

Ynet-News-January-3-2020, Friday

01.03.20 – Fr -

IDF Kochavi & Bennett pushing for thousands of Gazans to work in Israel

01.03.20 – Fr -

Israel braces for Iranian retaliation after Soleimani assassination

01.03.20 – Fr -

Israeli officials refuse to hold Palestinian elections in the capital of Jerusalem

01.02.20 –Th - - - News Placed in Jan 2 spot - Thursday-

Heads of Israel, Greece, Cyprus sign gas line deal in Athens - Turkey claims waters

01.02.20 –Th -

High Court throws out petition on PM, allowing public to decide in March 2 elections

01.02.20 –Th -

Netanyahu in Athens for gas pipeline deal

01.02.20 –Th -

IDF special ops tactics go beyond front lines with classified combat technologies

01.03.20 – Fr -

Trump says Soleimani should have been killed 'years ago'

01.03.20 – Fr -

Iran vows 'harsh' response to U.S. killing of top general

01.03.20 – Fr - - - News Placed in Jan 3 spot - Friday-

US air-strike in Baghdad Iran kills Iraq elite general that planned US Embassy attack

01.02.20 –Th -

Iranian general says not afraid of conflict; Trump says They will pay a very BIG PRICE

01.03.20 – Fr - - - News Placed in Jan 4 spot - Saturday-

US Sending 3,000 More Troops to Mideast to Reinforce 14,000 since May

01.03.20

IDF Kochavi & Bennett pushing for thousands of Gazans to work in Israel

01.03.20

### IDF pushing for thousands of Gazans to work in Israel

Analysis: Bringing workers from the Hamas-run coastal enclave into Israeli territory will potentially force the terror group into a period of calm while giving in to opposition from the right and the Shin Bet could trigger another dangerous engagement

Yoav Zitun | Published: 01.03.20 , 18:37

Israel Defense Forces Chief of General Staff Aviv Kochavi made a dramatic announcement on Wednesday, in which he declared his support for the plan to offer Gaza's citizens certain relief in return for calm in southern Israel.

The plan, which Kochavi refers to as "government policy," would see thousands of Gaza citizens enter Israel for employment purposes, and is nothing less than a breakthrough since it deals with a subject that was considered taboo in Israel ever since the doors to Gaza were locked 13 years ago.

Bringing workers from Gaza into Israeli territory is a step which was publicly sanctioned by the IDF and will potentially be endorsed by new Defense Minister Naftali Bennett, who tends to adopt the classic "carrot and stick" method, which proved itself when it successfully prevented a third intifada four years ago.

According to this method, civil and economic relief will be given to the people of Gaza as long as calm persists, but if Hamas instigates an attack on Israeli soil for any reason, it will be the people of Gaza who will pay the price - which will be high, uncompromising and extremely severe.

Israel hopes that this will cause the people of Gaza to rein in Hamas with demands for calm, effectively forcing the group or any other instigators in the Strip to adhere to the people's wishes.

Quietly and effectively, Israel has increased the number of Gaza merchants and workers allowed to enter its territory.

As further proof for the progress being made in Gaza, Hamas officially announced on Thursday that it will dramatically decrease the number of protests in the Strip.

The plan is not without its hurdles though. The Shin Bet domestic security service is vehemently opposed to the idea of letting anymore Gazans into Israeli territory, fearing that some of those granted entry will work either operate on behalf of Hamas or turn into lone wolf terrorists, gathering intelligence or going on sporadic killing sprees while inside Israel.

The Shin Bet is also concerned Hamas will use this opportunity to make contact with terror groups located in the West Bank, groups that are thirsty for money and guidance from the Hamas leadership.

Furthermore, Israel's powerful right-wing political bloc fears that agreeing to let in more Palestinians from Gaza would result in public criticism that would hamper its chances of success in the March 2 elections.

Such fears could result in the next elected prime minister abolishing the idea, causing further deterioration in the relationship with Hamas, resulting in another unwanted engagement.

01.03.20

Israel braces for Iranian retaliation after Soleimani assassination

01.03.20

Israel braces for Iranian retaliation after Soleimani assassination

IDF heightens alertness along border regions, fearing possible retaliation by Iran-aligned groups Hamas and Hezbollah; Defense officials meet in Tel Aviv for 'situational assessment'

Associated Press| Published: 01.03.20 , 09:44

Israel's defense minister summoned the country's military and security chiefs to Tel Aviv on Friday in the wake of the U.S. airstrike that killed senior Iranian Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani.

As Iranian officials vowed revenge, the government of America's closest ally in the Middle East gave no immediate public response to the deaths of Soleimani and of Iraqi militia commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in Baghdad.

