Soleimani: Did the U.S. Violate International Law?

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U.S.-Iran Conflict: Strategic Context

- U.S.-Iran conflict since 1979
  - Each U.S. Administration tried to define the conflict in limited political, diplomatic, & covert operations
- Differing views of Iran:
  - The U.S.
  - Israel
U.S.-Iran Conflict: Strategic Context

- Iran and U.S. “red lines”
  - Trump breaks the “red line” understating
  - Shocks Tehran leadership
- Threats to Iran: Internal & external
- Shift of proxy wars, political information/influence operations
- Iranian miscalculation regarding U.S. “red line”
The Operation to Execute Soleimani

- April 2019: Trump signs the authorization
- U.S. did not seek escalation with Iran. Did not respond to:
  - Japanese oil tanker attack
  - Downing of U.S. drone
  - Saudi oil facilities attack
- National security team & intelligence community: pulled together operational details of Soleimani’s plan
Who Was Soleimani?

- Second most powerful man in Iran
- Ran Iran’s proxy, paramilitary, political intelligence, & diplomatic operations
  - Proxy infrastructure to alter geopolitical balance of power
- Built the Hezbollah apparatus: Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, etc.
- Objective: U.S. out of Iraq & Middle East
Origins of International Law

- European intellectual thought
  - Sir Thomas More, Hugo Grotius: Is it legal to kill an enemy anywhere during wartime?
  - St. Augustine: “Just war” doctrine

- U.S. Founding Fathers
  - Jefferson: uncivilized abuses

- 20th century: Assassination as a tool of statecraft

- Since 2001: U.S. & Israel increase lethal covert operations
Case Study: Admiral Yamamoto

- 1943: U.S. Navy intercepts ADM Yamamoto’s itinerary
- Aim to restore morale after Guadalcanal
- U.S. seminal operations:
  - April 1942: Doolittle Raid
  - June 1942: Battle of Midway
  - April 1943: Operation Vengeance
A New Middle East/Persian Gulf

- Regional realignments
  - U.S.-Israel
  - U.S.-Israel-Saudi Arabia
  - MESA/GCC
  - China-Russia-Iran