

Trump: US was facing imminent threat of attack from Soleimani

Mon, 2020-01-13 18:50

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump on Monday morning defended his decision to kill Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani, contending Soleimani posed an impending threat to the United States but also saying that was not important given the military leader's history.

"The Fake News Media and their Democrat Partners are working hard to determine whether or not the future attack by terrorist Soleimani was 'imminent' or not, & was my team in agreement." Trump wrote on Twitter.

"The answer to both is a strong YES., but it doesn't really matter because of his horrible past!"

Since confirming that Iranian military leader Qassem Soleimani had been killed by a US air strike in Baghdad, administration officials have claimed they acted because of an imminent risk of attacks on American diplomats and service members in Iraq and throughout the region.

Democrats and a few Republicans in Congress have questioned the justification of the attacks and said they have not been given adequate, detailed briefings.

Last week Trump posited in an interview that Iran had been poised to attack four American embassies before Soleimani was killed in a U.S. drone strike on Jan. 3. But on Sunday US Defense Secretary said he did not see specific evidence that Iran was planning an attack.

"What the president said was that there probably could be additional attacks against embassies. I shared that view," Esper said. "The president didn't cite a specific piece of evidence."

When pressed on whether intelligence officers offered concrete evidence on that point, Esper said: "I didn't see one with regards to four embassies."



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Trump says he believes Soleimani was targeting 'four embassies' Pompeo: Qasem Soleimani not in Baghdad on diplomatic mission

[Japanese PM Abe Shinzo arrives in UAE](#)

Mon, 2020-01-13 17:31

DUBAI: Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo arrived in Abu Dhabi on Monday on the second half of his Middle East tour that aims to boost bilateral cooperation between Tokyo and the region.

The Japanese premier touched down in Abu Dhabi International Airport earlier in the day, and is expected to meet the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed.

He will also attend the gala dinner event at Emirates Palace featured by Abu

Dhabi Sustainability Week (ADSW), where he will also meet President of Indonesia Joko Widodo.

Abe intends to hold talks with leaders of the UAE and try to win their support for Japan's plan to send naval Self-Defense Force units to the Middle East on a mission to gather information for ensuring sea lane safety in the region.

He also plans to call on the cooperation of the three countries he is visiting in order to boost diplomatic efforts for easing the tensions in the region.



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US troops clear rubble from Iraq base days after Iran strike

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Mon, 2020-01-13 12:16

AIN AL-ASAD BASE, Iraq: US troops were clearing rubble and debris on Monday from a military base housing American soldiers in western Iraq, days after it was struck by Iranian ballistic missiles.

The Ain Al-Asad air base in Iraq's western Anbar province is a sprawling complex about 180 kilometers west of Baghdad and houses about 1,500 members of the US military and the US-led coalition fighting the Islamic State militant group.

It was struck by a barrage of Iranian missiles on Wednesday, in retaliation for the US drone strike that killed a top Iranian commander, Gen. Qassem Soleimani, whose killing raised fears of a wider war in the Middle East. An Associated Press crew touring the Ain Al-Asad base Monday saw large craters in the ground and damaged military trailers as well as forklifts lifting rubble and loading it onto trucks from a large area the size of a football stadium.

The US said no American soldiers were killed or wounded in the Iranian attack.

Ain Al-Asad air base was first used by American forces after the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein, and later saw American troops stationed there amid the fight against the Daesh group in Iraq and Syria.

Trump visited the sprawling Ain Al-Asad air base in December 2018, making his first presidential visit to troops in the region. Vice President Mike Pence also has visited the base.





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No Iraqi casualties as 22 Iranian missiles hit bases: Iraq military
US announces new sanctions on Iran after missile strikes on bases in Iraq

[Four Iraqi servicemen wounded by rocket attack on air base](#)

Author:

By QASSEM ABDUL-ZAHRA | AP

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Sun, 2020-01-12 18:31

BAGHDAD: Four members of Iraq's military were wounded Sunday in a rocket attack targeting an air base just north of Baghdad where American trainers are present, Iraqi security officials said.

The attack by at least six rockets came just days after Iran fired ballistic missiles at two bases in Iraq that house US forces, causing no casualties. Recent heightened tensions between the US and Iran were sparked last month when a rocket attack killed an American contractor at a base in Iraq. The US has blamed that attack and others on Iran-backed militias.

Sunday's attack wounded an Iraqi air force officer and three enlisted men, Iraqi security officials said. They spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

No group claimed responsibility for the attack.

The rockets struck Balad air base, which hosts American trainers, advisers and a company that provides maintenance services for F-16 aircraft. Some rockets fell on a restaurant inside the air base, the officials said.

The base is located some 50 miles (80 kilometers) north of Baghdad.

A statement from the Iraqi army's official media office confirmed the attack but said eight rockets hit the base, and that two officers had been wounded. The difference in accounts could not immediately be reconciled.

"There are American experts, trainers and advisers at the base," said one defense official, who requested anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to media.

