

Blast heard in Riyadh as Saudi Arabia intercepts ‘hostile target’

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Saudi Arabia has come under repeated attacks from Yemen's Houthi rebels. (Photo: Ahmed Yosri / Reuters)

Riyadh, January 23 (RHC)-- Saudi Arabia intercepted an apparent missile or drone attack over Riyadh on Saturday, said state media in the kingdom, which has come under repeated attacks from Yemen's Houthi rebels since 2015.

Social media users posted videos of what appeared to be an explosion in the air over Riyadh. The incident came at about 11 a.m. (08:00 GMT).

"I heard a loud sound and thought that something had fallen from the sky," said one resident, who lives in the Al-Sulaimaniyah district of Riyadh. "The whole house was shaking."

The Saudi Arabia-led coalition, which backs Yemen's internationally recognised government against the Houthis, said it "intercepted and destroyed a hostile air target going towards Riyadh", without elaborating, according to state-run Al Ekhbariya television station.

The Houthis did not immediately acknowledge launching a missile or a drone towards Riyadh on Saturday.

Riyadh's King Khaled International Airport said there were a number of flight delays, but it was not immediately clear if they were linked to Saturday's incident. The U.S. embassy in Riyadh issued a warning to Americans calling on them to "stay alert in case of additional future attacks."

Saudi Arabia has been repeatedly targeted by the Houthis since its intervention in Yemen's civil war in 2015. It is rare, however, for drones and missiles launched by the Houthis to reach the kingdom's capital – about 700 km (435 miles) from the Yemeni border.

The rebels have yet to comment on the incident, which comes only days after Joe Biden was sworn-in as the US president, replacing Donald Trump. According to the new U.S. secretary of state, Antony Blinken, the Biden administration will quickly revisit the designation of Yemen's Houthi rebels as "terrorists."

At his confirmation hearing on Tuesday, Blinken said he would "immediately" review the Trump administration's labelling of the rebels, fearing the move will worsen a humanitarian crisis already described as the world's worst.

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