

Killing Inside Iraq to Punish Iran

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President Bill Clinton once launched a mini-cruise-missile-war on targets in Sudan and Afghanistan to serve as a distraction from the Monica Lewinski scandal. It must be considered that Donald Trump might be doing something similar within the context of his currently ongoing impeachment crisis, but the back story to the two developments is somewhat different. Clinton may have been a serial philanderer but he appears to have had no particular animus against either the Sudanese or the Afghans. Donald Trump, however, has expressed unrelenting hostility against Iran since the time when he took office. One of his first acts was to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which placed limits on Iranian nuclear programs so as to prevent the development of a nuclear weapon, and since that time sanctions have been added to cripple the Iranian economy.

The JCPOA was good for the United States, supportive of non-proliferation efforts, but Trump, guided by neoconservative advisers, most of whom were Jewish and having close ties to Israel, chose to ignore actual American interests. In a sense, Iran has from the beginning been the exception to Trump's no-new-war pledge, a position that might reasonably be directly attributed to his pandering to the expressed needs of Israel's belligerent Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Indeed, there is already some speculation that Israel might have done [everything but pull the trigger](#) in last Thursday's assassination of Iranian Quds Force commander General Qassem Soleimani and the head of Kata'ib Hezbollah Abu Mehdi Muhandis by virtue of a U.S. Reaper drone strike near the Baghdad International Airport. The two men had just arrived in the city by a commercial flight to attend the funerals of the Iraqi soldiers killed by the U.S. earlier in the week. Soleimani had also scheduled a meeting with the Iraqi prime minister.

Israel has long been targeting Soleimani and has demonized his relationships with Hezbollah and the Syrian government. It has also called him the architect of the often cited "bridge" of Shi'ite dominated states that would run from Iran, through Iraq and Syria, to Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea. The "bridge" has always been an Israeli fantasy concoction as Iraq, Syria and Lebanon have never expressed any willingness to become Persian satrapies. And ironically, the Israeli agitprop that might have led to the assassinations is actually counter-productive as Iraqis were recently demonstrating against Iranian influence. Now, given the killing of their countrymen and the insult to their sovereignty, they will instead be targeting the United States for its malign influence and Iran gets a free pass. And the death of Soleimani will also strengthen the Iranian government at home by its exposure of a completely malevolent outside enemy, quite likely leading to the suspension of the protests that have been sweeping the country in the past weeks.

An Israeli hand in recent developments is not unthinkable and there have already been reports that Soleimani's coordinates were provided to the drone operator by Netanyahu, [who was informed](#) of the attack plan in advance. The Israeli air force has already been bombing targets in Iraq that it conveniently describes as "Iranian." After the assassination, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo spoke with Netanyahu, which he

[shared on twitter](#) “and I just spoke and underscored the importance of countering Iran’s malign influence and threats to the region,” also stating how he was “always grateful for Israel’s steadfast support in defeating terrorism.”

Promoting terrorism would have been more accurate, but Pompeo dares not going there. In the past, Israel’s Mossad has frequently “shared” intelligence with the United States relating to possible nefarious activity by Iran. Often that information has been fabricated in an attempt to get Washington to act as Israel’s proxy. One notable example of intelligence fraud was the laptop that surfaced in 2004 that was claimed to be evidence of an Iranian nuclear weapon program. Can it be far off to suggest that Israel might have been the source of the alleged intelligence suggesting that Soleimani was involved in planning to kill more Americans? It is certainly plausible to think so, particularly as it appears the Soleimani might have been in Baghdad to discuss a Saudi proposal to lessen tensions in the region. Ironically, Donald Trump knew about the proposal and had reportedly encouraged the possibility of some form of detente. Israel, however, is not interested in lessening tensions and would rather see the United States go to war with and destroy Iran.

Trump’s successful presidential campaign included a pledge to disengage from useless Asian wars, a promise that might well have been his margin of victory. Since that time, he has at least occasionally drawn back from escalating conflicts in places like Syria and Afghanistan, but his supporters have always been quick to point out that he has not actually started anything new. Though he has in fact expanded military involvement in a number of countries, that assertion was at least somewhat true until last Thursday.

Having executed a deliberate, planned assassination of a foreign leader, the United States has committed an act of war and is now *de facto* at war with Iran in a conflict that could easily have been avoided and which will not end well for any of the participants. If the White House truly believed that Iran was systematically trying to kill Americans, President Trump should have gone to Congress and asked for a declaration of war. Instead, he opted to assassinate a top foreign government official from a country with which the U.S. is not at war in a third country that America is also was not at war with and which was not aware of the impending killing. There is nothing to be proud of there.

Though there will be no actual declaration of war coming from either side, the escalation that will develop from the assassinations will shift the long simmering conflict between the two nations into high gear. It is [being reported that](#) there have been additional U.S. airstrikes against a medical convoy north of Baghdad while nearly five thousand more U.S. troops [are on their way](#) to the Middle East.

Iran cannot let the killing of a senior officer go unanswered, even though it knows that it cannot directly confront the United States militarily. But there will be reprisals and Tehran’s suspected use of proxies to stage limited strikes will now be replaced by more damaging actions that will be attributable to the Iranian government, though with considerable deniability built in. As Iran has significant resources locally and countries like Saudi Arabia are vulnerable, one can expect that the entire Persian Gulf region will be destabilized.

