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## **MASUM DEFENDS IRAN REVOLUTIONARY GUARD COMMANDER'S ROLE IN IRAQ**

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Iraq's president has lauded and defended the existence of Iranian military advisers in Iraq, including a top general whom the United States considers to brand as terrorist.

Speaking to Iranian news agency Tasnim, Fouad Masum hailed the prominent role of commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force, Major General Qassem Soleimani, in Iraq.

The US and other European countries have also military advisors in Iraq, so one cannot say that Iranian military advisors are not allowed in Iraq. This is a common issue in our view, and Iran has the same rights as the other countries, the agency quoted the Iraqi president as saying in an interview.

Shia Iran has been the strongest supporter of Shia political forces and militias in Iraq, and has been believed to provide generous support -in terms of training and finances- for Iraqi paramilitary forces fighting Islamic State Sunni extremists.

Recent reports have quoted United States officials as saying that President Donald Trump's administration was mulling to place the IRGC on its list of terrorist organizations. Defence Secretary James Mattis had called Iran biggest state sponsor of terrorism.

The Trump administration has also declared intentions to impose new sanctions on Iran over the latter's ballistic missiles tests, and declared a tougher stance on Iran's nuclear program.

Iraq is very keen to preserve its national interests (..)and does not wish to be part of any regional or international conflict which would lead to disasters for the region and for Iraq, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said Saturday, according to state TV.

The U.S., too, is providing effective military backing for Iraqi government forces in their war against Islamic State extremists.