



Burjesia IDF Attack – Post Incident Report

20 June 2019

The Incident

- At approximately 0350hrs, on 19 June, two to three mortar rounds were fired and impacted buildings belonging to the Iraqi Drilling Company (IDC) in the Burjesia area of the Zubayr Oil Field, located 25km southwest of Basra City.
- At least one round damaged an accommodation building associated within the IDC and another impacted nearby on the road adjacent to the Oasis Camp, housing ExxonMobil.
- Eye witness accounts alleged with a high degree of confidence that the weapon system used to conduct the attack was a small caliber mortar rather than a Katyusha rocket.
- The firing point was positively identified at 400m to the southwest of the Halliburton camp which in turn is approximately 2.4km west of the Point of Impact (POI).
- ExxonMobil announced that it would evacuate at least 20 employees following the attack.
- Police stated that two or three Iraqi nationals were wounded as a result of the incident.
- There have been no immediate claims of responsibility for the attack.

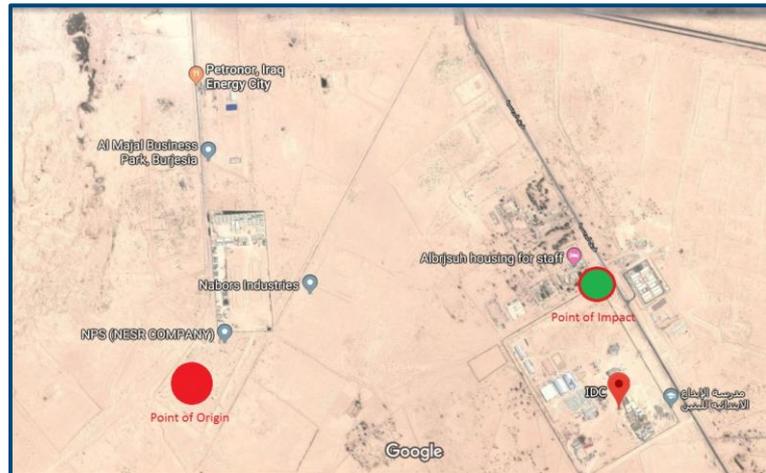


Figure 1: POO and POI of 19 June IDF attack in Burjesia

Analysis

It is assessed that the intended target was likely the Oasis/ Exxon camp and that the mortar rounds failed to hit their intended target. This would fall in line with current reporting regarding the strained relations between the US and Iran, which have resulted in a number of attempted IDF attacks against US diplomatic and military facilities over the past month. While no groups have been officially credited with the attacks, it is highly likely they were conducted by hardline, Iranian-backed militias (known as Popular Mobilisation Units or PMUs).

Tensions between the US and Iran heightened significantly over April and May following Washington's 15 April decision to designate Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC) and its extraterritorial Quds Force as foreign terrorist organisations. This resulted in two suspected PMU IDF attacks against Camp Taji, north of Baghdad, on 30 April and 17 June respectively, as well as multiple attempted rocket attacks against the US Embassy in Baghdad's International Zone on 19 May and 14 June. Such attacks have occurred in the past in times of heightened political rhetoric between the US and Iran, with suspected militia groups having previously targeted the US Embassy in the IZ with IDF on four separate occasions over 2018, as well as the US Consulate on the complex of Basra International Airport on 8 and 28 September 2018. The latter attacks prompted the US to close its Consulate in Basra.

In concurrence with these latest developments, and reports of Iran lifting its moratorium on Shia militias, allowing them to attack any US military/airbase facilities, in May the US issued threat warnings to its citizens in Iraq about the risk of violence or kidnapping because of an "imminent" threat directly tied to Iran and Iranian-backed groups, as well as ordering the evacuation of 'non-emergency' diplomatic staff

from the Embassy in Baghdad and the Consulate in Erbil. Several non-commercial flights were also temporarily cancelled due to the extant threat of IDF against US interests. Due to increased threat levels, Germany and the Netherlands temporarily suspended their military training operations in Iraq, while the UK begun implementing contingency plans to remove personnel from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar, should the crisis escalate. The potential threat also prompted ExxonMobil to temporarily evacuate 30 foreign engineers from West Qurna 1 to Dubai on 18 May (returning on 2 June on the condition of increased security protection). Oil officials at the time stated that the evacuation was a temporary precautionary measure and highly likely followed the withdrawal of nonessential US government staff from the country.



Figure 2: ExxonMobil Residential and Operations HQ in the aftermath of the IDF attack on 19 June. (Aurora Intel)

Meanwhile, Iran and its proxies have also demonstrated intent to disrupt oil operations in the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman. Following the deployment of additional US navy and military assets to the region, four commercial ships were sabotaged on 12 May off the coast of the UAE in the Gulf of Oman, with the US warning that Iran or its proxies could be targeting commercial maritime traffic in the region. All four ships suffered similar damage, consisting of a 5-10ft hole near or just below the water line, likely caused by an explosive charge. A subsequent attack on shipping in the Gulf of Oman was observed on 12 June, sabotaging a further two tankers. Though the attacks have not been officially attributed to any party, they bear the hallmarks of Iranian naval mining, as used previously during the Iran-Iraq war. Furthermore, in the hours prior to the latter attacks, a US reconnaissance drone reportedly observed Iranian vessels in vicinity of the tankers, before Iranian forces allegedly attempted to shoot the drone down. Of note, the 19 June IDF attack against the Oasis/ Exxon camp in Basra's IDC represents the first land-based attack against oil assets by likely Iraqi-based Iranian proxies during the current crisis.

Outlook

There is currently assessed to be a high likelihood of subsequent militia / Iranian activity directed toward the oil sector in Basra and the Persian Gulf / Gulf of Oman. Attacks will likely take the form of IDF, predominantly targeting US assets, or naval mining sabotaging international shipping. With the US Consulate in Basra closed last year, ExxonMobil represents the next viable and largest US target in the south of the country, and therefore likely explains the 19 June attack targeting the camp in Burjesia. While US assets and personnel are deemed the most likely targets, the threat is currently elevated for all foreign operators in the province, particularly those associated with the oil sector. The attack, being directed toward a civilian residential camp, also indicates an escalation of intent on the part of Iranian proxies, having previously concentrated activity on US diplomatic and military facilities.

Though direct kinetic attacks on personnel are not anticipated, Iranian proxies may seek to further disrupt / intimidate foreign oil companies operating in Iraq via asymmetric activity as a show of strength. This may pose a severe collateral risk to personnel in Basra. Such attacks, including rocket and mortar attacks, conducted by suspected Iranian proxies, are deemed likely as they afford Iran plausible deniability and provide a testing ground for a US response.