But Israel Army Radio said the military had gone on heightened alert, amid fears that Iran could strike through its regional allies such as Tehran-backed Lebanese movement Hezbollah to the north, or through Palestinian militant group Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza.

"They will wait for the right moment to exact revenge, perhaps by firing into Israeli territory through Shiite militias in Syria and perhaps even from Gaza," Ron Ben-Yishai, a commentator for Israeli news outlet Ynet, wrote on its website.

In Gaza, Hamas - which has long enjoyed financial and military support from Tehran - condemned Soleimani's killing and sent its "dearest condolences" to Iran.

With Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visiting Greece, Defence Minister Naftali Bennett called senior commanders together on Friday morning for a "situational assessment," ministry officials said.

Israeli military spokesman Avichay Adraee said on Twitter the Mount Hermon ski resort - which lies in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights close to the fortified frontier with Syria - had been closed "following an assessment of the situation."

He added: "There are no further instructions to the residents of the Golan Heights area and routine activities continue as normal."

Israel has long regarded Soleimani as a major threat. In August last year, the military said it had foiled a Quds Force attack, administered by Soleimani, involving multiple drones from Syria.

And Israel accused him of leading Quds Force efforts to establish a precision-guided missiles program for Hezbollah.

Israeli media commentators said that ministers in Netanyahu's right-wing coalition government had been asked not to comment publicly on Soleimani's killing.

"The goal is clear: not to unnecessarily complicate Israel and keep the message as unified as possible," said Dana Weiss, chief political analyst for Israel's Channel 12 news.

But Yair Lapid, an opposition lawmaker, congratulated U.S. President Donald Trump on Twitter for killing those responsible for "murderous terrorist acts from Damascus to Buenos Aires" and that Soleimani's "blood is forfeit."

Hamas said Soleimani "had a senior role in supporting Palestinian resistance in all fields". It extended "its dearest condolences to the Iranian leadership and the people of Iran at the martyrdom of Major General Qassem Soleimani."

01.03.20

Israeli officials refuse to hold Palestinian elections in the capital of Jerusalem

01.03.20

'No East Jerusalem, no Palestinian elections'

Perspectives: Israel's decision to ignore a request from Ramallah to let residents of the capital's eastern neighborhoods participate in the upcoming PA ballot is not new, says Nabil Sha'ath, and a Fatah spokesman warns of consequences for Jewish state if it restricts voting

The Media Line | Published: 01.03.20 , 09:24

Adding an extra twist to an already knotty situation, the government has decided to ignore the Palestinian Authority's request last month to allow the inclusion of East Jerusalem in the Palestinian legislative and presidential elections.

After high-level Israeli officials discussed the request over the past few days, the government agreed not to respond positively or negatively to the PA's appeal.

Nabil Sha'ath, an adviser on international relations to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, says that Israel's position isn't new. However, the PA managed to reverse this position in previous elections, for example in the 2006 legislative elections.

"They ignored our request before, and then they denied it, but eventually our request was accepted," Sha'ath says.

"Israel is bound to its claim before the world of being a democratic state. To that end, how would it justify its decision to prevent a few thousand Palestinians from partaking in their legitimate elections? The whole world will pressure Israel," Sha'ath says.

"We will intensify diplomatic efforts on European Union countries and other states to increase pressure on Israel, as happened in the previous three elections, including the 1996 elections," he says.

"The Palestinian leadership will continue to operate through the international community," says Osama Qwasme, a spokesperson for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' ruling Fatah faction.

According to Qwasme, Israel doesn't want the Palestinians to hold elections in East Jerusalem, especially after U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

However, the Palestinian elections won't be held without East Jerusalem, he says. Reaffirming Fatah's position that participation by Jerusalemite Palestinians is imperative, he says: "We can't hold the elections at the expense of Jerusalem, as if it were separate from the Palestinian system."

Qwasme also rejects questions about the sincerity of Fatah's stated intention to hold elections, saying that the Palestinian leadership in the West Bank has for years been holding municipal, university and other elections, "which indicates that democracy is an essential part of our national work."

Qwasme also says the Palestinian public is divided on a presidential decree to set the date of the elections. Some Palestinians demand that Abbas set a final date for the elections and then pressure Israel to approve, while others think it doesn't matter.

"Despite the division in the Palestinian street, the majority of Palestinians refuse to hold elections without Jerusalem in any case," he says.

Meanwhile, Shadi Othman, the European Union spokesperson in Jerusalem, denies reports that the EU intends to cut aid to the PA if elections aren't held.

"Once a presidential decree setting the time frame for elections is issued, the EU will stand ready to engage with relevant actors to support the electoral process," says Othman. "The EU calls on all Palestinian factions to seek common ground and to resolve pending issues as regards the organization of the elections," he says.

