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Trump and Esper: No Evidence, Just a "Sneaky Feeling". Time for the Invaders to Go Home

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In-depth Report: IRAN: THE NEXT WAR?

Secretary of Defense Mark Esper *told Margaret Brennan on "Face the Nation" on Sunday that he didn't see any specific evidence that Iranian* ***General Qassem Soleimani*** *was planning an imminent attack, which had been widely used by Trump as the justification of his assassination along with Iraqi militia commander* ***Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis****. "What the president said was he believed that it probably and could've been attacks against additional embassies," he said.*

While Trump was apparently making Ouiji-board foreign policy decisions, Esper was worried about the US troops now in Iraq, and with more on their way, whether these troops had the support of the American people; however, the American people want to see proof of why those troops need to be there, otherwise there is a case for bringing them back home to safety.

Time to go home

Iraqis feel the US was first an invader in 2003, and then left Iraq with a sectarian constitution which has the country deeply divided. "It is not true that we Iraqis are divided into either hating the US or loving Iran. We appreciated both for fighting ISIS, but that is over and we need to be independent," said Nezar George, a welder in Baghdad.

More than 60% of Iraqis are Shiite, which is the state religion of their neighbor, Iran. Post-war political parties, and their leaders, were formed with stances of either pro-US or pro-Iran. The US is secular and touts religious freedom. All Americans live side by side, not in segregated ghettos, but diverse communities. The US imposed a constitution on Iraq which maintains divisions by religion and sect. The Iraqi people identify with their sect, which is translated into sectarian political parties. Patriotism is a foreign concept, which could only be nurtured in Iraq by time spent under a secular government. They pledge their allegiance to their family, their sect, and their party. Iraq is now referred to as either Sunni or Shiite, with the Christians having been virtually eliminated by the US invasion, and ISIS.

After seeing over 1 million Iraqis murdered by US troops, the Iraqi government invited them to return in 2014 to fight ISIS. However, after ISIS was defeated in 2017, Iraqi politicians are determined to oust the US troops. Iraqi **Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi** telephoned **Secretary of State Mike Pompeo** on Thursday and asked him to "send delegates to Iraq regarding the withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq," and said American forces had entered Iraq and drones are flying in its airspace without permission from Iraqi authorities and this was a violation of the bilateral agreements. He appeared to give the US time to plan for the

withdrawal of about 5,200 US troops in Iraq. The US State Department acknowledged that Pompeo had spoken with Abdul-Mahdi, but neglected to mention withdrawal.

General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Mark Esper have said there were no plans for the US to leave Iraq. The Iraqi parliament passed a resolution to expel US troops after the Trump ordered the assassination of Soleimani and Muhandis at Baghdad's airport.

Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani urged opposing factions to unite. The cleric was born in Iran but has lived most of his life in Iraq.

> "The serious attacks and repeated violations of Iraqi sovereignty that occurred in recent days with the apparent weakness of the concerned authorities in protecting the country and its people … are part of the repercussions of the current crisis," al-Sistani said.

Ammar al-Shibli, a member of the parliament, said

> "There is no need for the presence of American forces after defeating Daesh (ISIS)," and added, "We have our own armed forces which are capable of protecting the country."

"The guests arrive, and later the party is over, but they won't go home. What do we do? We make their stay with us so unbearable; they will leave on their own," said Abdul Khayat, a Baghdad pizza baker.

Trump Flip-Flops

Trump broke the Iran nuclear deal that the US had agreed to, along with other nations, in a head-spinning reversal. Without offering anything to take its place, he then slapped drastic sanctions of Iran which have devastated the economy, going so far as to prevent humanitarian medicines to be imported.

Trump threatened to freeze billions of Iraqi dollars in the New York Fed if Iraq insists the US troops must withdraw; however, in almost the next breath he suggest on Friday he would not oppose a troop withdrawal from Iraq, "I'm OK with it," Trump said on a Fox News interview.

After the constant reversals by Trump, the Iranians might be waiting it out, hoping to deal with a future US president who they can trust to keep a deal.

Soleimani history

Soleimani arrived in Baghdad airport by invitation of the PM Abdul-Mahdi to attend a regional peace talk when he was assassinated by Trump. He was the head of Iran's Quds Force and also the mastermind of the Iraqi militia networks, who are part of the Iraqi military structure. In 2014, when ISIS came into Iraq, a religious ruling was issued calling on all Iraqis to fight against ISIS; however, most Iraqis did not enlist in the Iraqi armed forces but instead joined militias supported by Iran.

The millions of people in Iraq and Iran who attended his funeral revered him. Lebanese and Syrian people remembered he helped to save them from ISIS. Noam Chomsky wrote, "They have not forgotten that when the huge, heavily armed US trained Iraqi Army quickly collapsed, and the Kurdish capital of Erbil, then Baghdad and all of Iraq were about to fall in the hands of ISIS, it was Soleimani and the Iraqi Shia militias he organized that saved the country."

The mainstream media reporting the death of Soleimani have all chanted the same mantra: that he was responsible for hundreds of Americans' deaths. They refer to US forces killed by IEDs during the Iraq War; however, the Pentagon has provided no evidence that Iran made those IEDs. That unproven claim was used by VP Dick Cheney in his plan to wage a US war on Iran.

Soleimani and his militiamen targeted US troops or contractors/mercenaries stationed in a country that the US illegally attacked and occupied. Under Soleimani's leadership, the Iraqi militias provided effective military resistance to foreign occupying forces. The US was not an innocent party getting accidentally trapped into going to war, rather it was actively pursuing it. Michelle Goldberg explains, "To Iranians, after all, America is the aggressor."

Even though the US might have viewed Iran, and Soleimani as an enemy, the US troops fought alongside the Iraqi militias under Soleimani's command in the 2014-2017 fight against ISIS. Law scholar Karen Greenberg wrote that killing Soleimani was illegal and an "inevitable outcome of our dangerous 'war on terror' policy."

The locals have a saying, "Saddam Hussein's Hell was better than the Americans' paradise."

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