
IRAQ ROCKET ATTACK: OIL FIRMS BEGIN EVACUATING STAFF FROM BASRA SITE

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Three people have been injured after a rocket hit an Iraqi compound housing several international oil companies, including the US multinational ExxonMobil, officials have said.

A short-range Katyusha rocket struck the Burjesia residential and operations headquarters west of Basra in the early hours of Wednesday, according to the Iraqi military. The wounded are all Iraqi nationals.

The incident follows two separate attacks in as many days on bases that house US military personnel in Iraq and a series of attacks on oil infrastructure and tankers in the Middle East, which have raised tensions between the US and Iran.

The US evacuated non-essential diplomatic staff from its Baghdad embassy last month and closed the countrys Basra consulate in September, citing unspecified threats from Iran against US interests in Iraq, where Tehran supports some Shia militias.

ExxonMobil staff, previously ordered to leave after the departure of US diplomats, had begun to return to Basra when the rocket attack occurred. The company immediately began evacuating 21 foreign nationals to Dubai, a security source told Reuters.

Operations, including those of Shell and the Italian company Eni, were not affected by the attack, the Iraqi military said. The price of Brent crude rose to \$62.17 (£49.34) a barrel on Wednesday morning after another surge on Tuesday.

Iraqis are worried their country will be caught up in any escalation of the dispute between the US and Iran, Baghdads two main allies. Tensions have flared after attacks on oil tankers off the coast of the United Arab Emirates last month and on two more ships in the Gulf of Oman last week. The Iranian-backed Houthi rebel group in Yemen has claimed responsibility for the first attacks, while Washington has blamed Iran directly for the latter. Tehran has denied involvement.

Last month, Donald Trump tightened US sanctions on Iran after restoring them last year when he pulled the US out of the 2015 nuclear deal, and demanded all countries halt the import of Iranian oil or face sanctions themselves.

Iran said it would break the uranium stockpile limit within 10 days and could also start the process of enriching the material up to 20%, closer to weapons grade, from 7 July. The announcement

challenges Trump's assurances to allies that scrapping the nuclear deal would make the world safer.

Washington announced it was sending an additional 1,000 troops to the region to counter alleged threats from Iran, including those from Iranian-backed militias in Iraq.

Both sides have repeatedly said they are not seeking conflict, but security officials and analysts warn the brinkmanship could trigger a wave of violence in the region.

On Tuesday, in a move clearly designed to prevent friction between US troops and Iran or Iranian-backed militias, the Iraqi prime minister, Adel Abdul-Mahdi, said foreign troops and local militias were barred from confronting each other on Iraqi soil.

He said no foreign troops in Iraq should use the country to attack another foreign presence or a state in the region, and no local group should work outside the supervision of the Iraqi armed forces.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/19/iraq-rocket-attack-basra-injured-foreign-oil-companies>

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