

Ynet-News-Jan 8, 2020-01-08 - Wednesday

01.08.20 –We - - - News Placed in Jan 8 spot - Wednesday–  
Geneva occupation law invalid to West Bank, as Israel is not foreign to their homeland

01.08.20 –We -  
Netanyahu & Katz support the US in its confrontation against Iranian terror.

01.08.20 –We –  
Northern Haifa & Nahariya besieged by floods after violent cloudburst, 2 inch in 2 hours

01.07.20 – Tu -  
Eastern Mediterranean Sand storm triggering high air pollution warning  
on Tuesday

01.07.20 – Tu -  
Steinitz: Too early to say if Iran on path towards nuclear weapon

01.07.20 – Tu -  
Iran Guard leader Salami threatens to 'set ablaze' U.S.-backed places

01.06.20 – Mo - - - News Placed in Jan 6 spot - Monday–  
Despite political stalemate, MKs give themselves pay rise

01.06.20 – Mo -  
IDF says Israel watching from the sidelines 'not the story' in Soleimani killing

01.05.20 – Su - - - News Placed in Jan 5 spot - Sunday–  
Jordanians protest government committing treason from import of Israel gas

01.05.20 – Su -  
Netanyahu praises Trump worthy of all appreciation for U.S. strike on Soleimani

01.08.20 –We – Combined Below  
Ukrainian airliner crashes after take-off in Iran, killing all 176 aboard

01.06.20 – Mo -  
Senate Minority Leaders complain that targeted attack notification was insufficient  
Senate Minority complains - - - News Placed in Jan 6 spot - Monday–

12.30.19 – Mo -  
Putin weighs future options as he marks 20 years in power

01.08.20 –We – Combined Below

Iran's supreme leader: missile attack on US forces, legitimate self-defense.

01.08.20 –We -

Trump says no U.S. casualties, Iran appears to be standing down

01.08.20 –We - Combined

Ukrainian airliner crashes after take-off in Iran, killing all 176 aboard

01.08.20 –We - Combined

Iran's supreme leader: missile attack on US forces, legitimate self-defense.

Combined = - - - News Placed in Jan 7 spot - Tuesday-

Iran's missile attack on US forces shoot Iranian airliner in Iran

01.08.20

Geneva occupation law invalid to West Bank, as Israel is not foreign to their homeland

01.08.20

Pompeo says U.S. support for Israeli settlements advances peace with Palestinians

Speaking by video link at a Jerusalem policy forum, Pompeo said the administration returned to a 'balanced and sober' approach to Middle East peace by changing its position on Israel's presence in the West Bank

Reuters| Published: 01.08.20 , 15:20

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Wednesday that Washington's backing for Israel's settlements in the occupied West Bank will advance Israeli-Palestinian peace, angering Palestinian leaders who seek the territory for a state.

In a reversal of four decades of U.S. policy, Pompeo in November announced that the United States no longer viewed Israel's settlements on West Bank land it captured in the 1967 Middle East war as "inconsistent with international law".

Palestinians and the international community view the transfer of any country's civilians to occupied land as illegal under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and U.N.

Security Council resolutions. Many countries condemned the announcement.

But the move delighted Israel and provides important U.S. support amid a potential International Criminal Court (ICC) inquiry into alleged war crimes in Palestinian areas, including the West Bank.

Speaking by video link at a Jerusalem policy forum dubbed "The Pompeo Doctrine", Pompeo, in a pre-recorded statement, said the administration of U.S. President Donald

Trump returned to a "balanced and sober" approach to Middle East peace by changing its position.

"It's important that we speak the truth when the facts lead us to it. And we are recognizing that these settlements don't inherently violate international law," Pompeo said.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that the Trump administration's backing was a "proper answer to the decision by the ICC in the Hague to investigate Israel's actions in Judea and Samaria", referring to the West Bank.

Last month, the ICC's chief prosecutor said she would launch a full investigation in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip as soon as the Hague-based body's jurisdiction had been established.

The prosecutor's announcement opened the possibility of charges being filed against Israelis and Palestinians.

"The 'Pompeo doctrine' regarding the status of the settlements simply states that we are not foreigners in our homeland," Netanyahu told the conference, hosted by the Kohelet Policy Forum, a Jerusalem think-tank.

The conference sought to build upon the new U.S. stance by laying out legal arguments in defense of Israel's settlements and debating critics' defenses.

Around 430,000 settlers live amongst some 3 million Palestinians in the West Bank, where the Palestinians seek to set up a state along with the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem.

