

## Summary

The January 27 drone attack on a US base in Jordan, and US retaliatory strikes in Western Iraq and Baghdad on February 3 and 7 may lead to increased engagements between the US and Iran-backed Shia militia groups operating in Iraq. Such groups, who demand the immediate US withdrawal from Iraq, are likely to attack American military instalments and interests. Recent and additional US strikes could ignite protests by Iraqis who want an end to US intervention in Iraq.

## Recent events and developments

On January 27, a drone attack carried out by Iranian-backed Shia militia group Islamic Resistance in Iraq, killed 3 American service members in Jordan. The US army responded with strikes on Iranian-backed groups in Syria and Iraq, killing several senior members. US officials vowed to continue striking Iranian backed groups, as they did on February 7, when a US strike in the Mashtal neighborhood of Baghdad killed the leader of Kataib Hezbollah. A regional leader of Harakat Nujaba was also killed in a US strike on January 4 in Baghdad. Such Shia militia groups have demanded the expulsion of US and coalition troops from Iraq and have vowed retaliation to US strikes. The Iraqi government has called for a timeframe to be set for US withdrawal and has condemned US strikes on Shia militia groups in the country, calling them irresponsible. Following the February 7 strike, authorities reportedly closed all bridges and roads to the Green Zone, anticipating a response by Iran-backed groups, some of which reportedly encouraged members to march on the US embassy. The embassy was previously attacked with rockets on December 3, 2023. Armed clashes between feuding tribal militants, as well as explosives attacks on security forces and politicians, have also increased in frequency.

## Impact assessment

Recent events come against the backdrop of a wider confrontation between the US, Iran and Iranian-backed militia groups across the Middle East. Fighting has intensified due to US support for Israel in the invasion of Gaza. The recent events could result in a larger escalation between the US and the many Iranian-backed proxy groups operating in Iraq, especially after the killing of senior Shia militia group members. Such groups also have considerable influence on the Iraqi government and army. Neither side has signaled intent to de-escalate. The US has tied withdrawal with the cessation of Iranian backing of proxy groups, an unrealistic demand. Ongoing talks on withdrawal are thus likely to stall due to hostilities. Further US strikes could likely further fuel anti-American sentiment amongst Iraqi leaders and Iraqis themselves. This increases the likelihood of protests demanding US withdrawal, as seen in January 2020 when mass protests erupted following Qasem Soleimani's assassination. Recent developments, in addition to the potential for protests threaten to worsen the already tense security situation in Baghdad. US buildings in the Green Zone could be targeted by rocket attacks by Shia militia groups as seen in December 2023. International organizations with US affiliations could also be targeted for attacks by such groups. Iraqi security forces have deployed in large numbers to protect the Green Zone from intrusion and attacks.

## Advice from Forth Global

- Ensure all employees travelling to Iraq complete a several-days HEAT training prior to departure.
- Continuously monitor local news to keep updated on any developments in the area of operations. Prepare contingency plans if security situation deteriorates further.
- Advise all staff to avoid large crowds and gatherings, and sensitive areas, such as the Green Zone, in case of attacks.
- Avoid expressing personal opinions on the ongoing security/political situation, especially online.
- Advise all employees to cooperate with local authorities and security personnel.

## Customized advice

Please contact us for specific advice:

+31 (0) 35 543 04 37

[christiaan@forthglobal.com](mailto:christiaan@forthglobal.com)

We provide a wide range of services to prepare your organization and employees for situations like these. More information on our website: [www.forthglobal.com](http://www.forthglobal.com)

[DISCLAIMER](#)