The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Iran Military Commander May Have Visited Russia, Defying UN Travel Ban

August 09, 2015



Ghasem Soleimani

The United States is trying to determine whether the commander of the elite Quds Force in Iran's Revolutionary Guard recently visited Russia in violation of a United Nations travel ban, U.S. Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power said on Friday.

Power said the travel ban requires that all countries deny Major General Ghasem Soleimani entry into their borders, and the only exception is if the Security Council committee monitoring sanctions against Iran grants an exemption.

"To our knowledge no such exemption was granted, and we would know," Power told reporters Friday. "So these are very concerning reports but we are still, again, tracking down the facts."

Soleimani has been on the UN sanctions blacklist since 2007, which also requires that all countries freeze his overseas assets.

Fox News, citing two Western intelligence sources, reported Thursday that Soleimani arrived in Moscow on July 24 for meetings with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and President Vladimir Putin.

Spokesmen for Iran's UN Mission and Russia's UN Mission both said they had no immediate comment. A Kremlin spokesman denied any meeting between Soleimani and Putin had taken place, the RIA news agency reported.

In June, the UN panel of experts monitoring sanctions against Iran cited media reports and published several photos of Soleimani showing that he traveled to Iraq, Syria and Lebanon — although no country had reported a violation of the travel ban.

Soleimani "was reportedly organizing and training militia and regular forces in those countries," the panel said. He was also shown on a magazine cover as a commander fighting the Islamic State group in Iraq, it said.

Iran says the Quds force has played a key role in rolling back the Islamic State group, which now controls about a third of Iraq and Syria. The effort has been led by Soleimani, but Tehran insists its officers are only providing military advice and training.

In the years following the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, American commanders repeatedly accused the Quds Force of backing Shiite militias implicated in attacks on American troops and Sunni civilians, charges denied by Tehran.

Additional reporting from The Moscow Times was included in this report.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/08/09/iran-military-commander-may-have-visited-russia-defying-un-travel-ban-a48841