The US and Iran recently stepped back from escalating tensions following the killing of Gen. Qassem Soleimani, Iran's top general, in a US airstrike in Baghdad. A senior Iraqi leader of an Iran-backed militia was also killed. Iran's retaliatory attack for Soleimani's death hit two Iraqi bases, Ain Al-Asad and Irbil, where American troops are based.

The limited Iranian strikes appeared to be mainly a show of force, and deescalated tensions that had threatened to turn Iraq into a proxy battlefield.



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[Trump warns Iran not to kill protesters, door still open to talks](#)

Sun, 2020-01-12 17:35

LONDON: US President Donald Trump warned Iran Sunday against killing protesters who have risen up over the regime's downing of a civilian airliner as his defense secretary left the door open to talks with Tehran without preconditions.

Trump's salvo came as Iran's Islamic regime faced a challenge from angry street protests, having come to the brink of war with the US after a series of tit-for-tat confrontations.

"To the leaders of Iran – DO NOT KILL YOUR PROTESTERS," Trump tweeted, warning that the world and "more importantly, the USA is watching."

In an interview with CBS's "Face the Nation" just before the tweet, US Defense Secretary Mark Esper said Trump was still willing to hold talks with

Iran's leaders.

"We're willing to sit down and discuss without precondition a new way forward, a series of steps by which Iran becomes a more normal country," Defense Secretary Mark Esper said on CBS's "Face the Nation."

And if something happened to the protesters? Esper replied: "The president has drawn no preconditions other than to say we're willing to meet with the Iranian government."

Long-standing US-Iran tensions have soared since January 3 when missiles fired from a US drone killed a top Iranian commander, Qassem Soleimani, near Baghdad's airport.

Iran responded with a barrage of missiles at two US bases in Iraq, inflicting no casualties in what was seen as an attempt to prevent a spiral of escalation.

But hours later, an Iranian Revolutionary Guard unit shot down a Ukrainian passenger jet shortly after takeoff from Tehran.

The death of all 176 people aboard and Iranian leader's belated admission its forces mistook the plane for a cruise missile has set off angry protests against the regime.

The British ambassador to Iran was briefly arrested Saturday after attending a memorial service to the victims at Tehran's Amir Kabir University.

"I just think you see a very corrupt regime that the Iranian people are finally standing up and trying to hold them accountable," Esper said.

On another Sunday talk show, national security adviser Robert O'Brien said the Iranian regime was "reeling from maximum pressure."

"They are reeling from their incompetence in this situation. And the people of Iran are just fed up with it," he said on ABC's This Week.

Meanwhile, said Esper, the US believes it has disrupted the plots that it says precipitated Soleimani's killing, and expects no further Iranian retaliation.

"We do not expect any further attacks. But if you look at what's happening on the ground today, you have just yesterday in Tehran and other cities, Iranians chanting, 'death to the Ayatollah,'" he said.

Esper and O'Brien defended the intelligence that led the administration to claim Soleimani was plotting imminent attacks on US troops and diplomats in the region.

But other than in the case of the US embassy in Baghdad, Esper would not confirm Trump's claim in a recent Fox News television interview that four US embassies in the region were among Soleimani's target.

Asked if there was specific evidence in the intelligence to support the claim, Esper said, "I didn't see one with regard to four embassies."

The administration has come under withering fire from Democrats – and at least two Republican senators – for refusing to share the intelligence with members of Congress.

Senior congressional leaders – the so-called Gang of Eight – were briefed January 8 as skepticism mounted about the administration's rationale for a killing that raised the risk of war with Iran.

"We had exquisite intelligence and the intelligence showed that they were looking at US facilities throughout the region and that they wanted to inflict casualties on American soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, as well as diplomats," O'Brien said on NBC's Meet the Press. "The threat was imminent. I saw the intelligence."

Adam Schiff, chair of the House Intelligence Committee, said there was no discussion in the briefing given to the Gang of Eight about plots against four embassies.

"In the view of the briefers, there was plotting, there was an effort to escalate, a big plan, but they didn't have specificity," he said.

"So when you hear the president out there on Fox, he is fudging intelligence," he said on Face the Nation.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said the congressional leadership should have been informed of the strike against Soleimani in advance.

"I don't think the administration has been straight with the Congress of the United States," she said on Meet the Press.

This comes as the leaders of Britain, France and Germany on Sunday called in a joint statement on Iran to return to full compliance with a 2015 nuclear deal with world powers and refrain from further violence.

"We urge Iran to reverse all measures inconsistent with the agreement and return to full compliance," the leaders said in the statement issued by the office of French President Emmanuel Macron.

"We call on Iran to refrain from further violent action or proliferation; and we remain ready to engage with Iran on this agenda in order to preserve the stability of the region," they added.

Also on Sunday, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called for countries in the region to bolster ties to overcome turbulence caused by the presence of the US and its allies.

"The current situation in the region demands – more than ever before – strengthening of relations between countries in the region as well as avoiding influence of foreigners'" meddling, Khamenei was quoted as saying on his official Twitter account as he hosted Qatar's emir.

"The reason for the current turbulent situation in our region is the corruptive presence of the US and its cohorts. The only way to confront this is to depend on cooperation within the region," he said.

(With AFP and Reuters)



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Iran summons UK ambassador over Ukrainian airline rally