

US targeting 52 Iranian sites if Tehran attacks Americans: Trump

Author:

Sun, 2020-01-05 02:18

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump warned Saturday that the US is targeting 52 sites in Iran and will hit them “very fast and very hard” if the Islamic republic attacks American personnel or assets.

In a tweet defending Friday’s drone strike assassination of a top Iranian general in Iraq, Trump said 52 represents the number of Americans held hostage at the US embassy in Tehran for more than a year starting in late 1979.

Trump said some of these sites are “at a very high level & important to Iran & the Iranian culture, and those targets, and Iran itself, WILL BE HIT VERY FAST AND VERY HARD. The USA wants no more threats!”



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Reaper drone launched from Qatar fired missile that killed Soleimani
Missiles hit Green Zone, Baghdad and Iraq base housing US troops

Erdogan under fire over troops for Libya

Author:

Sun, 2020-01-05 01:03

JEDDAH: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan faced growing international opposition on Saturday to his plans to send troops to fight in Libya.

Members of the Libyan Parliament in Benghazi accused Ankara of “a return to colonialism,” and the African Union said it was deeply concerned about “interference” in Libya.

Turkish politicians last week approved a law authorizing a military deployment in Libya to shore up the UN-backed government in Tripoli, which has been under sustained attack since April from the rival administration in the east.

At an emergency meeting of the Libyan Parliament in the eastern city of Benghazi, members accused the Tripoli government of “high treason” because of the maritime and military deals it signed with Ankara in November, clearing the way for a Turkish military intervention.

FASTFACT

Members of Libya’s Parliament in Benghazi accused Ankara of ‘a return to colonialism.’

Parliament spokesman Abdallah Bleheq said MPs voted unanimously to scrap the accords, and to sever ties with Ankara.

In Addis Ababa, African Union chief Moussa Faki Mahamat said he was “deeply concerned at the deterioration of the situation in Libya and the continuing suffering of the Libyan people.”

“The various threats of political and military interference in the internal affairs of the country increase the risk of a confrontation, whose motives have nothing to do with the fundamental interests of the Libyan people and their aspirations for freedom, peace, democracy and development,” Faki said.

He urged the international community to join forces with Africa in seeking a peaceful resolution of the crisis, which he warned had “dangerous consequences” for the continent as a whole.



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Turkish intervention risks Syria scenario for Libya, say experts
Libya's Haftar makes 'call to arms' over possible Turkey intervention

[Reaper drone launched from Qatar fired missile that killed Soleimani](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-01-05 00:58

LONDON: A drone launched from Qatar fired the missile that killed Iranian warlord Qassem Soleimani, US military sources have revealed.

Soleimani, head of the overseas Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis, deputy chief of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, and five others were killed in the strike at Baghdad airport early on Friday.

They were hit by Hellfire R9X Ninja missiles launched by the MQ-9 Reaper drone sent from Al-Udeid military and air base in Qatar, UK media reported.

Two missiles were fired, one for each of the two vehicles carrying Soleimani and Al-Muhandis, and were controlled remotely by operators at the US Air Force base in Creech, Nevada. A second backup drone was also launched from US Central Command headquarters in Qatar, but was not needed.

The “near-silent” Reaper drone has a range of 1,850 km, can fly at a height of 15,000 meters, and is an “armed, multi-mission, medium-altitude, long-endurance” aircraft designed primarily for offensive strikes, according to the US Air Force. “It provides a unique capability to perform strike, coordination and reconnaissance against high-value, fleeting, and time-sensitive targets,” it said.

HIGHLIGHT

As Qatar’s role in Soleimani’s death was revealed, Qatar’s foreign minister flew to Tehran for talks with President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

US President Donald Trump is thought to have authorized the strike last Sunday, at the same time as approving F-15 fighter jet attacks on bases in Iraq operated by Iran-backed militias. The operation was planned by the US National Security Agency based on intelligence on Soleimani’s movements supplied by informants, electronic intercepts, reconnaissance aircraft, and the security forces of America’s regional allies. Soleimani arrived in Baghdad on a private jet from Damascus minutes before the missile strike.

As Qatar’s role in Soleimani’s death was revealed, Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani flew to Tehran for talks with President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

Sheikh Mohammed said the situation in the region was sensitive and concerning, and he called for a peaceful solution leading to de-escalation.

In Baghdad on Saturday, tens of thousands of people took part in a march to mourn Soleimani, as Iran ramped up threats of revenge for his death.

A rocket fell inside the heavily fortified Green Zone near the US Embassy, another hit the nearby Jadriya neighborhood, and two more were fired at the Balad air base north of the city. There were no casualties.

NATO and a separate US-led mission suspended their programs to train Iraqi security and armed forces.

Gholamali Abuhameed, a senior commander of the Revolutionary Guards, said Tehran would punish Americans “wherever they are in reach,” and threatened attacks on ships in the Arabian Gulf.



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Iranian ambassador to UN says Soleimani death an 'act of war'

[Government formation in Lebanon still facing obstacles](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-01-05 00:33

BEIRUT: The first week of the New Year ended without the formation of a new government to rescue Lebanon from an economic crisis. The process of forming a government still faces obstacles, including the refusal of three main parties to participate in it: The Future Movement, the Progressive Socialist Party and the Lebanese Forces Party.

