



[New Year's Eve Attack on U.S. Embassy in Iraq](#)

Thousands of people stormed the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, Iraq on Tuesday, in response to American airstrikes against Iranian-backed militias in Iraq. The episode began when an Iraqi military base came under attack from rocket fire, presumably from Iranian proxies, which resulted in multiple American and Iraqi casualties, including the death of an American contractor. In retaliation, the United States attacked five sites controlled by Kataib Hezbollah, the militia group suspected of being behind the initial attack. Iran claimed a death toll of 31, with at least 60 more wounded. Iran called the strike a "terror attack," and its proxies commenced an assault of the American embassy in Baghdad. Unlike prior attacks on American embassies, there were no casualties reported on either side, and the militias eventually left the compound following an order from their leaders.

In response to the attack, U.S. President Trump threatened Iran via Twitter, saying the country would "pay a very big price," and to ensure that he was taken seriously, clarified that his message was "not a warning, it is a threat." The President also called on the Iraqi government to do more to protect American personnel and interests in the country. The Trump Administration was keen to ensure that the situation did not devolve into a second Benghazi, where four Americans were killed after the consulate in Libya's second city came under attack. President Trump ordered 650 troops from Fort Bragg, North Carolina to deploy to the Middle East after the attack. These troops were preceded by about 100 marines who arrived from a base in Kuwait during the siege to provide extra security.

The protestors did not breach the embassy, although some people did reach the main reception area of the embassy before being repelled by American and Iraqi security forces. The militias cited their reasoning for the attack being the American military presence in Iraq, and demanded a full withdrawal of American personnel from the country. In order to reach an agreement with the militias to withdraw from the area, the Iraqi government pledged to move forward with a piece of legislation that would expel American forces from Iraq. The militias have legitimacy in Iraqi politics under a 2014 piece of legislation that officially recognizes the groups for their role in the fight against ISIS in Iraq, and they report directly to the Prime Minister.

There is little doubt over the extent of Iran's influence in the attack, as Qasem Soleimani, the leader of Iran's elite Quds Force was spotted during the siege. There was also graffiti on the walls of the embassy that said Soleimani had passed through the compound. The Quds Force is a wing of Iran's Revolutionary Guards that specializes in covert operations on foreign soil. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said that Iran was not involved in the embassy attack, but Soleimani's presence appears to tell otherwise.

Moving forward, the attack will increase tensions between the United States and Iraq, which are already high due to disagreements over the future of American presence in Iraq. There is widespread anti-American sentiment throughout Iraq, but the Trump Administration has shown few signs of concern over this, and still seemingly regards Iraq as strategically important to American interests in the Middle East.