"Israeli colonial settlements are illegal under international law ... ignoring facts (doesn't) mean they don't exist," chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said.

Erekat added that U.S. policy was pushing "the region further towards bloodshed and violence".

01.08.20

Netanyahu & Katz support the US in its confrontation against Iranian terror.

01.08.20

Netanyahu: We stand by the United States

PM warns Iran of a 'resounding blow' if the Islamic Republic were to target Israel in any way; the prime minister congratulated Trump for the U.S. assassination of Qassem Soleimani

Ynet| Updated: 01.08.20 , 14:18

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reaffirmed Israel's commitment to stand with the U.S. following the Iranian missile attack on American bases in Iraq.

"We stand in determination and strength", said Netanyahu during a ceremony on Wednesday at The Begin Heritage Center in Jerusalem. "He who shall strike at us will face a strong blow."

Qassem Soleimani was killed in a U.S. airstrike on his convoy near the Baghdad airport Friday.

On Wednesday Iran launched missile attacks on two bases hosting U.S. forces in Iraq.

The prime minister said U.S. President Donald Trump is to be congratulated for the attack that killed Iranian Soleimani Friday calling the Revolutionary Guard Corps commander a terrorist with the blood of many on his hands and the architect of Iran's policy of terror in the Middle East.

Netanyahu said Iran's attempts to achieve a stranglehold on Israel is because it understands that Israel is the strongest force for the West to counter the Islamic Republics' aggressive intents and any attempt to harm Israel " will suffer the most resounding blow ."

Netanyahu also repeated that the United States has no greater friend than Israel and Israel no greater friend than the United States.

Foreign Minister Israel Katz said Israel stands by the United States in its confrontation against Iranian terror.

01.08.20

Northern Haifa & Nahariya besieged by floods after violent cloudburst, 2 inch in 2 hours

01.08.20

Nahariya besieged by floods after violent cloudburst

Local government instructs residents to stay home as heavy floods hit northern city; rescue teams find body of missing man after vehicle overturns

Ahiya Raved| Published: 01.08.20 , 14:10

The Nahariya Municipality has instructed its residents on Wednesday to not leave their homes after major floods broke out across the northern city due to unusually high amounts of rainfall.

Rescue crews rescued three people who became trapped after their vehicle overturned by floodwater. A fourth passenger, a 32-year-old man who was also in the vehicle, was reported to be missing and his body was recovered after several hours.

Firefighters also safely rescued 15 children and several staff members from a pre-school that was flooded in the Sprinzak neighborhood.

The railroad in the Haifa Center HaShmona railway station area was flooded after a 50-millimeter (2 inches) cloudburst hit Haifa in less than two hours Wednesday morning.

Police, in cooperation with local authorities, have closed several roads and sites in the Haifa metropolitan area and rescued several civilians whose vehicles were stuck in the flood.

The Fire Service said that in the event of flooding, people should avoid subterranean parking lots and refrain from using elevators below ground level.

Last weekend, 25-year-old couple Dean Shoshani and Stav Harari drowned when after becoming trapped in an elevator in their Tel Aviv building's underground parking lot, as it filled with floodwater.

The Sea of Galilee's water level rose by a centimeter (0.5 inches) overnight, measuring 211.33 meters below sea level, The Government Water and Sewage Authority reported on Wednesday.

The waterline has risen by a total of 57 cm (22.5 inches) since the beginning of Israel's rainy season.

The Sea of Galilee is still 2.53 meters (8'3 feet) short of reaching its full capacity.

**Snow** began to fall on the northern **Golan Heights** Wednesday morning leading to schools in the region closing down.

Mount Hermon Ski Resort reported that ten centimeters (3.9 inches) of snow had piled up on the mountain's lower levels overnight.

Rescue services advise people to avoid open spaces and stay away from antennas and trees in the event of a lightning storm.

Fire and Rescue Service Commissioner Dedi Simchi has instructed all districts to prepare for various scenarios, with a focus on a quick response.

He ordered operational reinforcements at fire stations throughout the country and placed volunteer units on full alert.

The Electric Corp. also announced it is on high alert and has halted disconnections for people who have not paid their bills.

**01.07.20**

**Eastern Mediterranean Sand storm triggering high air pollution warning on Tuesday**

**01.07.20**

**Sand storm triggering high air pollution, government warns**

Anyone sensitive, including those with heart and lung problems, the elderly, children and pregnant women, told to refrain from physical activity outside; poor conditions set to improve with heavy rain system expected overnight Tuesday

Ynet| Published: **01.07.20**, 19:11

The Ministry of Environmental Protection issued a warning on Tuesday regarding high air pollution due to a sand storm coming from the eastern Mediterranean.