According to Othman, participative, representative and accountable democratic institutions are key for Palestinian state-building, which is essential for the two-state solution.

Alon Pinkas, an Israeli political adviser and former diplomat, says that Israel has always been ambivalent about the voting of East Jerusalem Palestinians, which showed that it essentially had no policy.

"On the one hand, Israel annexed East Jerusalem and vowed that the city would never be divided again, which means that East Jerusalem Palestinians should be eligible to apply for full Israeli citizenship. But they are not," Pinkas says.

"On the other hand, allowing the Palestinians in East Jerusalem to vote in the PA election will undermine the entire concept of a unified and united city."

Last month, PA Civil Affairs Minister Hussein Sheikh requested that Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem be allowed to participate in the upcoming Palestinians elections. This followed President Abbas' promise, made during his speech to the UN General Assembly on September 26, to finally hold long-overdue elections in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.

Ismail Haniyeh, head of the political bureau of the Islamist movement Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip, informed Palestinian Central Elections Commission Chairman Hanna Nasser on October 28 of Hamas' willingness to participate in the election. However, no presidential decree has yet been issued setting a date for the elections, due to the lack of an Israeli response.

Ali Jarbawi, a political science professor at Birzeit University and former higher education minister, says that holding elections in East Jerusalem is a matter that concerns Israel.

However, the interim government, which is itself preparing for an election on March 2 following two elections that produced indecisive results, will in the meantime neither accept nor reject the Palestinian proposal.

"Israel won't allow Palestinians to hold elections in East Jerusalem until after the Israeli elections, which need time," Jarbawi said.

At the same time, Jarbawi says, it is not possible to hold Palestinian elections without East Jerusalem.

Therefore, a Palestinian decision is needed to figure out how to hold the elections in Jerusalem as well: "If the Palestinians are interested in holding the elections, there is always a possibility for creative solutions."

01.02.20

Heads of Israel, Greece, Cyprus sign gas line deal in Athens - Turkey claims waters

01.02.20

Leaders of Israel, Greece and Cyprus sign gas pipeline deal

The EastMed pipeline, which will run from Israel's Leviathan field to Cyprus and the Greek mainland, is set to provide an alternative gas source for energy-hungry Europe; move set to aggravate Turkey that's also laying claim to gas resources in the area  
Associated Press, Published: 01.02.20, 19:56

The leaders of Israel, Greece and Cyprus on Thursday to signed a deal in Athens for an undersea pipeline that would carry gas from new offshore deposits in the southeastern Mediterranean to continental Europe.

The 1,900-kilometer (1,300-mile) EastMed pipeline is intended to provide an alternative gas source for energy-hungry Europe, which is largely dependent on supplies from Russia and the Caucasus region.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who attended the signing ceremony with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades, said the pipeline will offer Europe "better flexibility and independence in its energy sources."

The pipeline would run from Israel's Levantine Basin offshore gas reserves to Cyprus, the Greek island of Crete and the Greek mainland. An overland pipeline to northwestern Greece and another planned undersea pipeline would carry the gas to Italy.

The project could also accommodate future gas finds in waters off Cyprus and Greece, where exploration is under way.

The project, with a rough **budget of \$6 billion**, is expected to satisfy about 10% of the European Union's natural gas needs. But it is fraught with political and logistical complexities.

The **race to claim offshore energy deposits in the southern Mediterranean** has created new tensions between Greece and Cyprus, on one side, and **historic rival Turkey**.

Ankara has raised the stakes with recent moves to explore waters controlled by the two EU member countries. **Cyprus and Greece are particularly disturbed because Turkey sent warship-escorted drill ships into waters where Cyprus has exclusive economic rights.**

Cyprus' Anastasiades said the pipeline affirms that **Greece and Cyprus have sovereign rights** in waters assigned to them under international law.

"This cooperation that we have developed ... isn't directed against any third country," he said. "On the contrary, whichever country wishes is welcome to join, on the understanding of course that it adopts the basic principles of international law and fully respects the sovereign rights and the territorial integrity of independent states."

Alluding to Turkey's stance, Anastasiades said cooperation is the only approach in an unstable region instead of embarking on a course of "self-isolation."

Netanyahu said Israel is set to become a "powerhouse in terms of energy" with its offshore gas reserves. He added that **the three countries have established "an alliance of great importance"** that will bolster regional stability.

Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz has said the **EastMed pipeline would take up to seven years to build** and that its advantages include being less vulnerable to sabotage and not crossing many national borders to reach markets.

Cyprus is divided into a Greek Cypriot south, where the island nation's internationally recognized government is located, and a breakaway Turkish Cypriot north backed by Turkey. The split followed a 1974 Turkish invasion after an aborted coup aiming to bring Cyprus under Greek rule.

