

Militancy/Terrorism

27

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9:44 UTC

Iraq Alert (UPDATE): Multiple rockets land near perimeter of US Embassy in Baghdad's Green Zone during early morning hours of December 27; maintain heightened vigilance

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Please be advised:

- Reports indicate that four rockets landed near the perimeter of the US embassy in the Green Zone in Baghdad during the early morning hours of the December 27.
- The Green Zone is completely closed for all entry and exit at the time of writing.
- No casualties were reported in the incident and the US Embassy in Baghdad remains operational.



Assessment & Forecast:

1. The development comes amidst a growing competition between the US and Iranian interests in Iraq and their ability to influence Iraq's domestic affairs. The Iranian-backed "Conquest Alliance", which is the political arm of the Shiite Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) emerged as the second largest political party in the May 2018 elections and is part of the newly formed Iraqi government. As a result, these Iranian-backed elements can be expected to enforce their interests more prominently, including the reduction of US influence in Iraq. At the same time, Washington continues to wield considerable influence over Iraqi affairs. This is highlighted by Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi's October 26 decision to comply with US sanctions on Iran, and halt oil exports to the country.
2. Against this background, US interests in Iraq have been subjected to increasing threats over the past months. During the overnight hours of [September 7-8](#), mortar shells had been fired towards the US Embassy in Baghdad's Green Zone. Moreover, three Katyusha rockets were fired towards Basra International Airport, which also housed the US Consulate. Following the attack, the US Consulate in Basra was closed citing "increasing and specific threats and incitement to attack" issued by PMU-linked militia elements. This measure highlights the growing threat against US interests in Iraq. This is also underscored by the November 7 release of a security alert by the US Embassy in Baghdad stating that "unspecified militia leaders discussed kidnapping US citizens attending the 45th Baghdad International Fair, scheduled for November 10-19, 2018".
3. With this in mind, we assess that the current rocket attack was also perpetrated by such PMU-linked militia elements. The time point of the incident is highly symbolic, as it follows US President Donald Trump's December 26 surprise visit of US troops at a military base in Iraq's western province of Anbar. While Trump did not meet any Iraqi government representatives in Baghdad, the targeting of the US Embassy serves to underscore the perpetrator's opposition to the US presence in Iraq. Moreover, the current attack action was probably additionally encouraged by the closure of the US Consulate in Basra, which is likely regarded by the assailants as a sign of weakness by the US.
4. **FORECAST:** Over the coming hours and days, security forces will exercise heightened security protocols in Baghdad's Green Zone and restrict access to the public over the coming hours. Moreover, the US embassy will likely review their already intensive security protocols at the US Embassy and may further restrict the movement of its staff within the Green Zone, given the increased threat posed to US personnel. However, the US Embassy can be expected to remain fully operational over the coming months. Overall, we anticipate a high risk for individuals and entities perceived as Americans or associated with them in any way to be targeted by Iranian-linked elements across Iraq.

Recommendations:

1. Maintain heightened vigilance throughout Baghdad, particularly in the vicinity of governmental buildings, foreign diplomatic missions, and other central locales, in light of the recent increase in hostilities next to such locations. Avoid nonessential travel to the vicinity of all public gatherings. Contact us for itinerary-based consultation and on-ground support.
2. 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.
3. For those remaining in Baghdad, it is advised to restrict travel to the Green Zone, while maintaining heightened vigilance in the area due to the December 27 incident, and ensure that contingency and emergency evacuation plans are updated. Contact us for itinerary and contingency support options.