

Trump's Illegal Drone Strike on Iranian General Soleimani: Sets the Stage for War on Iran?

Led to Award for British Troops

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Seven members of Britain's armed forces won an award for their 'vital operational' work supporting the US military after it killed Iranian general Qasem Soleimani in a drone strike last year, Declassified has found.

The assassination of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani, ordered by President Donald Trump in January 2020, brought Iran and the West to the brink of war.

A UN expert said the killing was [illegal under international law](#) and Iranian officials demanded revenge.

Soleimani was one of Iran's top commanders, leading the Revolutionary Guard's elite Quds Force on military missions in the Middle East.

It can now be revealed that a secretive team of British troops based in Bahrain, which is 190km from Iran, played a key role in a “period of increased activity and tension that followed the death” of Soleimani.

Their efforts were quietly recognised in [November](#) with a commendation from the Royal Air Force (RAF), but the announcement did not mention the Soleimani strike. Instead it simply stated the location of their unit: Muharraq, a US military base in Bahrain.

Little is known about the presence of British troops at Muharraq, and no other details of their award were published until a freedom of information request by *Declassified* forced further disclosure.

We have obtained a summary of the award citation – the full version remains classified to prevent “a potential enemy wishing to attack the UK” from gaining “sensitive information” on the movement of British troops.

The summary shows UK military commanders regarded the assassination's aftermath as “arguably the most dynamic and intense situation faced by Naval Forces in recent years”.

Soleimani's death on 3 January created "a period of increased activity and tension" which saw four members of the RAF and three from the Royal Navy dispatched to Muharraq.

Over the next nine days they provided logistical support to UK and US forces "who were deployed into the central Arabian Gulf".

The killing of Qasem Soleimani

A US drone strike killed Soleimani in Baghdad, triggering huge protests in Tehran. Naval forces in the Gulf went on high alert, including British troops in Muharraq, Bahrain.



Map: Phil Miller/Declassified UK • Created with Datawrapper

The Muharraq team “were tasked to deliver vital operational and high priority related stores and coordinate the transfer of personnel to and from ships at sea”.

As a matter of “urgency”, they secured “load space on a US Sea Dragon helicopter and helped to establish key lines of communications to vital assets.”

The Sea Dragon is a heavy-lift, long-range aircraft.

Stop the War Coalition convener Lindsey German told *Declassified*:

“The assassination of Qasem Soleimani brought us very near to war with Iran, a war which would have had bloody consequences across the whole region.

“This revelation shows the involvement of British troops in its aftermath – something which has never been divulged publicly here in Britain.”

She added:

“This lack of transparency is typical of the way in which British forces – and by implication the British government – operate in the region, but it also demonstrates the way that the demonisation of and increasing confrontation with Iran depends on these sorts of covert and illegal operations.

“All those who campaign against war in the Middle East must demand a full public explanation of British troops’ involvement.”

World War 3

The US assassination of Iran’s most high-profile military officer caused the phrase “World War 3” to trend on [Twitter](#), such was the concern that Britain, Russia and China could all be drawn into the crisis.

According to [The New York Times](#), the US had “plans to strike a command-and-control ship and conduct a cyber attack to partly disable Iran’s oil and gas sector” if the situation escalated after the assassination.

Trump claimed to have approved a list of [52](#) targets in Iran, including cultural sites, that he said “WILL BE HIT VERY FAST AND VERY HARD”.

Meanwhile Bahrain, which is home to the US Navy’s Fifth Fleet and a major base for British minesweepers, could have been among the first set of targets for Iran’s short-range missiles.

Fearing they might be caught in the crossfire, Britain withdrew some of its non-essential troops from [Iraq](#), while boosting its naval presence in the [Gulf](#) to protect British-flagged oil tankers – a task which the Muharraq team most likely assisted.

Although Iran did retaliate with a rocket attack on a US military base in Iraq, tensions fell after Tehran tragically shot down a passenger airline it mistook for an incoming missile.

What is Muharraq?

Muharraq is a former British air base dating back to Bahrain’s time as a UK “protectorate” (or colony). It is now run by the US navy.

During the first Gulf War in 1991, British pilots flew from Muharraq to bomb Saddam Hussein's forces in Iraq.

That conflict, known as Operation Granby, appears to be the [last time](#) UK military personnel have earned awards from operations in Muharraq, until the Soleimani strike.

Last May, MPs were [told](#) that it costs the taxpayer £270,000 a year to keep British troops at Muharraq – however, that information has since been removed from the Parliament website in an apparent technical glitch.

Police stations near the base are notoriously used for [torturing](#) critics of the Bahraini regime, which is one of the most repressive in the region, and a close British ally.

The issue of torture recently generated controversy when British home secretary [Priti Patel](#) visited a police facility in [Muharraq](#).

Bahrain is ruled by a dictator, King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. He does not tolerate press freedom or dissent, and liquidated the largest opposition party, Al Wefaq.

Ali Alaswad, a senior figure in Al Wefaq, told *Declassified* that Britain should obtain “the approval of the people” of Bahrain to have military bases in the country.

He expressed concern at the threat to Bahrainis “in the event that the British navy wages an offensive war against any of the [neighbouring] countries through Bahraini lands or from its territorial waters”.

A Ministry of Defence spokesperson said: “Qassem Soleimani posed a threat to all our interests and was responsible for a pattern of disruptive, destabilising behaviour in the region.

“Following Qassem Soleimani's death, we urged all sides to de-escalate, exercise restraint and prevent further conflict.”

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