**Turkey doesn't recognize Cyprus as a state and claims much of Cyprus' exclusive economic zone as falling within its own continental shelf.**

**Turkey is also laying claim to large tracts under Greek control in the Aegean Sea and off Crete.** Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said no project can proceed without his country's consent following a maritime border agreement that Ankara **signed with the Libya's Tripoli-based government.**

**01.02.20**

**High Court throws out petition on PM, allowing public to decide in March 2 elections**

01.02.20

High Court throws out 'premature' petition on PM's ability to form government

The justices presiding over the hearing decide not to give their opinion on whether Netanyahu, indicted on 3 corruption charges, could stay in his role as Israel's premier if his Likud party wins the March 2 election

Ynet, Associated Press | Published: 01.02.20, 17:04

The High Court of Justice ruled Thursday it will not give its opinion on whether an indicted parliament member can form a new government, effectively giving way to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to establish a coalition if he emerges victorious after the March 2 elections.

Israeli law requires cabinet ministers and mayors to resign if indicted but does not specify so for a sitting prime minister. There are no restrictions on Netanyahu to run in the unprecedented third elections in less than a year, but good governance groups petitioned the court, claiming he could not be tasked with forming a new government.

Chief Justice Esther Hayut, Deputy Justice Hanan Melcer and Justice Uzi Vogelman, who presided over the hearing, threw out the petition, ruling it to be highly hypothetical. "At this time, it is theoretical and premature."

The court said that the election campaign period is a "realm of uncertainty" and that it remains to be seen who the president will select to form a government after the March 2 vote. The judges said that in light of the "most sensitive and complicated period the state of Israel is in at this time," it decided to "act with restraint and moderation" and dismiss the petition for the time being.

"The issue raised in the petition is fundamental and concerns the principle of the rule of law, the integrity of elected representatives and public confidence in government institutions. Thus, it touches on the core values on which our judicial system is based," said the ruling.

"However, according to the electoral system in Israel, the public votes for party lists and not for potential candidates to become prime minister."

The court emphasized the prime minister is eligible to run in the upcoming elections as the leader of the ruling Likud party since there are no laws that prohibit him from doing so, regardless of the concerns stated in the petition.

The hearing comes just a day after Netanyahu said he will seek immunity from the corruption charges against him, delaying the prospect of a trial until the elections when he hopes to have a parliamentary majority coalition that will shield him from prosecution.

01.02.20

Netanyahu in Athens for gas pipeline deal

01.02.20

### Netanyahu in Athens for gas pipeline deal

The accord allows Jerusalem to transport gas via the island nation to the Peloponnesian Peninsula, enabling the Jewish state to export some of its soon-to-be surplus energy to Europe as well as Jordan and Egypt

Ynet, The Media Line | Updated: 01.02.20 , 14:24

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz traveled to Greece on Thursday where he was expected to sign a pipeline agreement with both the Greek and Cypriot governments.

The accord allows Jerusalem to transport gas via the island nation to the Peloponnesian Peninsula, enabling the Jewish state to export some of its soon-to-be surplus energy to Europe.

The Leviathan field, Israel's largest offshore gas resource, successfully began test pumping on December 31.

Oded Eran, a senior researcher at the Institute for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University and a former ambassador to the European Union and Jordan, says the significance of the deal was primarily political, in the regional cooperation with Greece and Cyprus.

"Right now, it's only politically significant, which should not be underestimated," he says.

"It also has to be looked at from the economic point of view of how much [gas] there is to conveyed, and whether all the countries in the East Mediterranean will cooperate in such a pipeline: Lebanon, Israel, Egypt, and maybe sometime in the future the Palestinians.

"These are very important questions which have to be decided," he says.

Eran says that for the Leviathan field, Israel's largest offshore gas resource, that had successfully begun test pumping on December 31, to be economically feasible, Israel must export gas.

"The Israeli market itself is too small to allow financially for the further development of natural gas," he says.

Israel must weigh the cost of the pipeline against transporting liquefied natural gas to Egypt by ship and then on to Europe, he says.

As the latter framework already exists, it might be less expensive to transport gas that way rather than create new infrastructure, Eran says.

An agreement between the three nations does not ensure that the pipeline will definitely be built. Tensions in the region, particularly with Turkey, might prevent it.

"[President Recep Tayyip Erdogan] is trying to stop the flow of gas to Europe," says Prof. Shmuel Sandler, from Bar-Ilan University and the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies. The project also entails security risks.

"Hizbullah in Lebanon might attack the pipeline," Sandler says.

