

Profile: Liwa Ahrar al-Iraq

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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 \(/policy-analysis/how-use-militia-spotlight-profiles\)](#)

This facade group is used to brand militia rocket and drone attacks on Turkish targets in Iraq.

Name: Liwa Ahrar al-Iraq (Free People of Iraq Brigade, or LAI). (This profile was last updated on February 13, 2023).

Type of movement: Facade group. Nonkinetic support to kinetic military operations. Foreign counter-Turkey operations.

History and objectives:

- The first public mention of Liwa Ahrar al-Iraq was in a statement issued June 19, 2022, declaring that “the bases and other lands occupied by [Turkish president] Erdogan’s gangs are legitimate targets until their liberation.”
- On June 20, LAI issued another statement claiming four rocket attacks and two drone attacks against Turkey's Zilkan base in Bashiqa northeast of Mosul, including older attacks that occurred months earlier.

- According to the statement, the rocket attacks took place on December 27, 2021, and April 3, June 9, and June 18, 2022 (the latter date may have been an effort to take credit for a confirmed attack that occurred June 17). In all, the group claimed that ten Grad rockets had been fired at Zilkan, fewer than indicated by ground reports of attacks on those dates. LAI's claims did not overlap with claims by [Ahrar Sinjar \(/node/17475\)](#) (the only other group to claim strikes on Turkish targets), nor did they account for all rocket attacks on Zilkan (of which about two-thirds remain unclaimed).
- LAI's purported 2022 drone attacks took place on April 10 (against the Iraq-Turkey Pipeline manifold) and June 2 (as part of mixed rocket/drone attack on Zilkan). The group claims that one drone was launched in each attack. Neither incident caused any damage, and evidence indicates that the drones may have been intercepted using electronic warfare. In the second operation, the group claimed the use of a "Murad-6" drone. No other actor had previously claimed either operation.
- On June 26, 2022 LAI claimed another attack on Zilkan, stating that two Grad rockets were used, though ground reports suggested four (possibly based on echoes).
- On July 22, 2022 the group claimed another Grad rocket attack on Zilkan. Militia media outlet [Sabereen News \(/node/16673\)](#) announced the attack first and detailed that fourteen rockets were fired. LAI later claimed and confirmed that the strike was in response to the killing of nine Iraqi tourists during the [July 20 Turkish shelling of a resort \(/node/17560\)](#) near the Kurdistan Region city of Zakho.
- On October 8, 2022 LAI claimed yet another rocket attack on Zilkan, using four Grad rockets.
- LAI has threatened to target Turkish military vehicles using man-portable antitank guided missiles, but as of this writing there are no claims or evidence that this has happened.
- On December 4, 2022, LAI also claimed the heavy twenty rocket barrage against the Turkish military base at Zilkan in Iraq.
- On February 1, 2023, LAI claimed an eight-rocket 107mm daylight attack on Zilkan. (LAI claimed twenty rockets were fired and four 4-rocket stands were found in an olive grove outside the village of Fadhiliyah).



Liwa Ahrar al-Iraq logo

Chain of command:

Not enough evidence exists to link the Liwa Ahrar al-Iraq facade brand to a specific real-world *fasail* (armed group). On June 19, LAI retroactively took credit for about a quarter of all unclaimed attacks on Turkish bases in 2021-22. Pattern analysis of those attacks suggests cooperation with the ground-holding militia units in the northwest Nineveh Plains (see below).

LAI has also demonstrated a very mixed (but gradually improving) level of resourcing. Unusually, its claimed attacks have made exclusive use of longer-range and heavier 122 mm rockets, not 107 mm. Until July 22, its static launching platforms were quite rudimentary, with operators demonstrating poor accuracy or being deliberately nonlethal. The group used its first large multiple-rocket launch "mattress" for the fourteen-round strike of July 22, the first attack undertaken after the brand's public launch. On June 2, it claimed (without evidence) to have used an Iranian-designed Murad-6 (Shahed-136 type delta-wing) drone against Zilkan.

Affiliate relationships:

LAI has been linked to the 50th Brigade (Liwa Babiliyoun) of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces. This PMF unit controls areas of the Nineveh Plains from which most of LAI's claimed attacks have originated. The 50th Brigade is led by Rayan al-Kildani. In contrast, most of the unclaimed attacks on Zilkan launched from the Nineveh Plains area originated in sectors controlled by [the 30th PMF](#)

Brigade (/node/17496) (Hashd al-Shabak).

Subordinate elements:

LAI has an active social media channel on Telegram. ❖

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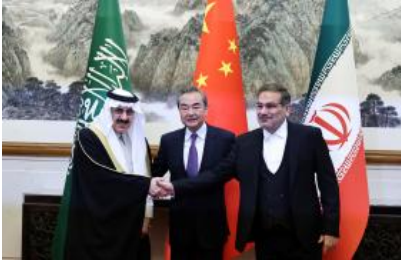


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