
Khor Mor Gas Field Attacks

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Authors

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Unlike the previous missile attacks that targeted Erbil and its surroundings, this time, there were three missile attacks on the Khor Mor gas field in the Chamchamal district of Sulaimani. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, but this accident is a recent development and a turning point in the attacks of armed groups "Militia" on the Kurdistan Region. Because this time, the target represents an area where the PUK has more influence. While the PUK keeps deeper ties with Iran and Shiite circles.

Who carried out the attacks?

Although the triangle between southern Kirkuk-Mountain Hamrin and Northern Diyala province is until now a stronghold of ISIS and occasionally attacks the Peshmerga from there, ISIS has outstripped the capacity and equipment for such missile attacks since 2020. According to officials, they were Katyusha rockets. Considering the diversity of this weapon in Iraq, it is more likely that it was launched from somewhere between southern Kirkuk and Northern Diyala province. The distance is not moreover than 20-40 km. However, if the type of Katyusha is determined, and it turned out to get the kind that does not cut a long-distance and goes around 8-9 kilometers, then that means the rocket was launched site from the KRG, which gives it a different dimension and if this was correct. There might be another aim for the attack. Although there was a massive conflict between the Kurdish powers in the region recently, they have never thought about fighting each other. However, this becomes an option if someone from within the Kurdistan Region has performed the attack.

Since the areas between the southern triangle of Kirkuk-Hamrin and Diyala remain the location of various groups of Hashd Shaabi, the Iraqi army, and there are many security gaps, suspicion goes toward the armed groups behind the missile and drone attacks on the Kurdistan Region.

Why were these attacks carried out?

The strikes on Khor Mor came at a time tension between PDK and PUK decreased, which was after the initiatives of Nechirvan Barzani – Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, which required an opening in relations between the PUK and PDK. The Sadr's withdrawal has left no choice for the two parties, and more likely, they are forced to agree with each other. The attacks also came after most Shiite leaders in recent days warmly welcomed Lahur Sheikh Jangi. This welcoming is considered political pressure on the "New PUK", while these groups had previously thought it advisable to stand silent during the events related to Lahur's dismissal. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) announced earlier this month that it would establish two oil and gas companies. It is challenging to develop these companies without the consent of the PUK, and there may have been an understanding between the two sides of this matter.

When we match the events together, missile attacks and political pressure seem like two practical tools to prevent a hypothetical agreement between the PUK and KDP on natural gas. However, we should know that the attacks can equally affect the decision of foreign companies operating in the energy sector of the Kurdistan Region and coincide with the second letter of warning to foreign companies about the fate of their work with the Kurdistan Regional Government.

Another factor to consider is that after Sadr's withdrawal from parliament, the leading parties in the coordination framework, such as Amiri and Maliki, will be forced to compromise with the PDK and "Taqaddum" for their future government to have relative legitimacy. When they do so, they will have to take an unusual stance against the pressure of the armed groups on the KRG and Anbar province (Halbousi). This is besides the fact that it will force them to ignore some demands of these armed groups. This is possible given the differences in the coordination framework components. Hadi Amiri had called on the Supreme "Marjajya" to prevent the disruption of the political process, which indirectly means that he would put a red line on Maliki's name because the "Marjajya" had previously said that what has been tried should not be attempted again. According to reports, Nouri al-Maliki wants to decide on the prime ministerial candidate as soon as

possible within the coordination framework. [1] Qais al-Khazali, secretary of the Ahl Al-Haq militia, said it would be a disaster if they formed the government as before, and the next prime minister should be able to overcome economic problems. If not, elections are to be held additionally. In contrast, Maliki does not support this option. It also seems that [2] Hezbollah's battalion, estimated to have six close associates in parliament after Sadr's withdrawal, said in a statement that it was not part of previous governments and is not part of the current situation.

Regarding the talks on NATO of the Middle East, President Biden is expected to visit the ME and participate in the US-India-UAE-Israel quadrilateral talks, and the attacks on a UAE company in the Kurdistan Region could have a dimension of intense regional competition too.

The attacks on Khor Mor mark a turning point in the attacks of armed groups on the Kurdistan Region. The primary goal may be to prevent a further rapprochement between the PUK and KDP, especially on the energy issue, which is also to force companies to stop working with the KRG. There is a consensus debate within the coordination framework about picking the next prime minister. Mustafa al-Kadhimi may want to stay. In this context, his visit to Tehran, for whatever reason, at the moment, smells like he wants to say that I can represent the candidate of all parties and remain in position. However, whether the next Iraqi PM was Kadhimi or anyone else, it is significant that missile attacks and technical path and military measures to prevent them be considered mutual issues between the PUK and KDP in their negotiations to form the new government.

Reference:

[1] <https://ahlualhaq.com/read/19290>

[2] <https://www.kataibhezbollah.me/news/3231>