

Iranian Messages Behind Attacking US Bases in Iraq and the Consequences

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Global Research, January 09, 2020

[Elijah J. Magnier](#) 8 January 2020

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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Just after midnight local time today, Iranian ballistic missiles “[Fateh 313](#)” hit [two](#) military bases in Iraq that host a significant concentration of US forces, along with other allies. The Iranian direct hit was the retaliation for the US assassination of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds brigade Sardar Qassem Soleimani and his companions, killed by a US drone at Baghdad airport last week. The Iranian retaliation carries several strategic messages to the Middle East for this year 2020 and for many years to come. What are these messages? What will come of Iran’s open attack on the most powerful country in the world?

A high-ranking Iranian official [contacted](#) the Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi after midnight to inform him that Iran had decided to retaliate for the assassination of its General. Iran said it would hit a concentration of US forces in Iraq, without hitting any Iraqi forces.

Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi – according to well-informed sources in Baghdad – answered that “this act may carry devastating results on the Middle East: Iraq refuses to become the theatre for a US-Iran war”. The Iranian official replied: “Those who began this cycle of violence are the US, not Iran; the decision has been taken.”

Prime Minister Abdel Mahdi informed the US forces of the Iranian decision. US declared a state of emergency and alerted all US bases in Iraq and the region in advance of the attack.



Iran bombed the most significant US military base in Iraq, Ayn al-Assad, where just in the last two days, the US command had [gathered](#) the largest number of forces. Many US bases, particularly in Shia controlled areas and around Baghdad, were evacuated in the last days for security reason towards Ayn al-Assad, a base that holds anti-nuclear shelters. Ayn al-Assad is located in the desert of al-Anbar, close to the Iraqi-Syrian borders. This is the same base from which the drones which assassinated Sardar Soleimani and his companions at Baghdad airport took off. Iran also bombed another US base in Erbil, Kurdistan.

Iran copied the style used by the Americans in communicating its decision. On the 30th of December 2019, US Defence Secretary Mark Esper contacted Prime Minister Abdel Mahdi and informed him - [without asking his permission](#) - of the US intention to bomb Iraqi Forces (Popular Mobilisation Force - PMF). Five Iraqi security forces bases on the Iraqi-Syrian borders were destroyed, killing and wounding 79 PMF, federal police and Iraqi army officers.

Esper gave little time (half an hour) to the Prime Minister to inform his forces. Iran gave Mr Abdel Mahdi half an hour before bombing US forces and launching between 16 modernised multi-warhead "Fateh 313" missiles against al-Anbar and Erbil bases.



Iraq has lost its sovereignty in the middle of the Iran-US battle. It can recover the control of its country only when the US forces leave Iraq as the Iraqi parliament has decided it. The decision came as a response to the assassination of Major General Qassem Soleimani, who was serving as an envoy in a diplomatic capacity. Soleimani was officially invited by the Iraqi government in 2014 when Iraq asked Iran to send 100 Iranian advisors to Iraq to fight ISIS. He had Iraqi immunity and led the Iranian intelligence cell in Baghdad, not far from the US embassy, in coordination with Russian, Syrian and Iraqi officials. He was a diplomat carrying a diplomatic passport and was asked to [meet](#) the Prime Minister of Iraq the following day at 08:30 am to receive a message from Saudi Arabia. Prime Minister Abdel Mahdi agreed to play a mediation role between Iran and Saudi Arabia and was the go-between following Iran's peace initiative to the Arab leaders. Soleimani arrived in Iraq following a request from President Trump to calm down the tension with Iran. It was a multi-task trip.

Iran did use its precision missiles when bombing ISIS and the separatist [Kurds](#) in Kurdistan on the 8th of September last year when its missiles reached their desired target. Last night, Iran used its precision ballistic missiles with significant warheads on targets designed to avoid casualties and send a clear message to President Donald Trump. There were few if any victims. The US did not share information on casualties.

The Iranians did not use missiles from underground silos only but also overtly deployed its solid-fuel missiles against the two US operating bases in Iraq. Iran gave space for de-escalation because, without de-escalation, war will no doubt light up the entire Middle East.



President Trump cornered the Iranian regime so that it had to respond to the US assassination of its General. Its state outlet [claimed](#) “80 US servicemen were killed”, a message that gratified domestic opinion and the Iranian nationalism manifested by millions of crowds honouring Sardar Soleimani. It also served to gather public support behind the regime in case of US retaliation necessitating further Iranian retaliation that could lead to war.

The Iranian message is also directed to the US Democrats to use against the US President who had promised that his soldiers would not be in danger during his tenure. Instead, he is risking the lives of thousands of soldiers in one hit or confrontation with Iran and its allies in the Middle East.

Iran selected to also target the US base in Erbil to send a clear message. According to Iranian officials, it intended for the US to understand that in case its command decides to leave Iraq and gather in Erbil, its presence in Kurdistan is not far from its missiles and that US soldiers won't be safe anywhere in Iraq.

Iran's bombing is revealing that the US interception missiles were inactive in Ain al-Assad and that another significant attack with precision missiles could create a massacre if that were the intention behind the hit.



This is the second response to the assassination of Sardar Soleimani. The first came from the Iraqi parliament whose resolution calls for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from the

country. The second came from President Hassan Rouhani who [said](#): “You have managed to cut the hands of Qassem Soleimani (the hit dismembered the Iranian General), we shall cut your legs (force you out) from the Middle East.”

This is far from being the last Iranian hit against US forces in the Middle East. But if President Trump decides to refrain from retaliating, Iran will no longer hit the US forces directly and announce its responsibility. Iran and its allies are not expected to stop harassing the US forces if they stay in Iraq.

Another message was sent to Israel: the newly appointed commander of the IRGC-Quds Brigade Ismail Qaani met with all Palestinian groups in Tehran. According to a well-informed source, Iran promised “unlimited support to all Palestinian groups so that they reach their objective”. Indeed, Iran announced, “Israel is in partnership with the US in the assassination of Sardar Soleimani”.



The time when the US can hit without being hit back seems over. Since Pearl Harbour, this is the first time a country claims its responsibility for hitting US targets. This grave and complicated situation can end if there is a total withdrawal of US forces from Iraq. This step, already officially requested by the Iraqi parliament, can spare US servicemen’s lives.

The US is capable of using only the sky of Iraq, avoiding any land transport. But it is swimming in a severely hostile society in Iraq where every single soldier, officer or diplomat is a potential target. Following the hostile announcement of several groups in Iraq, it is clear there is no longer any safe place for US forces in the country. The assassination of Sardar Soleimani closed all roads of this US administration to all possible negotiation with Iran. Russia and China are waiting just behind the door to move in and fill the vacuum.

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