Profile: Liwa Ahrar al-Iraq

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This facade group is used to "brand" muqawama attacks on Turkish targets.

Name: Liwa Ahrar al-Iraq (the Free People of Iraq Brigade).

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

History and objectives: The first mention of Ahrar al-Iraq was in a statement issued on June 19, 2022, saying that "the bases and other lands occupied by Erdogan’s gangs are legitimate targets until their liberation...".

- On June 20, 2022, Ahrar al-Iraq issued another statement claiming four rocket attacks and two drone attacks against Turkey's base at Zilkan in Bashiqa, northeast of Mosul.

- The purported rocket attacks happened on 27/12/2021, 3/4/2022, 9/6/2022 and 18/6/2022 (possibly meaning the 17/6/2022 confirmed attack). Ahrar al-Iraq claims that in these attacks 10 Grad rockets were fired at Zilkan, which seems to be fewer than indicated by ground
reports. These claims did not overlap with any claims by Ahrar Sinjar, the only other group to claim any strikes on Turkish targets, and nor did Ahrar al-Iraq’s claims account for all the rocket attacks on Zilkan (of which about 2/3 remain unclaimed).

- Ahrar al-Iraq’s purported drone attacks took place on 10/4/2022 (against the Iraq-Turkey Pipeline manifold) and 2/6/2022 (a daylight claimed mixed rocket and drone attack on Zilkan). Ahrar al-Iraq claims that one drone was launched in each of these attacks. In both cases, no damage was caused and there are indications of interception using electronic warfare. In the latter case, Ahrar al-Iraq claimed the use of a “Murad-6” drone. No other actor had previously claimed these drone attacks.

- On June 26, 2022, Ahrar al-Iraq claimed another rocket attack on Zilkan. Ahrar al-Iraq said two Grad rockets were used, while ground reports (possibly based on echoes) suggest four.

- On July 22, 2022, Ahrar al-Iraq claimed another Grad rocket attack against Zilkan. Sabreen News (/node/16673) announced the attack first and detailed that 14 were fired. Ahrar al-Iraq later claimed and confirmed that the attack was in response to the killing of nine Iraqi tourists as a result of an apparent July 20 Turkish shelling on a tourist resort (https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-62246911) in the city of Zakho, Iraqi Kurdistan.

- Ahrar al-Iraq has threatened to target Turkish military vehicles by man-portable anti-tank guided missiles, but so far there is no claim or evidence that this has happened.

**Chain of command:**

Not enough evidence exists yet to link the Ahrar al-Iraq facade to a specific real-world fasail. On June 19, 2022 the brand launched and retrospectively claimed about a quarter of the unclaimed attacks on Turkish bases in 2021/2022. Pattern analysis of those attacks suggests cooperation with the ground-holding militia units in the northwestern Nineveh Plains (see below).

The group has demonstrated a very mixed (but gradually improving) level of resourcing. Unusually, they have exclusively used longer-ranged and heavier 122mm rockets, not 107mm. Until July 22, their static launching platforms were quite rudimentary and their accuracy was poor or deliberately non-lethal. They used their first large multiple-rocket launch “mattress” for the 14-round July 22 strike - the first strike they undertook after their public launch. On June 2, before their public launch, they claimed (without evidence) to have used an Iran-designed Murad-6 (Shahed-136-type delta-wing) drone against Zilkan.

**Affiliate relationships:**

PMF Brigade 50 (Liwa Babiliyun). This PMF unit controls areas of the Nineveh Plains where Ahrar al-Iraq-claimed attacks have mostly originated. PMF Brigade 30 is led by Rayyan Khaldani and influenced by Kataib Hezbollah (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-kataib-hezbollah) (KH). It is notable that most remaining unclaimed attacks on Zilkan from the Nineveh Plains have originated in the area controlled by PMF Brigade 30 (Liwa Shabak) (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-hashd-al-shabak-30th-pmf-brigade).

**Subordinate elements:**

Liwa Ahrar al-Iraq has an active social media channel on Telegram.
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