How Trump Took the U.S. to War With Iran

The Secretary of Defense Pentagon is given the go-ahead to carry out a bombing raid on an Iranian military base. Trump's decision to kill Iranian Gen. Qasem Soleimani was based on a flawed intelligence report.

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By Jonathan Swan and Maggie Haberman

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On June 21, 2019, President Donald Trump and Secretary of Defense Mark Esper met in the Situation Room and before 11 a.m. ET, the Trump-Esper tandem, who had been pressing for months for the U.S. to take more aggressive action against Iran, had agreed to carry out a bombing raid against three Iranian military bases. Trump was ready to strike Iran in retaliation for the shooting down of a U.S. drone, and Esper had offered guidance that the Iranian drone, adjacent to the Strait of Hormuz, was in international waters. Trump was also considering a cyber attack against Iran's military bases, but Esper, the President Trump and his friends in the White House Situation Room, which was used to plan military operations, had ruled out that option.

Mr. Trump, Esper, and the rest of the senior participants at the head of the room's mahogany conference table had been briefed on the cyber option, but it was not the President's preferred option. Instead, they had left Mr. Soleimani, who was the chief of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, the quasi-military organization, off the table. Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force, the elite unit of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, was the most popular military figure in Iran, and he was the most prominent Iranian military figure in the Middle East. Soleimani was also the most popular military figure in the Middle East