

Rockets target US interests despite arrests: Iraq military



The US embassy compound in Baghdad, seen here in January, has been repeatedly targeted by militants

● One rocket fired at the Green Zone landed near a home, wounding a child

AFP | Baghdad

Two rocket attacks targeted American diplomatic and military installations overnight, Iraq's security forces said Sunday, a little over a week since unprecedented arrests prevented a similar incident.

Since October, US diplomats and troops across Iraq have been targeted by around three dozen missile attacks which Washington has blamed on pro-Iranian armed factions.

In the first move of its kind, elite Iraqi troops in late June arrested more than a dozen Tehran-backed fighters who were allegedly planning a new attack on Baghdad's Green Zone, home to the US and other foreign embassies.

Iraqi government officials said the raid would serve as a "message" to deter future at-



Counter rocket, artillery, and mortar, abbreviated C-RAM or counter-RAM, is a set of systems used to detect and/or destroy incoming rockets, artillery, and mortar rounds in the air before they hit their ground targets, or simply provide early warning.



tacks, but early on Sunday, militants made another attempt.

One rocket fired at the Green Zone landed near a home, wounding a child, according to the Iraqi military.

"At the same time, our forces were able to thwart another attack and seize a Katyusha rocket and launcher that were targeting the Taji base north of Baghdad," where US-led coalition troops are based, it added.

The attempts came just hours after the US embassy tested a new rocket defence system known as a C-RAM, according to a senior Iraqi security source.

The C-RAM, set up earlier this year at the embassy, scans for incoming projectiles and explodes them in the air by targeting them with several thousand bullets per minute.

A series of muted blasts could be heard across Baghdad on Saturday as the system was apparently tested, leaving passersby confused and Iraq's parliament outraged.

Deputy speaker Hassan al-Kaabi slammed the trial as "provocative" and "unaccept-

able" as it could put residential areas in danger.

There was no immediate comment from the embassy on whether the system was used against the rocket overnight.

US 'applauds' arrests

The US blames the attacks on Kataeb Hezbollah, a Tehran-backed faction within Iraq's state-sponsored network of armed units known as the Hashed al-Shaabi.

Washington has demanded Iraqi authorities be tougher on the group. Local forces had long hesitated, fearing that direct action against such a powerful actor would risk broader confrontations.

But last month, state security forces carried out the first raid of its kind against a Kataeb Hezbollah base on the edges of Baghdad, seizing rockets and arresting 14 fighters allegedly planning an attack on the Green Zone. The move was hailed by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who said rogue groups are "the single biggest obstacle to additional assistance or economic investment" for Iraq.

In Canada, art lovers head to drive-in for safe Van Gogh show



Toronto | Canada

While some museums have had to cancel or postpone long-planned exhibits because of the coronavirus, organisers of a Van Gogh show in Toronto had a novel idea: offering art lovers a drive-in option.

"Of course, because of COVID, we had to think creatively," said Corey Ross, a co-producer of the exhibit, which was initially slated to start in May and was delayed by the pandemic.

As Canada's largest city gradually comes out of lockdown, the exhibit began this week with two viewing areas in a huge Toronto warehouse: one area with social distancing circles on the ground for those who prefer taking in their art on foot, and another for people in cars that drive right into the building.

Viewing art from inside a car provides a safe experience for people who are physically fragile, fearful of the virus or vulnerable. And it is a unique experience, said Ross.

"You've never had an experience like this in your car," said Ross. "The feeling is almost as if the car is floating through the art."

The show was set up in collaboration with the creators of "Van Gogh, Starry Night," a hugely popular exhibit presented last year at l'Atelier des Lumieres in Paris.

Cruising in a Plymouth

The Toronto show features a similar, digital concept: works by the Dutch painter are projected in high definition on walls and floors.

The warehouse has space for up to about 10 cars at a time, parking in designated spots.

Car engines stay off during the projection of the artworks, which is accompanied with music. The paintings are positioned so people can see them through their windshields.

Some people take photos with their kids in their lap as they spend 35 minutes in the bold, intense world of Van Gogh.

Jessica Counti, 17, came with her family for the first drive-in edition on Friday to celebrate her sister's birthday.

"It's just a really immersive experience that you can't really get in a regular art gallery. So I really appreciate that, even though we can't walk around art pieces," she said.

Another visitor, Patrick Corcoran, took in the show from the steering wheel of his vintage 1950 Plymouth.

"The whole thing of sitting in your car and being out and enjoying the art -- it was comfortable, it was safe. With all the stuff that's going on in the world with the COVID, it was an experience. It was great."

Ross said the idea is turning out to be a hit but will just be temporary.

"If you're a car enthusiast, it's a very special moment," he said.

"But I think overall as soon as there's an opportunity for the public to go back to experiencing art in the way that we love to, in groups, beside other people, where you can talk and see strangers and see how they react and be part of a community, I think we will go back to that," Ross said.

The art hall for cars is booked almost solid through its end on August 9.

The show will remain open to pedestrians through September.



People sit in their cars to experience a drive-in immersive Vincent Van Gogh art exhibit in Toronto, Ontario, Canada on July 3, 2020; amid the coronavirus pandemic, many events are rethinking their programming and innovating for safety's sake

Australian scientists discover ancient underwater sites

Reuters | Sydney

Australia's first underwater archaeological sites off its west coast dating to more than 7,000 years ago will help with the understanding of the cultural and technology development of its first peoples, scientists said yesterday.

Archaeologists in Western Australia discovered hundreds of stone tools made by aboriginal people when the seabed was dry, at two ancient sites now submerged in the Dampier Archipelago.

While the region is well known for its rich ancient history and its rock-art carvings, the two sites are the first confirmed underwater locations holding evidence of human civilization on Australia's continental shelf.

"The future work that we will be doing is ... to look at the skill, the technology, how they made these tools, to see if they represent a different cultural approach to tool making that we



Archaeologists in Western Australia discovered hundreds of stone tools made by aboriginal people

haven't yet identified in Australia," marine geoscientist Mick O'Leary, a co-director of the project, told Reuters.

Divers from Flinders University plunge into the water on the Pilbara Coast to retrieve the aboriginal objects from what was once dry land, at a depth of between 2.4 metres and 11 metres (8-36 feet).

They have found cutting and

grinding tools and hammer stones that date back thousands of years, said archaeologist Jonathan Benjamin, leader of the project.

"You can start to recreate what the people were doing and how they were making their life way in their economy," Benjamin said.

Data from the find is being analysed for precise dating, how-

ever radiocarbon dating and analysis of sea-level changes show the site is at least 7,000 years old.

Benjamin said the vast majority of artefacts remain on the seabed. The ones taken have been scanned for further research and then handed to the indigenous land owners, the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation.