

# Killing Soleimani Was Just – Now Let's Get Out

The heightened risk of the outbreak of another war in the Middle East should serve as a reminder that the U.S. military has no business being in that conflict-prone region. President Trump should honor his campaign promise to avoid unnecessary foreign wars by withdrawing the remaining U.S. troops from Iraq as soon as possible.

At the same time, the summary execution of Iranian Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani in Iraq on Friday appears to be completely justifiable. According to U.S. officials, the missile strike that destroyed Soleimani was planned after [a rocket attack killed a U.S. civilian](#) military contractor in Kirkuk in late December. This was one among thousands of U.S. civilian and military deaths Soleimani was responsible for as the leader of Iran's paramilitary Quds Force, which organized insurgent militia groups to oppose the U.S. across the Middle East – notably by using improvised explosive devices to maim, kill, and terrify.

Some critics of President Trump's decision to execute Soleimani liken the Iranian terrorist to an august statesman and general, and say his assassination is as outrageous to Iranians as would be the killing of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Americans. Perhaps, but Soleimani was also a covert paramilitary operator who practiced the black arts of sabotage and murder.

The [Geneva Convention](#) direct humane treatment of militia groups and irregular troops as long as they identify themselves as combatants by a fixed sign recognizable from a distance, carry their arms openly, and conduct their operations in accordance with the laws and customs of war. Soleimani and his troops blended into the populace, conducted

covert operations, and used means that did not discriminate between soldier and civilian. Soleimani did not fight fair, so it's ridiculous for anyone to expect that he should have been fought using fair means.

That doesn't mean, however, that we should feel jubilant about Soleimani's death as do the many gloating neoconservatives whose foreign policy got us into this mess in the first place. Arch-neoconservative John Bolton, recently fired from the Trump Administration and seemingly incapable of learning any lesson from the decades of failed U.S. military interventions, tweeted out yesterday his hope that that "this is the first step to regime change in Tehran."

A legitimate point can be made that the U.S. intelligence agencies and military are also guilty of heinous military acts, notably with U.S. drone strikes, which have taken place outside of formal war zones and killed hundreds of civilians as collateral damage. Complicating matters further is that Soleimani also indirectly aided the U.S. by fighting ISIS. Nor should [we blindly believe that our government is giving us a clear picture](#) of what goes on in war zones or even that it has a clear strategy itself, as the recently released Afghanistan Papers reminded us.

The situation should remind us of the moral quagmire the U.S. descended into during the Vietnam War, when the unconventional tactics of the Viet Cong prompted U.S. forces in many cases to respond with equal savagery. During the Tet Offensive on Feb. 1, 1968, South Vietnamese General Nguyen Ng?c Loan captured a Viet Cong insurgent who had infiltrated the Saigon home of Lt. Col Nguyen Tuan. The insurgent had slit Tuan's throat and those of his wife, six children, and 80-year old mother. General Loan summarily executed the insurgent with a revolver shot to the head, fired in front of the camera of Associated Press photographer Eddie Adams, thereby creating one of the most iconic images of the war.

Despite justifying his actions on the grounds that the Viet Cong agent was operating outside of the Geneva Conventions, the execution permanently damaged General Loan's career as the image stirred moral outrage in the U.S. It also created awareness of the brutal measures being taken by the U.S. side of the conflict. After General Loan's death, Adams expressed regret for the effect the photograph had had. "That guy was a hero. America should be crying," Adams [said in an interview](#).

"What would you do if you were the general at that time and place on that hot day, and you caught the so-called bad guy after he blew away one, two or three American soldiers?" Adams wrote in an [obituary for \*Time\*](#) magazine.

There are no easy answers to these difficult moral questions that arise during war, and that's why war should only be engaged in when absolutely necessary, and out of self-defense. "We took action last night to stop a war. We did not take action to start a war," Trump said. None of the military campaigns our neoconservative and neoliberal foreign policy establishment have conducted in the Middle East over the last 20 years have met that standard, nor have they been [worth the life or soul of a single U.S. soldier](#).

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