

Seems Increasingly Likely Trump Just Made Up the ‘Imminent Threat’ Posed by Soleimani

New reporting reveals the president conditionally approved the Iranian general's assassination seven months ago.

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New reporting out Monday further erodes the White House narrative that President Donald Trump was justified in ordering the assassination of Iranian Gen. Qasem Soleimani earlier this month because Soleimani posed an “imminent” threat to American targets.

[According to NBC News](#), Trump authorized Soleimani's killing in June—seven months ago—on the condition that Iranian actions resulted in the death of an American. The assassination was pushed by Iran war hawks John Bolton and Mike Pompeo, who wanted the U.S. to carry out the killing in retaliation for Iran [shooting down](#) a US. drone in June. Trump responded to the push by responding “that’s only on the table if they hit Americans,” according to a person briefed on the discussion.

Discussions on targeting Soleimani began even earlier. From *NBC*:

The idea of killing Soleimani came up in discussions in 2017 that Trump's national security adviser at the time, retired Army Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, was having with other administration officials about the president's broader national security strategy, officials said. But it was just one of a host of possible elements of Trump's “maximum pressure” campaign against Iran and “was not something that was thought of as a first move,” said a former senior administration official involved in the discussions.

Middle East analyst Juan Cole added to the mounting scrutiny over Trump's “imminent” threat narrative on Monday. Writing at his *Informed Comment* blog, Cole [noted](#):

[Soleimani] does not appear to have killed or had killed any Americans at all in the past decade, and from 2015 because of the U.N. Security Council nuclear deal with Iran, Soleimani was not an adversary of the US in recent years. In fact, he was often a de facto ally and [the U.S. Air Force gave him air support at Tikrit and elsewhere](#) in the campaign against ISIL (ISIS, Daesh). In fact, for a while there Soleimani was fighting ISIL and al-Qaeda-linked militias in Syria in tacit alliance with the Kurds supported by the United States at a time when [Israel allied with an al-Qaeda affiliate](#) in the Golan Heights.

Moreover, the entire narrative of the Trump administration was undermined by Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdulmahdi, [who told Parliament on Jan. 5](#) when he asked its members to kick out the U.S. military, that he had personally invited Soleimani to Baghdad as part of a back-channel set of negotiations between

Saudi Arabia and Iran aimed at cooling down tensions between the two. Soleimani did not sneak into Iraq on a covert mission. He flew on a commercial jet and went through passport control with his diplomatic passport.

While an attempt was made to invade the U.S. embassy on the Wednesday before Soleimani's arrival, that was done by members of the Iraqi militia, the Kata'ib Hizbullah, who were angry that on December 30, the Trump administration bombed its bases in northern Iraq and killed some two dozen of its fighters.

Cole suggested the Trump administration appeared to be taking a page from the George W. Bush administration, which set up the [Office of Special Plans](#) to amass sketchy evidence to push the narrative of a threat of weapons of mass destruction posed by Iraq.

Lawmakers from both sides of the aisle have also [found](#) evidence presented to them by administration officials to be unconvincing.

Among that group is Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), who pointed to Defense Secretary Mark Esper's comments to *CBS Sunday* that he "didn't see" any specific evidence about four U.S. embassies being targeted by Soleimani.

Speaking on *MSNBC's* Kasie DC show Sunday, Merkley said, "the whole imminent argument is basically made up and they're trying to backfill and give that some substance."

"But it wasn't there," Merkley said. "It wasn't in the [Senate] briefing. It wasn't detailed... and there's Secretary Esper trying to square the circle and having a hard time doing it."

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has also contributed to the doubt over the administration's stated justification, [telling](#) *Fox News* last week that the administration actually didn't know when or where the purported "imminent" attacks were going to take place.

Soleimani's killing has sparked Agnes Callamard, United Nations special rapporteur on extrajudicial executions, to [call](#) this month for an impartial probe.

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