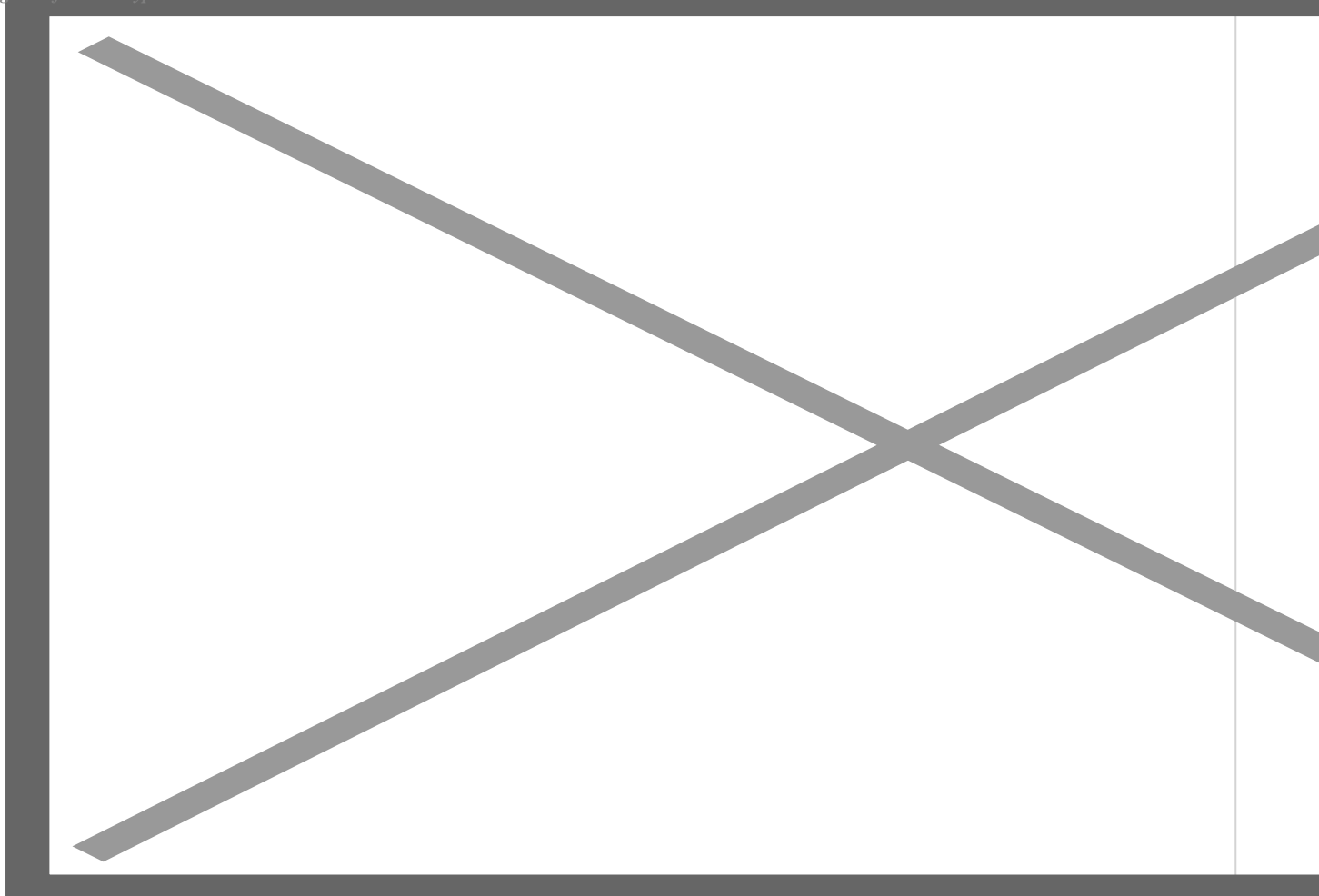


Rockets target Ain al-Assad military base housing U.S. military in Iraq

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A general view of the U.S. Ain al-Assad air base in Anbar Province, western Iraq. (Photo: Press TV)

Baghdad, March 3 (RHC)-- A barrage of rockets have struck the Ain al-Assad air base hosting American forces in the western Iraqi province of Anbar.

The Security Media Cell, affiliated with the Iraqi prime minister's office, announced in a statement that 10 Grad rockets had struck the base, located about 160 kilometers (100 miles) west of the capital Baghdad, on Wednesday morning.

The statement added that security forces had found the launch pad for the projectiles, and further details about the incident would be provided later. The attack took place at 7:20 am (0420 GMT), coalition spokesman Colonel Wayne Marotto confirmed.

An informed security source, meanwhile, told Press TV that the attack involved 10 projectiles of the type that the Iraqi resistance groups used to deploy between 2006 and 2010 in the course of their efforts to expel the United States from the Arab country.

Eight of the projectiles, the source added, struck the "American part" of the base, while two hit the section that is assigned to the U.S.-led coalition. The incident led to the deaths of two American contractors -- also known as mercenaries -- and injured as many as six people, it noted, adding that the episode also resulted in material damage to both parts of the outpost.

Iraqi and Western security sources, however, said a mercenary with the U.S.-led military coalition died of a heart attack during the rocket attack. His nationality has not been unveiled.

Sabereen News, a Telegram news channel associated with Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units, reported that C-RAM systems as well as Patriot Advanced Capability-2 (PAC-2) missile systems deployed at the base were not able to intercept the rockets.

According to the report, a number of U.S. military aircraft as well as Spanish choppers could be seen flying over the Hit district, where the air base is located, in the aftermath of the rocket attack.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack yet, which is the latest in a series of assaults that have targeted U.S. positions in Iraq over the past few months. Witnesses said a thick column of smoke could be seen billowing from flames in the base.

The raid comes days after the U.S. military conducted an air raid on positions belonging to the forces of the PMU, better known as Hashd al-Sha'abi, on the Iraqi-Syrian border, where they were engaged in fighting the remnants of the Takfiri Daesh terror group.

The Iraqi counter-terrorism force pledged retaliation, prompting the US military forces to go on high alert and adopt maximum security measures in anticipation of a response. The U.S. raid was said to be a response to recent attacks on its military base in Erbil and its mission in Baghdad's Green Zone, which Washington blames on Iraq's Kata'ib Hezbollah, a claim rejected by the Hash al-Sha'abi faction.

On Saturday, a roadside bomb struck a convoy of trucks belonging to the US-led coalition forces as it was moving along al-Diwaniyah highway in Iraq's central province of al-Qadisiyah. The blast damaged a vehicle and wounded an Iraqi guard.

There has been a spike in attacks on US military bases and diplomatic missions amid anti-US sentiment over the assassination of top Iranian anti-terror commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad early last year.

General Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), and his Iraqi trenchmate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy head of the Popular Mobilization Units, were targeted along with their companions on January 3, 2020 in a drone strike authorized by former U.S. President Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport.



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