

Iraqis demand U.S. troops pull out on Soleimani killing anniversary

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Thousands condemn 'American occupiers' a year after U.S. drone strike killed top Iranian general and Iraqi commander

Baghdad, January 3 (RHC)-- Thousands of Iraqi mourners have condemned the “American occupiers” -- one year after a U.S. drone strike killed Iran’s revered general Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi militia commander, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

The anniversary of their deaths in Baghdad -- which brought arch enemies the U.S. and Iran to the brink of war -- was also marked on Sunday in Iran and by supporters in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and elsewhere in the Middle East.

Streets leading to central Baghdad’s Tahrir Square were packed with thousands of protesters who had converged on the site since early Sunday morning. The protesters raised pictures of Soleimani and al-Muhandis, and flags of Iraq, the Hashd al-Shaabi or Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), of which al-Muhandis was a leader, and other Iraqi factions.

They also carried banners with slogans demanding the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq and chanted for retaliation against those who carried out the assassination.

Reporters said that the Iraqi protesters were demanding the immediate, swift withdrawal of all remaining U.S. troops in Iraq. “They are also demanding a continuation of the kind of heated rhetoric that we’ve heard in a couple of days around the anniversary of the assassination of the leader of the Revolutionary Guards, Qassem Soleimani. They are demanding and promising revenge,” he said.

In Tehran, the mood was similar where the head of the country’s judiciary, Ebrahim Raisi, as well as the head of the Revolutionary Guard, Major General Hossein Salami, said Tehran was not finished with avenging Soleimani’s death. “That will come in due time. It’s something that we have heard from the supreme leader as well as the president earlier in December,” she said.

The powerful pro-Iranian Hashd al-Shaabi paramilitary network in Iraq which al-Muhandis commanded has led the sombre and angry vigils for him and Soleimani, who headed the elite foreign operations arm of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

The commemorations started on Saturday night when thousands of black-clad mourners converged at the spot near Baghdad’s international airport where the US hit the two vehicles and killed Soleimani, al-Muhandis and eight other men. By candlelight, they honored their “martyrs” and condemned the American “great Satan” at the site where nearby walls are still pock-marked by shrapnel.

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