

Soleimani should have been taken out years ago, says Trump

Sat, 2020-01-04 00:23

JEDDAH: In his first comments since the strike against the head of Iran's elite Quds Force, US President Donald Trump said Qassem Soleimani "should have been taken out many years ago." He said the targeted killing was ordered because Soleimani was "plotting to kill" many Americans.

The UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash called for "wisdom and moderation" rather than "confrontation and escalation."

Egypt's Foreign Ministry said it was following developments in Iraq with great concern and appealed against any further escalation.

French President Emmanuel Macron urged all parties to avoid any new escalation. In a telephone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Macron said there should be no "new dangerous escalation of tensions" and "called on all the parties to act with restraint."

Germany urged restraint and de-escalation. "We are at a dangerous point of escalation. It is now important through prudence and restraint to contribute to de-escalation," said Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokeswoman Ulrike Demmer. China said it is "highly concerned" and called for all sides, especially the US, to exercise "calm and restraint." UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is deeply concerned.

"The secretary-general has consistently advocated for de-escalation in the Gulf. He is deeply concerned with the recent escalation," said his spokesman, Farhan Haq. "This is a moment in which leaders must exercise maximum restraint. The world cannot afford another war in the Gulf."

Republican lawmakers quickly spoke out in strong support of Trump's attack.

"In a display of resolve and strength, we struck the leader of those attacking our sovereign US territories," top House Republican Kevin McCarthy said.

"Wow – the price of killing and injuring Americans has just gone up drastically," Senator Lindsey Graham, a close confidant of Trump, wrote on Twitter. Former US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley also praised the attack. "Qassem Soleimani was an arch terrorist with American blood on his hands," Haley said on Twitter. "His demise should be applauded by all who seek peace and justice. "Proud of President Trump for doing the strong and right thing." Trump's former adviser John Bolton praised the killing of Soleimani and "congratulated" those involved.



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Iran promises to avenge US killing of top Iranian commander Soleimani
How Iran's Qassem Soleimani destabilized the Middle East

[Air strikes target Iraqi militia convoy north of Baghdad, six people killed](#)

Sat, 2020-01-04 02:11

BAGHDAD: A United States air strike targeted an Iraqi militia late on Friday on Taji road north of Baghdad, state TV said. It did not name the militia or provide further details.

Air strikes targeting Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces umbrella grouping of Iran-backed Shiite militias near camp Taji north of Baghdad have killed six people and critically wounded three, an Iraqi army source told Reuters late on Friday.

– Developing story.



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[Sudan's women pursue soccer dream, challenging conservatives](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-01-04 00:39

OMDURMAN, SUDAN: All her life, Elham Balatone wanted to play soccer – like her brothers, like the boys on her street. But in the Sudan where she grew up, women could be flogged for wearing pants, let alone soccer shorts. She heard all the reasons why she had to give up her dream. It's a Muslim country; the uniform is inappropriate; the sport was meant for men. She played anyway, wearing pants or putting on leggings underneath shorts. "There's nothing in this world that I love more than soccer. Please let me play," she says she told her family. For years, she and other women played largely in the shadows, sometimes on dirt pitches they cleaned themselves, often bouncing from one spot to another. The women finally took center stage when the world watched them play at a Khartoum stadium as the youth and sports minister and others celebrated Sudan's new, officially recognized women's soccer league. Balatone even had her family's blessings. But it is more than just a game. The women's league became a field of contention as Sudan grapples with the transition from three decades of authoritarian rule that disenfranchised women in particular.

Transitional authorities have taken some steps to roll back the legacy of ousted President Omar Bashir. In November, they overturned a notorious "public order" law that the prime minister said had been used as a "tool of exploitation, humiliation," resulting in "atrocities" against women and youth. Rights defenders call it a step in the right direction, but say the fight is far from over.

Some ultraconservatives, however, have been pushing back. Preacher AbdulHay Yousif and others have painted soccer as part of a battle for Sudan's identity.

"What religion, what Shariah, what manhood would allow a Muslim woman to appear before men ... with her arms, legs and some of her thighs exposed and then run before them," Yousif told worshippers in October, shortly after the league, made up of 20 teams, started.

"By God, these people have not come ... for economic development or social prosperity or scientific elevation. They have come to destroy religion and morals."

He also denounced the youth and sports minister, a woman, saying she "doesn't believe in what we believe in" and is a follower of "an apostate" – comments that sparked a legal battle between him and the minister.

Critics argue some conservatives are using an old playbook in Sudan: Weaponizing stringent religious views to target political opponents, control women and thwart change.