President Michel Aoun said a government could be formed next week. His media adviser Rafiq Shalala told Arab News: "There are changes in the names of Christian figures and some Muslim figures underway. There's an attempt to rearrange the names after the portfolios were distributed to all parties. Work is underway to substitute some of the names with others."

There have been many leaks regarding names that have been chosen to participate in the government, which will consist of only 18 ministers. The issue of the participation of some of them has been settled, while others

have faced objections from influential parties.

Tarek Mitri, a former minister, told Arab News that it is unlikely that regional developments will have “a direct impact on the formation of the government.”

He said: “The rules for forming a government are constantly changing, and the parties in power practice their old habits ... What people expect from the authority hasn’t been taken into account.”

He added: “The parties are choosing new acceptable faces, but since the beginning of the discussion about forming a government, we haven’t heard a useful sentence about ... how to deal with the problems that Lebanon is facing, as if politics just means fighting for Cabinet seats and the remnants of power.”

Activist Nemat Bader Al-Deen told Arab News that the “vacuum” regarding forming a government is “harmful, especially in light of the current economic crisis.”

He said activists are “following leaks about the names of the personalities that may be part of the government. We can’t determine our position on them before we know who they are.”

He added: “What we do know is that the parties in power still impose who they want. The criterion on which we’ll accept or reject the government is the integrity of these personalities. Is there suspicion of corruption around them? Do they take their instructions from the parties in power?”

Bader Al-Deen said: “The most important thing we demand is knowledge of the government’s program and how it will face monetary policies. We want a ministerial statement biased toward the middle and poor classes, and policies that protect people and guarantee the independence of the judiciary and the restoration of looted money.”

He added: “If the situation remains the same, it will be answered with a second wave of the revolution that’s more violent than its predecessor. There’s hidden hunger and rising unemployment, and Lebanon faces foreign entitlements that must be paid next March.”

FASTFACT

The process of forming a government faces obstacles, including the refusal of three main parties to participate in it: The Future Movement, the Progressive Socialist Party and the Lebanese Forces Party.

Prime Minister-designate Hassan Diab is continuing his political meetings to overcome the remaining obstacles and reservations about some names.

Meanwhile, the political community is waiting to see whether Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah will link government formation with the US assassination of Iranian Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad on Friday. MP Fadi Karam, secretary of the Strong Republic parliamentary bloc, said: “We as Lebanese, if we’re aware of the interest of our country, shouldn’t let regional events affect our internal situation.”

He added: “Our sole goal should be to save the economic situation we’re going through, regardless of what happens in the region.”

He said: “We as Lebanese can’t bear the repercussions of these events on our

internal situation. As Lebanese, we must agree to keep Lebanon neutral, because if a team decides to continue linking Lebanon to regional events, this would have severe consequences for the country.”



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Protesters in violent clashes with bank staff, security forces in Lebanon Lebanon's Aoun hopes government will be formed next week, former minister warns of need for huge bailout

[Syria death toll tops 380,000 in almost 9-year war, says monitor](#)

Sun, 2020-01-05 00:30

BEIRUT: Almost nine years of civil war in Syria has left more than 380,000 people dead including over 115,000 civilians, a war monitor said in a new toll on Saturday.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which has a network of sources across the country, said they included around 22,000 children and more than 13,000 women.

The conflict flared after unprecedented anti-government protests in the

southern city of Daraa on March 15, 2011.

Demonstrations spread across Syria and were brutally suppressed by the regime, triggering a multi-front armed conflict that has drawn in rebels and foreign powers.

The conflict has displaced or sent into exile around 13 million Syrians, causing billions of dollars' worth of destruction.

The Britain-based Observatory's last casualty toll on the Syrian conflict, issued in March last year, stood at more than 370,000 dead.

The latest toll included more than 128,000 Syrian and non-Syrian pro-regime fighters.

More than half of those were Syrian soldiers, while 1,682 were from the Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah whose members have been fighting in Syria since 2013.

The war has also taken the lives of more than 69,000 opposition rebels and Kurdish-led fighters.

It has killed more than 67,000 militants, mainly from Daesh and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), a group dominated by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate.

NUMBER

13m – Syrians have been displaced or sent into exile due to the conflict that has caused billions of dollars' worth of destruction.

The total death toll does not include some 88,000 people who died of torture in regime jails, or thousands missing after being abducted by all sides in the conflict.

With the support of powerful allies Russia and Iran, Syria's Bashar Assad has inched his way back in recent years to controlling almost two-thirds of the country.

That comes after a string of victories against fighters and rebels since 2015, but also his forces being deployed to parts of the northeast of the country under a deal to halt a Turkish cross-border operation last year. Several parts of the country, however, remain beyond the reach of the Damascus government.

They include the last major opposition bastion of Idlib, a region of some 3 million people that is ruled by the rebels of HTS.

An escalation in violence there in recent weeks has caused 284,000 people to flee their homes, according to the UN.

In the northeast, Turkish troops and their proxies control a strip of land along the border after seizing it from Kurdish fighters earlier this year. Kurdish-led forces control the Far East Syria, where US troops have been deployed near major oil fields.

Syria's conflict is estimated to have set its economy back three decades, destroying infrastructure and paralyzing the production of electricity and oil.



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Syria scenario for Libya, say experts