The air quality was set to improve Tuesday night, with a new rain system entering the region.

The ministry, after consultations with the Health Ministry, advised anyone sensitive – mainly those with heart and lung problems, the elderly, children and pregnant women - to refrain from any physical activity outside.

Wednesday was expected to see heavy rain showers, hail, thunderstorms and snow in the Golan Heights and Mount Hermon, home to Israel's sole ski resort.

The rain system was set to reach Israel's shores on overnight Tuesday and was to continue at least until Friday noon.

Temperatures were expected to be lower than usual for the season and there were concerns of flooding in low-level cities and rivers.

Thursday would continue to be cold and rainy.

On Friday, a reduction in rainfall was expected, with Saturday being relatively clear.

01.07.20

Steinitz: Too early to say if Iran on path towards nuclear weapon

01.07.20

Steinitz: Too early to say if Iran on path towards nuclear weapon

The energy minister tells Army Radio 'we have to wait and see' what happens after the Islamic Republic announced it is to abandon limitations on enriching uranium following the killing of Qassem Soleimani by U.S.

Reuters| Published: 01.07.20 , 09:25

The energy minister said on Tuesday it is too early to determine whether Iran is on the path towards building a nuclear weapon after it announced it would abandon limitations on enriching uranium.

"It's too early to say," the minister, Yuval Steinitz, told Israel Radio when asked if Iran was on the way towards constructing an atomic bomb. "We have to wait and see."

On Sunday, two days after a U.S. drone strike in Baghdad killed a top Iranian military commander, Tehran said it would abandon limitations on enriching uranium.

Iran has already breached many of the restrictions of the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, from which the United States withdrew in 2018.

But Iran also has said it would continue to cooperate with the U.N. nuclear watchdog and could quickly reverse its steps if U.S. sanctions are removed.

Steinitz, a member of the security cabinet, reiterated Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's pledge that Israel would never allow arch-enemy Iran to have nuclear weapons.

But he appeared to try to distance Israel - whose military, according to Army Radio, went on alert after Friday's U.S. strike in Iraq - from the current heightened tensions between the United States and Iran.

01.07.20

Iran Guard leader Salami threatens to 'set ablaze' U.S.-backed places

01.07.20

Iran Guard leader threatens to 'set ablaze' U.S.-backed places

Hossein Salami makes the pledge in front of a crowd of thousands chanting 'Death to Israel!' in Kerman, the hometown of Qassem Soleimani, where the slain general's third funeral was to take place

Associated Press | Published: 01.07.20 , 09:04

The leader of Iran's Revolutionary Guard threatened on Tuesday to "set ablaze" places supported by the United States over the killing of a top Iranian general in a U.S. airstrike last week, sparking cries from the crowd of "Death to Israel!"

Hossein Salami made the pledge before a crowd of thousands gathered in a central square in Kerman, the hometown of the slain Gen. Qassem Soleimani. His vow mirrored the demands of top Iranian officials - from Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to others - as well as mourners across the Islamic Republic, demanding retaliation against America for a slaying that's drastically raised tensions across the Middle East.

Mourners in Kerman dressed in black carried posters bearing the image of Soleimani, a man who Monday drew Iran's supreme leader to weep over his casket as a crowd said by police to be in the millions filled Tehran. Although there was no independent estimate, aerial footage suggested a turnout of at least 1 million, and the throngs were visible on satellite images of Tehran taken Monday.

Authorities later brought his remains and those of the others to Iran's holy city of Qom, turning out another massive crowd.

The outpouring of grief was an unprecedented honor for a man viewed by Iranians as a national hero for his work leading the Guard's expeditionary Quds Force. The U.S. blames him for the killing of American troops in Iraq and accused him of plotting new attacks just before his death Friday in a drone strike at Baghdad's airport. Soleimani also

led forces in Syria backing President Bashar Assad in a long war, as well as served as the point man for Iranian proxies in countries like Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen.

His slaying already has pushed Tehran to abandon the remaining limits of its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers as his successor and others vow to take revenge. In Baghdad, the parliament has called for the expulsion of all American troops from Iraqi soil, something analysts fear could allow Islamic State militants to mount a comeback. Officials brought Soleimani's remains and others killed in the airstrike to a central square in the city of Kerman, a desert city surrounded by mountains that dates back to the days of the Silk Road. He'll be buried in his hometown later Tuesday.

Salami praised Soleimani's exploits and said as a martyr, he represented an even greater threat to Iran's enemies.

