
IRAQ: US MILITARY PRESENCE IN COUNTRY COULD BE ENDED

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Iraq's National Security Council suggested that Baghdad could ask the Washington to withdraw troops from the country on the heels of a U.S. airstrike in the capital Baghdad that killed a senior commander of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) and another from the Iraqi Hashd al-Shaabi group.

The council in a meeting on Friday chaired by Iraq's Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi discussed a U.S. airstrike that killed Qasem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC Quds Forces, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, vice head of Hashd al-Shaabi group, or Popular Mobilization Units (PMU).

Condemning the killing, the council declared that the attack violated the country's sovereignty.

It said the U.S. strike had transgressed the conditions for the presence of U.S. forces in Iraq, calling on the country's parliament to hold an emergency session on the matter to make a decision on whether to put an end to the U.S. military presence in the country.

Abdul-Mahdi also called on lawmakers to take legislative measures "to safeguard Iraq's dignity, security and sovereignty".

Soleimani and Al-Muhandis were killed early Friday morning in a U.S. airstrike outside Baghdad's airport.

Shortly after the strike, the U.S. embassy in Baghdad urged all its citizens to depart Iraq immediately.

Soleimani's slaying marks a dramatic escalation in tensions between the U.S. and Iran, which have often been at a fever pitch since President Donald Trump chose in 2018 to unilaterally withdraw the U.S. from a nuclear pact world powers struck with Tehran.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, who gave Soleimani the countrys highest honor last year, vowed "severe retaliation" in response to his killing.

The Pentagon accused Soleimani of plotting an attack on the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad, and planning to carry out additional attacks on U.S. diplomats and service members in Iraq and the region.

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