INSS's Eran says the agreement Netanyahu is to sign is of great importance for Europe, which wants a calm geopolitical climate in the Eastern Mediterranean and which is the prime destination for Israeli natural gas as the European Union tries to diversify its sources of the fuel.

Despite the benefits that Europe could reap from the pipeline, Eran argues that the agreement will have minimal effect on the fraught EU-Israel relationship.

01.02.20

IDF special ops tactics go beyond front lines with classified combat technologies

01.02.20

New IDF special ops unit to go deep in enemy territory

Multi-corps division comprises tanks, UAVs, classified combat technologies and highly trained infantry soldiers; set to go operational within a year, it will take major part in missions featuring ground maneuvering on front lines

Yoav Zitun | Published: 01.02.20, 11:02

The IDF on Wednesday began work on its new special ops unit designed to go deep into enemy territory. The unit will be equipped with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and be joined by teams from various other commando units.

The first commando teams, alongside Air Force pilots, were mobilized to the new unit, which is still in its preliminary stages and is supposed to become operational within a year.

The new unit will take a major part in IDF missions featuring ground maneuvering on the front line and will operate its own tanks. It will also operate deep within enemy territory, targeting valuable assets.

The unit will be equipped with classified combat technologies, some of which are still in development, alongside UAVs for a variety of missions, including marking targets. In addition, it will be based on highly trained infantry soldiers who will receive effective combat equipment that is adapted to the battlefield of the future.

An IDF official said that this new unit is the first of its kind in the Israeli army and around the world.

"The establishment and operation of the multidimensional unit will have implications on structure and organization of other IDF units and lessons from it will be passed on to other units," the official said. "The unit will operate with new abilities to track down, attack and destroy the enemy."

01.03.20

Trump says Soleimani should have been killed 'years ago'

01.03.20

Trump says Soleimani should have been killed 'years ago'

In first comments since strike against head of Iran's elite Quds Force, president says general also responsible for killing and wounding 'thousands' of Americans and many more in region; Pompeo defends strike as 'wholly lawful,' Soleimani posed 'imminent' threat

Associated Press| Published: 01.03.20 , 20:15

WASHINGTON -- U.S. President Donald Trump said Friday that he ordered the killing of Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani because he was "plotting to kill" many Americans and that he should have been killed "years ago."

In his first comments since the strike against the head of Iran's elite Quds Force early Friday, Trump said Soleimani was also responsible for killing and wounding "thousands" of Americans and many more in the region.

"He should have been taken out many years ago," Trump tweeted from his private club in Palm Beach, Florida, where he was vacationing.

The strike marked a major escalation in the conflict between Washington and Iran, as Iran vowed "harsh retaliation" for the killing of the senior military leader.

The two nations have faced repeated crises since Trump withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal and imposed crippling sanctions.

The United States urged its citizens to leave Iraq "immediately" as fears mounted that the strike and any retaliation by Iran could ignite a conflict that engulfs the region.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo defended the strike as "wholly lawful," saying that Soleimani posed an "imminent" threat against the U.S. and its interests in the region.

"There was an imminent attack," Pompeo told Fox News.

"The orchestrator, the primary motivator for the attack, was Qassem Soleimani."

The White House did not inform lawmakers before the strike. It was expected to give classified briefings to members of Congress and staff in the afternoon.

Defense Secretary Mark Esper notified House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of the strike shortly before the Pentagon confirmed it publicly.

Pompeo called world leaders Friday to explain and defend Trump's decision to order the airstrike that has sparked fears of an explosion of anti-American protests as well as more violence in the already unstable Middle East.

The State Department said Pompeo had spoken Friday with top officials in Afghanistan, Britain, China, France, Germany and Pakistan.

In his calls with the British and German foreign ministers as well as China's state councilor, Pompeo stressed that Trump acted to counter an imminent threat to U.S. lives in the region but also that the U.S. is committed to "de-escalation" of tensions, according to the department's summaries of the conversations.

De-escalation was not mentioned in the department's summary of his call with the French foreign minister, nor in his calls with Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani or the Pakistani military chief of staff.

In those calls Pompeo "underscored the Iranian regime's destabilizing actions through the region and the Trump Administration's resolve in protecting American interests, personnel, facilities and partners," the department said.

01.03.20

Iran vows 'harsh' response to U.S. killing of top general

01.03.20

Iran vows 'harsh' response to U.S. killing of top general

Khamenei declares three days of public mourning, names Esmail as new Quds force chief; Zarif brands killing an act of 'state terror'; U.S. urges its citizens to leave Iraq 'immediately', says Baghdad embassy closed, consular services suspended  
Associated Press | Published: 01.03.20, 13:13

Iran has vowed "harsh retaliation" Friday for an overnight U.S. airstrike near Baghdad's airport that killed Tehran's top general and the architect of its interventions across the Middle East, as tensions soared in the wake of the targeted killing.

