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The inevitable assignation of Al Quds General Soleimani

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Attached please find the 38th issue of *Persian Gulf Observer*, titled "The inevitable assignation of Al Quds General Soleimanis" by The Ezri Center's research fellow, Dr. Glen Segell

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The inevitable assignation of Al Quds General Soleimani

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Iranian Al Quds force commander General Soleimani had to go. He was too successful and thus he posed a threat. Over the last decade he has led his forces, as a major component of the troops on the ground, in the eradication of Al Qaeda and ISIS forces in Iraq and Syria. This success has positioned Iran as a too powerful a player in the region, with too many forces in too many locations having unhindered and unrestricted local power.

The assignation wasn't a surprise. It was in the planning for years. It was inevitable. But it was delayed so long as General Soleimani was doing the dirty work of leading troops on the ground fighting Al Qaeda and ISIS. He did this in the rural areas of Syria together with the Shia Hezbollah forces from Lebanon, that also receive Al Qaeda support there. The air cover was provided by the Syrian and Russian air forces. This enabled the embattled Syrian Army to operate in major urban areas and communication routes in a civil-war against diversified rebels.

Any soldier knows that war is war and you could get killed. That is an understatement to say the least if your job is to generate civil-war in other countries. The writing was on the wall for General Soleimani. But he didn't heed his own intelligence open sources. Almost two years to the day, prior to his assassination, on 1 January 2018 a Kuwait newspaper *Al Jarida* told him that he was going to get assassinated. That report suggested it would have happened in 2015 when he was fermenting mayhem near Damascus. The journalist assumed that the Obama regime, working on the Iran Nuclear-deal, thwarted an intended Israeli hit by telling Teheran. There is no evidence to support that assumption.

Notwithstanding, after Trump took office in 2016 an American-Israeli agreement was undertaken that Soleimani is a "threat to the two countries' interests in the region". Over the last few months that threat has increased with the last battle for the Syrian civil-war being fought at Idlib in Northern Syria. And no further battles needed against Al Qaeda and ISIS in Syria or Iraq. These successes, in part due to General Soleimani, has led to the potential to turning the now idle but

battle-hardened Al Quds forces against Israeli and American interests. And so has heightened the need for him to go.

The full picture comes from examining five increasing threats posed by Iran with direct Al Quds involvement, and the combination of these. One of these was the specific catalyst in December 2019/January 2020, that necessitated the assassination of its commander, General Soleimani.

The first is the military control, by a substantial Al Quds force, of a land corridor stretching from Iran's western border to the Mediterranean. This was Al Qaeda and ISIS territory in Iraq, that controlled by Iranian ally Hezbollah in Lebanon and unrestricted access to Syria as a favor owed by President Assad of Syria. The threat was identified as an Al Quds force aiming South into Jordan and Israel or North into the Caspian Basin. The mere presence of this Al Quds force, coupled by Iranian belligerent statements, poses a direct and imminent threat to Israeli and American interests. This threat has been identified and reported openly for some time.

The second is the continual flow of weaponry from Iran, including precision guided unnamed munitions across the Middle East and even into Africa. Supply of missiles to Hezbollah in Lebanon for example poses a direct threat to Israeli, American and European interests across the Mediterranean, Europe and the Middle East.

The third is the flow of such weaponry coupled with Al Quds recruitment and Shia Islamic propagation that has increased the Sunni-Shia rift on a local basis globally. Al Quds is inspiring local proxies the same way that Sunni has done for example Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al Shabab in Somalia. There is a potential for these local Shia proxies to engage in battle supplied by and even led by Al Quds. This would have been a global proxy war, in many localities. This threat has also been identified and reported openly for some time.

The fourth is the increasing Iranian dominance over regions in Iraq for example the southern port of Basra. Iran has also projected and supported militia forces in Shia regions and in the capital Baghdad since Saddam Hussein was toppled in 2003. There are also now Hezbollah forces from Lebanon that had supported General Soleimani in Syria. With the eradication of Al Qaeda and ISIS in Iraq Al Quds could stand to bring Iraq to a new civil-war and even challenge the American supported Iraq military.

The fifth, that was the specific catalyst, arose in just seven few days of events in Iraq. An American civilian contractor was killed, and several troops wounded on 27 December 2019. American forces responded by attacking Kataeb Hezbollah forces on 29 December. Iranian inspired forces responded by attacking the American Embassy and the Green Zone in Baghdad

on 30/31 December. Both Iraqi and American interests, including diplomats and commercial endeavors were seen to be in immediate threat. America responded by assassinating General Soleimani on 2 January 2020.

In examining the decision to assassinate General Soleimani it cannot be denied that pundits are also correct on a few other reasons. For example that it is election year in the United States and President Trump is seeking domestic appeal. Also that Iran has attacked American shipping and a Saudi Arabian oil refinery but American hasn't responded yet because there wasn't loss of life. And so it was waiting for an opportunity and now is the time when an American civilian contractor was killed.

General Soleimani will go into the history books as having led the troops on the ground to eradicate ISIS from Iraq and Syria. He will also go into the history books because of one of two further options. The first due to any potential collateral damage after his assassination, because it sparks a war. Or the second because it has brought peace to the region.

On the first option there is a heightened security alert on assumption that Iran will respond. Only an irresponsible Ayatollah Khamenei would respond militarily. Many in Lebanon, Israel, Syria, Iraq, and those in Iran are tired of being inflicted with the Iranian Ayatollah's verbal and physical rants, as seen in unrests and protests. An escalation to a regional war would threaten the very existence of an Ayatollah-type regime.

On the second option a responsible Ayatollah Khamenei should recognize that bringing the Al Quds force home. and in not supporting Hezbollah and Hamas any further, will most likely prevent another assassination. That being his own, be it by foreign forces or by his own population, as a result of a devastating regional war.