [Asaib Ahl al-Haq \(/node/16715\)](#) (AAH)-assisted rocket and drone cells in Nineveh. The Ahrar Sinjar brand may be reserved for anti-Turkish attacks that are portrayed as linked to Yezidi grievances with Turkey and which are launched from Nineveh. Closely related kinetic cells also appear to also be involved in rocket attacks on Kurdish targets, and on Turkish targets from within Iraqi Kurdistan, but these attacks are not branded as Ahrar Sinjar attacks.

#### Affiliate relationships:

- PMF Brigade 53 (Kataib Imam Hussein) and its Yazidi regiment (Lalish). This PMF unit is a KH and Badr-supported unit from Tall Afar and Qaytaniyah/Sinjar. Rocket cells using the same green timers employed in the Ahrar Sinjar-claimed February 3, 2022 attack confessed in the May 16, 2022 video to receiving training from KH at PMF Brigade 53 facilities.
- PMF Brigade 80. This PMF unit was formed in 2021 from elements of the YBS (Yekîneyên Berxwedana Şengalê, or Sinjar Resistance Units), a Sinjar-based Yazidi militia force, and especially the YBS special forces unit, the Asayesh Ezidikhan. PMF Brigade 80 is led by Bir Shakho Shingali, the former head of the YBS' special forces. Ahrar Sinjar claimed the February 3, 2022 attack in vengeance for Turkish strikes on PMF Brigade 80.
- PMF Brigade 30 (Liwa Shabak). This PMF unit controls areas of the Nineveh Plains where Ahrar Sinjar-claimed attacks have originated. It is influenced by KH and [Asaib Ahl al-Haq \(/node/16715\)](#) (AAH).

## Subordinate elements:

Unlike many other *muqawama* facade groups, Ahrar Sinjar does not have a noticeable presence on social media, seemingly to prevent analysts from attributing the group's activities to actual militias by analyzing their media activities. One Telegram channel with very low activity claims to be affiliated with Ahrar Sinjar, but it is hard to verify the authenticity of this channel at this stage. Ahrar Sinjar uses other *muqawama* media outlets such as [Sabereen News \(/node/16673\)](#) to announce its activities. ❖

## PART OF A SERIES

### [Militia Spotlight: Profiles \(/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight-profiles\)](#)



#### [How to Use Militia Spotlight: Profiles](#)

(/policy-analysis/how-use-militia-spotlight-profiles)



#### [Profile: Directorate of Education, al-Hashd al-Shabi \(DEHS\)](#)

(/policy-analysis/profile-directorate-education-al-hashd-al-shabi-dehs)



#### [Profile: Saraya al-Jihad](#)

(/policy-analysis/profile-saraya-al-jihad)

## RECOMMENDED



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

## Addressing Entities of Particular Concern: Non-State Actors and Egregious Violations of Religious Freedom

Nov 19, 2024

◆  
Aaron Y. Zelin

(/policy-analysis/addressing-entities-particular-concern-non-state-actors-and-egregious-violations)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

### Iraqi Militias Unveil SAD Aircraft Carrier

Nov 19, 2024

◆  
Michael Knights,  
Hamdi Malik,  
Crispin Smith

(/policy-analysis/iraqi-militias-unveil-sad-aircraft-carrier)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

### Anti-Israel Attacks by Iraq-Based Group with Implied Saudi Membership

Nov 19, 2024

◆  
Hamdi Malik,  
Michael Knights,  
Crispin Smith

(/policy-analysis/anti-israel-attacks-iraq-based-group-implied-saudi-membership)

#### TOPICS

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

Terrorism (/policy-analysis/terrorism)

#### REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Iran (/policy-analysis/iran)

Iraq (/policy-analysis/iraq)