The killing of Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran's elite Quds Force, marks a major escalation in the standoff between Washington and Iran, which has careened from one crisis to another since President Donald Trump withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal and imposed crippling sanctions.

The United States urged its U.S. citizens to leave Iraq "immediately." The State Department said the embassy in Baghdad, which was attacked by Iran-backed militiamen and other protesters earlier this week, is closed and all consular services have been suspended.

Around 5,200 American troops are based in Iraq, where they mainly train Iraqi forces and help to combat Islamic State militants.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei warned that a "harsh retaliation is waiting" for the U.S. after the airstrike, calling Soleimani the "international face of resistance."

Khamenei declared three days of public mourning for the general's death, and appointed Maj. Gen. Esmail Ghaani, Soleimani's deputy, to replace him as head of the elite Quds force.

The Iranian government has also declared three days of public mourning.

Iran also summoned the Swiss charges d'affaires, who represents U.S. interests in Tehran, to protest the killing.

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif called the strike "an act of state terrorism and violation of Iraq's sovereignty."

The killing, and any forceful retaliation by Iran, could ignite a conflict that engulfs the whole region, endangering U.S. troops in Iraq, Syria and beyond. Over the last two

decades, Soleimani had assembled a network of heavily armed allies stretching all the way to southern Lebanon, on Israel's doorstep.

However, the brazen killing may itself act as a deterrent, with fears of an all-out war leading Iran and its allies to delay or restrain any potential response.

Oil prices surged on news of the killing and markets were mixed.

The Defense Department said it killed Soleimani because he "was actively developing plans to attack American diplomats and service members in Iraq and throughout the region." It also accused Soleimani of approving the orchestrated violent protests at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad earlier this week.

The **airport strike** also killed Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy commander of Iran-backed militias in Iraq known as the Popular Mobilization Forces. A PMF official said the strike **killed a total of eight people**, including Soleimani's son-in-law, whom he did not identify. The killing promised to strain relations with Iraq's government, which is closely allied with both Washington and Tehran. Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi condemned the strike as an "aggression against Iraq" and a "blatant attack on the nation's dignity." He also called for an emergency session of parliament to take "necessary and appropriate measures to protect Iraq's dignity, security and sovereignty" on Saturday, when funerals will be held in Baghdad for al-Muhandis, the militia commander, and the other slain Iraqis.

Hassan Nasrallah, head of the Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon, called on "the resistance the world over" to avenge Soleimani's killing.

In the Gaza Strip, the ruling Hamas militant group offered its "sincerest condolences" to Iran, saying **Soleimani had "played a major and critical role in supporting Palestinian resistance at all levels."**

There was no immediate reaction from Israel, which views Iran as its greatest threat.

Authorities closed the Mount Hermon ski resort near the borders with Lebanon and Syria as a precaution but didn't announce any other security measures.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said he was cutting short a trip to Greece to return home and follow "ongoing developments."

The **Syrian government**, which has received key support from Iran throughout the civil war, also **condemned the strike, saying it could lead to a "dangerous escalation"** in the region.

**01.03.20**

**US air-strike in Baghdad Iran kills Iraqi elite general that planned US Embassy attack**

**01.03.20**

**U.S. kills Iran's most powerful general in Baghdad airstrike**

**Defense Department says Qassem Soleimani killed because he 'was actively developing plans to attack American diplomats, service members in Iraq and region,' accuses him of approving recent attacks on American embassy in Baghdad**

Associated Press| Published: 01.03.20 , 07:50

The United States killed Iran's top general and the architect of Tehran's proxy wars in the Middle East in an airstrike at Baghdad's international airport early on Friday, an attack that threatens to dramatically ratchet up tensions in the region.

The targeted killing of Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran's elite Quds Force, could draw forceful Iranian retaliation against American interests in the region and spiral into a far larger conflict between the U.S. and Iran, endangering U.S. troops in Iraq, Syria and beyond.

The Defense Department said it killed Soleimani because he "was actively developing plans to attack American diplomats and service members in Iraq and throughout the region." It also accused Soleimani of approving the attacks on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad earlier this week.

An adviser to Iran's President Hassan Rouhani quickly warned President Donald Trump of retaliation from Tehran.

"Trump through his gamble has dragged the U.S. into the most dangerous situation in the region," Hessameddin Ashena wrote on the social media app Telegram. "Whoever put his foot beyond the red line should be ready to face its consequences."

Iranian state television later in a commentary called Trump's order to kill Soleimani "the biggest miscalculation by the U.S." in the years since World War II. "The people of the region will no longer allow Americans to stay," the TV said.

