

Middle East after Baghdad embassy attack

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The United States said on Tuesday it was sending additional troops to the Middle East, after hundreds protesters stormed its embassy compound in Iraq, setting fires and chanting: "Death to America!"

Angered by US air raids that killed two dozen militia fighters on Sunday, supporters of the powerful Hashd al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilization Forces) paramilitary group spilled through checkpoints in the high-security Green Zone on Tuesday, demanding the removal of American troops from Iraq.

Reacting to the attack, US President Donald Trump said he held Tehran "fully responsible" for the incident, and said the protesters "will be held fully responsible", he wrote on Twitter on Tuesday.

"In addition, we expect Iraq to use its forces to protect the Embassy, and so notified!"

Trump later warned in a separate statement that Tehran would "pay a very big price" after the attack, but when asked later in the day about the possibility of tensions spiralling into a war with Iran, Trump told reporters: "Do I want to? No. I want to have peace. I like peace. And Iran should want to have peace more than anybody. So I don't see that happening."

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the attack was "orchestrated by terrorists", one of whom he named as Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

Al-Muhandis has been identified as the second-in-command of the Tehran-backed Hashd al-Shaabi group which includes Kataib Hezbollah, the group that was hit in the US air raids.

Defense Secretary Mark Esper said in a statement that about 750 troops from a rapid response unit of the 82nd Airborne Division are prepared to deploy over the next several days to the region.

"This deployment is an appropriate and precautionary action taken in response to increased threat levels against US personnel and facilities, such as we witnessed in Baghdad today," he said.

A social media post from the US Marines said the troops from its crisis response command in Kuwait were deployed to Iraq.
