

“Three US troops killed in drone attack in Jordan, more than 30 injured”

<https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/28/politics/us-troops-drone-attack-jordan/index.html>

Three US Army soldiers were killed and more than 30 service members were injured [in a drone attack overnight](#) on a small US outpost in Jordan, US officials told CNN, marking the first time US troops have been killed by enemy fire in the Middle East since the beginning of the Gaza war.

“We shall respond,” President Joe Biden said while speaking in South Carolina on Sunday.

The killing of three Americans at Tower 22 in Jordan near the border with Syria is a significant escalation of an already-precarious situation in the Middle East. Officials said the drone was fired by Iran-backed militants and appeared to come from Syria. It is still being determined which militia group specifically is responsible.

US Central Command confirmed in a statement Sunday that three service members were killed and at least 34 injured in a one-way drone attack that “impacted at a base in northeast Jordan.” Eight injured service members were medically evacuated to receive higher-level care, CENTCOM said.

The number of wounded is expected to rise as service members seek treatment for symptoms consistent with traumatic brain injury, two US officials said.

Biden vowed Sunday to hold those responsible for the attack “to account,” saying that while facts are still being gathered, “We know it was carried out by radical Iran-backed militant groups operating in Syria and Iraq.”

“These service members embodied the very best of our nation: Unwavering in their bravery. Unflinching in their duty. Unbending in their commitment to our country — risking their own safety for the safety of their fellow Americans, and our allies and partners with whom we stand in the fight against terrorism. ... [H]ave no doubt – we will hold all those responsible to account at a time and in a manner our choosing.”

Iran on Sunday denied any involvement in the attack, state news agency IRNA reported, citing the country’s permanent mission to the United Nations.

Tehran sought to distance itself from the attack, calling accusations of Iranian involvement “baseless.”

Iranian foreign ministry’s spokesperson, Nasser Kanaani, said in a statement on Monday that “regional resistance” groups do not take orders from Iran. “We believe the region does not need more tension or a new war,” he added.

Tehran’s denial came after the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, an umbrella group of a number of Iran-backed militias in the country, said in a statement Sunday it attacked a number of targets along the Jordan-Syria border, including Al-Rukban camp. The camp is in close proximity to the US outpost Tower 22.

The statement, posted to the Islamic Resistance’s Telegram channel, came before the US announced the death of the three service members.

Wider conflict

Speaking at a church in South Carolina later Sunday, Biden asked for a moment of silence to honor the service members.

“I want to point out that we had a tough day last night in the Middle East. We lost three brave souls in an attack on one of our bases,” Biden said at the conclusion of his remarks.

As of Friday, there had been more than 158 attacks on US and coalition forces in Iraq and Syria, though officials have described the constant volley of drones, rockets, and missiles as unsuccessful as they have frequently not caused serious injury or damage to infrastructure.

It’s unclear why air defenses failed to intercept the drone, which appears to be the first known attack on Tower 22 since attacks on US and coalition forces began on October 17. US forces at the outpost are there as part of an advise-and-assist mission with Jordan.

CENTCOM said later Sunday that “there are approximately 350 U.S. Army and Air Force personnel deployed to the base, conducting a number of key support functions, including support to the coalition for the lasting defeat of ISIS.”

The US has taken several retaliatory actions against the Iran-backed groups in Iraq and Syria, one as [recently as last week](#), when the US struck three facilities in Iraq used by Kataib Hezbollah and other Iran-affiliated

groups. The US has also been engaged with the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen, carrying out [multiple strikes](#) — many unilaterally and some with the UK and other allies — on Houthi missiles and drones, radar systems, storage facilities, and more.

Meanwhile, Israel is continuing its campaign in Gaza against Hamas following Hamas' terror attack on Israel on October 7. [More than 25,000 people](#) are estimated to have been killed and tens of thousands more injured — according to the Hamas-run Ministry of Health in Gaza, in the intense fighting since October 7. Israel is also targeting Hezbollah in Lebanon; on Sunday, the Israel Defense Forces said it struck Hezbollah sites in southern Lebanon with artillery and fighter jets.

The Biden administration has been criticized, primarily by Republicans, for not taking strong enough action against the Iran-backed groups for their attacks. In a statement on Sunday following the news of the three Americans killed, Sen. Lindsey Graham said the Biden administration's "policy of deterrence against Iran has failed miserably."

"The Biden Administration can take out all the Iranian proxies they like, but it will not deter Iranian aggression. I am calling on the Biden Administration to strike targets of significance inside Iran, not only as reprisal for the killing of our forces, but as deterrence against future aggression," Graham said.

Sen. Roger Wicker, the highest-ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, also called Sunday for a response "directly against Iranian targets and its leadership." And House Armed Services Chairman Mike Rogers said it is "long past time for President Biden to finally hold the terrorist Iranian regime and their extremist proxies accountable."



This satellite photo from Planet Labs PBC shows a military base known as Tower 22 in northeastern Jordan, on Oct. 12, 2023. (Planet Labs PBC via AP)

Efforts to deescalate

Amid the increasingly high tensions on multiple fronts in the region, US officials have repeatedly said they do not want to see tensions boil over into a regional war. Asked last week whether the Pentagon assessed that Iranian proxies were stepping up their attacks on US forces, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said, “Not necessarily, no.”

In a previously recorded interview with ABC News that aired Sunday morning, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. CQ Brown said part of the US’ work is to “make sure as things have happened in the Middle East is not to have the conflict broaden.”

“The goal is to deter them and we don’t want to go down a path of greater escalation that drives to a much broader conflict within the region,” he said.

There have been dozens of injuries since the attacks began — a senior military official told reporters last week there were roughly 70 — but the Pentagon has classified most of them as minor, aside from one US soldier who was critically injured in an attack in Iraq on Christmas Day.

Chief Warrant Officer 4 [Garrett Illerbrunn](#) from the 82nd Combat Aviation Brigade was set to be sent back to the US for further treatment after he critically injured in a drone attack on Erbil Airbase.

The killing of three Americans also comes as the US and Iraq are expected to [begin talks](#) soon about the future of the US military presence in the country.