

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Ali Shamkhani, the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, said Friday a massive march in Baghdad was a "countdown" to expelling U.S. forces. "It indicated that Iraqi people are the flagship on the path of expelling the U.S. from the region," he said.

Cleric Muhammad Hassan Abutorabifard, who led Friday prayers in Tehran told worshippers that "the legitimacy of the West-appointed puppet rulers in the region has totally collapsed."

PRISTINA (Dispatches) -- Kosovo police has arrested a woman for condemning U.S. assassination of Iranian Commander General Qassem Soleimani.

Police said that Ikballe Berisha Huduti, the founder of a now defunct organization called Qur'ani, was arrested following an order from the prosecution and she will remain in detention for 48 hours awaiting a court decision.

Huduti wrote comments on her private Facebook page criticizing Washington after the U.S. forces assassinated Gen. Soleimani on Friday.

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### Viewpoint

## Awakening of Iraq

## CBC: U.S. Officers Told to Target Iranians

OTTAWA (Dispatches) -- U.S. border officers working at multiple Canada-U.S. border crossings were instructed to target and interrogate Iranian-born travelers in early January, said a U.S. border officer in an email obtained by CBC News.

The allegation follows reports that up to 200 people of Iranian descent traveling from B.C. — many of them Canadian or U.S. citizens — were detained and questioned for hours at the Peace Arch Border Crossing in Blaine, Wash., during the weekend of Jan. 4.

On Friday Jan. 3, the U.S. assassinated Iran's top general, Qassem Soleimani, intensifying tensions between the two countries.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) told CBC News that the "current threat environment" prompted it to implement an "enhanced posture" at the border. However, it denied detaining Iranian-born travelers and said the delays at the Peace Arch crossing were related to staffing issues during a busy holiday weekend.

The U.S. border officer challenges CBP's claims in an email he sent to Blaine-based immigration lawyer, Len Saunders.

Saunders believes the officer reached out to him because the lawyer has been openly critical of how CBP allegedly treated Iranian-born travelers.

Saunders confirmed the U.S. officer's identity and said that he works on the front lines. He asked that CBC News keep the officer's name confidential, because the person fears repercussions from his employer.

The officer told Saunders that CBP's Seattle Field Office — which covers the Canada-U.S. border from Washington State to Minnesota — directed border officers to ask Iranian-born travelers counterterrorism questions.

The officer claimed that the sole reason Iranian travelers were detained and questioned that weekend was due to their ethnicity. He said that the operation was unethical and possibly unconstitutional.

In his email, the officer also told Saunders that after the detainment of Iranian-born travelers made nation-

al news on Jan. 5, the operation was suspended.

Saunders said he also recently spoke with another U.S. border officer who worked the weekend of Jan. 4 at a Washington State border crossing different from the Peace Arch. Saunders said the officer confirmed the Seattle Field Office had directed frontline staff to target Iranian-born travelers.

"It confirms my suspicion that this was not just happening at Peach Arch," said Saunders. He also said that the officers' claims confirm his beliefs about how Iranian-born travelers were treated at the border.

"They violated American constitutional rights by interrogating them and detaining them," alleges Saunders. "What's next? Where does it stop?"

Iranian-born Canadian citizen Sam Sadr of North Vancouver said he and three relatives were heading to Seattle when they were detained at the crossing for more than eight hours on Jan. 4.

"Why us?" said Sadr who was visiting the U.S. for the first time. He said he counted more than 120 people of Iranian heritage being held for questioning that day.

"As soon as they released me, I told the officer, 'This is called discrimination.'"

## Zionists Attack Mosques as Trump Set to Unveil Plan

RAMALLAH (Dispatches) -- Zionist settlers torched a mosque and wrote racist anti-Arab slogans on its walls in the occupied East Jerusalem Al-Quds suburb of Sharafat village on Friday, residents told Middle East Eye.

Al-Badria Mosque serves as a place of worship for the residents of both Beit Safafa and Sharafat, two Palestinian communities south of East Al-Quds and close to the occupied West Bank's Bethlehem.

In the early hours of Friday morning, residents of Sharafat woke up for dawn prayer and were surprised to find the fire raging in the mosque's bookshelves, carpets and minbar.

Israeli police have closed off the mosque amid further investigation. As a result, Sharafat's residents are anxiously waiting to be able to see the extent of the damage.

Ismail Awad, the mukhtar of Sharafat, told MEE that he man-

## 'Millions' of Iraqis Call for Ouster of U.S. Troops



Iraqis converge on the Jadriyah neighborhood near Baghdad University on Jan. 24, 2020 to call for the expulsion of U.S. troops.

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) -- Hundreds of thousands took to the streets of Iraq on Friday calling for the removal U.S. troops from the country, following American airstrikes earlier this month that martyred a top Iraqi commander and Iranian General Qassem Soleimani.

Protesters chanted "get out, get out, occupier" as they massed in the Jadriyah district of east Baghdad. Others chanted "Death to America", while the Iraqi flag was widely flown.

