## U.S. Army Prepares to Pull Out of Three Military Bases in Iraq

The United States Army announced plans to withdraw from three bases in Iraq amid mounting tensions with Iraq and Iran. The U.S. will officially hand over control of the bases to the Iraqi Army later this month, which will end the American presence along the Iraq-Syria border. One of the bases, al-Qaim, has been a base for American forces on the frontlines of the fight against Al Qaeda and ISIS. Forces serving out of al-Qaim were in close proximity to Iranian-backed militias in Iraq, and the two sides had a fragile agreement to work together to oust ISIS from the border region. However, after the American strike against Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, the base faced an increased risk from the Iranian-backed militias, which made its presence untenable. The withdrawal from the bases is part of the larger American strategy to reduce its military footprint in Iraq and throughout the region.

Iraqi militias backed by Iran have recently escalated their attacks on bases hosting foreign troops as part of Iran's larger effort to expel foreign militaries from the region. Iraq's parliament also voted to expel all foreign forces from the country in the aftermath of the American strike that killed Qassem Soleimani. The United States currently has eight bases in Iraq, and will remain in five after turning three over to Iraq. In a statement, the American coalition said that they would continue to have a presence in Iraq in order to facilitate the permanent defeat of ISIS. A senior defense official for the United States said that the proximity to the Iranian-backed militia Kataib Hezbollah factored into the decision to relocate troops from the al-Qaim base along the Syrian border. American forces will also withdraw from the base used as a platform to recapture the city of Mosul from ISIS, and from a compound in Kirkuk.

The American presence in Iraq has been growing increasingly untenable since the strike in Baghdad that killed General Qassem Soleimani. That strike alienated the Iraqi government and incensed Iran, which used its proxies to threaten American and Western interests throughout the Middle East. 33 rockets crashed into the Taji airbase near Baghdad late last week, just days after two Americans and a British medic were killed by a rocket strike on the same base. Additionally, Basmaya camp, a key training compound for coalition forces in the fight against ISIS was hit by an attack earlier this week. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has called on the Iraqi government to do more to prevent attacks on coalition forces stationed in Iraq, and said that the United States would take matters into its own hands if Iraq was unable or unwilling to do so.