

Rockets hit U.S. embassy in Iraqi capital amid anti-government protests



Baghdad, January 27 (RHC)-- The U.S. embassy in Baghdad's heavily-fortified Green Zone came under attack from rocket fire on Sunday evening. Five rockets crashed into a river bank near the embassy in the Iraqi capital without causing any injuries, the U.S. Joint Operations Command said in a statement -- but AFP news agency citing a security source said that three of the rockets "directly hit the U.S. embassy." One reportedly slammed into a cafeteria at dinner time, according to the AFP.

It was the third such attack on the U.S. embassy this month, but was the first time the complex had been directly hit. It was not immediately clear who was responsible.

Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi swiftly condemned the attack in a statement, calling it an "aggression" that could "drag Iraq into becoming a war zone." In a statement, the United States urged Iraq to protect the embassy. "We call on the Government of Iraq to fulfill its obligations to protect our diplomatic facilities," a State Department spokesperson said in a statement.

Meanwhile, one protester was killed in Baghdad, police sources told Reuters news agency, and more than 100 demonstrators were hurt in violence in the capital and several other cities after the security

forces tried to clear sit-in protest camps.

Medical sources said 75 of those hurt were in the southern city of Nassariya, where a witness told Reuters protesters set fire to two security vehicles, and hundreds of other demonstrators controlled key bridges in the city. The protesters are demanding the removal of what they consider a corrupt ruling elite and an end to foreign interference in Iraqi politics, especially by Iran.

Unrest resumed last week, after a lull of several weeks, following the January 3rd U.S. drone strike that killed General Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, an Iraqi commander of the pro-Iranian Hashd al-Shaabi militia group.

The killing, to which Iran responded with ballistic missile attacks on two Iraqi bases hosting U.S. troops, has revived tensions in Iraqi politics and delayed the formation of a new government. Amid growing calls for an end to interference, the Iraqi parliament on January 5 backed a nonbinding resolution for all foreign troops - including 5,200 U.S. soldiers - to leave the country.

At least 12 demonstrators have been killed since Saturday, the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights said, with three in Nasiriya, and nine in Baghdad province. In total, at least 500 protesters have been killed since October.

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