

Reaper drone launched from Qatar fired missile that killed Soleimani

Author:

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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 Abuhamez, 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 fighting looms over Putin-Erdogan meeting
Turkish intervention risks Syria scenario for Libya, say experts

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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