Around 5,200 U.S. troops are still in Iraq. Earlier this month, the Iraqi parliament voted to expel all

## Iran Reportedly Reaches Agreement With Gianni De Biasi



## President Ghani: Afghanistan Ready for Major U.S. Troop Reduction



aged to put the fire out himself before calling the Israeli police and fire brigade.

"I extinguished the fire in a quarter of an hour, and called my friends to help me," he said. "Then I called the Israeli police, who are now trying to make it a criminal case, not a terrorist one."

Such vandalism by Zionist settlers against Palestinians communities are known as "price tag" attacks, and are used to intimidate residents and assert supremacy in territories the Israeli regime has militarily occupied since 1967.

Israeli extremists also stormed the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the occupied Jerusalem Al-Quds under the protection of security forces.

Palestinian media said the invaders stormed the mosque in order to keep Palestinian worshippers from performing Friday prayers.

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American forces in the country. U.S. President Donald Trump has refused to discuss the withdrawal with Iraq's acting prime minister, Adel Abdul Mahdi and instead threatened to seize about \$35 billion of Iraqi oil revenues held in a bank account in New York.

The massive rally on Friday came following a call from influential cleric Muqtada al-Sadr who had originally called for a "million-man march" to show Iraqi opposition to the U.S. presence in the country.

Sayed Sadiq al-Hashemi, the director of the Iraqi Center for Studies, said more than 2.5 million took

part in the demonstrations.

Since the early hours, huge crowds of men, women and children of all ages converged on the Jadriyah neighborhood near Baghdad University.

Iraq's Al-Ahd news network reported that Iraqis from all of the country's provinces had gathered in the city.

Sadr issued a statement on Friday calling for U.S. bases to be shut down and Iraqi airspace closed to US warplanes and surveillance aircraft.

He warned that U.S. presence in the country will be dealt with as an occupying force if Washington

does not agree with Iraqi demands to withdraw for the country.

In a message delivered through a representative at Friday prayer in the holy city of Karbala, top cleric Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani also urged Iraqi political groups to do what is needed to the safeguard the country's sovereignty.

He called on Iraqi groups to stand united, far from any foreign influence in countering the dangers which threaten the country.

On Thursday ahead of the planned rallies, Sadr called on Iraqis to mobilize and defend the country's independence and sovereignty.

"Oh women, men and youth of the country, the time is now upon us to defend the country, its sovereignty and dependence," Sadr said in a tweet.

"Spread the word of an independent future Iraq that will be ruled by the righteous; an Iraq which will not know of corruption nor aggression" he added, calling on Iraqis to expel the "tyrants".

Various Iraqi resistance groups affiliated with the country's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) backed the anti-American rally.

Speaking to the Lebanese Al-Mayadeen television channel, Jaafar al-Husseini, a spokesman for the PMU-affiliated Kata'ib Hezbollah resistance group, said "other means" will be used against the Americans if they do not leave Iraq.

The American presence, he said, has led to corruption and instability in the country.

Firas al-Yasser, a member of the

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## More Cities Restrict Travel as Virus Kills Dozens

BEIJING (AFP) -- Chinese authorities rapidly expanded a mammoth quarantine effort aimed at containing a deadly contagion on Friday to 13 cities and a staggering 41 million people, as nervous residents were checked for fevers and the death toll climbed to 26.

While the World Health Organization (WHO) held off on declaring a global emergency despite confirmed cases in half a dozen other countries, China expanded its lockdown to cover an area with a total population greater than Canada's.

A range of Lunar New Year festivities have been cancelled, while temporary closures of Beijing's Forbidden City, Shanghai's Disneyland and a section of the Great Wall were announced to prevent the disease from spreading further.

The previously unknown virus has caused alarm because of its similarity to SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), which killed hundreds across mainland China and Hong Kong in 2002-

2003.

The WHO said China faced a national emergency but stopped short of making a declaration that would have prompted greater global cooperation, including possible trade and travel restrictions.

The outbreak emerged in late December in Wuhan, an industrial and transport hub of 11 million people in China's centre, spreading to several other countries including the United States.

China is in the midst of its Lunar New Year holiday, a typically joyous time of family gatherings and public festivities.

But on Friday Wuhan was a ghost town, its streets deserted and stores shuttered.

Hospitals visited by AFP journalists bustled with worried patients being screened by staff wearing full-body protective suits.

At a temperature-check station, a medical staffer in bodysuit, face mask and goggles took a thermometer from a middle-aged woman,

pausing to examine the reading before quickly turning back to the patient.

"Have you registered? Then go and see the doctor," the staffer said. One 35-year-old man surnamed Li voiced the fears of many.

"I have a fever and cough, so I'm worried that I'm infected," he said. "I don't know the results yet."

With hundreds of millions of people on the move across China for the holiday, the government has halted all travel out of Wuhan, shut down its public transport and told residents to stay home. Deepening the isolation, there were few flights available to the city.

"This year we have a very scary Chinese New Year. People are not going outside because of the virus," said a taxi driver in the city, who asked not to be named.

But said a prolonged shutdown should not pose food-shortage problems because many Chinese had stocked up for the holiday.

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