

Ashab al-Kahf Threatens U.S. Helicopters

by [Hamdi Malik \(/experts/hamdi-malik\)](#), [Michael Knights \(/experts/michael-knights\)](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Hamdi Malik (/experts/hamdi-malik)

Hamdi Malik is an Associate Fellow with the Washington Institute, specializing in Shia militias. He earned his doctorate at the school of social, political and global studies, Keele University. He is a co-founder of the Militia Spotlight platform, which offers in-depth analysis of developments related to the Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria. He is the coauthor of the Institute's 2020 study "Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces."



Michael Knights (/experts/michael-knights)

Michael Knights is the Jill and Jay Bernstein Fellow of The Washington Institute, specializing in the military and security affairs of Iraq, Iran, and the Persian Gulf states. He is a co-founder of 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 \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight\)](#)

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

In its latest threats to U.S. aviation, the oldest militia facade group in Iraq made an interesting callback to a deadly 2006 shutdown of a British helicopter.

On April 22, Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve issued a short [statement \(https://www.inherentresolve.mil/NEWSROOM/News-Articles/Stories-Display/Article/3371367/coalition-unmanned-aerial-vehicle-crashes-outside-kirkuk/\)](#) noting the following: "On the morning of April 22, 2023, a Coalition Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV), in direct support of Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) operations, experienced a mechanical failure and crashed south of Kirkuk, Iraq...Coalition service members cleared the area with a controlled detonation."



Figure 1: AK implies that it shot down a U.S. drone south of Kirkuk, April 22, 2023.

Ashab al-Kahf (/node/16638) (AK), a *muqawama* (resistance) facade group affiliated with **Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba (/node/16716)** (HaN) and **Asaib Ahl al-Haq (/node/16715)** (AAH), seized this opportunity to imply that it had shot down the UAV, posting a Telegram message that read: "At the village of Saad, near Daquq [south of Kirkuk], the enemy tastes the bitterness of humiliation and defeat. It's the days of changing equation between the camp of truth and the camp of Satan" (Figure 1).

AK then quickly delivered a threat to manned aircraft in a subsequent post: "[Downing] the manned [aircraft] is different from [downing] the drone. The targeting may take place in Baghdad, who knows?" (Figure 2).

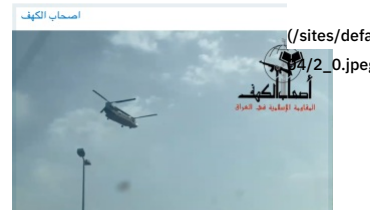


Figure 2: AK threatens to shoot down U.S. manned aircraft, April 22, 2023.

AK had made similar threats to air assets in two previous posts. An April 6 post showed a Chinook helicopter seemingly flying over Baghdad, and the accompanying English-language message read, "We are serious" (Figure 3). A few days later, AK posted a short video of two helicopters seemingly flying over Baghdad, warning, "We are not like those who threaten without acting. The English know" (Figure 4).

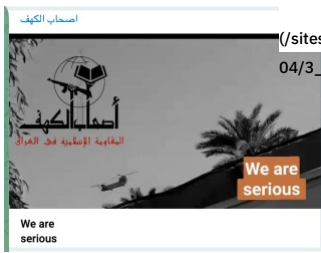


Figure 3: AK issues a threat to air assets, April 6, 2023.

The "English" comment was likely a reference to the May 6, 2006, fatal shutdown of a British Lynx helicopter over Basra, which killed five personnel. The crash [was caused by](#)



Figure 4: AK issues a second threat to air assets in a week, April 16, 2023.

[\(https://www.flightglobal.com/single-missile-downed-uk-lynx/73497.article\)](#) a man-portable air-defense system (MANPADS) according to the British government, with a [Daily Telegraph press leak \(https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1544537/Teheran-agents-smuggled-in-missile-that-shot-down-RAF-helicopter-in-Iraq-inquiry-finds.html\)](#) specifying an SA-14 missile brought into Iraq from Iran. At the time, the attack was [attributed to AAH \(https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ResurgenceofAAH.pdf\)](#).

These anti-air threats are the first to be made by AK, which leans toward Sadrist splinters such as HaN and AAH. The [last major round of anti-air threats \(/node/16873\)](#) were made in July 2021 by *muqawama* outlets more closely tied to [Kataib Hezbollah \(/node/16641\)](#) and [Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada \(/node/16731\)](#). This suggests that AK is honing its distinctive role in the *muqawama* network as running anti-U.S. militancy in Iraq, a role it [claims to have pioneered since 2017 \(https://aymennaltamimi.substack.com/p/targeting-us-forces-in-iraq-interview\)](#).



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