"We will take revenge. We will ablaze where they like," Salami said, drawing the cries of "Death to Israel!"

01.06.20

Despite political stalemate, MKs give themselves pay rise

01.06.20

Despite political stalemate, MKs give themselves pay rise

Hike sees lawmakers' monthly salary rise to NIS 45,251, ministers' pay increases to NIS 50,623 - fourfold national average of NIS 11,000

Zvi Zrahiya, Calcalist | Published: 01.06.20, 18:54

Knesset members voted to raise their monthly salary by 2.8% starting January, despite more than a year of parliamentary inaction due to the political turmoil engulfing Israel.

A lawmaker's monthly pay was increased by NIS 1,232 (\$354) per month to NIS 45,251 (\$12,992), while ministers see their wages increased to NIS 50,623 (\$14,535) per month. The average national salary is approximately NIS 11,000, roughly one quarter of what lawmakers earn.

President Reuven Rivlin will also see an increase in his salary, receiving NIS 64,616 (\$18,552) a month, while Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu - who is currently seeking permission to solicit donations for his legal expenses - will see his monthly income grow to NIS 56,295 (\$16,163).

Only 15 MKs asked to be excluded from the pay rise, including Yisrael Beytenu Leader Avigdor Liberman, Likud lawmaker Ofir Katz and Labor leader Amir Peretz.

Just five MKs from Blue & White declined the increase, despite the party's previous announcement that all of its lawmakers would refuse to receive the pay rise.

All 120 members of Knesset went on hiatus in December 2018 due to the April 2019 elections. Parliament was active for a mere total of two and a half months in 2019, due to



Israel's major parties inability to form a government, the two national elections and the upcoming third ballot in March.

The 23rd Knesset is supposed to be inaugurated on March 16, two weeks after the elections. Members of Knesset go on recess for Passover soon after, returning in mid-May - all while receiving their monthly salary.

If a government is indeed formed after the March 2 elections, Knesset will be resuming work after a year and a half of inactivity during which MKs also received their monthly salary.

01.06.20

IDF says Israel watching from the sidelines 'not the story' in Soleimani killing

01.06.20

IDF says Israel 'not the story' in Soleimani killing

Israeli army distances itself from the assassination of top Iranian commander in a first official comment since the U.S. raid on Friday; adds no attempts by Iran-backed, Gaza-based Islamic Jihad to avenge the death have been identified

Nina Fuchs | Published: 01.06.20 , 14:58

The Israeli military on Monday distanced itself from the killing of the top Iranian general by the U.S., saying it is monitoring the events.

Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran's elite Quds Force and mastermind of its regional security strategy, was killed in an airstrike early Friday near the Iraqi capital's international airport that has caused regional tensions to soar.

"We're watching from the sidelines," GOC Southern Command Maj. Gen. Herzi Halevi said at the Ynet conference in Jerusalem. "We need to look at assassinations such as this as part of a battle between Iran and the U.S. over Iraq's character," he added.

Halevi said the assassination will most likely have an impact on Israel but added that Israelis "are not the story here."

"It's good that it happened so far away."

The IDF official also said the military has so far not identified any attempts by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, a recipient of Iranian military and financial support, to carry out attacks against Israel in response for the killing.

"We hit Islamic Jihad with a significant blow," he said, referring to November's cross-border flare-up in Gaza after Israel assassinated a top Islamic Jihad commander Baha Abu Al Ata.

Halevi added that overall, the situation in Gaza is “unstable” but the conditions for a potential long-term ceasefire arrangement with Hamas have improved.

01.05.20

Jordanians protest government committing treason from import of Israel gas

01.05.20

Jordanians come out in droves to protest gas import from Israel

Protesters in the Jordanian capital chant 'no to normalization' after Israel announces the country's newly opened Leviathan field is now supplying gas to the Hashemite Kingdom Daniel Salami, Itamar Eichner | Published: 01.05.20, 11:19

Hundreds of locals in the Jordanian capital of Amman protested over the weekend a government agreement to import natural gas from Israel, labeling the deal as "normalization" with the Jewish state.

Protesters carried signs calling the gas deal "an occupation of the Jordanian people" and chanted "no to normalization," as well as "the Jordanian people are not for sale." The demonstrations took place a week after Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz announced that Israel's newly opened Leviathan field is now supplying gas to Jordan.

One protester strongly condemned the Jordanian government for signing the deal and even accused the administration of committing treason.

"The Jordanian government has betrayed the Jordanian people, who oppose this deal," said the protester. "This government stands against the Jordanian people and we must stop this deal, even if the transfer of gas had already begun."

