Air Strike

15
APR
8:00 UTC

Iraq Alert (UPDATE): KRG MoI confirms UAV attack in vicinity of Erbil International Airport on April 14; notable due to rarity of modus operandi, unlikely to prompt significant US retaliation

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Please be advised:

- Initial reports indicated that rockets were fired at the Erbil International airport during the late evening hours (local time) of April 14.
- However, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Ministry of Interior (MoI) released a statement indicating that preliminary investigation into the incident revealed that the explosion was due to the detonation of a “TNT drone directed at Coalition forces”.
- The report further stated that an investigation is ongoing to determine the unmanned aerial vehicle’s (UAV) location of origin.
- The attack caused material damage to an unspecified building linked to the US-led Coalition. However, no casualties or injuries were reported.
- The US has not yet published an official statement regarding the incident, at the time of writing. However, the US Department of State Spokesperson announced that he was “outraged” at reports of attacks in the KRG region, which “violate” the sovereignty of the Iraqi people and increase their suffering.

Assessments & Forecast:

1. While this incident is notable due to the overall rarity of security incidents recorded in Erbil city, it is the second such attack targeting Erbil International Airport over recent months, following the February 15 rocket attack that targeted a US base near Erbil International Airport, which resulted in the wounding of one US military serviceman and four US civilian contractors. This attack was claimed by an Iran-linked Shiite militia group called Saraya Awliya al-Dam, to which the US retaliated by conducting airstrikes on Iran-backed militias near al-Bukamal along the Syria-Iraq border on February 25-26.
2. In the broader context, the latest incident comes amid an intensification of Iran-backed Shiite militia-perpetrated IED attacks targeting Coalition-contracted convoys across Iraq over recent months, with multiple such attacks recorded on a daily-basis. These attacks are grounded in the Shiite militias' long-standing demand for the complete withdrawal of US troops from Iraq. This is because such groups perceive the continued presence of US troops in Iraq as an infringement upon Iraqi sovereignty. Given this context and the fact that the latest attack was "directed at Coalition forces", one such Iran-backed Shiite group is likely responsible for the latest attack.
3. The use of an explosive-rigged UAV renders this incident further noteworthy, as this modus operandi has been rarely used by Shiite groups to conduct attacks against US interests in Iraq. These groups generally conduct attacks using rockets or IEDs. However, this does not imply an increase in the operational capabilities of such Shiite militias. This is because non-combat UAVs are easy to procure and the installation of explosives to such devices does not require seasoned expertise. The fact that the explosion did not cause any casualties and only impacted one building further points towards the relatively unsophisticated nature of the explosive device.
4. Nevertheless, this incident points towards the significant gaps in security protocols surrounding Erbil city and Erbil International Airport. **FORECAST:** While this incident is liable to increase tensions between Tehran and Washington, it is unlikely to prompt a significant retaliation from the latter, as the attack did not lead to any casualties or injuries among US or Coalition troops at the facility, which is often considered a "red line". However, the possibility of retaliatory US airstrikes

targeting Iran-backed groups in Iraq or Syria cannot be fully ruled out. Washington will also likely exert pressure on KRG authorities to apprehend the perpetrators, thereby prompting increased security measures in and around Erbil city over the coming days and weeks. Despite such efforts, additional attacks by Iran-backed Shiite militias targeting US-linked interests are likely across Iraq.

Recommendations:

1. It is advised to avoid nonessential travel to Erbil, at this time due to the recent attack and the heightened risk of further security incidents over the coming days and weeks. Those operating in the country are advised to consult with us at operations@max-security.com.
2. Those remaining in Erbil are advised to maintain heightened vigilance and adhere to security precautions regarding the threat of militant attacks and civil unrest.
3. It is advised to defer all travel to Baghdad at this time due to the daily threat of militancy in the capital, violence in areas surrounding the city, and the risk of a broad deterioration of security conditions.
4. For those remaining in Baghdad, it is advised to restrict travel to the Green Zone and ensure that contingency and emergency evacuation plans are updated. Contact us for itinerary and contingency support options.
5. Travel to Anbar, Nineveh, Salahuddin, Kirkuk, and Diyala provinces should be avoided at this time due to ongoing counter-militancy operations and militant attacks. Those operating in these regions are advised to contact us for itinerary and contingency support measures, including evacuation options, given the deterioration in the security situation.
6. As a general precaution, it is advised that any travel, particularly in outlying areas, be conducted in armored vehicles, with proper security escorts and coordination with authorities.