

American fighter jets go hunting the next morning.

The time is 11:00 a.m. United States Air Force F-15E Strike Eagles fly in formation over Iraq and Syria. Far below is the Euphrates River Valley, where mankind has waged war for thousands of years. The American pilots are vectoring toward Iranian ammunition de-pots and command posts that have been used by General Soleimani to launch attacks on US forces. Five targets, three in Iraq and two in Syria, have been preselected. The sites are guarded by Hezbollah terrorists loyal to Iran. Each American aircraft has precision-guided bombs affixed to a hard point beneath the wings. Overflight in Syria means potential conflict with Russian MiG fighters, but that is a risk the American military is now willing to take. The F-15 pilots are focused on their mission, ready to deal with the Russians if needed.

President Donald Trump has named his war against terror the “maximum pressure” campaign. So far, the United States has re-frained from directly attacking Iran. Trump’s focus has been on eradicating ISIS. But tension between the mullahs and the United States has escalated since America pulled out of the nuke deal.

The fighter pilots do not hesitate as they reach their targets, releasing their bombs and then turning back toward home base in Iraq. They see each bomb detonate, sending thick black clouds pluming into the air. Secondary explosions follow as ammunition dumps are blown up. The American attack comes without warning; there is no time for the terrorists to flee. Twenty-five militants will die, and an-

other fifty- five are injured.*

Back in Somalia, American forces of the United States Africa Command also strike. This time, another wave of US jets kill the militants responsible for the Mogadishu truck bombing. The air strikes, conducted in conjunction with the Somali government, kill four

* These figures were announced by Iraqi security forces and the Hezbollah militia. Among the dead was Abu Ali Khazali, an Iran-allied militia leader.

militia members at two separate sites. The lethal actions against the terrorists send a clear warning.

Iran immediately pledges revenge. “Our response will be very tough on the American forces in Iraq,” says senior commander Jamal Jaafar Ibrahim, leader of a paramilitary group loyal to Qasem Soleimani.

Russia calls the American action “unacceptable” and “counter-productive.”

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu immediately phones Secretary Pompeo to congratulate him.

Pompeo himself issues a statement—knowing Soleimani will hear his words almost immediately. “What we did is take a decisive response that makes clear what President Trump has said for months and months and months. Which is that we will not stand for the Islamic Republic of Iran to take actions that put American men and women in jeopardy.”

President Trump stays silent, allowing the military action to speak for itself.



Baghdad is ablaze.

New Year’s Eve. Vandalism and arson are rampant. After three months, protests continue in the Iraqi capital and show no signs of abating; if anything, the tension has escalated. Thousands of Sunni Muslims are taking to the streets to condemn the Iranian military. But now they are also engaged in a war of words with Shia counter-protesters funded by Iran.

A third group joins the confrontation. Mourners dressed in militia uniforms are just leaving the funeral for Hezbollah militiamen killed in the US bombing two days ago. They march down Kindi Street, near what is known as the Green Zone. This heavily fortified sanctuary is home to the American embassy. Iraqi security forces guard a checkpoint marking the entrance to the zone—but step aside as the angry mob marches closer.

Shouting “Death to America” and “Death to Israel,” the mob throws rocks at the American embassy, then breaks windows and spray-paints graffiti over the entry building. The outer walls of the

embassy are breached. Waving pro-Iranian flags, the protesters force their way inside storage facilities and ransack files.

Fire soon breaks out in the Green Zone. US ambassador Matthew Tueller is out of the country on personal travel, but the agitators do not know this. The terrorists have been instructed to take control of the embassy and parade captured staffers before the world.

Soon, more militia fighters join the fracas. US marines stand atop the main embassy building, their guns trained on the pro-Iran crowd below them.*

In Washington, a furious President Trump takes to Twitter. “Iran killed an American contractor, wounding many. We strongly responded, and always will. Now Iran is orchestrating an attack on the US embassy in Iraq.

“They will be held fully responsible.”

*The marines did not fire, out of fear of causing an international incident.