"And thus Israel has become an energy exporter for the first time in its history," Steinitz told Ynet. "It is happening right now at this moment and I am announcing it here for the first time that Israel is becoming a gas exporter to Jordan. We will also start exporting gas to Egypt within a week to 10 days," Steinitz said. Despite the outrage, however, Israel's Tamar natural gas reservoir has been exporting gas to private Jordanian companies, Jordan Bromine and Arab Potash, for the past two years.

Additionally, the leaders of Israel, Greece and Cyprus last week 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 underway.

All three countries committed to protecting the pipeline and work in coordination to ensure the proper transfer of gas to Europe.

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 drillships into waters where Cyprus has exclusive economic rights.

First published: 11:19 , 01.05.20

01.05.20

Netanyahu praises Trump worthy of all appreciation for U.S. strike on Soleimani

01.05.20

Netanyahu praises Trump for U.S. strike on Soleimani

PM says the move to eliminate Iran's hardline general is 'worthy of all appreciation,' adding the head of Quds Force 'planned and carried out many terror attacks' in the Mideast and beyond

Associated Press, Ynet| Published: 01.05.20 , 12:57

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says President Donald Trump is "worthy of all appreciation" for ordering the killing of Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani.

Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran's elite Quds Force and mastermind of its regional security strategy, was killed in an airstrike early Friday near the Iraqi capital's international airport that has caused regional tensions to soar.

Netanyahu told his cabinet Sunday that Soleimani "initiated, planned and carried out many terror attacks" in the Middle East and beyond. Israel has long accused Soleimani of being the **mastermind of Iran's belligerency in the region.**

"Qassem Soleimani brought about the death of many American citizens and many other innocents in recent decades and at present," Netanyahu said. "President Trump is deserving of all esteem for taking determined, strong and quick action."

Netanyahu said **Israel "fully stands" alongside the United States** in its current campaign against Iran.

Netanyahu has been among the strongest voices against Iran's Islamic rulers in recent years. The Israeli leader pushed hard against the nuclear deal Western powers signed with Tehran in 2015 and which Trump later reversed

01.08.20

Ukrainian airliner crashes after take-off in Iran, killing all 176 aboard

01.08.20

Ukrainian airliner crashes after take-off in Iran, killing all 176 aboard

Iranian state media claims fatal incident caused by technical difficulties; airliner pilot did not declare emergency before crash

Reuters| Published: 01.08.20 , 09:32

A Ukrainian airliner crashed soon after taking off from Tehran's Imam Khomeini airport on Wednesday, killing all 176 people aboard, Iran's state television and Ukraine's leaders said.

The Boeing 737 belonging to Ukraine International Airlines (UIA) crashed near the airport and burst into flames. Iranian TV said the crash was due to technical problems but did not elaborate.

Iranian state media later reported the Ukrainian jet did not declare an emergency, quoting Iran Civil Aviation Organization official Hassan Rezaeifar - the general director of the body's panel to investigate aircraft accidents.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said there were no survivors.

"My sincere condolences to the relatives and friends of all passengers and crew," Zelenskiy said in a statement, adding that Ukraine was seeking to establish the circumstances of the crash and the death toll.

Iranian state TV and Ukraine's prime minister said 167 passengers and 9 crew were on board. Iranian TV said 32 of those on board were foreigners.

Iranian media quoted an Iranian aviation official as saying the pilot of the airliner did not declare an emergency.

There was no official word from Ukraine International Airlines.

"The fire is so heavy that we cannot (do) any rescue... we have 22 ambulances, four bus ambulances and a helicopter at the site," Pirhossein Koulivand, head of Iran's emergency services, told Iranian state television.

Television footage showed debris and smoldering engine parts were strewn across a field, and rescue workers with face masks retrieving bodies of the victims.

According to air tracking service FlightRadar24, the plane that crashed was Flight PS 752 and was flying to Kyiv. The plane was three years old and was a Boeing 737-NG, it said.

A spokesman for Boeing said the company was aware of media reports of a plane crash in Iran and was gathering more information. The plane manufacturer grounded its 737 MAX fleet in March after two crashes that killed 346 people.

It was the first fatal crash for the Kyiv-based UIA.

Founded in 1992 after the collapse of the Soviet Union, planes operated by loss-making privately-held UIA, which is based out of Kyiv's Boryspil airport, had suffered technical problems in flight over the years but had never crashed before.

UIA says on its website it had been awarded the IOSA - the IATA Operational Safety Audit certificate - meaning its operational and safety standards were fully in line with international requirements.

