

Assassination of Iran's General Suleimani planned months in advance

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The assassination of General Qassem Suleimani, regarded as the second most powerful figure in the government of Iran, was planned more than six months before he and nine others were murdered in a January 3 US drone missile strike at Baghdad's international airport, NBC News reported Monday.

The revelation of these longstanding plans to kill the head of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds force and a key architect of Iranian policy in the Middle East has exposed as deliberate lies the claims of the Trump administration that the assassination was carried out in response to some "imminent" threat to US lives and facilities in the region.

According to the report, the decision to assassinate Suleimani was taken in retaliation for the shooting down last June of a Navy RQ-4 Global Hawk spy drone that Tehran charged had violated its airspace near the strategic Strait of Hormuz. At the time, it was revealed that Trump had ordered, but then called off with barely 10 minutes notice, US airstrikes against Iranian missile and radar installations.

Advocating the revenge assassination strike, according to NBC, were Trump's Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and his then-national security adviser John Bolton, a long-time advocate of all-out war against Iran, who had called for attacking Iran for more than a decade, invoking as pretexts supposed Iranian support for resistance to the US occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan and the need to stop Iran's non-existent quest for a nuclear bomb by "bombing Iran." Bolton has since exulted in Suleimani's murder, voicing his hope that it is the first step in Iranian regime change.

While Trump signed off on the assassination order, he imposed two caveats, officials quoted by the news network stated. He required that such a "targeted killing" be carried out only in response to the killing of US citizens, and that he sign off on the operation.

The firing of missiles at the Iraqi K-1 Air Base near Kirkuk on December 27, claiming the life of a US contractor, followed by US strikes that killed dozens of

Iranian militia members and the response by Iraqi protesters who stormed the US embassy in Baghdad, provided the pretext for the January 3 drone missile assassination, although no evidence has been produced linking Suleimani to any of these events.

He was murdered after flying openly into Baghdad aboard a commercial airliner and going through customs with his diplomatic passport. Iraq's prime minister, Adel Abdul Mahdi, has insisted that the Iranian general had come to the Iraqi capital to meet with him to discuss efforts to cool tensions in the region between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Murdered along with him was Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the top commander in the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), the powerful coalition of predominantly Shia militias that constitutes an arm of Iraq's armed forces, together with eight other Iranians and Iraqis.

The NBC report came as the Trump administration's attempts to justify the assassination as a response to an imminent threat were already crumbling. The administration has yet to provide either publicly, or in closed-door briefings to the US Congress, a shred of evidence to support these claims.

Last Thursday, Secretary of State Pompeo went on Fox News to declare in relation to the supposed Iranian threat, "We don't know precisely when and we don't know precisely where, but it was real."

Appearing on the same program Friday with right-wing Fox host Laura Ingraham, Trump feigned to provide inside information on the reasons for the assassination strike. "I can reveal that I believe it probably would've been four embassies" that would have been attacked, he said.

On the Sunday television news talk shows, however, US Defense Secretary Mark Esper acknowledged that, while he "shared" Trump's view about embassy attacks, "The president didn't cite a specific piece of evidence" to support this claim. Asked whether he had seen a single piece of information supporting this pretext, Esper admitted, "I didn't see one with regards to four embassies."

Trump's national security adviser Robert O'Brien

responded similarly, stating, “We knew that there were threats to American facilities—now whether they were bases, embassies, you know, it’s always hard until the attack happens.”

In an attempt to shore up the administration’s lies, US Attorney General William Barr was brought before the microphones on Monday telling reporters that killing Suleimani was a “legitimate act of self-defense.”

“The Department of Justice was consulted and frankly I don’t think it was a close call,” Barr said. “I think the president clearly had the authority to act as he did under numerous different bases. We had a situation where the Iranians had already embarked on a series of escalating violent action taken against our allies, taken against the American people, our troops, with the avowed purpose of driving us out of the Middle East.”

While constituting an argument in favor of a criminal imperialist war policy, Barr’s statements provide no legal justification for what is a war crime and an act of aggressive war, punishable under both international and US law.

The US corporate media has called attention to the inconsistencies in the Trump administration’s claims, but has almost entirely evaded the issue of the criminal character of the Suleimani assassination. This murder was carried out not in response to an imminent threat—a so-called preemptive strike—but rather as an act of revenge, not just for the unproven charge of an Iranian connection to the death of a US contractor in an Iraqi missile strike, but for the reversals suffered by US imperialism in Iraq, Syria and more broadly in the Middle East.

As the NBC report makes clear, this act of war is not merely the outcome of Trump’s recklessness, but rather of a deliberate buildup toward war with Iran in a desperate attempt to offset the failure of three decades of wars waged in the Middle East to achieve US imperialism’s strategic objective of hegemony over the oil-rich and geostrategically vital region. Underlying this desperate attempt is the preparation for war against Washington’s “great power” rivals, in the first instance China, which depends upon the Persian Gulf region for its energy supplies and views Iran as a key link in its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) aimed at integrating China far more closely with Eurasia.

As the lies justifying Suleimani’s assassination were exposed, the Trump White House resorted to an increasingly bald-faced defense of this state murder. In a tweet Monday morning, Trump denounced “The Fake News Media and their Democrat Partners” for questioning whether a supposed threat from Suleimani was “imminent.” He responded that “it doesn’t really matter because of his horrible past.” Speaking to reporters on the White House lawn, he insisted that the assassination should have been

carried out “20 years ago.”

He subsequently re-tweeted a photoshopped image of US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in a hijab and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer in a turban, superimposed on an Iranian flag with the caption “the corrupted Dems trying their best to come to the Ayatollah’s rescue.”

Challenged about the incendiary, Islamophobic imagery, White House Press Secretary Stephanie Grisham gave a prepared statement escalating the attack: “I think the president is making clear that the Democrats have been parroting Iranian talking points and almost taking the side of terrorists and those who were out to kill the Americans. I think the president was making the point that the Democrats seem to hate him so much that they’re willing to be on the side of countries and leadership of countries who want to kill Americans.”

These inflammatory charges are being leveled as the Democratic leadership in the US House of Representatives is preparing to send articles of impeachment to the Senate that are centered on Trump’s decision to temporarily delay a massive weapons shipment to Ukraine as part of the war buildup against Russia.

“Everything that he has done, whether it’s in Syria vis-à-vis the Turks, whether it’s been in Ukraine in terms of withholding assistance as they try to fight the Russians, his denial about their role in our election then and now—all roads lead to Putin,” Pelosi declared Sunday in an ABC interview. “And sometimes I wonder about Mitch McConnell too, what’s he—why is he an accomplice to all of that.”

That each of the major capitalist parties in the United States, the center of world imperialism, is leveling charges of treason, one against the other, is symptomatic of an insoluble economic, social and political crisis that threatens to drag humanity into the horrors of war and dictatorship. The answer to this danger lies in the fight to unify the growing struggles of the international working class through the construction of a united, international and socialist antiwar movement directed at putting an end to capitalism.



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