

Summary

The Iranian strike on Israel has increased tensions in the Middle East. As a result, the situation in Iraq is likely to become more unstable due to its location between two countries involved in tit-for-tat strikes. The potential that Iraq will be dragged into hostilities is further exacerbated by the Iranian-backed militias present in Iraq, who launched drone strikes on Israel in March. The militias have also struck US bases in Syria and Jordan resulting in retaliatory US strikes in Iraq. Due to this, discussions are underway on the future of US presence in Iraq.

Recent events and developments

On April 1, an Israeli bombing strike on the Iranian consulate in Syria resulted in the deaths of, among others, eight Iranian high-ranking diplomats, including a senior commander of the al-Quds force. In response, on April 13 Iran, alongside its proxies in Yemen, Lebanon, and Iraq, launched a large-scale missile and drone attack on Israel. The majority of drones and missiles were intercepted, and casualties were minimal. However, Israel has stated its willingness to conduct a retaliatory strike. Iraq has also been involved in drone strikes on Israel before as, throughout March, the Iranian-backed Islamic Resistance in Iraq launched strikes on several targets in Israel. The drone attack on a military base in Rosh Pina Airport in Israel on March 7 serves as an example. In early January and late February, the militia has also struck US military bases in Syria and Jordan respectively, which prompted a US retaliatory attack, among others, in Baghdad on February 7. This development has soured relations between the US and Iraq, resulting in discussions of a potential withdrawal of US forces from Iraq which have been stationed in the country to prevent the resurgence of ISIS. The militia threatened to renew its attacks on US bases if US forces will remain in Iraq. The situation in Iraq is further exacerbated by fighting and instability in the north. The Turkish army continues to bomb Kurdish positions along the Iraqi-Iranian-Turkish border, primarily in the Dohuk and Erbil provinces.

Impact assessment

The recent attacks between Israel and Iran have left Iraq in a precarious position and potentially in a crossfire. With the current escalation of conflict in the region, the tit-for-tat attacks between Iran and Israel will likely continue. Israel has already stated its willingness to respond to the Iranian aerial attack, yet it is unknown in what form and where the retaliatory strike will take place. Iraq might become a potential target of a retaliatory strike as Israel has a history of attacking Iran indirectly by hitting targets in other countries with Iranian-backed groups. In a statement from the White House, Iranian proxies in Iraq were identified as sharing the responsibility for the drone and missile attack on Israel, which might provide additional legitimacy for a strike on Iraq. With potential further aerial attacks between Iran and Israel, it is expected that the airspace in Iraq will be closed again, thereby limiting and disrupting travel. Furthermore, should the Iraqi and US governments reach a mutual accord regarding the deployment of US forces in Iraq, it would lead to increased assaults on US bases by the Islamic Resistance, exacerbating the already precarious situation in the nation. Additionally, the northern Iraqi provinces of Erbil and Dohuk will remain unstable as fighting between the Turkish army and the Kurdish forces will continue. On March 18, President Erdoğan stated his intention for the Iraqi border region to be secure by summer, potentially signaling an intensification of military operations in order to meet the deadline.

Advice from Forth Global

- Ensure that all employees travelling to Iraq receive a three-day HEAT training prior to deployment.
- Ensure that contingency and security plans are up-to-date and that staff are aware of them.
- Closely monitor the local and international media for updates on a potential escalation and its impact on the situation in Iraq.
- Refrain from travelling to northern Iraqi border regions, specifically north Erbil and Dohuk.

Customized advice

Please contact us for specific advice:

+31 (0) 35 543 04 37

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