The airport strike also killed Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy commander of Iran-backed militias in Iraq known as the Popular Mobilization Forces, and five others, including the PMF's airport protocol officer, Mohammed Reda, Iraqi officials said.

Trump was vacationing on his estate in Palm Beach, Florida, but sent out a tweet of an American flag.

The dramatic attack comes at the start of a year in which Trump faces both a Senate trial following his impeachment by the U.S. House and a re-election campaign. It marks a potential turning point in the Middle East and represents a drastic change for American policy toward Iran after months of tensions.

Tehran shot down a U.S. military surveillance drone and seized oil tankers. The U.S. also blames Iran for a series of attacks targeting tankers, as well as a September assault on Saudi Arabia's oil industry that temporarily halved its production.

The tensions take root in Trump's decision in May 2018 to withdraw the U.S. from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers, struck under his predecessor, Barack Obama.

The 62-year-old Soleimani was the target of Friday's U.S. attack, which was conducted by an armed American drone, according to a U.S. official. His vehicle was struck on an access road near the Baghdad airport.

A senior Iraqi security official said the airstrike took place near the cargo area after Soleimani left his plane and joined al-Muhandis and others in a car. The official said the plane had arrived from either Lebanon or Syria.

Two officials from the PMF said **Suleimani's body was torn to pieces in the attack**, while they did not find the body of al-Muhandis. A senior politician said **Soleimani's body was identified by the ring he wore.**

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to give official statements.

It is unclear what legal authority the U.S. relied on to carry out the attack. American presidents claim broad authority to act without the approval of the Congress when U.S. personnel or interests are facing an imminent threat. The Pentagon did not provide evidence to back up its assertion that Soleimani was planning new attacks against Americans.

Democratic Connecticut Sen. Richard Blumenthal said Trump owes a full explanation to Congress and the American people. "The present authorizations for use of military force in no way cover starting a possible new war. **This step could bring the most consequential military confrontation in decades,**" Blumenthal said.

But Trump's allies were quick to praise the action. "To the Iranian government: if you want more, you will get more," tweeted South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham.

For Iran, the killing represents more than just the loss of a battlefield commander, but also a cultural icon who represented national pride and resilience while facing U.S. sanctions. While careful to avoid involving himself in politics, Soleimani's profile rose sharply as **U.S. and Israeli officials blamed him for Iranian proxy attacks abroad.** While Iran's conventional military has suffered under 40 years of American sanctions, the Guard has built up a ballistic missile program. It also can strike asymmetrically in the region through forces like Lebanon's Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthi rebels. The U.S. long has blamed Iran for car bombings and kidnappings it never claimed.

As the head of the Quds, or Jerusalem, Force of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, **Soleimani led all of its expeditionary forces** and **frequently shuttled between Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria.** Quds Force members have deployed into Syria's long war to support President Bashar Assad, as well as into Iraq in the wake of the 2003 U.S. invasion that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein, a longtime foe of Tehran.

Soleimani rose to prominence by advising forces fighting the Islamic State group in Iraq and in Syria on behalf of the embattled Assad.

**U.S. officials say the Guard under Soleimani taught Iraqi militants how to manufacture and use especially deadly roadside bombs against U.S. troops** after the invasion of Iraq. Iran has denied that. Soleimani himself remains popular among many Iranians, who see him as a selfless hero fighting Iran's enemies abroad.

Soleimani had been rumored dead several times, including in a 2006 airplane crash that killed other military officials in northwestern Iran and following a 2012 bombing in Damascus that killed top aides of Assad. Rumors circulated in November 2015 that Soleimani was killed or seriously wounded leading forces loyal to Assad as they fought around Syria's Aleppo.

Soleimani's **killing follows the New Year's Eve attack by Iran-backed militias on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.** The two-day embassy attack, which ended Wednesday, prompted Trump to order about 750 U.S. soldiers deployed to the Middle East.

It also prompted Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to postpone his trip to Ukraine and four other countries "to continue monitoring the ongoing situation in Iraq and ensure the

safety and security of Americans in the Middle East," State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said Wednesday.

The breach at the embassy followed U.S. airstrikes Sunday that killed 25 fighters of the Iran-backed militia in Iraq, the Kataeb Hezbollah. The U.S. military said the strikes were in retaliation for last week's killing of an American contractor in a rocket attack on an Iraqi military base that the U.S. blamed on the militia.

U.S. officials have suggested they were prepared to engage in further retaliatory attacks in Iraq.

