

Walking on eggshells

EDITORIAL

MOST WORLD LEADERS, it would appear, are walking on eggshells right now as the smoke, both figuratively and literally, starts to clear following U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to use a drone to kill a top-ranking Iranian military official last week.

While the act has, largely, been condemned by mainstream media across the globe, there appears to be a concerted effort by political leaders, particularly in Europe and Asia, to de-escalate the situation by not taking a side, and instead calling on both Iran and the U.S. to remain calm and refrain from taking any measures that would further aggravate tensions.

In the immediate aftermath of Qassem Soleimani's death last Friday, Iran's Supreme Leader, the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, vowed there would be "severe revenge" taken against those responsible for the attack. Soleimani was killed by missiles fired from American drones that targeted his convey near Baghdad International Airport. It was believed he was in Iraq to discuss de-escalating tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia, although it has also been suggested the trip was designed to plan and coordinate attacks against the U.S.

The latter appears to be the official position of the White House. On the day of the attack, President Trump noted he had approved a move to kill "the number one terrorist anywhere in the world". He claimed Soleimani was responsible for attacks on the U.S. embassy in Baghdad on Dec. 31, and was plotting further "imminent and sinister" attacks on U.S. military personnel.

White House officials said later that Soleimani had long been on America's radar, although former presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush had stopped short of taking action out of fear it could serve as the catalyst for a serious global conflict.

Relations between Iran and the U.S. have been tense ever since Mr. Trump announced in 2018 that he was withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal, agreed upon in 2015.

That deal, also signed by the UK, Russia, France, China, Germany and the European Union, introduced framework that would see Iran redesign, convert and reduce its nuclear facilities, and accept inspections by international experts plus additional protocol to lift all nuclear-related economic sanctions, freeing up tens of billions of dollars in oil revenue and frozen assets for the middle eastern power.

Now, after ordering the killing of a seemingly beloved figure in Iran "tens of thousands took to the streets in cities across the country on Tuesday in commemoration of Soleimani's funeral" relations between the two nations have never been worse since the hostage taking in the U.S. embassy back in 1979.

While there were fears Iran would seek serious immediate retribution "perhaps cyberattacks against U.S. interests, it is likely that Tuesday's bombing of two Iraqi military bases used by U.S. forces will be the most serious measure taken to get even, so to speak.

President Trump acknowledged the attack, communicating via Twitter that "all is well", later noting there were no American casualties as a result of the strikes.

Paying credence to our suggestion, Iran's foreign minister suggested the missile strikes could be the beginning and end of Iran's retaliation for the drone attack.

"We do not seek escalation or war, but will defend ourselves against any aggression," Mr. Zarif posted on his personal Twitter account.

Outside of Iran, there doesn't appear to be a great deal of upset over Soleimani's death. By all accounts he was, as branded by both

the U.S. and European Union, a terrorist. While it's not unusual for the U.S. to take measures and strike against individuals it deems to be a threat to national security, as in well-publicized attacks on Osama Bin Laden, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Anwar al-Awlaki, this is different. It's one thing to strike out against leaders of terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda and ISIS and another thing entirely to assassinate a top ranking military official of an adversary.

The move itself speaks to the arrogance, or strength, of Mr. Trump, depending on where you stand and which way you look at it. While Soleimani, undoubtedly, had a questionable background, we believe the POTUS saw this as an opportunity to turn attention away from his recent impeachment and, possibly, to rally the American public once again in an election year.

While it clearly isn't the best thing for the rest of the world, an ongoing conflict with Iran may be the best thing for a U.S. President seeking re-election.