The airline, which operates domestic and international flights, has a fleet of 42 planes made up, according to its own website, of various Boeings, including 737-800s and 737-900s. It also operates Embraer aircraft.

Financial problems forced it to scale back its route network last year.

01.06.20

Senate Minority Leaders complain that targeted attack notification was insufficient

01.06.20

Congress demands answers from Trump about Soleimani killing

Lawmakers appeal to Trump to declassify 'insufficient and inappropriate' notification sent to Congress on targeted killing of Iranian general

Associated Press | Published: 01.06.20, 20:37

Two top Senate Democrats called on U.S. President Donald Trump Monday to immediately declassify the administration's reasoning for the strike that killed Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps general Qassem Soleimani on Friday, saying there is "no legitimate justification" for keeping the information from the public.

In a letter to Trump, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and the Senate Foreign Relation Committee's Sen. Robert Menendez said the White House's classified notification sent to Congress late Saturday under the War Powers Act was insufficient and inappropriate.

"It is critical that national security matters of such import be shared with the American people in a timely manner," the letter read. "An entirely classified notification is simply not appropriate in a democratic society."

Trump did meet the 48-hour deadline required by the War Powers Act to notify Congress after the deadly drone strike, though the document was classified and no public version was released.

Both senators asked that the notification be declassified "in full."

The administration is expected to brief lawmakers on its actions this week.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said late Sunday the House would introduce and vote this week on a war powers resolution to limit the president's military actions regarding Iran. In a letter to House Democrats, Pelosi called the airstrike "provocative and disproportionate" and said it had "endangered our service members, diplomats and others by risking a serious escalation of tensions with Iran."

Pelosi also said the notification "raises more questions than it answers. This document prompts serious and urgent questions about the timing, manner and justification of the Administration's decision to engage in hostilities against Iran."

Iran has vowed to retaliate Trump's targeted killing of Soleimani, the head of Iran's elite Quds force.

It has sparked outrage in the Middle East, including in Iraq, where more than 5,000 American troops are still on the ground 17 years after the U.S. invasion.

Trump raised the prospect of targeting Iranian cultural sites Saturday in a tweet, dismissing concerns within his own administration that doing so could constitute a war crime under international law.

Speaking with reporters Sunday as he flew back to Washington from his holiday in Florida, he refused to back down, despite international prohibitions.

"They're allowed to kill our people. They're allowed to torture and maim our people.

They're allowed to use roadside bombs and blow up our people. And we're not allowed to touch their cultural sites? It doesn't work that way," Trump said.

The administration has scrambled to contend with the backlash to the killing of Soleimani, which marked a stark escalation in tensions between Washington and Tehran.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the U.S. military may well strike more Iranian leaders if the Islamic Republic retaliates.

Pompeo tip-toed around questions about Trump's threat to attack Iranian cultural sites, a military action that likely would be illegal under the laws of armed conflict and the U.N. charter.

Pompeo defended the targeted killing of Soleimani, saying the administration would have been "culpably negligent" in its duty to protect the United States if it had not killed him.

The secretary of state did not provide evidence for his previous claims that Soleimani was plotting imminent attacks on Americans. Instead of arguing that an attack had been imminent, Pompeo said it was inevitable.

Trump also warned Iraq that he would levy punishing sanctions if it expelled American troops in retaliation for the airstrike in Baghdad that killed Soleimani and the U.S.

wouldn't leave Iraq without being paid for its military investments in the western Asian country over the years.

"We will charge them sanctions like they've never seen before ever. It'll make Iranian sanctions look somewhat tame," he said. "If there's any hostility, that they do anything we think is inappropriate, we are going to put sanctions on Iraq, very big sanctions on Iraq. We're not leaving until they pay us back for it."

12.30.19

Putin weighs future options as he marks 20 years in power

12.30.19

Putin weighs future options as he marks 20 years in power

The 67-year old Russian president remains widely popular in his country despite tightly controlling the media, marginalizing opposition and triggering U.S. and European sanctions in the wake of Russia's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimea

Associated Press| Published: 12.30.19 , 12:02

As Russian President Vladimir Putin marks two decades in power , he boasts about his achievements but remains coy about his political future - a reticence that fuels wild speculation about his intentions.

Putin points to the revival of Russia's global clout, industrial modernization, booming agricultural exports and a resurgent military as key results of his tenure that began on Dec. 31, 1999. On that day, Russia's first President Boris Yeltsin abruptly stepped down and named the former KGB officer his successor, paving the way for his election three months later.

