

Armed drone intercepted near U.S. Embassy in Baghdad

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FILE PHOTO: Iraqi security forces stand guard near the gates of Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone. © Reuters / Khalid al Mousily

Baghdad, July 6 (RHC)-- An explosives-laden drone was shot out of the sky by American air defenses as it neared the US Embassy in Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone, Iraqi security sources said, soon after rockets targeted a base housing US troops.

The apparent drone attack came late on Monday night, Iraqi defense officials told AFP and Reuters, though the armed UAV failed to reach the embassy complex. It marked the 47th attack on American

forces in Iraq so far in 2021, six of them involving drones, according to the French newswire.

Unconfirmed footage of the shootdown has circulated online, showing US air defenses engaging a target in the night sky. Strings of glowing tracer rounds could also be seen in the videos, over the loud rumble of exploding munitions from the American C-RAM defense systems, which appeared to fire off several volleys.

Unverified photos purporting to show the remains of the drone have also made the rounds, depicting what appears to be a small quad-copter.

The reported drone attack came just hours after three rockets slammed into the Ain al-Asad airbase in Iraq's Anbar Province earlier on Monday afternoon. Colonel Wayne Marotto, spokesman for the US-led military coalition, noted that the strikes caused no deaths or injuries, adding that damage to the base was still being assessed.

The same base, which houses American soldiers, has come under attack repeatedly over the years, with an armed drone targeting the installation last May. Ain al-Asad was also pounded by Iranian ballistic missiles in January 2020, inflicting brain injuries on several U.S. troops, after the U.S. assassination of Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani near the Baghdad airport days earlier.

While Monday's drone and rocket attacks were not claimed by any actor, and Washington has yet to lay blame, it often pins such operations on Iran-backed Shia militia groups operating across Iraq and Syria, known collectively as the Hashd al-Shaabi, or the "Popular Mobilization Forces."

Late last month, President Joe Biden ordered a series of strikes on facilities used by two Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria, Kata'ib Hezbollah and Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada, claiming the move was meant as a "deterrent" against future attacks. Baghdad, however, condemned the operation as a "blatant and unacceptable violation" of its national sovereignty, a complaint that has been made many times throughout the 18-year U.S. occupation.

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