



Iraq: UAS Attack against Erbil Air Base

According to press reporting, on 14 April 2021, just before 2000 hours local time (1700 Coordinated Universal Time), a weaponized unmanned aircraft system (UAS) attacked U.S. interests located at Erbil Air Base (EAB), which is collocated with Erbil International Airport (ICAO: ORER), in Iraq. No casualties were reported. The weaponized UAS attack against EAB occurred shortly after a rocket attack targeted a Turkish base in northern Iraq, resulting in one Turkish soldier killed, according to Turkish press reporting.

This is the first reported weaponized UAS attack against U.S. forces at EAB, although U.S. interests at EAB have been targeted previously by Iranian-aligned militia groups (IAMGs). The most recent previous incident was an indirect rocket fire attack in February 2021. Weaponized UAS attacks have been employed in multiple conflict areas, including include Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya. UAS provide an economical option with improved accuracy over traditional rocket or mortar fire. Although there are no claims of responsibility for the weaponized UAS attack on EAB at the time of this report, the pro-Iranian group calling itself Awliyaa al-Dam (Guardians of Blood), which claimed responsibility for the February 2021 attack on Erbil, praised the 14 April UAS attack.

Iraq-based IAMGs have slowly integrated more capable UAS variants and tactics into their operations over the last year. IAMGs in Iraq have been implicated in several notable UAS attacks, including a January 2020 attack on Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, with a weaponized long-range UAS and a May 2019 attack targeting two pumping stations in Saudi Arabia using several UAS, according to Israeli press.

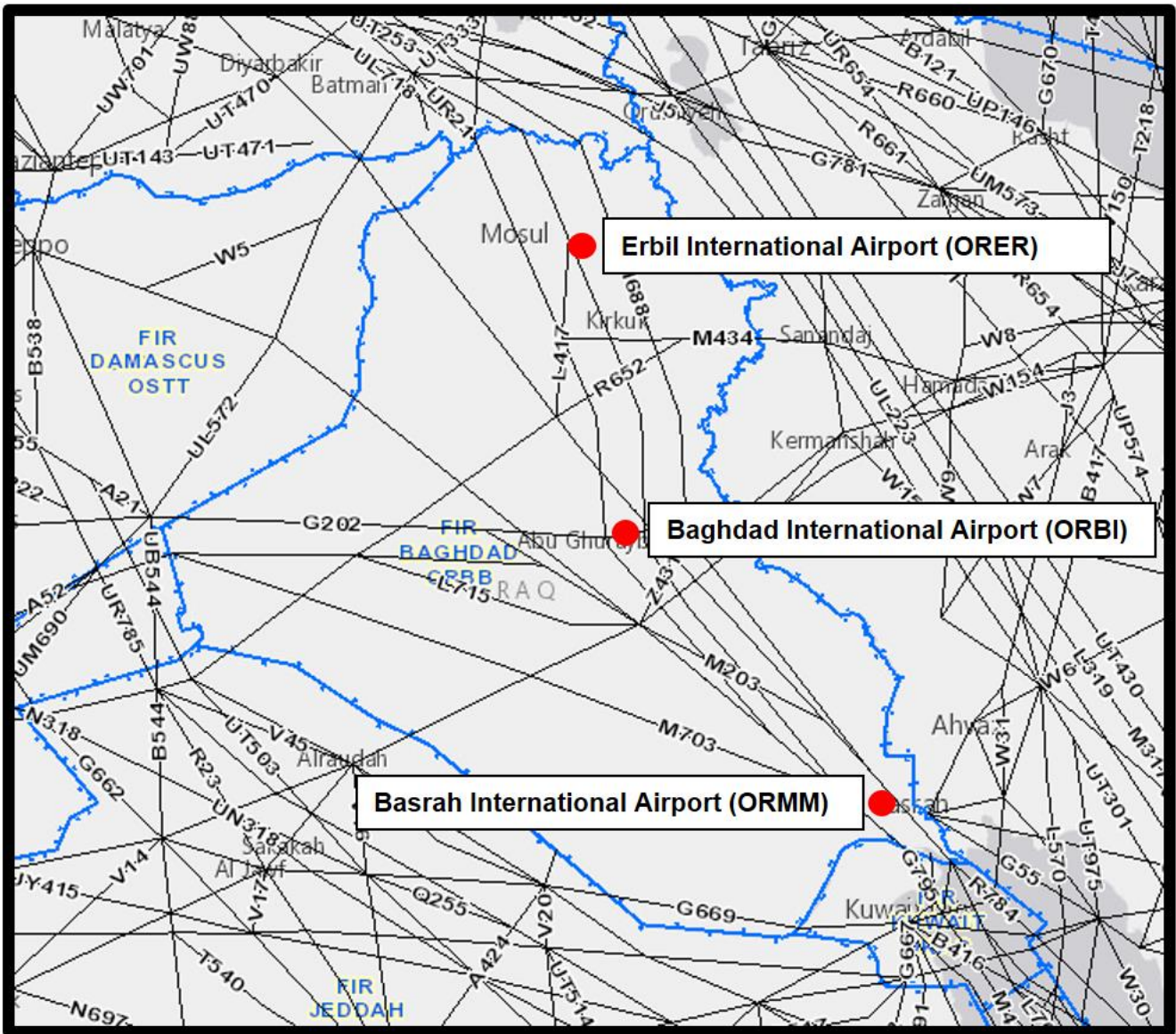
Outlook:

Iraq-based IAMGs and/or other militants/extremists may attempt additional weaponized UAS and/or indirect fire attacks targeting U.S. interests in an attempt to influence a coalition force withdrawal. Shia elements criticized the recent Iraq-U.S. strategic dialogue session for not resulting in an announced withdrawal of coalition forces. IMAGs may also conduct attacks elsewhere in the region, targeting U.S. interests or allied States, like Saudi Arabia, to support other political objectives. Weaponized UAS attacks against U.S. interests, particularly those collocated with civil airports, pose a safety-of-flight hazard to low-altitude flight operations and to aircraft at airports in the Baghdad (ORBB) Flight Information Region (FIR).

The FAA maintains an all-altitude flight prohibition Notice to Airmen (NOTAM), KICZ A0036/20, for the entire Baghdad FIR (ORBB). This NOTAM is in addition to Special Federal Aviation Regulation (SFAR) 77, which prohibits U.S. civil aviation operations at altitudes below flight level (FL) 320 in the entire Baghdad FIR (ORBB). Copies of all FAA-issued flight prohibition SFARs, flight prohibition NOTAMs, and advisory NOTAMs are available on FAA's Prohibitions, Restrictions and Notices website at: http://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/us_restrictions/.

If there are any questions, please contact the FAA Threat Analysis Division (AXE-200) at 202-267-3203 or FAA-Watch@faa.gov.

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Iraq's Baghdad Flight Information Region (ORBB) with high-level air routes.

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