

Netanyahu Says Israel Stands With U.S. After Assassination of Iran's Soleimani

Defense Minister Naftali Bennett convened the army's top brass and top security officials for a situation assessment after the U.S. assassinated the leader of Iran's Revolutionary Guards.



Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaks during a press conference in Athens on January 2, 2020AFP

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Friday that Israel "stands with the United States in its righteous struggle," after a U.S. strike in Iraq killed the leader of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force, Major-General Qassem Soleimani.

Netanyahu cut short his planned trip to Greece and returned to Israel on Friday. Shortly before boarding the plane, he spoke to reporters and said, "Just as Israel has the right to self-defense, the United States has exactly the same right. Qassem Soleimani is responsible for the deaths of American citizens and other innocents, and he was planning more attacks."

"President Trump deserves all the credit for acting swiftly, forcefully and decisively," Netanyahu said. "Israel stands with the United States in its righteous struggle for peace, security, and self-defense."

Israeli Defense Minister Naftali Bennett met with Israel's top military brass Friday morning for a situation assessment after Tehran vowed: "crushing revenge" for the assassination. Bennett met with Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi and senior security officials at the military headquarters in Tel Aviv. Following the assessment, it was decided not to make any changes to the army's routine or border defenses.

Netanyahu has instructed members of the security cabinet not to speak publicly

about the events. Kahol Lavan leader Benny Gantz also said in a tweet “I expect all of the nation’s leaders to refrain from insinuations [on the issue] detrimental to the security of the state” and added, “When it comes to the security of the state, there is no coalition or opposition.”



Bennett conducts a security assessment with Kochavi and other senior security officials, January 3, 2019. Credit: Ariel Hermoni / Defense Ministry

On Friday morning, Israel Army Radio said the military had gone on heightened alert. The army decided to close Mount Hermon to visitors Friday, however, no other instructions were given to citizens living in the north of the country. Residents of the Golan Heights reported that their cellphones, internet, and landlines have all been operating much more slowly than usual.

Israel has raised its security alert levels at its missions abroad.

The assassinations are a potential turning point in the Middle East and are expected to draw severe retaliation from Iran and the forces it backs in the Middle East against Israel and American interests.

Soleimani is considered the main figure leading Iran’s operations in the Middle East, and Israel has accused him for years of instigating terror in the region and held him responsible for the killings of Israelis.

Soleimani survived several assassination attempts against him by Western, Israeli and Arab agencies over the past two decades.

‘Crushing revenge’

Iranian Supreme Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Friday the assassination of Soleimani would double the motivation of the resistance against the United States and Israel, state television reported.

“Soleimani’s martyrdom will make Iran more decisive to resist America’s expansionism and to defend our Islamic values,” Iranian President Hassan Rohani said in a statement on Friday. “With no doubt, Iran and other freedom-seeking countries in the region will take his revenge.”

Hamas spokesman Bassem Naim said on Twitter: “The assassination “opens the doors of the region to all possibilities, except calm & stability. The USA bears the responsibility for that

Islamic Jihad has issued a message mourning Soleimani’s death, saying his assassination reflects U.S. crimes and its ongoing support for Israel and the occupation.

Islamic Jihad official in Gaza Muhammad Alhandi also said: “The U.S. administration and President Trump prove to be working for Israel. They live in the illusion that this assassination and the removal of Soleimani are creating an opportunity for strategic change for the benefit of the U.S., Israel, and their allies in the region, but this will be an opportunity to change the trend and actions against the U.S. and Israeli intervention and expansion in the Middle East.”

Deputy Secretary-General of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine Abu Ahmed Fouad also said: “Soleimani is a popular commander who did not abandon the territory and supported the resistance movements in Palestine, Lebanon, and Yemen.” Adding that “the U.S. opened the gates of hell with his assassination.”



Noa Landau
Haaretz Correspondent

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