01.02.20

Iranian general says not afraid of conflict; Trump says They will pay a very BIG PRICE

01.02.20

Iranian general says Iran not heading to war but not afraid of conflict

Revolutionary Guards commander delivers message to U.S. after Trump accuses Iran of orchestrating demonstrations at American embassy in Iraq; Islamic Republic protests 'warmongering statements' by U.S. officials

Reuters| Published: 01.02.20 , 14:14

A top Iranian commander said on Thursday that Iran was not moving towards war but was not afraid of any conflict, the semi-official Tasnim news agency reported after U.S. President Donald Trump said Tehran was behind anti-U.S. protests in Iraq.

Trump accused Iran of orchestrating demonstrations at the U.S. embassy in Iraq on Tuesday and said Tehran would be held responsible. Iran has rejected the accusation.

"We are not leading the country to war, but we are not afraid of any war and we tell America to speak correctly with the Iranian nation. We have the power to break them several times over and are not worried," Revolutionary Guards Commander Brigadier General Hossein Salami was quoted by Tasnim as saying.

Trump had said in a tweet on Tuesday that Iran would be "held fully responsible for lives lost, or damage incurred, at any of our facilities. They will pay a very BIG PRICE! This is not a Warning, it is a Threat." He later said he did not want or foresee a war with Iran. Iran's Army chief Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi said on Thursday his forces were ready to confront the "enemy".

"Our armed forces ... monitor all moves, and if anyone makes the slightest mistake, they will decisively react, and if the situation heats up, we will show our abilities to the enemy," Mousavi was quoted as saying by state broadcaster IRIB.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Wednesday condemned U.S. attacks on Iranian-allied militias in Iraq, blaming the United States for violence in Iran's neighbor.

01.03.20

## US Sending 3,000 More Troops to Mideast to Reinforce 14,000 since May

01.03.20

### US Sending 3,000 More Troops to Mideast as Reinforcements

Friday, 03 January 2020 01:13 PM

The United States is sending nearly 3,000 more Army troops to the Mideast as reinforcements in the volatile aftermath of the killing of an Iranian general in a strike ordered by President Donald Trump, defense officials said Friday.

The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a decision not yet announced by the Pentagon, said the troops are from the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. They are in addition to about 700 soldiers from the 82nd Airborne who deployed to Kuwait earlier this week after the storming of the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad by Iran-backed militiamen and their supporters.

The dispatching of extra troops reflects concern about potential Iranian retaliatory action for the killing Thursday of Gen. Qassem Soleimani, commander of Iran's Quds Force. But it also runs counter to Trump's repeated push to extract the United States from Mideast conflicts. Prior to this week's troop deployments, the administration had sent 14,000 additional troops to the Mideast since May, when it first publicly claimed Iran was planning attacks on U.S. interests.

The reinforcements took shape as Trump gave his first comments on the strike, declaring that he ordered the killing of Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani because he had killed and wounded many Americans over the years and was plotting to kill many more. "He should have been taken out many years ago," he added.

The strike marked a major escalation in the conflict between Washington and Iran, as Iran vowed "harsh retaliation" for the killing of the senior military leader. The two nations have faced repeated crises since Trump withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal and imposed crippling sanctions.

The United States urged its citizens to leave Iraq "immediately" as fears mounted that the strike and any retaliation by Iran could ignite a conflict that engulfs the region.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo defended the strike as "wholly lawful," saying that Soleimani posed an "imminent" threat against the U.S. and its interests in the region.

"There was an imminent attack," Pompeo told Fox News. "The orchestrator, the primary motivator for the attack, was Qassem Soleimani."

The White House did not inform lawmakers before the strike. It was expected to give classified briefings to members of Congress and staff in the afternoon. Defense Secretary

Mark Esper notified House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of the strike shortly before the Pentagon confirmed it publicly.

Pompeo called world leaders Friday to explain and defend Trump's decision to order the airstrike that has sparked fears of an explosion of anti-American protests as well as more violence in the already unstable Middle East.

The State Department said Pompeo had spoken Friday with top officials in Afghanistan, Britain, China, France, Germany and Pakistan.

In his calls with the British and German foreign ministers as well as China's state councilor, Pompeo stressed that Trump acted to counter an imminent threat to U.S. lives in the region but also that the U.S. is committed to "de-escalation" of tensions, according to the department's summaries of the conversations.

De-escalation was not mentioned in the department's summary of his call with the French foreign minister, nor in his calls with Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani or the Pakistani military chief of staff. In those calls Pompeo "underscored the Iranian regime's destabilizing actions through the region and the Trump Administration's resolve in protecting American interests, personnel, facilities and partners," the department said.

Trump opted not to play a round of golf on Friday, and he was not expected to be seen publicly until he travels to Miami for an afternoon event for his reelection campaign.

© Copyright 2020 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.