Iraqi Muqawama Disinformation and the Zainab Isam al-Khazali Shooting

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Oct 5, 2022
Also available in العربية (/ar/policy-analysis/alhmlat-altldlyyt-alty-tnzmha-almqawmt-alraqyt-wmqtl-zynb-sam-alkhzly)

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Brief Analysis


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The muqawama launched a coordinated and intentionally misleading anti-U.S. disinformation campaign in an attempt to ease the pressure caused by the unrest in Iran.

Amid the widespread protests in Iran, which was triggered by the death of Mahsa Amini (https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-62998231) in the custody of the Iranian morality police, the Iraqi muqawama media is exploiting the death of an Iraqi female teenager to ease the pressure on themselves.

Zainab Isam al-Khazali was killed by a stray bullet fired from an Iraqi military shooting range located in Abu Ghraib neighborhood of Baghdad. The muqawama is claiming that the teenage girl was killed by the U.S. troops. This is despite the fact that Qasim al-Araji, the Iraqi National Security Advisor confirmed (https://bit.ly/3T3Cl0F) that the Iraqi Security Forces are responsible for the accidental killing of Zainab Isam and that the U.S. troops do not have any activity in that area.

The main channel behind the disinformation campaign was Sabereen News (/node/16673). On September 19, 2022, it published a post which read “The American forces killed an Iraqi girl named Zainab Isam Majed al-Khazali in the Abu Ghraib area, Albu Alwan village, by random shooting from the Victoria base, in which live fire exercises happen from time to time” (Figure 1).

Sabereen then posted remarks of two men who are introduced as the relatives the victim. They narrate what happened and said that the bullet came from “the airport firing range, belonging to the joint operation commands”. They said that people of their neighborhood have been complaining about dangerous practice of those run the shooting range which have impacted their livelihood too. But, they never mention the U.S. troops, even once. Despite this Sabereen news
captioned the video as follows “Relatives of the girl killed by the bullets of the American forces... confirm that the girl was exposed to random bullets from the airport camp...” (Figure 2).

This was the start of a coordinated anti-U.S. disinformation campaign led by senior muqawama leaders. The next day on September 20, 2022, Qais al-Khazali, the leader of Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) (/node/16715) issued a statement and asked for “an immediate investigation in the incident of the martyrdom of the young 15-year-old Zainab Isam who was martyred by the bullets of the U.S. troops. We call on the security and intelligence forces to prepare a detailed report explaining the circumstances of the incident and how a military base can exist on Iraqi soil in clear violation of the Iraqi constitution and how a gross violation of the Iraqi sovereignty [is allowed to happen] and how [the U.S. troops are allowed] to fire live ammunition in residential neighborhoods under the pretext of training [the Iraqi forces]” (Figure 3).

Many muqawama figures issued similar statements which helped the fake news to spread. This time the muqawama TV channels started an extensive coverage of the incident, blaming the U.S. troops for the death of Zainab Isam. AAH’s al-Ahd TV (/node/17268) interviewed the father of the deceased. He said that they have been complaining about the firing range for years. He also gave details of the incident which led to the death of his daughter, but he never mentioned the United States troops. Yet al-Ahd social media captioned the interview as follows: “The father of the martyr Zainab Isam: We appealed to remove the shooting range at the Victoria base which belongs to the American occupation away from the civilians’ homes” (Figure 4). This pattern was repeated across other TV channels which belong to the muqawama militias.

After the campaign was established numerous muqawama social media messages were posted to compare the death of Zainab Isam with that of Mahsa Amini. For example Mahmoud al-Rubaiyee, the spokesperson for the Sadiqun bloc (the political wing of AAH) posted photos of the two deceased ladies in a tweet and said “Zainab Al-Iraqi was killed by the American forces, so the cowards were silent and unable to condemn and console [the family of the deceased]. The Iranian Mahsa died of a stroke, so those silenced by the American crime rose up” (Figure 5).

The Iraqi media is closely following the developments in Iran. The Sadrists social media channels have been particularly sympathetic towards the protesters and very critical of the Iranian regime. The muqawama felt the pressure and used the tragic death of Zainab Isam to ease this pressure.
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