

# *Iranian president says withdrawal serves U.S. interests, restores regional security*

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Tehran, January 15 (RHC)-- Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has warned the United States to end its military intervention in the region, saying such a withdrawal will both help restore regional security and serve Washington's own interests.

The "intolerable" insecurity currently afflicting the region menaces Asia, Europe, and even America itself as it can lead to all sorts of incidents, Rouhani told the cabinet session on Wednesday. The American forces in the region are today faced with insecurity, which may come to threaten the European troops as well in the near future, he added.

"Restore this security. We want you to leave the region... not by means of war, but by taking the wise move [to do so]," he said. "You [yourself] will stand to benefit from this. Go down the path that benefits the region and the entire world," the president added.

He also touched on the Islamic Republic's recent strikes against U.S. bases in western and northern Iraq, which came in retaliation for the US assassination of revered Iranian commander, General Qassem Soleimani, among others, in Baghdad on January 3rd.

“General Soleimani’s martyrdom will not go unanswered. The military response was given,” he said, noting that the strikes that hit the US’s Ain al-Assad Airbase in Iraq’s Anbar Province showed that “we do not back down in the face of the US and will surely respond to their crime.”

Apart from the military retaliation, Rouhani suggested, the real response would be a collective endeavor by regional countries towards the U.S. departure from the region.

Rouhani also addressed the human error that caused the downing of a Ukrainian passenger aircraft shortly after take-off from Tehran’s Imam Khomeini Airport last week. The jetliner was mistaken for an incoming cruise missile, while a communication breakdown prevented the operator from obtaining the permission required for the launch. It killed all 176 people on board.

“Our people and the world need to be assured that this incident will never be repeated,” the president asserted. Rouhani said the General Staff of the Armed Forces acted appropriately in announcing the cause of the tragedy, but that the Armed Forces ought to follow it up with rectifying measures. “A final step,” he added, would be making sure that the mistake would never happen again.

However, efforts aimed at making up for the error should not serve to weaken the country's military, he said. “We need and will always need our Armed Forces.” The president, meanwhile, said that the delay in informing the public about the circumstances surrounding the crash came due to the fact that the cause of the crash had not been initially “plausible.”

“No one could believe that an aircraft taking off from an international airport in the capital, and flying on its route would be targeted,” Rouhani said. The Armed Forces, he added, need to also apologize to the public for the belated dissemination of information.

He said a first compensatory measure could be to “diligently” follow up on the issue through legal channels with the participation of the Judiciary, the government, and the Armed Forces.

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