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Trump Ordered the Assassination of Soleimani, and the Middle East Prepares for Possible War

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In-depth Report: IRAN: THE NEXT WAR?

Qasem Soleimani was assassinated last night in Baghdad by a drone strike ordered by President Trump. The Iranian Commander of the 'Quds Force' was killed alongside the leader of the Iraqi 'Popular Mobilization Forces', Jamal Jaafar Ibrahimi, aka Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, along with at least 6 persons.

Regional leaders and analysts feel that Trump has crossed a 'red-line' by killing such a high-level Iranian official. This may illicit a comparable attack on a US official of equal stature. This decision by Trump is unprecedented, and many feel demonstrates his chaotic Middle East foreign policy.

Defense Secretary Mark T. Esper said the Pentagon had taken "decisive defensive action" against Soleimani, and confirmed the attack was on the orders of Trump. He added prophetically, "The game has changed,"

Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, vowed revenge while his Defense Minister, Brig. Gen. Amir Hatami, said their response would be crushing, and the Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif, called the strike an "act of international terrorism".

Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi condemned the U.S. "assassination," adding that the killing of the Iraqi militia leader was an act of aggression against Iraq and a breach of the conditions under which American forces operate in the country. This killing is the newest in a long line of US actions which periodically cause the Iraqi government and parliament to debate a final ouster of US troops.

Iraqi protestors broke into the US Embassy compound in Baghdad on Tuesday, lighting fires, throwing stones and spraying Anti-American graffiti on the walls. While the actual embassy was not breached, there was significant fire damage sustained to the outer walls. The protestors sought revenge for the deaths of 24 Iraqi militia members who were targeted and killed by US airstrikes on Sunday, with dozens of others wounded. The Khataib Hezbollah is an Iraqi militia on the Iraqi government payroll and had fought alongside the US in the defeat of ISIS.

President Trump has blamed the militia, without any evidence presented, for the death of an American contractor, and the injury of US troops in an unclaimed attack at a military base in Kirkuk on Friday. On Sunday morning, the US forces conducted F-15 airstrikes on 5 facilities in Iraq and Syria which the Pentagon claims are tied to the militia. US Defense Secretary Mark Esper confirmed that Trump ordered the strikes. The Kataib Hezbollah is an Iraqi militia that operates under the umbrella of the 'Popular Mobilization Units' who are an Iraqi

government–sanctioned home defense force.

The protestors could be heard chanting, "Death to America" as they burnt US flags and stepped on images of the US Ambassador. The spokesman for Kataib Hezbollah, Mohammed Muhi said, "We will not leave these tents until the embassy and the ambassador leave Iraq."

> "Iran will be held fully responsible for lives lost, or damage incurred, at any of our facilities," President Trump said in a tweet. "They will pay a very BIG PRICE! This is not a Warning, it is a Threat. Happy New Year!"

The Iraqi interior minister, Yassin al-Yasiri, said in an interview near the embassy that the US attacks had prompted this violence.

> "These are the dangerous ramifications of this strike," he said. "What happened today is the danger that we were afraid of, and that the Americans should have been afraid of."

Condemnation of the US airstrikes continued as the Iraqi Prime Minister, Abdul Mahdi, announced an official three-day mourning period for the Iraqis killed in the strikes, which he called an "outrageous attack", and the Iraqi Foreign Ministry reiterated the government's condemnation of the US airstrikes, and the Iraqi government announced on Monday they would be forced to review its relationship with the US.

The US government and the US media identify the Kataib Hezbollah as a 'Tehran-backed Shite militia'. Iraq is a Shite majority, and the Iraqi government is Shite dominated and is aligned with its neighbor Iran both culturally and economically. The militia is made up of Iraqi citizens, who are fighting terrorism on their soil and have died fighting ISIS. Trump blames Iran for the Friday attack, but he has attacked Iraq which is hosting US troops, and is supposed to be an ally in the war on terror, killing Iraqi soldiers who have no proven connection to the Friday attack.

In December 2018, Trump visited US troops at a base in Iraq but failed to give any notice to the government in Baghdad, who perceived the arrogant slight as a violation of their sovereignty. In February, Trump announced that he wanted US troops to remain in Iraq to watch Iran, which caused former supporters of the US in Iraq to denounce their presence. Iraq's President Barham Salih, a longtime diplomat in Washington, said in March,

> "We are surprised by the statements made by the U.S. president on the presence of U.S. troops in Iraq. Trump did not ask us to keep U.S. troops to watch Iran."

In March the Iraqi parliament debated ousting the US military from Iraq, which fields an estimated 5,200 troops there.

> "There is a broad consensus among the various political blocs and national forces to eject foreign presence in all forms," said Fadhil Jabr Shnein, a deputy in the Iraqi parliament.

Qais al-Khazali, a militia commander claimed the US military presence was intended to serve Israel and not Iraq and called for the US to leave Iraq.

The cancer of the Middle East began with the 2003 invasion of Iraq by President Bush. The disease that was started has spread and has never received treatment. Iraq remains a destroyed nation, and the current protestors filling the streets in the thousands since October 1 are demanding electricity, water, schools, jobs, medical care, and security which they have never seen since Saddam Hussein was forcibly removed from office by the US. The US is responsible for the deaths of approximately 655,000 Iraqis as a direct result of the invasion from 2003 to 2006. The US attacks abroad for regime change have since continued, such as Libya, Egypt, and Syria.

The US invasion and decimation of Iraq produced a sectarian divide which the US used as the basis of the new Iraqi version of democracy. The US imposed a sectarian constitution on Iraq which is the reason the current protesters are in the streets demanding a new secular form of government, which is not run on religious sects and their corresponding parties, as the corrupt Iraqi officials cut up the budget to their advantage, and the determent of the people.

Ilan Goldenberg, former Middle East expert under Obama, and now a scholar with the Center of New American Security, said "Unfortunately, I highly doubt the Trump administration has thought out the next step or knows what to do now to avoid a regional war."

Marc Polymeropoulos, a retired CIA official and counter-terrorism expert, said "For the legitimacy of the Iranian regime, a forceful response against the U.S. should be expected. The American public needs to understand that we may lose American lives after this act."

Trump's critics among the Democrats are fearful this heavy-handed strike may lead to an escalation.

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