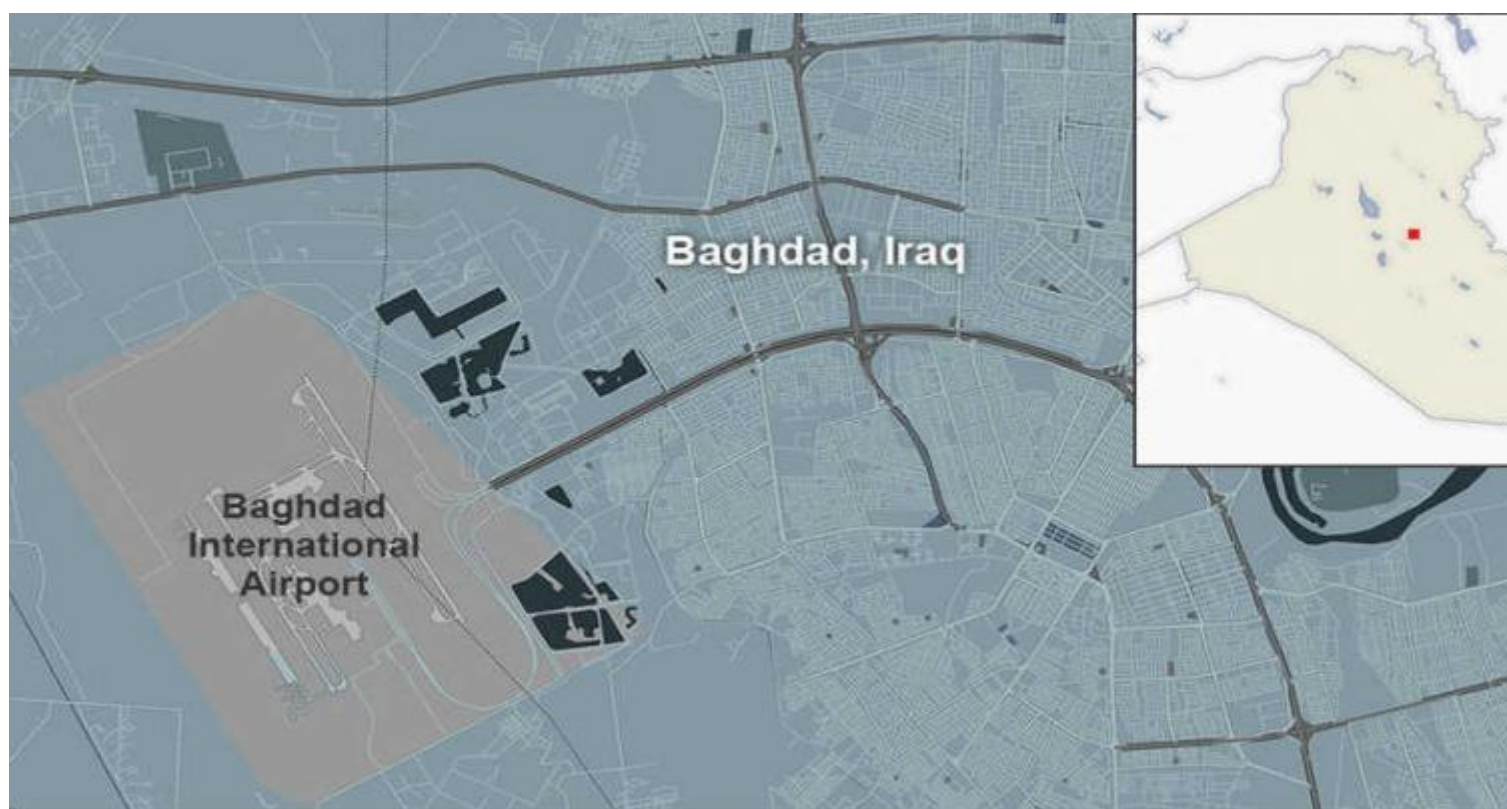


Pentagon confirms Trump ordered assassination of Iranian military official



Washington, January 3 (RHC)-- The U.S. Department of Defense confirmed Thursday night that its forces killed Iranian Major-General Qassem Soleimani "at the direction of the president." The statement calls the assassination a "defensive action... aimed at deterring future Iranian attack plans."

Meanwhile, U.S. President Donald Trump has not issued an official statement but only tweeted a U.S. flag with no caption. There has been no official response to the attack by Iran's government so far.

Soleimani, head of the elite Quds Force, and Iraqi militia commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis were killed late on Thursday in an airstrike on their convoy in Baghdad airport, an Iraqi militia spokesman told Reuters.

"The American and Israeli enemy is responsible for killing the mujahideen Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis and Qassem Soleimani," said Ahmed al-Assadi, a spokesman for Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces umbrella grouping of Iran-backed militias.

According to sources cited by the Lebanese channel Al Mayadeen, the explosions occurred in the vicinity of an Iraqi Air Force base, west of Baghdad. Al Arabiya reports that 12 Iraqi soldiers have been injured in the attack.

After the attack, several vehicles were seen on fire near the airport. The sirens sounded in the airport area after the noise of the explosions was heard, witnesses say. It is also reported that U.S. helicopters flew over the airport area.

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