

EXIT IRAQ: ON US-IRAN TENSIONS

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

The vote by Iraqi parliamentarians in favour of a resolution seeking to expel American troops on Sunday was the first blowback the U.S. faced after it assassinated Iranian General Qassem Soleimani inside Iraq on Friday. The outcome of the vote was expected as the lawmakers were under pressure from both the public and militias to act against the U.S. after the killing. The U.S. troops, which are in Iraq on an invitation from the Iraqi government to fight the Islamic State, have carried out air strikes against Iraqi militias in recent weeks, without the approval of the Baghdad government. This triggered public protests and led to the siege of the American Embassy last week. In an already explosive situation, the killing of Soleimani acted as a catalyst. The anger among Iraqi lawmakers towards U.S. actions was on full display inside the Parliament hall on Sunday when they chanted, 'America out, Baghdad remains free', before the voting. Parliament itself doesn't have the authority to expel foreign troops. But a resolution passed in Parliament is a call to the executive branch to act. Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi, who condemned the killing of Soleimani, has stated unambiguously that it is time for the Americans to go home. Government officials have already started working on a memorandum on the legal and procedural formalities to expel U.S. troops, according to him.

Iraq is a crucial ally for the U.S. in the war against terrorism in West Asia, and the Trump administration has nobody to blame but itself for the setback. It pushed the Iraqis to a point where they had to choose between Tehran and Washington. And understandably, they picked their powerful neighbour. But U.S. President Donald Trump still doesn't seem to be in a mood to listen. He has threatened Iraq with sanctions and a bill for billions of dollars if the U.S. troops are forced to pull back. This approach not only violates Iraq's sovereignty, it also escalates the situation to a three-cornered crisis involving the U.S., Iraq and Iran. Mr. Trump is primarily responsible for today's situation. His decision to pull the U.S. out of a functioning Iran nuclear deal was the trigger. When the U.S. reimposed sanctions on Iran, it was up to the other signatories of the deal — European countries, Russia and China — to save the agreement. Iran waited for a year before taking countermeasures. But they did nothing, barring issuing occasional statements in favour of the agreement. Europe, which has good ties with both the U.S. and Iran, should wake up at least now. It should use its diplomatic channels to rein in Mr. Trump and pacify Iran to prevent an all-out war. As a first step of de-escalation, what Mr. Trump could do is to order his soldiers to pack their bags and leave Iraq.

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