

Kataib Hezbollah's Raba Allah Undertakes Unclaimed Attacks on U.S. Brands

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Brief Analysis

Part of a series: [Militia Spotlight \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight\)](#)

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The vigilante group appears to have targeted American-branded businesses in Baghdad while taking pains not to claim the attacks, which embarrassed the Iraqi government.

Since May 24, a range of U.S.-linked brands have been subjected to attacks and blockades in Baghdad:

Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) outlets in Baghdad. On May 26, two attackers on a motorbike fired guns and threw a bomb at a KFC branch on Palestine Street, with no injuries recorded (Figure 1). On May 27, masked militiamen riding in seven SUVs and armed with sticks ransacked another KFC restaurant in Baghdad's Karrada neighborhood (Figure 2). The style of the attack and apparel of the perpetrators resemble that seen in past incidents involving [Raba Allah \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-raba-allah\)](#), a vigilante group run by the state-funded militia [Kataib Hezbollah \(/node/16641\)](#) (KH). Yet the latest attacks were portrayed on *muqawama* (resistance) social media as organic instances of "angry youths" protesting the Gaza war.



Figure 1: The aftermath of the KFC attack on Palestine Street, Baghdad, May 26, 2024.

[\(/sites/default/files/2024-05/figure%201.%20The%20aftermath%20of%20the%20attack%20on%20KFC%20on%20Palestine%20Street%20in%20Baghdad%20on%20May%2026%202024\)](#)

Two other U.S.-linked restaurants. Also on May 26, two suspects on a motorbike threw hand grenades at the U.S.-branded establishments Chili House and Lee's on Palestine Street. These attacks received little open support from *muqawama* media, but ground contacts indicate that Raba Allah undertook at least one of the them.



Figure 2: Suspects trashing a KFC in Karrada, Baghdad, on May 27, 2024.

[\(/sites/default/files/2024-05/figure%202.%20Muqawama%20thugs%20destroying%20KFC%20in%20Karrada%20on%20May%2027%202024\)](#)

Caterpillar. On May 30, the Caterpillar construction equipment company in Baghdad's Jadriyah neighborhood was targeted with a stun grenade or similar "sound bomb" device.

British Cambridge Institute. On May 30, the British Cambridge Institute on Palestine Street was also targeted with a sound bomb.

Conversely, a May 28 incident at the Baghdad Soft Drinks Company (which bottles Pepsi and 7-Up) was only a protest over a worker dispute, not a militia vigilante attack.

The *muqawama* information space surrounding these incidents has been suspiciously quiet and well-organized. The situation embarrassed the government and ran counter to its pro-

investment message—in response, the Interior Ministry strongly condemned the attacks and sacked division and brigade commanders at the Federal Police. In addition, one person linked to Raba Allah was arrested, after which KH secretary-general Abu Hussein (aka Ahmad Mohsen Faraj al-Hamidawi) intervened directly with Interior Minister Abdul Amir al-Shammari.

The fact that KH appears to be organizing *muqawama* mob attacks on American brands is ironic considering that KH itself set up the first unauthorized Starbucks coffee outlet in Baghdad in 2020—by, amusingly enough, emptying the shelves of Jordanian Starbucks outlets to get all the necessary materials to establish a convincing-looking Iraqi clone. KH even intimidated the Iraqi lawyers hired to contend the trademark infringement, who dropped Starbucks as a client within a day of being hired by one of the world's most famous brands—a good illustration of the negative effects that militias have on Iraq's commercial success. Recently, in the face of rising public anger at the United States, KH appears to have rebranded its Starbucks outlet, providing an interesting case of a U.S.-designated terrorist organization distancing itself from U.S. brands due to potential reputational damage. ❖

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