

U.S. admits it did not give Iraq notice of strikes despite earlier claims

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US B-1 bombers last week carried out air strikes on targets in Iraq and Syria [File: South Korean Defence Ministry via Getty Images]

Washington, February 6 (RHC)-- The United States has admitted it did not notify the Iraqi government before its recent air strikes in the country after a top White House official claimed Baghdad had been informed in advance.

State Department deputy spokesman Vedant Patel said on Monday that Iraqi officials were only informed after the strikes on Iranian-linked targets.

"Iraq, like every country in the region, understood that there would be a response after the deaths of our soldiers. As for this specific response on Friday, there was not a pre-notification," Patel told reporters.

"We informed the Iraqis immediately after the strikes occurred."

The clarification came after White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby on Friday said that Washington had informed the Iraqi government in advance.

Kirby said on Monday that he had responded to reporters' questions with the "information that I had been provided at the time." "It was not as specific as it could have been, and I regret any confusion caused," he said.

"That said, we had made no secret -- both to Iraqi officials and in public channels -- that we would respond to the attacks on our troops. And, we did, in fact, officially notify Iraq, as appropriate with standard procedure."

U.S. President Joe Biden on Friday ordered air strikes against 85 targets in Iraq and Syria alleged to be linked to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and pro-Iranian groups, following a drone attack in Jordan that killed three U.S. troops.

Iraq condemned the strikes, which officials said killed 16 people, including civilians, as a violation of its sovereignty that placed the security in the region on the "brink of the abyss."

Iraqi government spokesman Bassem al-Awadi rejected the suggestion that his country had helped to coordinate the attacks, accusing Washington of making a "false claim aimed at misleading international public opinion and disavowing legal responsibility".

Tensions between Washington and Baghdad have escalated in recent months as the Biden administration has carried out strikes inside Iraq in response to a surge in attacks on US forces since the start of the war in Gaza that it has blamed on Iran-aligned groups.

About 2,500 U.S. troops are stationed in Iraq, a legacy of the U.S.-led coalition's war against the ISIL (ISIS) group. Last month, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Washington would begin talks with Baghdad on the withdrawal of U.S.-led forces in the country while maintaining security ties between the sides.

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