Critics accuse Putin of rolling back post-Soviet freedoms to establish tight control over the political scene, marginalize the opposition and stifle critical media. They hold him responsible for tensions with the West after Russia's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimea, which bolstered his approval ratings but triggered U.S. and European sanctions. Putin stopped the normal development of Russia as a normal market economy and a normal political democracy" and turned the country into a "global spoiler," said Andrei Kolesnikov, a researcher with the Carnegie Moscow Center.

Kremlin watchers are trying to predict what will happen after Putin's current six-year term ends in 2024. They agree on one thing: Putin, **Russia's longest-serving leader since Soviet dictator Josef Stalin, will likely stay at the helm.**

A fitness fan, the 67-year old Putin appears in good shape to stay on. He regularly practices judo, skis and plays ice hockey in a demonstration of his vigor.

He remains widely popular, although the propaganda effect of Crimea's annexation has worn off amid stagnant living standards, a rise in the retirement age and other domestic challenges.

Putin can easily use the rubber-stamp parliament to scrap term limits, but most observers expect him to take a less straightforward approach. A law faculty graduate, the Russian leader prefers more delicate methods that have a democratic veneer.

Earlier this month, Putin hinted at possible constitutional amendments to re-distribute powers among the president, the Cabinet and parliament.

He didn't specify what changes could be made, but the announcement may signal his intention to trim presidential powers and continue ruling the country as prime minister.

There are other opportunities. Kazakhstan's longtime leader Nursultan Nazarbayev offered an example this year when he abruptly resigned and had his protege elected president in a snap vote. The 79-year-old Nazarbayev retained his grip on power by securing a prominent position as head of the nation's security council.

There is another, more dramatic option. Many in neighboring Belarus fear that the Kremlin could push for a full merger of the two ex-Soviet allies to allow Putin to become the head of a new unified state.

When asked recently if he was considering it, Putin dodged the question.

Each of those potential options carries major risks.

Putin moved into the prime minister's seat from 2008-2012 after eight years as president to observe a constitutional limit of two consecutive terms, allowing Dmitry Medvedev to take the top seat.

Putin continued calling the shots under Medvedev, who obediently stepped down after one term. Putin benefited from his placeholder's move to extend the presidential term to six years, but still wasn't quite happy with the "tandem rule."

Putin was particularly critical of Medvedev's decision to let the United Nations give the go-ahead to a 2011 Western air campaign in Libya that helped oust longtime dictator Moammar Gadhafi and plunged the country into chaos.

And at home, the announcement of Putin's return to the presidency sparked massive protests in Moscow in 2011-2012 and caused a rift among elites. Putin's aides suspected some of Medvedev's lieutenants of prodding their boss to stay for a second term and encouraging the protests.

Putin's statement this month about a possible change to the constitution to limit the president to just two terms altogether was widely interpreted as a signal that he was contemplating creating a new governing position for himself while trimming the authority of his successor.

If Putin chooses to become prime minister with new broad powers, it may raise other threats.

By empowering a parliamentary majority to name the prime minister, Putin would become more vulnerable because he will depend on the ruling party's performance. While Putin's approval ratings have remained high, the popularity of the main Kremlin-directed party, the United Russia, has plummeted and the president has kept it at a distance.

A merger with Belarus to create a new leadership position has even greater risks. The prospect may excite some Russians who dream about revival of imperial glory, but it is certain to trigger strong resistance in Belarus and further antagonize the West.



Belarus' authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko, who has been in office for more than a quarter-century, has vowed to uphold Belarus' post-Soviet independence. While the Kremlin has pressured him by raising energy prices and cutting subsidies, Lukashenko has remained adamant and even warned recently that Russia's attempt to take over his country could trigger a war with NATO.

"The interest of Lukashenko is to be the dictator of his own nation state, not the person who will be dependent on the will of Putin," Kolesnikov said. Whatever path Putin chooses, he's widely expected to keep his intentions secret until the last moment.

"This uncertainty has its advantages - you can play groups of interests against each other, you can hold them in this situation of uncertainty," said Moscow-based political analyst Yekaterina Shulman. "But it can't go on for too long because it provokes infighting within the elites."

She noted that the Kremlin may call the parliamentary elections that are currently set for 2021 at an earlier date before approval ratings plummet.

"It's important to have a loyal majority in the parliament," Shulman said. "How to achieve this is a tricky question."

Shulman argued that the Kazakhstan-style scenario appears the most likely. She said staying at the helm but sharing authority with his successor would allow Putin to temper an inevitable succession battle among his lieutenants.

