



Iran-backed Attacks Against U.S. Forces Resume

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After a nearly three-month pause in Iran-linked attacks on U.S. forces in the Middle East, Iran-backed militia [attacked](#) the Ain al-Assad base in Iraq, which hosts U.S. troops, on July 16. Similar to two attacks that these groups [launched](#) in April, which also interrupted another lengthy pause in attacks, the most recent attacks are likely an attempt by the Iran-backed militia to signal its disapproval of recent meetings between senior U.S. and Iraqi officials and dissatisfaction with the U.S. military presence in Iraq. By launching the attacks, the Iranian proxies demonstrated their continued capability to target U.S. troops, and the limited deterrent effect of past U.S. strikes against the groups, as they have done on at least 176 occasions since the Israel-Hamas War began.

What Happened?

- On July 16, Iran-backed groups in Iraq [launched two drones](#) at the Ain al-Assad base in Iraq, which hosts U.S. troops. An Iraqi military official told Reuters that military forces downed one of the drones at the base perimeter. No casualties were reported.

Iran-linked Projectile Attacks Against U.S. Personnel Since the Start of the Israel-Hamas War

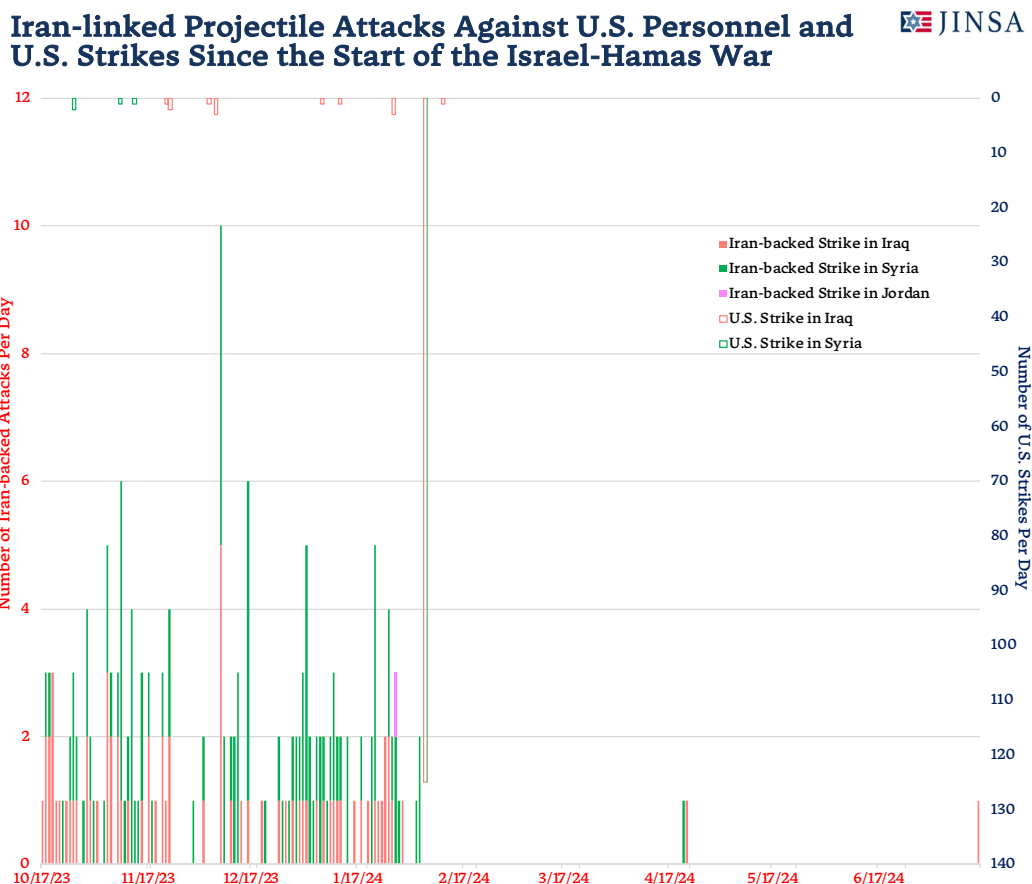


Why Is It Important?

- The Iran-backed militia attack against U.S. forces in Iraq on July 16 interrupted a nearly three-month pause in such attacks. Similar to attacks that Iranian proxies launched in April that also disrupted a long pause in attacks, the incident was likely an attempt by those groups to inject themselves into dialogues between U.S. and Iraqi officials and show their continued disapproval with the U.S. military presence in Iraq. While it is not clear whether the Iranian proxies will escalate further, the attack demonstrated their continued ability to target U.S. forces.
- The attack on July 16 was the second attack against U.S. forces in Iraq or Syria since February 4 and the first since April 22, ending an 86-day pause that was the longest pause in such attacks since the Iran-backed escalation began on October 17.
 - » At the end of April, Iran-backed forces in Iraq [launched](#) the first attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq or Syria since February 4, which ended a 78-day pause that had been the longest pause in such attacks since October 17.
- Similar to attacks on April 21 and 22, the Iran-backed militia may have launched the attacks on July 16 as an attempt to demonstrate their disapproval of a high-level trip of Iraqi military officials to Washington next week and the continued presence of U.S. troops in Iraq.
 - » The two attacks that Iran-backed groups in Iraq [conducted](#) on April 21 and 22 occurred shortly after Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani returned to Baghdad from a trip to [meet](#) in Washington with President Joe Biden, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and other U.S. officials.
- This attack further demonstrated that Iran's proxies retained the capacity and capability to conduct operations in Iraq and Syria and were lying low to gauge U.S. intent after escalated U.S. airstrikes on February 2-7 against Iran-aligned targets in Iraq and Syria.

» Iran-backed groups in Iraq and Syria have launched at least 176 attacks on U.S. personnel since October 17, 2023.

» The United States has launched only 12 rounds of strikes against Iran-backed groups in Iraq and Syria involving at least 142 strikes but has not launched any strikes since February 7.



What Should the United States Do Next?

- Since previous rounds of infrequent and limited U.S. strikes against Iran-backed groups have not deterred them or the regime in Tehran that funds, arms, and directs them, establishing deterrence will require the United States to use stronger, faster, and more frequent military force against Iran-linked targets that endanger U.S. personnel or American partners in the region.
 - » U.S. strikes should target the fighters, not only the facilities, involved in attacks on Americans and hold Iran directly responsible for attacks by its proxies.