“Clearly this is part of an effort by Yousif to undermine the new government by stimulating a ‘moral panic’ regarding the subversion of gender roles. Partly it’s about his religious views, but it is predominantly a patriarchal form of gender politics,” said Willow Berridge, a lecturer in history at Newcastle University who has written about Sudanese extremists. Yousif and his supporters “tend to occupy the most uncompromising end of the religious spectrum in Sudan.”



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More than 20 dead, many displaced after violence in Sudan’s West Darfur

[What now awaits Turkey on the Libyan front?](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-01-04 00:30

ANKARA: Turkish troops are expected to be sent to Libya to support the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) against Libyan military

strongman Khalifa Haftar, after Turkey's Parliament approved the motion for military deployment on Thursday evening. Insiders suggest some 200 Turkish marines will arrive in advisory, training and support roles. However, beyond grabbing international headlines, the deployment has security risks, logistical constraints and geographic limitations compared to Turkey's previous cross-border interventions in neighboring war zones such as Syria or Iraq.

For Karol Wasilewski, an analyst at the Warsaw-based Polish Institute of International Affairs, Turkey will have to find a way to reconcile its interests and those of Russia in Libya.

"To be successful, it should probably gain broader support, because for now Turkey is isolated in its support for Fayeze Al-Serraj's GNA. I also think that securing manpower for this operation may be a challenge – Turkey may send its own troops for training, but I find it unlikely that it will send soldiers for combat missions," he told Arab News.

"Thus, it will have to continue sending Syrian rebels, and it seems they are unwilling to go, especially during (Syrian President Bashar) Assad's assault on Idlib," Wasilewski added.

Experts also caution against an influx of irregular troops and mercenaries into Libya which could escalate the situation on the ground.

Overt support for the GNA could also strain Turkish relations with other regional powers supporting Haftar.

Wasilewski anticipates that a proxy war is about to accelerate across the region. Egypt has already criticized Ankara's decision to deploy troops, and called on the international community to react.

"Technically speaking, Egypt has the capacity to complicate Turkey's operation in the sea, so there is one possible source of escalation," he said.

Cairo is not the only party Ankara must contend with – Russia, too, has taken an interest in Libya. Dmitry Novikov, a Russian lawmaker, told Interfax news agency that a Turkish military presence in Libya would "only deteriorate the situation," and Russian private military contractors have allegedly been drafted in to support Haftar's forces.

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Karol Wasilewski, a foreign affairs expert

All eyes are now on Russian President Vladimir Putin's expected visit to Ankara on Jan. 8, with Libya ranking on the top of the bilateral agenda. Galip Dalay, a visiting scholar at the University of Oxford, expects a sort of Astana-style deal around Tripoli after Putin's visit.

"But in return, Russia may expect some compromises from Turkey in Syria's opposition-held Idlib province, and try to get some advantages for the Assad regime in that zone," he told Arab News.

Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, Ankara office director of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, agrees.

"A significant deployment by Turkey to Libya would be contingent on tacit Russian approval based on an Astana-like process. This would not only

increase Russian leverage over Turkey, but would probably come with a price tag. The price could be a new arms deal, concessions in Syria or anything that would benefit Russia,” he told Arab News.

Turkish opposition members who voted against the motion have suggested Turkey should persuade the UN to deploy a peacekeeping mission to the country.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his US counterpart Donald Trump discussed the unfolding events in Libya in a phone call on Jan. 2. According to the readout issued by the White House: “President Trump pointed out that foreign interference is complicating the situation in Libya,” with no details added about which countries Trump was referring to.



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Libya will confront and expel foreign forces, says Khalifa Haftar
Flights suspended in Libya's capital due to rocket fire

[Libya will confront and expel foreign forces, says Khalifa Haftar](#)

Sat, 2020-01-04 00:10

TRIPOLI: The leader of the Libyan National Army (LNA) Khalifa Haftar said on Friday his forces would “confront and expel” any foreign troops sent to the

country.

His comments came after Turkey recently approved a parliamentary motion to deploy troops in Libya.

Haftar used his televised address to accuse Turkey, without naming it, of trying to “colonize” Libya, and said: “The friendly Turkish people must rise up against the adventurer who is pushing his army to death.”

The LNA leader also accused Turkey’s president Recep Tayip Erdogan of trying to ignite a conflict to target Middle East security and of attempts to “revive the Ottoman legacy in Libya and the region.”



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Turkey parliament approves Libya military deployment