"The difficulty in the successor model is that the whole amount of power vested in the current president is untransferable indeed to any other person," Shulman said. "But if this power is redistributed, at least part of it, then it's easier for the decision-makers to agree on the figure of the potential successor."

First published: 12:02 , 12.30.19

01.08.20

Iran's supreme leader: missile attack on US forces, legitimate self-defense.

01.08.20

Iran's supreme leader: missile attack on U.S. forces 'slap across America's face'  
Revolutionary Guards Corps say they would not hesitate to strike American bases elsewhere in region, adding that 'Zionist entity' not removed from U.S. in crime committed against Tehran

Agencies, Ynet | Published: 01.08.20 , 11:04

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Wednesday called an overnight missile strike on military bases, where U.S. troops are stationed in Iraq, a "slap across the face of the United States."

Iran TV said none of the 35 missiles launched had been intercepted and claimed the attack resulted in 80 casualties.

U.S. officials said that the Pentagon "had no confirmation" that any Americans had been killed.

Warning the U.S. at a ceremony commemorating slain General Qassem Soleimani, Khamenei said the United States may have "cut off Soleimani's arm" but Iran will respond by "cutting off your legs" in the region.

The Iranian general was assassinated in a U.S. drone attack on his convoy near Baghdad Airport on Friday.

Khamenei went on to say the U.S. was trying to remove Hezbollah from Lebanon in a bid to help Israel, but the Iranian-backed militia is acting as "our hands and eyes."

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on his Twitter account said that the Islamic Republic seeks neither escalation or war, but "will defend ourselves against any aggression."

On Iranian television, Zarif said that Tehran's missile attack was "legitimate self-defense."

01.08.20

Trump says no U.S. casualties, Iran appears to be standing down

01.08.20

Trump says no U.S. casualties, Iran appears to be standing down

The president also announces new 'powerful' sanctions on the Islamic Republic after the country fires 18 ballistic missiles at two military bases in Iraq housing U.S. troops in retaliation for Washington's killing of Gen. Qassem Soleimani

Associated Press, Reuters| Updated: 01.08.20, 19:06

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Wednesday there were no American casualties in the Iranian strikes on military bases housing U.S. troops in Iraq and that Tehran appeared to be standing down.

Iran launched 18 ballistic missiles at Iraqi bases housing U.S. troops in response to the killing of Iran's top general. Iran's attack was its most brazen direct assault on America since the 1979 seizing of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran.

"No Americans were harmed in last night's attack by the Iranian regime. We suffered no casualties," Trump said in a special White House address. "Our great American forces are prepared for anything."

"Iran appears to be standing down, which is a good thing for all parties concerned and a very good thing for the world."

As he spoke, the U.S. president was flanked by Vice President Mike Pence, Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and military officers.

Trump signaled a desire to de-escalate the crisis. "The fact that we have this great military and equipment, however, does not mean we have to use it," he said. "We do not want to use it. American strength, both military and economic, is the best deterrent."

Trump stopped short of making any direct threat of military action against Iran. He urged world powers including Russia and China to abandon the 2015 nuclear accord with Iran and work toward a new agreement.

"We must all work together toward making a deal with Iran that makes the world a safer and more peaceful place," he said, adding he is going to ask NATO to become much more involved in the Middle East.

The president, nevertheless, went on to announce new "powerful" sanctions on the Islamic Republic unless the country "changes its behavior."

The Iranian strikes came days after Trump authorized the targeted killing of Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran's elite Quds Force. The missiles targeted two bases - one in the northern Iraqi city in Irbil and the other at Ain al-Asad in western Iraq.

A lack of U.S. casualties could signal that Iran is not interested in escalating the tension with Washington - at least not now - and could give Trump an opening to calm relations with Iran and pull the nation back from the brink of war. Trump, who is seeking reelection at the end of the year, campaigned for president on a promise to keep the United States from engaging in "endless war."

The counterattack by Iran came as Trump and his top advisers were under pressure to disclose more details about the intelligence that led to the American strike that killed Soleimani.

Top Senate Democrats, citing "deep concern" about the lack of information coming from the Trump administration about the Iran operation, called on Defense Department officials to provide "regular briefings and documents" to Congress.

Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and the senators said in a letter Wednesday that the White House's classified War Powers notification to Congress was "generic, vague, and entirely inconsistent in its level of detail" compared with the norm.

"While recognizing the need for operations security, we similarly believe there is a requirement to be transparent with the American people about how many troops this Administration plans to deploy in support of contingency plans," wrote Schumer, Sen. Dick Durbin and the Armed Services Committee's Sen. Jack Reed to Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint chiefs of staff.