U.S. air strikes hit Iran-backed militias in Syria, Iraq: Pentagon

Attack on facilities on Iraq-Syria border in response to 'drone assaults by militants'

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The U.S. has, on President Joe Biden's direction, conducted air strikes at two locations in Syria and one in Iraq, the Pentagon announced. The early morning "defensive precision air strikes" were carried out on facilities along the Iraq-Syria border used by Iran-backed militias to conduct drone attacks against American personnel and facilities in Iraq, according to the Pentagon. U.K-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said seven militia members were killed in the air strikes.

"Several Iran-backed militia groups, including Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH) and Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada (KSS), used these facilities," a statement from Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said.

Mr. Biden had directed further action to deter the attacks alleged by the U.S., Mr. Kirby said. The Biden administration already conducted air strikes against facilities used by Iran-backed groups on the Syrian side of the Iraq-Syria border.

Iran-backed Shia militias marching in Diyala, Iraq. Two Shia militia groups were targeted by the U.S. on Sunday. ▪ AP

"Given the ongoing series of attacks by Iran-backed groups targeting U.S. interests in Iraq, the President directed further military action to disrupt and deter such attacks. We are in Iraq at the invitation of the Government of Iraq for the sole purpose of assisting the Iraqi Security Forces in their efforts to defeat ISIS. The United States took necessary, appropriate, and deliberate action designed to limit the risk of escalation – but also to send a clear and unambiguous deterrent message," Mr. Kirby said.

'In self-defence'

"As a matter of international law, the U.S. acted pursuant to its right of self-defence. The strikes were both necessary to address the threat and appropriately limited in scope," he said.

While the Syrian Observatory said seven militia members were killed, the BBC reported that Sana, Syrian state media, saying three civilians and a child were killed in the strikes.

The strikes come at a significant time in Iran and in Iran-U.S. relations. Last week, Iran elected a hardliner, Ebrahim Raisi, as President. On Monday, Mr. Biden will welcome President Reuven Rivlin of Israel – a close ally of the U.S. and a major rival of Iran. The two are expected to discuss negotiations for the U.S. and Iran to re-engage in the Iran nuclear deal or the JCPOA (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), a move opposed by Israel.