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US launches air strikes against Iran-linked targets in Iraq and Syria

Tehran warns that Washington is engaging in 'another adventurous and strategic error'



The air strikes were the first of what US President Joe Biden said would be a series of retaliatory strikes © AFP/Getty Images

Felicia Schwartz in Washington and **Andrew England** in London 3 HOURS AGO

The US carried out a wave of strikes against Iranian-linked forces in Iraq and Syria on Friday, hitting targets that included facilities used by Tehran's elite Revolutionary Guards in retaliation for a drone attack that killed three American troops.

The US military said 85 targets at seven separate facilities were hit, including those associated with the guards' Quds Force as well as [Iranian-backed militia](#) in the region. It was the first of what US President Joe Biden said would be a series of retaliatory strikes for the drone attack on a base on the Jordan-Syrian border that killed three American servicemen last month.

"Our response began today," Biden said after the strikes were carried out. "It will continue at times and places of our choosing."

On Saturday, Iran's foreign ministry condemned the attacks as a violation of international law and said the US was engaging in "another adventurous and strategic error".

The Iraqi government also condemned the strikes, which it said killed 16 people, including civilians.

"This aggressive strike will put security in Iraq and the region on the brink of the

abyss,” the Iraqi prime minister’s office said on Saturday.

The Syrian military said that the strikes killed “many civilian and military martyrs” but did not provide details.

The air strikes, including at four sites in Iraq and three in Syria, marked the first time the US has targeted the Quds Force directly in its campaign in the region. The strikes will heighten fears that Washington is being drawn deeper into a widening regional conflict sparked by the [Israel-Hamas war](#).

US officials signalled that Friday’s strikes were the first in a phased response.

“These responses began tonight, they’re not going to end tonight,” US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said. “There will be additional action that we will take — all designed to put an end to these attacks.”

Although Biden has said repeatedly that he was not seeking to get involved in a wider war, he signalled on Friday that the US would continue to hit back if Iranian-aligned militants attacked American targets.

“The United States does not seek conflict in the Middle East or anywhere else in the world,” he said. “But let all those who might seek to do us harm know this: If you harm an American, we will respond.”

The Revolutionary Guards is an elite Iranian military force that defends the regime in Tehran and is separate from the country’s conventional military. Its Quds Force is responsible for overseas operations and trains and arms regional militant groups across the region.

The US employed long-range B1 bombers in the attacks, among other aircraft, senior US officials said. The bombers flew from the US “in a single nonstop flight”, said Lieutenant General Douglas Sims, director for operations for the US Joint Chiefs of Staff.

More than 125 precision munitions were fired and hit facilities including command and control and intelligence centres; rocket, missile and drone storage sites; and logistic hubs, Centcom said.

“We made these strikes tonight with an idea that there would likely be casualties associated with people inside those facilities,” Sims said.

Initially, Biden showed restraint in the face of repeated attacks by Iran-backed militias on US military personnel in Iraq, Syria and Jordan. But in recent weeks, as

attacks on US military personnel in Iraq, Syria and Jordan. But in recent weeks, as those attacks escalated, the White House has recalibrated. The US last month launched a campaign of missile strikes against Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen, who had attacked commercial shipping in the Red Sea.

Iranian officials have said they do not want direct conflict with the US and Israel, or a regional war and that the militant groups it backs have been acting independently. “We are not seeking war, but we are not afraid of it,” Major General Hossein Salami, commander of the guards, said this week.

Washington [attributed last Sunday’s drone attack](#) on its base on the Jordan-Syria border, which also wounded 41 US service members, to the Islamic Resistance in Iraq. It is a shadowy umbrella group that is believed to include fighters from Kataib Hezbollah, an Iraqi Shia militia, as well as other militants that have claimed responsibility for more than 160 attacks against Americans troops since mid-October, after the start of the Israel-Hamas war.

The IRI is part of Iran’s so-called [Axis of Resistance](#), which includes Iranian-backed militants such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Houthi rebels in Yemen, that have launched attacks against Israel since the war with Hamas began.

Biden has been under pressure from some Republicans to hit Iran directly in response to last week’s attacks, which follow months of strikes by Houthi rebels on commercial vessels in the Red Sea, an important shipping lane for global trade.

The president’s decision to attack came after several meetings in recent days with his national security team to decide on an appropriate response.

Additional reporting by Najmeh Bozorgmehr in Tehran

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