

US embassy in Baghdad attacked, guards launch stun grenades at protestors

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Dozens of Iraqi Shiite militia supporters are seen outside the U.S. embassy compound in Baghdad, Iraq, Tuesday, Dec. 31, 2019. An angry mob smashed a door and stormed inside the compound Tuesday following deadly U.S. military airstrikes on Sunday against the Kataeb Hezbollah militia in Iraq and Syria. (AP Photo/Qassim Abdul-Zahra)

Baghdad: Reports of scuffle from US embassy in Baghdad where Iraqi Shiite militia supporters stormed into the compound. News agency Reuters is reporting that the guards at US embassy in Baghdad used stun grenades to disperse the crowd.

Moments after the attack, US President Donald Trump blamed Iran for killing an American contractor. In his tweet Trump said, "Iran killed an American contractor, wounding many. We strongly responded, and always will. Now Iran is orchestrating an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Iraq. They will be held fully responsible. In addition, we expect Iraq to use its forces to protect the Embassy, and so notified!"

Earlier, dozens of angry Iraqi Shiite militia supporters broke into the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad on Tuesday after smashing a main door and setting fire to a reception area, prompting tear gas and sounds of gunfire. An Associated Press reporter at the scene saw flames rising from inside the compound and at least three U.S. soldiers on the roof of the main embassy building.

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There was a fire at the reception area near the parking lot of the compound but it was unclear what had caused it. A man on a loudspeaker urged the mob not to enter the compound, saying: "The message was delivered."

The embassy attack, one of the worst in recent memory, followed deadly U.S. airstrikes on Sunday that killed 25 fighters of the Iran-backed militia in Iraq, the Kataeb Hezbollah. The U.S. military said the airstrikes were in retaliation for last week's killing of an American contractor in a rocket attack on an Iraqi military base that it had blamed on the militia.

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Dozens of protesters pushed into the compound after smashing the gate used by cars to enter the embassy. The protesters, many in militia uniform, stopped in a corridor after about 5 meters (16 feet), and were only about 200 meters away from the main building. Half a dozen U.S. soldiers were seen on the roof of the main building, their guns were pointed at the protesters.

Smoke from the tear gas rose in the area, and at least three of the protesters appeared to have difficulties breathing. It wasn't immediately known whether the embassy staff had remained inside the main building or were evacuated at some point. There was no immediate comment from the U.S. Embassy.

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The protesters hanged a poster on the wall: "America is an aggressor" and some commanders of militia factions loyal to Iran joined the protesters. Among those was Hadi al-Amiri, the head of the state-sanctioned paramilitary Popular Mobilization Units, the umbrella group for the Iran-backed militias.

Yassine al-Yasseri, Iraq's interior minister, also appeared outside the embassy at one point and walked around to inspect the scene. He told the AP that the prime minister had warned the U.S. strikes on the Shiite militiamen would have serious consequences.

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"This is one of the implications," al-Yasseri said. "This is a problem and is embarrassing to the government."

He said more security will be deployed to separate the protesters from the embassy, an indication the Iraqi troops would not move in to break up the crowd by force.

- (With Inputs from Associated Press and Reuters)