And there is also the terrorism card, which will come into play. Iran has an extensive diaspora throughout much of the Middle East and, as it has been threatened by Washington for many years, it has had a long time to prepare for a war to be fought largely in the shadows. No American diplomat, soldier or even a tourist in the region

should consider him or herself to be safe, quite the contrary. It will be an “open season” on Americans. The U.S. has already ordered a partial evacuation of the Baghdad Embassy and has advised all American citizens to leave the country immediately. Other travel warnings in countries as far away as Nigeria have followed. Do you feel safer Americans?

The buck stops with Trump, who made the decision to kill the Iranian and bears full responsibility for what comes next. The president [referred to](#) how Soleimani was preparing “imminent and sinister” attacks that would have cost “hundreds of American lives” but provided no details. And he also described the Iranian general as a mass murderer who had killed millions, to include thousands of Americans, before finding something humorous in the assassinations, [tweeting that](#) “Iran never won a war, but never lost a negotiation.” It is not clear what the tweeter-in-chief meant, if he actually meant anything coherent, but it unfortunately was a reflection of how low foreign and national security policy has sunk under the current administration.

The neoconservatives and Israelis are predictably cheering the deaths. Netanyahu [commented afterwards that](#) “Israel stands with the United States in its righteous struggle for peace, security and self-defense.” Also, Mark Dubowitz of the pro-Israel Foundation for Defense of Democracies [enthused that](#) the death of Soleimani is “bigger than bin Laden...a massive blow to the [Iranian] regime.” Dubowitz, a shill for Israel whose credentials as an “Iran expert” are dubious at best, is at least somewhat right in this case. Qassem Soleimani was, to be sure, charismatic and also very popular in Iran. He was Iran’s most powerful military figure and known and respected throughout the region, being the principal contact for proxies and allies in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. But what Dubowitz does not understand is that no one in a military hierarchy is irreplaceable. Soleimani’s aides and high officials in the intelligence ministry are certainly more than capable of picking up his mantle and continuing his work.

In reality, the series of foolish attacks initiated by the United States over the past week will only hasten the departure of much of the U.S. military from the region. The Pentagon and White House have been insisting that Iran was behind an alleged Kata’ib Hezbollah missile attack on a U.S. installation that then triggered an [F-15 strike by Washington](#) on claimed militia targets in Syria and also inside Iraq that killed 25 Iraqis. The Iraqis were associated with Kata’ib but were also incorporated into the Iraqi Army as Popular Mobilization Forces in the fight against ISIS. Soleimani was in Baghdad to attend the funerals of the 25 murdered soldiers and also to pass on to the prime minister a Saudi request for dialogue to relieve tensions in the region. Even though the considerable U.S. military presence in Iraq is only possible through the good graces of the country’s government, Washington went ahead with its attack in spite of the fact that the Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi said “no.”

Iraq has a friendly relationship with Iran and the assassination of Soleimani on Iraqi soil has to be viewed by its government as a major compromise of its sovereignty. To justify the U.S. actions, Mark Esper, Secretary of Defense, went so far as to insist that “Iran is at war with the whole world,” a clear demonstration of just how ignorant the White House team actually is. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was similarly obtuse, parroting the possibly Israeli sourced claim that Soleimani was planning to kill more Americans, but he characteristically did not provide any credible evidence demonstrating either Iranian or Kata’ib involvement in recent developments.

But, inevitably, blood calls for more blood, and the counter-strike that killed the Iraqi soldiers produced the mass demonstrations against the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

Those demonstrations were also attributed to Iran by Washington, which claimed that a “red line” had been crossed, even though the people in the street were undoubtedly angry Iraqis.

Now that the U.S. has also killed Soleimani and Muhandis in the drone strike at Baghdad Airport, clearly accomplished without the approval of the Iraqi government, it is inevitable that the prime minister will ask American forces to leave even though Trump is threatening sanctions if that demand is actually made. The Iraqi parliament has already passed a resolution demanding that all foreign forces should leave the country. That will in turn make the situation for the remaining U.S. troops in neighboring Syria untenable. And it will also force other Arab states in the region to rethink their hosting of U.S. soldiers, sailors, Marines and airmen as it is now clear that Washington is prone to high-risk initiatives, having foolishly begun a *de facto* war that serves no one’s interests.

And there is no end in sight with Donald Trump now tweeting furiously that if the Iranian government seeks to retaliate for Soleimani the U.S. will strike 52 targets inside Iran, including cultural sites, a war crime. Congress will do nothing to stop the carnage because it is just as completely controlled by the Israel Lobby as is the White House.

The blood of the Americans, Iranians and Iraqis who will die in the next few weeks is clearly on Donald Trump’s hands as this war was never inevitable and serves no U.S. national interest. It will surely turn out to be a debacle, as well as devastating for all parties involved. And it might well, on top of Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Libya, be the long-awaited beginning of the end of America’s imperial ambitions. Trump has had three years to learn the lesson gleaned from Iraq and Afghanistan. He obviously used that time to learn nothing.

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